

Jurjen A. Zeilstra

Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985

Living for the Unity of the Church

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Jurjen A. Zeilstra

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Permission for reproduction of the photographs: the Visser 't Hooft family and the World Council Of Churches.

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For Adrienne

Le chrétien sait très bien que demain ça n'ira pas mieux.
Mais il continue à espérer.[1]
– Visser 't Hooft, 'Message paroisse Chêne-Bourg', 1973

1 'The Christian knows very well that it won't be better tomorrow. But he continues to hope.'

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Foreword and Acknowledgements

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A major problem in writing a biography of Visser 't Hooft is the inconceivable amount of written sources, which can very quickly leave a researcher feeling overwhelmed. It was absolutely necessary to ask pointed questions that could be properly researched. To formulate such answers, it seemed for me extraordinarily valuable to speak to a number of people who had known Visser 't Hooft well. I am especially grateful to Frans Bouwen, Albert van den Heuvel, the late Ruud van Hoogevest, the late Hebe Kohlbrugge, Anneke Musacchio-Visser 't Hooft, Konrad Raiser, Boudewijn Sjollema and Jet Sjollema-van Sandick, Caspar Visser 't Hooft, Clan Visser 't Hooft, Pat Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, and Marcus Visser 't Hooft.

For Visser 't Hooft's view of the painter Rembrandt and his work, I consulted the Rembrandt expert, Prof. dr. Ernst van de Wetering. The chapter on the relation between Visser 't Hooft and the World Council of Churches on the one hand and the Russian Orthodox Church on the other was submitted to an expert on the Russian Church, Prof. dr. Wil P. van den Bercken, who gave me valuable advice on various points. I had fascinating conversations with Dr. Karim Schelkens, director of the Cardinal Willebrands Research Centre in Tilburg, on the relationship between Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands.

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I never met Wim Visser 't Hooft myself. But I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to become acquainted with his fascinating life in this way. I share his love for the church as the living body of Christ in the world, infinitely various, changing shape again and again, and yet one.

Jurjen Zeilstra
Hilversum, January 2020

Introduction

The Importance and Limitations of a Biography

1 Subject and Background

Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985) was one of the founders of the World Council of Churches and was the first general secretary of the organisation from 1948 to 1966. The World Council was one of the most important manifestations of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century, which aimed at and still aims at the unity of worldwide Christianity in the modern period. Someone whose active life was so interwoven with such an influential organisation had to have had wider impact – in this case not only on the institution of the World Council of Churches but also on the ecumenical movement in general. This gives us the basic idea behind this historical study, which is completely devoted to the life of Visser 't Hooft, a life that, for the most part, was dedicated to serving the cause of church unity. This is by no means an overstatement: he lived his life for the unity of the church.

This book is a biography, not a history of the World Council nor of the ecumenical movement. Before exploring the problem of an academic biography, we should be clear on the historical framework. With respect to the ecumenical movement, there have been several movements that called themselves ecumenical, but not all of them ended in the World Council of Churches. The movement that this book discusses has been described by prominent practitioners of 'ecumenicity' themselves as 'a positive but at the same time deeply concerned and critical reaction by Christian communities and individual Christians to the project of modernity."[1] Such a description leaves no or hardly any room for a positive assessment of secularisation.

1 Hoedemaker, Houtepen and Witvliet, *Oecumene als leerproces. Inleiding in de Oecumenica* (1993), 33. Translator's note: in Dutch 'oecumene' is a substantive based on the Greek 'oikumène' indicating both ecumenicity and ecumenical movement. The Dutch subtitle of the present biography is: 'Een leven voor de oecumene'; literally 'A Life for Oikumène'. The original meaning of the Greek New Testament word is more neutral and refers to the inhabited world, or civilisation.

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The question should also be raised as to whether modernity can be called a project. Is it really a strategically determined response that we are talking about here? A historical study of this nature needs a modified description of the ecumenical movement that refers explicitly to concrete relationships that have developed from the ecumenical idea into a specific organisation with a global variety of Christian ideas and forms of encounter. The definition of the ecumenical movement could then be as follows:

> The ecumenical movement is a complex of challenges by and reactions to modernity involving the identity of Christianity in the whole of a developing world society, and that gives occasion for an international network of individuals, organisations, and churches that is capable of a supporting role in shaping institutions.[2]

The recognition of a worldwide pluriformity while speaking nevertheless of one religion plays an important role.[3] When the historian James Kennedy looks at the World Council of Churches in this regard, he speaks of 'a particular kind of religious international' that originated with the globalisation of Protestantism. He sees the World Council of Churches as an 'ecclesiastical international, a formal federation of churches focused, first and foremost, on worldwide Christianity.[4] In the context of a joint quest for unity, goals traditionally considered important in Protestantism were again presented as matters that united them: evangelisation, social justice, education, and humanitarian aid. What was needed was to act in union and energetically in the public domain in a way in which the institutional shape was not the only goal but certainly an important aspect. Those who worked on this were convinced that churches had unique, partly neglected, capacities for tackling world problems.

The task of Visser 't Hooft's biographer is to present his life in the context of this global development. The interaction between the microlevel of family contacts and friends and the macrolevel of global church and political events will be cited and analysed. Many around the world saw Visser 't Hooft as a custodian of church unity. He was a man with insight and growing experience, through which he was viewed – right up until he was quite advanced in years – not incorrectly as a wise expert in the area of the

2 This definition builds on an earlier attempt; see Zeilstra, 'Oecumenische beweging', 2005.

3 Koschorke, 'Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity', 2016.

4 Kennedy, 'Protestant Ecclesiastical Internationals', 2012, quote on page 295.

relations between churches. As early as 1928, Visser 't Hooft saw himself as a bridge-builder with respect to the transatlantic relationships in the world church. He viewed the basic contrast between America and Europe, or between practical Christianity and dogmatic-pietistic ways of belief, as the contrast between – to use the language current around 1970 – 'horizontal' and 'vertical.' As far as he was concerned, neither could do without the other. Any biography of Visser 't Hooft is thus not only a description of an individual but also a description of the response of Christians, Christianity, and the church in the modernity of the twentieth century.[5]

Striving for mutual recognition and unity had to serve the well-being of 'civil society' expressly in the broad sense of the term as a society of self-aware citizens able to organise themselves in the interest of specific values. An inspired and well-informed elite, primarily emerging from the international Christian student movement of the nineteenth century, saw this as a divine commission. From the perspective of the participating churches, national and cultural boundaries were fundamentally relativised if people believed in one God, one Jesus Christ, and thus also one world church, often referred to in ecumenical literature as the *Una Sancta*. Even more than in practical collaboration and institutional organisational forms, most pioneers of the ecumenical movement saw surplus value in the deepening of what Kennedy calls 'a global spiritual fellowship'. Although the intellectual frameworks were initially strongly Protestant in nature, the ecumenical movement, of which the World Council of Churches was the most important exponent, was open to all churches, including the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

The ecumenical movement, as considered in this study, found its most elaborate, internationally oriented form in the World Council of Churches, founded in 1948. Visser 't Hooft was an exponent of this council. He was a religious man who saw himself as being led by a commission from on high. He and many around him felt privileged by their descent, upbringing, education, and intellect. Thus, aside from being a portrait of an individual, this biography is also a group portrait, even though it focuses on only one person.[6] The members of this group saw themselves as a vanguard, called to turn back the coarsening of society that had occurred as a result of materialism, fascism, and state communism and to help churches rediscover their task in response to that coarsening. One of the major questions here is what factors made it possible for Visser 't Hooft to mobilise so many people and

5 Cf. Peltonen, 'What is Micro in Microhistory?' 2013.

6 Cf. Levi, 'The Uses of Biography', 2013, 89-112.

churches in the ecumenical movement in the midst of the secularisation of the twentieth century.

It is not my task as his biographer to describe the history of the ecumenical movement, but we will have to look at that regularly if we are to understand the life of the individual we are writing about here. This study has a descriptive, arranging, and clarifying objective in which Visser 't Hooft's life is central, but this book nevertheless goes beyond that life. After all, because he was such an iconic figure for the ecumenical movement, the story of his life gives access to the history of this movement.[7] I am well aware that there are many participant perspectives and that the experience of an iconic figure cannot be taken without further ado as representative for all others involved in this movement. In fact, precisely in the years after Visser 't Hooft retired in 1966, a variety in opinions and views emerged that confronted the whole striving of the ecumenical movement with a new challenge.

This study is not intended to confirm or illustrate what we already know about the World Council of Churches. Nor is it a question of confirming or denying the value of an institution like the World Council. It is not our intention either in this study to give a definition or assessment of the most important building block of the organisation, namely, 'the church'. At most, Visser 't Hooft's view of the church will be illustrated and assessed, whereby it is also of interest to chart the emerging challenges and possibilities in continually changing circumstances in a candid way. The fundamental contingency of continually new moments in which choices had to be made, should not be underestimated. There is the aspect of coincidence. The life of the one whose story is being told could have taken a different course. Visser 't Hooft almost became a teacher in Indonesia, and then later the director of the missionary centre in Oegstgeest and director of Radio Oranje. He was given various opportunities to be a university professor. For me, as a biographer who wants to look candidly at these defining moments, it is often more a disadvantage than an advantage to know the result of a process or the results of years of intense effort.

2 Existing Biographies

There are many other biographies, both longer and shorter, of W.A. Visser 't Hooft. Most of these are not academic studies but so-called 'commemorative

7 De Haan, *Van kroon tot bastaard. Biografie en het individuele perspectief in de geschiedschrijving* (2015), 298-302.

writings'.[8] They were often written in connection with an anniversary or birthday. There are many interviews, of quite differing character and quality.[9] There are also various unabashed admiring works, 'hagiographies', usually by friends and (former) colleagues who wanted to pay tribute to Visser 't Hooft at a memorable moment. The extent to which these accounts show a critical-academic tone varies.[10] The media devoted a great deal of attention to his life on the occasion of his death on 4 July 1985. At that time, English, German, French, and Dutch newspapers and magazines and journals especially contained longer and shorter articles about him.[11] Most obituarists kept it to a tribute, often illustrated by personal anecdotes. Usually, the writers also wanted to turn their view of Visser 't Hooft into an opportunity to justify the right of the ecumenical movement or the World Council of Churches to exist. A remarkable tribute came from the journalist Gerhard Rein, a youth delegate during the World Council Assembly in New Delhi. He calls Visser 't Hooft 'the most significant unknown person in Germany', who changed him from a naïve young man into a critical citizen and a critical Christian who discovered the world.[12]

A few authors who gave an academic treatment to Visser 't Hooft's life are the theologians H. Berkhof and the church historians A.J. Bronkhorst, A.J. van der Bent, and P.N. Holtrop, and myself.[13] They usually provide more or less the same data. There are hardly any critical interpretations that make

8 For example, Golterman and Hoekendijk, *Oecumene in 't vizier* (1960). For a theoretical analysis of the genre 'Life Writing': De Haan, 'The Eclipse of Biography in Life Writing', 2013.

9 For example, the interview by Puchinger of Visser 't Hooft in Geneva on 6 April 1966, in: Puchinger, *Is de Gereformeerde wereld veranderd?* (1966), and Murray 'The Head Fisherman', 1961. See also 'The Chief Fisherman' in: *Time*, 8 December 1961, 58-61.

10 For example, Freudenberg and Harms, 'Willem A. Visser 't Hooft "Unter dem einen Ruf"', 1963. Cf. Brennecke, 'Der Generalsekretär Dr. Willem A. Visser 't Hooft', 1963; *Istina* vol. 48 no. 1, *Deux pionniers de l'unité: Yves Congar et Willem Visser 't Hooft* (2003); Thomas et al., 'Tribute to Willem A. Visser 't Hooft', 1966; Fries, 'Ein Friedenspreis für ökumenischen Arbeit', 1966; Hampe, 'Augustin Kardinal Bea und Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, Friedenpreisträger 1966', 1966; Blake, 'Visser 't Hooft: A Tribute', 1966; Van den Heuvel, 'Eerbewijs aan een tachtigjarige', 1980; Newbigin, 'The Legacy of W.A. Visser 't Hooft', 1992; Garrett, 'Remembering Wim', 2000; Sjollema, 'Portrait of the WCC's first General Secretary', 2015. Non-critical: Von der Kloeden, 'Visser 't Hooft, Willem Adolf', 1997.

11 See file in Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.

12 Rein, 'Willem A. Visser 't Hooft. The Future of Peace', 2018, 99.

13 Berkhof, 'Visser 't Hooft as Ecumenical Theologian', 1986; idem, 'Herdenking van Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft', 1986; Bronkhorst, *Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft vertelt over Evanston* (1954); Van der Bent, 'Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985) Une présentation biographique', 2001; idem, 'Visser 't Hooft, Willem Adolf', 1991; idem, *W.A. Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985* (2000); Holtrop, 'Hooft, Willem Adolph 't', 1994; idem, 'De Kerk, de kerken en de Wereldraad van Kerken', 1987; Zeilstra, 'Visser 't Hooft, Willem Adolph', 2001.

use of broad historical perspectives. A recent exception is the study by Jan Schubert, *Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985). Ökumene und Europa*,[14] which was published in 2017. Schubert opts for the biographical perspective for discussing Visser 't Hooft's ideas about Europe and portrays him as an independently acting professional representative of various international ecumenical organisations. What Schubert does not offer, however, is a fundamental critical analysis of the development of Visser 't Hooft's thinking about Europe, including the great expectations of federalism in interaction with the expected renewal of the church. Because Schubert's research does not go beyond 1966, it cannot claim to be a biography and does not pay enough attention to break points and disappointments.[15] This biography deals with the final phase of Visser 't Hooft's life as well. I do not deal with the question of Europe in this study in any special way, however, because I looked at that precisely in my theological study published in 1995.[16] The survey of Visser 't Hooft's theological thinking by Michael Kinnamon was not available to the present author at the time the Dutch manuscript of the biography was completed. Kinnamon's appraisal is thorough and concentrated on both Visser 't Hooft's memoirs and other sources, but not very critical.[17] As a former World Council staff member and theologian he is unable to distance himself enough in order to take the more objective view of the historian.

A cardinal problem in the existing biographical publications on Visser 't Hooft – aside from the fact that they often copy one another – is that they are often strongly based on the memoirs of the main character himself. There are different autobiographical documents, thus written by Visser 't Hooft himself, whether or not he had the assistance of others, especially his assistant Aat Guittart. While he was still alive, she compiled, in collaboration with him, an overview of the facts of his life.[18] The memoirs occupy a central place among the autobiographical documents. For Visser 't Hooft, an earlier finger exercise in that respect was *Leren leven met de Oecumene*, a book based on twenty radio talks in 1968 for the NCRV (Dutch Christian Broadcasting Corporation).[19] His 1982 book *The Fatherhood of*

14 Schubert, *Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985). Ökumene und Europa* (2017).

15 Zeilstra, review of Schubert, *Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985)*, in: *Church History and Religious Culture* (2018), vol. 98, no. 2, 310-312.

16 Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995).

17 Kinnamon, M., *Unity as Prophetic Wittness. W.A. Visser 't Hooft and the Shaping of Ecumenical Theology* (2018).

18 Guittart, 'Biographical documents on Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft', no date. WCC 994.1.31.

19 Visser 't Hooft, *Leren leven met de oecumene* (1968).

God in an Age of Emancipation is strongly autobiographical in nature.[20] The minister C. Michael de Vries, who was in charge of broadcasting at the communications department of the World Council since 1963, played a major role in the writing of the memoirs and was also responsible for the authorised Dutch translation of the manuscript. The Dutch version was published in 1971 and the English in 1973.[21] Translations in German and Swedish were published in 1972, and in French in 1975. Visser 't Hooft did most of the research for the memoirs himself and reports in the foreword that he did not want to write an 'I-book'; rather, his main purpose was to repay part of his debt to the ecumenical movement. His goal here was to give the ecumenical movement, and the World Council of Churches in particular, greater publicity. After his retirement, Visser 't Hooft wanted to show a wide audience that he fundamentally believed that it was more than conferences and resolutions. He found the example he wanted to follow in the memoirs of his friend, Marc Boegner, president of the Eglise Réformée de France, for which he himself wrote the preface.[22] As an individual with a great deal of experience, he felt called to offer information and inspiration to those both in and outside the church who were interested in ecumenicity.[23] A number of handwritten notes were found stuck between the files in the archives of the World Council. They were written by Visser 't Hooft himself, usually in his regular handwriting on the beloved square sheets of his scribbling pad, A5 format. These notes give years and details that are missing in the files themselves and make connections between the files. They are what is left of the notes Visser 't Hooft made after his retirement in 1966.

Visser 't Hooft's memoirs are a typical example of those of someone who played an important role in a public position and who wants to justify his actions after having retired. Usually, the various existing studies that claim to be academic too easily use the memoirs as a 'primary source' for a development that Visser 't Hooft himself describes.[24] The memoirs were a period document from around 1970, and, while the reviews were primarily

20 Visser 't Hooft, *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation* (1982); Dutch version: *Gods vaderschap in een eeuw van emancipatie* (1983).

21 Page references in this study refer to the original English version of the memoirs: Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973). In giving quotes in Dutch, use is made of the translation by C. Michael de Vries. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoires. Een leven in de oecumene* (1971).

22 Boegner, *L'exigence oecuménique des Eglises. Souvenirs et perspectives* (1968).

23 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, ix.

24 Cf. Giordano, and Dell'Aqua (eds.), *'Die Welt war meine Gemeinde' Willem A. Visser 't Hooft. A Theologian for Europe between Ecumenism and Federalism* (2014).

positive, it should be kept in mind that almost all were written by Visser 't Hooft's friends.[25]

Various colleagues with whom he had worked a great deal were critical, even though they did not express that openly.[26] In his memoirs, Visser 't Hooft analyses his own actions, while still in contact with many of those people described in the book who were still alive at that time. Albert van den Heuvel and Konrad Raiser related that they were part of a group of young employees who were expected to attend a monthly private tutorial given by Visser 't Hooft in his closed porch at home on the 'history of ecumenicity'. There Visser 't Hooft shared his own research results with them and appreciated it when he was critically interrogated by well-prepared young people. At the same time, Van den Heuvel remembers having once called out: 'But it wasn't like that at all!' Visser 't Hooft reply was simply: 'It should have been that way!' We will look more critically at the memoirs in section 9.4.

It is obvious that information from the autobiographically coloured sources should be used carefully and critically in an academic biography. The questions of how these autobiographical texts fit into Visser 't Hooft's life and what we can deduce from them about his self-image at the time of writing and how they were received by his readers play a major role in the attention we will pay to them in this biography.

3 Method

Some biographies struggle with a scarcity of sources. That is not the case here: Visser 't Hooft wrote more than 50,000 letters.[27] Dealing with a plurality of written and printed sources is a problem in itself. Many of the archives of the World Council of Churches were available on microfiche for this work. In addition, there are many other documents apart from the letters – analyses, policy notes, as well as reflections, sermons, and lectures, many of the latter of which ended up being published.[28] These publications resulted in five large and ten smaller books and many articles, of which a number have been collected into volumes.[29]

25 For example, Mertens, 'Portrait de W.A. Visser 't Hooft', and Courvoisier, 'Le temps du rassemblement. Mémoires', 1976.

26 Zeilstra, interviews with A.H. van den Heuvel, 13 April 2013 and B.C. Sjollema, 20 August 2013.

27 Van der Bent, 'Visser 't Hooft, Willem Adolf', 1991.

28 For example, see also Visser 't Hooft, *Heel de kerk voor heel de wereld* (1968).

29 Nelson, *No Man is Alien. Essays on the Unity of Mankind* (1971), 264-330, offers a quite complete overview of the writings of Visser 't Hooft's writings up to and including 1970.

A prior critical question concerns the origin and history of these sources. Who collected them and to what end? The answer may be simple with respect to the sources in the archives of the World Council of Churches: Visser 't Hooft himself as the general secretary, together with his secretaries, was behind the archives.[30] This raises the impression that almost everything that seemed to be of any importance was saved. In addition to a comprehensive correspondence archive of the general secretary himself, in which business correspondence is difficult to separate from personal, there are a number of partial archives concerning sub-departments of the World Council and archives of projects. Some have been recently rearranged and opened. Much has been saved, but, despite the many sources, Visser 't Hooft's life is accessible only in fragments, impressions, and partial aspects. The guiding hand of Visser 't Hooft himself played a great role in what was saved, and I will have to be reserved with respect to filling in the gaps. In consulting the sources, I have made choices that are connected to the purpose of this study as well as to special attention for Visser 't Hooft's Dutch contacts.

In addition to the written and printed sources, I also relied on a number of conversations that Visser 't Hooft had with people he knew personally – as father, father-in-law, grandfather, uncle, supervisor, or friend. It is not difficult to get people to talk about Visser 't Hooft, and a number of living impressions often emerge. That is certainly true for his daughter Anneke Musacchio-Visser 't Hooft, his daughter-in-law Patricia Adams Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, his niece Clan Visser 't Hooft, and grandson Caspar Visser 't Hooft. Albert van den Heuvel, Konrad Raiser, and Boudewijn Sjollema were young colleagues in the 1960s. Ruud van Hoogevest, a staff member for refugee work, and intern Frans Bouwen cooked for the very old and vulnerable Visser 't Hooft at his home and ate with him. Hebe Kohlbrugge met him as a courier during the war. The questions I asked of those I interviewed were primarily concerned with their own interaction with Visser 't Hooft. As stated above, the goal here is not to write a 'commemorative' work, even though the standard anecdote is not out of place in a biography like this one. The basic approach was one in which primarily open questions were asked and the interviewee was given room to tell his or her own specific story. Certain statements were investigated further by comparison. In addition to the sources mentioned and the interviews, audiovisual material is digitally available.[31]

30 See especially the deposited archives of Visser 't Hooft, WCC 994.1 and 994.2.

31 Sound and Vision, Hilversum, digital productions of radio and television recordings since 1939.

This study is intended to be a critical and interpretative biography,[32] and we will pursue depth here by giving a great deal of room for a study of the sources for the theological content and religious experience. Religion is treated in this sense as an authentic guiding element, important for a person's direction in life, for what they consider to be a 'good life', and an important motivation for devoting themselves to a certain task.[33] Thus, important encounters that had a great influence on Visser 't Hooft are discussed in their historical context. The works he read and wrote are also discussed in connection with concerns current to the period in question. I will apply them as needed in this work; doing this will provide a certain depth to his development, and the expressiveness of his thoughts and the effectiveness of his deeds can be weighed by the reader him- or herself.[34]

He himself saw primarily continuity in his life's work, but there is a great difference between the effectiveness of his work in the different periods, a fact that he himself readily recognised for that matter. Objectively demonstrable moments in which, figuratively speaking, a new chapter began are the following: 1924, graduation, marriage, a new job, moving to Geneva; 1939, new job, moving; 1948, foundation of the World Council of Churches; and 1966, retirement. It speaks for itself that those years also largely determine the chapter divisions in this book: respectively chapters 2, 3, 5, 6, and 9. But other gaps in content emerge from the sources. In 1918 Visser 't Hooft embarked on a period of exploration in which he found his style and beliefs; in 1933 he saw his peace idealism fail; in 1938, he assumed a prominent role as general secretary of the World Council of Churches that was forming; in 1942, he had to accept the Allied rejection of the overture sought by the German resistance; in 1968, his wife died and in the same year, during the assembly in Uppsala, he noticed how problematic his message had become. These final breaking moments brought more change in content that we will explore in specific chapters. The second criterion for the chapter division is thus thematic, and chapters 4, 7, and 8 are to be read as special 'excursuses' on three major themes: the 'Swiss road'; ecumenicity and Eastern Orthodoxy; the Roman Catholic contacts. These three chapters overlap temporally with the other chapters we listed above. In chapter 10, finally, we will provide an evaluative picture focused on his love for Rembrandt in which his own reflections on his life and others are juxtaposed.

32 Renders, *De zeven hoofdzonden van de biografie* (2008), 6. Cf. Teunissen, *Voor 't gewone leven ongeschikt* (2017), 10-11.

33 Borgman, 'Biografie, publieke inzet & religie', 2011, 264.

34 Cf. Renders, *De zeven hoofdzonden van de biografie* (2008), 45.

The existence of a comprehensive amount of material that little or no use has been made of for critical research into Visser 't Hooft's life gives legitimacy to a primarily inductive approach, as opposed to a more deductive approach that connects the assessment of a career to some fundamental ideas formulated by the biographer that are not primarily derived from the career in question. This approach implies that cultural-historical, cultural-sociological, and cultural-philosophical aspects are discussed, but this discussion is deliberately restricted.

Against the background of both World Wars and the rise of totalitarian movements and of the Cold War, the sources show how Visser 't Hooft continually found his point of orientation in 'the church', how Visser 't Hooft chose the church and accepted the Bible as the Word of God and Jesus Christ as the embodiment of God's love for people. Though he started in the ecumenical youth movement, in the 1930s he made a principled choice for the institution of church as a central building block for unity. In this study we will explore what form of church unity he sought and how his high expectations of – often quiet – diplomacy were connected with that. As stated, we will not go extensively into these questions of cultural history, cultural sociology, and cultural philosophy, given that they require a separate study. But they do of course figure in the background and are explicitly discussed at the appropriate moments. The cultural-*historical* question is: What role did the background of two World Wars, the Cold War, decolonisation and secularisation play? The cultural-*sociological* question is: How far did his expectation of a consensus between institutions such as institutional churches go? How did he see the relationship between a 'movement' and an 'institution'? And the cultural-*philosophical* question is: What universal norms did he think he could build on? Were those norms derived directly from the Gospel?

A readable biography cannot simply be a detailed, chronological summary of the most important facts about someone's life. No biographer would want to avoid arranging, weighing, interpreting and thus thematising certain elements. What is truly important? What has explanatory value? What are secondary matters or unimportant issues in light of the questions posed? Things that contemporaries found very important do not have to remain as such for a biographer writing several decades later. And the converse is true as well. Things that were then thought to be obvious and perhaps not worth the trouble arguing for then could today be viewed as very remarkable. In this biography, the themes that determine the chapter division have been chosen in accordance with the interpretation I give to Visser 't Hooft's life, to the material at hand, and to the gaps in Visser 't Hooft's life. The themes

are thus derived directly from the sources that cohere with Visser 't Hooft's life and not from the description of that life on which I have superimposed my preconceived ideas.

No one can write a biography without a certain affinity for and fascination by his or her subject. The best place to write a readable, stimulating, and academic text on a human life is between distance and nearness. Visser 't Hooft is fascinating because of his striving to act in a deliberate and well-informed way in the border area between church and society. I never met him personally. That is a disadvantage and calls for modesty because something happens in a personal encounter with someone that cannot be simulated anywhere else. It is also an advantage. There is a natural distance, and the author feels free and not bound by any pious approach. I am working primarily as a historian, but I also have to employ my background as a theologian in a bi-disciplinary approach in order to understand the heart of Visser 't Hooft's life. But this book is written as a critical and historical, academic study. Theology is an important part of this story and is therefore also an object of detailed and critical reflection from the historical perspective.

1 The World Opens Up, 1900-1924

Abstract
This chapter traces Wim Visser 't Hooft's life from his birth at the beginning of the twentieth century in Haarlem in the Netherlands to his move to Geneva as international secretary for the YMCA in 1924. The chapter stresses his patrician and Remonstrant background, pointing out how this background shaped his worldview and taught him to think and act independently and on his own initiative. The chapter also traces important early influences on his thinking and theology, such as the NCSV (Dutch Christian Student Society) and Karl Barth. His work in student relief after the war showcased his networking and problem-solving capabilities. The qualities he developed were decisive for his career in the World Council of Churches.

Keywords: patrician elite background, Haarlem, the Netherlands, remonstrant protestants, grammar school, Dutch Student Christian Movement (NCSV), Jetty Boddaert

1.1 Introduction

Wim Visser 't Hooft spent his youth in Haarlem in the first decades of the twentieth century. He grew up in a close family that belonged to the social upper crust of the city. The family were Remonstrants, and his parents were broad-minded for that time and gave their three sons a great deal of freedom. Nevertheless, the adult Visser 't Hooft later remembered his youth as having been spent in a very quiet city, a safe 'bubble' far from world events. That feeling was probably nurtured by the fact that the trips abroad that the family made in the years before the Great War suddenly became impossible in the summer of 1914: 'We were stuck inside our borders, but we were also spiritually and intellectually cut off from the rest of the world.'[1] Against this

1 Visser 't Hooft, *Leren leven met de oecumene* (1986), 11.

Zeilstra, Jurjen A., *Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985: Living for the Unity of the Church*.
Taylor & Francis Group 2020
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726832_CH01

Figure 1 Wim (Visser) 't Hooft, ca. 1916



background, the vacations spent in the youth camps of the Nederlandse Christen Studenten Vereniging (NCSV = Dutch Student Christian Movement, i.e. Dutch branch of the World Student Christian Federation) played a major role for Visser 't Hooft. The end of the war in 1918 meant that the world opened up and that Visser 't Hooft found himself confronted by new challenges coming at him at great speed. In this chapter we will look at the values that he received and how he personally developed them (1.2). During his time in secondary school, which proceeded without any major incidents, Visser 't Hooft spent a great deal of time reading (1.3). His personal development at this time took a surprising turn as he chose theology and enjoyed the life of a student for a few years. What role did his belief in God play, and what task for his life did he derive from it? (1.4) In 1924 he married Jetty, a young woman from The Hague. What did she mean for him in this period? (1.5)

1.2 A Family with Status and Traditions

Willem Visser 't Hooft grew up in a patrician milieu. His parents, Hendrik Philip 't Hooft and Jacoba Clasina Lieftinck, were educated liberal people with a broad interest in culture. Their self-awareness was accompanied by a certain natural feeling for style and no need to show off their status, not to mention claiming positions that accompanied that status. In actual fact, they were genteel patricians, not nobility but 'regents' whose forefathers had filled leadership positions in Dutch society for generations simply as a matter of course. That boys learned to step forward and speak up while growing up went without saying. But it was not very formal in the Visser 't Hooft household. The sons Frans, Wim, and Hans were almost always challenging each other and formed a lively threesome. Frans was the oldest; he initially showed an interest in academia and later primarily in business. The youngest son, Hans was the athlete of the three and went on to study medicine. Wim was primarily interested in the world of literature, and already as a child, he read a great deal. But no one suspected during his school years that he would choose to study theology.

Like his father, Wim liked family traditions and developed a feeling for history already at a young age. He was interested in his family background. Countless portraits, objects, and diaries had been preserved in the family from various ancestors and their country residences. He was fascinated by the stories and anecdotes he was told about them.

Later, he loved being able to tell his children and grandchildren the old family stories, in which he liked to make connections with Dutch and world history. After his retirement in 1966, he carefully unravelled the family

Figure 2 **Wim's father: Hendrik Philip (Hans) (Visser) 't Hooft, 1866-1930**



Figure 3 **Wim's mother: Jacoba Clasina (Visser) 't Hooft-Lieftinck, 1874-1928**



history himself.[2] He found it quite extraordinary that his oldest known ancestor he learned something about, a certain Iman 't Hooft, was born in 1584, the year in which William of Orange was murdered. Iman 't Hooft was a rope-maker in Sint-Maartensdijk, and his descendants became well-to-do owners in the rope industry in Dordrecht.[3] In 1886, the family business had to close because shipping began to use steel cables at that time. There were men on the Visser side of the family who were active seamen. Visser 't Hooft was proud that a number of his ancestors had been involved in the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie).

When Visser 't Hooft and his brothers were children, one of the important places for family gatherings was the beautiful house of Bellevue in a park by a pond in Dordrecht, where two unmarried aunts of his father lived.[4] Visser 't Hooft would never forget how his aunt Marie, a very energetic individual, could turn the stately Bellevue into such a warm place for the family to meet. For him and his brothers, the summer vacations there formed the high point of the year in their childhood. They went on boat trips and on outings by horse and carriage to the country residences of other rich family members. He was completely at a loss when, after Aunt Marie 's death in

2 Visser 't Hooft, *Notes on the Ancestors* (1976). See also: *Nederland's Patriciaat* 32 (1946), 88ff., and over the family Visser 't Hooft-Boddaert, ibid., 100-101.

3 *Nederland's Patriciaat* (1923), Vol. 13, 110-111.

4 The house was located at Singel 272 in Dordrecht. No longer standing, it was close to the railway and was surrounded by verdure and water. Cf. Caspar Visser 't Hooft, *Een hof tot ons gerief. Zeven buitenplaatsen en hun bewoners* (2019).

1913, Bellevue had to be sold and was torn down. To keep the memory of this aunt alive and to keep the Visser name from disappearing from the family, his father, Hendrik Philip 't Hooft, decided to add it to the family name by Royal Decree. Thus, the name Visser 't Hooft came into being.[5]

They were a Remonstrant family, but they had not been for very long. The choice for the Remonstrant Brotherhood was made by Wim's paternal grandfather, the lawyer Willem Adolph 't Hooft (1833-1922). His father and Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876), court historian and one of the leaders of the Réveil, champion of Christian education and the founder of the Anti-Revolutionary political movement, were cousins. This grandfather, after whom Wim was named, was the 14th of 15 children and the only one allowed to stay in school. His father saw a minister in him and had him study Hebrew, but he chose to study law in Utrecht. There he attended the lectures by the empiricist philosopher C.W. Opzoomer who influenced him to become a liberal. He thus began to distance himself from the orthodox milieu in which he grew up in Dordrecht. In 1858, he opened a law office in The Hague where he, helped by good family relations in high circles, quickly became successful. In 1862, he became the secretary of the court in 's-Gravendeel and in 1865 he married Jacoba Visser (1840-1901), from a rich family in Dordrecht, with whom he shared a love for music. He left the Reformed Church, probably in the 1880s, because of the conflicts that continued to flare up in that church. He was a Liberal Party member on the Haarlem city council for 15 years and also sat on the Provincial Council of North Holland. He was decorated as a knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion (Orde van de Nederlandse Leeuw). His grandson Wim admired him for his practical wisdom and humorous interventions in political debates.

In 1880, Wim's grandfather 't Hooft built a large house in Haarlem, Florapark 10.[6] This house was an important gathering place for his three children Hans, Sophie Cornelia and Henriëtte Petronella, their spouses and children, and cousins. There was always a large party on 19 December, Grandfather 't Hooft's birthday, with a dinner for about thirty guests. His 75th birthday was also celebrated in this way. To mark the occasion, six grandsons, including Wim, dressed up as small chefs. His grandfather loved music and had a pianola with a large repertoire of classics. In addition to his house in Haarlem, 't Hooft also had a wooden house built high in the dunes at Overveen, called Thalatta, with a beautiful view from the roof.

5 Royal Decree, 3 September 1917. Visser 't Hooft, *Notes on the Ancestors* (1976), 21-22.

6 This building was built together with no. 11 and was designed by architect A.J. van Beek. It is still standing.

Figure 4 Thalatta, house in the dunes, owned by Wim's grandfather, W.A. 't Hooft



Wim Visser 't Hooft had wonderful memories of this place. The family went there in his grandfather's carriage driven by his driver Christian. On 25 September 1914, Queen Wilhelmina stayed at Thalatta so that she could observe the exercises of the mobilised Dutch army from the roof. Wilhelmina asked: 'This is, after all, the highest point in the area?' Wim's grandfather did not want to contradict her and said: 'Indeed, Your Majesty, if we do not count the top of the dune over there.' Wim was allowed to take pictures with his own camera of the troop movements in the dunes.[7] The whole family was proud of this royal visit.

Wim's mother, Jacoba Clasina Lieftinck, was originally from Bergambacht, and her family owned various properties in that area. She inherited a farm with the land belonging to it. The three brothers enjoyed the visits to this farm. Every year the farmer brought a large round cheese with him when he came to pay his rent. Wim's maternal grandfather was Franciscus Lieftink (1835-1917), who was born in Odoorn in Drenthe and went to Groningen to study theology in 1853. There he came under the influence

7 Cf. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 4. A copper commemoration plaque of this event is in the possession of P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, Heiloo.

of the professor in practical theology, W. Muurling, a representative of the Groningen school, who was open to new insights and turned against Calvinistic confessionalism. He was married to his first wife, Sijtske Zijlstra (1843-1866) for only one year before she died. In 1869 he married Cornelia Nicolaine Johanna Smits van der Goes (1837-1883). For some time, he was a preacher in various villages in the northern part of the Netherlands. In 1874, the year in which his daughter Jacoba was born, he joined the Freemasons. During this period, gradually and just like W.A. 't Hooft, Wim's paternal grandfather, he turned away more and more from the Reformed Church. In the end, he gave up being a preacher. That happened when he was elected in 1879 to the House of Representatives as the liberal representative for Leeuwarden. He would continue to serve in the House of Representatives until his death in 1917, thus for 38 years. In 1905, he represented the Zutphen district. As a Freemason, Lieftinck very quickly became Grand Speaker of the order among the Grand Orients of the Netherlands. That is how he met Prince Frederick, son of King William I, and Prince Alexander, son of King William III, with whom he became friends. When Prince Alexander died in 1884 at the age of 33, Lieftinck gave the eulogy for him for the Freemasons. He himself moved to Haarlem with his family in 1883, where his wife died that same year. In Haarlem he became the 'Emperor' of the rhetorical society 'Trou moet Blijcken', at that time actually a gentlemen's club. As a Member of Parliament, his areas were fishing and education, and he was an outspoken opponent of Christian school education. In 1917, he was the only Member of Parliament to vote against the Private Education Act that settled the school dispute. He was a pacifist and also regularly got into disputes with Roman Catholic representatives. Lieftinck dressed in an old-fashioned way for that time, had a huge nose, a forked beard, and was an easy target of satire. Because of his verbal skills, for instance, he was called 'the Mouth on Legs' (de Bek op Pooten). Wim Visser 't Hooft and his brothers were very much in awe of him but did not see him very often. He was a busy man. It was a particularly impressive experience for the boys when, during the summer in the Haarlemmerhout, they could attend the concert in the open door pavilion of 'Trou moet Blijcken' and sit at the centre table with 'the Emperor' himself while the citizenry of Haarlem stood listening at a distance.

Wim's father, Hendrik Philip 't Hooft (1866-1930), was born in 's-Gravendeel and was called Hans, which was a tradition in the family for those whose first name was Hendrik. He attended the Stedelijk Gymnasium (Municipal Gymnasium) in Haarlem and studied law in Leiden. He established himself as a lawyer and prosecutor in Haarlem in 1890. He served regularly as a

Figure 5 House where Visser 't Hooft was born, called Zonnebloem, Koninginneweg 107, Haarlem



curator in bankruptcies and divorce cases.[8] He was also a correspondent in Haarlem for the bank association and member of the board of the Nutspaarbank, and, in collaboration with the bank association, he rented out strongboxes. After some time, he assumed other roles as well, such as commissioner of the N.V. Hollandse Voorschotbank, deputy judge in the Haarlem district court, and member of the supervisory board of the

8 *Haarlem's Dagblad*, classified ads between 1895 and 1920.

bar. In 1892 he took a pleasure cruise from Algiers to Athens, Istanbul, and Smyrna.[9] In 1895 he married Jacoba Lieftinck and they moved into the house called Zonnebloem, Koninginneweg 107, in the stately Haarlem district of Wilhelminapark.[10] Hans 't Hooft was a well-known Haarlemmer and was known to be a cheerful man with a zest for life.[11] His work led to many contacts, which in turn led to various additional jobs to which he devoted himself faithfully. For example, he was treasurer of the Haarlem Bach Society for 25 years and cofounder of the 'Queen's Day' Society. He was also a member of the College of Regents of the St. Elisabeth Hospital, board member of the Remonstrant Church, treasurer of the Haarlem Art Club (Haarlemsche Kunstclub), treasurer of the Tourism Society, and president-curator of the Stedelijk Gymnasium.

Hans 't Hooft was, just like his own father, quite musical and gifted literarily. He played the cello – music was important at home. Wim took violin lessons as a child and seems to have been a good player, but he did not continue with the lessons. His father regularly wrote occasional verse, such as a comforting poem about Wim's dog, called Freddie, when it was hit by a truck in 1911. Hans 't Hooft became 'Factor' of the same Haarlem rhetorical society 'Trou moet Blijcken' of which Wim's grandfather Franciscus Lieftinck was 'Emperor'. In the tradition of this gentlemen's society, it was a custom for the Factor to present a long, self-composed poem annually, the so-called year-song in which current events near and far were cited.[12] On the occasion of the British military activity against the Boers in the South African War of 1880-1881, Hans 't Hooft, under the pseudonym 'Antibull' wrote a satirical poem about the English called *De inval in Transvaal, of De ware grieven der Uitlanders: 'n waarachtig verhaal*. (The Invasion of Transvaal, or the True Grievances of the Foreigners: A True Story).[13] He contributed to the local history with a study on the Courthouse in Haarlem. He was also a lover of 19th century literature and published a small book on

9 [Visser] 't Hooft, H.P., 'Reisbeschrijving van de reis naar de Levant en Algiers', no date, Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.

10 This property, Koninginneweg 107 in Haarlem, still exists and still bears the name 'Zonnebloem'.

11 *Trou moet Blijcken, jaarboek*, 1931, 16.

12 J.C. Visser 't Hooft, 'De Leeuwenhoek. Een familiegeschiedenis', 2014, 7 and 9. H.P. 't Hooft's year-songs have been transferred to the municipal archives in Haarlem. W.A. Visser 't Hooft would later introduce the performance of a 'year-song' at the Christmas party of the World Council staff. His father wrote these 'year-songs' for the years 1906-1921 and 1924.

13 [Visser] 't Hooft, (under the pseudonym Antibull), *De inval in Transvaal, of De ware grieven der Uitlanders: 'n waarachtig verhaal*, (1896).

Jan van Walré, a poet famous in Haarlem who lived around 1800.[14] Hans 't Hooft was a great admirer of Hildebrand, a pseudonym for the Protestant minister-poet Nicolaas Beets (1814-1903). He also wrote a book on this famous Haarlemmer and worked on having a Beets monument erected.[15] During the city council elections in 1919, Hans 't Hooft ran as a candidate for the Vrij-Liberale (Free-Liberal) Party, argued for the limitation of government interference in the lives of its citizens, and said he despised 'bureaucracy'. The party also promised to back private initiative robustly. He was not elected.

Wim's mother, Jacoba Clasina Lieftinck (1874-1928), played an important role in the family. She herself did not have an easy youth. As a Member of Parliament, her father was almost always in The Hague. In 1883, the family moved to Haarlem, but her mother died that same year. Her father then married Hermine Marie Elisabeth Holtzman, the daughter of the liberal Member of Parliament Petrus Hendrik Holtzman. Franciscus Lieftinck's third wife could not cope with Jacoba's brother Jan Lieftinck, and he was told to leave the house. In 1888 Jacoba's stepsister Francisca Hermine was born. Jacoba was sent to boarding school in Aachen in 1891, and she married Hendrik Philip 't Hooft in 1895 when she was 21 years old. In 1897 their first son Franciscus (Frans) was born, in 1900 Willem Adolph (Wim) and in 1905 Hendrik Philip (Hans). Wim saw his mother as the linchpin of the family, an energetic woman who called the shots. He typified the atmosphere at home as a special mixture of discipline and freedom that included a great deal of mutual teasing.[16] The many contacts meant that teatime in the Zonnebloem house regularly had many visitors, and Jacoba played the role of hostess with verve.

Wim Visser 't Hooft had a twin brother who died in birth in Haarlem on 20 September 1900. Wim became the 'sandwich child' between the older Frans, born in 1897 and the younger Hans, born on 20 September 1905. Hans was a great comfort to his parents because that date was not only Wim's birthdate but also the day Wim's twin brother died. Visser 't Hooft took various aspects of the family bonds he enjoyed in his youth and projected them onto the international ecumenical movement, which he often called 'family'. He treated young people in a fatherly way and composed limericks and other poems on events that he presented to his co-workers at the end of the year,

14 [Visser] 't Hooft, *De dichter Jan van Walré* (1920). Van Walré was the writer of the booklet *Afrekenmaal* (1819).

15 [Visser] 't Hooft, *De student Beets. Met een inleiding over humor* [...] *uitgegeven ten bate van het Hildebrandgedenkteeken* (1914). The monument, for which the first initiative was taken in 1914, has not had a happy history. The group of statues by J. Bronner in Haarlemmerhout could not be unveiled until 1962 and has been plagued by vandalism time and again.

16 *Notes on the Ancestors* (1976), 30.

just as his father had done in 'Trou moet Blijcken' in Haarlem. In his own eyes, he could experience happiness at the centre of a movement just when the crisis was the most intense. Visser 't Hooft was able to flourish when exciting things happened.[17] He was often in the forefront at his tennis club, Tidas in Haarlem. When the airplane manufacturer Anton Fokker demonstrated his plane 'de Spin' (the Spider) in his hometown of Haarlem on 31 August 1911, Wim Visser 't Hooft was present, together with his friend, a neighbour boy of the Fokkers. Together, the boys helped pump up the airplane's tyres. This was the kind of thing that typified his enterprising character.

1.3 Gymnasium: A Little Philosopher

The summer vacations of his childhood were usually spent in Dordrecht, but in the years preceding the war, the family was also able to take trips abroad. Wim thus made his first trip abroad along the Rhine to the Siebengebirge in 1912. He spent his summer vacation in 1913 in the Jugendheim Bergstrasse in Frankfurt. In 1914 he went hiking with his father first in the Netherlands with the ANWB (*Algemene Nederlandse Wielrijdersbond*, Royal Dutch Touring Club), but the summer vacation with the family in Sauerland was cut short prematurely by the outbreak of war on 1 August. Wim and his brothers watched the German army mobilising in Düsseldorf. There were no trains from Germany to the Netherlands, so the brothers and their parents had to cross the border on foot.[18]

At this time, Wim became an enthusiastic participant in the youth summer camps organised by the Nederlandse Christen Studenten Vereniging (NCSV), the Dutch chapter of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). His parents had possibly stimulated him after Queen Wilhelmina and Prince Hendrik had visited the NCSV summer camp in the summer of 1913, which resulted in a great deal of publicity for these camps. Students volunteered as camp counsellors not only to have teenage boys enjoy camaraderie, sports, and games in a natural setting but also to share their faith with them. The mood was characterised by social involvement, and there were lots of sports and a great deal of attention paid to personal development. Since trips abroad had become impossible because of the war, from that time on Wim went camping annually with the NCSV somewhere in the Netherlands, usually at De Waskolk near Nunspeet. What he experienced at the NCSV youth summer camps was very different from what he was used to at home. The students who

17 Cf. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 342.
18 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 3.

Figure 6 The three 't Hooft brothers (Frans, Hans, and Wim) with their father, ca. 1912



volunteered as camp counsellors often had a pietistic bent and challenged the boys to read the Bible themselves, as if it had been written for them personally. The Bible was not seen here as a book of cultural and historical interest that contained contextually determined and dated texts. At the NCSV camps, the Bible was the Word of God with a contemporary message for young people, and the message was presented in a direct, modern way. Faith in Jesus Christ was central here. The counsellors worked hard to appeal to the boys to come to a personal commitment. Individual and communal prayer with concrete questions about life in mind was stimulated. Visser 't Hooft experienced his faith here as a power to unite, and he never forgot that.

> The NCSV led me to faith in Jesus. The message about Him was not passed on by august ministers but by students a few years older than we were, who used the simplest language and often had a very primitive faith. When, at the end of a raucous meal in the main tent of De Waskolk camp, it suddenly became quiet, and a student we knew as an athlete or as a joker tried, by the light of a kerosene lamp, to say what prayer actually meant or why you had to live with the Bible, then we listened like we never listened before.[19]

19 F. Groeneveld, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1980. De Waskolk is a nature area near Nunspeet: 'De NSCV heeft mij tot het geloof in Jezus gebracht. De boodschap over Hem werd niet door

Figure 7 Wim as a schoolboy



In 1912 Wim was admitted to the Stedelijk Gymnasium in Haarlem, where, he himself states, he was not a brilliant student.[20] But already at a young age, he read everything he could get his hands on, mature or not, usually from his father's large library. In comparison to most children, he came to the school very well read and describes himself in his memoirs as a smart aleck who was teased a bit by girlfriends about his philosophising. His family also saw him as a little philosopher in this period. Whatever

plechtige predikers doorgegeven, maar door studenten die ee paar jaar ouder waren dan wij, die de meest eenvoudige taal gebruikten en vaak een oer-primitief geloof hadden. Als het aan het eind van een luidruchtige maaltijd in de grote tent van het Waskolkamp plosteling heel stil werd en een student die wij als sportsman of als moppentrapper kenden, bij het licht van een petroleumlamp probeerde te zeggen wat bidden eigenlijk betekende of waarom je met de Bijbel moest leven, dan luisterden we zoals we nog nooit geluisterd hadden.'

20 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

he could not find among his father's books he attempted to buy second hand. He himself states in his memoirs that there was no one line in his reading. He read writers like Heinrich Heine, Oscar Wilde, Romain Rolland, Leo Tolstoy, and especially Fyodor Dostoyevsky. He also tried to read philosophers like Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Schleiermacher, but they were too much for him. When the worldly-wise Wim once tried to discuss Schleiermacher with his grandfather Lieftinck, the latter responded scornfully: 'Soon ripe, soon rotten'. Wim did not pay much heed. With respect to poetry, he was mostly interested in the Tachtigers (the Eighties Movement). He himself wrote poems, and together with a friend he composed a musical comedy called 'Andromeda', which was performed during a party in Leeuwarden. In 1917, he sent some of his poems to Willem Kloos, but this was a disappointment: the famous poet responded with nothing more than a standard rejection letter. He had more success in the *Rostra Gymnasiorum*, the journal of the Dutch gymnasium students, which published three of his poems.[21]

1.4 A Student in Leiden: Questions and Answers

In the last phase of his life, probably without being aware of it, his grandfather Lieftinck played an important role in Visser 't Hooft's life. Wim had a great deal of respect for him, but seldom had the chance to speak to him privately. Lieftinck defended the Freemasons enthusiastically, which he presented as a big-hearted, undogmatic form of religion. But Visser 't Hooft was shocked when he discovered that his grandfather rejected any possibility of a personal encounter with God. The fact that Lieftinck, who had once been a minister himself, had left the office of minister and the church behind him gave Wim a lot of food for thought.

> It was not that he had lost all faith in God. But he had come to the conclusion that God was so great and so unknowable that poor human beings had no right to talk about him. Intercessory prayer, asking God to intervene in human affairs, was wrong. All we could do was listen to the voice of our conscience.[22]

21 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 4. The poems cannot be found; they were possibly published under a pseudonym.

22 Ibid., 5.

Lieftinck died in Haarlem in 1917. With his beliefs, he left a spiritual legacy for his grandson Wim that was viewed by the latter as both a challenge and a directive. Curiosity was combined in this phase with the rise of all kinds of personal life issues. During the 1917/1918 school year, he studied Hebrew with the Haarlem rabbi and took confirmation classes with Rev. Dr. A.H. Haentjens (1876-1968). The minister was unable, Visser 't Hooft felt, to give him real answers, but that did not prevent Wim from being fascinated by the material. Haentjens followed Hegelian philosophy of religion in his understanding of faith and was an original thinker. Wim's father liked him and once wrote a long occasional poem for him.[23] But this minister, whom some found difficult to understand, was accused of being secretly orthodox. On Easter morning 1905, he summarised the Easter message in the words: 'The Lord is truly risen!'[24] This led to a conflict with the board, which accused him of abandoning the modernist standpoint of the Remonstrants and of secretly being orthodox rather than liberal. Haentjens resigned but was called again by the congregation and remained in Haarlem until his retirement in 1939. He attached objective value to baptism as a moment of sanctification by God and held that the kingdom of God also took form in the church. Not everyone in his congregation shared this view. He was a fascinating man with his own views, and he influenced Visser 't Hooft's personal development at a crucial time. On an intellectual level, the latter felt truly challenged by Haentjens but did not subscribe to his views.[25]

Later on, when, as an old man in 1980, he looked back at this time, he found that he had been on the way to becoming what he called a 'syncretist'. For Visser 't Hooft, this was a negatively charged term: it referred to someone who pasted together all kinds of insights from various philosophical and religious traditions without accounting for their mutual contradictions and was no longer able to distinguish between the degrees of truthfulness of the various religions.

> [T]he most dangerous part … was that this could easily lead to quite abstract views of religion in general, instead of connecting me with the Jesus of the New Testament. I randomly read all kinds of religious books,

23 [Visser] 't Hooft, H.P., 'Feestgedicht voor A.H. Haentjens, 29 June 1903, Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.

24 Barnard, *Van verstoten kind tot belijdende kerk. De Remonstrantse Broederschap tussen 1850 en 1940* (2006), 178-183.

25 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 3.

> including those by pantheists, mystics, and agnostics. Because of that, I was on the way to becoming a syncretist who viewed all varieties of religious experiences to be both true and untrue.[26]

Visser 't Hooft described his internal restlessness in the diary that he kept in 1917.[27] It was usual in the Remonstrant Brotherhood for catechists to confess their faith in words they chose themselves. Unfortunately, Visser 't Hooft's text has been lost. We know only that he was not at all happy later with the text he used at his confirmation. According to how he felt later, he had tried frenetically to combine all kinds of ideas about God and human beings. He attempted, he recalled, to find room for both the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, just as the philosopher Pascal had done. Later on, he felt that he had thus reduced Christ to an idea and denied him the honour he was due in his concrete incarnation as the Son of God, 'as God entering into human history.'[28] But although he thought differently about this during his student years and had his membership transferred to the Dutch Reformed Church in 1923, Visser 't Hooft could still, after many years, look back gratefully at his contact with the Remonstrant Haentjens. Most of all, he appreciated the fact that the minister had given him food for thought.[29] It is a shame that neither the diary nor his self-composed confession can be found, for they could have perhaps shed light on Visser 't Hooft's personal development in this period of his life.

When he had to choose in 1918 which subject he would like to study, theology seemed to Wim to be an attractive possibility for going further on his personal quest. He did not have much to do with the church at this

26 F. Groeneveld, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1980: '[D]e gevaarlijkste kant [...] was dat dit makkelijk kon leiden tot nogal abstracte beschouwingen over godsdienst in het algemeen., in plaats van mij te binden aan de Jezus van het Nieuwe Testament. Ik las in het wilde weg allerlei godsdienstige boeken, ook van de hand van pantheïsten, mystici en agnostici. Daardoor was ik op weg een syncretist te worden, die allerlei variëteiten van godsdienstige ervaringen als even waar en onwaar beschouwde.'

27 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 5. I did not have access to this diary.

28 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 6.

29 Visser 't Hooft to A.H. Haentjens, 26 January, 1944. YDS-12, 61: Vooral nu mijn dochter enkele maanden voor haar bevestiging is, komen de herinneringen aan catechisatie en bevestiging in Haarlem bij mij op en denk ik met dankbaarheid aan wat U mij in die jaren gegeven hebt. Ook al vloog de vogel eenigszins ver van huis, zoo blijft dat verband met het verleden toch levend.' ('Especially now that my daughter will be confirmed in a few months, the memories of catechism and confirmation in Haarlem are returning to me, and I look back with gratitude on what you gave me in those years. Even though the bird has flown somewhat far from home, that connection with the past is still alive.')

time and did not at all intend to become a minister. He was primarily interested in finding answers to his own questions and saw theology as 'a wonderful subject of study'.[30] He did not feel called in any way. His goal in studying theology was first of all to gain more 'clarity' in spiritual matters. His parents had always stimulated him to participate in the Christian youth camps, but his desire to study theology led to surprise and hesitation on their part. One grandfather had left the ministry. What was a gifted young man, who did not want to become a minister, to do with an education in theology in the 1920s? That was not a field that offered many careers. Did Wim understand that this choice could cost him a bright future? His father warned him, but in the end he approved of Wim's studying theology if he added law. Perhaps the choice for theology would turn out to be nothing more than a passing fancy.

In the summer of 1918, he graduated from the Stedelijk Gymnasium in Haarlem, and, at 17 years of age, he was quite young for that time to go to university. The war was in its last months: the Allies had repelled the German and Austrian troops with the Hundred Days Offensive. The Spanish flu that ravaged the world and did not spare the Netherlands led to the cancellation of the NCSV summer camp. On 20 September 1918, Wim Visser 't Hooft turned 18. He followed his father's wishes and began to study both law and theology, in turns, in the autumn of 1918 at Leiden University. But, although law did not capture his imagination at all right from the start and he continued with it only out of duty, theology began to fascinate him more and more. Much more than he himself had expected, the problem of the church also quickly played a major role in this. During his time at secondary school, he had been influenced by Tolstoy's objections to the church as institution:[31] the New Testament condemned violence, while the church had supported violent states throughout the centuries, just as it also had in the war that tore Europe apart. Because of that, churches – to their shame – had essentially become anti-Christian institutions.[32] Visser 't Hooft now began to modify his view.

In Leiden he underwent the usual freshman initiation and hazing so that he could become a member of the Leids Studenten Corps. The address of the student house he moved into was 129 Rapenburg. It was customary for them to give each other nicknames, and Wim's stayed with him throughout

30 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 6.

31 Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1893).

32 Visser 't Hooft, 'Is the Ecumenical Movement Suffering from Institutional Paralysis?' 1973, reference on 296.

Figure 8 On a bike trip from Breda to Brussels, November 1918; Wim is in the middle



his life. Because of his somewhat pointed face, his brothers and parents had called him 'Muis' (Mouse) when he was a child. He did not mind. His student friends and his wife Jetty continued to call him that.[33] Some friends, like Frederik M. van Asbeck, Herman Rutgers, Nico Stufkens, and Conny Patijn, continued to call him that for the rest of his life.

Initially, Visser 't Hooft had difficulty concentrating on his studies at this intense time. On 11 November, the Germans capitulated and the armistice was announced. Together with three friends of the Leids Studenten Corps, he decided 'at the bar in Leiden' to go to Brussels to see the entry of the Belgian king, Albert. To gain access to the ceremonies, the boys applied for press cards from local papers in the cities they came from. They travelled to Breda by train and from there they could easily bike to Brussels. They went through an area that the German army had just left, and the Belgian army had not yet arrived. Visser 't Hooft's first report on the entry of the Belgian royal couple into Brussels was published in the foreign news section of the city edition of the *Haarlem's Dagblad*.

33 Cf. Stoop, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1960. Interview by R. Foppen with C.S., Count van Randwijck, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives.

> On Friday, amid the indescribable jubilation of the Belgian people, King Albert, the much-loved ruler of the Belgians, made his entrance into the Belgian capital. It was beautiful weather. It was very busy in the vicinity the Parliament buildings. A great many Belgian and Allied troops were there, drawn up for a parade. The guilds had gathered in front of the Parliament buildings with their banners. Many people watched the spectacle and the military activity from their windows and balconies. There were many foreign soldiers and Red Cross nurses. In the meantime, the cars of ministers and other dignitaries rolled in, as well as those of the diplomatic corps. A whole squadron of Belgian planes came flying in in V-formation and circled over the park, the Parliament buildings, and the palace. The public is ecstatic. The people feel they are free again, redeemed from the oppressive times of foreign domination and foreign violence. The people are enjoying their freedom.[34]

Wim was inspired, and in 1919 he made a trip to northern France and Paris. He was deeply impressed by the trenches near Reims, which looked as though the soldiers had just left the day before. The heavily damaged cathedral in the city formed the background in a landscape full of destruction. He wrote: 'If you have any spark of militarism left in your mind, you will notice in this place that you have got rid of it.'[35] Despite all distractions, Wim obtained his propaedeutic certificate in theology in 1919, with a research paper on Satan for the professor of Semitic Languages, A.J. Wensinck. He also took his first year foundation course in law in 1920, but that was the end of his law studies. He had proved that he could do it, but the subject did not interest him.[36]

34 Visser 't Hooft (anonymous), 'Van onzen reizenden redacteur. Op weg naar Brussel', *Haarlem's Dagblad*, 25 November 1918: 'Onder onbeschrijfelijk gejubel van de Brusselsche bevolking heeft Vrijdag Koning Albert, de veel geliefde vorst der Belgen, zijn intocht in de Belgische hoofdstad gedaan. 't Was prachtig weer. In de nabijheid van het parlement was het vooral een groote drukte. Daar stonden vele Belgische en geallieerde troepen opgesteld voor het defilé. Daar ter plaatse waren de vereenigingen met hun vaandels voor de Kamergebouwen geschaard. Van de vensters en de balcons kijken velen naar het schouwspel en de militaire bedrijvigheid. Veel vreemde militairen zag men en ook Roode Kruis-zusters. Intusschen rollen de auto's aan van ministers en andere hoogwaardigheidsbekleeders alsmede van het corps diplomatique. Een heel eskader Belgische vliegtuigen komt in V-formatie aanvliegen en cirkelt over het park, het Kamergebouw en het Paleis. Het publiek is verrukt. Het volk voelt, dat het weer vrij is, verlost uit de benauwende dagen van vreemde heerschappij en vreemd geweld. Het volk geniet van de vrijheid.'

35 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 8.

36 He would later often state that he knew nothing at all any more about law.

The student he was now was still fascinated by the NCSV camps, which he had attended since 1915. Wim spent every summer until 1924 camping somewhere in the Netherlands; he graduated quickly from participant to adjutant, then to tent officer and one of the youngest 'camp commanders', in charge of a camp of a hundred secondary school boys. There were no boys from the lower classes at these camps, but the elitist atmosphere in which he grew up that was directed so much at individual development was broken open to a certain degree. The boys had to work together, and they had adventures in the world of nature. At these camps, he enjoyed an entirely different atmosphere than what he experienced in Leiden during his classes, at the Leids Studenten Corps, or at home in Haarlem.

Visser 't Hooft later looked back on his two years in Leiden as a student as a period of superficial student life. In the evenings, he spent a considerable amount of time at the Minerva society. It was pleasant, but he wanted something more. The great change came in 1920 when he and his friend Herman Hoogendijk decided to spend three months at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Selly Oak in Birmingham. Leiden University had had connections with this institute since 1903 when the New Testament scholar J.R. Harris declined a chair in Leiden but indicated that Leiden theology students were welcome at Woodbrooke.[37] For Wim Visser 't Hooft, these were very enriching months spiritually. There was an ecumenical spirit in Woodbrooke, and open discussions on belief were stimulated. The Quakers also included many adherents of the social gospel movement, which laid a great deal of emphasis on putting faith into practice in everyday life. Here Visser 't Hooft had the opportunity to hear well-known speakers such as the New Testament scholar H.G. Wood. He later referred to this time at Woodbrooke as an important time of reflection in which he found direction for his life.[38]

Visser 't Hooft and Hoogendijk also visited other British cities. In Cambridge they heard the writer George Bernard Shaw and the economist John Maynard Keynes. Shaw was a sensation. In an article in the newsletter of the Leids Studenten Corps, Visser 't Hooft wrote of his admiration for the famous writer, who effortlessly captivated everyone in his audience as a speaker, whether they were capitalists or socialists.

> The grey-haired teacher of pure reason at Leiden College would dubiously shake his thought-infused head. What will come of the polarised nature of reality if someone in the world is right? And nonetheless: perhaps he has

37 Kennedy, *British Quakerism* (Oxford 2001), 184.
38 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 9-10.

> never yet discovered a kindred spirit as Shaw appeared to be. Only Shaw does it in a more psychological way. That is the unsolvable secret of this popular reasoner, which we can label by the nice term 'mass psychology' but cannot explain it.[39]

This was the engagement that he missed in Leiden.

In January 1921, as part of the NCSV delegation, he attended a conference in Glasgow of the Student Christian Movement (SCM), the British-Irish chapter of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) and thus a sister organisation of the NCSV. This was his first major international meeting, and it made a deep impression on him. Around two thousand students from 38 countries gathered and were addressed by celebrities like Edward Grey, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs when the First World War broke out. He told the young people that the decline of civilisation could be prevented only by the restoration of the spiritual values of Christianity. Visser 't Hooft's eyes were opened in Glasgow to the opportunities international encounters offered to do something about the problems of the world. Here the relational character of the language of faith became concrete for Visser 't Hooft. He heard speakers like William Temple (1881-1944), at that time the Anglican bishop of Manchester, and the Scot Joseph H. Oldham (1874-1969), missionary in India and member of the United Free Church, who spoke about God as the highest reality. It struck him that these people did not speak of God as an idea or an impersonal power, but as the living God who takes the initiative and speaks to people personally. Visser 't Hooft would later be closely associated with both Temple and Oldham. In 1938 they were the ones who nominated him to be the general secretary of the World Council of Churches when it was still in the process of formation.

Soon after, it was the Calvinist Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) who started him thinking. It was his friend Nico Stufkens (1892-1964), study secretary of the NCSV, who introduced him to Barth, specifically the second edition of his study of Paul's epistle to the Romans that was published in 1922.[40] Visser 't Hooft was not immediately convinced and found it a difficult book. What appealed to him was that Barth took the struggle with the

39 Visser 't Hooft, 'Engelsche Brieven. Bernard Shaw', 1920: 'De grijze leermeester der zuivere rede aan de Leidsche Hoogeschool zou zijn gedachte-doorploegd hoofd bedenkelijk schudden. Wat komt er van de gepolariseerdheid der realiteit terecht, als er iemand in de wereld gelijk heeft? En toch: hij heeft misschien nog nooit zoo'n geestverwant ontdekt als Shaw blijkt te zijn. Alleen Shaw doet het psychologischer. Hoe? Dat is het onoplosbaar geheim van den volksredenaar, dat we met de mooie naam van massapsychologie kunnen etiketteeren maar niet verklaren.'

40 Barth, K., *Der Römerbrief. Neue Bearbeitung* (1922).

historical-critical method and the questions of modern philosophy seriously. Barth had read Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky and wrestled with the penetrating questions that they posed. At the same time, Barth continued to respect the Bible as the Word of God, which made Visser 't Hooft respect him. According to Barth, the voice of God can be heard both on a personal level and on the level of society as a whole and it was possible to proclaim salvation to the world, based on the message of the Bible. Visser 't Hooft suspected that Barth's approach contained the heart of the answer he was seeking, a reasonable counterweight to the scepticism of his grandfather Lieftinck. Nevertheless, it was some years before he felt he truly understood Barth's intentions.[41]

In 1921, Wim Visser 't Hooft became president of the NCSV student aid committee that sought funds to give assistance to students, especially food and clothing, in countries which had been hit by the First World War and the Spanish flu. He was very quickly asked to be president of the relief committee of the Nationale Studenten Organisatie (NSO; National Students' Association), which included not only Protestant Christian student organisations but all Dutch student organisations. Visser 't Hooft saw his chance and quickly understood that he had been given a complex combination of positions. The NCSV work fell under European Student Relief, the greatest project of the WSCF, which was led by Americans and was supported by the multi-millionaire John D. Rockefeller. Visser 't Hooft thus wore two different hats and, in addition to his studies, spent considerable time raising funds and in mutual co-ordination of his two roles.

An international discussion on the work of the European Student Relief organisation in Turnov, Czechoslovakia in 1922, with eighty students from 29 countries was organised by Conrad Hoffman (1884-1958), the American secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Hoffman did pastoral work among prisoners of war, refugees, and students in Europe. He asked Visser 't Hooft to serve as secretary of the conference, which took place under great tension and threatened to fail because of mutual disagreements. But it went well.

> Mr. Visser 't Hooft declared that he could not conceive that anyone who had taken part in the conference during the past few days could fail to understand the conference spirit. For him personally it had been a deep experience, and he knew it was so for many others.[42]

41 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 16.

42 'Minutes of the Turnov Conference. Held under the auspices of the European Student Relief. April 8th-16th 1922'. HDC-PE, NCSV 524-826.

Visser 't Hooft was starting to be noticed. His approach and personal style were experienced as energetic and polite. He went to work enthusiastically and managed to raise good sums of money for student aid, begging people and organisations to contribute. The Dutch committee contributed the most, relatively speaking.[43] The general secretary of the NCSV, Herman Rutgers, took Visser 't Hooft with him later that year on a major trip for the student society to Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. Galloping inflation made life especially difficult for students in Central Europe in 1922 and 1923. One of the hotels where Rutgers and Visser 't Hooft stayed was plundered during their stay. But Visser 't Hooft again appeared to be extraordinarily well-suited for this work. He enjoyed the contacts and developed an understanding of the youth in Germany and the countries that had emerged from the former Danube Monarchy. He was annoyed by – in his eyes – the all too easy caricatures and judgmental attitude about the losers of the First World War that he sometimes encountered in other countries. His interest in Germany and Central Europe obviously increased considerably at this time. He opposed prejudices, and his empathic attitude was again noticeable in his responses, an attitude that can be called *deutschfreundlich* (Germanophilic), whereas his critical view with respect to England had already possibly been nurtured by conversations with his father. The latter had, after all, strongly opposed the actions of the English against the Boers in South Africa.

In 1923, during a meeting of the European Student Relief organisation in Parád in Hungary, he was asked to be chairman of the programme committee. Despite a great deal of political tension internationally, such as the French occupation of the Ruhr and increasing anti-Semitism, the mood remained good during the conference. In Visser 't Hooft's eyes, this was due to the Christian faith to which every participant felt accountable. It is very telling that he also became chairman of the Dutch aid committee 'Duitsche Universiteiten' in 1923, which organised special aid to German universities. In 1924, it was concluded that the worst needs had been alleviated, and the aid committee of the NSO was disbanded. In the following year, European Student Relief became the International Student Service (ISS) and concerned itself with student conferences and study trips. In the second half of the 1930s, however, it also offered help to refugees. In 1950, this organisation shed its Christian identity and became the World University Service.

43 Van den Berg, *De Nederlandse Christen-Studenten Vereniging, 1896-1985* (1991), 73. Cf. H.C. Rutgers to Visser 't Hooft, 17 December 1922, HDC-PE, 524 NCSV, 711. Rutgers speaks of 20,000 guilders' worth and 100,000 guilders' worth of goods.

The headquarters of the NCSV was the beautifully situated Hardenbroek Castle, close to Driebergen-Rijsenburg. When Herman Rutgers, the general secretary, travelled to Peking in 1922 to attend an international meeting of the WSCF, Visser 't Hooft was asked to replace him temporarily as acting secretary. He was the host of the castle for four months in the first half of 1922. This was quite something for him. During the week it was dead quiet and he had any amount of time to simply enjoy nature. But at weekends Hardenbroek became the centre of bustling activity. Large groups of students, who could have intense discussions, were present in the building and the gardens. There were special speakers on a regular basis. For example, Visser 't Hooft played host to Dr. Georg Michaelis, Chancellor of Germany for a short time in 1917 and now chairman of the German chapter of the WSCF. Michaelis had a pietistic outlook on faith and touched a sensitive chord in Visser 't Hooft. At the same time, this encounter led him to understand that, to unite people on the basis of their Christian faith into a movement that could influence the world, more than an intense personal faith was necessary. It was not only Christians but the churches themselves that needed to be organised. They were standing with their backs to the world, and that had to change.

In post-war Europe, Christian youth work was held by many to be important, and American and British leaders especially in the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA, founded in London in 1844 by George Williams) saw new opportunities. The intention was to prevent young men who were now growing up in countries that had suffered from the violence of war or revolution or had disintegrated from falling prey to cynicism. The pleasure with which Visser 't Hooft attended the NSCV summer camps, first as participant and later as student and leader, shifted smoothly and seamlessly into this enthusiasm for international conferences. In the summer of 1923, he and his fiancée Jetty were part of the Dutch delegation at a YMCA conference in Pörtschach in Austria to promote the new initiatives of the YMCA. He hoped to get new ideas there that he could apply to the work of the NSCV.[44] There he heard John R. Mott (1865-1955) speak, the famous American missionary and leader of the YMCA and the WSCF, whom he had also heard speak in England and had once met in the Netherlands.[45] Visser 't Hooft was critical of what he saw as the naively

44 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 14.

45 J.R. Mott held a number of positions in these organisations. From 1895 until 1920 he was general secretary of the WSCF, and president from 1920 to 1928. From 1926 to 1937, he was the president of the YMCA World Alliance.

optimistic approach of Americans who wanted to convert European youth with an emotionally charged call. But in John Mott, who spoke about 'Boyhood – the Greatest Asset of Any Nation', he saw a man of deep faith with a broad vision that touched him.[46]

Herman Rutgers of the NSCV saw special qualities in Visser 't Hooft and wanted him to set up a Christian publishing company connected with the NCSV, similar to the British SCM Press. What Rutgers did not know was that Conrad Hoffmann, who had chaired the conference in Turnov in 1922, had not forgotten about Visser 't Hooft and wanted him for a position with the social department of the WSCF that was to be set up.[47] Following a management crisis in 1923, which led to the resignation of a number of secretaries, they were seeking young people in this organisation to give leadership to a new structure for European work. Visser 't Hooft initially saw more in Rutger's idea of setting up a publishing company. But love had now entered his life in the person of Jetty, and this weighed very heavily in his decision. In a letter to Rutgers he clearly indicated his motives:

> The reason why I chose to continue to study theology and did not, as people thought I would, switch to law is simply this: that I believe only in doing work in which I feel that I am doing what God asks me to do. You don't need to be afraid that I will end up being a civil servant in disguise – I think I need to watch out that I do not go in an entirely different direction. That is, I run the risk of putting the content of my work so far above my social status that I would be a danger to myself socially. Before I became engaged, that didn't matter, but now that I am engaged and want nothing more than to get married as soon as possible, I have to watch out for that. And if I therefore talk about that aspect in our further collaboration, I ask you then to remember that [this] is happening despite myself. Jetty is prepared to support this work; I will therefore never ask for anything else than that we can live in such a way, financially speaking, that Jetty will never have to suffer. As you will have noticed, Jetty's strength is not unlimited – and this is the only point that I have questions about. But I want to accept, without restriction, all work that I am able to do and is actually useful in the larger whole of the work that serves God's kingdom indirectly or directly.[48]

46 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 15.

47 Visser 't Hooft to H.C. Rutgers, 28 November 1923, HDC-PE, NCSV 524, 711.

48 Visser 't Hooft to H.C. Rutgers, no date, December 1923, HDC-PE, NCSV 524, 711: 'De reden, waarom ik theologie ben blijven studeren en niet zooals de menschen dachten, dat ik zou doen,

Visser 't Hooft soon encountered a host of difficulties, however. The greatest one here was that the publisher's association refused to admit the new publishing company to be set up by Visser 't Hooft as a member because the association was exclusively interested in purely commercial enterprises. It was a difficult time economically, and he also found it hard to raise funds for the NCSV in this period. At times, however, he had a major success, as in June 1924, when he managed to get a pledge for 1000 guilders from the Van Schaardenburg company in Rotterdam: 'You realise of course that I danced in public on the Maasbrug.[49]

In the meantime, in 1924 Hoffmann had passed Visser 't Hooft's name onto the Canadian Edgar M. Robinson, organiser of the Pörtschach conference and the secretary in Geneva for the youth work of the YMCA International Committee for the United States and Canada. He was the one who asked Visser 't Hooft in the spring of 1924 to come to Geneva for a few years as the international secretary for the new European youth work of the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations. Rutgers, who had told Robinson about Visser 't Hooft, advised against it. Not only was Visser 't Hooft not available because of the publishing plans, but, at 23, he was too young.[50] But Robinson was not to be put off. He felt that experience working in a position in the Netherlands would make Visser 't Hooft less suited for international work. With mottos like 'catch them young, and train them in the type of work they are expected to do' and 'youth is an asset', he invited Visser 't Hooft to come to Geneva from 25 to 28 April 1924 for some interviews.[51] He accepted his first paid job. During a meeting in

omgezwaaid ben naar de rechten, is alleen deze, dat ik geloof alleen in zulk werk het gevoel te zullen hebben, dat ik het doe, wat God van me vraagt. Je behoeft dan ook in zoover niet bang te zijn dat ik een gecamoufleerde ambtenaar zou zijn – ik geloof dat ik juist in een heel andere richting op moet passen. Ik heb n.l. het gevaar, dat ik het gehalte van mijn werk zoo boven mijn maatschappelijke situatie zal stellen, dat ik aan de maatschappelijke kant in het gedrang kom. Voordat ik geengageerd was, deed dat er niets toe – nu ik dat wel ben en niets liever wil dan zoo spoedig mogelijk trouwen, moet ik daarvoor oppassen. En als ik daarom in onze verdere samenwerking het wel eens over die kant zal hebben, dan vraag ik je te bedenken, dat [dit] als het ware ondanks mezelf gebeurt. Jetty is bereid mede achter dit werk te staan; ik zal daarom nooit meer vragen, dan dat we, financieel gesproken, zoo kunnen leven, dat Jetty er door niet in de knel komt. Zooals je wel gemerkt zult hebben, zijn Jetty's krachten niet ongelimiteerd – en dit is het eenige punt, waarop ik wel eens een vraagteeken zet. Maar verder wil ik dan ook zonder restrictie elk werk accepteeren, dat ik bij machte ben te doen en dat daadwerkelijk nuttig is in het groote geheel van het werk, dat indirect of direct Gods Koninkrijk dient.'

49 The bridge on the river Maas. Visser 't Hooft to H.C. Rutgers, 13 June 1924, HDC-PE, NCSV 524, 711.

50 H.C. Rutgers to E.M. Robinson, 5 March 1924, HDC-PE, NCSV 524, 711.

51 E.M. Robinson to H.C. Rutgers, 21 March1924, HDC-PE, NCSV 524, 711.

1923 in the Netherlands with John R. Mott, then head of the YMCA, Visser 't Hooft's mother said these prophetic words to Mott: 'You're just like a big spider: first you catch him in your web, and now you're going to swallow him.' Mott is said to have answered: 'But, madam, you underestimate the great gift that God has made to us in your son.'[52]

1.5 The Marriage of Two 'Children of the Sun'

When Visser 't Hooft visited Woodbrooke again in the summer of 1922 for a reunion, he met a young woman from The Hague there and fell in love with her immediately. He had probably heard of her before – she was, after all, a cousin of his friend Steven van Randwijck. After their stay in Woodbrooke, he was able to meet her that summer in Oxford and London. Her name was Henriette Philippine Jacoba Boddaert, Jetty for short. She was a beauty. She had not attended university but immediately made an impression on him through her independent spirit. He found her a fascinating woman with a rich spiritual life. In that same summer, shortly after their return to the Netherlands, Wim and Jetty were engaged. After he graduated in 1923 as a theologian and opportunities for paid work came along, they made plans to marry. Jetty was the daughter of Jacob Eduard Boddaert, secretary of the Board of Trustees of Leiden University, and Anna Johanna Boddaert, née Lady de Jonge. Jetty had grown up in a quite formal Hague environment. Her parents did not think it important to send Jetty to university,[53] but that did not bother Visser 't Hooft at that time – he was in love.

Wim and Jetty were married on 16 September 1924 in The Hague. The church ceremony took place in the Duinoordkerk. The study secretary of the NSCV, Rev. Maarten van Rhijn, a Reformed minister in Groesbeek, led the service.[54] The marriage was at the same time a farewell, for after their honeymoon, the bridal couple moved immediately to Geneva, the home of the new international secretary for the youth work of the YMCA. It was a big

52 Hopkins, *John R. Mott* (1979), 636. See also: Stoop, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1960.

53 Visser 't Hooft, *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation* (1982), 57-58. Jetty's father J.E. Boddaert had been involved as a student in the Utrecht Munster Cemetery scandal of 31 May 1883, where someone died. The mild punishments led to the court being accused of class justice. Montijn, *Hoog geboren* (2015), 313-315.

54 M. van Rhijn to Visser 't Hooft, 4 March 1939. YDS-12, 67. M. van Rhijn (1888-1966) was a professor in Utrecht in 1926. The Duinoordkerk was torn down in 1942 at the behest of the occupying forces. M. van Rhijn to Visser 't Hooft, 4 March 1939. YDS-12, 67.

Figure 9 Henriëtte Philipine Jacoba (Jetty) Boddaert, 1899-1968, ca. 1922



Figure 10 Wim and Jetty 'reading' after they were engaged. Wim is holding a book called *De moderne staatsidee* of H. Krabbe (1915), but is looking at her.



party. The festivities began already on 26 August with a dinner for 22 family members in the Zonnebloem house on the Koninginneweg in Haarlem, adorned with green and flowers. Those who were present sang a welcome song:

Welcome, Welcome, radiant bride and groom
In the old Zonnebloem!
Every heart beats warm for you
Oh children of the sun![55]
Together you will live your lives,
Together you will travel far,
May your path in those far lands
Be filled with sun beyond compare!

Welcome, welcome, children of the sun,
In the old Zonnebloem!
Go with great cheer to Geneva
Which I call a place of peace!
But don't forget your friends here
Who bind you to this land,
Come back sometime to all these friends
In this old Fatherland![56]

Wim and Jetty could both point to a distant relationship with the legendary Groen van Prinsterer, who was a great-uncle of the father of Wim's grandfather Willem Adolph 't Hooft and of Elisabeth de Jonge-Philipse, Jetty's grandmother. This fact led to jokes and allusions about her fate. Everything was set down in a commemorative book, and the table was wonderfully decorated with the symbol of this hospitable home, Zonnebloem, that had a beautiful effect in between the old blue of the dinner service. There were many warm speeches. First, the bridegroom's brother who spoke on behalf of his father welcomed everyone warmly. Then the father of the bride spoke,

55 Translator's note. The Dutch term for 'sun' is Zon'. The translation of 'zonnebloem' is 'sunflower'. The song, in calling the bridal couple 'Zonnekinderen' (children of the sun) is playing on the name of the house.

56 Welkomstlied 26 augustus 1924. Feestbundel 26 augustus – 16 september 1924, Visser 't Hooft Family Archives. 'Welkom, welcome, stralend Bruidspaar / In de oude Zonnebloem / Ieder hart klopt warm U tegen / Als 'k U Zonnekindereren noem! Samen gaat g'uw leven leven, / Samen trekt ge verre heen, / Moge in die verre streken / Zonnig zijn uw pad als geen ! / Welkom, welkom, Zonnekinderen, / In de oude Zonnebloem! / Trek straks fleurig naar Genève / Dat 'k een oord vol vrede noem! / Maar vergeet niet d'oude banden / Die U binden aan dit land, / Keer soms weer tot alle vrienden / In het oude Vaderland.

Figure 11 Wedding photo of Wim and Jetty, The Hague 16 September 1924



commenting on the relationship of the bridal couple in great detail. Then Wim's father spoke as if he were the ghost of Groen van Prinsterer:

> The ghost of Mr. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer speaks:
> Though unbelief and revolution still celebrate their heyday in the world,
> It's time again in the Netherlands that soundness and piety be unfurled.
> Because those virtues already adorned of yore our old Netherlandic race
> So I have brought together two scions of Groen van Prinsterer's race.
> In Joy and Peace both bride and groom came and there together met
> They quickly sensed that it was good and thus their course was set.
> Grandchild of my cousin Philipse, and grandson of my cousin 't Hooft
> These young people, one in mind, have pledged each other troth.
> Like old wine in new bottles, may this young loving couple never cease
> To be filled with that old spirit – that is my wish at this their wedding feast![57]

Two cousins later performed a special sketch in which they came in as the professors Karl Barth and Ernst Troeltsch to congratulate the couple. But they ended up arguing fiercely in half articulate but incomprehensible theological German in an attempt to stump each other. Brother Frans stole the show with a very apt song and dared to mock his brother Wim's international enthusiasm.

> Internationalism on the brain,
> Every new flag drives me near insane.
> When I go to bed,
> The map turns round my head.
> England, France and China
> Are old friends of mine,
> And the people living along the Rhine.
> But the only people that are real OK,
> That's the crowd that lives in dear old USA.
> My own country makes me weep,
> When I'm in Holland I'm asleep.
> Sure, I've internationalism on the brain.[58]

57 Nu ongeloof en revolutie nog in de wereld hoogtij viert / Wordt het tijd dat degelijkheid en vroomheid de Nederlanders weder siert / Die deugden sierden reeds van oudsher ons oud en Nederlandsch geslacht / Op Vreugd en Rust daar kwamen beiden de Bruid en Bruigom toen bijeen / En spoedig was de zaak beklonken en liepen zij gelukkig heen / Zij kleinkind van mijn nicht Philipse, hij, kleinzoon van my neef 't Hooft / De jongelieden, één van denken, zij hebben trouw elkaar beloofd / Moog 't jonge paar in liefde samen steeds zijn vervuld van d'ouden geest / Als oude wijn in nieuwe vaten, dat is mijn wensch op 't Huwelijksfeest!

58 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 16.

Figure 12 Wim and Jetty on their honeymoon, 1924



It was a fun song, but Frans was mistaken. It was not the ideal of internationalism itself that drove Wim but how he could live out the Christian faith with young people from various countries.

In the week that followed there were various dinners in honour of the bridal couple, at, among other places, the Patijn family. There were outings – to Marken on 28 August and on 7 September to his grandfather's house Thalatta in the dunes near Bloemendaal. Wim and Jetty spent their honeymoon in Lugano and Venice, after which they moved to Geneva in October 1924.

1.6 An Enthusiastic Youth Worker is Formed

This chapter relates how Wim Visser 't Hooft, who was born on the threshold of the twentieth century, grew up with his two brothers in Haarlem in an elitist environment. His father and mother were members of the upper class of the population. The family belonged to the Remonstrant Brotherhood, and his parents saw an important element of and guarantee of a civilised life and society in the Christian faith. Visser 't Hooft grew up with a good dose of rivalry with his brothers, but when he wanted to start something, there was little that stood in his way.[59] He heard all kinds of opinions proclaimed in his immediate circles, but these differences did not lead to serious conflict.

59 Zeilstra, interview with C.M.W. Visser 't Hooft, 25 October 2014.

Already at a young age, he could think and work independently. He grew up in times of crises, and when certain paths were blocked, he turned out to be very resourceful.

The young Visser 't Hooft was curious and eager to learn. He read a great deal and got through secondary school without incident and had a preference for languages, literature, and philosophy. He spoke reasonable French, German, and English at a young age already, albeit with a heavy Dutch accent that he never lost. There were no foreign trips, which the family could easily afford, during the war. That was precisely why he had so much time to attend the NCSV youth camps that he went to every summer. There he learned the values of camaraderie and adventure, which he experienced as an important supplement to his somewhat protected life at home. At these camps he also became acquainted with a personal way of reading the Bible and of believing that appealed to him.

The discrepancy between the way in which faith was dealt with at home and in the Remonstrant Brotherhood and the way in which it was treated at the youth camps raised many questions for Visser 't Hooft. All in all, it was a formational and stimulating background. He hoped to find answers to his questions by studying theology. His father was astounded by this choice and laid down the condition that he could study theology only if he also studied law at the same time. But although law did not interest him and he gave it up rather quickly, theology became his passion. That was reinforced when he discovered a more committed form of faith during an ecumenical students' conference in the Quaker centre of Woodbrooke that allowed him to connect both the experiences he had at the NCSV camps and his intellectual interests. The international context of the encounter between young people from various backgrounds played a major role in this. At Woodbrooke, the atmosphere was one of a personal faith combined with attention for the great questions that were being raised in society. In the Swiss Karl Barth he found a theologian with a similar concern. Barth not only asked questions but also gave answers that Visser 't Hooft valued. This seemed to him to be a theology that, if simplified, could appeal to people in church and society. With his work for the financial support of students in countries that had been affected by the war, Visser 't Hooft also showed that he did not back down from difficult tasks and could relate easily to people, including those of other languages and cultures. He sought solutions. At the international conferences he attended for student aid work, it appeared that he could deal with disagreements well and could connect and motivate people from very different backgrounds. He appealed candidly in his contacts with people to – precisely as Christians – relativise

national disagreements and truly listen to each other. These qualities led to his being noticed by leaders who saw potential in him as a youth worker. In 1924 he was asked to be the international secretary of the youth work of the YMCA, located in Geneva. That is how Visser 't Hooft ended up in one of the great international Christian organisations that was connected – via all kinds of personal contacts – with the ecumenical movement that was slowly developing but had not yet taken shape completely.

He immediately felt a strong spiritual affinity with Jetty Boddaert from The Hague, whom he met in 1922 at a reunion at Woodbrooke, because of her independent attitude. This led in a short time to their engagement, and they were married in 1924 and moved to Geneva.



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2 The School of International Encounter

Working with Youth and Students, 1924-1939

Abstract
Chapter 2 discusses Visser 't Hooft's work over the next decade and a half. It looks at his work as the YMCA international secretary for youth work and later for the WSCF and traces his development as a thinker and as an increasingly influential voice in the ecumenical movement, against the background of the theology of Karl Barth, and questions of mission and ecumenicity, and of the rising threat of totalitarian movements and the challenges this posed for youth work. The chapter shows how his developments in this period made him the logical choice, given his vision and character, for the position of general secretary of the planned World Council of Churches.

Keywords: Theology at Leiden University, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Rise of German Fascism, Karl Barth, World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), peace talks at Geneva

2.1 Introduction

The wounds left by the First World War were deep – millions of young men had met their death in the trenches. The Spanish flu claimed even more victims. The catastrophic events caused severe damage to the European view of itself as an example of civilisation and progress for the world. The expansion of the Western, more or less Christian, civilisation that had been taken for granted was no longer accepted as inevitable. In 1919, it had not even been ten years – though it seemed much longer – since the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 when John Mott spoke of 'the evangelisation of the world in this generation'.[1] The alleged source of

1 Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in this Generation* (1900).

Zeilstra, Jurjen A., *Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985: Living for the Unity of the Church*.
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civilisation for the world was infected with death and decay. Churches had played a reprehensible role in legitimising the war, with the clergy in all countries at war praying for a national victory and blessing their weapons without hesitation.

A new sense of urgency arose in the 1920s in the ecumenical organisations that had already existed before the war. Various movements were started to attempt to bring church leaders together, not only on a bilateral basis, i.e., between two churches seeking rapprochement, but for the church as a whole. In this search for contemporary forms of Christian unity, however, the organised churches hardly played any role whatsoever; rather, it was inspired personalities who took the lead. The most well-known examples were two movements. The one started in Stockholm at the initiative of the Swedish bishop, Nathan Söderblom, in 1925, i.e., Life and Work, and the one started by the Canadian episcopal bishop, Charles H. Brent, for faith and church order, i.e., Faith and Order. Questions were being raised about the raison-d'être of existing movements, such as the International Missionary Council, Christian youth movements like the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations/Young Women's Christian Associations (YMCA/YWCA) and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches was founded at the outbreak of the Great War. This was a movement replete with good intentions but extremely vulnerable, for it was completely dependent on individuals: there were no official ties to institutional churches. But since, for the most part, the same individuals popped up in these different movements, informal networks of ecumenical contacts slowly developed. These networks became more and more important through the 1920s. An old ecumenical movement, which continued to exist outside these developments, was the Evangelical Alliance. This organisation had been founded in 1846 in London as a Protestant reaction to the European revival of Roman Catholicism at that time.

This was the emerging field in which Visser 't Hooft ended up in 1924. His appointment as secretary for youth work in Europe for the World Alliance of YMCAs in Geneva was a pioneering position that had to be built up from scratch; he had no predecessor whose work he could simply take over. His modest salary was initially paid by the Dutch chapter of the YMCA. The energetic and creative way in which he carried out his duties was striking. What were his insights here? How did he deal with international idealism and the rising fascism of the 1920s? (2.2). The YMCA sent the young secretary to a series of large ecumenical conferences. The first was the founding conference for the ecumenical organisation for practical Christianity, 'Life and Work' in

Stockholm in 1925, under the leadership of the Swedish archbishop Nathan Söderblom. He learned a great deal at these international gatherings (2.3). His work also brought him to the United States, where preparations were being carried out for a world conference of the YMCA in Helsinki in 1926. The developments in American Christianity fascinated him to such an extent that he decided to write his doctoral dissertation on that subject, and he earned his doctorate in 1928 (2.4). His move to the World Student Christian Federation around 1930 proceeded slowly, and for a couple of years he worked for both the YMCA and the WSCF. His principal tasks for the latter organisation were editing and speaking. He took clear standpoints and managed to engage his audience through his ability to simplify the content while at the same time hinting at depth in his words (2.5). At the beginning of the 1930s, all of Europe was focused on the disarmament talks that had been organised by the League of Nations in Geneva. How did Visser 't Hooft present the connection between what was happening there and their engagement as Christian students to the members of his movement? (2.6). Visser 't Hooft initially underestimated the significance of Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany at about the same time, (2.7). He had great expectations of missions with respect to colonies and countries outside Europe and followed the development of independence movements with interest. In the end, however, he decided not to go into missions (2.8). His roots lay in the youth movement, but he gradually began to pay more attention to the role of the church and to believe that it was through the renewal of the churches that the great social issues could best be tackled. He was the most obvious candidate in 1938 for the difficult position of secretary of the World Council of Churches which was being formed at that time. Just before the Second World War broke out, in the summer of 1939, 1500 Protestant young people from many countries gathered in Amsterdam. This meeting would make a deep impression on Visser 't Hooft (2.9).

2.2 Secretary of the YMCA in a Wounded Europe

All three brothers, Frans, Wim, and Hans, graduated from the Stedelijk Gymnasium (Municipal Gymnasium) in Haarlem without incident, and after that, they each went in very different directions. The oldest brother Frans (1897-1982) studied in Delft, earned his doctorate in pharmaceutics, and married the American Martha Hamlin (1906-1994), the daughter of fabulously rich parents. She started studying at the Académie Julien in Paris in 1922 and then at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art in 1925

and became an expressionist and surrealist artist. After getting married in 1928, Frans and Martha moved to Buffalo, New York, where Frans became vice-president of the Novadel-Agene Corporation and later president of Wallace and Tiernan's Lucidol Division. He retired in 1961. He was also an honorary consul for the Netherlands in Buffalo. They had three children: Martje, Frans Jr., and Emily. It was not a happy marriage, however. While Frans concentrated on his career and social position, Martha was primarily occupied with her art and her artistic friends – and the family got in the way of both of them.[2] Because they lived in completely different worlds, Wim had little contact with his brother Frans. They would visit once in a while but did not see each other much. Wim got along better with Hans (1905-1977), the youngest of the three. He was the most athletic of the brothers, became a hockey player of some merit, and was selected for the Dutch national team, which won silver at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928. Hans studied medicine in Leiden and became a general practitioner in Velp. In 1932 he married Wilhelmina Scheurleer (1911-1974), and they had six children: Willem, Clan, Annemarth, Hans, Sander, and Willemijn. There was regular contact between Velp and Geneva, especially when the children were still young.

After their honeymoon, Wim and Jetty moved in the autumn of 1924 into a temporary home on the Boulevard de la Tour in Geneva. This house was quickly traded in for a pleasant small villa in Petit-Saconnex. They found a church community to join in Ferney-Voltaire, just across the French border northwest of Geneva. The preaching of the Protestant preacher, Pierre Maury (1890-1956), who had been general secretary of the French chapter of the WSCF, appealed to him immediately, and Wim and Jetty attended services weekly after that. Maury was not only their pastor but very soon became one of Visser 't Hooft's best friends.

In the autumn of 1924, Visser 't Hooft went to work enthusiastically for the YMCA. His supervisor, Edgar M. Robinson, who directed the work in Europe, gave him a great deal of freedom and allowed him a great deal of latitude. The only arrangement they had was that Visser 't Hooft was to be responsible for the youth work of the YMCA in Germany and Scandinavia and would concentrate on work among boys in secondary schools. The first thing he did was to organise an international conference. He had closely observed what did and did not work at the international meetings he had attended. The working model of the conference suited him, and Visser 't Hooft would organise many of them in the various positions he held.

2 Bertholf, *Martha Visser 't Hooft* (1991).

Figure 13 Wim in tennis clothes, Hans, Frans, and Jetty, ca. 1928



Figure 14 During a student exchange in the 1920s



The YMCA, for which he now worked, had been founded in 1844 in London by the industrialist and philanthropist George Williams. It was initially focused on Bible study and prayer groups led by volunteers. Under the leadership of Henri Dunant, the founder of the International Red Cross, it became a world organisation in Paris in 1855. This is where the so-called *Paris Basis* was accepted, the formulation 'Jesus Christ as God and Saviour'. This formulation later appeared in the basis document for Faith and Order and, in 1938 – also through Visser 't Hooft's doing – these words would be taken over as the basic formula for the World Council of Churches in formation.

> The Young Men's Christian Associations seek to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be his disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of his Kingdom amongst young men.[3]

Halfway through the 1920s, the World Alliance of YMCAs was a collection of diverse national and local organisations of youth work among young people of all ages. It sometimes primarily concerned school-age children, sometimes students, and the clubs were often 'melting pots' of children from all strata of society. There were clubs led by laypeople and clubs that had been organised by churches. Keeping all these different clubs together and having them contribute in a way that enriched the YMCA as a whole was a problem it itself. Activities ranged from Bible study to campaigns for swimming lessons, education programmes for 'the masses', evangelisation, and holiday camps. In 1926, there were almost 10,000 associated local clubs with an estimated membership of 1,700,000, 30% of whom were younger than 18, in 36 different countries, territories, and colonies.[4] They were financed in continental Europe largely by American philanthropists who were worried at the time about the effects of war violence and revolutions on young people. During the years 1924-1929, Europe was recovering and was relatively prosperous, but the YMCA leadership was afraid that war and revolution would lead young people to succumb to a spirit of scepticism, materialism, and secularisation. A new generation had to be prevented from becoming susceptible to influence by radical movements.[5]

As secretary for the YMCA, Visser 't Hooft was primarily successful in organising a number of large international gatherings. He organised a

3 Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations* (1955), 133.
4 Ibid., 491-492.
5 Ibid., 471.

conference twice in Dassel in Lower Saxony for those who worked with secondary school students. The first was in 1927, with delegates from about fifty movements. The second Dassel conference took place in 1932.[6] A special international committee was formed that stimulated a psychology of religion approach to the issue of the youth. Visser 't Hooft managed to enlist the services of the Dutch professor Philip A. Kohnstamm (1875-1951) here as an expert. Kohnstamm was not only an educator but also a philosopher and a physicist. As the father of scientific pedagogy and didactics in the Netherlands, he argued for an open and realistic approach with emphasis on the developmental phase of the growing child.[7]

The YMCA watched with great concern as the youth groups of communist and fascist youth organisations flourished and continued to hold great attraction for boys and young men. Visser 't Hooft came from a milieu that was both religious and politically liberal, but, as a young man, he had been receptive to socialism's power to attract.[8] He himself viewed this later as a youthful flirtation that had to do with utopian dreams, and later had no further interest in it. Universal suffrage for men was introduced in 1917 in the Netherlands, and in 1922 women were allowed to vote for the first time. Many wondered at that time what the influence of what were called 'the masses' would be on politics and culture. Visser 't Hooft was interested in that question, but even more in the question of how the masses could be reached with a proclamation of the Christian faith that spoke to them. Visser 't Hooft himself had never joined a specific political party or movement. He had never voted in the Netherlands, and when he could vote in Geneva as an honorary citizen, he himself said that his vote, when it concerned one of the many referendums, was never motivated by party ideology. He had no confidence whatsoever in a violent revolution, and he detested communists, especially when they were in power. If socialists worked with them, he had nothing good to say about them – then or later.

In his youth work for the YMCA, Visser 't Hooft was very much involved with secondary schools. He distanced himself from the liberal ideal that education should focus on the individual development of children privileged by birth into the right families, as was the case in his own youth. The YMCA was focused on camaraderie, built around a clear Christian message. That was intended to be the realistic alternative to radical movements. In Visser

6 A third Dassel conference was held in 1936, but Visser 't Hooft was not involved in organising it.

7 Cf. Visser 't Hooft, *Christus im Schulleben* (1927).

8 F. Groeneveld, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1980.

't Hooft's eyes, Russian communism and Italian fascism were particularly dangerous, and indirectly so for underprivileged school children outside Russia and Italy as well. There was an international idealistic movement, as represented by R.N. de Coudenhove-Kalergi with his Pan-European movement, that focused on getting rid of national sovereignties. But in 1914, at the very last minute before the war, the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches was founded. At its peak in 1929, this movement accepted the resolution of Eisenach-Avignon, whereby the international legal order was placed above loyalty to a national state.[9] In these organisations, people looked to the League of Nations with great optimism. But Visser 't Hooft could not believe that the post-war generation of young people could find any anchor in such ideas – those ideas were much too abstract for that. In his view, totalitarian movements like Mussolini's were successful because love for the fatherland could be presented in a very concrete way, whatever happened. That they then went too far in their absolute claims to political loyalty was not the fault of 'the masses'. An ominous sign for the new order was the occupation of the Ruhr Area by French and Belgian troops in 1923 when Germany failed to meet the penal provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

Still, in 1934, when Wim and Jetty came to Geneva, there was hope that the formation of the League of Nations would entail a change of some sort in how nations dealt with other nations. A great deal was expected of international law, and in the five years that followed, Europe was dominated by a certain optimism. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aristide Briand, and his German counterpart, Gustav Stresemann, were able to conclude the Treaty of Locarno in 1925 whereby Germany recognised its new Western border. In 1926, Germany became a member of the League of Nations. With the Briand-Kellogg Treaty of 1928, the signatory nations officially rejected war as a means for settling disputes in international politics. Work was started on a prestigious Palais des Nations in Geneva. At the same time, fascism and national socialism were on the rise and capable of once again stoking the smouldering embers of feelings of unease still remaining from the war. These movements made a religiously charged appeal to the individual's loyalty to a collective ideal, supplemented by a strong nationalistic myth. When the stock market crashed in New York at the end of October 1929 and brought an end to the years of relative prosperity, fascism was able to forge ahead.

Aside from J.R. Mott, the great visionary behind both the YMCA and the WSCF and Visser 't Hooft's first source of inspiration, Karl Barth was also

9 Dam, *De Wereldbond voor Vriendschap door de Kerken, 1914-1948. Een oecumenische vredesorganisatie* (1996), 195-199.

an important influence. Visser 't Hooft gave a lecture on his theology for students at the beginning of 1924 called 'Faith and Religion'. But he himself was not satisfied with it and did not feel that the students understood what he was talking about.[10] When Barth visited Geneva in 1925, there was time for a meeting and a deep theological conversation with Visser 't Hooft and Maury. Barth's conviction that all 'religion' was the work of people and that God's grace had to be presented as completely sovereign and what he called 'dialectical' over and above human culture appealed to both of them. The friends agreed that Visser 't Hooft and Maury would attempt to make Barth's work known outside German-speaking areas by publications, lectures, and translations. By doing so, they sought to link Barth's work with current events. In 1928, for example, Visser 't Hooft published a short article on Barth in the French journal *Foi et Vie*, in which he presented his view as a counter to the sinister scenario sketched by Oswald Spengler for Europe that so many people were concerned about at that time.[11]

Of the liberal cultural theology that dominated his student period in Leiden, the German professor Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) was the most appealing example. Troeltsch held that God was related to the world in an immanent way. In 1923, Visser 't Hooft wrote an undergraduate thesis on the influence of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher on Troeltsch's thinking. In this study, he analysed Troeltsch's argument for a contemporary church that adjusted to the cultural context of the twentieth century: 'a group of free individuals who form a spiritual organic unity by their relation to one centre.'[12] Other examples of important scholars who influenced his

10 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 16. This lecture has not been preserved.

11 'Il est un point unique d'où il est possible de soulever le monde; ce point n'est pas dans le monde – il n'en existe pas moins pour cela – C'est la pure grâce de Dieu.' (It is a unique point that it is possible to lift the world; this point is not in the world – it does not exist in principle – It is the pure grace of God.) Visser 't Hooft, 'Le Message de Karl Barth', 1928. Cf. Visser 't Hooft, *Introduction à Karl Barth* (1931). Translations in English and Dutch. WCC 994.2.03/2 and 3. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (1922-1923).

12 Visser 't Hooft, 'Kantiaansche en Schleiermacheriaansche elementen in het werk van Ernst Troeltsch', 1923. Visser 't Hooft concludes: 'Het komt Troeltsch voor, dat dit het eenig mogelijke kerkbegrip is voor onzen tijd. De groote versplintering en vertakking, die er in het Protestantisme opgetreden is, zal alleen een organisatie kunnen verdragen, die aan een ieder het recht toekent het christendom op zijn eigen wijze te interpreteeren. De bovennatuurlijke, onfeilbare, autoritaire kerk is een anachronisme in onzen tijd. Aan den anderen kant moet er echter een bron van eenheid zijn, die het organisch karakter der organisatie waarborgt en die aan de kerk het eigen karakter geeft, waardoor zij meer dan vereeniging of secte wordt. Deze bron, zegt Schleiermacher en Troeltsch neemt het gaarne over, ligt in de levende en levenwekkende kracht van den geest van Christus. Zeker Troeltsch geeft toe, dat de positie der kerken nog veel ingewikkelder en moeilijker is geworden dan zij al was ten tijde van Schleiermacher. De

study programme were Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) and Rudolf Otto (1869-1937). In Visser 't Hooft's view, while they were also able to offer scientific knowledge of religions, they could not provide any basis for a faith that could build up the church or be thrown up as a bulwark against a godless mass movement. He had nothing positive to say about Otto's 1917 book *Das Heilige*. In a fashion that has proven to be characteristic of him, he wrote: 'Rudolf Otto … can tell us more about the *mysterium tremendum* than is good for us to know.'[13] In his view, 'the masses' could never be inspired by the ideas of these academic theologians, and that alone was enough to disqualify their scholarship despite any truth that scholarship might contain, a scholarship that he saw as locked in the ivory towers of a barren elite. Troeltsch distinguished between the ideal of a 'church' that formed a community on the one hand and 'sects' that withdrew from the world and produced schisms on the other. Although Troeltsch argued for the legitimacy of both church and sect as mysticism, not every position contributed to solving the modern social problem. Here Troeltsch was referring to a complex of difficulties that resulted from capitalism, the industrial proletariat, militarism, the growth of the world population, colonialism, labour ethics, migration, and mechanising technology.[14] He saw churches that were focused on and

historisch-critische wetenschap heeft niet voor niets haar eenerzijds bevrijdend, maar anderzijds destructief werk gedaan. Allerlei elementen van het Christendom, die voor Schleiermacher nog tot de onomstotelijke waarheden behoorden, zij door haar aangetast, gewogen en te licht bevonden. De principieele oplossing echter blijft die van Schleiermacher: een band van vrije menschen, die door hun betrekking tot één middelpunt een geestelijke organische eenheid vormen.' Niet toevallig had het denken van Kant veel invloed op Karl Barth. (It seems to Troeltsch that this is the only possible concept of the church for our time. The great splintering and branching off that has occurred in Protestantism will only be able to tolerate an organisation that grants everyone the right to interpret the Christian faith in his own way. The supernatural, infallible, authoritarian church is an anachronism in our time. On the other hand, there needs to be a source of unity that guarantees the organic character of organisation and that gives the church its own character through which it becomes more than an association or sect. This source, Schleiermacher says and Troeltsch readily takes it over, lies in the living and life-giving power of the spirit of Christ. Troeltsch certainly admits that the position of the churches has become more complex and difficult than it was already in the time of Schleiermacher. It is not for nothing that historical-critical studies have been liberating for the church, but they have also been destructive. All kinds of elements of Christianity, which were still part of the incontrovertible truths for Schleiermacher, have been assailed by it, weighed, and found wanting. Schleiermacher's solution, however, remained in principle: a group of free individuals who form a spiritual organic unity by their relation to one centre.' It is not coincidental that Kant had a deep influence on Karl Barth.)

13 Dutch translation: Otto, *Het heilige* (1928). English translation: *The Idea of the Holy* (1923); Visser 't Hooft, 'Le trésor dans les vases d'argile', 1934.

14 Reitsma, *Ernst Troeltsch als godsdienstwijsgeer* (1974), 87-100.

completely absorbed with themselves and ignored their place and role in wider society as 'sectarian'. In his view, many churches in the 20th century found themselves stuck in such a fruitless position.[15] Their decline was imminent. As far as Visser 't Hooft was concerned, Troeltsch was right about this. Student and youth movements that went along with the splintering of Christianity into 'sects' could, as a result, do nothing else than follow suit and organise themselves in a segregated fashion as well. In the eyes of Visser 't Hooft, this was a development at the expense of the church of Christ as the visible people of God on the move in the world. According to Visser 't Hooft, Troeltsch had done a good job of analysing religion and the forms of being church, but, because of his relativism and acceptance of individualism, he had also deprived himself of the opportunity to provide people with an answer. Karl Barth, who called himself a 'dialectical' theologian, presented God not as immanent but as transcendent and sovereign. According to this Swiss theologian, God was judging humanity in his revelation. The truth came out, and this truth led either to reflection and the building of God's kingdom of peace and justice or the rejection of that. For Visser 't Hooft, to accept these insights from Barth entailed an increasing distance from cultural theology.

A third figure that Visser 't Hooft considered to be inspiring and analytically strong was the Russian philosopher of culture and religion Nikolai A. Berdyaev (1874-1948). Thinkers like Berdyaev rejected internationalism as unfoundedly optimistic and vague and found it unsuitable as the basis for a message that could appeal to young people. Berdyaev had initially become a Marxist in Tsarist Russia and had embraced the Marxist revolution of Lenin and his followers in 1917. But, because of his criticism of state communism, he had been expelled from Russia. Berdyaev was inspired not only by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy but also by the old church fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine. He made connections between the roots of Christianity and the challenges of the modern world and seemed able to build a bridge between East and West. First in Berlin and then, after 1924, in Paris, Berdyaev developed a social Marxism with a strongly personalised emphasis.[16] Visser 't Hooft met him because Berdyaev managed to bring émigré students in Paris together in a special chapter of the World Student Christian Federation that he set up there. The combination of modern and

15 Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (1912).

16 Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations* (1955), 498. Quote by Berdyaev: 'the image of man is defaced when the image of God is obliterated from the human soul.'

old, East and West, that Berdyaev strove for appealed to Visser 't Hooft. He found in him an answer to the anti-church element in Tolstoy: it was a matter of the quality of the community. Through his contributions to the journal *Esprit*, among other things, Berdyaev would have a great deal of influence on the ecumenical youth movement and the thinking in the early World Council of Churches.

In addition to international conferences, Visser 't Hooft started looking for other means to reach young people. He started a journal with editions in two languages, *The World's Youth/Jugend in Aller Welt.* This journal tackled all kinds of questions young people were faced with in a very concrete and modern way. By means of reports on the life of young people in different countries, articles, and attractive photos, this journal gave young people the impression that they were members of a variegated worldwide family. What was it like to be a Greek Orthodox young man in the Balkans? Or a young Chinese Christian in Canton after the revolution of Sun Yat-sen? What was the spiritual struggle among the youth of Central Europe ultimately about?[17] *The World's Youth* did not shy away from taking a clear theological position. As chief editor, Visser 't Hooft avoided a naive world fraternity and made room for the proclamation of the redemption of a sinful world by the Son of God.[18] The YMCA was a variegated organisation, and not everyone followed him blindly. In response to the question what it meant to bring young people to Christ, Visser 't Hooft answered that four different answers were given in what he now called 'the movement of Dassel'. First, there was a group of staff members who found that the sense of sin and forgiveness had to be central. The second group placed the accent on the gifts of Christ and his resurrection. The third group emphasised a process of personal surrender to Christ, with room for the individual development of the young people they were talking to. The fourth group spoke rather of the concrete application of Christian principles to different areas of life. But Visser 't Hooft did not want to exaggerate the differences within the YMCA: 'These points of view were not held exclusively by one or the other. In most cases the differences were those of gradation rather than of opposition.'[19]

Visser 't Hooft was now constantly travelling through Europe and was actively involved in numerous meetings with secondary school students, young employed people, and young theologians. Also, as an international

17 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Perilous Position of Christianity', 1929.

18 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 21-22. Visser 't Hooft, 'Moderne Jugend und das internationale Ideal', 1927.

19 Visser 't Hooft, 'Bringing Boys to Christ', 1928.

representative of Christian youth work, he had easy access to a number of dignitaries, both in the church and in politics. At Pentecost in 1925, for example, there was the biannual event of the German YMCA in Hannover, where 50,000 young people convened around the theme 'Forward to Christian Manliness'.[20]

2.3 Ambassador for the YMCA

At the foundation ceremony of the organisation for Practical Christianity that took place in Stockholm, as a YMCA delegate, Visser 't Hooft was the youngest participant at the age of 24.[21] Jetty accompanied him to Sweden, and from 19 to 30 August they were the guests of Prince Oscar Bernadotte, brother of the king and president of the Swedish YMCA. The driving force behind bringing Christians together from a wide variety of churches with a view to giving practical shape to Christian faith in social issues was the Lutheran archbishop Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931). Delegates from many countries, including countries that had been at war with each other not long before, were summoned for an international meeting as part of their Christian calling. The movement was known primarily by its English name Life and Work. At the conference, Visser 't Hooft met the Swiss minister Alphons Koechlin and the later British bishop George Bell, at that time Dean of Canterbury. He would collaborate extensively with both men. The *Rotterdamsche Courant* remarked in its report that most of the participants at the conference did not listen very well to others – they were more occupied with their own witness concerning their faith than with an actual exchange of ideas about current problems, such as the youth issue. The reporter made an exception for one contribution: 'One of the few business-like remarks was made by the youthful Dutch delegate, 't Hooft.'[22]

It was Söderblom's intention that doctrinal questions on the content of the faith during the conference should be set aside, and the phrase *Lehre trennt, Dienst vereint*, coined by Hermann P. Kapler, the president of the federation of German Protestant churches, became the slogan for the conference.[23] This seemed to be a useful means initially for deciding on the subjects and has also become known as *doctrine divides, but service unites.* A conference

20 Visser 't Hooft, 'Forward to Christian Manliness', 1925.

21 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 24.

22 *Rotterdamsche Courant*, 27 August 1925.

23 Karlström, 'Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work, 1910-1925', 1986, 509-544, 540.

had already been planned where faith as such would be discussed: the Conference of Lausanne in 1927, where the Faith and Order movement was founded. Nevertheless, Visser 't Hooft had learned already at the meetings in Stockholm that it did not work in that way. Tackling practical matters without allowing faith to be discussed could be nothing more than a stopgap measure. He also saw that the working groups were poorly organised: people spoke more at each other than with each other. There was too little time for discussion, and the translators were not sufficiently acquainted with the church and theological terms. Visser 't Hooft explained much of this talking past each other by his observation that delegates from England, France, and especially the United States advocated a form of engaged Christian action whereby human activities should, as a matter of course, end in the kingdom of God. In contrast to that, he saw a type of continental European theology, endorsed especially by German Lutherans, that wanted nothing to do with such human arrogance. According to these participants, it was only God himself who could build his kingdom at the end of time. It was this fruitless opposition that made him choose his subject for his dissertation: the optimistic American social gospel theology. When he received his doctorate in 1928, Visser 't Hooft attempted to throw light on this opposition and to make suggestions for a better dialogue.

Visser 't Hooft was good at organising conferences, but the YMCA had varied success among secondary school students. He preferred working with clubs in which young people would learn to know Jesus Christ, to read the Bible and pray as well as being helped in their personal development through sports and games. In the autumn of 1927 he visited the Netherlands and Denmark so he could observe and stimulate work at secondary schools. But the YMCA was unable to achieve very much in the Netherlands with respect to working among secondary school students. The Education Act of 1920 led to public schools being very defensive about their neutrality, whereas – precisely because of their confessionally based identity – the private schools set up barriers to protect them against outside influences. In practice, therefore, the YMCA work in the Netherlands mainly consisted in extracurricular activities and summer camps. In Denmark, however, Visser 't Hooft was welcomed with his YMCA at Lutheran state schools, and the clubs could be set up within the schools. He saw a challenge in those national differences: 'It gave a chance for a comparative study of methods and for an interchange of experiences.' Europe, for him, was a training ground for the world.

> What I learned in Holland and Denmark again I may perhaps bring to India or Siam or some other country. In these matters cultural and racial differences

> do not constitute absolute barriers, because an idea received in Denmark may be unrecognisably adapted to suit local conditions in Brasil [sic].[24]

Visser 't Hooft was constantly on the alert for new opportunities. Thus, he wondered if someone should be sent to the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928 to represent the YMCA. In any case, according to him, the YMCA would have to concern itself with two things during the Games. There should be a centre for information on places to sleep, so that young men could go to the proper places, rather than the wrong ones, and healthy forms of amusement should be organised for the evenings. 'A good piece of work at Amsterdam in these days would, of course, serve as fine propaganda.'[25]

For the YMCA's work among secondary school students, Visser 't Hooft visited Czechoslovakia twice in 1928, a new state that had emerged as a result of the collapse of the Danube monarchy. Here he saw a test case for the rest of European Christianity. The central question was, in his view, whether Czechoslovakia would be a Roman Catholic country or something else. What role was there for the substantial Protestant minority with its rich past? Visser 't Hooft saw a major challenge: guiding Czech schoolboys out of the mental confusion he felt they were in and into a sense of what he called 'the constructive Christian truth'. But the YMCA work in Czechoslovakia suffered from a shortage of leaders, and new leaders had to be recruited or trained to break through the vicious circle in which weak Protestant religious education found itself.[26] Visser 't Hooft wrote a solid syllabus for training YMCA youth leaders: 'Christianity and Modern Thought'.[27]

Visser 't Hooft also visited the Balkans and Turkey several times at the end of the 1920s. While the Protestant YMCA was usually welcome in countries like Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Greece, there was also mistrust in this part of the world on the part of the Orthodox Churches. Visser 't Hooft wanted good relations with the church authorities, but bringing the youth into contact with Christ was a non-negotiable objective for him, which meant that risks had to be taken sometimes. The YMCA was, after all, not simply an 'ethical society'. Under the direction of the experienced chairman of the WSCF and a major source of inspiration behind the YMCA, John Mott, Visser 't Hooft called an informal meeting with church leaders in Sofia

24 Visser 't Hooft, 'Report on Visits to Holland and Denmark in the Interest of Work among High School Boys', 1927.

25 Ibid.

26 Visser 't Hooft, 'Report on Two Visits to Czechoslovakia in May and September 1928 in the Interest of Work for Secondary School Boys', 1928.

27 Visser 't Hooft, 'Christianity and Modern Thought', 1930.

in 1928, in which agreements on principles were reached on the YMCA's methods in Orthodox countries.[28] He also saw opportunities in Turkey. Modern Turkey was a brand-new national state that had been founded on the secularisation ideology of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, with the legacy of a recently collapsed empire. There had already been a flourishing chapter of the YMCA during the Ottoman period. It was now in trouble, for the Greek Christians were being expelled everywhere. But here as well the YMCA had to bring a message of eternity to a youth that, in Visser 't Hooft's eyes, were drowning in relativism and what he called 'this-worldliness'. He hoped that the YMCA would seize the opportunity before the youth were lost.[29]

Completely in the style of the NCSV, Visser 't Hooft used his personal life story about his discovery of personal faith in God at Woodbrooke in 1920 to make contact with young men in the various countries he went to. In the book, *We Believe in Prayer*, in which a number of people give their view of prayer, he described his own 'conversion' as follows:

> Prayer seems to me to be inseparably connected with faith in a personal God. Whenever in me the awareness of God's supreme right to rule all of my life fades I cannot pray. Whenever I do not pray God's existence becomes an idea instead of a reality. When at the time of adolescence I began to enjoy using my capacities for rational thinking, the first result was a complete break down of this personal view of God and consequently of prayer-life. Reason could not admit a God who would be more than a hidden force of nature. Prayer could not be anything but a sort of mystical contact with nature. But there came a day when I had to pray otherwise – because I realized that a question was being put to me, that I was called.[30]

That is how he wrote about his personal development in a way that it could be used in the work for the YMCA and appealed to many young men.

2.4 A Bridge Builder between Europeans and Americans

From 16 October to 12 December 1925, Visser 't Hooft was in the United States and Canada to study the sub-chapter American Movement for Boys in the

28 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Orthodox Churches and the Y.M.C.A.', 1930.

29 Visser 't Hooft, 'Report of Some Aspects of the Situation of the Y.M.C.A. in Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Turkey', 1929.

30 Strong, *We Believe in Prayer* (1930), 89-91.

High Schools and to strengthen European contacts with the headquarters of the international YMCA in Washington, where various meetings on youth work in America were held. Another important objective of his visit was to prepare for the YMCA world conference that would be held in Helsinki in 1926. Visser 't Hooft was impressed by the American organisation and the great public acquaintance with its work. He was less taken with the content of the programmes in the United States. In his view, they were too moralistic and were often limited to a matter of dos and don'ts, without much attention being paid to the development of a personal life of faith for the boys. When confronted with the reality of life, the danger of disappointment was thus great.[31]

After his return from America, Visser 't Hooft regularly presented himself in Europe as an expert in the church and the life of Christian societies in America. In his view – based also on his experiences at the Stockholm Conference in 1925 – one of the major problems of the future was the opposition between the character of Europe and that of America, not least with respect to Christianity. The differences in mentality were enormous, and the gap was increased even more by misunderstandings in the images they had of each other. In Germany, according to Visser 't Hooft, Americans were viewed as the equivalent of barbarians.[32] He saw it as his task to make an essential contribution to decreasing this gap in understanding. He warned the Americans in his lectures in the United States that American secondary school students were growing up too fast and were beginning to act as adults while they were still adolescents. According to him, this was caused by boys and girls attending the same schools and the provocative way girls dressed.[33] In his view, the YMCA had to have a clear message for what he saw as an often indifferent and sometimes cynical youth in the United States. He felt that boys were hungering for authenticity instead of 'slogans and schemes'. For a true, credible spirituality, youth leaders also needed to dare to speak without hesitation about the distance and difference between God and human beings.[34]

The YMCA world conference was held in Helsinki from 1 to 6 August 1926. The YMCA saw itself as a social melting pot in which class differences did not play any significant role. Good collaboration between church and

31 Visser 't Hooft, 'Report on Visit to the United States of America and Canada', 1926.

32 Visser 't Hooft, untitled lecture, beginning with 'Eines der schwierigsten Probleme der Zukunft…', no date, WCC 994.2.01/21.

33 Report of American Journey, WCC 994.1.37/1.

34 Visser 't Hooft, 'Youth Today and our Message to It', 1927.

lay organisations was also pursued, with varying success, whereby both laypeople and clergy held leadership positions in the YMCA but never on behalf of the church. A few innovations tried out at the Helsinki conference were working with questionnaires and splitting the 1500 participants into 50 working groups. The target group was also – for the first time – represented at the conference. There were 231 boys who attended as participants. John Mott, who already had a high reputation at that time and a great deal of experience with international conferences, asked Visser 't Hooft to act as his personal assistant. This was a golden opportunity to learn a great deal about organising and leading such a large international conference. It struck him that there was something intangible about Mott, and he liked to open a meeting with a sweeping statement while leaving others to work out the details. During this conference, the tensions between the French and Germans delegates ran high. An offer by Mott to mediate was declined.[35] Visser 't Hooft observed everything and from that time on began to develop into a 'bridge builder' who felt drawn primarily to the Germans with respect to realism and eschatological orientation and to the Americans with respect to social ethics and a practical work attitude.

The year 1928 brought high and low points.[36] Wim and Jetty's first child was born on 17 February, Anna Johanna, and was called Anneke for short. Wim's mother, Jacoba Lieftinck, died that same year after a long illness. His father decided then to stop practising law, and Wim and Jetty asked him to come live with them in Geneva. The house 'Zonnebloem' on Koninginneweg in Haarlem was sold, and Wim's father moved to Geneva in April 1929. With the birth of Anneke and the arrival of Wim's father, the cottage-like house in Petit-Saconnex was too small, and they moved to a larger house, at 18 Chemin de la Combe in Champel. There their second child was born on 29 March 1930, Hendrik Philip, named after his grandfather. In line with family tradition he was called Hans. Shortly after, on 15 August 1930, his proud namesake and grandfather H.P. Visser 't Hooft died in Geneva.[37]

The family was not well off at this time, and settling Wim's father's affairs occurred at a time in which they were just making ends meet. About a year later, on 13 April 1931, another son was born, Cornelis, Kees for short – 'Indeed

35 Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955. A Biography* (1979), 637-38.

36 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 35.

37 H.P. Visser 't Hooft had already had his first seizure in 1924. Visser 't Hooft to H.C. Rutgers, 10 March 1924. HDC-PE, NCSV 524, 711. He was cremated and his ashes were placed in the Driehuis-Westerveld cemetery near Santpoort. Dr. A.H. Haentjens, minister of the Remonstrant church in Haarlem, spoke at his funeral of his infectious cheerfulness and uplifting optimism.

Figure 15 Jetty with her daughter Anneke, ca. 1930



somewhat soon but no less welcome.'[38] They moved into a chalet on Route de Florissant in May 1931 where the family lived until 1938.[39] Mother Boddaert, whom the family called 'Moek', came often during this time to stay with Wim and Jetty in Geneva to help her daughter with the young children since Jetty's health was poor. Wim was always busy and often absent for long periods. Jetty, 'Mammie' to the children, did not like household work, and so they hired a girl for the housekeeping chores but primarily to look after the children. Over the years, various girls and sisters would succeed one another. Not everyone was suitable, and it happened more than once

38 Visser 't Hooft to his brother Hans, no date, Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.

39 Both houses have been demolished.

Figure 16 Wim, Jetty, and their three children, Anneke, Hans, and Kees, ca. 1933



that the children were hit. Neither Wim nor Jetty were warm or liked to hug, and the children often had to process their personal ups and downs on their own. But Jetty was certainly a mother that wanted to hear the stories her children could tell her at teatime after school. Anneke, Hans and Kees grew up without seeing much of their father, 'Atta' ('Dad' in Homerian Greek).[40] The vacations were short, usually somewhere in the Swiss mountains, and Atta often took his work with him. He loved climbing mountains. As a mountain climber, he had, he himself stated, considerable stamina.[41] There were also trips to the Netherlands for family visits. Jetty had married an

40 See 6.2.

41 Stoop, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1960.

extroverted man, but she herself was not someone who went out much or drew attention to herself. She was disappointed that she had not gone to university, but she read a great deal, particularly on the position of women.

When Visser 't Hooft was not travelling, he was often busy working on his dissertation in the evenings during their first years in Geneva, often deep into the night. He wrote the plan for this study and its sub-questions in thirty school notebooks.[42] After the First World War, 'America' was in fashion in Europe but was often poorly understood. Through its successful participation in the war, the United States had helped Europe, but after the war it returned to the politics of isolationism and did not join the League of Nations. At the same time, it was 'the promised land' for Europeans. The prosperity, which was visible in automobiles, mechanical sound transmission, film, a new dance culture, and Charles Lindbergh, who flew to Europe in his *Spirit of St. Louis* – all of it was fascinating. All kinds of new American products flooded the European markets during the 'Roaring Twenties' and brought American culture to Europe.

On 26 October 1928, Visser 't Hooft earned his doctorate in theology with the study *The Social Gospel in America*. His dissertation supervisor was Professor H.T. de Graaf (1875-1930), endowed professor of the Leer der Godsdienstige Gemeenschap (Doctrine of Religious Fellowship). With this work, Visser 't Hooft wanted to make a constructive contribution to the improvement of the theological understanding between Americans and Europeans, particularly the Germans. He argued against the immanent concept of God in which revelation merges into ethics. At the same time, he sought to provide a theological basis for the social responsibility of the church. He thought he found it in an image of God in which people were called to responsibility in terms of judgment and grace as well as enabled to act by God's Spirit. Visser 't Hooft built his argument on the basis of his analysis of the socially engaged Social Gospel theology in the United States. The American Baptist minister and professor of theology Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) was one of the most important representatives of this thinking. He formulated his ideas in books like *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907) and *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917), which Visser 't Hooft examined extensively.[43] Rauschenbusch wanted to save the kingdom of God from *apocalypticism* and an *otherworldly orientation*. Visser 't Hooft's criticism was that Rauschenbusch had, however, fallen into an

42 WCC 994.2.51/1 and 2. This was how he always ordered his thoughts. The school notebooks were replaced for this purpose by the slate grey scribbling pads with squared paper in A5 size; WCC 994.2.65/2 and 3.

43 Rauschenbusch would influence the thinking of Martin Luther King Jr. and Desmond Tutu.

Figure 17 Visser 't Hooft and Pierre Maury as mountain climbers, Saas-Fee, 1934



improper 'immanentism' because he wanted primarily to point to the work of God in the world. Years later, he himself believed that he had not done sufficient justice to Rauschenbusch in 1928 and that the latter had made a more important contribution to the ecumenical conversation than he then understood.[44] Visser 't Hooft made a sharp contrast between the American Social Gospel and European theology, especially German theology, that was still strongly dominated at this time by Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms. The opposition between the respective approaches of Life and Work and Faith and Order could be seen in the background. He wanted not only to clarify their positions over against each other but also remove prejudices and to increase the understanding for the different positions among the participants in the debate. He was not successful in the latter. Visser 't Hooft's study received mixed reviews.[45]

2.5 Secretary of the WSCF in a Europe Once Again under Threat

The leaders of the youth work of the YMCA included many students who were themselves members of their respective national chapters of the World Student Christian Federation. In the Netherlands, that was the Nederlandse Christen Studenten Vereniging (Dutch Student Christian Movement). The WSCF had been founded in 1895 in Sweden by, among others, John Mott; the NCSV was founded a year later, in 1896. The objective of the NCSV was to bring together Protestant students from various churches. Most of the members were Reformed, but Remonstrants like Visser 't Hooft were obviously also welcome. The society wanted to reinforce the students' spiritual life and encourage them to bring fellow students to Christ. Local chapters organised smaller meetings, but all met together at the summer conferences held at the national headquarters of Woudschouten near Zeist.[46]

44 Visser 't Hooft, 'Rauschenbusch in Ecumenical Light', 1957. Cf. his own reflections on the 1920s in: Interview by R. Foppen with Visser 't Hooft, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives.

45 Cf. *Walker's Century Album pour Coupures de Journeaux*, no. 33, 1928, in which not only newspaper clippings from various countries about the dissertation were pasted but also his report on the entry of King Albert into liberated Belgium in 1918 and his newspaper articles on France in 1919 and Austrian student life in 1921. In 1932 Dietrich Bonhoeffer asked the director of the Life and Work study department in Geneva, Hans Schönfeld, for a copy of Visser 't Hooft's dissertation which he could not find in Berlin at that time. D. Bonhoeffer to H. Schönfeld, 1 December 1932. YDS-4, 219.

46 Van den Berg, *De Nederlandse Christen-Studenten Vereniging 1896-1985* (1991).

Figure 18 Participants of the international meeting of the YMCA in Canada, in the fall of 1925. Visser 't Hooft is holding the 'Holland' sign.



In 1928 a crisis arose in the leadership of the WSCF over disagreement about the proper course to pursue. The expected candidacy of the Swiss Gustav Kullman for the position of general secretary, which was vacant, was blocked by John Mott, who found him unsuitable because he was divorced. In December 1928, the executive committee sent a request to Visser 't Hooft to work half-time for the WSCF in Geneva where the head office of the WSCF was located, at 13 Rue Calvin. He accepted, thereby giving up on another plan – namely, to help set up a theological education programme in the Dutch East Indies. It was an important change. For the other half of his time, he continued to work for the YMCA for the time being, now as general secretary.

After working for some time as *co-ordinating secretary*, he started working full-time for the WSCF as general secretary in 1932, a position he would hold until 1938. He now took his leave of the YMCA. A few people with whom he worked in the executive committee of the WSCF were the Japanese W.E. Kan, the Chinese T.Z. Koo, and in particular Suzanne de Diétrich (1891-1981) from Alsace. She had had a technical education but had, under the influence

of Karl Barth, decided to work with international Christian students. Visser 't Hooft later wrote about his colleagues at the WSCF:

> It was really a team of men and women who were bound together by deep common convictions and by a common sense of mission with regard to the future of the Christian Church all over the world. It was therefore natural that most of those who in the 1930s had worked together in the Federation should meet again twenty years later at meetings of the World Council of Churches.[47]

The WSCF was an even better fit for Visser 't Hooft than the YMCA and brought him a new challenge. He could give his intellect free rein here. From then on he talked and discussed with students wherever he could. It was also because of his activity that the leadership crisis of 1928 became a turning point for the WSCF, and in the years following the organisation experienced a strong revival. Visser 't Hooft laid out a clear course and addressed the students with, as Suzanne de Diétrich observed, healthy realism and a fiery faith. He made no secret of his faith and acted in his position from a strong sense of the sovereignty of God, as he learned to say in 'Barthian'. In that way, he wanted to sound a powerful dissent with respect to the spirit of the times. De Diétrich wrote:

> In my view, it is this deep-rooted spiritual honesty, this straightforward will, that won Visser 't Hooft the hearts of the students. They were certainly often attracted, overwhelmed even by his intelligence, by his gift at showing the major lines of a problem with rare clarity. But their attachment had deeper reasons and was based in the atmosphere of seriousness and sincerity, which is perhaps the best and most unique characteristic of the World Federation, and which Visser 't Hooft embodied so much in this circle. It would not be correct to speak about the renewed intellectual interest and activity of the World Federation during this period 1930-1938 without … emphasising this very spiritual aspect of his activity.[48]

47 Visser 't Hooft, 24 March 1958, WCC general correspondence 727.

48 De Diétrich, 'Visser 't Hooft als secretaris van de WSCF', 1950, 430-31: 'Het is, naar mijn mening, deze diepgewortelde geestelijke eerlijkheid, deze rechtlijnige wil, die Visser 't Hooft de harten van de studenten deed winnen. Zeker, zij waren vaak aangetrokken, overweldigd zelfs door zijn intelligentie, door zijn gave om met zeldzame helderheid de grote lijnen van een probleem te laten zien. Maar hun gehechtheid had diepere redenen en berustte in die sfeer van ernst en oprechtheid, die misschien het beste en meest unieke karakteristiek is van de Wereldfederatie, en die Visser 't Hooft in deze kring zozeer belichaamde. Het zou niet juist zijn

As a leader of international students, he encountered – unlike in the YMCA – resistance from critical students. They were often disappointed in the church, even if they had not yet left it. Sometimes they were idealistic, but many followed politics with mistrust. They were often inclined to keep their distance from every social commitment and to retreat into student life and science. But there were also those who were open to the increasingly louder radical appeal of the totalitarian movements. Visser 't Hooft recognised the temptations. He felt called to awaken a personal faith in God in these young men, from which both church involvement and social engagement could flourish.

For ten years, from 1928 to 1938, he was the editor of *The Student World*, the quarterly magazine of the WSCF. This suited him perfectly. From a modest student magazine he turned it into a serious international ecumenical journal in which the great topics of the time were discussed. *The Student World* was not only read by students; with a theme issue on the United States in 1931, Visser 't Hooft wanted, just as in his dissertation, to remove misunderstandings and prejudices whereby he openly cited the caricatures that existed. He wrote: 'But these myths are in themselves facts. Even if they misrepresent the truth about American and European life, they are of tremendous influence as psychological realities.' It was the task of Christians, he believed, to break through these caricatures. Civilisation should not be European or American but Christian. Americans were not only innovators of production, and Europeans were not only bearers of culture.[49]

While Adolf Hitler's assumption of power in Germany could not be directly treated in the journal because of censorship in that country, *The Student World* gave the good reader much to think about between the lines. In 1934, there were theme issues about, respectively, the problems that confronted female students especially, the Bible, Eastern Orthodox countries, and revolution. The second subject that year, 'What Shall We Think of the Bible', was a major risk, according to Visser 't Hooft, given the pluriformity of the subscribers. But while the whole of the contributions avoided the image of artificial unity, the authors did succeed, in his view, in expressing a shared appreciation of the Bible. Visser 't Hooft considered this to be a 'sign of the times'. As he saw it, all were aware that they were dependent on the Bible. After a period of increasing distance from the Bible, he believed that a rediscovery of God's Word was taking place. Gulfs between the 'narrowly

over de vernieuwde intellectuele belangstelling en activiteit van de Wereldfederatie gedurende deze periode 1930-1938 te spreken, zonder [...] dit zeer geestelijke aspect van zijn werkzaamheid te hebben onderstreept.'

49 Visser 't Hooft, 'Europe looks to America', 1931, 78.

conditioned' primitive atmosphere of the Bible and 'sophisticated modernity' thought to be unbridgeable did not seem to be so large any more 'since our sense of historical perspective, as well as our humility, have been sharpened by all sorts of crises.' The Bible transcended the discussion found in commentaries and spoke to the people with authority.[50]

The future of the unity of Christians depended on their willingness to continue to undergo the biblical pilgrimage together. Here Visser 't Hooft's concern was not with the literal text of the Bible but with the presence of the living God that had to be actively sought. That was essential. Without the expectation of God's power of revelation the Bible would remain as closed as the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

> For the Bible is the place where we may meet each other only if it's the place where each of us meets God. Without God's presence, the Bible is just a book and a very old and incomprehensible book at that. Unless God makes it come alive for us today, as He made it to Rembrandt enabling him to explain every bit of it as a contemporary event – the Bible is no more our meeting-place than the Egyptian Book of Death.[51]

He viewed opening one's Bible in the morning as making oneself available to experience that day consciously with God. Jacob's struggle at the Jabbok showed him that it was not always easy to find the right way.[52]

Visser 't Hooft regularly challenged what he considered to be the sterility of knowledge for the sake of knowledge, with no healthy involvement in social problems. Many believers were specialists in their areas but not conscious, he found, of their Christian calling. They were not or not sufficiently able to put the implications of their faith into practice in their work and lived in two separate worlds. A Christian psychiatrist could have a high, idealistic, and yet, according to Visser 't Hooft, completely pagan view of his profession. Other fields that Visser 't Hooft thought about in similar fashion were law, politics, and economics. He ascribed what he saw as a troubling lack of Christian responsibility to a dominant individualism and a weak sense of community that he warned students against.[53]

Just as at the YMCA, the international conference was one of the most important tools for Visser 't Hooft to reach his goals in the WSCF. He himself

50 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Bible as Meeting Place', 1934, 98.

51 Ibid., 98.

52 Genesis 32:22-32.

53 Cf. Visser 't Hooft, 'Who Challenges Whom', 1930.

was one of the speakers for the students countless times during meetings. Looking back after several decades, he was not at all satisfied with his speeches for young people in this period. Initially, he liked to speak about the role of Christians in the world, but that went over their heads sometimes. The young audience had personal questions of faith or were concerned about their decreased prospects for jobs. Through trial and error he learned to theorise in a less theologically complicated way and to address the young people in a direct and practical way.[54] At a European conference of theology students in Canterbury around New Year 1930/1931 Visser 't Hooft told the oft related anecdote of the ferryman transporting the three professors, one in theology, one in biology, and one in geology. As the boat became caught in a fast current, the ferryman laconically asked the three scholars, who were deep in discussion, if any of them knew anything about swimmology. Theology, Visser 't Hooft claimed, had to be 'swimmology' in that era. Only by approaching theology in that way, according to him, could the conference truly contribute to the ecumenical movement.[55] If necessary, he was not afraid to make political statements. The feedback on such statements was not always positive but nevertheless usually favourable.[56] He was adept in giving a continually different analysis of the situation young people found themselves in. At the beginning of the 1930s he also attempted to unmask the strongly growing nationalism among young people as a false religion.

Within a few years, Visser 't Hooft built up a reputation as a strong speaker, a true debater, who fascinated the students and was not afraid to take clear positions.[57] He learned a great deal in the meantime about the backgrounds of his audience, for example when he did a tour of British universities from 14 January to 3 February 1930. The British-Irish Student Christian Movement was known as the strongest national department of the WSCF, but, during his stay in Wales, he noticed that many students were opposed to the concept of a personal God. He wondered if this was perhaps a reaction to the evangelical awakenings that were so important in Wales, especially in 1859 and in 1904-1905. Had the Gospel been presented in perhaps too simple a fashion earlier? Was that why students now rejected it without much interest because they lacked any awareness that there was a problem and had not learned to think critically as believers? In England, religion

54 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 46-47.

55 *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 10 January 1931.

56 *Toronto Star*, 23 February 1933. The correspondent of this newspaper wrote about Visser 't Hooft: 'In the student and Y.M.C.A. life of the world … a new star has appeared.'

57 Cf. *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 21 January 1930.

seemed to be so much a part of the culture that personal faith seemed to be missing for precisely that reason. He wondered if the message of the church itself had not been much more secularised than many British understood.[58]

Maury and Visser 't Hooft carried out their plan to introduce the theology of Karth Barth in English and French-speaking areas, and thus, by the beginning of the 1930s, Visser 't Hooft was known in France as an expert on Barth. In a lecture for the French SCM in 1930, Visser 't Hooft argued for a revaluation of Christian doctrine, not as a way to declare traditional truths absolute but as a means to focus attention more clearly on the Christian position at that time in the public domain. That was a problem that was keenly felt by the small minority of French Protestants in secularised France. The message of the German Reformed theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) with his crucial emphasis on feeling and the dependence of the human being on God was insufficient in his view. A renewal of the function of doctrine as reflection on the message of God for the world was only possible if it talked to people about what God himself had said and was saying:

> Doctrine is, therefore, nothing else but an attempt, a very human attempt, to repeat in our own words what God has said himself. It is not the absolute truth itself but it is nevertheless very definitely a Word from God because its contents are not ours but God's.[59]

In Visser 't Hooft's view, one does not need to have the gift of prophecy; rather, all one needs is to have 'the gift of being a parrot', if one wanted to speak of a crisis in civilisation at the beginning of the 1930s. Students were, according to him, very conscious of this crisis and understood better than other groups that everything was on edge: Nietzsche was, he thought, right when he called out: 'Woe to us! Hail to us! The thawing wind blows!'[60] Visser 't Hooft quoted *Also sprach Zarathustra*:

> 'Fundamentally stands everything still' – that is an appropriate winter doctrine, good cheer for an unproductive period, a great comfort for winter-sleepers and fireside-loungers. 'Fundamentally stands everything

58 Visser 't Hooft, 'Report on a Visit to Great Britain. January 14 – February 3, 1930', 1930.
59 Visser 't Hooft, 'Vers un renouveau doctrinal', 1930. English version: 'Towards a Rehabilitation of Doctrine', 1930.
60 Visser 't Hooft, 'Introduction' in: *A Traffic in Knowledge: An International Symposium on the Christian Message* (1931).

> still' –: but contrary to this, preaches the thawing wind! The thawing wind, a bullock, which is no ploughing bullock – a furious bullock, a destroyer, which with angry horns breaks the ice! The ice however – breaks gangways! O my brothers, is not everything at present in flux? Have not all railings and gangways fallen into the water? Who would still hold on to 'good' and 'evil'? 'Woe to us! Hail to us! The thawing wind blows!' – Thus preach, my brothers, through all the streets![61]

It was with speeches like these that Visser 't Hooft wanted to stir up sensitivity to the signs of the times among his audience.

In the spring of 1930, he made his second trip to North America and discovered that the contrasts in religious and cultural life he had witnessed there had sharpened since his first visit. It disturbed him that he heard students questioning the existence of God much more than during his first visit.[62] In September of that year, he visited Italy where he gave lectures in Florence for twenty youth leaders at the annual Secretaries' Training School of the YMCA. The Italian movement of Christian students had recently disbanded because Mussolini only allowed student societies that were connected with the Fascist Party. Christian students continued to gather in informal groups and the YMCA tried to support them where possible.[63] When he visited Italy again in November 1932, Visser 't Hooft was able to ascertain, to his joy, that spontaneous contacts had arisen between Protestant and Roman Catholic students. He expected that the influence of the Vatican on Roman Catholics outside Italy would also start to diminish in the coming years and that all contact would be valuable.

> Some reaction is bound to come against the Italianisation of the Church's government and the consequent lack of understanding by Rome of the most hopeful movements within the Church. It will, however, be useful for us to keep in touch with leaders in Rome itself, so as to know their

61 Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883), Dritter Teil, 'Von alten und neuen Tafeln', 8. '"Im Grund steht alles stille" – das ist eine rechte Winter-Lehre, ein gutes Ding für unfruchtbare Zeit, ein guter Trost für Winterschläfer und Ofenhocker. "Im Grund steht alles still" –: *dagegen* aber predigt der Tauwind! Der Tauwind, ein Stier, ein Zerstörer, der mit zornigen Hörnern Eis bricht! Eis aber– –*bricht Stege!* O meine Brüder, ist *jetzt* nicht alles im Flusse? Sind nicht alle Geländer und Stege ins Wasser gefallen? Wer *hielte* sich noch an "Gut" und "Böse"? "Wehe uns! Heil uns! Der Tauwind weht!" – Also predigt mir, o meine Brüder, durch alle Gassen!' English translation: Thomas Common, modified by Bill Chapko, Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2010), 159.

62 Visser 't Hooft, 'Impressions of a Visit to North America, May-June, 1930'.

63 Visser 't Hooft, 'Report on a Visit to Italy, September 1930'.

> mind, and so as to prepare the day when a real discussion between the leadership of the Church and ourselves might begin.[64]

In the encyclical *Mortalium animos* of 1928 Pope Pius XI had expressed his disapproval of all Roman Catholic contact with the Protestant ecumenical movement that came to expression in Life and Work and Faith and Order, among other things. He was responding there, however, primarily to the Malines Conversations, a series of ecumenical discussions between Anglicans and Roman Catholics that occurred in Mechelen between 1921 and 1927. *Mortalium animos* was in line with Pope Leo XIII's rejection of the Anglican offices in 1896 in his apostolic letter *Apostolicae curae* and claimed the apostolic succession exclusively for the Roman Catholic Church. But Visser 't Hooft could not believe that matters would remain that way – he expected a breakthrough especially from the contacts between students.

He detected a desire among many intelligent young people in various churches, motivated by faith, to be involved in developments in society. It was almost impossible to see what the ideal of a Christian community had to do with the churches of which the students were members.

> Have they anything more than a name in common? Is it not almost profanity to suggest that these bourgeois Churches of ours, with their hopeless mixture of unsuccessful worldliness and lukewarm Christianity, which give us so little direction or leadership, are somehow related to the Apostolic vision of the Bride of Christ?[65]

Visser 't Hooft saw it as his task to have this desire come into its own in a movement, and he now sought for organisational forms and thinkers to give form and content to this.[66] In this context, his discussion in *The Student World* of the book *Politique de la Personne* from 1934 by the personalist philosopher Denis de Rougemont (1906-1985) is very telling. He praised the book because it pointed the Christian intellectual to his political and social task. But his criticism was that De Rougemont had insufficiently defined the concept 'person', which entailed that it was susceptible to misunderstanding, and a fascist dictator, for example, could also be seen as a 'personality' of stature.[67]

64 Visser 't Hooft, 'Notes on a Visit to Italy, November 1932'.
65 Visser 't Hooft, *None other Gods* (1937), 74.
66 Ibid., 79.
67 Visser 't Hooft, 'A Christian in Politics', 1935.

Only Jesus Christ deserved to be followed in any real sense. While Visser 't Hooft argued on the one hand for a shared Christian ethics based on an ecumenical reinterpretation of the Bible – actually a form of situation ethics – he also held, on the other hand, that people had to stop 'interpreting' Jesus and start following him, by which he meant: obey him.[68] The accent in ethics lay, as far as Visser 't Hooft was concerned, in the divine command. The young people to whom Visser 't Hooft wrote had been summoned by a decision of the will to serve Jesus as Lord.[69] This would lead, he firmly believed, to a 'renewal' of one's personal life, the life of the church, and the life of the world. Renewal was a word that Visser 't Hooft would continue to use until long after the Second World War. He held that any actual new beginning was only possible if based on the sense of reality found in faith.

> [W]e have to start all over again. We can take nothing for granted. We dare no longer speak and act as if the foundations were stable. We must first rediscover for ourselves what Christianity is all about, learn its A B C again, and then go out into a pagan world as missionaries.[70]

The living church that flourished in this way would produce level-headed citizens and politicians who would do justice to the communist demand for social justice as well as to the fascist desire for a national community and to the democratic principle of individual freedom. Realistic Christians would see these values as supplementary, without making any of them absolute.

> [I]nstead of seeing any of these as a panacea for all ills, or as an invention of the devil, they would see them all as badly needing to learn from each other and to be criticized by each other.[71]

But before a person could do that, he or she needed to make a clear faith decision, and Visser 't Hooft stimulated his audiences and readers to do just that.

The pope in Rome – who clung to the Roman Catholic Church exclusively as the only true church – was not the only voice of Christianity outside of Protestantism. Shortly after the First World War, at the beginning of 1920,

68 Ibid., 32 and 67.
69 Ibid., 91.
70 Visser 't Hooft, *None other Gods* (1937), 108.
71 Ibid., 113.

the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople published an encyclical that proposed a League of Churches parallel to the League of Nations. Already in 1902 and 1904, Patriarch Joachim III had argued for orthodox unity and fraternal relations with other churches, using the word *koinonia*, fellowship, for this. Visser 't Hooft always referred to this proposal as an important initiative without precedent in church history.[72] The leader of the Greek church with whom he would later work as ecumenical patriarch (1949-1972) was Athenagoras I (1886-1972). He met him for the first time when the latter was the metropolitan of Corfu, when Visser 't Hooft visited the island with Jetty in the winter of 1929 for a meeting of the Youth Committee of Life and Work. Athenagoras made a deep impression immediately on Visser 't Hooft by explicitly raising the question of the unity of Christians in conjunction with faith in Christ. For Visser 't Hooft, his words were proof that a genuine encounter between East and West was not an illusion: the East deserved an answer from the West, and he wanted to work at supplying that response.

Building on his lectures for students at the theological faculty of Geneva and observations he made during his travels in Great Britain, the Balkans, and visits to the Orthodox centres in Paris and Rome, Visser 't Hooft completed his second major study in December 1932: *Le Catholicisme non-romain*.[73] In this book, Visser 't Hooft used the term 'catholic' to indicate standing in the continuous tradition of the church, but not the Roman tradition. He compared the Anglican and the Orthodox churches with each other and argued not only for more understanding but also for more candour in the dialogue between the traditions, which should lead to more reflection on their own traditions and awareness of their heritage. The strategic role that he ascribed to these churches between Rome and reformation does not exist in reality, but he did set many to thinking.[74] He wanted to equip people in both the WSCF and the churches for what he called 'a struggle for unity'. This struggle would, he expected, make distracting problems relative and lead to openness to God.

72 Bria and Heller, *Ecumenical Pilgrims* (1985), 3.

73 Visser 't Hooft, *Le Catholicisme non-romain* (1933); English: *Anglo-Catholicism and Orthodoxy: A Protestant View*; Romanian: *Ortodoxia Vàzutà de un Protestant*. All three editions were published in 1933. One of Visser 't Hooft's handy working methods was to have a small notebook with him on his travels almost all the time. In this book he made notes not only with respect to preparing for the trip but also wrote down his observations, usually in Dutch. Later, his notes included the sources he drew on in writing speeches, articles, and books. For a number of these notebooks that have been preserved, see WCC 994.2.61/5, 6, and 7.

74 Cf. Giampiccoli, *Willem A. Visser 't Hooft. La primavera dell'ecumenismo* (2015), 44-47.

2.6 Christian Realism instead of International Idealism

In 1919, in article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was declared guilty of responsibility for starting the Great War. But the conviction grew that the international arms race that preceded the war had been a major factor. All the signatory countries to the Treaty, except for the United States, committed themselves to disarmament. In 1932, the League of Nations organised the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments in Geneva. The failure of this conference in 1934 was a major disappointment for many, not only for peace idealists. Visser 't Hooft was not surprised. In his view, as soon as the self-interest of the delegates came under threat, there was no willingness at all to compromise. He could observe the process closely in Geneva and noted that, in discussions at the League of Nations, most countries did not usually progress beyond defending their alleged self-interest in the short term. Thus, for example, he had discerned – already in 1925 during talks in Geneva on passing an international ban on opium – that the Netherlands showed no inclination at all to sanction this because of the lucrative opium production and trade in the Dutch East Indies.[75]

In Visser 't Hooft's view, the whole disarmament conference was an astonishing mixture of idealism and short-sightedness, of a sincere but also naive desire for peace. But the conference was dominated by a cynical power politics in which self-interest and a technical approach to the balance of power were primary. There was something sad and helpless about the many demonstrations of idealists, pacifists, and internationalists that he witnessed in Geneva. He was impressed by the speeches of the Swiss politician Giuseppe Motta and the Irish president Éamon de Valera, who argued for worldwide religious freedom in the context of the Soviet Union joining the League of Nations. But they did not achieve much. Visser 't Hooft himself appeared at the peace talks as a correspondent for the American periodical *The Christian Century*.[76] He also published articles about it in his own *The Student World* and encouraged students to reflect on this with him. In the first quarter of 1932, the magazine had a theme issue on disarmament. Visser 't Hooft criticised the naive pacifism that was often associated with Christian support for the League of Nations. In the midst of the cacophony of demonstrations and protests, he attempted to raise a more realistic voice through the WSCF. Together with six other international Christian organisations, despite internal differences of opinion, the WSCF was able to

75 Visser 't Hooft, 'Een naklank van de Opiumconferentie', 1925.
76 *The Christian Century*, January-October 1932.

read aloud a declaration at the opening of the conference. That was done by Joachim Müller, the writer of the German contribution on the conference in *The Student World*. The WSCF succeeded in keeping a constructive tone. But most students pulled out. Visser 't Hooft did not blame them. In his view, the blame lay with the delegates and their lack of any willingness to empathise with the psychological sensitivities of other peoples and to be informed about them.[77] In fact, the whole conference consisted of a series of monologues. Few participants acted like statesmen. In Visser 't Hooft's eyes, they were mainly functionaries who lived in the delusion that the world would continue to exist forever as it was now and who did not understand that their failure would lead to war again. Nevertheless, he himself continued to follow the discussions closely and wrote a report for his WSCF contacts in July 1932:

> These delegates don't for a moment desire the war to which they are letting the world drift. It is a sobering thought that it is this group of very human and decent people who will be responsible for the next war if it comes.[78]

That it slowly but surely was indeed moving in the direction of a new great war – Visser 't Hooft had no doubt at all: in September 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria, and on 28 January 1932, Shanghai followed. The writing was on the wall once again.

> One gets the impression that very few people realize all that is involved in the question. It would seem that the future of the League as well as of disarmament depends largely on the outcome of this conflict.[79]

Visser 't Hooft was informed about the progress of the conference by three experts he esteemed highly. Immediately after coming to Geneva in 1924, he became acquainted with the Swiss lawyer and scholar in the area of international law Hans Max Huber (1874-1960). In 1932, Huber was the most important Swiss delegate in the disarmament discussions. Huber had then already acquired a great deal of experience. He had been a judge since 1922, had been president of the Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague from 1925 to 1927, and president of the International Committee of the Red Cross since 1928, a position he would hold until 1944. Huber's

77 McCaughey, *Christian Obedience in the University* (1957), 32-33 and 36-37.
78 Visser 't Hooft, WSCF circular July 1932, cited by McCaughey; ibid., 36.
79 Visser 't Hooft, cited by McCaughey; ibid., 37.

observation that the Christian politicians showed more stamina than others in the protracted discussions pleased Visser 't Hooft immensely. His second source of information about the disarmament talks was the Englishman Lord Robert Cecil, Viscount of Chelwood (1864-1958).[80] This conservative politician supported the hard line of the British naval blockade against Germany before the war but subsequently moved in the direction of those proposing peace. He was one of the architects of the League of Nations, the permanent representative of the United Kingdom at the League of Nations, and around 1930 became a major supporter of disarmament. It was he who requested Visser 't Hooft in 1931 to put the disarmament talks at the League of Nations explicitly on the agenda of the WSCF. It was disappointing for the British students in particular that Lord Cecil was kept out of the official British delegation in the end because the government considered him to be too idealistic. Cecil then joined the peace activists in a show of demonstration. Visser 't Hooft's third source of information was the British specialist in international relations, Alfred E. Zimmern (1879-1957), classicist, historian, and political scientist. Zimmern also knew international politics and the life of the League of Nations through and through, and, according to Visser 't Hooft, he also had 'the advantage that, unlike so many others in Geneva – or in international politics as a whole – he had not yet become a sterile cynic.'[81] Over the years, Zimmern would, as a lay specialist, make an important contribution to ecumenical thinking about international relations and exercise a great deal of influence in that area on Visser 't Hooft as general secretary of the World Council.

The start of the disarmament conference was also an occasion for an event organised in Geneva by the revival movement of Frank N. Buchman (1878-1961), a former secretary of the YMCA in Pennsylvania. The Lutheran Buchman had taken a more evangelical turn and was involved in a great deal of evangelisation among students at this time. He argued for setting up so-called 'house groups' and in 1938 founded the Oxford Group, which was also later called Moral Rearmament. Buchman thus worked with the same

80 In the 1983 IKON documentary 'Het ongebroken geweertje' by Henk Biersteker, an aged Visser 't Hooft reflects on the experiences at the time of the failed disarmament talks. Lord E.A.R. Cecil, 1864-1958, a British lawyer and politician, was the author of *The Way of Peace* (1928) and 'The League as a Road to Peace', 1933. When the British delegation became increasingly cynical, Cecil stood with the students and the protesting citizens who advocated disarmament. Cecil was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1937.

81 Visser 't Hooft to G.J. Heering, 18 June 1937, YDS-12, 56: 'bovendien het voordeel, dat hij nog niet zooals vele anderen in Genève, of in de internationale politiek überhaupt, tot een steriel cynisme gekomen is.'

Figure 19 The leaders of the WSCF, 1935, with, among others in the first row: Philippe Maury, Wim Visser 't Hooft, Robert Mackie, Pierre Maury, and Suzanne de Diétrich



target groups as Visser 't Hooft. But Visser 't Hooft saw little in Buchman's preaching that was worthwhile. He wrote to Karl Barth:

> Given the current situation of the Genevan church and other churches, it is easy to understand why many people quickly come round when they are addressed directly and personally. On the other hand, it is terrible to see how people treat holy affairs there. There, the Holy Spirit becomes a kind of electric current that people can switch on and off at will ... It still continues to be the case, however, that there is a very thin line between an – in the best sense – existential faith and the religion of experience, and it will then always be difficult to see where the difference lies.[82]

82 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 1 February 1932, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 8-9. 'Man kann verstehen, dass viele bei der jetzigen Lage der Genfer und anderer Kirchen bald umfallen, wenn einmal direkt und persönlich zu ihnen geredet wird. Andererseits ist es schrecklich zu sehen, wie man dort mit den heiligsten Dingen umgeht. Der heilige Geist wird da zu einer Art neuen Elektrizität, die man andreht und auslischt je nach Belieben. [...] Es bleibt doch wohl dabei, dass nur eine ganz dünne Linie zwischen dem im besten Sinn existenziellen Glauben und der Erfahrungsreligion läuft, und es wird darum wohl immer schwierig sein, deutlich zu machen,

While the leadership of the WSCF supported a realistic form of disarmament, it was clear from reactions that there were great differences of opinion among the members. For example, many young Germans were suspicious and bitter about the humiliation their country had suffered at the end of the First World War. The United States did not become a member when the League of Nations was founded in 1920 and returned to its isolationist stance. Most American students supported disarmament but were critiqued by the European chapters for being too superficial: their enthusiasm for peace was often thought to be naive and unfounded.

In this period, Visser 't Hooft saw to his joy that there was an increasing interest in the significance of Jesus in the important British Student Christian Movement. He explained this development as a reaction to the disturbing developments in international politics. A powerful preaching of Christ's message of salvation was experienced here as an antidote to the ascendant disruptive totalitarian movements. This was a confirmation of Visser 't Hooft's priorities. The Lutheran theologian and secretary of the German chapter of the WSCF, Hanns E.R. Lilje, and the Scottish missionary of the United Free Church, Joseph Oldham, spoke at the Edinburgh Quadrennial of 1933, a student event largely organised by the Scottish staff member Robert C. Mackie and the British SCM leader Eric Fenn. Lilje and Oldham asserted that the old world with its Christian culture had died 'from adapting' and that reflection was needed on the deepest questions of human existence. True Christians had to dare to swim against the current.

According to Visser 't Hooft, it now concerned a proclamation that dared to demand involvement and unanimity: Jesus Christ had to be confessed against the idols of secular humanism and the communism of the time. The rise of the mass movements against the background of the economic crisis of 1929 and the impossibility of countries to agree on disarmament gave rise to a sense of urgency. The cultural translation of the Christian faith and making the core truths individually acceptable were increasingly viewed in WSCF circles as superseded goals. Such intellectual exercises belonged in the studies of socially irrelevant liberal theologians. Liberalism in theology had 'died' even faster than Visser 't Hooft had expected in the first half of the 1920s. Many young theologians had apparently appropriated the more orthodox approach – and had done so too easily perhaps. In Germany and in important non-European centres like Chicago, a great deal of 'liberalism' in

wo der Unterschied liegt.' Buchman was later heavily criticised because he praised Hitler for the resistance Nazi Germany showed to the communist Soviet Union. He was also said to have thought he could convert Hitler to Christ.

theology seemed now to have transposed into what Visser 't Hooft, following Barth, described as 'positivism'. In any case, in Visser 't Hooft's opinion, Christianity could no longer be credibly presented as the greatest of the great religions – thus, a relative appreciation. From that point on, it was necessary to present Christianity clearly and place it directly against the new paganism. A radical choice had to be made. Visser 't Hooft wrote in the same spirit for the International Missionary Council in 1932:

> The great difference between 1927 and 1932 is that between the fool's paradise before the crisis and the crisis itself, between the atmosphere of calmness and expectation and the atmosphere of terror, between a world which was not facing reality and a world which simply *had* to face it. For us today, Communism is no longer the extraordinary theory of a semi-Asiatic nation, but an immediate challenge, an unavoidable problem, a very imminent danger. Nationalism is no longer the cherished desire of a small group of eccentric authors and wild militarists, but the supreme passion of the masses. The economic confusion is no longer covered up by the seemingly unlimited possibilities of increased production and increased sales; the anarchy and senselessness of it all has become apparent. And so in every sphere of life, a psychology of crisis has developed.[83]

The League of Nations declined quickly after the failure of the disarmament talks. In October 1935, Italy invaded Abyssinia, now Ethiopia. Nothing came of sanctions against Italy, a boycott by other European countries, or other measures. Addis Ababa was occupied in May 1936. The following month Emperor Haile Selassie, who fled to Geneva, addressed a special session of the League. He pleaded for justice and warned that the next victim of such practices could be a European country. He was able to address the session only after Italian journalists were removed from the public gallery for shouting him down and making jungle noises. There was a spontaneous initiative by the YWCA to show, on behalf of international organisations, solidarity with the emperor who was staying in the Carlton Hotel. Visser 't Hooft was asked to speak to him as the head of a delegation. He spoke without any mandate but said he managed to convey the feelings of millions with his demonstration of solidarity. He also stated that the delegates were ashamed of the fact that their countries had not defended the principal starting points of international law, the basis of the League of Nations.

83 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Federation News Sheet', 1932, quoted by McCaughey, *Christian Obedience in the University* (1957), 47.

For Christians especially, the occupation of Ethiopia was a very sad affair because it concerned a people that had confessed the Christian faith since the first centuries.

> We don't know God's plans and we don't know what future he is preparing for the Ethiopian nation. But we do know that the spiritual destiny of a people should not depend on the arbitrariness of political contingencies.[84]

Long after the war, Visser 't Hooft would receive Haile Selassie once more as head of the Ethiopian church at the Ecumenical Centre on the Route Ferney in Geneva, and in January 1971 he, along with the executive committee of the World Council as guests of the emperor, celebrated the Timkat feast of the baptism of Christ in Addis Abada.[85]

International idealism had suffered a serious defeat, but Visser 't Hooft was not surprised:[86] in his view, internationalism had never been the answer. The 'brotherhood of man' would always be nothing more than a dream unless it was founded on the fatherhood of God.[87] When the Indian independence fighter Jawaharlal Nehru, who would become prime minister of India, visited Geneva in 1938, Visser 't Hooft heard him refer to the Palace of the Nations that had been opened shortly before with great fanfare as 'that tomb'.[88]

2.7 A 'German Revolution'?

Visser 't Hooft discovered that there was no political explanation for the quick growth of nationalist youth movements around 1930. It was the writer Thomas Mann who helped him see this through the analysis of 'spiritual values that are defensible in themselves and have a certain logical necessity'. Especially in Germany and Italy – but also elsewhere – young people who had returned from the war in the 1920s underwent a 'return to meaninglessness'. Their inclination to fascism, which had the characteristics of a 'new religion', was a reaction to cheap individualism and an empty democracy of counting

84 Visser 't Hooft, Address to H.M. Emperor Haile Selassie, no title, 1936, WCC 094.2.05/11: 'Nous ne connaissons pas les desseins de Dieu et nous ne savons pas quel avenir il prépare pour la nation Ethiopienne. Mais nous savons que la destinée spirituelle d'un peuple ne saurait être à la merci des contingences politiques.'

85 Kenmerk, IKOR television, 27 January 1971, Sound and Vision Archives.

86 Visser 't Hooft, 'Wishing Peace but not the Means of It', 1932.

87 Visser 't Hooft, 'Nationalism as a Religion', 1931.

88 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 34.

noses. Despite the fact that this could be understood, he still thought that fascism should be rejected as a false religion.

> The Church is charged with the task of raising the prophetic voice of the Old Testament once again, in order to address the people, just as Amos and Jeremiah did to preach the word of the Lord of the nations.[89]

He thought it important to show that the Gospel was more than a nice but superficial appendage of the internationalist ideal.

Visser 't Hooft relates in his *Memoirs* that he was in the United States when Hitler took power in Germany in 1933. While strong reactions could be read in the American press, Visser 't Hooft commented laconically: 'Do not get excited, these Nazis will have to put a lot of water in their wine when they have to bear responsibility.' A few weeks later, however, as he himself writes in his *Memoirs*, he had to change his views drastically when he began to understand what a government under Hitler could mean. Astonishingly enough, the developments made little impression on the American students:

> February and March – months of great events in world history! Some day my grandchildren will ask, 'Were you really in that great crisis of 1933, when nobody had any money and when Roosevelt saved the country? Wasn't it rather exciting?' and I shall have to be honest and say, 'Well, the curious thing was, that in the universities where I spent practically all my time, there was very little excitement.' 'But,' they will insist, 'didn't the American students at least get terribly worked up about the German Revolution and the Sino-Japanese War?' And again I shall have to disappoint them by saying that these things were discussed, but that they did not seem to throw the American student out of his amazing equilibrium.[90]

It would be incorrect to say that Visser 't Hooft changed his mind entirely after his American journey. He continued to believe for a number of months that Hitler had saved Germany from decline and spoke of a 'German revolution'. He agreed with many of his German contacts who rejected the Nazi party and its methods but did nonetheless believe that Hitler had prevented

89 Visser 't Hooft, 'Nationalisme als religie', 1930-1931. Quote on page 307: 'Op de Kerk rust de taak om de profetische stem van het Oude Testament weer te doen klinken, om weer tot de volkeren te spreken, zooals Amos en Jeremia deden, om het woord te prediken van den Heer der volken.'

90 Visser 't Hooft, article in *The Intercollegian*, cited in 'The Federation News Sheet', quoted by McCaughey in: *Christian Obedience in the University* (1957), 51.

Germany's collapse. Visser 't Hooft warned against the hasty interpretations of journalists and the judgments of pacifists and Christian leaders and began a serious study of the ideas Nazism had about the church and state. He was concerned that new developments would revive anti-German resentment rooted in the First World War.[91]

When – shortly after coming into power – the democratically elected government of Hitler burned the Reichstag on 27 February 1933, the chancellor seized the opportunity and excluded the Reichstag from any real power. But in an article in *Algemeen Weekblad voor Christendom en Cultuur* that appeared in May, Visser 't Hooft was still mild towards those in power in Germany and asked for understanding for the distinction made in the new Germany between Jew and non-Jew:

> This is not the place to parse this phenomenon – one can point to causes that are explainable and even to a certain extent defensible; this development is partly also to be blamed on prejudice and ignorance pure and simple – but it must be said that this issue is much more complicated than the outsider seems to understand.[92]

By way of explanation, Visser 't Hooft cited two circumstances. First, there were Jews who wanted to be a separate people within the German population: 'This yields special difficulties for a country that is already threatened with collapse as a result of disagreement and internal division.' In the second place, Visser 't Hooft expected, just as he did in his initial response in the United States, that the Nazi party would quickly back down now that it had to engage seriously in the work of government. The radical and blind

91 Visser 't Hooft, 'Memorandum over: Kerk en staat in Duitsland sinds januari 1933', 1934. See also: 'Report of Dr. Visser 't Hooft on the latest developments in the German Church', 1934. His analysis is supported by the study secretary of Life and Work: 'The report by Dr. Visser 't Hooft seems to me to give a very good and clear overview of the present situation (Der Bericht von Dr. Visser 't Hooft scheint mir eine sehr gute und klare Übersicht über die gegenwärtige Lage zu geben).' H. Schönfeld to H.-L. Henriod, 23 February 1934, YDS-4, 137. Cf. Van Roon, *Protestants Nederland en Duitsland, 1933-1941* (1973), 61-64.

92 Visser 't Hooft, 'Het Nieuwe Duitschland', 1933: 'Het is hier niet de plaats om dit verschijnsel te ontleden – er vallen oorzaken voor aan te wijzen die verklaarbaar en tot op zekere hoogte zelfs verdedigbaar zijn; voor een ander deel is deze ontwikkeling te wijten aan vooroordeel en onwetendheid zonder meer – maar wel moet gezegd worden dat deze kwestie veel ingewikkelder is dan de buitenstaander schijnt te beseffen'; 'Dit geeft biezondere moeilikheden voor een land dat toch al dreigt uiteen te vallen ten gevolge van onenigheid en innerlike [sic] verdeeldheid'; 'de wat minder hardvochtige houding van onderscheid tussen anti-nationale en pro-nationale Joden.'

anti-Semitism would be watered down and reduced to the 'somewhat less harsh position of a distinction between anti-national and pro-national Jews.' He asked for patience. The chief editor of the *Algemeen Weekblad voor Christendom en Cultuur*, H.T. Obbink, lodged an objection against Visser 't Hooft's article in a footnote but did not think he could refuse 'this expression of someone's opinion signed with the author's full name.'[93]

Whereas there was often criticism in the WSCF of German members for their intransigence, Visser 't Hooft argued that, while he wanted to point to the 'German revolution', that same characteristic is what enabled them to stand up for the Gospel in those uncertain times.[94] According to Visser 't Hooft, German youth fiercely opposed any kind of false security that was part of the bourgeois mentality of earlier generations.

> The new primitiveness of youth implies that it is less inclined to reject religion in the name of 'progress', of 'philosophy' or of 'science', and more inclined to judge it on its own merits. … If youth seeks anything in Christianity, it seeks in it a message of authority and power.[95]

In Visser 't Hooft's mind, young people did not want an intellectualistic apologetic, but faith:

> But a faith which lives by the absolute sovereignty of its own object and which offers itself as the truth rather than as *a* truth, has at least a chance of being taken seriously. It goes without saying that this implies that youth has no use for a faith which would restrict its own validity to one realm of life only. That would be a strange authority which would be supreme in the inner life and have nothing to do with outward actions, with social and political life. Youth asks rightly that the claim of truth shall be proved in life (all of life) as well as in speech.[96]

In June 1933, he nevertheless started to have second thoughts about the nature of the new regime in Germany and decided not to publish the article 'Youth 1933'.

In that month, Visser 't Hooft attended the conference of the German Christian Student Movement in Neu-Saarow in Bavaria. He writes in his

93 H.T. Obbink, editor's note accompanying Visser 't Hooft's article.
94 Visser 't Hooft, 'On the Present Situation of the German Student Christian Movement', 1933.
95 Visser 't Hooft, 'Youth 1933', unpublished article.
96 Ibid.

memoirs, not without humour, that people did not know how to behave in the new Germany. At the beginning of a chaotic meeting, someone next to Visser 't Hooft was too enthusiastic in making a Hitler salute, striking him in the eye with his fist. The newly elected Friedrich von Bodelschwingh was threatened with being replaced as bishop of the Lutheran church by the Hitler sympathiser Ludwig Müller, and the discussions among the students on that issue were heated. A few weeks later, during a meeting of the International Student Service, the aid organisation of the WSCF, in a monastery in Oberammergau in Ettal, Visser 't Hooft witnessed a number of Nazis marching in and the international guests being addressed, unasked, by the SA leader who was unknown to most non-Germans at the time, Ernst Röhm. For Visser 't Hooft, the black and brown uniforms were a new phenomenon during student gatherings, and he wanted to ask Röhm if the Nazis really would respect the national traditions of other countries, as Röhm had claimed in his speech. He did so while they walked from the monastery to the hotel, but Röhm's attention was distracted by the boisterous cheers, and it was impossible to have a real conversation. Later that evening, the uniformed Nazis were also noticeably present at a party organised by the mayor. Visser 't Hooft found himself seated next to SS leader Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945), but in 1933 the name Himmler did not mean anything to him. He asked Himmler what Röhm meant but did not learn much from the answers he was given. Visser 't Hooft said something about the Dutch national tradition of tolerance that went back to William the Silent, but Himmler explained that the Dutch would lose the Dutch East Indies as a colony if they did not liberate themselves quickly from the Jews. It was not clear to Visser 't Hooft what the one had to do with the other. And so the conversation went on. Visser 't Hooft found the statements by the Nazis to be disjointed, and it would be a few years before it dawned on him completely how dangerous they were.[97] He did wonder later if he could have had any premonition of the terrible things Himmler was capable of. But he could not think of anything: 'He seemed to me just a narrow-minded *petit bourgeois*.'[98] Nevertheless, this meeting would turn out to be useful.[99]

A major project Visser 't Hooft took on at this time was setting up an ecumenical seminary in Geneva. He himself took on teaching tasks for the modest summer courses intended for theologians who had to provide the

97 Cf. Van Roon, *Protestants Nederland en Duitsland, 1933-1941* (1973), 93.

98 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 84-86; quote on 86. H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

99 See 3.6.

impetus for this.[100] When Karl Barth was dismissed, by order of the Nazis, as professor in Bonn in December 1934, Visser 't Hooft attempted in vain to persuade him to come to Geneva.[101] Pierre Maury and he visited Barth at this time in his weekend home on the Bergli on Lake Zurich, where they had long conversations. Barth did agree to come to Geneva for a series of guest lectures on John Calvin at the Protestant Faculty, but he finally chose a professorship in Basel, close to Germany because he wanted to maintain good contacts with members of the German churches.

Visser 't Hooft wanted that as well. He attempted to keep abreast as much as possible with developments in the German church by reading German, Swiss, English, and other newspapers. In February 1934, he travelled to Germany and visited a large number of representatives of the Lutheran Church in particular. He knew many of the players in the field personally and presented himself not without some reason as an expert in German church politics. While Hitler was vague in his *Mein Kampf* with respect to religion and spoke of *positives Christentum* without explaining what he meant by that, the Nazi party ideologist Alfred Rosenberg began to attack both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in his book *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*.[102] This was not official Nazi policy, but Hitler did seem to agree with it. Despite Hitler's promises to respect the church, the church was completely and quickly taken over from within by Hitler sympathisers. A schism among the Protestants threatened to occur, but the opposition quickly split into a moderate group around Bishop August Mahrarens and a more radical group around the Reformed minister Martin Niemöller and the so-called Council of Brethren. According to Visser 't Hooft, the actual problem was how to preserve the German church for God. As long as the Gospel could still be preached in this church, splitting from it was not a solution. It was typical for Visser 't Hooft at this time that he felt that only a principal theological approach, i.e., upholding the confession of the German church, could offer a solution. He was opposed to any interference from outside, such as breaking ties with the German church.[103]

The lot of the Jews in general did not really lead to a major debate in the church. But when ethnic Jewish ministers were forbidden, on the basis of the 'Aryan paragraph' in the Law on the Reconstruction of the Professional Civil

100 Jehle-Wildberger, *Adolf Keller* (2008), 335-336.

101 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 23 December 1934, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 25.

102 Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung der Seelischen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (1930); English translation: *The Myth of the Twentieth Century: An Evaluation of the Spiritual-Intellectual Confrontations of Our Age*.

103 'Report of Dr. Visser 't Hooft on the latest developments in the German Church', 1934.

Service, to practise their office in the church, a violent conflict arose. The state was interfering in church affairs by appropriating the right to appoint leaders and making it impossible for others to function. A 'free synod' of the German Lutheran and Reformed churches was held in Barmen 29-31 May 1934. A number of theses compiled by Karl Barth, still a professor in Bonn at that time, were accepted. These theses lodged a serious objection against the state's view of itself as the highest authority over all areas of life and seeing the church as an organ of the state. For Visser 't Hooft, this was an important phase of becoming aware. The Bekennende Kirche, or Confessing Church, which was in the process of formation, was not undergoing, in his words, a 'separation but a sorrowful dissent' and the threat of martyrdom was real. After all, the signatories felt that they had been attacked by the government directly with respect to their confession of faith, that is, their *statu confessionis*. The government was not impressed, and in September Ludwig Müller, Hitler's trusted representative and co-founder of the *Deutsche Christen*, who was prepared to collaborate completely with the Nazis, was appointed *Reichsbischof* (Reich bishop). This was another important step in making the Lutheran Church toe the party line. Now the tensions with the international ecumenical movements quickly came to a head. Visser 't Hooft also made a study of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, in which he ascertained that this church had not suffered nearly as many difficulties as Protestant churches. He researched Protestant youth work and saw, to his regret, that the Nazis had taken control of or disbanded all youth work. That was also true of the internationally oriented German chapters of the YMCA for which he had been partly responsible for so long.[104] The student organisations, including the WSCF, would quickly follow.

It was not only churches that ran the risk of denying their identity in totalitarian takeovers. The sterile academic approach of the universities he had constantly warned about ended up, according to Visser 't Hooft – paradoxically enough – practising science that was not value-free science. Vulnerable universities were the target of unhealthy political interference and became saturated with social, political, and economic unrest. Riots were led by students who had been incited. According to Visser 't Hooft, they were not inclined to militarism in any country but were disappointed in their chances in society; they were uncertain about the future and filled with desire for change. Students were thus easy prey whenever dream scenarios were promised. Visser 't Hooft perceived a religious undertone in their yearning.[105]

104 Visser 't Hooft, 'Memorandum over: Kerk en staat in Duitschland sinds januari 1933', 1934.
105 *Lucknow News*, 7 January 1934.

What was the mass movements' essential attraction for young people? That was the question that Visser 't Hooft asked in May 1934 in his speech to the Glasgow University Union during a tour of 15 British universities. He remembered the hopeful yearning of youth for another time, so soon after the war. Now, students felt they were in a 'sick world' threatened by the ghosts of unemployment and war. In Eastern Europe, universities had to close regularly because of riots. Students felt that no one wanted them for any other purpose than to turn them into soldiers. According to Visser 't Hooft, people had been backed into a corner by the totalitarian mass movements. It was necessary to choose. It was either Christ or a leader like Mussolini, Hitler, or Stalin. Christianity could no longer afford an apologetic attitude. It now needed to become aggressive in calling people to a 'heart-whole and mind-whole loyalty to Christ.' Intellectuals could no longer permit themselves to contemplate life without engagement.[106] In Visser 't Hooft's view, Christian students the world over recognised this new urgency and many rejected any kind of compromise. A radical choice for Christ was the answer.

True evangelisation was witnessing teamwork, not preaching to the other, but alongside and in conversation with the other in which prayer meant a collective openness for God:

> But not as *pretension*. I don't have it, you don't have it. Evangelise yourself while you are evangelising the other. Take your place alongside him under the call and the promise. Solidarity. Only if we give do we receive.[107]

He wanted to offer an alternative. During a special NCSV evangelisation conference in 1933 at the international school La Châtaigneraie in Geneva, he emphasised that the choice for Christ was a serious matter. Students were the spiritual leaders of tomorrow and had a responsibility to develop their gifts. At issue here was an antidote to defeatism, communism, and fascism. In the case of the NCSV, the Dutch qualities could be placed over against those movements. For a few years, the NCSV, partly under Visser 't Hooft's influence, focused on all kinds of aspects of the idea of the unity of the people. An important contribution in this context was the famous cultural scholar Johan Huizinga, who was in no way a thinker associated

106 *Glasgow Herald*, 3 May 1934; *The Birmingham Gazette*, 30 May 1934, and *The British Weekly*, 7 June 1934.

107 Visser 't Hooft, 'Student + Evangelisatie', 1933: 'Doch niet als *pretentie*. Niet ik heb het, jij niet. Evangeliseer jezelf terwijl je de ander evangeliseert. Stel je met hem onder den roep en den belofte. Solidarity. Slechts als wij geven ontvangen wij.'

with the church. With his lecture *Nederland's geestesmerk* in May 1934 at Woudschoten he was able to make an important contribution for the NCSV.[108]

But, given his leadership style and zeal with respect to 'aggressive' evangelisation, Visser 't Hooft could be quite authoritative, sometimes using terms no one else could appreciate. For example, in 1935 he spoke of the necessity of a 'totalitarian Christianity' and ascribed absolute value to genuine Christianity.[109] This was critiqued by his own circle. Eric Fenn, a leader in the British SCM, rejected this kind of language for the church or for Christianity. In his view, it gave an incorrect impression of a central embodiment of objective divine authority. Visser 't Hooft yielded, and in his report about the WSCF for the period 1931-1935 that terminology no longer appeared.[110] He had wanted to wake the British up from their sometimes all too lethargic Christianity, based on a natural theology that, in his view, threatened to blind them to what was happening in Germany.[111]

Visser 't Hooft wanted to remain in contact with Christian leaders in Germany. But how? His proposal to place a permanent ecumenical observer in Germany from the ranks of the WSCF was not enthusiastically received in that country. Writing letters had become more difficult because of censorship, and friendly Germans asked explicitly that people read between the lines of their letters.[112] Visser 't Hooft called on Dutch people who lived close to the German border to remain available for help in attempts to maintain contact.

In 1938, the Hitler regime abandoned every appearance of reasonability in Visser 't Hooft's view. On the night of 9 November, Visser 't Hooft himself saw synagogues in Tübingen and Stuttgart burning during one of his visits to Germany.[113] Together with Henry-Louis Henriod, general secretary of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches and Adolf Keller, director the European Central Bureau for Interchurch Aid for refugees, he sent a letter on 16 November 1938 to a large number of churches to remind them of what had been previously agreed in the ecumenical movement with respect to the rejection of anti-Semitism and the accommodation of Jewish refugees.[114] But people felt primarily responsible for

108 Huizinga, *Nederland's geestesmerk* (1934).
109 Visser 't Hooft, 'Totalitarian Christianity', 1935, and the response by E. Fenn; ibid., 78.
110 Visser 't Hooft, *Students Find the Truth to Serve* (1935).
111 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 15 February 1935, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 30.
112 'Report of Dr. Visser 't Hooft on the latest developments in the German Church', 1934.
113 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 90.
114 H.L. Henriod, Visser 't Hooft, and A. Keller, 16 November 1938, WCC general correspondence 637.

ethnic Jews who had converted to Christianity and especially for their ministers. Visser 't Hooft had a list of 30 'non-Aryan' ministers in Germany, many of whom now wanted to leave the country. He asked J.C. Wissing of the Ecumenical Council in the Netherlands to accommodate some of these ministers in the Netherlands or in the Dutch East Indies as a brotherly duty.[115] Wissing himself was one of the directors of the Protestant Support Committee for Racial and Religious Refugees (*Protestants Hulpcomité voor Uitgewekenen om Ras of Geloof*) that was founded in the Netherlands and worked closely with the refugee committee of the World Council in Geneva. They attempted to have refugees emigrate to South America, but it was hard work, for the German Jewish ministers were not easy to place. But Visser 't Hooft informed Wissing that he found that people in the Netherlands responded strongly and clearly to the recent events in Germany. Early in 1938, the NCSV, encouraged by Visser 't Hooft, took action on the behalf of the German Reformed minister Martin Niemöller, a former submarine commander and since 1933 a fierce opponent of the Nazis and founder of the Emergency Covenant of Pastors (*Pfarrennotbund*). He was imprisoned on Hitler's personal order because of his criticism of the Nazis. Visser 't Hooft urged the NCSV not to present Niemöller as a politician or defender of free speech. According to Visser 't Hooft, he should be presented to the public as a man of the church.[116] The 'German Revolution' turned out to be a nightmare for both church and society. Now, nothing other than a Christianity in the form of confessing churches that could make sacrifices and provide unity that could produce the results Visser 't Hooft expected.

2.8 Not Called to Mission Work

Visser 't Hooft came very close to taking on a leadership position in missions. The topic fascinated him. The Dutch East Indies were standing on the threshold of a new age and, in his view, missions could play a constructive role in the decolonisation process. Missions were discussed both in the WSCF and his family. Jetty's cousin, Steven C., Count of Randwijck (1901-1997), was the missions consul in Batavia from 1929-1942. Conny L. Patijn (1908-2007), another of Jetty's cousins, considered entering missions after earning his

115 Visser 't Hooft to J.C. Wissing, 17 November 1938, YDS-12, 38.

116 Visser 't Hooft to F.M. Kooijman, 17 March 1938, YDS-12, 64. Cf. Van den Berg, *De Nederlandse Christen-Studenten Vereniging* (1991), 139.

doctorate in law in 1937. This was discussed during walks on the Veluwe estate of the family of Conny's wife, Mariët Patijn-van Citters, where Wim and Jetty were once guests as well. Conny Patijn was also related to Steven van Randwijck. But Visser 't Hooft soberly advised Patijn to stay in the Netherlands:

> It is curious that this remark comes from me, and it can be that I am too much stuck in the idea that you and other people from your NCSV generation can someday help launch a new Netherlands. … One thing I would not let weigh too heavily, namely the question of 'calling'. For many among us, it is simply not the case that a calling comes to us in some kind of direct obvious way, and we must then accept, in a business-like way, the facts that lie before us and contain God's guidance just as surely as a direct calling. What actually helps me all the time is the idea that there is an economy in the Kingdom of God and that one needs to stand where one, as far as humanly understood, can best serve.[117]

In the end, Conny Patijn chose for the Netherlands. After the war, he made a career for himself as, among other things, a Member of Parliament for the Labour Party and as senior official in various ministries.

Mission was a topic that was obviously more or less part of the Christian youth movement in the 1930s, and the call to become a missionary was often heard. One of the conclusions of the 1928 World Mission Conference in Jerusalem was that, confronted with secularisation, not only Protestant churches but religions in general were not competitors but allies that should collaborate more. In the years 1930-1932, a major study of the mission work of six Protestant churches in India, Burma, China, and Japan was carried out under the American idealist and philosopher W.E. Hocking. The argument was made in the committee report *Rethinking Missions* for a new approach: more attention to education and prosperity, transfer of leadership functions to local groups and institutions, less evangelisation and more respect for

117 Visser 't Hooft to C.L. Patijn, 3 July 1937, YDS-12, 50: 'Het is wonderlijk dat deze opmerking van mij komt en het kan zijn dat ik te zeer vast zit in het idee dat jij en andere menschen uit jouw N.C.S.V. generatie op een goeden dag mede kunnen helpen een nieuw Nederland van stapel te doen loopen […] Eén ding zou ik niet te zwaar laten wegen, namelijk de quaestie van 'roeping'. Voor velen onder ons gaat het nu eenmaal niet zoo, dat roeping op de één of ander direct evidente wijze tot ons komt en wij hebben dan op zakelijke wijze de gegevens te aanvaarden, die voor ons liggen en die precies evenzeer Gods leiding inhouden als directe roeping. Mij helpt eigenlijk altijd meer de gedachte, dat er een economie van het Koninkrijk Gods is en dat men daar moet gaan staan waar men naar menschelijke berekening het beste dienen kan.'

indigenous religions.[118] But Visser 't Hooft did not welcome such recommendations. In his view, this was 'Religion', and he did not mean that as a compliment. This was human work, dabbling without God. The Gospel could not be proclaimed in this way. Under Barth's influence, he argued for preserving the content of divine revelation, even if missions had to adapt to the local culture with respect to form. Hocking's recommendations were rejected by Visser 't Hooft in *The Student World* as 'spineless mission'.[119]

He personally felt very drawn to the Dutch East Indies. The first time he himself considered going to work in the Dutch East Indies was after he earned his doctorate in 1928. There was a serious plan to build up a theological faculty there, but, because he had been hired by the WSCF, nothing came of it.[120] He did make a major trip to the East Indies with Jetty and two staff members when the Chinese missionary T.Z. Koo organised a conference there for the Southeast Asian chapters of the WSCF. Cees L. van Doorn and his wife applied themselves successfully to organising a Javanese chapter of student work. According to an enthusiastic Visser 't Hooft, it was the only place where Christians from all 'Indonesian groups' could meet each other. The governor-general at the time was B.C. de Jonge, Jetty's Uncle Bonne, who received them in the palace in Batavia. The impression that Visser 't Hooft retained of this was that the Dutch administrators did not understand how far nationalism had progressed. He noted that most Dutch people, including the governor-general, still lived with the understanding that they could govern the Dutch East Indies for a long time yet in a paternalistic way. De Jonge saw many problems, but he blamed them on the world crisis and did not think that the Dutch administration was to blame for anything. In Visser 't Hooft's eyes, however, the Dutch were neglecting the colony. Great opportunities were being missed. Spiritual depth and 'aggressive evangelisation' were needed. While government and missions could still do a lot together to develop the Dutch East Indies before the struggle for power would erupt, the churches were divided and youth work was fragmentary.[121]

> I have to tell you honestly that I am shocked at the great uncertainty in the East Indies with which Dutch people and native people stand opposite each other, and of the great gulf that separates them. My main

118 Hocking, *Re-thinking Missions* (1932).

119 Visser 't Hooft, 'Rethinking Missions', 1933, 270-273 and 361. Wind, *Zending en oecumene in de twintigste eeuw*, 1 (1984), 124.

120 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 35.

121 Visser 't Hooft to H.C. Rutgers, 11 December 1933, HDC-PE, NCSV 524-711.

> impression is that, after many years of having honestly tried to co-operate on strengthening the power of the native population, Holland is now threatening to change course and to follow the path of a pure power politics.[122]

Although the Netherlands was, in his view, in the process of 'forfeiting its moral justification as a colonial power', he did not expect an uprising soon because he saw more aspiration than punch in the national movement. Back in the Netherlands, he gave a lecture on the Dutch East Indies on the Dutch WSCF federation day in 1934, in which he shared his concerns with the students.[123] The lawyer Frederik van Asbeck, a good friend of Visser 't Hooft, took up the task of working out the East India theme in the NCSV.

Visser 't Hooft's opinion of the Dutch policy towards the Dutch East Indies became more and more negative. The Dutch Prime Minister, Hendrikus Colijn, was seen at this time as an authority on the colonial question. At the end of the 1930s, he had to address the League of Nations in Geneva, and at that very same time Hendrik Kraemer was staying with Visser 't Hooft. Kraemer (1888-1965) was an expert on the Indonesian churches and had lived in the colonies for many years. He was convinced that the Dutch had to actively prepare the population of the Dutch East Indies for independence and that there had to be room in education for the spiritual tradition of the East Indian people. When Kraemer went to Colijn's hotel to talk about this, he was instead given a lecture on colonialism by the prime minister. Colijn turned out to have no interest at all in any advice Kraemer might give him. For Visser 't Hooft, that was the end of Colijn's authority, as far as the Dutch East Indies was concerned.[124]

With respect to mission, he wanted to liberate it from the bourgeois culture of doing good deeds, wanting to present the world of missions in 'both its poverty and its promise', without any false romanticism.[125] He

122 Visser 't Hooft to Beste vrienden, 11 december 1933.,HDC-PE, NCSV 524-711: 'Ik moet u eerlijk zeggen, dat ik in Indië geschrokken ben van de groote onzekerheid, waarmee Hollanders en inheemschen tegenover elkander staan en van de diepe kloof die hen van elkander scheidt. Mijn hoofdindruk is, dat Holland, na vele jaren gepoogd te hebben eerlijk aan de versterking van inheemsche volkskracht mede te werken, nu opeens van koers dreigt te veranderen en den weg van een zuivere machtspolitiek inslaat.'

123 Cf. Visser 't Hooft, 'De roepstem van Indië tot den Nederlandschen Student', 1935.

124 Cf. Colijn, *Koloniale vraagstukken van heden en morgen* (1928). Visser 't Hooft interviewed by Biersteker, Trouw, 27 January 1968: 'dat ging dwars in tegen alles wat ik zo langzamerhand had geleerd over Indonesië.'

125 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 29 May 1935, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 31.

radically rejected any form of syncretism, by which he meant that, with respect for the local culture, the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ should be proclaimed in full, and any synthesis with other religions or adoption of elements from them was absolutely forbidden. What he forgot here was that any proclamation of the story of Jesus made use of concepts from the receiving culture, as had also happened in Europe.[126]

An international student missions conference was held in Basel in September 1935, under the auspices of the International Missionary Council and the WSCF, with more than 250 students from many countries, and Visser 't Hooft invited his favourite theologian and friend Karl Barth to participate. He expected that Barth would make an inspiring contribution, but that was not to be. Barth responded with a blunt judgment:

> In any event, I think that these kinds of Christian circuses – can you imagine Athanasius or Calvin or Kohlbrügge at such an event? – have had, and perhaps now have definitively *had*, their day. What have all these meetings actually accomplished? Would it not be better to convene such con-ferences [sic] only if something is actually *mobilised* for burning issues, questions, and tasks, for common insights and prospects – and not for the sake of conferences as such?[127]

Visser 't Hooft was deeply hurt and responded immediately as if he had been stung by a wasp:

> Do you really have so little confidence in your friends Eduard Thurneysen, Pierre Maury, Karl Hartenstein, and me, who are all active in those conferences that you don't see us as anything more than a few Christian Sarrasanis? And what's the actual basis for this quick judgment of yours?[128]

126 See 6.6.

127 K. Barth to Visser 't Hooft, 4 July1935, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 37. 'Wie ich überhaupt glaube, dass diese Art von christlichen Cirkussen [sic] – könnten Sie sich Athanasius oder Calvin oder Kohlbrügge bei einem solchen Anlass vorstellen? – ihre Zeit gehabt, aber nun vieleicht endgültig *gehabt* hat. Was kommt eigentlich heraus bei dem vielen Zusammenlaufen? Wäre es nicht allmählich besser, Kon-ferenzen [sic] nur noch zu veranstalten, wenn man wirklich etwas *zusammenzutragen* hat an wirklich brennenden Nöten, Fragen und Aufgaben, an gemeinsamen Einsichten und Ausblicken – und gar nicht um der Konferenzen als solcher Willen?'

128 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 9 July 1935, ibid., 39: 'Haben Sie Wirklich so wenig Vertrauen in Ihre Freunde Eduard Thurneysen, Pierre Maury, Karl Hartenstein und mich, die ja alle daran beteiligt sind, dass Sie uns als nicht besser als christliche Sarrasanis ansehen? Und auf welchen Grund kommen Sie eigentlich zu diesem schnellen Urteil?' Sarrasani was a famous German circus.

While Visser 't Hooft and others were doing their best to liberate missions from philanthropy, Barth had characterised them as Christian clowns. The scholar whom Visser 't Hooft saw as his strongest ally looked down on precisely what he himself had for years considered to be the heart of his work: organising ecumenical conferences. His response reveals the real Visser 't Hooft:

> It's a shame that you look at it that way and do not wish to understand that there is serious work to be done on this front as well. Should we then just abandon the hope that the right theology can also have some understanding for the unofficial but not unnecessary work that we have been attempting to do for years in our student movement? Do you really think that it's about nothing else than 'conferences for the sake of conferences as such' for us? Then you don't know us very well, and you don't understand the state of the human heart that would much rather sit at home but has been given another task.[129]

Calvin and Anthanasius would also – according to Visser 't Hooft – really not have been too unhappy with the conference in Basel. Barth had apparently not realised that he had trampled on Visser 't Hooft's feelings, for he responded, shocked:

> Hold on a minute! Life is much too short and difficult, and it is much too hot at present to cause unnecessary grief and worries and anger for ourselves. Please, don't take what I wrote in such a terribly narrow way![130]

Barth now emphasised that he intended to say that it threatened to become a circus performance *for him*. He begged Visser 't Hooft not to stay angry. He would rather attend all possible conferences than lose Visser 't Hooft's

129 Ibid.: 'Schade, dass Sie die Sache so ansehen und nicht verstehen wollen, dass auch an dieser Front ernste Arbeit getan werden muss. Sollten wir denn doch noch die Hoffnung aufgeben müssen, dass die richtige Theologie auch ein wenig Verständnis haben kann für die unoffizielle, aber nicht unnötige Arbeit, die wir in unserer Studentenbewegung nun seit Jahren zu tun versuchen? Denken Sie wirklich, dass es uns dabei 'um der Konferenzen als solcher willen' geht? Dann kennen Sie uns schlecht und verstehen Sie nicht, wie es aussieht im Herzen eines Menschen, der viel lieber zu Hause sitzen möchte, aber dem nun einmal ein anderer Auftrag gegeben ist.'

130 K. Barth to Visser 't Hooft, 12 July 1935. Ibid., 40-41: 'Halt, halt, halt! Das Leben ist viel zu kurz und schwierig und es ist auch gegenwärtig viel zu heiss, als dass wir uns unnötig Betrübnis, Sorge und Zorn bereiten dürften. Fassen Sie, was ich Ihnen geschrieben habe, bitte nicht so schrecklich prinzipiell auf!'

Figure 20 Portrait: Jetty Visser 't Hooft-Boddaert, ca. 1935



friendship. This joking, almost ironic, tone from the professor did not fade in the years that followed. One wonders whether Barth ever really understood Visser 't Hooft. On the other hand, Barth's critique touched the Achilles' heel of a 'consensus ecumenicity' in which Visser 't Hooft expected good discussions and the collective taking up of the challenges of the world to

yield a great deal. He was more keen on Barth, than Barth on him.[131] This clash was not the last.

Jetty Visser 't Hooft-Boddaert had a clash of her own with Barth in 1934 that was connected with the character of absolute revelation that Barth ascribed to the Bible as the Word of God. She wrote Barth – whom she had not yet met at the time – a letter in 1934 in which she asked him how he explained the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:5-9 about the unequal relationship between men, women, and God.[132] Barth answered that it was not a matter of equality because the text was essentially not talking about husband and wife but about God and human beings. She had to learn to distinguish more clearly between her human and her theological arguments.[133] Jetty could not leave it at that and answered with a letter in which she asked Barth a series of critical questions based on experience.[134] What was God's intention if history showed that people had never understood the true reason of their 'upward orientation'? Where was the love that wanted nothing to do with superiority or inferiority in this theology? She herself thought in terms of a triangle. Only when God was the goal, the point of the triangle, were the husband and wife correctly positioned. Faith in God was the condition for faith in each other; it was a dynamic three-way covenant. She summarised her ideas first in an article under her maiden name in *The Student's World*, 'Is there a Women's Problem?'[135] Almost apologetically, she stated that it was not a question of feminism for her but, in her view, a spiritual and religious problem. Women had fallen in love with their gift of adapting to their husbands. Pilate was more impressed by the voices of the crowd than his wife's. Thus, modern leaders and statesmen were like modern Pilates who ignored the voices of their wives and mothers. But women did not exist for the sake of men; there was a reciprocal responsibility. In 1936, she published the booklet *Eva waar zijt Gij?* in which she related the conversation with Barth that followed their correspondence:

> In a conversation with Karl Barth, who kept to the Pauline line: God-Christ-husband-wife, whereby the first is the head of the next, I said to him, that I could understand less and less how even the most orthodox Christian would accept that line. He was silent for a moment and then answered seriously: 'But don't you believe that this is a heavy burden

131 Zeilstra, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 23 April 2013.
132 H. Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, March 1934, in: *Eva, wo bist du?* (1981), 14.
133 K. Barth to H. Visser 't Hooft, 27 April 1934; ibid., 15-17.
134 H. Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 9 May 1934; ibid.17-19.
135 H. [Visser 't Hooft-]Boddaert, 'Is There a Women's Problem?', 1934.

> (*schwere Last*) for us (men)?' I was deeply moved: is this not the first time in the history of the Church that a man, a Christian, communicated his tragic situation in this way? But a moment later I thought: No, no, this can't be. God, who does know what he can expect from people, so much so that he even offered his only born Son for them, cannot send him to the world with a heavy burden for the one half of mankind, on which the salvation of the other half depends to a large degree.[136]

Jetty had read a great deal on the 'woman question', by, among others, Carl Gustav Jung and Emma Jung-Rauschenbach. She saw men and women as equal and complementary: they constituted the human race together. She was convinced that women had a spirituality entirely of their own. Men and women had a lot more to offer each other than was often realised. She argued for the recognition that all men and women had both a female and male side, and she expected that that recognition would enrich married life and that women could make a valuable contribution to society, whereas men should get to know themselves better.

> Alongside the many divorces, we all know cynical men who bury themselves in their work and women who finally abandone themselves in resignation to the rut of daily life.[137]

Barth and Jetty could not come to an agreement. He did not find her original ideas worth a mention in any footnote in the hundreds of pages of his *Church Dogmatics*. This was, in the view of the theologian Jürgen Moltmann, writing in 1990, 'a great disadvantage for Barth's anthropology'.[138] Nevertheless,

136 *Eva waar zijt gij?* (1936), 24-25. See also Brodbeck, *Siehe, ich schaffe Neues* (1998), 36-41: 'In een gesprek met Karl Barth, die vasthoudt aan de Paulinische lijn: God-Christus-man-vrouw, waarbij dan steeds de eerste het hoofd is van de volgende, zei ik hem, dat ik steeds minder begrijpen kon, hoe zelfs de meest geloovige christen die lijn aandurfde. Hij zweeg een ogenblik en antwoorde toen ernstig: 'Maar gelooft u dan niet, dat dit voor ons (mannen) een zware opdracht (schwere Last) beteekent?' Het ontroerde mij werkelijk diep: is het niet voor het eerst in de geschiedenis der Kerk, dat een man, een christen zoo zijn tragische situatie kenbaar maakt? Maar een oogenblik later dacht ik: neen, neen, het kan niet. God, die wel weet wat hij aan de menschen heeft, zoo goed zelfs, dat hij zijn eenig geboren Zoon voor hen offert, kan deze niet naar de wereld zenden met een zware opdracht voor de eene helft der menschheid, waarvan voor een groot deel het heil afhangt van de andere helft.'

137 Ibid., 19: 'Naast de vele echtscheidingen, kennen we allen de cynische mannen, die zich in hun werk begraven, en de vrouwen, die zich tenslotte geresigneerd aan de sleur van het dagelijksch leven prijs geven.'

138 Moltmann, 'Henriëtte Visser 't Hooft', 1990, 145.

Jetty continued to expect something from Barth, and she studied his whole volume on the doctrine of creation. When Barth ridiculed the prudent rise of feminist theology in a workshop during the inaugural meeting of the World Council of Churches in 1948, which Visser 't Hooft had added to the programme at Jetty's urging, she was deeply disappointed in him and hurt.[139] Visser 't Hooft understood too late that she had brought up a very important topic that the theologian they both revered did not understand.[140]

From 1935 on, Visser 't Hooft slowly began to feel that he had to return to the Netherlands, perhaps for a position in missions. Or the secretariat of the Nederlands Bijbel Genootschap (NBG; Dutch Bible Society) – would that be a possibility? Herman Rutgers tipped him off about the first.[141] There were many advantages, such as a stable working environment, no longer having to travel all over the world, more time for family and study, the NBG was in contact with missions and the student world and was the only body in which almost all Protestant churches worked together in unity. But Visser 't Hooft stayed in Geneva. He admitted that he was sometimes a little tired from 'running round the world'. But he still felt he was where he should be.

> The matter has however not become very acute with me for I am rather convinced that it will be very hard to find any work which has more really satisfying elements in it and which gives greater scope for service than the present job.[142]

His Dutch friends persisted. Could Visser 't Hooft not become an unsalaried president of the WSCF in addition to his work at the Dutch Bible Society? The treasurer of the NBG, the legal scholar Paul Scholten, also a friend of Visser 't Hooft from university, had a strong argument: once in a while he heard the criticism

> that Dr. Visser 't Hooft has it easy, travelling all over the world telling everyone what they should do, but he has no idea what difficulties and sensitivities and pettinesses and orientation questions and I don't know what else arise when people want just to do something concrete in a certain country, what they are told internationally should be done.[143]

139 H. Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 1948, in: *Eva, wo bist du?* (1981), 34-36.

140 See 9.9.

141 H.C. Rutgers to Visser 't Hooft, 8 February 1935, HDC-PE, NCSV 524-711.

142 Visser 't Hooft to H.C. Rutgers, 13 February 1935, HDC-PE, NCSV 524-711.

143 P. Scholten to Visser 't Hooft, 1 July 1937, YDS-12, 48: 'dat Dr. Visser 't Hooft het wel gemakkelijk heeft om over de geheele wereld aan iedereen te vertellen wat men behoort te doen, maar

The warning Scholten gave Visser 't Hooft here is remarkable, but the argument did not convince him. From 1935 on people were pulling at Visser 't Hooft from all sides for a few years. The Dutch Mission Society (Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap) wanted him as director, but John Mott wanted him to stay in Geneva. Visser 't Hooft himself discouraged everything, however. Rutgers himself took the position of secretary at the Dutch Bible Society, and Hendrik Kraemer accepted a professorship in dogmatics in Leiden. In the same period, there was talk in Life and Work circles about a World Council of Churches that was to be set up. Would there be a position for him there?

Visser 't Hooft had studied theology and had joined the Reformed Church in 1923, but he had never been ordained as a minister. After the Barmen Declaration, however, the importance of the church became increasingly clearer to him, and he began to feel more and more strongly attracted to the ministry. On 29 March 1936, he was ordained by his good friend Pierre Maury from Ferney as a minister of the Église Protestante Nationale de Genève in the church of Eaux-Vives. During this service, Visser 't Hooft gave an account of his attitude to the office in a solemn but personal 'Declaration'. He had come to believe that actual participation in a concrete church was indispensable.

> Because I have developed a very special interest in the question of Christian unity, I have clearly seen that that unity cannot come outside of and above the churches. I have seen that my faith in the Universal Church would become an abstract illusion as long I did not take my place in a concrete Church.[144]

He said that he had felt called when he started studying theology but not to the ministry: 'To the contrary, I was rather afraid of the office of the pastorate. I knew only one thing: that God wanted to use me. How and where, I didn't know.' But his work for the YMCA and the WSCF had grown into a special ministry and a spiritual school, a parish on five continents. Thanks to the deep and vital contacts with students worldwide, he had slowly come to feel that he was indeed the pastor of a true Christian community. For a long time, the church had only played a small part in his life, but he had

dat hij er geen notie van heeft welke moeilijkheden en gevoeligheden en kleinzieligheden en richtingskwesties en weet ik wat al meer, er komen kijken, wanneer men nu in een bepaald land eens concreet wil doen, wat men internationaal vertelt dat behoort te geschieden.'

144 Visser 't Hooft, 'Déclaration', 29 March 1936. Original text, see note 145.

increasingly realised the danger of a spiritually uprooted life, especially to international and ecumenical work.[145]

Western Europe had, he found, become a mission field itself. In the winter of 1937, the local NCSV chapters in Utrecht and in Amsterdam organised an evangelisation week in February. There was a lecture programme, and postcards were handed out with Bible texts printed on them. The lecture Visser 't Hooft gave then, in the full auditorium of the Utrecht University Hall (Academiegebouw), was called '"Goed leven" of geloof' (' "The good life" or faith'). He wanted to look seriously at the question of standards for life without God – a question actually already posed by the 17th century legal scholar Hugo Grotius as *etsi deus non daretur* – but ended up with the dilemma of the character Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*: 'Raskolnikov … concludes that, if God does not exist, then *all* is permitted.' As a solution to the whole problem, Visser 't Hooft postulated the existence of God on the basis of the Bible:

> The Bible *declares*: God exists; God begins a new era; You are of God. God starts working on you; Christ has overcome the world; and you can participate in His victory.[146]

Missions and ecumenism go hand in hand, according to Visser 't Hooft. A vital church that was striving for renewal was essentially occupied with growth and exploring new horizons. It was no coincidence that the fundamental unity of the church was discovered on the mission field. If the churches really wanted to have something to offer to non-Christians, then they had to present themselves as one. With respect to the mission work in the colonies, appreciation for the peculiarities of rising young churches was indispensable. During his time at the YMCA and the WSCF he came to know many future leaders of new states among the students that began to take shape in movements for self-government and independence. Visser

145 Ibid.: 'Lorsque j'ai été amené à m'intéresser tout spécialement à la question de l'unité chrétienne, j'ai compris clairement que cette unité ne pourrait se réaliser en dehors et au dessus des Eglises. J'ai vu que ma foi en l'Église Universelle deviendrait une illusion abstracte tant que je ne prendrais pas ma place au sein d'une Église concrète.' – 'Au contraire j'avais plutôt peur du ministère pastoral. Je ne savais qu'une chose: que Dieu voulait m'utiliser. Comme et à quel endroit, je l'ignorais.' – '[…] danger menaçant surtout dans le travail international et oecuménique'.

146 Visser 't Hooft, '"Goed leven" of geloof', 1937: 'Raskolnikow […] concludeert, dat, zoo God niet bestaat, ook *alles* gepermitteerd is'; 'De Bijbel *declareert*: God is er; God begint een nieuw tijdperk; Gij zijt van God; God gaat met U aan het werk; Christus heeft de wereld overwonnen; en gij kunt deelhebben aan Zijn overwinning.'

't Hooft was an early proponent of the recognition of what was later called the 'polycentric structure' of Christianity.[147] But the space he allowed for alternative explanations remained limited. He adhered closely to the central role of Christ as this was understood in the theology of Karl Barth. He no longer felt called to a position in missions. But where to then?

The great world mission conference of the International Missionary Council took place at the end of 1938 in Tambaram, near Madras in India. Steven van Randwijck, NCSV secretary Frans Kooijman, and Visser 't Hooft formed the Dutch delegation from the WSCF. The Dutch missionary and expert on Islam, Hendrik Kraemer, wrote a long book for this meeting, called *A Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, that Visser 't Hooft read with pleasure and praised for its clear vision.[148] Kraemer urged his readers to reflect on the meaning of Christ's missionary method. The message was a mandate. Kraemer had an eye for the spiritual sources of Eastern cultures but insisted that they be interpreted Christocentrically and thus Christianising. That was precisely what Visser 't Hooft wanted to hear, for that prevented a 'slide into a relativistic missions ideology' as had happened with Hocking.[149] There was one church to proclaim worldwide.

After his return from Madras in January 1939, Visser 't Hooft was convinced more than ever that the Christian church, which was busy rediscovering its own universality, was on a collision course with the powers that ruled the world precisely for that reason.

> The dominating characteristics of the Christian scene as viewed from Madras are that the Church is in process of becoming truly universal and that precisely at the moment when its inherent universality becomes evident, it enters into a crucial conflict with the forces which dominate the world. The Church becomes a World-Church but at the same moment it is reminded that the Church is not of this world.[150]

Large delegations from China, India, and the Dutch East Indies made the limits of 'Western provincialism' visible in Madras, according to Visser 't Hooft. Great results could be expected from visible church unity in the

147 Koschorke, 'Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of the World', 2016.

148 Kraemer, *A Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938).

149 Visser 't Hooft, contribution to a festschrift for Kraemer on his 70th birthday, 1958.

150 Visser 't Hooft, 'An Impression of the World Missionary Conference at Madras', 1939.

mission field. If that unity would lead to a World Council of Churches, then it should not be an organisation dominated by the Western churches.

2.9 Secretary of the Emerging World Council of Churches

One of Visser 't Hooft's theses accompanying his dissertation in 1928 was:

> The unity of the Christian churches and confessions cannot really be promoted unless a synthesis can be found between the approach in the practical and ethical area (Stockholm) and the approach in the area of church doctrine and church order (Lausanne).[151]

In the middle of the 1930s, the wise saying 'doctrine divides, but service unites' that became the motto of the inaugural conference of Life and Work in Stockholm in 1925 seemed to have lost its magic for many. It was precisely from bringing the two approaches together – practical Christianity on the one hand and church order on the other – that the continuation committees of both movements were expected to offer support to a powerful international ecumenical movement. The concept 'oikumène' was used more and more often.[152] Two large conferences were convened in the summer of 1937: first, members of Life and Work would meet in Oxford and then those of Faith and Order in Edinburgh. The members of both movements could be official representatives of churches, but there were also often specialists in a specific area or from missions who would be attending informally.[153]

It was an important 'ecumenical year', but whoever expected instant solutions from Oxford and Edinburgh would be disappointed. Visser 't Hooft, who had been a member of the continuation committee of Faith and Order since 1930 was happy with the enthusiasm students showed for the coming conferences in 1937. But he also thought it wise to warn them:

> It may well be that many young Christians will become very impatient with the ecumenical movement, because it does not seem that this is enough in a world which needs so much more than words. That is all to the good, if this impatience finds expression, not in pharisaic and

151 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 76.
152 On the term 'oikumène' and its translations see Introduction, note 1.
153 Rouse and Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* (1986), 421 and 553.

> negative criticism, but in an attempt to bring the Churches (our own Churches) to a deeper consecration to God's Will, which stands for both truth and unity.[154]

With the publication earlier that year of *None other Gods* he offered an accessible and substantive book for students, particularly those from Britain and America. Theologically complicated subjects were presented here in a simplified version.[155] For himself, this was a finger exercise for the important book he would write together with the Scottish former missionary and pioneer of Life and Work, Joseph Oldham, *The Church and its Function in Society*, which also appeared in 1937. That was still before the conference, and it helped establish his reputation among the participants insofar as they did not yet know who he was.[156] In his contribution to this book, Visser 't Hooft built on his 1933 study *Le catholicisme non-romain* in terms of content. Visser 't Hooft and Oldham's book was the first volume in the series *Church, Community and State*, and it was published for preparation for the Life and Work conference in Oxford. Further volumes followed.[157] Visser 't Hooft wrote the ecclesiological chapters under the title 'The nature of the Church', and Oldham looked after the chapters on the function of the church in relation to society.

What or who was 'the church' actually? In Oldham and Visser 't Hooft's analysis, the church was at the centre of the struggle against the totalitarian movements that undermined the whole of civilisation with their absolute claim on the individual. The church of Christ was presented as the only hope for the world. It is clear that Visser 't Hooft was inspired by Karl Barth, who had been publishing volumes of his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* since 1932.[158] It was to be held to as a truth of faith of one universal church in all those different churches. While the differences could not be denied, there was also the reality of the unity of the church as God's gift to it. Starting with this should lead to prayer and the capacity to make joint statements and to act together.[159] The churches were not to permit themselves by anything or anyone to be functionalised or equalised. They needed to be aware of an essentially other task – that is, to be church, pure and simple: 'Let the Church be the Church'. Those were the famous words that would be often

154 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Federation in this Oecumenical Year', 1937, 108.
155 Visser 't Hooft to G. van der Vlier, 18 December 1937. YDS-12, 49.
156 Visser 't Hooft and Oldham, *The Church and its Function in Society* (1937).
157 *The Church, Community and State Series*, 7 vols. (1937-1938).
158 Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 13 vols. (1932-1967).
159 Visser 't Hooft and Oldham, *The Church and its Function in Society* (1937), 94-96.

cited. Visser 't Hooft claimed that he was 'purely descriptive' in his word, but he smuggled all kinds of prescriptive bits of theology into his text. At the same time, he posed some big questions that would not lose any of their importance in the following years: 'Is there a Church in the Churches?' and 'Can the Churches speak and act together?' He saw the Church in light of the New Testament not quantitatively as a collection of separate individuals but primarily qualitatively as a new work of creation by God, as a given unity.[160] This church itself was part of the proclamation (*kerygma*) of the New Testament. Jesus was viewed by Visser 't Hooft historically as the founder of the *ekklesia*. The Last Supper was *the* founding moment of this church.

After he had listed the special characteristics of the various types of churches, Visser 't Hooft rejected in principle the so-called *branch theory* that saw the Christian churches as branches of a kind of primal or root church. In this view, each church is part of the world church, whereby the one had been allotted one thing and another another, and it was a matter of valuing and complementing each other. He did see points of overlap between the branch theory and the New Testament image of the body of Christ with its many members, but Visser 't Hooft pointed out that the branch theory had its origin not in the Bible but in 'modern humanitarianism': 'Its weakness is that it isolates the question of *unity* from the question of *truth*."[161] This question remained fundamental for Visser 't Hooft with respect to the unity of the church. Ecumenicity could not simply be concerned with a compromise or with granting each other room – the wine should not be watered down! Relativism was always lurking around the corner. For Visser 't Hooft, it was a matter of viewing each church as *the* church in the full sense of the word. He approvingly cited the Russian Orthodox priest George Florovsky from Paris, who had called the church the living image of eternity within time, similar to an icon.[162]

In July 1937, 437 participants gathered in Oxford, including three hundred delegates from 120 churches in forty countries for the large 'Universal Conference on Life and Work'. Some spoke of a council in the sense of the first

160 Ibid., 24.

161 Ibid., 92. The Church Father Cyprian of Carthage (210-258) had already rejected the branch theory and both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church followed him, equating the visible and the invisible Church. The branch theory was popular in the Oxford Movement in the first half of the nineteenth century and was developed at that time by W. Palmer – whom Visser 't Hooft does not cite, by the way. Cf. Palmer, *A Treatise on the Church of Christ* (1838). John Henry Newman had been influenced by Palmer but rejected this theory when he joined the Roman Catholic Church. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua. Being a history of his religious ideas* (1864).

162 Ibid., 33. Florovsky, *The Church of God* (1934).

seven authoritative ecumenical councils in the church, but Visser 't Hooft felt such a claim was not justified. Although he saw a certain objective basis for meeting on behalf of the churches, this was not a meeting of churches. Oxford could be little more than 'an international humanitarian organisation'. He summed up the ecumenical situation of 1937 in two facts:

> [T]he fact that all the Churches concerned believe in the Church as a reality which transcends any given historical Church body and is brought into existence, not by men, but by God; and the other fact that these same Churches cannot at present be brought together into one united Church.[163]

This was not yet the church of Christ in its full, final form. But, in Visser 't Hooft's view, it did witness to that church; he used the word 'earnest' in this context.[164] During the conference he was the chairman of the working group 'The Church and War', and he helped with the final declaration. There was no delegation from the German Evangelische Kirche present, and no hard commitments were made about the turbulent situation in Germany. The most important result of this meeting in Oxford was the intention to merge with Faith and Order into a World Council of Churches. The Life and Work conference in Oxford and the Faith and Order conference that took place the following month in Edinburgh each appointed seven delegates to prepare the fusion that would lead to the preliminary World Council of Churches. This Committee of Fourteen decided to convene a special conference in 1938 in order to establish a constitution and to make the appropriate nominations. Visser 't Hooft was happy: they had now taken the road that would lead to a World Council of Churches.

But it was his teacher Karl Barth who again threw a spanner into the works. Barth was greatly bothered by the 'impossible speech' the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, had given. With respect to the German situation, Lang defended a policy of pacification, just as the British government was doing at that time. There was a passionate response in Germany to the declaration of Oxford on the German church, which showed solidarity in a non-political way: 'Let the Church be the Church' was understood by the Nazis as stirring up church opposition.[165] But Barth called the declaration 'lemonade', contrasting it to the wine that gladdens human hearts (Psalm

163 Visser 't Hooft and Oldham, *The Church and its Function in Society* (1937), 98.
164 Ibid., 100.
165 Boyens, *Kirchenkampf und Ökumene*, I, *1933-1939* (1973), 164-170.

104:15).[166] Visser 't Hooft thought that Barth was caricaturing ecumenicity. The Anglican contribution had perhaps been too large, but the church was taken completely seriously as church in Oxford. They had listened sincerely to their German contacts. According to him, they had said all they could say in the closing declaration.[167]

Visser 't Hooft assured Barth dutifully that he had long ago traded in his earlier natural joy 'in large international constructions' for common sense. As long as he himself was not involved, Barth did not have the right to criticise the ecumenical movement in this way. He made a sharp appeal to Barth that was characteristic of his way of thinking:

> I'll probably get my hands dirty, but how can someone complain about that if 99% of Christians are in the same situation? I'm not asking you to trust me more than I deserve, and I hope that you will tell me as clearly as possible if I have missed the target or have been cowardly. But I'll take your much needed advice seriously only if I see that you are trying to understand the matter and that you do not critique it too easily.[168]

Now he did nevertheless have an impact on Barth. In an extensive, documented answer, Barth explained that the statements from Oxford did not help. They had walked on the non-spiritual paths of the world in Oxford, and the effects of that could be seen in the result. Barth referred Visser 't Hooft to 1 Corinthians 2:13: 'This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.'[169] For him, this defined the rules of the game that guided him in writing his own dogmatics and which he hoped could be of use to ecumenicity. Without these rules, the whole ecumenical enterprise was a 'waste of time and energy'. The ecumenical movement should have clearly raised a call to battle in 1937. But that had not happened, and thus, according to Barth, the rules had been violated. A true ecumenical leader did not search for support in a political way and to spare sensitivities but had

166 K. Barth to Visser 't Hooft, 18 August 1937, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 69.
167 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 15 August 1937. Ibid., 62-65.
168 Ibid.: 'Ich werde schon manchmal meine Hände schmutzig machen, aber wie kann man darüber klagen, wenn das die Lage [von] 99% der Christenheit ist? Ich frage nicht, dass Du mir rein grösseres Vertrauen gibst, als ich verdiene, und ich hoffe, dass Du mir manchmal so deutlich wie möglich sagen wirst, dass ich daneben gehauen habe oder auch feige gewesen bin. Aber ich werde Deine höchst notwendige Kritik nur ernst nehmen, wenn ich bemerke, dass Du versuchst, etwas von der Sache zu verstehen, und Dir die Sache nicht zu leicht machst.'
169 Translation New International Version.

to stick his neck out. A clear distinction between the *Deutsche Christen* and the Confessing Church could no longer be avoided.[170] Visser 't Hooft would feel Barth's hot breath breathing down his neck for a long time.

Seven delegates from Life and Work, seven delegates from Faith and Order, and a reasonably representative group of delegates from the churches that were intended to join – almost all older white males – met in the auditorium of the University Hall of Utrecht University from 9 to 12 May 1938, to draw up a constitution for the World Council. Again, there was no delegation from Germany. In March, the *Anschluss* of Austria to Germany took place, and international tensions were heating up. The conference in Utrecht succeeded in deciding, along the lines set in Oxford and Edinburgh, to found a World Council of Churches 'in the process of formation' – a temporary construction, thus. The official founding would take place in 1940 perhaps, it was thought, but probably in August 1941. There was a consensus that this World Council should not become a church and did not strive for any legal or regulative authority over the member churches. All authority had to rest on grounds of spiritual content. After an extensive discussion, the basis of Faith and Order was finally adopted as the basis for the World Council. This basis was itself derived from the *Paris Basis* of the YMCA:

> The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of Churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour.[171]

William Temple wrote an explanation in which the basis was presented as a confirmation of the incarnation and the reconciliation with which the council expressed the desire to be a fellowship of churches that accepted these churches. The following remark was very important for the future general secretary:

> Any authority that it [the council] may have will consist in the weight which it carries with the churches by its own wisdom.[172]

While the church delegation would for the time be decided on the basis of region and not on that of confessional groups, a *Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches in Process of Formation* was appointed, made up of the fourteen delegates of Life and Work and Faith and Order, supplemented

170 K. Barth to Visser 't Hooft, 18 August 1937. Ibid., 75.
171 Rouse and Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, (1986), 705.
172 Temple, 'Explanatory Memorandum', 1938, 109.

by a few others from the administrative committee of Life and Work and the continuation committee of Faith and Order. The members of the smaller and thus more efficient administrative committee all participated in this provisional committee. The committee met for the first time on 13 May 1938 in Utrecht. Because nothing came of the actual foundation of the World Council during the early 1940s owing to the war, this provisional committee came to be much more important than the members could have known at that point.[173] William Temple, the Archbishop of York was the chairman, with vice-chairmen John Mott, Germanos Strenopoulos (1872-1951), the delegate from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Archbischop of Thyateira and exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Western Europe and an important contact of Visser 't Hooft, and Marc Boegner (1881-1970), president of the Fédération Protestante de France. The committee decided to invite the 37-year-old Visser 't Hooft to fulfil the full-time position of general secretary. Many thought that British Presbyterian William Paton (1886-1943), secretary of the International Missionary Council, had the best chance for this highest leadership position. But Visser 't Hooft had a broader development, smoother forms of interaction, and an excellent network among young people. He also spoke several languages, albeit with a heavy Dutch accent that he never lost. The objection that Visser 't Hooft was too young for such a responsible position was brushed aside by Temple. Life and Work transferred all important responsibilities immediately, but Faith and Order did not. A tense continuation meeting of Faith and Order was held in Clarens in Switzerland from 29 August to 1 September 1938 where the plans were finally approved with a few small changes.

Fortunately for Visser 't Hooft, Geneva was indicated as the headquarters. The study centre of Life and Work under the leadership of Hans Schönfeld and the European Central Bureau for Interchurch Aid, an ecumenical refugee centre under the leadership of Adolf Keller, were already established here. In the half year that followed the conference in Utrecht, Visser 't Hooft was still secretary of the WSCF and the designated secretary of the World Council that was in the process of formation, a 'curious interim period'.[174] At this time, he began launching a reflection on what he formulated as 'The Meaning and Purpose of the Oecumenical Movement'. Another important priority concerned the preservation of contacts with the German church. In the meantime, the WSCF work continued, but it was no longer possible to rely on a secretariat. Because of cutbacks, the number of salaried team

173 Visser 't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (1982).
174 Visser 't Hooft to L. Hodgson, 1 July 1938, WCC general correspondence 653.

members in Geneva for international student work was reduced from six to one man, Visser 't Hooft himself. It all threatened to become too much for him in the summer of 1938. He had to inform Frans Kooijman of the NCSV that he could not come to Woudschoten for the summer conference.

> The thing is … I'm getting bogged down in my work. I tremble when I think of everything that still has to be done before I go for a short three-week holiday on 6 July, and in any case I do not see at the moment how I can get through this mountain of work.[175]

In the end, he was able to hand over his work as secretary for WSCF to the Scot Robert C. Mackie at the end of 1938.[176] Mackie wrote the following words in praise of Visser 't Hooft at the latter's departure:

> There has been no period in the Federation's history when the burden has fallen more heavily on one man's shoulders, or been carried with such spirit. Financial difficulties reduced the Staff until for a year or two he stood alone; for many Movements, and their leaders, he *was* the Federation.[177]

He praised him for his gift to inspire others and pointed out that Visser 't Hooft had countless friends among students worldwide.

In the preparatory discussions of the conference in Utrecht, Visser 't Hooft had suggested that he could better be director of the bureau of the World Council, with Oldham beside him as ecumenical secretary. But Oldham did not care for that idea and purposely wanted to throw him into the deep end right away.[178] Visser 't Hooft felt the appointment coming but hesitated. He was afraid that the churches would not go ahead and that it would never be anything more than a loose federation. He was also afraid that it would only be a discussion platform whereas from the beginning, on the practical

175 Visser 't Hooft to F.M. Kooijman, 11 June 1938, YDS-12, 64: 'De zaak is […] dat ik bezig ben met mijn werk vast te loopen. Ik ril als ik denk aan alles wat er nog gebeuren moet voor ik op 6 juli voor een kleine drie weken vacantie ga nemen, en zie in ieder geval op het oogenblik niet hoe ik door den rijstebrij berg van werk heen kom.'

176 Bria and Heller, *Ecumenical Pilgrims* (1985), 138.

177 Mackie, 'W.A. Visser 't Hooft', 1938, 60.

178 Visser 't Hooft to J.H. Oldham, 6 August 1937, WCC general correspondence, 692. Visser 't Hooft added a draft budget in which he would earn £700 as director and Oldham the same as secretary. The total budget came to £7,000.

Figure 21 The Visser 't Hooft family home in the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, 11A Chemin des Crèts de Champel, Geneva



side, he had been looking for solidarity and assistance.[179] That is why he attached some concrete conditions to his agreeing to take the position, conditions that had great influence on the formation of the World Council. First, he thought that the leaders of participating churches should openly agree with the foundation of the World Council and that there should be a *modus vivendi* with the existing national ecumenical councils and their staff. Second, he requested sufficient financial means for five to seven years; that would make it possible to build up and modestly expand a 'first-rate staff' provided with the necessary material and secretarial support. To be able to play an independent role, the World Council should have a broad financial basis that really was provided by the churches. Third, he wanted the freedom to compile his team himself. That was permitted to a certain extent. For example, the current German Life and Work study secretary Hans Schönfeld – not really Visser 't Hooft's choice – was part of the new organisation. For an office, they used a building that belonged to the Swiss Protestant Church, at 41 Chemin des Crêts-de-Champel in Geneva. The new

179 Interview by R. Foppen with Visser 't Hooft, 'De Kerk Vandaag', NCRV radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives.

position meant that the Visser 't Hooft family would have to move because the house they lived in was connected with his position at the WSCF. The house they rented was on the same street as the office, no. 11A, so Visser 't Hooft could walk to work.[180] It was a nice large, detached house, situated on a hill at what at that time was the edge of Geneva with a good view of the fields.

The Munich Agreement of September 1938 promised, according to the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain when he came home, 'peace in our time'. Not everyone immediately saw that, in reality, nothing more than new steps towards war had been taken. Hitler drew the conclusion that the West would not intervene and could now occupy the Czech Sudetenland. Visser 't Hooft had no delusions from the start about the results Chamberlain had achieved. When Rudolf J.H. Patijn (1863-1956), the father of Jetty's cousin Conny Patijn, the lawyer and politician for the Liberale Unie (Liberal Union), published a critical piece in the newspaper, Visser 't Hooft wrote Conny:

> The article by your Father in the *Rotterdammer* interested me very much. I was just astounded by the conclusion. Can Chamberlain be called a great statesman if he could be so incredibly fooled as your Father thinks? The inevitable conclusion from this theory should then be that Churchill and Eden have seen through the situation on a much deeper level.[181]

The city council of 's-Hertogenbosch had thought to pay tribute to Chamberlain's 'greatest work of peace' by putting the text *Laus Deo Semper Pax Optima Rerum* on the front gable of the city hall.[182] Visser 't Hooft immediately analysed that it was a serious mistake to make peace a priority above all other matters because justice and freedom were then made subordinate and declared relative.[183] In the autumn of 1938 he made a trip to Czechoslovakia and Germany. There he listened to Czech Christians who felt betrayed by the Munich Agreement, primarily by Christians in Western Europe. After returning to Geneva, Visser 't Hooft pleaded passionately for material and moral support for the Czechs. But the members of the Confessing Church in

180 The house is still standing but its address is now 10 Avenue de Champel.

181 Visser 't Hooft to C.L. Patijn, 12 October 1938, YDS-12, 50 : 'Het artikel van je Vader in de Rotterdammer heeft mij zeer geïnteresseerd. Alleen stond ik versteld van de conclusie. Kan men Chamberlain een groot staatsman noemen wanneer hij zich zoo ongelooflijk voor de gek heeft laten houden als je Vader meent? De noodwendige conclusie uit deze theorie zou juist moeten zijn dat dan Churchill en Eden de situatie heel wat dieper doorzien.'

182 A text that was quickly removed by the Germans after they occupied the Netherlands.

183 Visser 't Hooft, 'Questions', 1938.

Germany also deserved support. Their voices had to be heard. Visser 't Hooft was convinced that the German people did not approve of Kristallnacht. While the persecution of the Jews could not be criticised strongly enough, this should never mean that the German people as a whole should be held guilty for it.[184] In the meantime, Visser 't Hooft came to learn that his quiet diplomacy with the Nazis no longer had any effect, not even individually.

Not everyone was enthusiastic, for that matter, about the decision to found the World Council of Churches. The Remonstrant minister H.J. Heering (1912-2000) published a very critical article in the June 1938 issue of *Vox Theologica* in which he reproached the new World Council for the inclination to strive for church power on a narrow dogmatic basis. But, according to Visser 't Hooft, Heering was guilty of 'yellow journalism', as cheap journalism was called in the United States.[185] According to Visser 't Hooft, precisely the fear of some that the World Council would interfere in the life of the member churches had been refuted in Utrecht. Presenting the basic formula, 'Jesus Christ as God and Saviour' as a victory of 'Faith and Order' over 'Life and Work' was, in Visser 't Hooft's view, a wrong view of the process that preceded the merging of the two organisations. After all, everyone, including those who were active in Life and Work, supported a clear Christocentric basis for the World Council. Heering had stated that the liberal churches were now excluded because of the Christocentric basic formula that posited Christ as God. Visser 't Hooft disputed that but he had no strong arguments. It seemed that, personally, he could live with a broad interpretation by liberals. When, for example, the Vrijzinnige Christelijke Studenten Bond (Liberal Christian Students Federation) drew back in 1946 from closer ties with the NCSV because of the basic formula of the WSCF, which was very much like that of the World Council, he advised that they should not make such a big deal about it but focus primarily on the practical collaboration that already existed.[186] Visser 't Hooft was fully aware that a strictly dogmatic basic formula would prevent some churches from joining, but he saw more advantages than disadvantages. The basic formula was not presented as a confession of the World Council but, in Visser 't Hooft's eyes, a certain Christocentric clarity had to be present – and this should have reassured conservative churches. He admitted to one of his university friends, Evert

184 Visser 't Hooft, 'Notes on a Visit to Czechoslovakia and Germany', 16 November 1938.

185 Visser 't Hooft to H.J. Heering, 1 July 1938. YDS-12, 48.

186 Van den Berg, *De Nederlandse Christen-Studenten Vereniging* (1991), 172. The first goal of WSCF was: 'To lead students to accept the Christian faith in God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – according to the Scriptures, and to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ.' Cf. Rouse, *The World's Student Christian Federation* (1948), 314.

Jansen Schoonhoven, that there were objections to the basic formula and that a compromise had been reached in Utrecht in 1938. Tellingly, Visser 't Hooft added: 'With this whole basic formula issue, one really feels for the first time how much theological formulas can lose their meaning and be misused for all kinds of ends.'[187] This basic formula would continue to invoke objections and misunderstandings.

Another type of criticism emerged from movements that felt excluded from the World Council by the fusion of Life and Work and Faith and Order. That obtained in particular for the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches, founded in 1914. This organisation's membership consisted of individuals rather than churches, and after the fiasco of the disarmament talks of the League of Nations in 1934, it had become a shadow of itself. Now the new World Council of Churches threatened to appropriate the theme of peace. According to the critics, the ecumenicity of the movements had been displaced by the church element.[188] J.C. Wissing, secretary of the Ecumenical Council in the Netherlands, of the Ecumenical Society and of the Dutch Chapter of the World Alliance, protested personally to Visser 't Hooft against the World Council's monopolisation of the ecumenical movement at the expense of the World Alliance. Wissing found that the World Alliance chose the side of the people, while the World Council that was in the process of being formed was more a matter for church leaders to study.

> We are constantly busy with looking for ways to have the whole movement penetrate to the people in the churches. However important this study may be – we hope to incite people to provide strong collaboration, provincial study groups have been formed – but the movement has to be more than a study matter for officers, if the life of the churches is to be renewed on the basis of the belief in the Una Sancta. Chapters of the Ecumenical Society have been set up now in all provinces of the Netherlands.[189]

187 Visser 't Hooft to E. Jansen Schoonhoven, 18 August 1939, YDS-12, 62: 'Bij deze heele basis quaestie voelt men eerst recht, hoezeer theologische formules hun zin kunnen verliezen en voor allerlei doeleinden misbruikt kunnen worden.'

188 Dam, *De Wereldbond voor Vriendschap door de Kerken, 1914-1948: Een oecumenische vredesorganisatie* (1996), 267-270.

189 J.C. Wissing to Visser 't Hooft, 11 May 1938, YDS-12, 38 : 'Wij zijn durend bezig wegen te zoeken om de geheele beweging tot het kerkenvolk door te laten dringen. Hoe belangrijk de studiearbeid ook moge zijn – wij hopen in Nederland tot krachtige medewerking ook daaraan op te wekken, provinciale studiegroepen worden gevormd – toch moet de beweging meer zijn dan een studie aangelegenheid van officieren, wil het leven der kerken van uit het geloof

Wissing himself could not and did not want to separate the World Council and the World Alliance in his work for the Ecumenical Council in the Netherlands. The Dutch chapter of the World Alliance was a committee of the Ecumenical Council in the Netherlands, which would in essence be aligned with the World Council of Churches. He asked Visser 't Hooft whether an approach could not still be sought and if the World Alliance could be included in setting up the World Council alongside Life and Work and Faith and Order. Visser 't Hooft answered Wissing to the effect that he did not yet have a definitive view. As a consequence of the international tensions, the World Council could not escape developing initiatives in the area of the peace work done by the World Alliance. Bishop George Bell of Chichester, the chairman of the English chapter of the World Alliance, then turned with his peace initiatives more readily to the able and decisive World Council than to the weak World Alliance. It was the World Alliance itself that did not want to change structurally. On whose behalf did the delegates of the World Alliance speak, after all? Visser 't Hooft had put his finger on the sensitive issue: perhaps Wissing could do something from within. Both were aware that the World Alliance's right to exist was at stake here. But attempts to reach a compromise were hindered by insurmountable personal objections.[190] A discussion between both organisations did finally take place in Geneva, but it did not produce any results. Wissing had not been present. He died suddenly on 22 June 1939 in De Bilt.

In January 1939, the provisional committee of the emerging World Council met in St. Germain near Paris. Visser 't Hooft, who had been officially working for the World Council since 1 January, was confronted with a range of problems. There had been no German delegates involved in the decisions made in Oxford and Utrecht, and now the Germans were refusing to work with them. The Lutheran bishop Theodor Heckel, who headed up the foreign office of the official state-recognised Deutsche Evangelische Kirche, had little confidence in Visser 't Hooft and attempted to prevent his becoming the European secretary of the World Council. The Confessing Church, not recognised by the state, had set up their own office for church unity, but it was impossible to ignore Heckel. Schönfeld, the German study secretary of Life and Work in Geneva, advised caution and looked after keeping up the contacts with the foreign office in Berlin.

When the *Deutsche Christen* published a sharp anti-Jewish statement on 6 April 1939, the positions hardened. That was too much – the credibility

de Una Sancta vernieuwd worden. In Nederland zijn thans in alle provincies afdeelingen der Oecumenische Vereeniging opgericht.'

190 Visser 't Hooft to J.C. Wissing, 27 May 1939. YDS-12, 39.

of church unity was at stake. Barth strongly urged Visser 't Hooft to speak directly to the Christians in Germany on the radio. He had to reassure them

> that, according to Christians of all nations, the war was not directed against the German people but against the usurpers who had become a danger to all and that we have to ask of all Christians in Germany if they do not need, in all conscience, to do everything they can to prevent a victory by these usurpers.[191]

Visser 't Hooft could only report that he had no mandate for that. This objection would be repeated a number of times in the first years of the war, whereby Barth played the role of gadfly in the skin of the whole ecumenical movement, directing his sting primarily at the general secretary. On 15 June 1939, Visser 't Hooft was asked to come to Berlin for a consultation with Heckel, which amounted to nothing more than Heckel lecturing him and giving the World Council an ultimatum by demanding two official seats for representatives of the German Church in the provisional committee and the sole right for his own office to represent the international ecumenical movement in Germany. Heckel's demands were rejected at the meeting of the administrative committee in Zeist, at the end of July. Schönfeld lost the argument, and it was agreed to have two German representatives, but one of the two had to be a delegate from the Confessing Church. The outbreak of war meant the end of negotiations, and Visser 't Hooft made the most of informal contacts where possible from that point on. An ecumenical specialist conference in the Beau Séjour hotel in Champel near Geneva in July 1939 was largely composed of contacts from his own network, such Van Asbeck and Patijn. The conference would not affect international politics in any way, but the report would give him something to hold on to during the war years.[192] It was an important meeting with respect to content. Shortly after the war, the then new committee of the emerging World Council, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, took up the thread of Beau Séjour again.

In that same summer of 1939, Visser 't Hooft was completely absorbed in the preparations for the largest ever World Conference of Christian Youth,

191 Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf* (1975), 311: 'dass der Krieg im Sinn der Christen aller Länder nicht gegen das deutsche Volk, sondern gegen dessen gemeingefährlich gewordenen Usurpatoren sich richte und dass wir die Frage an das Gewissen aller Christen in Deutschland zu stellen hätten, ob es nicht ihre Sache sei, zur Verhinderung dieses Krieges bzw. eines Sieges der Usurpatoren ihrerseits alles in ihren Kraften Stehende zu tun.'

192 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Church and the International Crisis', 1939.

which would open in Amsterdam on 24 July in the Concertgebouw. The intention was to have churches, the YMCA/YWCA, and the WSCF collaborate, so that young people would also take the results of recent ecumenical developments to heart. It was hoped that they would thus be protected from cynicism and be spiritually equipped for those tense times. The preparations in the host country, the Netherlands, did not go very well initially. NCSV secretary Frans Kooijman complained to Visser 't Hooft that the preparations had not been entrusted to the NCSV, but to an ad hoc committee in which the Reformed minister and director of the Amsterdam Society for Young Men (Amsterdamse Maatschappij voor Jonge Mannen), Jopie Eijkman, did most of the actual work.[193] The Dutch government was concerned that Dutch neutrality would be affected. Visser 't Hooft had to do his best to convince the officials that the American Reinhold Niebuhr, who had been invited to speak, was not a communist. In the end, the conference was impressive, with 1500 participants and interest shown by the royal family. On 22 July, before the opening of the conference, there was a rally with 7,000 young people in the Ajax stadium, with the delegations entering ceremoniously. Against the background of the threatening war, the theme 'Christus Victor' gained even more significance for the participants than the organisers had dared to hope.[194] Although there was no German delegation, a number of young Germans had come to Amsterdam on their own account. There was now no longer any talk among the youth of peace idealism or pacifism. Visser 't Hooft did ascertain a determination to hold fast to Christian unity in time of war, a major difference from the mood on the eve of the First World War. In his closing speech on John 16:33, Visser 't Hooft assured the young people that the church of Jesus Christ was not only a source of attractive ideas and good intentions in this world but a 'conspiracy' by those who knew the mystery that God had overcome the world in Christ.[195] The church was thus the only community in the world that truly lived with an open future, the only community with an inexhaustible hope. For Visser 't Hooft, this meeting was the high point of his work with youth. He was proud of the manifestation of realism and unanimity he witnessed. The closing meeting in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, where the 'À Toi la Gloire' was sung, touched him deeply, even more than the founding of the World Council in

193 F.M. Kooijman to Visser 't Hooft, 27 May 1939, YDS-12, 64.

194 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Opening Address', 1939 and 'I have Overcome the World', 1939.

195 Visser 't Hooft, 'I Have Overcome the World', 1939, see 233. The speech made a deep impact. Cf. interview van R. Foppen with J. Verkuyl on Visser 't Hooft, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives.

Figure 22 Organising committee of the World Conference of Christian Youth in Amsterdam, summer of 1939



Seated, from left to right: Wim Visser 't Hooft, John Mott, and Prince Bernhard. Jetty is standing in the back on the left.

1948 in the same place. Many of those present, Visser 't Hooft understood, could very soon be facing each other on the battlefield.

For Visser 't Hooft, this youth conference in Amsterdam would be his last contribution as someone working in ecumenical youth work. All lines came together here. It was not without a sense of drama that he wrote the following in his *Memoirs* about this conference: 'Amsterdam 1939 was the time to receive our marching orders for the trials ahead."[196] Visser 't Hooft often used the metaphor of marching orders at the end of conferences, sometimes even with a nod to the *deus lo vult* of the crusades. In his experience, a spiritual struggle was going on. Obedience to 'orders' had to lead to resolve and unanimity. He knew that there would be many trials following this encouraging meeting, not least of all for himself. In his position at the World Council, he would have to prove himself under even more difficult circumstances than in the 1930s.

196 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 101.

2.10 The Charismatic Student Leader

And Visser 't Hooft's time of directing the international work among youth and students at YMCA and the WSCF thus came to an end. Having begun as the international secretary of the youth work of the former organisation, since 1924 Visser 't Hooft had been organising various large and small international encounters in the area of Christian youth work among secondary school youth in Europe and also founded a modern international magazine for youth. He shared with his primarily American contacts the insight that the post-war youth was running the risk of becoming demoralised, especially in Europe. He based his own theological convictions in this work primarily on Karl Barth's church revelation theology. He distinguished himself from cultural theologians who studied religion as a phenomenon in a purely academic way and analysed the Bible primarily in a historical-critical way, such as Ernst Troeltsch. Confronted with the challenges of totalitarian movements that wanted to control the masses, he considered the cultural theological approach to be a major mistake.

At the major conferences he attended, he learned much that he could use in his own conferences. Gradually, he began to see his own work more and more as a building block in a large growing international ecumenical movement. Around 1930 he left the YMCA for the WSCF, in a period in which the threat of war was growing in Europe. During this period, he was a charismatic speaker for students, valued for his humour and his realism. He also wanted the magazine *The Student World* to educate and stimulate students to be a budding international close-knit Christian elite. He argued that church members should dare to use their faith and their expertise to help each other. He expected little from idealistic internationalism and disarmament, but he began to articulate much of what he viewed as Christian realism in an increasingly ecclesiastical way. After he underestimated – for a short period – the significance of the rise of Nazism in Germany, he understood the seriousness of developments and began to equip the students involved to distinguish between dangers and opportunities. For Visser 't Hooft, mission and unity were inseparably connected. A living church could not miss the missionary attitude. In these years, he expected that there would be an important task for mission when colonies prepared for independence and mission posts developed into new churches. Despite his fascination with missions, in the end he did not choose to become a missionary.

Visser 't Hooft did not succeed in closing the transatlantic ecumenical gulf between Americans and Europeans. He did analyse the tensions between the practical American way, directed at success, and European reflection.

He recognised these differences also in the connection he missed between taking up the questions of church and society in Life and Work on the one hand and the attention for the dogmatic differences in insight in the churches in Faith and Order on the other. He hoped that the founding of the World Council of Churches would make this tension fruitful and felt suited to play a major role here.

When a candidate was sought for the difficult position of general secretary of the World Council of Churches, he was nominated by John Oldham, William Temple, and John Mott. They saw in him a man with a good network and the right attitude to put this organisation on the map. Visser 't Hooft had a clear vision, and he was able to combine a sure and certain faith with strategic thinking. In addition, he was in good health and had almost inexhaustible energy. During that time Visser 't Hooft had developed a directive leadership style that fitted the 1930s: brisk and solution-directed. This approach also had its vulnerable and limiting sides. Some experienced his didactic tone from Geneva as pedantic. He was not always properly up to date on what he was speaking about as if he was an expert. The network that Visser 't Hooft used almost daily had a strongly elitist side. Because of that, his manner could seem somewhat unrealistic to relative outsiders. He always insisted that discussions be conducted at a high level. *The Student World* was certainly not a superficial student-like publication with jokes. On the eve of the Second World War, which demanded an authentic church unity, Visser 't Hooft could not take up Karl Barth's prophetic tone because he lacked the support he felt he needed.

3 Church Unity in Wartime, 1939-1945

Abstract
Chapter 3 explores Visser 't Hooft's thinking and activity during the Second World War. Against the background of this war, Visser 't Hooft saw the unity of the church as a counter to a world ripped asunder by violence. This involved the role of the church as prophet, a role Visser 't Hooft took on himself. This chapter thus looks at how this basic issue was worked out in Visser 't Hooft's activity in relation to government officials and programmes, organisations, and to his own government in exile. While his public statements could sometimes offend colleagues, Visser 't Hooft's reputation as a reliable representative of the ecumenical movement was confirmed under the difficult circumstances of the war, and his self-confidence grew.

Keywords: ecumenical movement, World Council of Churches (WCC) in process of formation, theology and church in wartime, postwar planning, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Adam von Trott zu Solz

3.1 Introduction

When with some distance afterwards he looked back at the Second World War, it seemed to Visser 't Hooft that the time of the greatest crisis was simultaneously the time when ecumenical work was becoming appreciated more and more. This was true not only in churches and Christian organisations but outside them as well. He believed that a spiritual struggle was being waged behind the theatres of war and that the kingdom of God had gained ground over evil. The front line of the struggle cut across all peoples, and, in his view, the true battlefield was in people's hearts. The value of the church as the place where all lines came together had been, he felt, discovered by many. Ecumenicity in time of war was not an academic question of interest to church leaders and professors of theology but one of commitment by people – that was the reality of the situation. In 1945, Visser

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't Hooft and those who shared those views were stronger than they were in 1939. While Christians, theologians, and churches in all the countries at war in the First World War allowed themselves as a whole to be used for nationalist propaganda when the war broke out in the period 1939-1945, there was a much stronger sense internationally of an ecumenical connection.

At the beginning of the war, Visser 't Hooft and his colleagues were faced with the question of whether it was possible to keep the office in Geneva open and running (3.2). Nevertheless, the value of keeping it open soon became clear, not least because of Visser 't Hooft's analyses and contacts. He actively attempted to interpret the war and was constantly busy keeping the ecumenical network alive (3.3). In connection with the struggle in the German church, Karl Barth forced Visser 't Hooft to account for both the church's silence and its speaking out. The proper assessment of this demanded the utmost from Visser 't Hooft, and this put a great deal of pressure on his relationship with Barth (3.4). While the revelation of God was a non-negotiable starting point in Barth's theology, Anglicans, with whom Visser 't Hooft was closely connected, saw this quite differently. In their natural theology, the existential world of people regarding the experience of God was taken very seriously. In his intense wrestling with this, he eventually found a balance that he often used later (3.5). He devoted a great deal of energy to working with prisoners of war and refugees in the war years. Sometimes, there was little they could achieve and that led to great frustration, but at other times the initiative itself from the World Council of Churches made the difference. Usually, it was a matter of improvisation, involving a great deal of trial and error (3.6). The staff at the World Council in Geneva understood relatively early that Jews in areas under German control and/or its allies were in immediate danger of being killed en masse. How did Visser 't Hooft deal with that? (3.7) The German resistance tried to get in contact with the Allies at various times through Visser 't Hooft. One of the most important contacts was Dietrich Bonhoeffer (3.8). Another contact person was Adam von Trott zu Stolz. Despite Visser 't Hooft's serious attempts to pass on the information the latter gave him, he became deeply disillusioned. For Visser 't Hooft, this was a story of great hope and deep disappointment (3.9).

3.2 The First Year of the War in Geneva: Isolation or Hub?

While the international contacts were seriously impaired by the war, Visser 't Hooft devoted a great deal of time to study in these years in addition to

his work. Looking at political, economic, cultural, and social developments, he sought for the spiritual background of the conflict and attempted on that basis to formulate useful ideas for the ecumenical movement. The German Hans Schönfeld was the formal leader of the Life and Work study department, now part of the World Council that was forming, but Visser 't Hooft wrote the most important critical studies. His own dedication here left no distinction between work and leisure time, and he was often busy writing in the evenings.[1] With only a few staff members, he provided leadership for a complex network, taking on numerous responsibilities, in which improvisation played a major role. Although Schönfeld sometimes seemed to be implementing nothing more than his own agenda, Visser 't Hooft trusted him.[2] He considered himself fortunate that all the staff at the German consulate in Geneva were anti-Nazis, as Schönfeld had pointed this out to him earlier. Thus, documents could sometimes be sent from Berlin via diplomatic bag to Geneva. When the Gestapo expressed suspicions about the World Council in Geneva, someone from the German consulate there must have been favourably disposed to the council and reported to Berlin that Lausanne was actually the place that needed careful surveillance. When the financial support from Germany for the emerging World Council stopped altogether in the spring of 1939, the churches in neutral countries were asked to donate more. It was hoped that the Scandinavians, the Dutch, and the Swiss could guarantee that the Genevan office would remain open, and that they would also continue to do so if the contacts with the Anglo-Saxon countries were seriously impaired. During the course of the war, the burden of financing fell primarily on the Swiss churches. But American sources became more important towards the end of the war, and for a long time, in terms of the post-war reconstruction programme and work among refugees, the budget was almost entirely dependent on American money. In 1941 the Swiss churches gave 77,000 francs to the World Council, the United States 10,000 francs, and the Swedish churches contributed 6,000 francs. But Visser 't Hooft's appeal to the American Christians was not in vain, and the contribution from American churches increased enormously in these years, especially after America became involved in the war. In 1942 the American churches gave 241,000 francs and in the following year 368,000.

After Hitler assumed power in 1933, Visser 't Hooft, as secretary of the WSCF, kept up his contacts as much as possible with the German chapter.

1 Visser 't Hooft to M. van Blankenstein in London, 29 May 1941. YDS-12, 56.

2 Visser 't Hooft to F. Hildebrandt, 24 March 1939, WCC general correspondence 644. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 99 and 130.

But at the beginning of 1939, Germany as a whole started to look more and more to Visser 't Hooft like what he called 'a vast concentration camp'. The non-official contacts became *de facto* increasingly more important as far as content was concerned.[3] Nevertheless, as people from the Confessing Church also told Visser 't Hooft, the official contacts were indispensable. The occupation of Bohemia and Moravia on 15 March 1939 brought about a definitive change in how he himself saw Germany. Visser 't Hooft went to Germany at the end of March 1939 to size up the situation. He paid a formal visit to Bishop Heckel of the foreign office of the Evangelische Kirche but stayed mainly with friends from the Confessing Church, such as Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff.

On 26 March 1939 the German Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs Hanns Kerrl issued a statement that became known as the *Godesberger Erklärung* (Godesberg Declaration) and was supported by the middle group of the German church. This helped him undermine the Confessing Church and the solidarity of the critical Protestants who did not belong to the *Deutsche Christen*. Christianity was defined as nationalistic, anti-Jewish, and anti-ecumenical, and the international ecumenical movement was shunted aside as 'politically corrupt'. This led the leaders of the ecumenical movement to issue a protest declaration signed by William Temple, George Bell, Marc Boegner, Visser 't Hooft, and William Paton.[4] But Visser 't Hooft backed off from breaking all ties with the *Deutsche Christen* who supported Hitler. He warned the Dutchman Jan Koopmans against counterproductive actions and urged caution: 'I know we Barthians all have difficulty with that, and so I'm saying it not only to you but just as much to myself.'[5] It is interesting that Visser 't Hooft is speaking here of 'we Barthians', an expression that he later preferred to avoid. It was his intention to issue special press reports for Germany from that point on in which even the word 'ecumenical' was avoided. His goal was to keep the trust of the German churches by recording primarily religious messages: 'If that's successful, then we can go further step by step later.'[6]

But already by April 1939, Visser 't Hooft saw that the church in Germany was completely hedged in by the state. He agreed with Hermann Rauschning,

3 Visser 't Hooft to F. Hildebrandt, 18 February 1939, WCC general correspondence 644. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 94.

4 Ter Haar Romeny, *De geschiedenis van de eerste oecumenische raad in Nederland -ook in zijn internationale context-, 10 mei 1935-10 mei 1946* (1989), 132.

5 Visser 't Hooft to J. Koopmans, 29 November 1939, YDS-12, 48.

6 Visser 't Hooft to A. Koechlin, 3 September 1939, WCC general correspondence 789: 'Würde das gelingen, so könnten wir später Schritt vor Schritt etwas weiter gehen.'

Figure 23 Portrait, ca. 1940



the former president of the Senate of Danzig, that National Socialism had turned out to be a nihilistic ideology in which power had become an end in itself.[7] In the spring of 1939, together with William Paton, one of the two associate secretaries of the World Council, Visser 't Hooft wrote the programmatic article 'The Ecumenical Task: The Church as an Ecumenical Society in Time of War'. This article translated the main task of the church – to be church, the task that was so clearly set down in Oxford and Madras – into three concrete points. If war broke out, its first task was to pray and proclaim the commandment to love one's enemies; its second task was to hold to fraternal relations between the churches; and its third was that the churches and their members had to get to work preparing a just peace.[8] In line with this, Visser 't Hooft outlined the task for the provisional committee of the emerging World Council in the coming years: he highlighted maintaining contact, providing information, refugee work, in particular for non-Aryan Christians, and care for prisoners of war.

Visser 't Hooft did not say anything in this policy document about making public statements in the name of the World Council or the ecumenical movement. This had already proved very difficult in the context of the Life and Work conference in Oxford in 1937. The urgency for such statements increased after war broke out, though the possibilities for developing support for this decreased.[9] In the meantime, Visser 't Hooft did not remain idle but made every effort to stay informed about what was going on in the countries involved in the war and so became a privileged observer. He deliberately took on the role in Geneva of observer and reporter, particularly on the level of spirituality. He did this in the first place as general secretary of the emerging World Council of Churches and thus to keep his church network informed, but it was not long before he also began to do this as a Dutchman for the Dutch government in London and his contacts in the Netherlands and, over the course of time, even as the contact person for the German resistance. His most important contacts outside of continental Europe were the two associate secretaries of the World Council, William Paton in London and Henry Smith Leiper in New York.

Even though the whole of the ecumenical work was now at risk, Visser 't Hooft continued to see opportunities. But everything was uncertain.

7 Visser 't Hooft, 'Notes on the Church Situation in Germany', 1939. Rauschning, *Die Revolution des Nihilismus. Kulisse und Wirklichkeit im Dritten Reich* (1938).

8 Visser 't Hooft and Paton, 'The Ecumenical Task: The Church as an Ecumenical Society in Time of War', 1939. See also Visser 't Hooft, 'L'Église et la Situation Internationale', 1940.

9 Visser 't Hooft, 'Memorandum on the Work of the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches (in Process of Formation) in Time of War', 1939.

Without good international communication, Visser 't Hooft would possibly be better off leaving Switzerland. In the summer of 1940, the World Council office had enough financing left for only a few months. The American ecumenical contacts had to be informed and needed to understand that it was not about a conflict that the European countries had to fight on their own, and the spiritual significance of this crisis needed to be explained.[10] The moral and financial support of the Swiss *Kirchenbund* (Association of Protestant Churches) was essential during this time. For Visser 't Hooft, the Reformed minister Alphons Koechlin (1885-1965) especially was a great help. Koechlin was a minister in Basel, president of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, and a member of the executive committee of the emerging World Council and had good relations with the Swiss authorities. Halfway through June 1940, Visser 't Hooft made the decision to stay in Geneva, and voices from the United States especially had urged him to stay there.[11] Nonetheless, he believed right up to November 1940 that Switzerland was in danger of being invaded as well.[12]

3.3 Interpreting the War

Hitler was able to invade Poland on 1 September 1939 without fear of having to fight a war on two fronts. This was because of the non-aggression pact reached by German Minister of Foreign Affairs Von Ribbentrop and his Soviet counterpart Molotov. The outbreak of the war was a shock, but there were hardly any hostile activities in Western Europe for six months after that. It was confusing that Nazi Germany and communist Russia had been allies since 24 August and that Russia also invaded Poland, which then was hopelessly lost. That happened on 17 September. How was all of this to be understood? In his analysis of the occupation of Poland, Visser 't Hooft stated that the great threat facing the Christian West was the Nazis and Soviets combined.[13] This war had to be understood in spiritual terms.

For some time he managed to keep as neutral a tone as possible. As a citizen of the Netherlands, a neutral country in the autumn of 1939, Visser 't Hooft was living in another neutral country, Switzerland, and worked at the officially neutral World Council of Churches. But an important turning

10 Visser 't Hooft to A. Koechlin, 15 May 1940, WCC general correspondence 789.
11 Visser 't Hooft to A. Koechlin, 22 June 1940, WCC general correspondence 790.
12 Visser 't Hooft to A.S. Aberson in Sumatra, YDS-12, 56.
13 Visser 't Hooft, report with a handwritten note, no date, YDS-4, 154.

point that made a great impression on him personally was the outbreak of war between the Russians and the Finns in November 1939. In this so-called 'Winter War', he sided openly and clearly with one of the parties for the first time. In a letter to Professor Eelis G. Gulin (1893-1975) in Helsinki, whom he had known since the 1920s through the YMCA, he expressed himself frankly as to how much all who worked in the ecumenical movement supported their Finnish brothers in their thoughts and prayers. According to Visser 't Hooft, the spiritual meaning was now that neutrality was no longer an option. He assured Gulin that many church leaders hoped in their hearts that Finland would emerged strengthened from this trial 'and ready to stand as clear as ever for a truly Christian type of civilization as over against atheism'.[14] During his recent visits to France, England, and the Netherlands, Visser 't Hooft had, he reported, found deep admiration for the Finns everywhere. He promised Gulin money for evangelisation among Russian prisoners of war. On Sunday, 10 December 1939, he preached in a special prayer service for Finland in the American Church in Geneva on 2 Chronicles 14:11. Just as in this biblical narrative about King Asa of Judah, only God could help now. According to Visser 't Hooft, the moment of a spiritual rebirth for the Finnish people had come because their only recourse now was God.[15] Finland was an example for the whole church.[16] But Finland lost the war to the Soviet troops as early as March 1940.

The trauma of 1914-1918 hung heavy in the air. On 6 and 7 January 1940, the administrative committee of the emerging World Council met in a closed session in the Netherlands, which was still neutral, in the Centraal Hotel in Amsterdam. Visser 't Hooft's friend, Conny Patijn, editor of *Woord en Wereld* in The Hague, was sent to the visa office (*Rijksvisa Dienst*) to ensure that all members could enter the neutral Netherlands without difficulty. Also, the press was not to be informed about this meeting at all. After the meeting, the possibility of a real ecumenical peace initiative was explored in deep secrecy in the De Zilven Hotel near Apeldoorn. The one who took the initiative here was the Norwegian bishop Eivind Berggrav, chairman of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches since 1938.[17] This proved, in fact, to be this organisation's final death throes: in 1948 it would dissolve in favour of the World Council of Churches. Under

14 Visser 't Hooft to E.G. Gulin, 9 November 1939, WCC general correspondence 605.

15 Visser 't Hooft, Sermon on 2 Chronicles 14:11, 10 December 1939, WCC 994.2.07/9.

16 Visser 't Hooft to E.G. Gulin, 22 February 1940, WCC general correspondence 604.

17 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 19 January 1939, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 119: Berggrav 'who feels himself to be something of a second Söderblom (der sich irgendwie ein zweiter Söderblom fühlt).'

the circumstances, the whole initiative was doomed from the start, and Visser 't Hooft was opposed. If he had argued and pleaded for more patience and understanding in 1933, now he took a hard line. Together with Marc Boegner, Berkelbach van der Sprenkel on behalf of the Ecumenical Council in the Netherlands, and Alphons Koechlin, he opposed the Scandinavians who wanted to go as far as possible in preventing war. In Visser 't Hooft's view, the Scandinavian Lutheran churches were being naive.[18]

The unrealistic attitude of the Lutheran Berggrav could not, in his mind, be a coincidence. Behind it was the Lutheran theology of two kingdoms, which sharply distinguished the worldly from the spiritual. In neutral countries with a more Calvinist tradition, like Switzerland and the Netherlands, Visser 't Hooft now saw a readiness to fight. When he attempted to have a condemnation of German conduct passed in Apeldoorn, he was supported only by the French, the Swiss, the Dutch, and by William Temple. The peace doves, Bishop Eivind Berggrav and Bishop George Bell of Chichester, rejected the proposal. Nor did he get any support from other Scandinavians or from the Americans. He concluded that he could not be the voice of the ecumenical movement in this way, but that did not mean that he was planning to keep silent.

> Precisely because there could be no hope now that we could quickly come to a dialogue, everyone of us has a new freedom to be able to speak for himself. I will now make use of this freedom.[19]

Visser 't Hooft felt that the time had now come for taking a clear ecumenical position, even if he did not have complete support. In his memo 'Main Points for Statement to the Churches', dated 7 January 1940, he called on the churches to abandon neutrality and to choose publicly for the Confessing Church in Germany and to support military resistance by countries that resisted National Socialism.[20]

In his analyses Visser 't Hooft chose during this period to place current events in a cultural-historical perspective and then to refer primarily to points of contact with theology and church history. In doing so, he did not shy away from broad judgments. In March 1940, he presented a study into the relations

18 Ter Haar Romeny, *De geschiedenis van de eerste oecumenische raad in Nederland -ook in zijn internationale context-, 10 mei 1935-10 mei 1946* (1989), 142-43 and 149.

19 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 19 January 1940. Ibid., 121: 'gerade weil jetzt keine Hoffnung da sein kann, daß wir bald zusammen sprechen können, hat ein jeder von uns eine neue Freiheit, von sich aus zu sprechen. Von dieser Freiheit werde ich auch Gebrauch machen.'

20 Visser 't Hooft, 'Main Points for Statement to the Churches', 1940.

between Germany and the Western European countries: 'Germany and the West'.[21] His most important conclusion was that National Socialism was not a new creation by Hitler but a *reductio ad absurdum* of an important tradition that had already dominated German political life for decades. That meant, according to Visser 't Hooft, that National Socialism should not be understood as a typically German phenomenon. All of Europe was caught up in a spiritual struggle of which this war was only one eruption. The true struggle was not against Germany but for church unity, and a deeper understanding of German life was needed. This was a unique voice in the cacophony of war propaganda that was heard everywhere in the spring of 1940.

When the *Sitzkrieg* changed into a *Blitzkrieg*, however, and Nazi Germany occupied one country after the other within a short time, support for Visser 't Hooft's view grew. In a clear document, 'The Ecumenical Church and the International Situation', he asserted that it was now time to speak.[22] It would always be risky to give a voice to the churches through the emerging World Council. Lines of connection were broken and large conferences impossible, but the network had to be kept alive. The stories about what was now happening in the churches had to be gathered and told. In contrast to the situation at the outbreak of the First World War, the concept of 'holy war' was now completely avoided, and there were sincere prayers for peace and for churches in enemy countries.[23]

In Visser 't Hooft's view, the World Council of Churches had to develop into the spiritual source that the now moribund League of Nations had lacked. At the beginning of 1940, the International Group for Peace and Disarmament met in the Palais des Nations in Geneva, and Visser 't Hooft made a presentation there called 'Spiritual Factors in the Peace Failure (1919-1939)'.[24] According to Visser 't Hooft, the League of Nations had been built on a strange mixture of utopianism and realism. But the spiritual vacuum that followed the First World War had not been filled, and consequently the masses had started to believe in myths. After the failed disarmament talks and given the trade restrictions by which every country shortsightedly attempted to safeguard its own economy, the moral bankruptcy of the egocentrically governed Western democracies could no longer be concealed. The Western world was disintegrating at a rapid pace; values like the dignity of the human individual, social justice, and the international system of law

21 Visser 't Hooft, 'Germany and the West', 1940.

22 See also Visser 't Hooft, 'The Ecumenical Church and the International Situation', 1940.

23 Visser 't Hooft, 'Is the Church the Church in War-time?' 1940.

24 Visser 't Hooft, 'Spiritual Factors in the Peace Failure (1919-1939)', 1940.

were in danger of being lost. In the meantime, a search for a new universalism had arisen. The totalitarian movements proved to be destructive, while humanism remained superficial and optimistic. Visser 't Hooft believed that only Christianity provided the right combination of realism and hope. Instead of focusing on what was useful, the search now had to be for a new integration of society which, in his view, involved facing up to the truth.

Visser 't Hooft expected that the violence of the war as such would have the effect of undermining people's trust in God. After all, if the dispute was settled not by arguments but by weapons, and if that was how it would always be, could people still recognise God's intervention in this world? He pointed time and again to the spiritual struggle that was taking place behind the façade of violent war. That struggle for values was raging in all countries and in human hearts. This was the war behind the war.[25]

3.4 Visser 't Hooft, Karl Barth, and the Public Statements of the Church

While Visser 't Hooft very much appreciated Karl Barth as a teacher and friend and a prophetic voice that spoke to his conscience, he also knew the Swiss theologian was someone who could completely isolate himself in his belief that he was right. Nevertheless, he still wanted to listen to Barth, even though his view was often severely limited. From 1939 onward, whenever possible, he gave voice to an ecumenicity that had left neutrality behind.

> The only difficult question is who has to speak here so that what is said is said with authority. An official declaration seems therefore to me to be less valuable, for our so-called Provisional Committee cannot represent the churches as long as the churches have not joined the new ecumenical council.[26]

How could churches take a clear position without turning the war into a crusade? Barth believed that in this time of crisis, Visser 't Hooft was called to be the voice of the church. He was receptive to this, but he attempted to

25 Cf. Van Beijnum and Spruyt, *De oorlog achter de oorlog* (1995).

26 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 15 April 1939, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 92: 'Die einzige schwierige Frage ist, wer hier reden soll, damit mit wirklicher Autorität geredet wird. Eine offizielle Erklärung scheint mir darum weniger wertvoll, weil unser sogenanntes Vorläufiges Komitee die Kirchen nicht vertreten kann, solange die Kirchen sich nicht bei dem neuen Ökumenischen Rat angeschlossen haben.'

make clear to Barth that a personal word from himself would not make any impression and that a legitimation from the churches was truly necessary for a meaningful ecumenical declaration: 'It is not simply that I can say: "le mouvement oecuménique – c'est moi".'[27] Directly opposite Barth was George Bell, the bishop of Chichester, who wanted precisely at this time to hear neutrality and great emphasis on the indivisible unity of the church from the ecumenical movement.

It was a confusing time. What did God actually have to do with this war? There were different answers to this question in the ecumenical network. In response to a long letter from Barth dated 7 October 1939, which he received just before a trip to Paris, London, and the Netherlands, Visser 't Hooft wrote his analysis 'Notes on the Attitudes of Christians to this War' in November 1939, in which he concluded that the neutral attitude was no longer justified.[28] With respect to the dilemma concerning politically charged public statements by the church, Visser 't Hooft took the position that the provisional committee – in his view, the only functioning body of the ecumenical movement – could, indeed, not speak *on behalf of* the churches, but it could speak *to* the churches. The churches could then take responsibility for themselves by making those words their own and and repeating them on their own authority or not. But that was not enough for Barth. He demanded a clear message from the church and thought that Visser 't Hooft's office had to express this in a judgment about the political situation and about the actual political duties of Christians.[29] This led to a series of questions that he posed to Barth. For example, was a 'No' to National Socialism automatically a 'Yes' to the Allies? Did the church of ecumenism not risk a great deal by mingling in the realm of historical judgments? And who did Barth actually mean when he said that the church had to speak out: the ecumenical movement or Visser 't Hooft? Visser 't Hooft wanted to discuss these questions with Barth and others, such as Barth's sympathiser, the Swiss Lutheran theologian Eduard Thurneysen. But, to his regret, that did not happen.

> Thurneysen … is very much inclined to a meeting and hopes it will go through also for Barth's sake who is otherwise inclined to isolate himself and play Karl Barth contra mundum. … and it is precisely that that is so

27 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 30 October 1939. Ibid., 113.

28 'Notes on the Attitudes of Christians to this War', confidential, 1939.

29 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 30 October, 1939, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 114.

> difficult, on the one hand in Barth there is the truly prophetic and on the other a natural Adam who wants to impose his own opinion on others.[30]

In later reports, such 'Notes on the State of the Church in Europe', written in the winter of 1941 and 'État spiritual de l'Europe d'aujourd'hui' of December 1942, Visser 't Hooft constantly tried to meet Barth's demands without going beyond his own areas of competence.[31] One of the solutions he thought of was to collect church declarations and to publish them. It is within that framework that the news bulletin *Stemmen uit Nederland*, which Visser 't Hooft edited, can be understood.[32] This activity also included the two-part publication, 'Die Kirche spricht zur Welt. Ecclesia Militans,' by the Life and Work study department and stencilled by the World Council staff itself. This study, which was also published in French and English, included various church declarations from many countries.[33]

Barth was not impressed. When he once more accused the World Council outright in his open letter to the Americans of not speaking out, Visser 't Hooft could no longer hold back. Why did Barth not do a better job of keeping the ecumenical movement, Geneva, and Visser 't Hooft separate? Irritated because he felt forced to apologise, he summarised for Barth the most important moments and activities in which he had stuck his neck out since the war began: (1) in January 1940 he was almost alone in his clear rejection of Berggrav's peace initiative; (2) he publicly pleaded for the church to speak in the memorandum 'The Ecumenical Church and the International Situation' of April 1940; (3) when German troops occupied the Netherlands in May, he sent a clear telegram to the American churches that was also published; (4) shortly before that, through his doing, a clear declaration by various ecumenical organisations was published in the American press that stated the seriousness of the situation; (5) Visser 't Hooft had prepared a publication in the Dutch East Indies that stated that Dutch people could in no way give the impression, through their silence, that they accepted this conquest of their country; (6) he began to systematically

30 Visser 't Hooft to J. Eijkman, 24 November 1939, YDS-12, 59. 'Thurneysen [...] voelt veel voor een samenspreking en hoopt, dat het door zal gaan ook ter wille van Barth, die anders de neiging heeft om zichzelf te isoleren en Karl Barth contra mundum te spelen. [...] En dat is juist het moeilijke, dat er hier bij Barth aan den eenen kant het echt profetische zit, en aan den anderen kant' een natuurlijke Adam, die eigen meening aan anderen wil opleggen.'

31 Visser 't Hooft, 'Notes on the State of the Church in Europe', 1941, and 'The Story of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1940 and 1941', 1942, YDS-12, 18.

32 See 4.2.

33 'Ecclesia Militans', 1, 'Die Kirche spricht zur Welt' and 2, 'Die Verkündigung der Kirche im Krieg', 1942.

collect material from the occupied Netherlands and to publish it in *Stemmen uit Nederland*; (7) he had attempted to influence the lukewarm attitude in France by the publication of theses called 'Thèses de Pomeyrol' of 16-17 September 1941, directed against the Vichy regime of the unoccupied part of France and the anti-Jewish laws there, with an appeal to the Reformed in France to spiritual resistance; (8) in Wipkingen near Zurich he had given a lecture at a conference of the Swiss organisation for help to the Confessing Church in Germany on 17 November 1941 in which he had incorporated many of Barth's ideas; (9) in the spring of 1942, Visser 't Hooft had visited London where he was given a government commission to set up a communication connection between the Dutch government in exile and the occupied Netherlands; (10) at Christmas 1942, he worked very hard to get a common ecumenical declaration from the provisional committee of the World Council, but this came to nothing because of the Swedish archbishop Erling Eidem, who did not want a declaration that was signed only by church leaders from neutral countries and countries on only one side of the conflict, i.e., the Allies.

Visser 't Hooft vented his feelings when he told Barth that he was often dispirited because of the many rejections he had experienced.

> In this I have been met with so much indifference or rejection, and I have had so little support from my best friends on this point that I can just become discouraged in this area. I believe, however, that I would not have been successful if I had applied myself more energetically than I have done. For there are many, including some of the best ecumenicists, like Chichester, who always find the maintenance of fellowship more important than concrete witness.[34]

This discussion Visser 't Hooft had with Barth is important, not only with respect to whether church declarations on political issues should be made or not. It also had to do with the style and the meaning of church unity. Visser 't Hooft sharpened his views through his interactions with Barth, but he explicitly and diplomatically set his own course, which would have a great influence on the World Council after the war.

34 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 19 February 1943, in: Herwig, *Briefwechsel* (2006), 156-163, quote on 162: 'Ich bin dabei auf soviel Gleichgültigkeit oder Ablehnung gestoßen, habe auch von meinen besten Freunden in dieser Beziehung so wenig Unterstützung gehabt, daß ich auf diesem Gebiet wohl zo leicht mutlos geworden bin. Ich glaube aber, daß auch energischere Vorstöße als diejenigen, die ich gemacht habe, keinen Erfolg gehabt haben würden, weil gerade auch viele der Besten der Ökumeniker, wie etwa Chichester, immer wieder die Aufrechterhaltung der Gemeinschaft wichtiger finden als das konkrete Zeugnis.'

An incident occurred during a theology students' conference in Gwatt, in Thun, Switzerland, in May 1943 that drove Barth and Visser 't Hooft further apart. After he had spoken about baptism for two and a half hours, Barth felt he had been made to look like a fool by the chairman for that day, Visser 't Hooft, who had called him to order and had Koechlin conclude the presentation.[35] Barth accused Visser 't Hooft of negative intentions and a 'conference style well known to me'.[36] He was nowhere near finished. He added: 'In that way the church will never be a confessing church. In that way it will always be nipped in the bud, every genuine movement ending in a blind alley.' This 'church of the middle' (*Kirche der Mitte*) was a 'construction', an artificial product he wanted to stay far away from.[37] This threatened to lead to a complete break between Barth and Visser 't Hooft. Jetty Visser 't Hooft attempted to break through the impasse and wrote a poignant letter to Barth. Without her husband's knowledge, she testified to his great appreciation for Barth, not only as a theologian but also as a person: a few weeks prior she had heard him say, 'What a counselor that man could have been for me if he wanted.' Jetty appealed to Barth, in a flattering way, to understand that it was not appropriate for people to let their minor conflicts get in God's way. She and her husband looked up to Barth as a theologian and prophetic instrument in God's hand:

> Really, professor, I'm not blind to my husband's faults: sometimes, without being in any way aware of it, he is very reckless, but he cannot be accused of insincerity, and he is completely incapable of 'refined direction'. Are you really such a bad psychologist that you don't know that? … If you're being used to bring about a huge transformation in theology, as is the case, a transformation that will perhaps require centuries to implement all its consequences, then you must understand that the working out of this will not depend on hasty human decisions but only, and please note, on God's patience.[38]

35 K. Barth to Visser 't Hooft, 9 May 1943. Ibid., 168-170.

36 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 10 May 1943; ibid., 170-171.

37 K. Barth to Visser 't Hooft, 11 May 1943; ibid., 172-174: 'So wird aus keiner Kirche jemals bekennende Kirche werden. So muß das immer schon im Ansatz verhindert, jede echte Bewegung auf ein totes Geleise geschoben werden.'

38 H. Visser 't Hooft-Boddaert to K. Barth, 13 May 1943; ibid., 175-176: 'Wie könnte dieser Mensch ein Seelsorger für mich sein, wenn er nur wollte.' And: 'Wirklich, Herr Professor, ich bin nicht blind für die Fehler meines Mannes: er ist manchmal, ohne es zu ahnen, ganz rücksichtlos, aber Unaufrichtigkeit kann man ihm nicht vorwerfen, und zu "raffinierten Regiekunsten" ist er nicht einmal fähig. Sind Sie wirklich ein so schlechter Psychologe daß Sie das nicht wissen? […] Wenn Sie, Herr Professor, dazu gebraucht werden, eine ungeheure Umwälzung in der Theologie zu Stande zu bringen, wie es der Fall

Jetty knew that her husband could work relentlessly when caught up in conference activities, in strict adherence to a plan. But this drivenness was, in her view, not the refined director's method that Barth had accused him of. Nevertheless, there were many over the course of years who both admired and vilified him for this.

After some time had passed, Barth was willing to accept that Visser 't Hooft had acted in good faith, but he continued to argue that the way things had gone was illustrative of the wrong road the ecumenical movement had taken.[39] Visser 't Hooft was senitive to Barth's reproach concerning unspiritual 'rules' and an objectionable 'conference style'. He identified himself more and more with that very church unity that Barth attacked so harshly, and their friendship suffered as a result.

> You don't understand why I react in such a 'personal' way to letters that are intended as 'business'. But that is precisely the difficulty for me: that you defend your case to me in such a non-businesslike way and mix in proposals and arguments that can only be explained in a personal way. Because of that, your question never comes across properly. I'm angry sometimes because you make it so easy for me. I do know that I need your criticism, even your attacks. But that's why I also need to say: *touché!* If, however, you give a constructed image of Visser 't Hooft a rap on the knuckles, the real Visser 't Hooft is let off too easily.[40]

During the summer of 1943, his friendship with Barth cooled considerably for some time. But several things were finally worked out in personal conversations. At the beginning of October 1943, Barth stayed with Visser 't Hooft in Geneva for a few days when he gave a class there. In spite of everything, Visser 't Hooft continued to esteem Barth, and his most important starting point was Barth's view on the primacy of God's revelation. He could not do without Barth.

ist, eine Umwälzung, die vielleicht Jahrhunderte brauchen wird, um ihre Konsequenzen durchwirken zu lassen, da muß man doch verstehen, daß diese Wirkung nicht von hastigen, menschlichen Entscheidungen abhängen dürfte, sondern nur und erst recht von Gottes Geduld.'

39 K. Barth to Visser 't Hooft, 15 May 1943; ibid., 176-179.

40 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 25 May 1943; ibid., 180-183: 'Du verstehst nicht, daß ich so "persönlich" reagiere auf Briefe, die Du "sächlich" meinst. Aber das ist gerade meine Schwierigkeit, daß Du mir gegenüber Deine Sache so wenig sachlich vertrittst und sie vermischt mit Vorstellungen und Argumenten, die nur persönlich verstanden werden können. So kommt Deine Frage niemals richtig zur Geltung. Ich bin Dir manchmal böse, daß Du es mir so leicht machst. Ich weiß schon, daß ich Deine Kritik, ja Deine Angriffe brauche. Aber darum muß ich auch sagen können "touché". Wenn Du aber eine konstruirte Imago von Visser 't Hooft auf dem Kopf schlägst, so kann der richtige Visser 't Hooft sich zu leicht davon machen.'

> I have received and learned so much from you … especially during the war years. … You should know that I am one of those people who eagerly consume the powerful food you place before the church and that it remains my main course theologically.[41]

In the same letter Visser 't Hooft made another appeal to Barth to say things differently from then on. Barth's function as a gadfly would, according to Visser 't Hooft, only become a genuine blessing if he, in addition to speaking sharply, would also show that he understood the actual state of affairs with respect to ecumenicity. Despite everything, Barth remained a valued thorn in the side for him.

3.5 Natural Theology: A Stumbling Block or a Common Base?

Visser 't Hooft was personally aware of his privileged background and considered himself a Christian intellectual connected with an international elite. In his view, this privileged group of people was duty-bound to be engaged in the church and to seek answers to the world crisis in word and deed. In his mind, churches were sick, and he saw the ecumenical movement as a hospital. Division and bickering in the church during the 1920s and 1930s had resulted in too much concentration on being right. Christ's command to look after the needs of the people was shamefully neglected. The problem of the masses had already arisen at the time of the industrial revolution, and the church had had no answer then. Troeltsch had shown him that. For Visser 't Hooft, moreover, the masses represented a shapeless and directionless crowd.[42] Industrialisation and the weakening of traditional communities were accompanied in Europe by disintegration and secularisation. The final remnants of the *Corpus Christianum*, which still formed an all-inclusive moral framework, had completely collapsed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The churches had forgotten their task of building community and had consequently become powerless. In a kind of tacit agreement, the churches had left ethical questions to the brute forces of the world. Now that the questions ordinary people had

41 Visser 't Hooft to K. Barth, 3 October 1945. Ibid., 197-201: 'Ich habe […] besonders in den Kriegsjahren, soviel von Dir empfangen und gelernt. […] Du sollst es wissen, daß ich zu denen gehöre, die die substantielle Nahrung, die Du der Kirche geboten hast, in unrationiertem Maße aufnehmen, und daß es meine theologische Hauptmalzeit bleibt.'

42 Visser 't Hooft, 'Le problème des masses' no date, probably 1940, WCC 994.2.07/32: 'la masse est une multitude d'hommes qui n'a pas encore trouvé sa forme, ou l'a perdue.'

about meaning and purpose and employment were no longer taken up by the churches, the masses easily fell prey to totalitarian ideologies. This was, according to Visser 't Hooft, a moral uprooting that could only end in disaster. Fascism, which gave expression to a pagan vitalism, was one of the forms that arose and thrived in the vacuum that the churches left behind. Visser 't Hooft saw this pagan vitalism in literature as well, for instance, in the work of D.H. Lawrence.[43]

It was not only the churches, but democracy itself was also sick, in his view. Politics had been affected by what he called 'the idolisation' of the quantitative: all the qualitative came under pressure sooner or later. He found it regrettable that in most democracies a member of Parliament represented a number of votes, rather than a clearly defined group of people he was in personal contact with. He preferred a qualitative democracy, such as that found in the United Kingdom, in which the quality of the representation was primary because of the district system.[44] He also saw such ideas about the relationship between the elite and the masses in the work of the cultural historian Johan Huizinga and the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset.[45] The masses needed guidance and identification figures and deserved recognition for their needs. The mistake of individualistic intellectuals, such as the Tachtigers in the Netherlands and the avant-gardists after the First World War in the field of literature, was that they had neglected the need for forms that had collective appeal. As a result, morality was also gradually undermined.

He expected healing and education from church unity.[46] He saw it as the task of the ecumenical movement to help the churches provide an answer to this crisis. But in exploring the way to that answer, Visser 't Hooft stumbled on what Karl Barth had labelled 'natural theology'. Visser 't Hooft felt that Barth did not do any justice to his opponents and made a caricature of their theology. Nonetheless, he himself largely agreed with Barth's views. Doing theology on the basis of sensory observation, tradition, and natural facts was, in the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, part of a legacy that went back to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and was considered normal. In Calvinism, such a foundation for theology and ethics was problematic.

43 Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). Zeilstra, interview with C.M.W. Visser 't Hooft, 25 October 2014. Visser 't Hooft, *None other Gods* (1937), 156-157. He called D.H. Lawrence and the Nazi ideologist Arthur Rosenberg 'brothers in the faith'.

44 Visser 't Hooft to M. Reich-Visser, 21 April 1943, YDS-12, 67.

45 Huizinga, *In de schaduwen van morgen. Een diagnose van het geestelijk lijden van onzen tijd* (1935); Ortega y Gasset, *De opstand der horden* (1933), English title: *The Revolt of the Masses* (1932).

46 Visser 't Hooft to G.H. Slotemaker de Bruïne, 10 April 1946, YDS-12, 78.

Barth considered natural theology to be irreconcilable with what he called a revelation theology (*senkrecht von oben*) that was connected directly to a sovereign God who in his holiness stands over against the human being and through this holiness makes the human being aware of his sin.

> As Christ, Jesus is the plane which lies beyond comprehension. The plane which is known to us. He intersects vertically, from above.[47]

Visser 't Hooft did not break loose from Barth's interpretation here. The contrast was exacerbated in the German political-social complex in the 1930s. Precisely by wanting to conform to the culture, most German theologians had been robbed of a fundamental critical attitude and were blinded by the disastrous meaning of the rise of Hitler. When it came to bracing themselves against Nazism, many of them proved to be incapable of doing so. Ernst Troeltsch, who had died already in 1923, remained his reference point here: he had to suffer every time Visser 't Hooft wanted to make his point as a loyal 'Barthian' in this context. At the same time, certainly many of his friends, whom Visser 't Hooft appreciated very much were Anglican theologians and leaders in the ecumenical movement, such as William Temple, the Archbishop of York, who were educated to have a great confidence in the natural order of things that, in their view, was rooted in divine Providence. Visser 't Hooft felt it was his task to take the Barthian critical stance and warn against such 'natural theology'. In any case, it was, in his view, not the basis for legitimating the unity of the church in principle.

He admitted that there were points of contact in natural theology for practical collaboration. He felt that collaboration between members of churches rooted in different theological traditions was both valuable and necessary with respect to, for example, the organisation of the state, family, and immigration law if one condition was met: the pure biblical revelation was not to be undermined by any compromise whatsoever. As far as he was concerned, collaboration with those who based themselves on natural theology was always *ad hoc* and oriented to practice. In principle, however, there would always be great differences, and fundamental harmony was impossible.[48] What is striking about his argument is that, with respect to God's revelation, Visser 't Hooft interpreted all kinds of biblical passages

47 Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1933), 29-30. Cf. Barth, *Der Römerbrief. Neuen Bearbeitung* (1922), 6: 'Jesus als der Christus ist die uns unbekannte Ebene, die die uns bekannte senkrecht von oben durchschneidet.'

48 Visser 't Hooft, 'Droit Naturel ou Droit Divin', 1942.

containing precepts, including those from the Old Testament, as directly prescriptive, without paying much attention to the historical context. Indeed, he did not view the Jewish rules for conduct, as given in Leviticus for example, as applicable to the church because the church was not under the law in the same way that Israel had been. Nevertheless, Visser 't Hooft assumed that a Christian doctrine of the state could be derived from the view of justice in Old Testament regulations. According to him, it was the duty of all Christians to study the biblical view of law with a view to discovering the fundamental order in it that God had intended for human beings as a guide. Contemporary law needed to be tested by the Bible. It was not a question of a system of law that could be found in the Bible but one of indications articulated in Old Testament laws that Jesus interpreted anew. Viewed this way, human rights rested partly on old Jewish-Christian insights. Visser 't Hooft deplored, however, the jumbled way they had been worked out since the Renaissance. That had led to chaos and human pride.

Visser 't Hooft distanced himself from the Neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), for whom trust in human nature seemed to be enough and the sole function of God's grace was to clarify something that already existed. In contrast, Visser 't Hooft portrayed human nature as deficient through being affected by sin. Only divine revelation offered, in his view, a sufficient basis for a law that could underpin a human order which had been undermined. He viewed the Stoic tradition as the great loser in this period: 'Its individualism, its rationalism have made it incapable of holding firm at the moment of the great landslide.'[49] Cultural Protestantism was again the culprit for him on this point. This had actually led a Protestantism rooted in the Reformation on the wrong path. But, for Visser 't Hooft, it was never as black and white as it was presented. He carefully kept the road open for ecumenical collaboration with Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and the Eastern Orthodox, and ultimately with non-Christians as well. After the war, he would work pragmatically in this sense to give shape to the ecumenical active support of human rights.

3.6 Ecumenical Work among Refugees and Prisoners of War

During the war, Visser 't Hooft was intensely involved in Switzerland in aid for refugees and prisoners of war. Already in 1933, shortly after Hitler assumed power, a group of ecumenical leaders, including George Bell,

49 Visser 't Hooft, 'Natural Law of Divine Law. Some Notes on the Question', 1943, 269.

Henry-Louis Henriod of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, the American church historian W. Adams Brown, the Danish Lutheran bishop O. Valdemar Ammundsen, and the French Protestant professor of theology, Wilfred Monod, had appealed to the churches associated with Life and Work for help for refugees. Initially, this appeal was only for fellow believers. Coordination and implementation were entrusted to the European Central Bureau for Interchurch Aid on the Rue de Montchoisy in Geneva that had already been set up in 1920 and operated under the direction of Adolf Keller (1872-1963).[50] Immediately after starting for the World Council, Visser 't Hooft began working closely with Keller. The Dutch envoy in Bern asked him to be the chairman of a special committee for the 'cultural care' of Dutch refugees. The primary purpose of this committee was to give practical aid, but it also included pastoral care, church services, the supply of literature, catechism, and lectures. Dutch people also constantly approached Visser 't Hooft in Geneva without first going through the embassy. What he did as a private individual overlapped with his activities for the World Council.

Visser 't Hooft was initially a strong proponent of quiet diplomacy with respect to political prisoners. As the secretary of the WSCF, he responded quickly at various times. In 1936 he had, at Karl Barth's request, written a letter to the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, on behalf of Hellmut Traub, a young minister in the Confessing Church. When Traub was released after a short time, Visser 't Hooft got the impression that this was the way to get things done with the Nazis. In 1937 he advocated on behalf of Werner Koch and Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff. There were also attempts from Geneva to help a number of Jewish Christians at that time, and during the summer of 1938 Visser 't Hooft was very busy trying to find places for German 'non-Aryan theologians' in other countries,[51] for whom he felt a special responsibility. While Jewish organisations concerned themselves with religious Jews and churches, citing church regulations, focused on the reception of Christian refugees, Jewish Christians fell between the cracks. It was difficult to find a safe place for these people.[52] In September 1938, there were, in total, 50 ministers of the Confessing Church, including the 'non-Aryans', who had to be helped in finding a place outside Germany. On 16 November, after the Kristallnacht on the night of 9-10 November 1938, the combined aid organisations in Geneva, as an informal subcommittee under

50 'German Refugees: An Appeal to the Constituent Churches', December 1933, YDS-4, 268-269.
51 Visser 't Hooft to A. Koechlin, 30 July 1938, WCC general correspondence 788.
52 Visser 't Hooft to H. Golzen, 9 October 1938, WCC general correspondence 583.

the auspices of the International Christian Committee in London, again drew attention to the persecution of the Jews in an appeal. They called for Christian prayer for the victims and for exercising pressure on governments to admit refugees and to create living space for 'non-Aryans' in the spirit of the Evian Accords.[53] Their efforts had limited effect. In May 1939, only 21 ethnic Jewish ministers were known to have been able to leave Germany since the appeal. At the beginning of 1939, the provisional committee of the World Council decided in St. Germain in Paris to officially hire someone for refugee work. This was Adolf Freudenberg (1894-1977), who had worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin until 1935 and had even married a Jewish woman. His provisional post was London.

The seriousness of the refugee situation became clear only when Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by German troops in March 1939. Collaboration was needed. Visser 't Hooft and Nils Eherenström of the World Council, Keller of Interchurch Aid and Henriod of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches did what they could to get Jews, 'non-Aryan Christians', and critical theologians out of the occupied Czech areas as quickly as possible. An important contact here was the Prague professor of theology Josef L. Hromádka (1889-1969). When the Germans occupied Prague, Visser 't Hooft, as the chairman of the WSCF, saw to it that Hromádka himself was able to get away, along with his wife and children, allegedly in order to teach in Geneva.[54] Hromádka travelled on to the United States where he settled in Princeton. There he received a letter from Visser 't Hooft:

> The rather naïve idea that this is just a war to stop Hitler from being naughty is being disproved every day. This war is indeed a tremendous landslide, an upheaval of forces from the dark. We can, therefore, at the moment have no conception of what kind of a world we will be confronted with when so-called peace will be established. That peace might indeed be worse than the war. On the other hand, I agree also that somehow this great chaos may lead to a clarification and purification, and that, therefore, there are reasons for hope.[55]

Hromádka became a full participant in the programme that the study department of the World Council developed in collaboration with a number

53 H.L. Henriod, Visser 't Hooft and A. Keller to 'Dear Sir', 16 November 1938, YDS-5, 21.
54 Visser 't Hooft to J.L. Hromádka, 11 April 1939, WCC general correspondence 685.
55 Visser 't Hooft to J.L. Hromádka, 15 December 1939, WCC general correspondence 686.

of committed academics from many countries. He concentrated on the responsibility of the churches for the future international order. In the United States, the programme was led by the Presbyterian Henry P. Van Dusen, who was a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and a major proponent of American intervention in the war. Memos were exchanged and discussed, and the results were used to attempt to influence politicians and diplomats. Visser 't Hooft thought Hromádka was the right person to represent this international European study programme in the United States and preferred to have Hromádka shuttle back and forth between Europe and America. He was planning to bring him back to Europe shortly before the German invasion of France.[56]

On 10 May 1939, William Temple, the Anglican archbishop of York, Marc Boegner, the president of the Fédération Protestante de France, William Paton, the English World Council secretary, and Visser 't Hooft issued a statement on Christianity and the Jews in *The Times* on behalf of the provisional committee of the World Council in response to German churches. Divided into four points, this statement said a great deal about Christ and the church but very little about the Jews. The writers renounced nationalistic views of the church: the acknowledgement of Christ as Lord left no room for demands for first loyalty to an ideology. As Christians, they expressed their recognition of the Jews but also made a distinction between Jews and Jewish Christians.

> The Christian Church owes it therefore to the Jewish people to proclaim to it the fulfilment of the promises which had been made to it. And it rejoices in maintaining fellowship with those of the Jewish race who have accepted that Gospel.[57]

Visser 't Hooft preferred that ecumenical work among the refugees be integrated as a whole into the World Council, and he had the support of the Americans for this. Samuel McCrea Cavert, general secretary of the Federal Council of Churches in America, came to Geneva in September 1942, and he and Visser 't Hooft came up with a plan. Freudenberg, who worked from Geneva as well after 1939, agreed with it. But Keller, who had directed the Interchurch Aid out of Geneva since 1920 and had been in the United States for a long time during the war to obtain funding, initially refused to let his office be absorbed into the World Council. Nevertheless, in the end,

56 Visser 't Hooft to J.L. Hromádka, 10 April 1940, WCC general correspondence 686.

57 *The Times*, 10 May 1939.

he helped to complete the integration.[58] After the war, ecumenical work among refugees, with millions of displaced people, would grow enormously within and outside of Europe into one of the most important tasks of the World Council during the period of its foundation.

In April 1940 Freudenberg published a report on the need of aid to Jewish Christian refugees called *Die Kirchen und die nichtarischen Christen*. Visser 't Hooft wrote in the foreword that there was no reason to be satisfied. He referred to Matthew 25:44: 'They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?"' Christian churches had done little for Jewish Christians up to that point. The Jewish community, he felt, had done much more and put the Christian community to shame. Freudenberg omitted an explicit appeal to look after all ethnic Jews without reservation, including the non-Christian ones.[59]

> So far our exchange of views proves that the sympathy with the suffering Non-Aryan Christians is still alive and that their tragedy has not been overshadowed by the new calamities of war. Everywhere Christian responsibility for these suffering brethren is being felt, and their plight recognized as a strong appeal of God to His Church and to the solidarity of its members. The more the voice of our oppressed brethren will meet a strong and sympathetic echo, the greater the blessing for the Church and the Christians themselves would be.[60]

Visser 't Hooft's work among refugees during the war was not formally part of his job. His activities were only partly public. He put great store in his good relations with the Swiss authorities and did not want to attract the attention of the Germans in any way. As far as the secret part was concerned, he worked a lot from the summer of 1943 with Jean H. Weidner (1912-1994), a Dutch Seventh-Day Adventist and textile merchant who lived in France near the Swiss border.[61] At risk to his own life, Weidner put his convictions into practice with respect to Christian charity, especially for the Jewish refugees, with no respect of persons. He managed to persuade Dutch people in Switzerland, especially P. Kerdel in Arosa, to part with tens of thousands

58 Jehle-Wildberger, *Adolf Keller* (2008), 489-490. Visser 't Hooft, *Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid in Europe* (1944).

59 Freudenberg, *Die Kirchen und die nichtarischen Christen* (1940).

60 Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear Friend', Refugee Work circular, 15 December 1939, YDS-5, 21.

61 Verkijk, 'Weg naar de vrijheid. Meer dan 1080', VPRO television documentary (1967).

of francs. The Dutch government in London made money available, via Visser 't Hooft, for the Dutch refugees in the non-occupied part of France. A major problem here was having the money available at the right places in French denominations, and there was a special committee to look after distribution.[62] His good contacts allowed Weidner to accept responsibility for the Geneva-Brussels part of a courier's route along which countless documents found their way from the occupied Netherlands via Geneva to London and vice versa. Weidner's efficient smuggling route meant a considerable improvement in capacity and frequency for the Swiss Road.[63]

Refugees, as well as pilots and politicians, and 'VIPs' like the journalist and politician Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart in 1944, were smuggled to Paris via the village Meers aan de Maas, Leuven, Brussels, and Quiévrain under the codename Dutch-Paris, and then to Lyon. A side route ran via Annecy to Collonges and then over Mont Salève to Geneva. People who were smuggled into Switzerland were reported a few days before to the Swiss authorities by Weidner and if possible provided with documents in order to avoid arrest. To attempt to enter Switzerland unannounced was very dangerous – there was the risk of being sent back or, worse, being handed over to the Germans. Sometimes it ended badly. For example, in 1943 in a letter to the Dutch embassy in Bern, Visser 't Hooft expressed his concern over the fate of a couple named Sweerts.

> It's a shame that it ended that way with Sweerts. I have had it said by various people whom I could reach that no one should attempt to cross the border without being announced first.[64]

There was also a Polish Jewish family from Antwerp that Visser 't Hooft reported to the Swiss police and the Polish consulate, but they were refused, handed over to the Nazis, and murdered in a camp.[65] It was impossible for Visser 't Hooft to check or verify the stories of many of the fleeing Dutch people – which included a fair number of Jews – who stayed in Switzerland. There were sometimes people who were even suspected of treason. Often,

62 Visser 't Hooft to P. Kerdel, 3 December 1943, YDS-12, 62. See also Koreman, *Gewone helden. De Dutch-Paris ontsnappingslijn, 1942-1945* (2016), 64-68.

63 Mulder and Koedijk, *H.M. van Randwijk. Een biografie* (1988), 315.

64 Visser 't Hooft to B. ten Bosch, 12 October 1943, YDS-12, 57.

65 Dentan, *Impossible de se taire*, 67, taken from Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 171. Cf. Zeilstra, interview with A. Musacchio-Visser 't Hooft. Visser 't Hooft himself told this story to the parliamentary fact-finding commission on 9 December 1948. https://sites.google.com/site/enquetecommissieregering/datum-verhoren/willem-adolf-visser-t-hooft.

Visser 't Hooft did not know what was true and what was not. It often had to do with children that people wanted to bring safely from the Netherlands to Switzerland, for example to the Dutch boarding school in Flims.

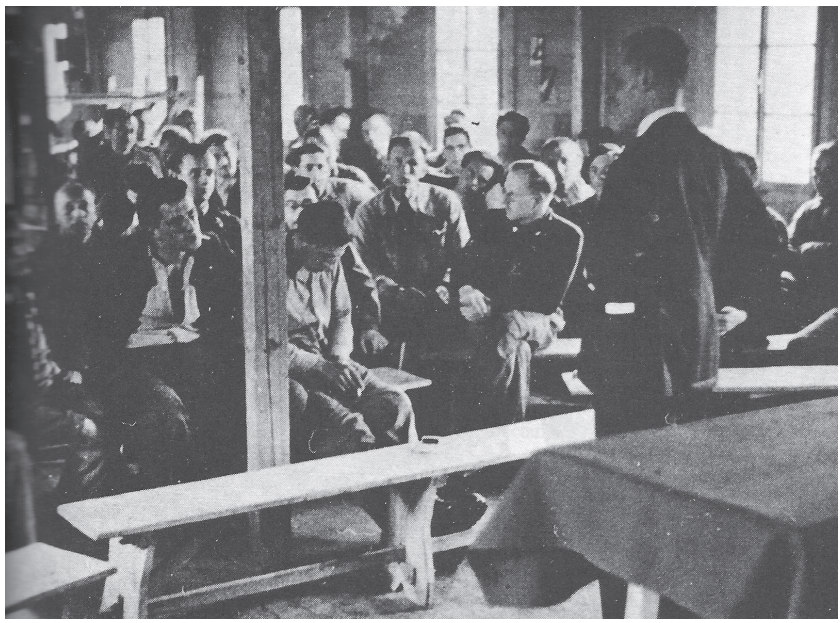
A few camps Visser 't Hooft was involved in were Les Ferrières, Les Enfers, and various hotel camps on Lake Geneva. In the summer of 1942, the Swiss authorities began to intern Dutch refugees and stranded *Engelandvaarders* (travellers to England) in a new work camp, Cossonay in Vaud, very close to Lausanne. Visser 't Hooft visited this camp on 31 August 1942 and led a church service on that day in honour of the birthday of Queen Wilhelmina. He spoke of the great significance of the House of Orange for the history of the Netherlands and compared the struggle against Nazism with the Eighty Years' War, starting with the Dutch Revolt against Spanish domination of the Low Countries (1568-1648). He also gave advice to the internees who were attempting to contact the Dutch government in London or family members and friends in France who had been picked up. He helped them send money and food (such as canned Portuguese sardines) to the latter. He approached the Dutch special envoy and minister plenipotentiary in Bern, J.J.B. Bosch van Rosenthal (1889-1955), to argue for study possibilities for the interned, usually young, men who were very bored and were, in his view, inclined to less uplifting activities.[66] The possibilities for doing so were very scarce, which was very frustrating for them. They were packed tight in the Swiss hotel camps, and quarrelling broke out often.

To both the Cleveringa committee, which was conducting a government study of the attitude of the diplomatic and consular services abroad with regard to Dutch refugees, and the Parliamentary Fact-Finding Committee 1940-1945, Visser 't Hooft later complained about the attitude of the Dutch embassy in Bern. In the first years of the war especially, he was bothered by the bureaucracy. In his view, the refugees were treated in a not very hospitable and rather impersonal way. There were too few staff, and Visser 't Hooft felt that a number of them were unsuited for this work. Material needs were provided in a very formal way, but no empathy was shown or use made of a socio-psychological approach that Visser 't Hooft thought was urgently needed because of the traumatic experiences many had gone through.[67] He was happy that he was an independent and, in relation to personal contacts with refugees, a non-salaried private individual.

66 Visser 't Hooft to J.J. Bosch van Rosenthal, 14 September 1942, World War II Records of the WCC, YDS-12.

67 Interrogation of Visser 't Hooft by the Cleveringa Committee, 1946-1950, National Archives 31.I.

Figure 24 Visser 't Hooft addresses Engelandvaarders (travellers to England) stranded in Switzerland, at the Cossonay internment camp, probably 31 August 1942



Visser 't Hooft also took up the interests of Dutch people in Brussels, Paris, and in the non-occupied part of France. New, often tragic, situations were constantly arising. One example of someone for whom Visser 't Hooft's efforts in 1942 were successful was Johanna de Geus, a famous singer at the time of religious songs and secretary of the Dutch Society for Protestant Church Music (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Protestantse Kerkmuziek). She had permission to perform in Switzerland, where she immediately applied for asylum. In the Netherlands, she ran the risk of being arrested both because she had helped a person in hiding and especially because of her political views.

In 1943 the Dutch embassy's cultural committee for refugees, which Visser 't Hooft chaired, was told – apparently, after a hint from the Swiss authorities – to divide Cossonay into a purely Jewish camp and a camp for the rest. Visser 't Hooft was deeply shocked and sent a warning letter to the envoy.

> Not only the Jews here but all who fight the fight of principles in Holland and not least 'London' would see a repudiation in this plan of the principles that are sacred to us and to our Government. I understand

> that there are major practical difficulties because of Jews and non-Jews living together, but I believe that these difficulties should never be the reason for measures that, even if they are not *intended* in an anti-Semitic way, can practically be explained as anti-Semitic. Thus, I hope that all responsibility for such measures will be left to the Swiss and that there will be no co-operation in any way.[68]

The plan was called off, but Visser 't Hooft was very annoyed by the lack of the awareness of a problem at the embassy. He got along well with the highest ranked soldier at the embassy, Major General A.G. van Tricht, but he was very critical of Envoy Bosch van Rosenthal. Visser 't Hooft expected him to provide leadership, initiatives, and now and then give a fatherly, encouraging word to the interned Dutch people. But the envoy was passive in his eyes and a bad speaker. Although the refugees were reasonably comfortably interned in sometimes pleasantly situated hotels, such as in the neighbourhood of Clarens, there were constant complaints. Initiatives by the refugees themselves were not encouraged or sufficiently appreciated by the embassy in Visser 't Hooft's view. The Jewish refugee Max Gans (1917-1987) set up a Jewish co-ordination committee and came up with a list of items to take action on as to how refugees and internees could best be helped, such as food packages.[69] Visser 't Hooft convinced Envoy Bosch van Rosenthal to give Gans room. The embassy then issued a newsletter and a family magazine for the refugees. Gans was able to organise an exchanged programme of books, language and accounting courses and there were pleasant social evenings and celebrations of important religious feasts like Passover.

Visser 't Hooft also felt responsible for promoting religious life in the camps and preventing moral decline, especially among single young men. Some kind of drive to convert others was thus present as well. A special catechism class was organised for refugees who wanted to become Protestants. Where possible, Visser 't Hooft tried to organise church services

68 Visser 't Hooft to J.J. Bosch van Rosenthal, 2 June 1943, World War II Records of the WCC. YDS-12: 'Niet alleen de Joden hier, maar allen, die de principieele strijd in Holland doorstrijden, en niet in de laatste plaats 'London', zouden in zulk een opzet een verloochening zien van de beginselen die ons volk en onze Regeering heilig zijn. Ik begrijp, dat er groote practische moeilijkheden ontstaan door het samenleven van Joden en niet-Joden, maar ik geloof, dat deze moeilijkheden nooit aanleiding mogen geven tot maatregelen, die, ook als zij niet anti-semitisch *bedoeld* zijn, practisch als anti-semitisch uitgelegd kunnen worden. Zoo hoop ik, dat men in dezen alle verantwoording voor dergelijke maatregelen aan de Zwitsers overlaat, en er op geenerlei wijze aan mede werkt.'

69 Cf. Gans, *Memorboek. Platenatlas van het leven der joden in Nederland van de middeleeuwen tot 1940* (1971).

in which he looked at 'psychological and spiritual questions that play a particularly major role in each emigration.'[70] The Swiss authorities who had oversight over the internment camps were often not very cooperative. Visser 't Hooft found it increasingly difficult to work with them during the war. He sometimes pleaded with them personally so that certain refugees would not be interned. Gans' committee bought passports from countries in South America and sent them to Jews in internment camps in the Netherlands, and a great number could escape. But in January 1944, a few South American governments began to refuse admittance to Jews who travelled with their passports because they were afraid they would have to recognise these refugees as citizens after the war as well. Gans and the rabbi of Zurich, T. Lewenstein then turned to Visser 't Hooft, who, together with Lewenstein, sent a telegram to Wilhelmina in London. That helped. The Dutch diplomatic service in South America arranged for the statements of invalidity to be revoked by promising that for the Netherlands, the Jews in question would remain Dutch citizens.[71]

In addition to the work among the refugees, there was also the work among prisoners of war. Immediately after the war broke out, ecumenical organisations that had their international headquarters in Geneva, like the World Council, the YMCA, and the WSCF, made their plans for this work, together with the Red Cross. Many members and former members of the WSCF had been conscripted, and a large number of them ended up prisoners of war. In November 1939, Visser 't Hooft contacted his friend the Swiss Max Huber, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, who proposed setting up a committee related to the World Council that would have enough independence to guarantee its neutral character.[72] This became the Ecumenical Commission for the Chaplaincy Service to Prisoners of War. The Swiss preacher Alphons Koechlin was chairman and Visser 't Hooft secretary. The first question was whether the chaplains brought in for this should come from neutral countries or belong to churches in the countries that were at war. Visser 't Hooft preferred neutrality, but in Edinburgh, where he had had discussions about this at the end of 1939, Scottish ministers explained to him that they thought it important that the Scottish carry out pastoral care

70 Visser 't Hooft to J.M. Kijzer, head of the refugee department of the Dutch legation in Bern, 23 February 1943, YDS-12, 62.

71 De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, part 8 (1978), 910.

72 Visser 't Hooft to W. Temple and others, 23 November 1939, WCC general correspondence 789.

among the German prisoners of war in Scotland. That would show the supernational character of the church. In addition to pastoral care, work among prisoners of war also involved organising church services and distributing Bibles, hymnals, and religious literature. Visser 't Hooft's committee sent one thousand copies of the booklets *Les Apôstres* and *Jésus de Nazareth* by Alexandre Westphal, which had been translated into Dutch, to the prisoner of war camps.[73] Improvised 'parishes' arose in many camps with their own spiritual life, often very ecumenical in nature. Dogmatic differences that divided churches in the home environment lost their significance in the camps. When the Netherlands stopped being a neutral country in May 1940, Visser 't Hooft's status changed as well, and he transferred the leadership of the ecumenical work among prisoners of war to Charles Guillon (1883-1965), a minister and the mayor of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in Haute-Loire, a member of the provisional committee of the World Council.

As a Dutchman, Visser 't Hooft personally felt a great responsibility for the financing of Red Cross packages for Dutch prisoners of war in German concentration camps.[74] It was very difficult to get these packages filled properly. Often, there was not much more to be found in Swiss markets than condensed milk. They were dependent on South American and Portuguese imports for most products, and those were available only on a very irregular basis and were sometimes suddenly bought en masse by the Americans or the British for their packages. Visser 't Hooft worked together on this with J.W.J. de Vos van Steenwijk and C.H.C. Flugi van Aspermont of the committee of the Dutch Red Cross in Geneva managed from London, with the Dutch embassy in Bern, and with the International Red Cross. The work was difficult, and there was always a new urgent case. In the Autumn of 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, it became known that the Germans had let three million Russian prisoners of war starve in improvised camps. The World Council tried to do something for these people together with the Red Cross. But Visser 't Hooft knew that it was nothing more than a drop in the ocean.

In December 1943 Visser 't Hooft issued a Christmas brochure for Dutch prisoners of war in Germany called *Het Licht schijnt in de duisternis* (The Light Shines in the Darkness).[75] This brochure, of which a few thousand

73 Visser 't Hooft to A.B.C. Dudok de Wit, 4 November 1941, YDS-12, 59.

74 Visser 't Hooft to J.J. Bosch van Rosenthal, 17 October 1941, World War II Era Records of the WCC, YDS-12.

75 Visser 't Hooft, *Het licht schijnt in de duisternis*, 1943.

copies were distributed, contained a Christmas sermon, a prayer, old Dutch Christmas carols and poems, and a reflection on the Christmas message of Rembrandt, illustrated with three reproductions of Rembrandt's works. The text was very careful because of censorship.[76] In a subsequent brochure, at Easter 1944, the message was more explicit.[77] There were meditations for Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost, each of which closed with a prayer and was signed with the initials VH. This brochure had a picture of the royal entrance to the Cathedral of Chartres on the front, pictures by Rembrandt, and a meditation by the Reformed missiologist Hendrik Kraemer. In the foreword Visser 't Hooft described the importance of worldwide church unity for the prisoners of war. Everywhere in the camps he saw spontaneous Christian communities forming. In his meditation for Easter, Visser 't Hooft wrote about the hearts burning within the disciples while they were on the way to Emmaus. They had not reckoned with God, and, in the view of the author, that was a current problem.

3.7 Church Unity in the Face of the Annihilation of the Jews

A grateful Max Gans described Visser 't Hooft after his death in 1985 in *Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad* as 'a friend of the Jewish people'.[78] The granting of an honorary doctorate by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1972 also points to Jewish appreciation for the role Visser 't Hooft played with respect to the Jews in the war. He himself, however, stated repeatedly that he had not done enough.[79] A great deal of practical work among the Jews in France was carried out by the Cimade, the Comité Inter Mouvements Auprès des Evacués, which had been set up in 1939 by the French Protestant youth movement. The secretary, Madeleine Barot (1909-1995), and the chairman, Marc Boegner (1881-1971), president of the Fédération Protestante de France, felt supported in this work materially and financially but above all spiritually by Visser 't Hooft. Many thousands of Jews in camps in the Vichy Republic were helped. Boegner and Visser 't Hooft were friends, and during the war he visited Geneva various times whereas Visser 't Hooft travelled several times to France for this work. Madeleine Barot once came in the middle of the night from Vésenaz to Geneva to ask Visser 't Hooft for help.

76 Visser 't Hooft to J.B. Braaksma, 12 November 1943, YDS-12.

77 Visser 't Hooft to H. Kraemer, *Er is maar één Heer. Paschen 1944* (1944).

78 M.H. Gans, in: *Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad*, 26 July 1985.

79 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 171-172.

At the end of the 1930s, the most important contact person in the United States for Visser 't Hooft in this area was the above-mentioned Conrad Hoffmann, the Presbyterian missionary who had done much for prisoners of war on behalf of the YMCA during the First World War.[80] Hoffmann had many contacts, and when he began to understand how serious the Jewish persecution in Germany was, he strongly insisted on the expansion of the ecumenical aid actions and returned to Europe.[81] The International Missionary Council made Hoffmann, who started working again with prisoners of war, chairman of the Committee for the Christian Approach to the Jews. Important individuals who were involved in this were Tinus Slotemaker de Bruïne and Jopie Eijkman in the Netherlands and the German Heinrich Grüber in Berlin.[82] Hoffmann initially attempted, just like Visser 't Hooft, to help German ethnic Jewish ministers especially by getting them placed in neutral countries or countries outside Europe.

In 1940 Visser 't Hooft carried out a background study into what at that time was called 'the Jewish question'. This is where his view of the situation in which Jews found themselves can be seen.

> At this time, the Jewish question is of course for us the horrible problem that has been created by National Socialist politics. We have to free ourselves, however, from this momentary pressure by viewing it in a wider context, just as the National Socialist revolution is not a momentary phenomenon.[83]

Visser 't Hooft pointed to what he called 'the Jewish renaissance in the last half century, especially in Germany', which he saw most prominently expressed in Zionism. In 'the Jewish question' he saw the traces of the old *Corpus Christianum* that had marginalised the Jews in the Middle Ages. In his view, Judaism had already lived in antiquity in constant tension between particularistic self-preservation and universal syncretism. But, Visser 't Hooft observed, Jewish isolation had to be seen from a universal perspective. Whereas Christ was rejected then by the Jewish people as a

80 Visser 't Hooft to C. Hoffmann, 8 October 1951, WCC general correspondence 667.

81 Visser 't Hooft to C. Hoffmann, 8 October 1939, WCC general correspondence 665.

82 H. Grüber to Visser 't Hooft, 18 September 1939, WCC general correspondence 596.

83 Visser 't Hooft (anonymous), 'Het Joodsche vraagstuk', no date, probably 1940: 'Het Joodsche vraagstuk staat op dit oogenblik natuurlijk voor ons als het gruwelijke probleem, dat door de nationaal-socialistische politiek is geschapen. We moeten ons echter van die momenteele druk vrijmaken door het in wijder verband te beschouwen, zooals ook de nationaal-socialistische revolutie geen oogenblikkelijk verschijnsel is.'

whole as the revelation of its own essence, the Jewish sect of his followers grew into the Christian church. The latter continued the Old Testament tradition as 'the new Israel' and viewed the appearance of the church, in Visser 't Hooft's mind, as the fulfilment of the prophetic promises. According to him, this is where 'the root of the problem of the Jewish people' lay. He therefore did not expect that the Jewish people would be absorbed but believed that

> a renewed effect of the problem between Judaism and Christianity from the perspectives of blood and spirit, law and gospel … [would] be indispensable for a further clarification of the place of Jews in human society.[84]

Visser 't Hooft was aware relatively early of the threatened destruction of the Jews. Nevertheless, it was still some time before incidental eyewitness accounts that reached Geneva were convincingly substantiated.

The first report in which this happened and that arrived at the office of the World Council of Churches in Geneva was from Hoffmann. It was written in March 1941 and was very explicit. Hitler had promised to make Europe 'Juden-rein' (free of Jews), and this was precisely what he was doing. Now that expelling and banishment were no longer possible, Hoffmann claimed, more than four million Jews were in immediate danger of being killed.

> Hitler is applying medieval ghettoization and a slow systematic process of elimination and extermination.[85]

While the World Council still distinguished between Jews and Jewish Christians, the Jews as such were entering the picture more and more now that the Nazis did not make this distinction. But Hoffmann worked for the International Missionary Council and, marvellously enough, even Hoffmann's shocking report pointed precisely to the Jews as the object of Christian mission:

> The current universal distress of Jews has made them most responsive and appreciative of Christian sympathy and interest. The wandering Jew has become the wondering Jew. Possibilities of sincere fellowship without

84 Ibid.: 'vernieuwde doorwerking van de problematiek tusschen jodendom en christendom onder de gezichtspunten van bloed en geest, wet en evangelie […] onontbeerlijk [zou] zijn tot nadere opheldering van de plaats der joden in de menschelijke samenleving'

85 C. Hoffmann Jr., 'A Brief Report on the Christian Approach to the Jews', 25 March 1941.

> compromise are numerous as a result. The Jew as the Gentile, when all other helpers fail, turns to God.[86]

There was thus the belief that God could use misery to do something good, fulfill prophecies and bring Christians and Jews into the one church. Precisely because of their threatened extermination, the Jews would become receptive to God's salvation.

On 29 October 1941, Visser 't Hooft pointed out the emergency situation in the Polish areas of Wartheland and General Government to Professor K. Burckhardt, the president of the Commission Mixte de Secours of the International Red Cross in Geneva. There was a serious famine in Warsaw, in particular among the Jewish population, and an outbreak of typhus and a high child mortality rate both within and outside of the Jewish ghetto. Overpopulation was definitely an issue, despite some new buildings and repair of the water lines by the German government. There were indescribable hygienic emergencies in the ghetto of Lodz. The small amount of help from the Red Cross did not have any effect. In the middle of October 1941, more and more German, Czech, and Austrian Jews were being transported to Poland. Reports were coming in of men having to work on the roads and women in munitions factories. But was that in fact so? Visser 't Hooft doubted it. Help was offered immediately.

> The Jewish question touches the heart of the Christian message; the failure of the churches to raise their voices in a protective and warning way and to help in any way they can would be disobedience to their Lord. It is therefore the task of the Christian churches, in particular of their ecumenical representation in the Provisional Ecumenical Council [i.e. the emerging World Council] to devote themselves vicariously for those who are persecuted.[87]

He argued in this memorandum that a doctor should conduct examinations and medicine for both the Polish and the Jewish population. Lublin could not be forgotten either. There were many deported Jews in the area around

86 Ibid.

87 'Memorandum zur Lage in Polen' 29 October 1941, attachment to letter by Visser 't Hooft to K. Burckhardt, 29 October 1941. YDS-5, 47: 'Die Judenfrage berührt das Zentrum der christlichen Botschaft; ein Versäumnis der Kirche, hier schützend und warnend die Stimme zu erheben und nach Kräften zu helfen, wäre ungehorsam gegen ihren Herrn. Es ist daher die Aufgabe der christlichen Kirchen, und insbesondere ihrer oekumenischen Vertretung des Vorläufigen Oekumenischen Rates, sich stellvertretend für die Verfolgten einzusetzen.'

the city in the winter of 1939/1940. Their fate was unknown but could be very serious. The memorandum concluded with the statement that the Red Cross could count on the complete cooperation of the World Council.

The truth about the death camps became increasingly clear as 1942 wore on. It was very well understood in Geneva that the Jews had been systematically rounded up in all the areas where the Germans were in control with the purpose of having them killed. In his report as secretary to the World Council on 1941/1942, Visser 't Hooft wrote in July 1942 about 'the indescribable suffering of the Jews who are being deported in thousands and placed in situations which can only lead to their extermination.'[88] The World Council was itself suffering financially but decided to support the Unitarian Service Committee for the distribution of medicine among the refugees in the Vichy Republic and via the Red Cross the Jewish refugees in Poland. On 3 June 1942, the World Council made a second appeal to the Red Cross. It was realised that many in Polish ghettoes would die because there was a serious shortage of almost everything.

In retrospect, Visser 't Hooft had a reliable source on which he based much of his knowledge of the death transports and mass murder of the Jews. This was Kurt Gerstein, a member of the Confessing Church who, as a member of the SS, had access to information about the death camps that he also sent to the Swedish diplomat Göran von Otter.[89] In an internal note to the World Council based on Gerstein's report, dated 22 September 1942, Visser 't Hooft reported on trains that were travelling from Belgium, the Netherlands, and France, loaded with Jews, living and dead. There were also indications of new methods, such as killing people by injecting air into their bodies. Dead bodies from the trains were turned into soap, lime, and train oil in overburdened factories.

> As to the proceedings of killing, the informer stated that the Nazis began to apply a new procedure. The killing in special gas-chambers has been replaced by another method which consists in injecting of the air by physicians into the veins of the human body. This procedure is much less expensive than the one applied formerly. The injection of the air into the human body leads to a general poisoning and at last after a few hours the person becomes unconscious. The procedure is applied even before the German frontier is reached so that to Germany there arrive

88 Visser 't Hooft, 'Report on Activities During the Period July 1941 – July 1942'.

89 Visser 't Hooft, 'W.C.C. Action at the Time of the Extermination of Jewish People', 3 March 1965, YDS-5, 45.

> only corpses. It is stated that one physician is capable of making 100 such injections within an hour.[90]

The economic value of a human body as raw material for products was estimated at 50 Reichmarks. More and more of these kinds of reports were coming in. Freudenberg brought the note up in the provisional committee of the World Council on 25 September. In November 1942, the World Council, like many other international organisations and governments, received an emergency signal from the British section of the World Jewish Congress: 'The Nazis are using Poland as the slaughter-house for European Jewry.'[91]

The World Council made a third appeal to the Red Cross on 3 December 1942, when evidence emerged again of mass executions in Poland. Visser 't Hooft stated that the situation had worsened alarmingly and called on the Red Cross to send delegations.

> You are, without a doubt, up to date on the mass executions with Polish Jews and the Jews who are deported from many European countries to Poland as victims. We can add to the information that has come in to other organisations the content of a report that we just received from a very highly placed German individual [allegedly K. Gerstein], whose good faith we vouch for. This report tells us that 6000 Jews – men, women, children – are shot each day in one place in Poland. These executions are done in three groups of 2000 people each, and this has been going on for weeks.[92]

90 Note, 22 September 1942, YDS-5, 44: 'Wat betreft de manier van doden stelde de informant dat de nazi's op een nieuwe procedure overgaan. Het doden in speciale gaskamers is vervangen door een andere methode, waarbij de lucht door artsen in de aderen van het lichaam worden geïnjecteerd. Deze procedure is veel goedkoper dan de eerder gevolgde. De lucht-injectie leidt tot algehele vergiftiging en uiteindelijk raakt de persoon na enkele uren bewusteloos. De procedure wordt al toegepast voordat de Duitse grens wordt bereikt, zodat er in Duitsland slechts lijken binnenkomen. Er wordt gesteld dat één arts in staat is binnen een uur 100 dergelijke injecties te verrichten.'

91 A.L. Easterman and N. Barou, secretaries of the World Jewish Congress, British Section to leaders of the English churches, 27 November 1942, YDS-5, 44.

92 Visser 't Hooft to K. Burckhardt, 3 December 1942, YDS-5, 47: 'Vous êtes sans doute informé des executions en masse dont sont victims les Juifs polonais et les Juifs déportés de bien des pays européens en Pologne. Aux informations qui sont parvenues à d'autres organisations, nous pouvons ajouter le contenu d'un message, que nous venons de recevoir d'une personalité allemande tres distinguée, dont nous pouvons garantir la bonne foi. Ce message nous informe qu'à un seul endroit en Pologne 6000 Juifs – hommes, femmes et enfants – sont fusillés chaque jour. Ces exécutions sont faites en trois parties, soit de 2000 personnes chaque fois, et cela se passe depuis bien des semaines déjà.'

Everything that was known at the World Council was passed on to the American Federal Council of Churches. The secretary of this organisation, S. McCrea Cavert, visited Geneva and gave a report on 5 November 1942 on his European trip to the American Friends Services Committee. The Federal Council, which met from 8 to 11 December 1942 in Cleveland, Ohio, issued a statement that was published in the *Federal Council Bulletin* of January 1943.[93] In this statement, the American churches protested against the 'deliberate extermination of the Jews in Europe'. It was confessed that not enough had been done in the past against anti-Semitism, and it called on the participating churches to strengthen ties with Jews where possible. It also argued for a safe place for Jews in Western countries and the expansion of immigration possibilities after the war. McCrea Cavert also made a report of his findings to the American rabbi and president of the World Jewish Congress, Stephen Samuel Wise in New York. Delegates from the Synagogue Council of America were received on 6 January 1943 for an emergency consultation at the headquarters of the Federal Council of Churches.[94]

Visser 't Hooft now thought the time was ripe to make clear statements in Europe as well. Together with the secretary of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, G.M. Riegner, he wrote a so-called 'Aide-mémoire' directed in the first place at the High Commissioner for Refugees of the League of Nations in London.[95] The document was attached in March 1943 to warning letters addressed to various Allied ambassadors in Switzerland and intended for the British and American governments and for the American Council of Churches and the American branch of the World Jewish Congress. The writers urged that German citizens interned in Allied countries be exchanged for Jews in countries occupied by the Germans and for guarantees to be given to neutral countries where Jews were staying.[96] That same month Visser 't Hooft sent alarming telegrams to William Temple and to the Federal Council of Churches in the United States. The Jews still in Berlin were exterminated:

93 S. McCrea Cavert to Visser 't Hooft, 26 March 1965, YDS-5, 45.

94 Ibid., 48. Rabbi S.S. Wise was later harshly criticised by Jews for his passive attitude during the Holocaust.

95 'Aide-mémoire', March 1943, with the following in Visser 't Hooft's handwriting: 'Was sent by British Ambassador to Foreign Office London in this form.' YDS-5, 46. See the more concretely formulated draft text for the Aide-mémoire by Visser 't Hooft, 9 March 1943, YDS-5, 46.

96 In March 1943, Visser 't Hooft personally sent the letter, on behalf of the World Council but therefore also on behalf of the secretary of the World Jewish Congress, to the American ambassador in Bern; Riegner sent it to the British Ambassador. Visser 't Hooft to L. Harrison , 19 March 1943; G.M. Riegner to S.J. Norton, 22 March 1943, YDS-5, 46.

> 15,000 Berlin Jews brought to assembling centres. Some hundreds shot. Total evacuation Berlin in execution. Similar news other regions prove extermination campaign at climax. Please back Allied rescue efforts suggest rapid proposals exchange against German civilians and guarantees of re-emigration money food supply enabling European Neutrals to grant transitory asylum.[97]

As chairman of the provisional committee of the World Council of Churches, Temple protested various times against the destruction of the Jews, including in the British House of Lords on 23 March 1943, and pleaded that the Jews be taken in. His protests had little effect.

Before Visser 't Hooft wrote his letter, he consulted with Allan W. Dulles (1893-1969) of the American secret service in Bern, the Office of Strategic Services. Dulles was a personal representative of President Roosevelt. There is no doubt at all that the shared information was known at the highest levels of both the British and the American governments. Riegner was in intensive contact with Freudenberg, the head of the World Council Refugee Desk in Geneva. Riegner later pointed to the crucial role that the World Council played in convincing the Swiss authorities of the deadly danger that the Jews were in in the occupied countries so that a more flexible admission policy was adopted by Switzerland in 1943.[98]

One person who was not happy at all with Visser 't Hooft's activities on behalf of the Jews and for whom the Aide-mémoire almost came out of nowhere was William Paton, the British general secretary of the World Council and Visser 't Hooft's colleague in London. He was informed by the High Commissioner for Refugees of the League of Nations, Herbert Emerson, that he had received a joint report from the World Council and the World Jewish Congress.[99] That was painful for Paton, for he knew nothing about this and had to ask Emerson if he could see the document.

> I should therefore be very glad if I might see the Aide-Mémoire as I consider it rather important that the Geneva office of the World Council should not take action in the name of the whole secretariat without consultation. It is, of course, possible that a letter has gone astray.[100]

97 Visser 't Hooft to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Federal Council of Churches, no date, March 1943, YDS-5, 46.

98 G.M. Riegner to Visser 't Hooft, 14 April 1965, YDS-5, 45.

99 Via the British Foreign Office, confirmation of receipt by the High Commissioner for Refugees of the League of Nations, 7 April 1943, YDS-5, 46.

100 W. Paton to H. Emerson, 9 April 1943, YDS-5, 46. Paton later received the Aide-mémoire from Visser 't Hooft via Sweden. W. Paton to W. Temple, 14 May 1943, YDS 5, 49.

Paton was 'not amused' and wanted to know what Emerson thought of it. He himself did not think much of it. Paton came from the International Missionary Council and never wanted anything to do with abandoning what he called 'the Christian claim of a universal evangelistic imperative'. Collaboration with Jews was fine, and Christians should understand the full weight and scope of the Jewish position, but the church would always be connected with the universal revelation of God in Christ.[101] According to Paton, Visser 't Hooft had gone beyond his remit.

> It looks to me, being somewhat inexpert in the matter, as if my colleagues in Geneva had to some extent swallowed the Zionist proposals neat![102]

He commented even more unpleasantly:

> As I knew nothing about it nor, I am confident, did my colleague in New York [H.S. Leiper], I assume that it is the work of 't Hooft and his colleagues and I should a little judge from the contents that they had been in touch with the Zionist group and had to some extent swallowed their stuff.[103]

The British government responded half-heartedly and grudgingly to the Aide-Mémoire. They had other things on their minds, such as winning a war.[104] It began to dawn on Visser 't Hooft in Geneva more and more that the Allies were not planning to intervene at all – however serious the reports were. On 20 April, his colleague William Paton discussed the Aide-Mémoire with Emerson in London. The latter attributed the content completely to the World Jewish Congress. It was established that the issue of repatriation was already looked after. But Emerson admitted that the document demanded extra attention for the question of repatriation in the now occupied countries. Most Jews would not want to return to Germany and Austria. Money could be made available, but food was more difficult given the blockade. The exchange of interned German citizens for Jews was considered impossible: wounded British prisoners of war had precedence over Jews, and giving Jews preference 'en bloc' – simply because they were Jews – could not be done. There were warnings against the danger of anti-Semitism flaring up

101 W. Paton to R. Smith, 22 December 1941, YDS-5, 54.
102 W. Paton to H. Emerson, 16 April 1943, YDS-12, 46.
103 W. Paton to H. Carter, 16 April 1943, YDS-5, 46.
104 Cf. the reaction of the American Secretary of State to an 'aide-mémoire' from the British Embassy, 20 January 1943, YDS-5, 49.

in Great Britain itself. Emerson, the High Commissioner for Refugees, was more in favour of a temporary refugee camp for Jews in North Africa and keeping the escape route via Spain open.

> [Emerson] strongly felt that the Jews had made a great mistake in emphasising only the plight of the Jews, and giving the impression that there are no other refugees in the world.[105]

All important issues that were addressed in the Aide-Mémoire were discussed in precisely this month, 19-30 April 1943, in Bermuda by the British and the Americans. But nothing was decided about Allied intervention concerning the concentration camps. All that they agreed on was that the war had to be won at any cost and that liberated European Jews had to be repatriated as much as possible after the war. They did not make the admission of Jews to Great Britain, the United States, or Palestine any easier. The lack of hard evidence hampered the American churches in their actions on behalf of the Jews.[106]

Visser 't Hooft found the lot of the Jews to be without parallel. In December 1943, he received a new report from his Jewish friend M.H. Gans on the state of affairs in the death camps.

> Because these facts … largely correspond with those I got from the Swiss, there is, unfortunately, no reason to do doubt their correctness. What can be called normal suffering in war pales in comparison with the horrible crimes and the inconceivable suffering now.[107]

In December 1943, Freudenberg wrote a detailed analytical and statistical report, with recommendations for the situation in which the remaining Jews would find themselves after the war.[108]

105 W. Paton, Note of conversation with Sir Herbert Emerson, 20 April 1943. YDS-12, 46. Emerson 'considers that this attitude of the Jews is a fostering cause of anti-semitism.' W. Paton to H. Carter, 20 April 1943. YDS-5, 46.

106 H.S. Leiper to Visser 't Hooft, 18 March 1965, YDS-5, 47.

107 Visser 't Hooft to M.H. Gans, 3 December 1943, YDS-12, 60: 'Daar deze gegevens zich […] grootendeels dekken met degenen, die ik van Zwitsersche zijde kreeg, zoo is er helaas geen reden om aan hun juistheid te twijfelen. Wat men het normale oorlogsleed kan noemen, verbleekt wanneer men het vergelijkt met de ontzettende misdaden en het onvoorstelbare leed waarvan hier sprake is.'

108 Freudenberg, 'Leitsätze für die Behandlung der Judenfrage in Deutschland der Nachkriegszeit', 1943.

The 400,000 Hungarian Jews were left in relative peace until the beginning of 1944. When reports began to come in in March that they were also on the verge of deportation, the World Jewish Congress was the the first organisation to sound the alarm, which also quickly reached the World Council offices in Geneva.[109] In June 1944, the ecumenical refugee aid in Geneva issued a 'solemn and public' protest against the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz.[110] A circular was also sent out from Geneva with attachments in which the signatories Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Visser 't Hooft expressed in a private capacity their dismay at the downfall of the Hungarian Jews.[111] It did not accomplish much, and the destruction of the Hungarian Jews continued. Visser 't Hooft always felt he did not do enough. When he was honoured with an honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1972, he said:

> We heard very quickly about the terrible things that were happening in camps like Auschwitz, among others. We had already heard about that around September 1942. The great difficulty was that the people simply did not want to think that you had reason to believe that there was something like gas chambers and that Jews were being brought in by the thousands and killed there. Our action, unfortunately, yielded little. That is why, in a certain sense, I found it almost a little bit painful that I now stood here before the representatives of the Hebrew University and thus also of the Jewish people, and I was highly praised there, for I had much more the feeling that we should actually have done infinitely more.[112]

109 G.M. Riegner to S.S. Silverman, telegram 21 March 1944, YDS-5, 46. A. Freudenberg to Visser 't Hooft, 23 March 1944, YDS-5, 46.

110 *Ecumenical Press Service*, June 1944, no. 26.

111 K. Barth, E. Brunner, Visser 't Hooft, and P. Vogt, circular, 4 July 1944, YDS-5, 47. This article was not issued on behalf of the World Council.

112 Eddo Rosenthal, interview with Visser 't Hooft, IKOR Radio, 12 October 1972, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Wij hebben heel vroeg gehoord van de afschuwelijke dingen die in kampen als Auschwitz onder andere aan de gang waren. Wij hebben dat al gehoord in ongeveer september 1942. De grote moeilijkheid was dat de mensen je eenvoudigweg niet geloven wouen, als je vertelde dat je reden had om te menen dat er zoiets was als gaskamers en dat daar Joden bij duizendtallen ingebracht werden en vermoord werden. Onze actie heeft helaas buitengewoon weinig opgeleverd. Daarom, in zekere zin vond ik het bijna een klein beetje pijnlijk dat ik hier nu stond voor de vertegenwoordigers van de Hebreeuwse Universiteit en dus ook van het Joodse volk en ik daar hooggeprezen werd, want ik had veel meer het gevoel dat we eigenlijk oneindig veel meer hadden moeten doen.'

3.8 One Church, One Europe: Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The various studies that Visser 't Hooft wrote about Germany and Europe during the war years were discussed in the Geneva group 'Christian Principles and Reconstruction' and sent to contacts abroad. Responses to similar documents from others were formulated as well.[113] A good example is the analysis called 'The Situation of the Protestant Church in Germany' from December 1943.[114] Here Visser 't Hooft points to the great difference with the First World War. In most churches, the preaching was on a high moral level and until that point remained largely free from war hysteria and propaganda. It was hoped that it would stay that way, given that massive bombings on civilian targets, such as Hamburg, were now occurring. There was, according to Visser 't Hooft, a major willingness on the part of the church in Germany to confess its guilt. The proper response, in his view, was not one of smugness or a one-sided condemnation of the German people but a common international recognition of guilt in the derailment of Europe. Visser 't Hooft stated that in Germany practically no one outside the Nazi party was truly informed about the extent of the German crimes in the occupied countries.

> In Christian circles who are actively preparing for the future, the conception of the future international order is that of a European Federation, in which frontiers would gradually cease to have political and economic significance, but in which cultural and national traditions would be safeguarded. These same circles are sceptical about plans to revive a world-wide League of Nations which would not be based on regional understandings. Their hope is, that Europe may rediscover its fundamental unity in the Christian faith, and that the Federation to be formed will be strong enough to oppose any tendencies which might appear to form governments of a totalitarian or anti-Christian character.[115]

One could ask if Visser 't Hooft sufficiently realised that his accommodating attitude towards Germany could have a counterproductive effect in England and the United States. The tone is conditional. His entreaty that the German resistance deserved to be heard, and also if it continued – even after peace would be made with the West – to combat Soviet communism, had little chance of succeeding with the Allies who wanted to keep the Russians on

113 Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 86-108.
114 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Situation of the Protestant Church in Germany', 1943.
115 Ibid. Cf. Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 106-107.

their side and did not want to risk the latter's involvement in the war under any circumstances. That tainted his argument for European unity in which a different Germany could possibly participate fully.

What Visser 't Hooft wanted to help his German resistance contacts link up with were the studies and discussions about an alternative international order, a topic that constantly came up in the ecumenical network and in which the absolutisation of national sovereignties was exposed as one of the causes of the wars constantly flaring up in Europe.[116] The illegality in occupied countries had a strong nationalistic tendency. At the same time, voices were raised supporting the idea of European federalism. There were a number of meetings in 1943 and 1944 in Visser 't Hooft's home of people involved in the resistance in various European countries to discuss far-reaching forms of European collaboration after the war.[117]

Thus, Visser 't Hooft was, to a certain extent, in regular contact with members of the German resistance for almost the whole war. Already in October 1940, a first exploratory memorandum had been smuggled from Geneva to England with information about ideas from the German opposition.[118] This memorandum was written by Adam von Trott zu Solz and Visser 't Hooft himself and intended for the British Peace Aims Group, which was chaired by William Temple and organised by the English World Council secretary William Paton. 'I wish 't Hooft would keep out of politics!' Paton is reputed to have said, but he did discuss the British responses to the memorandum with Visser 't Hooft in Lisbon later. In addition to Adam von Trott zu Solz, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was Visser 't Hooft's most important contact in the German resistance.

Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was an academically trained Lutheran theologian who rediscovered, in his reflections on modernity, the value of the church as the communion of the saints. During the period of the Confessing Church, he saw the church as the basis for resistance to the totalitarian movement of Nazism. Visser 't Hooft had heard a great deal about him but had never met him until he got the chance to speak to him in London in March 1939 at Paddington Station. They walked up and down the platform together for a long time. At that time, Bonhoeffer was wondering whether he should remain in London as a minister or return to Germany. He did return in 1940 and went to work for the *Abwehr*, the German secret service under the command of Admiral W. Canaris, which meant that he would not be called up to serve in the army

116 Cf. Paton, *The Church and the New Order* (1941), 21-22.

117 Braga, 'The 1944 Meetings at the House of Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft', 2014, 165-187.

118 Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 152.

but could contribute to the resistance activities of those who had gone into this service as a cover. The group to which Bonhoeffer belonged was in charge of contact with the Western allies. It was hoped that negotiations would end the war with the West after Hitler's expected defeat. It was not a matter of chance that Visser 't Hooft's most important German informants were also actively involved in the international ecumenical student work in the 1930s.

As a diplomat connected with the *Abwehr*, Bonhoeffer could travel internationally from Berlin, including to Geneva. He stayed there from 24 February to 24 March 1941 and visited Visser 't Hooft. On the basis of their conversation, Visser 't Hooft wrote – also on Bonhoeffer's behalf – a memorandum called 'Some Considerations concerning the Post-War Settlement'.[119] This document can be viewed as an exponent of what ideas were being proposed at the time about the future of Europe, not only in parts of the German resistance but elsewhere in the ecumenically oriented international network. Bonhoeffer himself had worked out much of the underlying ideas in his *Ethik*, a book that would never be completed but was intended as a reflection on the future of Europe and a contribution to ecumenical activity for Europe.[120] Although he thought Germany could not be expected to become a democracy after the war, a successful integration into a European community of nations would be essential; a lengthy isolation would be disastrous. To be able to offer constructive alternatives to the programmes of the Nazis could considerably hasten Hitler's fall and save many lives. Visser 't Hooft sent Bonhoeffer's memorandum to Archbishop William Temple and to John Foster Dulles, who, as chairman of the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace of the Federal Council of Churches in America, was in contact with many in ecumenical work and also made an important contribution to American ecumenical thinking about the future of America. In an accompanying note, Visser 't Hooft presented a number of questions on behalf of the German conspirators to Temple:

> What are the minimum conditions on which peace would be possible? Would their country [Germany] have a chance of being offered acceptable terms if it changed its regime? Or would such a change of regime be used to crush their country altogether?[121]

119 'Some Considerations concerning the Post-war Settlement', no date, WCC 994.2.08/10. Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 110-112 and 288.

120 The title was originally the one Bonhoeffer gave to his ethics volume *Grundlagen und Aufbau* [...] *eines geeinten Abendlandes*. Bonhoeffer, *Werke*, VI, *Ethik* (1992), 88-89, note 98.

121 Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 110-111.

The archbishop answered on 19 April 1941 that the Allies would probably be prepared to negotiate, but only after the definitive fall of the Nazi regime, complete withdrawal from all occupied areas, and the end of Gestapo terror.

When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union shortly afterwards, on 22 June 1941, that obviously entailed the end of the German non-agression treaty with that country. Paradoxically enough, the chances of the German resistance for negotiations in the West were lost forever from that moment on. The fear of the Western Allies that its good relations with the new ally would be in danger was not clear to all immediately. For Bonhoeffer, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union indicated that Hitler would lose the war, but a strong Germany would, in his view, still be necessary to protect Europe from what he called 'Pan-slavism'. When Bonhoeffer visited Visser 't Hooft in Geneva again, in August 1941, they co-authored the memorandum 'The Church and the New Order in Europe' in the form of a commentary on a book that had been published just shortly before, *The Church and the New Order* by William Paton.[122] Visser 't Hooft gave this document to the Scottish minister Denzil Patrick, who lived in Geneva as the secretary of the YMCA, on 12 September with the request that he pass the document on, via the British embassy, to Hugh Martin, Paton's publisher, in London.[123] The plan succeeded, and after some time responses were sent to Geneva from the ecumenical network. From the United States, for example, via H.P. Van Dusen, Visser 't Hooft received a response from the congregationalist theologian J.C. Bennett. The important point in this response was that Bennett, just like Reinhold Niebuhr, did not see an honourable peace in the West for the German army.[124] William Paton stated that he felt that democracy was not the best type of government for post-war Germany.[125] But he doubted the strength of the German opposition. Nor was he convinced that the danger of the 'Bolshevisation' of Europe was actually as great as Bonhoeffer and Visser 't Hooft feared and necessitated the existence of a German defense force after the war. Nevertheless, Paton sent the memorandum on to 'very important people'.

In the circles that Visser 't Hooft had contact with, federalism was a much-discussed international political model for the future at this time. It was widely held that the existence of many sovereign nations in Europe was outdated because it had led to economic protectionism, rivalry, and

122 Bonhoeffer and Visser 't Hooft (anonymous), 'The Church and the New Order in Europe' (1941); Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 288-293.

123 Visser 't Hooft to D.G.M. Patrick, 12 September 1941, YDS-4, 222.

124 J.C. Bennett to H.P. Van Dusen, 29 December 1941, YDS-4, 222.

125 Extract of a letter from Dr. William Paton to Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, 6 January 1942, YDS-4, 222.

instability for the European order. His Dutch contacts also reinforced Visser 't Hooft's confidence that federalism was the future. There were many rumours of an imminent coup in Germany. Visser 't Hooft also tried via the Dutch government in London to get the Allied governments to meet the German resistance halfway, a theme we will take up in the next chapter.

In May 1942 Bonhoeffer and the Geneva study secretary Hans Schönfeld met in Stockholm with George K.A. Bell, Bishop of Chichester, chairman of Life and Work and the provisional committee of the World Council and someone with many German contacts. They were able to convince him of the importance of the German opposition. The pacifist Bell was always in favour of negotiations and saw it as a Gospel task to distinguish sharply between the best forces and those who were guilty of atrocities in the camp of the enemy. For him, this was the current application of Christ's command, 'Love your enemies'.[126] Although Visser 't Hooft was also critical of Bell, he was happy with his nuanced view of Germany and his view regarding future European integration.[127]

3.9 The Memorandum of Von Trott zu Solz

In the spring of 1942, Visser 't Hooft was invited by the prime minister of the Dutch government in exile, P.S. Gerbrandy, to London to attempt to improve the contact of the government with the occupied Netherlands.[128] Just before Visser 't Hooft left Geneva at the end of April 1942 for London, he was visited again by Adam von Trott zu Solz, who had heard about the trip he was about to make. This diplomat from an aristocratic Prussian family had been friends with Visser 't Hooft already before the war and probably visited Geneva seven times between between 1940 and 1944.[129] He was part of the resistance network of the Kreisauer Kreis (Kreisau Circle), a group that formed around Helmut J. von Moltke (1907-1945). Visser 't Hooft advised his friend in the formulation of a 'Memorandum für die Englische Regierung' that he handed to the Labour politician Sir Richard Stafford Cripps (1889-1952) in London,

126 Matthew 5:44.

127 Besier, *Intimately Associated for Many Years* (2015).

128 See 4.4.

129 Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 295. For the significance of Visser 't Hooft's contacts with the German resistance, especially Von Trott zu Solz, see also: Garstecki, J. (ed.), *Die Ökumene und der Widerstand gegevn Diktaturen. Nationalisme und Kommunismus als Herausforderung an die Kirchen*, Stuttgart, 2007.

a Christian socialist and university friend of Von Trott zu Solz and who was now, as Lord President of the Council, an influential member of the British government. Stafford Cripps was very involved in the ecumenical movement and had worked for a number of years for the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches.[130] The memorandum in question contained ideas that Von Trott zu Solz considered representative for a considerable part of the German opposition. An analysis was given of the dangers that threatened European civilisation and argued for a new organisation of Germany with a decentralised government, integration in a federalised Europe, the abolition of economic self-determination, and free access to raw materials overseas. It was intended to invoke encouraging responses, if possible, from the British government. Because of that, Hitler's fall would be hastened, and an alternative government could emerge immediately after a successful attack, provided with a legitimacy that had a chance of being validated by the German people.[131]

Adam von Trott zu Solz and Visser 't Hooft knew each other through the YMCA. They had been friends since 1928, and Von Trott zu Stolz was a regular guest in Geneva. Visser 't Hooft shared his love for the works of Dostoyevsky and was sympathetic to Von Trott zu Solz's personal quest for an engaged faith. In Von Trott zu Solz's view, Christianity should be able to provide an important contribution to a Europe in which moderate socialism and and humanism could flourish. Via the WSCF, Von Trott zu Solz became acquainted with the British Student Christian Movement. He spent two years in Oxford as a Rhodes scholar where he became friends with various students who later became politicians. In 1940, Von Trott zu Solz went to work in the German diplomatic service and could travel to neutral countries during the war.

The memorandum by Von Trott zu Solz and Visser 't Hooft was read at high levels in the British government. Winston Churchill wrote 'most encouraging' on it but does not seem to have done anything further with it. The British government found it encouraging that there were signs that internal opposition to Hitler was growing, but that was where it stopped. After a few days, Visser 't Hooft received a formal message from Stafford Cripps that he felt that the continuation of the contact was very important, but there could be no negotiation with any German resistance prior to Germany's military defeat. The official British position was that Germany had to be defeated militarily on German soil. Behind the scenes, the Foreign

130 Stafford Cripps, *Towards Christian Democracy* (1945), 25.
131 Sykes, *Troubled Loyalty. A Biography of Adam von Trott zu Solz* (1968).

Office was not enthusiastic about Visser 't Hooft's presence in London and investigated him. An official wrote on 20 May 1942:

> Mr Visser 't Hooft is likely to be well-informed but, like all connected with these international … Church organizations, inclined to put too optimistic an interpretation on anything in the nature of an approach from 'decent German elements'.[132]

After a background check, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Eden communicated to Cripps, however, that Visser 't Hooft was reliable, 'a man above reproach or suspicion'. The Foreign Office did have reasons, however, to label Von Trott zu Solz's memorandum as dangerous. 'It can only be embarrassing if influential people are stimulated in this way to interfere in both our policy and political warfare towards Germany.' In the British Foreign Service, it was believed that it was the German government that was misusing well-meaning individuals to see how Great Britain would react to 'peace feelers' and the possibility of a separate peace in the West. The Dutch government in exile had similar views, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs E.N. van Kleffens informed Eden about that.[133] The war aim of *unconditional surrender* was the official joint policy for the Allies during the conference in Casablanca in January 1943, but already since the beginning of 1942, it had been a guiding principle to not talk bilaterally with the German regime. With the Washington Pact of 1 January 1942, the then 26 Allied countries decided that none of them would conclude a separate peace with the German regime. In January 1943 'unconditional surrender' was established in Casablanca as the way in which the war had to be ended.

Visser 't Hooft had sincerely felt that he could achieve something in London for the German resistance and thus for the peace of Europe. He had hoped that shortening the war in this way could spare many lives and also believed that a vital, de-Nazified Germany would be important for the security of Europe over against Bolshevism. But he wrongly calculated the chances of the German resistance with the Allies. It was comprehensible that the British government was afraid that representative figures like bishops in England could embarass the government. They were cautious, and Visser 't Hooft suffered both a political and an ecumenical defeat in England. During his stay in England in 1942, he had a meeting with British representatives of the ecumenical movement where extensive reports were

132 G.W. Harrison, quoted in: Boyens, *Kirchenkampf und Ökumene*, II, *1939-1945* (1973), 211.
133 Cf. 3.9.

given of the situation of world ecumenism and of the plans for the future. There was also a special encounter with members of the British Peace Aims Group, whom he informed in guarded terms of the content of Von Trott zu Solz's memorandum. But he did not get their support either. The British leaders of the ecumenical movement, such as Oldham, Temple, Bell, and Paton, backed the policy of their own government and viewed it as inappropriate at this stage of the war to suggest to any German resistance group whatsoever that there was a chance of a separate peace with the West.[134] The Americans Henry Smith Leiper and W. Adams Brown, who had come to England for William Temple's ordination as Archbishop of Canterbury on 23 April 1942, rejected it as well.

In the bombardment-battered Lambeth Palace on the Thames, Visser 't Hooft had a personal meeting with the new archbishop, Temple, whom he had known so long, in one of the few rooms still usable. It would be their last meeting.[135] Visser 't Hooft left England on 14 June 1942, disappointed with the responses to Von Trott zu Solz's memorandum. He was not looking forward to telling his German friend waiting in Geneva about the rejections. He was deeply disappointed, and the two of them sat up late in the night in Visser 't Hooft's garden talking while he attempted to explain it to Von Trott zu Solz. The latter did not give up. After the unsuccessful attack on Hitler on 20 June 1944, many members of the German resistance were picked up, including Von Trott zu Solz and Bonhoeffer, and eventually killed by the Nazis. The purpose of their participation in the resistance against Hitler was not, according to Visser 't Hooft, to destroy Nazism but to found a just international order. Visser 't Hooft would always lament the consistent lack of interest of the Allies in the German resistance as shortsighted. If the response had been more positive, 'the war could probably have been shortened.'[136] The actions of Bonhoeffer, Von Trott zu Solz, and others allowed a glimpse of a different Germany, from which he expected so much after war with respect to the ecumenical movement and to Europe. He did not give up on that hope.

Visser 't Hooft later always emphasised the continuity of Bonhoeffer's thinking with respect to motivations. The call for a new adult world and a 'secular Christianity', as found in Bonhoeffer's late letters from prison, is

134 Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 196.

135 Two years later, in November 1944, Visser 't Hooft had just arrived in England when Temple was buried. He also saw his colleague William Paton for the last time in the summer of 1942: Paton died suddenly of a heart attack on 21 August 1943.

136 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

often explained as a rejection of the church, but, in Visser 't Hooft's view, that was a misunderstanding. According to him, Bonhoeffer always thought Christocentrically.[137] He compared Bonhoeffer with Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), one of his own favourite thinkers: both were 39 years old when they died, and both were unable to finish their life's work; both opened up new contemporary ways to understand Christ. Visser 't Hooft saw a reflection in both of his own Christocentric faith.[138] Already at the beginning of the 1930s, Bonhoeffer had made the argument at various ecumenical conferences that there was an urgent need for a new, genuinely ecumenical theology. He had seen Bonhoeffer working right up until the end on the development of the contribution of Christianity to the world: 'making Christianity a reality in the world.' Bonhoeffer would have rejected a syncretistic Christianity – such a Christianity adapted to and made common cause with the pagan ideology of the Nazis. He had devoted himself to a confessing church with a recognisable face. The struggle in the German church was, according to Visser 't Hooft, so much more than a conflict between theologians, and the ecumenical movement so much more than a Christian version of internationalism. He felt he was witnessing nothing less than the birth of a new form of the universal church emerging from the nature of the universal lordship of Christ. The dignity of the human person, social justice, and the striving for international law had, according to Visser 't Hooft, Christian roots, which formed indispensable components for the rebuilding of Europe.[139]

3.10 The Hesitant Voice of the Ecumenical Movement

The decision in 1939 to keep the headquarters of the World Council in Geneva during the war had great consequences for the functioning of the ecumenical network. By way of conclusion to this chapter, it can be stated that Visser 't Hooft experienced the war as an ordeal by fire for himself, for the ecumenical movement, but especially for the church. This was the hour of truth. Churches had to show what they were worth. The World Council did not yet officially exist, but, because of the creative approach of the

137 He was later also critical of the thinking of the late Bonhoeffer. See 6.9.

138 Visser 't Hooft, 'Dietrich Bomhoeffer, 1945-1965', 1964/1965. In an article on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Bonhoeffer's death, Visser 't Hooft warned that Bonhoeffer's ideas were sometimes wrongly understood and misused, such as by the Bishop of Woolwich, J.A.T. Robinson, in his famous but shocking book, *Honest to God* (1963). See also 9.7.

139 Guittart, 'A Bibliography of the Writings of Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, 1918-1970', 1971, war years, 281-290.

small office in Geneva, under the supervision of the provisional committee, it still put up a spirited fight in a number of areas. Visser 't Hooft played a central role in this. He primarily saw opportunities for the church and the ecumenical movement in the crisis of the war and felt called to seize those opportunities where possible.

By connecting the value of the world church to the crisis of a world torn asunder by violence that was the instrument of God's judgment, Visser 't Hooft believed that people could finally experience God's grace so that something good could come out of the war. Flawed churches could experience inspiration, be renewed, and function as a moral compass for society. In the ecclesiology of Visser 't Hooft, in his view of the church, the church formed the place where the elite and the masses could come to a fruitful collaboration for the sake of civilisation. Churches needed to account for their ethical responsibility for the order of society and to have an eye for the current needs of ordinary people. Visser 't Hooft shared Karl Barth's conviction that the Bible should have the lead in this as the Word of God. He was willing to work with everyone of good will and also saw values in tradition and in principles of order recognisable in nature. But the experiences of people connected to that could be decisive in his opinion. What he could not share with Barth was his extreme, principled view of a prophetic ecumenical movement that did not mince words and also made clear statements without any consultation with others. Barth gave Visser 't Hooft cause for thought by emphasising acute wrongdoing and the fact that the Old Testament prophets dared to raise their voices against the established order. But Visser 't Hooft hesitated. He was simply not convinced that the World Council in process of formation had a prophetic task on behalf of the churches, a task that Barth the theologian laid on him as general secretary because of the necessary situation of the war. First he had to see the opportunities and experience the urgency for himself. As the war advanced, there were situations in which he, also without any extensive consultation with others, made statements as the general secretary, clearly and in public, as in connection with the continuing destruction of the Jews.

Visser 't Hooft did not want to run ahead of the troops but, in line with his task as formulated in Utrecht in 1938, he wanted to build on the support of a large international ecumencial institute, parallel to a renewed League of Nations. Barth saw such an institute as a diplomatic talking circus that churches needed to stay far away from and attached primary value to a principled theological view of a church built on the biblical mandate. In contact with Anglicans, important partners for Visser 't Hooft in the ecumenical movement at this time, discussion on the opposition between

Figure 25 On the stairs in Geneva



Standing, from left to right: Hans, an unidentified person, Jetty, Anneke, Kees, and Wim Visser 't Hooft; sitting by the dog Miro, Francisca Hermine van Marle-Lieftinck, stepsister of Wim's mother

revelation theology and natural theology could not be avoided, but the tone of the debate remained constructive. The standpoints that Visser 't Hooft took here had major consequences for the post-war development of the ecumenical movement.

Important contributions could be made to the work among prisoners of war and refugees, including many Jews. Visser 't Hooft was available, alert, practical, and proactive. He worked with the Swiss authorities, the Dutch embassy in Bern, and with a number of private individuals, among others Jean Weidner. Staff at the World Council, including Visser 't Hooft, understood relatively early that the Nazis were attempting to exterminate the Jews. Together with the Jewish World Congress and the International Red Cross, they sounded the alarm, but it had little effect.

The ideas about European unity that circulated among the German resistance were strongly federalist and ecumenically loaded. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote his *Ethik* as a contribution to this thinking. Because of the way it worked out with the German resistance, discontinuity arose, whereby post-war thinking about Europe did not automatically build on the ideas developed during the war. Visser 't Hooft was disappointed by the repeated rejection that he as courier had to communicate to his German friends. For Adam von Trott zu Solz, the lack of an Allied answer was a blow. Visser 't Hooft saw the Allied ignoring of the German resistance as a missed chance to bring post-war Europe to unity. He could understand the reasoning of the Allies not to want, under any circumstances whatsoever, to put any pressure on the war effort of the atheistic Soviet Union, but his trust in the restoration of the unity of a Christian Europe was decisive for him. Driven by increasing urgency in the time of war, especially with respect to the persecution of the Jews and the isolation of the German resistance, Visser 't Hooft himself began to act increasingly more candidly and he also regularly spoke out politically. That was not always appreciated by some of his colleagues in the ecumenical movement. Nevertheless, this did not lead to serious breaches of trust. On the contrary, his reputation as a reliable representative of the ecumenical movement was confirmed in the difficult circumstances of the war in the view of his ecumenical contacts, and his self-confidence grew.



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4 From 'Spiritual Contact' to Political Involvement

The Swiss Road, 1942-1944

Abstract
This chapter looks at Visser 't Hooft's political involvement during the war. It shows his own vision of how the war could bring revival for reconstruction. He hoped the war would lead to a revival of the church in preparation for reconstruction. The chapter sketches his involvement in setting up the Swiss Road, the tensions between civilian and military resistance, his disappointment in the Dutch government in exile. He had wanted to concern himself with spiritual contact, *Geestelijk Contact*, between the government in exile and the people of the occupied Netherlands, contributing to reflection and repentance. His task was more than passing on messages – it was also exercising spiritual influence.

Keywords: information hub, Swiss Road, Dutch civil resistance, Advisor Dutch government in exile London

4.1 Introduction

When Germany occupied the Netherlands in May 1940, Visser 't Hooft seized the special opportunities that his post in Geneva offered to help uprooted Dutch people. His initiatives quickly attracted the attention of the embassy in Bern and members of the Dutch government in London. Early in 1942, the Prime Minister, Piet S. Gerbrandy , was personally responsible for informally making Visser 't Hooft a non-salaried governnment 'official'. He was assigned the task of improving the contact between the government in exile and the occupied Netherlands by means of a smuggling route. This operation was quickly given the name the Swiss Road. Not everyone was enthusiastic about this enterprising Protestant minister in Geneva. How was the work Visser

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't Hooft did for the Dutch government in London and his advocacy for that related to his vision and work with the churches and Christian faith? What was the effect of his vision on the role of the German resistance here? Did he allow himself to be seduced into exercising political influence while it would perhaps have been better for him if he had been a simple 'mailman'?

Much has been published on the Netherlands-Geneva-London communication channel that was active during the war.[1] Little attention was paid, however, to the religious motivation behind the involvement of Visser 't Hooft and many of his friends. The main question in this chapter concerns precisely the effect of what he called the 'Spiritual Contact' ('Geestelijk Contact') on a number of major issues that the government in exile and the Dutch resistance had to struggle with. He saw the occupation of the Netherlands as a cowardly attack, and in response made himself available as a conduit for information (4.2). The Dutch government in London was impressed by this and made grateful use of his contacts with the Netherlands under occupation (4.3). During his visit to London in 1942, he was asked by the government to set up a communication route with the Netherlands, which very quickly became known as the Swiss Road (4.4). How did the message flow and the couriers actually work in practice? (4.5). Messages started flowing, primarily from the Netherlands to London, via the Swiss Road. But there were also tensions, and Visser 't Hooft clearly chose the side of the civil and political branch of the resistance (4.6). Numerous topics came up on the Swiss Road, and Visser 't Hooft was not the simple mailman some took him to be (4.7). In the end, he became caught up in making political plans for a civil transitional government, a project with a disconcerting end (4.8). For a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission, Visser 't Hooft – along with many others who were involved – was interrogated about his work as the one ultimately responsible for the Geneva end of the Swiss Road (4.9).

4.2 'Holland outside Holland'

Visser 't Hooft saw the sudden German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940 as traitorous and a brutal, barbarous act.[2] He asked the 'why' question and wondered how people in the Netherlands experienced all they were going through. Visser 't Hooft noted that not only were the Dutch people

1 Such as De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, vol. 6 (1975), 152-156; vol. 7 (1976), 900-908.

2 Visser 't Hooft to 'Beste Vrienden', May 1940, YDS-12, 17.

astonished and could not believe what had happened, but they were also deeply engaged in self-reproach. Had they not taken the inevitability of suffering in the world enough into account? Had they been too self-confident? Was Dutch Christianity not a very narrow, 'safe' form of Christianity? Visser 't Hooft was not the only one in May 1940 who attempted to give the occupation a biblical prophetic turn as a judgment of God so that what he called 'head Christianity' would become an experiential reality. Theory had to become practice. Here, he invoked the Romantic and nationalist paradigm in the nineteenth century of a people who had learned during the Rebellion against the king of Spain in the sixteenth century what it was to trust God.

In the end, it was not a matter of patiently waiting for this to end but of developing one's spiritual resilience. Active resistance against the demonic forces that held the world in their grip was essential. Visser 't Hooft had no doubt that this war was not only a military conflict but fundamentally a spiritual struggle. There was no room for defeatism. He gave his own answer to the why question he had asked: God wanted to teach the Netherlands a lesson in order to purify the nation. They had to unlearn their false securities. The cross stood in the midst of the world and did not permit Dutch people the luxury of tending to their gardens without taking that fact of the cross into account. Superficiality and narrowmindedness needed to be cast aside. But there was hope. Whoever suffered pain for the sake of the Gospel could be a pioneer for a renewed church. For Visser 't Hooft, the appropriate course of action now was not to stay silent out of fear but to call out National Socialism for what it was.

A prophetic voice was indispensable: that meant a concrete proclamation of the Gospel. Visser 't Hooft himself felt that, in his special position, he was in 'our piece of Holland outside Holland' and called to do what he could.[3] Immediately after the occupation, Dutch people in the Dutch East Indies tried to contact their families in the Netherlands via Visser 't Hooft. Everyone needed reliable information. That led Visser 't Hooft to the idea of calling for a circular to be set up for sending information that was suitable for sharing, with the purpose of preventing alienation.

> I would like … to propose that all who receive this letter keep me informed of everything that comes to their knowledge in any way about spiritual life in Holland.[4]

3 See also: 'Een brief van Dr. Visser 't Hooft', 1940, 75-79.

4 Visser 't Hooft to 'Beste Vrienden', May 1940. YDS-12, 17: 'Ik zou […] willen voorstellen, dat allen, die dezen brief krijgen, mij op de hoogte houden van wat zij op eenigerlei wijze over geestelijk leven in Holland te weten komen.'

This was what he called 'spiritual contact'. Thus, already in May 1940, he formulated a progamme that he, and those he wrote to, also implemented. He expressly wanted this information to be more than 'small talk', and he himself would gather everything and pass it on. He himself showed what he meant with a number of quotes from current letters from various parts of the world church. For example, a German friend in Switzerland wrote: 'I'm ashamed of my people. … The 'Wilhelmus van Nassau' is really a completely different battle song than the 'Horst Wessel Song.'[5]

In the summer of 1940, messages began to flow from the Netherlands to Geneva – church calls, statements, meditations, sermons, commentaries, and articles in the Christian press about the new situation and the future. There was material from church leaders and theologians as well as from (former) politicians. Many of these people were from the NCSV. The network of the Christian youth movement, which had been built up during the interwar period, was functioning in an unprecedented way. The following people were some of those involved in this: O. Noordmans, P. Scholten, J. Eijkman, H. Colijn, G.H. Slotemaker de Bruïne, H. Kraemer, J. Koopmans, J.H. Heering, P. Idenburg, W. Banning, N. Stufkens, C.L. Patijn and J.J. Buskes. Visser 't Hooft selected what he thought was suitable, stencilled the volume, and sent it. He called the periodical *Stemmen uit Nederland*. The first number appeared in June 1940, and was sent to Dutch people in various places, especially in Switzerland, London, and India.[6]

Stemmen uit Nederland demonstrates very well what moved Visser 't Hooft. He wanted to help people in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies to reinforce their spiritual resilience by information and becoming aware of the situation. He was firmly convinced that lessons learned during the German church struggle could now help members of churches in other countries distinguish what it came down to. Visser 't Hooft himself later

5 Ibid.: 'Ich schäme mich für mein Volk. […] Das Wilhelmus von Nassauen ist doch ein ganz anderes Kampflied als das Horst Wessellied.' In an attachment to the letter to friends, Visser 't Hooft included responses from the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, from the Protestant Church in Geneva to Queen Wilhelmina, from Czechoslovakian emigrants in France, from members of the Christian student society in Riga, from Alfred de Quervain in Bern, from the English YMCA, from J.L. Hromádka at Princeton in the United States, from L. Zander connected with the Russian Theological Faculty in Paris, from A. Keller, chairman of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, and from the French Christian student society.

6 The addressees were, among others, friends in the Dutch East Indies, Prime Minister P.S. Gerbrandy, Minister A.A. van Rhijn, G. Beelaerts van Blokland, secretary to the queen, and via him Queen Wilhelmina, and Prince Bernhard, and C.J. van Sluys of The Netherlands Publishing Company in London, publisher of the London paper *Vrij Nederland*. See, among other things, World War II Era Records of the WCC, YDS-12.

wrote in the first issue of *Stemmen uit Nederland*, which is preserved in the archives of the World Council: 'this was the beginning in 1940-1941 of what later became the Swiss Road'.[7] This is a promising interpretation by himself, which explains a number of problems that would later arise. For Visser 't Hooft personally, there was no sharp line with respect to content between his work for *Stemmen uit Nederland* on the one hand and ecumenicity on the other.[8] He was impressed by the attitude of the Dutch Reformed Church.[9] In the years before the German attack, it was a weak church, divided into factions fighting each other and with a synod lacking authority that, in Visser 't Hooft's eyes, had to come from influential individuals. It was now precisely this church that showed such unity, and gave rise to a surprising language of witness and protest against the unjust acts of the occupier.

7 There were probably ten issues of *Stemmen uit Nederland* published: each number contained reports and commentaries by church leaders and prominent theologians in the Netherlands. The announcement for the synod of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands can be read in no. II (Sept.-Oct. 1940), along with Visser 't Hooft's almost surprised commentary: the church reveals itself as church – it speaks. There is also an article against the Aryan paragraph by N.H. de Graaf and the statement of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Visser 't Hooft reported that many had been arrested, including the ministers Eijkman, Berkhof, and K. Schilder. No. III (Nov. 1940-Jan. 1941) was dedicated to the idea of 'nation and a national community,' with articles by Idenburg, Kohnstamm, and Banning. Kraemer wrote about Romans 9-11 in an article called 'Het raadsel der geschiedenis' (The Riddle of History). In No. IV (Feb. 1941), the CHU (Christian Historical Union) politican G.E. van Walsum wrote about the 'new order' in politics. There were also articles by, among others, Koopmans, Stufkens and the theologian K.H. Miskotte. In No.V (April 1941) Van Walsum wrote a 'Kroniek in Woord en Wereld' (Chronicle in Word and World) about the future possibilities in politics. Kraemer wrote about the fact that the church was speaking: 'what is special here is not the what but that the church spoke.' Nos. VI (May 1941) and VII (June 1941) looked at spiritual revival, with articles by Banning and H.C. Touw, and in an 'in memorium' for the theologian and CHU (Christian Historical Union) politician J.R. Slotemaker de Bruïne, who had died in 1941, by Idenburg. C.L. Patijn wrote about the Una Sancta and the people in No. VII; that issue also contained articles by Koopmans and Buskes, K. Strijd, and two pulpit messages, Koopmans (Lunters Circle): 'Wat wij wel en wat wij niet geloven' (What We Do and Do Not Believe). No. IX (Nov. 1941), contained an article inspired by the Barmen Statement of 1934. No. X (Feb. 1942) contained the protest submitted to the government by the joint churches in 1941, there was also a report on the dissolution of the NCSV and an article by P. Scholten about faith in the lives of the Dutch people. Miskotte wrote about the new paganism, and Kraemer about Christian faith and the modern human being.

8 The historian who did extensive research on the Netherlands during the Second World War, Loe de Jong, either missed this aspect or he was not interested in it, which entails that it was more difficult for him to understand the further course of events. Visser 't Hooft does not appear in B. Smits' biography of De Jong. Smits, *Loe de Jong, 1914-2005. Historicus met een missie* (2014).

9 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Life of a Church under Nazi Occupation (The Story of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1940 and 1941)', 1942, YDS-12, 18.

The two pulpit messages of 27 October 1940 gave, according to Visser 't Hooft, a clearly comprehensible statement on spiritual freedom and Christian upbringing and on how the Jews were being isolated by the occupier. Inspired by the German church struggle, there was a public protest based on Scripture against anti-Semitic legislation. Visser 't Hooft asserted that there was still a long way to go to heal the Reformed Church of division and bourgeois conservatism, but this church was on the way to becoming a true *ecclesia militans*, a militant church, once again.[10] Visser 't Hooft attributed this revival primarily to the effect of the views of the theologian K.H. Miskotte who had raised his powerful voice in 1939 with his book *Edda en Thora*, in which he pointed to Nazism as the new form of paganism. Hendrik Kraemer spoke of a great time for people who could work on the church. The whole situation had a deeper meaning. Visser 't Hooft could only agree: 'It's a wonderful thing, isn't it? That people are asking about the Church from all sides in a new way and that we can see something of a true revival of the Church.'[11] The war brought a new sense of urgency and opened up an international perspective, including for church members who had not previously been concerned with it at all. Paul Scholten, Frederik van Asbeck, Conny Patijn, and Jopie Eijkman were loyal friends whom Visser 't Hooft leaned on. But he hoped that precisely now others would become interested in ecumenicity. He saw God at work in everything.

4.3 From Conduit to Government Advisor

The Protestant lawyer and economist Aat A. van Rhijn (1892-1986) was an old acquaintance of Visser 't Hooft. Shortly before the German invasion, Van Rhijn was appointed CHU (Christian Historical Union) Minister for Agriculture and Fishing, which he would remain until May 1941. But, in fact, he worked during this period with almost no staff at the National Audit Office. He was one of Visser 't Hooft's addressees in London. Via Van Rhijn, the information also reached Prime Minister Piet Gerbrandy (1885-1961), in whom Visser 't Hooft saw a kindred spirit. He had worked with Gerbrandy's

10 Cf. the two World Council works published by the council itself called 'Ecclesia Militans', 1 and 2, respectively: 'Die Kirche spricht zur Welt' and 'Die Verkündigung der Kirche im Krieg', 1942.

11 Visser 't Hooft to A.B.C. Dudok de Wit, 4 November 1941, YDS-12, 59: 'Het is toch een heerlijk ding, dat er nu van alle kanten op een nieuwe wijze naar de Kerk gevraagd wordt en dat wij iets mogen zien van echte vernieuwing van de Kerk.'

son in the NCSV.[12] In November 1941 he sent Gerbrandy, in addition to *Stemmen uit Nederland*, some documents on the student resistance and Dutch complaints on Radio Oranje. Since 28 July 1940 a Dutch broadcast via the BBC in London could be heard in the Netherlands for 15 minutes every day at 9:00 pm. He found Gerbrandy's radio speeches good because, Visser 't Hooft said, they 'so clearly portrayed the spiritual background of the current struggle'. For him, however, this contrasted sharply with the general tone of Radio Oranje and the paper published in London, *Vrij Nederland*.[13]

> As a whole, it was not clear there what the Church meant for our countrymen. I and many others would be very happy if the editors of *Vrij Nederland* could be given a hint in this direction.[14]

Why were more reports not taken over from that other *Vrij Nederland* published clandestinely in the Netherlands? In London, they did not seem to understand, Visser 't Hooft concluded, that a spiritual struggle had commenced. He pointed to the resistance of universities and churches against the Aryan paragraph and the isolation of the Jews. Visser 't Hooft thought of the brochure *Wat wij wel en wat wij niet gelooven* that the Reformed minister Jan Koopmans, the Bible Study secretary of the NCSV since 1939, had published anonymously in 1941.[15] He wrote to his contact at the secret service, G. Beelaerts van Blokland:

> With respect to the Jews – it doesn't matter if they are nice people or not; it has to do with a principle that is inseparably connected to our faith and our tradition. I am grateful for and actually proud that two universities in the Netherlands [Leiden and Delft] have joined on *this point* and that the church has declared a 'non possumus' on this point. I'm not a Jew lover but believe with many in Holland that the question of our attitude towards anti-Semitism has become a *test* of where we actually belong.[16]

12 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 17 March 1942, YDS-12, 60.

13 Two different publications, both called *Vrij Nederland*, were published during his period, one in London and one in the occupied Netherlands.

14 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 18 November 1941, NIOD 186g-1. Visser 't Hooft to A.H.J. Lovink, 4 and 16 September 1942, NIOD 186g-2 A.H.J. Lovink to Visser 't Hooft, 8 October 1942. NIOD 186g-2: 'Het wordt daar in het geheel niet duidelijk, wat de Kerken nu voor onze landgenooten beteekenen. Het zou mij en vele anderen verheugen, wanneer aan de redactie van 'Vrij Nederland' een wenk in deze richting gegeven zou worden.'

15 Koopmans, 'Bijna te laat', 1940, in: Touw, *Het verzet der Hervormde kerk*, II (1946), 209-215 and Koopmans 'Wat wij wel en wat wij niet gelooven', 1941, in: ibid., 227-231.

16 Visser 't Hooft to G. Beelaerts van Blokland, 3 April 1941, YDS-12, 56: 'Wat de Joden betreft – het gaat er niet om, of ze aangename of onaangename menschen zijn; het gaat om een principe,

The church should not become a political centre, but 'the Church of Calvin and of Marnix' could not keep silent either when it concerned the realization or not of the freedom that was anchored in the Christian faith.[17] Visser 't Hooft wrote:

> A Church that is silent at such a time would be doing exactly what Goebbels wants when he says: 'for us the earth; for the church heaven."[18]

Prime Minister Gerbrandy saw a valuable contact in Visser 't Hooft and encouraged him. As a result, Visser 't Hooft gradually became more of an advisor for the Dutch government in exile. Though it might be a 'spiritual struggle' that he wanted to fight, he did not shun striving for political influence. Professor Paul Scholten, a lawyer at the University of Amsterdam, gave him information on the basis of which Visser 't Hooft put together descriptions for Gerbrandy of various authoritative groups in Dutch society that were preparing for liberation. He did not do this in a neutral way, dismissing various groups: the one was not important enough, another was too authoritarian. But the government had to take the group Scholten seriously. This group

> is a group of leaders of six parties: A.R., C.H., R.K., Lib., V.D., S.D.A.P. These leaders work most closely together, and old feuds have been shoved entirely to the background. It also includes some figures from trade and industry. This group still has close contact with the people in different areas. It is believed that that Dr. Colijn would work with this group at this time if he was not in prison.[19]

dat onafscheidelijk verbonden is aan ons geloof en onze traditie. Ik ben er dankbaar voor en eigenlijk trotsch op, dat twee Universiteiten in Nederland [Leiden en Delft] op *dit punt* den strijd aangebonden hebben en de kerk op dit punt een 'non possumus' uitgesproken heeft. Ik ben geen Jodenminnaar, maar geloof met velen in Holland, dat de vraag van onze houding tegenover het anti-semitisme een *test* geworden is, waar wij eigenlijk thuis hooren.'

17 With 'the Church of Calvin [John Calvin] and of Marnix [Filips van Marnix van Sint-Aldegonde]' Visser 't Hooft referred to the Calvinist tradition that played an important part in the 16th century Dutch revolt against the King of Spain.

18 Ibid.: 'Een Kerk, die op zulk een moment zwijgt, zou precies doen, wat Goebbels wil, wanneer hij zegt: "aan ons de aarde, aan de kerk de hemel".'

19 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 12 November and 15 December 1941, NIOD 186g-1: '...is een groep van leiders der zes partijen: A.R., C.H., R.K., Lib., V.D., S.D.A.P. Deze leiders werken nu ten nauwste samen en oude vetes zijn geheel op de achtergrond geraakt. Hierbij zijn ook eenige figuren uit handel en industrie. Deze groep heeft nog steeds nauw contact met het volk in zijn verschillende geledingen. Men meent te kunnen zeggen, dat Dr. Colijn op het oogenblik met deze groep zou samenwerken wanneer hij niet gevangen was.' Translator's note: The political parties

According to Visser 't Hooft, Colijn's popularity had returned now he seemed to have abandoned the thoughts of collaboration in the brochure in which he had called upon the Dutch people in June 1940 to accept the German occupation.[20] Colijn, however, was not suited, in Visser 't Hooft's mind, to lead a post-war Netherlands.

It continues to be striking how Visser 't Hooft did not hesitate, in his letters to Gerbrandy, to give strong interpretations that were controlling in nature. For instance, in 1941, he reported that Prince Bernhard was still extraordinarily popular, that the Dutch Union should have a place in the reflections on the future of the Netherlands but could not play a major role and that there had to be quite major tensions between the members of the so-called 'triumvirate' – (the authoritarian former Governor-General B.C. de Jonge, the former general W. Roëll, and the former president of De Nederlandsche Bank L.J.A. Trip) – that attempted to give direction to one of the resistance groups.[21] Like-minded individuals in occupied Holland, of which most were supportive of *Vrij Nederland* or had worked for it, also supported social and political reform in a moderate Christian socialistic way and opposed an authoritarian policy that would push aside traditional Dutch spiritual traditions. How would Germany emerge from the war? And how much room would the Allies allow for the restoration of pre-war situations? Visser 't Hooft implored Gerbrandy in 1941 to block all 'revenge politics' intent on destroying Germany. In his view, any possibility that the German extremist groups would link up with communist or Bolshevik elements had to be avoided. That would only lead to the further disruption of Europe. He believed that a positive attitude could be expected from the Dutch in the rebuilding of a new 'European community', which could best be organised as a federation.

The Dutch government in exile in London, meanwhile, did not impress Visser 't Hooft very much. He did understand that not much more could be done than to engage in resistance against Germany and to encourage resistance against the Japanese after the Dutch East Indies were occupied, to administer the free Dutch territories overseas areas as well as they could and

referred to are: Anti Revolutionaire Partij (Gereformeerd) (Anti-Revolutionary Party), Christelijk Historische Unie (Hervormd) (Christian Historical Union), Rooms Katholieke Staatspartij (Roman Catholic State Party), Liberale Partij (Liberal Party), Vrijzinnig Democratisch Verbond, (Free-thinking Democratic League), and the Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij (Social Democratic Workers' Party).

20 Cf. Colijn, *Op de grens van twee werelden* (1940).

21 Cf. Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 12 November 1941 (handwritten letter, date added later by Visser 't Hooft), NIOD, 186g-1.

attempt to prepare themselves for the liberation of the Nederlands and what had to be done then. But Visser 't Hooft missed vision and charisma among the ministers. With no parliament, legislation was simply a matter of announcing royal decrees in which Queen Wilhelmina was personally involved. Visser 't Hooft had great admiration for her, and he found Gerbrandy to be a fine exception among the ministers. The cabinet members squabbled among themselves and achieved little. Almost no-one in the Netherlands, according to Visser 't Hooft, understood why H. van Boeijen (CHU) was replaced as Minister of War by O.C.A. van Lidth de Jeude (Liberale Staatspartij/Liberal State Party) in September 1941. This was no time for narrow-minded games of party politics and personal issues. Visser 't Hooft assured Gerbrandy that he passed on everything that reached him as literally as possible 'so that you could have correct intelligence.' But he did colour the information he passed on. For instance, he did not hesitate to point out repeatedly to the Dutch government that it would be good if a key role was reserved for the churches in the post-war Netherlands. The churches were, after all, completely engaged in gaining new authority among the Dutch people, even among the socialists.[22]

In the meantime, he kept up his critique of Radio Oranje. Since the summer of 1940, he constantly heard from the Netherlands that the broadcasts caused more irritation than encouragement. Cursing the occupier or 'inciting the Dutch people' seemed to be the only thing they could do. Visser 't Hooft warned both the government and his friends in London a number of times that people in the Netherlands wanted something more than propaganda against the Nazis. The Germans took care of the incitement part themselves. According to Visser 't Hooft, people in the Netherlands wanted a different tone, 'calm reflections' that gave a clear picture of the situation and helped people to prepare for the necessary decisions that had to be made with an eye to the future. Was it understood in London that the Dutch people were undergoing a 'spiritual revival'?[23] It was the moral strength of the Dutch people that had to be built up, and here the government was not succeeding in playing any kind of meaningful role, in Visser 't Hooft's view. Without showing any of the reticence that would have been appropriate on his part, since he himself had lived in Geneva since 1924, Visser 't Hooft lectured the government indirectly via the person of Aat van Rhijn, in 1942:

> It is simply a somewhat tragic law, which emerges whenever a certain emigration occurs, that a certain lack of contact arises between those

22 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy in London, 15 December 1941, NIOD, 186g-1.

23 Visser 't Hooft to B. Bierens de Haan in London, 16 December 1941, YDS-12, 56.

> who have emigrated and their compatriots. I observe the same thing, although often in an even sharper way, in France. Those who have very clearly chosen resistance are also extremely critical of what they hear from their compatriots in London. As far as those who have emigrated are concerned, they can actually only respond by continually attempting to imagine the situation at home and to abandon the images they have from the past as much as possible. An amiable, calm nation like the Dutch, who are suddenly going through such tragic experiences, has to change and can no longer be compared with the nation prior to 1940. They think in new categories and have cast off many old categories, and when people in London use those old categories, the Dutch people become slightly irritated.[24]

The only Dutch person who, in his view at this time, struck the right tone in London was the queen. In the circa fifty radio speeches that she gave during the war, Wilhelmina regularly, without any reservation, identified the Dutch national cause with that of God. The unnuanced tone that he would perhaps have found inappropriate in peacetime seemed to Visser 't Hooft to be the right one in this time of war. While the views of Wilhelmina and those of Visser 't Hooft would later diverge during the war, at this time he recognised the authority that was now needed in her.

> It is remarkable that She seems to feel intuitively what Her people need. At least, I haven't heard any other speeches from London that can be compared with Hers on this score. It is difficult to describe where the difference is. There is something radical in Her calls that we miss in others. When She speaks, it becomes clear that we aren't involved simply in a political struggle but a life-and-death spiritual struggle, and the major

24 Visser 't Hooft to A.A. van Rhijn, 20 January1942, NIOD 186g-5: 'Het is nu eenmaal een ietwat tragische wet, die zich overal voltrekt waar een zekere emigratie plaats vindt, dat tusschen de geëmigreerden en hun landgenooten thuis een zeker gebrek aan contact ontstaat. Ik constateer precies hetzelfde, ofschoon dikwijls nog in veel feller vorm, in Frankrijk. Ook degenen, die daar zeer duidelijk gekozen hebben voor den weerstand zijn uiterst kritisch over de stemmen, die zij van hun landgenooten uit London te hooren krijgen. Van den kant van de geëmigreerden kan men daar eigenlijk alleen op reageeren door steeds weer te pogen zich in de situatie thuis meer in te denken en zich zooveel mogelijk los te maken van de beelden, die men uit het verleden heeft. Een gemoedelijk rustig volk als het Hollandsche volk, dat opeens door zulke tragische ervaringen heengaat, moet wel veranderen en is niet meer te vergelijken met het volk van voor 1940. Men denkt in nieuwe categorieën en heeft veel oude categorieën afgeschaft. Wordt dan uit London toch in die oude categorieën gesproken, dan is men licht geïrriteerd.'

> thing is that at the same time She speaks in a truly Christian way and in no way becomes sentimental.[25]

Seeing the queen as a dedicated mother with authority, able to truly encourge her people and to motivate them to persevere and do the right thing, corresponded with his view of the fatherhood of God.

If Visser 't Hooft argued that churches in the occupied Netherlands were playing an increasingly important role, he did not simply mean that the churches were full on Sunday mornings. An intense debate was occurring among church members about the future of the Netherlands and Europe. What was new here was that people were searching for and finding dialogue partners outside of their own groups. The Reformed journalist and resistance member Henk van Randwijk, who was closely involved in the underground paper *Vrij Nederland*, spoke of the many nightly meetings that people left afterwards with the 'glow of conviction'.[26]

> Many (and I with them) thought for a moment then that a new Europe was being born in those dark years, a new Europe that was different from the one Hitler had conceived, a Europe that would be again become aware of its past and identifying mark. The eruption of the Hitlerian underworld was not experienced as an invasion from without but as a disease from within, which would indeed have to be combatted from without but could only be healed from within. That is also a form of being 'with each other'.[27]

25 Ibid.: 'Het is merkwaardig, dat Zij intuïtief schijnt te voelen wat Haar volk noodig heeft. Ik heb tenminste nog geen andere toespraken uit London gehoord, die in dit opzicht met de Hare vergeleken kunnen worden. Het is moeilijk te beschrijven waar hem dat in zit. Er zit iets radicaals in Haar oproepen, dat men bij de anderen mist. Wanneer Zij spreekt wordt het duidelijk, dat wij niet maar in een politieke strijd zitten, maar in een geestelijke strijd op leven en dood, en het groote is, dat Zij tegelijk echt christelijk spreekt en op geenerlei wijze sentimenteel wordt.'

26 Cf. Van Randwijk, *In de schaduw van gisteren* (1967), 93: 'The churches were full. Books on history and civilisation were sold out. Huizinga, Jaspers, Steinhausen, Y Gasset, Roth, Chesterton, De Pascoaes, Barth, and many others were not only read but also discussed.' ('De kerken waren vol. Boeken over geschiedenis en beschaving uitverkocht. Huizinga, Jaspers, Steinhausen, Y Gasset, Roth, Chesterton, De Pascoaes, Barth en vele anderen werden niet alleen gelezen maar ook besproken.')

27 Ibid., 93-94: 'Velen hebben toen een ogenblik gedacht (en ik met hen) dat er in die donkere jaren een nieuw Europa bezig was geboren te worden, een ander nieuw-Europa dan Hitler meende, een Europa dat zich zijn afkomst en merkteken opnieuw bewust zou zijn geworden. De uitbarsting van de Hitleriaanse onderwereld werd niet ervaren als een inbreuk van buitenaf, maar als een ziekte van *binnenuit*, die weliswaar van buitenaf bestreden moest worden, maar alleen van binnenuit genezen kon worden. Dat is ook een vorm van 'bij elkaar' zijn.' Cf. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 177-178.

The revived churches would be indispensable in the new Europe.

With his sudden attack on the Soviet Union at the beginning of the summer of 1941, Hitler seemed to have plunged into an unwinnable war. The Russian winter began before Moscow had been captured. When the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 brought the United States into the war, and Germany and Italy sided with Japan on 11 December and also declared war on the United States, many thought that Hitler's fate was sealed. Visser 't Hooft felt called to play a meaningful role in this crucial period in Dutch history. The – in his view – not very competent government in exile needed assistance. More and more people seemed to have a fundamental idea of what faith involved. Membership in a particular church or not became less important, and it became instead a question of a just society that God could bless.[28]

According to Visser 't Hooft, people had discovered in this war that their striving for more autonomy, already described by Homer, was doomed to end in serving the power of evil. In contrast, serving God through Christ meant – also according to him – a precious balance, serving the highest good for human beings. The church could offer the balance that the world needed.

> Through the great struggles of our day the Church is called to become the Church once more. The only adequate response to the great disasters of the present time is the 'edification' of the Church.[29]

Visser 't Hooft did not shy away in this context from explaining to the Dutch government in London what was good for the Netherlands. The people needed to hear the government present its own views courageously. Why did the Dutch government not come with its own vision of the place of the Netherlands in post-war Europe? Everything was now being left to the violence of the Allies, and the dangers of the continuing escalation of violence were real. If they continued on the path the Allies were on, the war would indeed be won, but Visser 't Hooft had his doubts about whether it would end in a sustainable peace. The Allied countries had to become more aware of the problem. He regularly received reports that pointed to the strength of the German resistance, largely Christian in motivation, that an attack on Hitler was being planned, and that the Allies, in his view, had to take up contact with that resistance.[30]

28 Visser 't Hooft to A.A. van Rhijn, 20 January 1942, NIOD 186g-5.

29 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Function of a Christian in the World', 1942, 257.

30 See also 3.8 and 3.9.

Gerbrandy appreciated Visser 't Hooft but put him in his place in January 1942. The prime minister defended recent changes in the cabinet that had met with criticism from the Netherlands. These changes were not the result of 'personal issues': Could Visser 't Hooft convey that to his contacts in the Netherlands? He promised that the content of Radio Oranje would be looked at but defended the necessity in time of war for militant radio broadcasts, i.e., propaganda. He also defended the policy that the Dutch government had not yet appointed any supreme authority in the occupied Netherlands so that it itself would play the main role during liberation. That was intentional. The government hoped, in any event, to return as soon as possible after liberation in order to take on the task of leadership itself. Every other solution had to be rejected as being 'most dangerous'. With respect to Visser 't Hooft's ideas as well concerning a quick reintegration of post-war Germany into Europe, Gerbrandy had to confront him with completely different views held by the Dutch government.

> With respect to the attitude projected in your letters concerning Germany, they do not square completely with the views of the Government. The Government is of the opinion that something else needs to be done for the time being than to speak of the 'equality' of the German people who have surrendered heart and soul to Nazism. A new movement is beginning again to proclaim already now the German propaganda, if they may suffer a defeat, of 'the poor darlings theory'. But, for our part, it would not testify to our having a great deal of insight if we forget that pan-Germanism is a danger that was not born yesterday and Nazism nothing other than the political realisation of the notion of the 'All-German Federation', which goes back to the previous century. The Government does not consider it incorrect but indeed premature to make a distinction now between 'the impoverished mistreated German people' and its evil leaders. It believes it can conclude the same from your own line of thought. With you, it sees the possibility that a large group of Germans do not agree with the current state of affairs, but the same thing was the case in 1918 and, the Germans nonetheless proved themselves ready to accept the one aggression after the other within 20 years. What we must think about above all are the oppressed people of Europe, for whom the German Reich has brought a flood of injustice and destruction that history has never before seen. It seems to be an immense deficiency when the most supreme concept, that of 'justice',

> hides behind humanitarian ethical kindness that has often brewed nothing else than confusion and injustice.[31]

Gerbrandy informed Visser 't Hooft that the government did indeed share Visser 't Hooft's view towards ideas that it should give leadership to the new Europe, but not his optimism concerning a Christian basis for a quick post-war reconciliation with Germany. Gerbrandy speaks in this connection of an inappropriate 'humanitarian ethical kindness'. The German people had supported a state of unprecedented violence, a state that must be defeated at all costs. But the prime minister's intention was not to discourage Visser 't Hooft, and soon thereafter he invited him to come to London for a further briefing whenever it was convenient. Visser 't Hooft liked that idea. Not only did he see a good opportunity to improve his relations with the Dutch government, but such a visit would also be important for his work as secretary of the World Council. It could advance the work being done among prisoners of war and refugees. He might even be able to do something for his contacts in the German resistance.

At the end of February 1942, he wrote to Phlip Idenburg in the occupied Netherlands and therefore in guarded terms:

> It is necessary for us to do everything to keep the people there [in London] informed about what the best at home are concerned about. I primarily need ammunition to make it clear to father Piet [Gerbrandy] that there

31 P.S. Gerbrandy to Visser 't Hooft, 14 January 1942, NIOD 186g-1: 'Wat de in Uw brieven geprojecteerde houding ten aanzien van Duitschland betreft, zij strookt niet geheel met de opvattingen der Regeering. Deze is van meening, dat er voorloopig iets anders te doen is dan te spreken over "gelijkwaardigheid" voor het Duitsche volk, dat zich met lijf en ziel aan het nazi-dom heeft overgeleverd. Er begint zich wederom een strooming te uiten, die de Duitsche propaganda om, als zij een nederlaag mogelijk acht, reeds thans "the poor darlings theory" te verkondigen, maar het zou onzerzijds niet van veel inzicht getuigen te vergeten, dat het pan-germanisme een gevaar is, dat niet van gisteren dateert en dat het nazi-dom niets anders is dan de politieke verwerkelijking van de gedachten van de "All Deutscher Bund", die al uit de vorige eeuw dateert. De Regeering acht het zoo niet onjuist, dan toch wel praematuur, nu al weer een scheiding te maken tusschen "het verarmde mishandelde Duitsche volk" en zijn booze leiding. Zij meent hetzelfde te mogen afleiden uit Uw eigen gedachtengang. Zij erkent met U de mogelijkheid, dat een groote groep Duitschers het niet eens is met den huidigen gang van zaken, maar hetzelfde deed zich in 1918 voor en desalniettemin bleek het Duitsche volk binnen de twintig jaar weer bereid de eene agressie na de andere te aanvaarden. Waaraan wel en bovenal gedacht moet worden is, aan de vertrapte volken van Europa, over wie een vloed van onrecht en verwoesting door het Duitsche Rijk is gebracht gelijk de historie niet heeft gekend. Het schijnt een ontzaglijk tekort, wanneer het allerhoogste begrip, dat van "rechtvaardigheid" zou schuil gaan onder humanitair ethische lievigheid, die dikwijls niets anders dan verwarring en onrecht heeft gebrouwen.'

> is no general condemnation of whole peoples. And also to show on which concrete points the future should differ radically from the past. Therefore, continue to send me everything on this that you can. It will be put to good purpose. I have to be able to show via this that I'm not only speaking for myself nor for a few isolated idealists but actually for a responsible group of spiritual leaders. It is amazing that those who are not close to the fire are often more 'die-hard' than those who fight day in day out.[32]

Visser 't Hooft understood that the Dutch government in London was afraid of losing control if others in the occupied Netherlands started advertising themselves in the underground as the future transitional government.[33] In that way, however, they played into the hands of the more military forms of resistance, and strong civilian initiatives were discouraged. With respect to Germany, he deplored Gerbrandy's refusal to make a distinction between deceivers and the deceived. His German conversation partners like Bonhoeffer and Von Trott zu Solz were risking their lives. In March 1942, Visser attempted, once again in vain, to convince Gerbrandy that the Allies were playing a dangerous game with the future of Europe with their goals of Germany's collapse.

In the meantime, Radio Oranje continued to broadcast war propaganda, and his contacts in the Netherlands told Visser 't Hooft that they still missed 'a clear religious sound'. Visser 't Hooft swore to Gerbrandy that it was not really necessary to turn Radio Oranje into 'an NCRV' (Dutch Christian Broadcasting Corporation). It was just that people in the Netherlands needed inspiring leadership from London. He emphasised that this question really did not originate only in the circles called 'Christian' before 1940.

> Our whole people, including the socialists, are becoming aware that in the end it has to do with spiritual values. … The main thing, however, is to give our compatriots the feeling that the spiritual struggle they are

32 Visser 't Hooft to P. Idenburg, 27 February 1942, NIOD 186-5: 'Het is nodig dat we alles doen om de menschen daar [in London] op de hoogte te houden van wat er bij de besten thuis omgaat. Ik heb vooral ammunitie noodig om het vader Piet [Gerbrandy] duidelijk te maken, dat men er niet komt met globale veroordeling van geheele volken. En verder ook om te laten zien op welke concrete punten de toekomst van het verleden ingrijpend zal moeten verschillen. Blijf me dus op dit gebied alles sturen, wat je kunt. 't Wordt goed gebruikt. Ik moet in dezen aan kunnen toonen, dat ik niet in eigen naam alleen, ook niet alleen namens enkele geïsoleerde idealisten, doch werkelijk namens een verantwoordelijke groep geestelijke leiders spreek. Wonderlijk is, dat degenen die niet in het vuur staan, dikwijls meer die-hard zijn, dan degenen, die dag in dag uit strijden.'

33 Visser 't Hooft to F.M. van Asbeck, 27 February 1942, NIOD 186g-5.

> fighting is one piece of the great spiritual struggle taking place in so many countries.[34]

Radio Oranje and the London *Vrij Nederland* would do well, according to Visser 't Hooft, to completely abandon the propaganda tone and actually try to speak or to write about the war from that point on in a deep way.

> The big question is nevertheless this: whether it is understood that Hitler is really a scourge of God, a demonic instrument that God is using to clear away an infinite amount of pride. National Socialism does not have the least bit of positive significance, it is completely non-creative, and the new order does not exist. But it does have a very great negative significance.[35]

He did not want to accept that the Dutch government was entirely committed to the Allied war objectives and neither wanted to nor could deviate from that.

4.4 Visit to London, 1942

With a diplomatic passport in his possession, Visser 't Hooft began his trip to London on 27 April 1942. He needed to take the slow train through Chêne-Bougeries, where the line followed the Chemin des Voirons, where he would later live, the only road between Geneva and France at that time.[36] According to his papers, he was travelling as a representative of the Red Cross and the Ecumenical Commission for the Chaplaincy Service to Prisoners of War. He travelled by train via the non-occupied part of France, Spain, and Portugal.[37] On the way, he had meetings with various French church

34 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 17 March 1942, NIOD 186g-1: 'Ons geheele volk, de socialisten incluis, is bezig zich ervan bewust te worden, dat het in laatste instanties om geestelijke waarden gaat. […] Hoofdzaak is toch wel, om onze landgenooten het gevoel te geven, dat de geestelijke strijd, die zij strijden, een stuk is van de groote geestelijke worsteling, die nu in zoovele landen plaats vindt.'

35 Visser 't Hooft to A.A. van Rhijn, 17 March 1942, NIOD 186g-5: 'De groote vraag is toch wel deze, of men begrepen heeft, dat Hitler werkelijk een gesel Gods is, een demonisch instrument, dat God gebruikt om oneindig veel trots op te ruimen. Het Nationaal-Socialisme heeft niet de geringste positieve beteekenis, het is volslagen non-creatief, en de nieuwe orde bestaat niet. Maar het heeft wel een heel groote negatieve beteekenis.'

36 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 december 1977, Sound and Vision Archives .

37 Visser 't Hooft to J.J. Bosch van Rosenthal, 8 April 1942, World War II Records of the WCC.

leaders and resistance people. The latter gave him reports to take with him, intended for the French government in exile under General de Gaulle. In his diplomatic bag, he also had the memorandum from Von Trott zu Solz, sent on behalf of the German resistance to the English government.[38] He arrived in Lisbon via Madrid and there flew with KLM to Bristol on 4 May and took a room at Brown's Hotel in London, where Gerbrandy was also staying. The two got on well together personally. Visser 't Hooft rejected Gerbrandy's view of the war as if it was a kind of crusade of Christian countries against a Germany that was in the thrall of paganism.[39] But that did not prevent a sense of comradeship arising between them. Together with Gerbrandy's secretary, the Roman Catholic Pieter Kasteel, the Reformed (Gereformeerde) Gerbrandy and the (Swiss) Reformed Visser 't Hooft had long conversations in the hotel in the evenings on the most diverse subjects, not least of all theology. Karl Barth was admired by all of them. Visser 't Hooft did find Gerbrandy decisive and a good conversation partner, but not a politician with an eye for the problems with which the post-war Netherlands would be confronted. He wrote about Gerbrandy to his friend Van Asbeck in the Netherlands: 'Pieter is much better than his letters. Although he is not a very large man, he is a stalwart man who knows who he is.'[40]

In this amicable atmosphere, Visser 't Hooft tried to remind Gerbrandy of his responsibility. He wanted to convince him that there was a difference between a pure nationalistic motive and an ideological motive for winning the war. Nationalistic sentiments belonged to the past in his view, and resistance against tyranny undergirded by belief was the future. A radical reorientation of socio-political life was inevitable. 'More was needed for that than just feeling "national".'[41] In his own person, Visser 't Hooft embodied both the fatherland-nationalistic motif and the internationalistic European orientation. This paradox was recognisable in the resistance and and also played a major role in ecumenicity.

Like many who travelled to England, in 1942 Visser 't Hooft was invited to a personal audience with Queen Wilhelmina, who had made a great impression on him with her combativeness.[42]

38 See 3.9.

39 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 138.

40 Visser 't Hooft to F.M. van Asbeck, 2 July 1942.

41 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 7 May 1942, NIOD 186g-5: 'Daarvoor is meer noodig dan "nationaal" te voelen.' The letter is neither signed nor addressed.

42 He also met Prince Bernhard a few times. Visser 't Hooft to F.M. van Asbeck, 2 July 1942. NIOD 186g-5: 'He continues to be a pleasant man, but there is more than just pleasantness. In any case, he belongs completely with the family and is full of energy, which is not always easy

> She lives with her whole being and thinking with her family members [her compatriots]. It is impressive to note that she, more than anyone around here, intuitively feels what is going on with her people. She interrogated me as if it was an exam. No one should say that she is old and creaky. Her energy is admirable, and she now dominates the family situation more than ever. That is apparent in all kinds of ways. None of her uncles [ministers] can stand in her shadow spiritually, and she thus sets the tone in many areas. There is some truth in a somewhat naive remark that her son-in-law made to me when he said about one of the uncles: 'He is good, for he does precisely what Mother says.' It can indeed be seen that she has been through a lot, but she has apparently worked through it internally. We also talked of spiritual things, and it is remarkable to see how personal and strong her convictions are in this area. She has apparently suffered very much earlier from the church quarrels and has thus retreated to a biblical Christianity outside the church.[43]

He got the chance to say what he meant in a spiritually edifying message for the Netherlands on Whit Monday, 1942, when a sermon by Visser 't Hooft was broadcast over the radio from London.[44]

Gerbrandy saw a chance in Visser 't Hooft to structurally and concretely improve the defective communication lines between London and the Netherlands. He asked him to come up with a plan. Tony (A.H.J.) Lovink, an old friend from university from his time in Leiden, who had been appointed secretary of the Department of War shortly before, was requested to help in this during his stay in London.[45] Lovink understood

to guide into constructive paths.' Blijft een gezellige man, maar er zit toch wel wat meer bij dan alleen maar gezelligheid. Hij hoort in ieder geval heelemaal bij de familie en is vol energie, die niet altijd gemakkelijk in constructieve banen is te leiden.'

43 Visser 't Hooft to F.M. van Asbeck, 2 July 1942, NIOD 186g-5: 'Zij leeft met haar hele wezen en gedachten bij haar familieleden [landgenoten]. Het is indrukwekkend te merken, dat zij meer dan wie ook in haar omgeving intuïtief aanvoelt wat er bij de haren omgaat. Zij heeft mij uit zitten vragen als bij een examen. Laat niemand zeggen dat zij oud en krakerig wordt. Haar energie is bewonderenswaardig en zij domineert nu meer dan ooit de familie situatie. Dat blijkt op allerlei wijzen. Geen der ooms [ministers] kan geestelijk in haar schaduw staan en zoo geeft zij op menig gebied den toon aan. Er steekt eenige waarheid in een ietwat naïeve opmerking die haar schoonzoon tegen mij maakte toen hij over een van de ooms zeide: "die is goed, want hij doet precies wat moeder zegt". Wel is te merken, dat zij veel doorgemaakt heeft, maar zij heeft het blijkbaar innerlijk verwerkt. Wij spraken ook over geestelijke dingen, en het is merkwaardig te zien, hoe persoonlijk en krachtig haar overtuigingen op dit gebied zijn. Zij heeft blijkbaar vroeger erg geleden onder de kerkelijke twisten en zich daarom teruggetrokken op een Bijbelsch christendom buiten de kerk om.'

44 The author of this book was unable to locate the text of this Pentecost meditation by Visser 't Hooft.

45 See also Verhoor Visser 't Hooft door Commissie Cleveringa, 1946-1950, National Archive 31.

Visser 't Hooft's criticism of the Dutch government and Radio Oranje, and together they set up a plan. The most important points of this plan were (1) reinforcement of the spiritual contact between the Netherlands and London; (2) notifying prominent individuals in the Netherlands of government plans; (3) collaboration with the contact centre under the directorship of Visser 't Hooft with the embassy in Bern that it concerned: (a) 'the gathering and processing of information on the trends of thought in the Netherlands, the resistance to National Socialism, the conflict in the church and the educational system, the exchange of ideas on the major lines of the political and social development after the war, and the fundamental attitude with respect to Germany'; (b) sending on books, periodicals, and summaries published in the Netherlands; (c) passing on information about the government policies for the present and the future to the Netherlands; (d) the leadership and responsibility for the contact centre in Switzerland lay with the Department of General Warfare in London.[46] The plan conceived by Lovink and Visser 't Hooft also provided standing for the centre in Geneva, and, in addition, it determined that the centre would limit itself to contact about spiritual and general political topics and would not interfere in the reports about military and technical political facts or problems. This contact between London and the Netherlands would be called by the code name coined previously by Visser 't Hooft.

> All documents that I have looked at will be marked by the letters 'G.C.' [geestelijk contact; spiritual contact]. If the formulation is my own, and it is thus a report that is based on conversations and letters that I myself have processed, there will be an 'H' below it. All other reports are written by people whom I trust and whose information I take seriously.[47]

46 A draft version 'Afspraak met Lovink, Mei 1942' (Agreement with Lovink May 1942) has been preserved on paper by the Ecumenical Commission in Visser 't Hooft's handwriting. Cf. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 139. See also: *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945. Verslag houdende de uitkomsten van het onderzoek*, 4A en B, *De Nederlandse Geheime Diensten in Londen. De Verbindingen met het Bezet in Gebied* (1950), 197-198.

47 Visser 't Hooft to A.H.J. Lovink, 1 July 1942, NIOD 186g-2: 'Alle documenten, die door mijn handen gaan, zullen met de letters 'G.C.' (geestelijk contact) gemerkt zijn. Wanneer de formuleering van mijzelf stamt; en het dus een rapport is, dat gebaseerd is op gesprekken en brieven, die ikzelf bewerkt heb, zal er 'H' onder staan, Alle andere rapporten zijn geschreven door personen, die ik vertrouw en wier berichtgeving ik au serieux neem.' This document is erroneously dated 1 June, but it was written after Visser 't Hooft's return from London.

The adjective 'geestelijk' (spiritual) for Visser 't Hooft's contacts in the occupied Netherlands thus received a broader meaning for all information that he passed on between London and the Netherlands. But he also put his stamp on it figuratively.

4.5 Organising the Swiss Road

On 14 June 1942, Visser 't Hooft returned to Geneva from London and went to work immediately. The first step was to find a few capable and reliable people to help him. The Dutch medical student and NCSV member Joop Bartels was technically astute and had already offered his services to Visser 't Hooft previously. Bartels was staying in Davos because of tuberculosis but had been involved in the Netherlands in the church resistance in the 'Lunteren Circle' of which the theologians K.H. Miskotte and J. Koopmans were members. But Visser 't Hooft asked Bartels to develop Roman Catholic and socialist contacts as well in order to prevent the communication network from becoming a Protestant club: 'London should not get the impression that I'm just in contact with a small segment.'[48]

A Dutch nurse in Davos, Emmy ter Haar, was prepared to serve as a courier to bring the initial set of documents to the Netherlands from Switzerland. Visser 't Hooft found his good friends Gerard Slotemaker de Bruïne and Nico Stufkens willing to receive, distribute, and gather and edit documents in the Netherlands. Shortly after Emmy ter Haar's departure, Hebe C. Kohlbrugge appeared on Visser 't Hooft's doorstep in Geneva at 11A Chemin des Crêts-de-Champel in July 1942. She had managed to reach Switzerland via all kinds of underground routes through Belgium and France. She had documents with her from the Lunteren Circle and *Vrij Nederland*.[49] Visser 't Hooft was happy with Kohlbrugge's arrival; the courier thus showed that it was possible for an individual to travel to Switzerland from the occupied Netherlands via underground routes.[50] But he was in no way planning to involve her in this work with respect to content. Kohlbrugge did not strike him as serious enough in that respect.[51] On 18 July 1942, she arrived in Basel to hand the questions from the Lunteren Circle to

48 Visser 't Hooft to J. Bartels, 7 July 1942, YDS-12 : 'Londen moet niet de indruk krijgen dat ik maar een klein segment aan het woord laat.'

49 Kohlbrugge, *Twee maal twee is vijf* (2002), 166.

50 Visser 't Hooft to A.H.J. Lovink, 10 July 1942, NIOD 186g-2.

51 Zeilstra, interview with H.C. Kohlbrugge, Utrecht, 6 June 2013.

Karl Barth. Barth's open letter in response to these questions, 'An meine Freunde in die Niederlanden', was put on microfilm and brought back to the Netherlands by Kohlbrugge, where she arrived on 1 August 1942 and contacted Van Randwijk. Kohlbrugge herself made the journey only once but thus paved the way for the smuggling route. In the meantime, Ter Haar, upon her return in Switzerland by train via the legal route in August, brought with her a great deal of new material, among others the last two issues of *Vrij Nederland* and a letter from Gerard Slotemaker de Bruïne. With the Biblical Museum on the Herengracht in Amsterdam as his base, he had gathered the documents for Geneva and London, and the documents from London and Geneva were to be distributed by him in the Netherlands. The new courier service London-Geneva-the Netherlands was quickly dubbed 'the Swiss Road'.

In August 1942 Visser 't Hooft was on holiday for a few weeks with his family in Samaden in Graubünden. Here he worked on his *Misère et Grandeur de l'Église*, a small booklet containing reworked versions of lectures he had given, in which he sees the failure of the church in relation to its spiritual potential in God's eyes.[52] In this book he articulated his conviction that the church was undergoing a fundamental revival against the background of the war. His contribution to the 'Geestelijk Contact', the network between the dispersed Dutch citizens, including the government in London, and the occupied Netherlands, was inseparably connected with that. After returning to Geneva on 30 August, Visser 't Hooft and Bartels arranged various practical matters for the Swiss Road, such as an office for Bartels and the hiring of a technician, Eise Eisma, a chemist from Delft, who, just like Bartels, had been staying in Davos because of tuberculosis. In the darkroom of the radiology department of the clinic, Eisma devoted many hours to microfilming the documents to be sent to the Netherlands. He discovered a method to make microfilms even thinner by soaking off the celluloid layer of the negatives. What remained was a very, very thin film that could subsequently be very finely rolled up and hidden in a hollow toothbrush, for example. Three films of forty frames contained 240 pages of information and fitted into a propelling pencil. Two other staff members at the Swiss Road were the architecture student and artist J.H. van Borssum Buisman and his university friend Jan Postma. Visser 't Hooft got to know both of them in the Cossonay internment camp.[53]

52 Visser 't Hooft, *Misère et Grandeur de l'Église* (1943).

53 Couwenbergh, *Agent van de Zwitserse Weg* (2000), 66.

4.6 Visser 't Hooft and the Dutch Resistance

Lovink, who had worked out the plan for the Swiss Road with Visser 't Hooft, was delighted with the first successes of the new courier service. The pieces that arrived in London from Geneva were sent immediately on to the ministers and Queen Wilhelmina. There was enthusiasm in the Netherlands as well. But tensions arose very quickly. The culture differences between the various resistance groups were great. Only citizens were involved with the Dutch *Vrij Nederland*, which was in direct contact with Geneva. They were primarily intellectuals with progressive Christian socialist and moderate liberal sympathies. They could not be seen as representative of the entire underground movement, as evidenced, for example, by the splitting away of the underground newspaper *Trouw* in January 1943. An entirely different character was apparent in, for example, the Orde Dienst, a branch of the resistance consisting of ex-military personnel from the Dutch army that had emerged from the mobilisation period before the German invasion, when the state of war and siege was declared. Officers from the Dutch army, in particular Reserve Lieutenant-Colonel J.H. Westerveld, built up a military network in secret just a few months after the occupation, and this network had resolved to see to it that there was good order immediately after the capitulation of the German troops in the Netherlands. It was expected that, depending on how the Germans sounded the retreat, this restoration of order would take weeks at least, perhaps months or a year. As long as no legal civilian government could function in the Netherlands, the soldiers thought, it was logical for them to take over those tasks. The reserve Rittmaster Esquire P.J. Six was the chief of staff of the Orde Dienst from May 1942 until after the war. From De Koepelkerk on the Stadhouderskade in Amsterdam, he prepared the Orde Dienst for a struggle in the last phase of the occupation and a leading role directly afterwards. In the eyes of the civilian resistance, under Six's leadership, the Orde Dienst began to acquire more and more authoritarian characteristics in this period.[54]

In the civilian resistance, there were more and more who began to worry about this development and wanted to prevent a military transitional government. But London did not issue a clear and exclusive mandate, something that many in the resistance groups were hoping for. The conflict thus reached London as well, but the government always preferred to stay in control. Visser 't Hooft urged the government in vain to produce documents that contained content on vision and policy.

54 Cf. Corduwener, *Riemen onder de kin!* (2011), 194.

> Let the questions be answered as quickly as possible, so that the active and good forces in our country will be encouraged and no longer have the impression that the Government is completely absorbed in London concerns and not giving any leadership to our people themselves.[55]

He did not hide his strong preference for civil resistance from the government. In the summer of 1942, via Lovink, Visser 't Hooft recommended the resistance that was now included in the Grootburgercomité (Great Citizen Committee):

> [T]he group working in that committee is actually the most representative and responsible. In the meantime, by the way, the paramilitary organisations are weakened now that almost all their important people are prisoners of war.[56]

Lovink reported to Visser 't Hooft that his critique of Radio Oranje was being taken seriously and that there were plans to improve Radio Oranje and Radio Brandaris as well. He stated that Gerbrandy wished that Visser 't Hooft himself had stayed in London to give leadership to these plans.

> The Prime Minister is, like you and all of us, completely convinced of our shortcomings and often heaves the sigh: 'If only Visser 't Hoofd [sic] had stayed.' Indeed, you could have given the leadership that is so desperately needed. It is not primarily a matter of the factual content of what people say. It is the spirit, the tone, the mentality that needs to change, and other people from other circles are needed who can make that change. … As soon as we have a free hand, the new department will evaluate Radio Oranje daily.[57]

55 Visser 't Hooft to A.H.J. Lovink, 16 July 1942, NIOD 186g-2: 'Laat men toch zoo snel mogelijk antwoorden, opdat men de actieve en goede krachten in ons land bemoedige en den indruk wegneme, dat de Regeering geheel opgaat in Londensche aangelegenheden en geenerlei leiding geeft aan ons volk zelf.'

56 Visser 't Hooft to A.H.J. Lovink, 6 August 1942, NIOD 186g-2: 'de groep, die daarin medewerkt, is werkelijk de meest representatieve en verantwoordelijke. Intusschen zijn trouwens de para militaire organisaties zeer verzwakt nu practisch al hun belangrijke menschen weer in krijgsgevangenschap zijn.'

57 A.H.J. Lovink to Visser 't Hooft, 28 July 1942, NIOD 186g-2: 'De Minister President is met U en ons allen geheel overtuigd van onze tekortkomingen en slaakt veelal de zucht 'was Visser 't Hoofd [sic] maar gebleven.' Inderdaad, U zoudt die leiding hebben kunnen geven, die zoo broodnoodig is. Het gaat niet in eerste instantie om den feitelijke inhoud van hetgeen men zegt. Het is de geest, de toon, de mentaliteit, die wijziging behoeft en daarvoor heeft men andere

But Visser 't Hooft could not detect any improvement at that time. Two days later, on 30 July 1942, he reported to Lovink:

> With respect to Radio Oranje, there is the feeling now more than ever that the tone of grim seriousness and heroic resistance, which is so necessary now, has not yet been found. It is all too easy-going and the cursing too boyish. It should be borne in mind that it is now a matter of to be or not to be for our country and that at such a moment the only voice that penetrates to our people must have something of the depth that is found in the expressions of our leaders at the time of the Eighty Years' War.[58]

In 1942 Visser 't Hooft gradually became convinced that he was an extremely important informant and advisor for the Dutch government in exile. He offered solicited and unsolicited advice in his letters and telegrams to which government officials in London responded every now and then, as in the case of Radio Oranje. Via the Dutch envoy in Bern, Visser 't Hooft received an advance of 10,000 guilders in 1942 to cover the expenses of the work done by the Swiss Road. But Visser 't Hooft himself did not enter government service; he did not formally become a government official and did not receive any salary for this work.[59] In the Parliamentary Inquiry that was held after the war, it was established that this was a 'somewhat remarkable position': in

menschen uit andere kringen noodig die dit kunnen doen. […] Zoodra wij eenigszins de handen vrijkrijgen, zal het nieuwe departement zich dagelijks met Radio Oranje bemoeien.'
According to the date survey that his secretary Aat Guittart later made of Visser 't Hooft's life, he himself was originally asked to be a 'director' of Radio Oranje; Guittart, 'Biographical documents on Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft', no date. That precisely L. de Jong, who would later write critically about Visser 't Hooft's role with respect to the Swiss Road, was one of the most important editors of Radio Oranje can be called remarkable.

58 Visser 't Hooft to A.H.J. Lovink, 30 July 1942: 'Wat Radio Oranje betreft, zoo heeft men nu meer dan ooit het gevoel, dat men daar die toon van verbeten ernst en heroische weerstand, die nu noodig is, nog niet heeft weten te vinden. Het is alles nog te gemoedelijk en het schelden te kwajongensachtig. Men bedenke toch, dat het nu voor ons land om zijn of niet zijn gaat en dat op zulk een moment de eenige stem, die tot ons volk doordringt, iets van de diepte moet hebben, die er zit in uitingen van onze leiders in den tijd van de 80-jarige oorlog.' Cf. The telegram and letter by Visser 't Hooft to A.H.J. Lovink, 4 September 1942, NIOD 186g-2. Cf. A.H.J. Lovink to Visser 't Hooft, 8 October 1942, NIOD 186g-2.

59 He himself said in 1977: 'I never entered government service. I have never received a salary from the government for that. I didn't want that either. I wanted to remain free.' ('Ik ben nooit in dienst van de regering getreden. Ik heb nooit een salaris van de regering daarvoor gekregen. Dat wou ik ook niet. Ik wou vrij blijven.') H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

fact, Visser 't Hooft directed a government office in Geneva with salaried officials under him, even though he himself had no official appointment.[60]

In the plans for the Swiss Road he wrote with Lovink in London, it was agreed that it would not pass on any technical military information. But it turned out to be difficult in practice to establish per document where the boundaries precisely lay between the military resistance on the one hand and the work of the civil-political and church 'Geestelijk Contact' on the other. Over the course of time, documents of a more military nature were included in the dispatches. Visser 't Hooft expressed his concerns to the diplomat H.M. van Haersma de With in London in August 1942. While the collaboration with the embassy in Bern was going well, Visser 't Hooft was not so sure that the material was always properly assessed in London and ended up with the right people.[61] But there were no complaints from London – to the contrary. Lovink could again convey the gratitude of the government to Visser 't Hooft in October 1942:

> Finally, I can still tell you that Professor Gerbrandy asked me again to expressly convey his great appreciation for your loyal and valuable work. It is a great support for him that you fulfil this key role, and he declares his warm friendship for you. He still remembers your sermon in London very well. The work of Barth has his complete attention.[62]

As long as Lovink was in control of the process in London, everything went well. He kept Visser 't Hooft informed about the latest developments. For instance, he told him 'in strict confidence' in the same letter that the government was planning to have the return to constitutional relations after the liberation to be preceded by 'state of transition with a strong central administration under the direction of Her Majesty the Queen.' In the brief vacuum period that people in London expected immediately after the departure of the Germans from the Netherlands, decisive action was needed. The government insisted on the full co-operation of the Orde Dienst with the civil resistance groups that were part of the so-called Grootburgercomité.

60 *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945* (1950), 199.

61 Visser 't Hooft to H.M. van Haersma de With, 1 August 1942, NIOD 186g-3.

62 A.H.J. Lovink to Visser 't Hooft, 8 October 1942, NIOD 186g-2: 'Tenslotte kan ik U nog mededeelen, dat Professor Gerbrandy mij verzocht U nog eens nadrukkelijk zijn groote waardering over te brengen over Uw trouw en waardevol werk. Het is hem een groote steun, dat U deze sleutelpositie vervult en hij betuigt U zijn warme vriendschap. Hij herinnert zich Uw preek in Londen nog best. Het werk van Barth heeft zijn geheele hart.'

In the autumn of 1942, Visser 't Hooft had the feeling that, with all the work he was doing, he was making an important contribution to the desired unified action of the Dutch resistance. After the disappointment of his futile attempt to bring the German resistance into contact with the Allies, what he was doing now was a chance to make a serious contribution to the spiritual struggle by bringing the communication between London and the occupied Netherlands to a qualitatively higher and more co-ordinated level. For a long time, the Swiss Road functioned to the satisfaction of all parties. Both the group around *Vrij Nederland* and the Orde Dienst and various other organisations, like the Grebbe Commission and the National Committee (Nationaal Comité) under the direction of the socialist J.J. Vorrink, made use of it. Other underground newspapers did envy *Vrij Nederland* for its privileged position because people working there were often the first in the occupied Netherlands to have new material from London at their disposal.[63]

In the begining, from the summer of 1942 on, the messages were transferred by people who were more or less recruited on the spot to act as couriers: primarily nurses and businessmen who were permitted to travel internationally. The lawyer W.E.A. de Graaff, who worked for Philips, went a total of 22 times. The emphasis in collecting the messages lay initially – because of the nature of Visser 't Hooft's personal contacts – on Protestant messages. But the messages coming out of the Netherlands slowly became broader, and the courier service was more regular, especially after Jean Weidner began to organise part of the route in France between Geneva and Belgium via his underground 'Dutch-Paris' network at the beginning of 1943.[64]

4.7 Topics on the Swiss Road

The sending of messages via the Swiss Road from the Netherlands to the Dutch government in London was later judged by parliamentarians who investigated it to be 'of eminent importance'.[65] For Visser 't Hooft himself, it primarily concerned topics that showed a great deal of solid content. After his visit to London in the summer of 1943, he wrote a confidential memorandum, intended for his Dutch contacts.

63 Cf. Corduwener, *Riemen onder de kin!* (2011), 197. Van Namen and Winkel, *Het ondergrondse Vrij Nederland* (1970).

64 Ford, *Flee the Captor* (1966), and Koreman, *Gewone helden. De Dutch-Paris ontsnappingslijn, 1942-1945* (2016).

65 *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945* (1950), 249.

> They know a great deal in London about what is happening in our country, but it is outward knowledge. They have a lot of factual material, but they know very little about what is happening among our people, what is going on spiritually, how they are suffering, and what they are hoping for. That is why Radio Oranje so often fails to hit the nail on the head and its broadcasts are so judged so critically in Holland. That is also why the tone of many speeches from London disappoint people in our country.[66]

The government had to be helped 'in every possible way' so that no artificial 'Holland-outside-Holland' would be constructed, 'but the focus would remain in our Fatherland itself'. He added a number of critical questions to the memorandum: seven were general in nature; eight concerned the spiritual resilience of the Dutch people; seven were on the attitude towards the government in London; and seven dealt with the future. The answers were processed and sent to London.

Visser 't Hooft saw it as also part of his task to draw the attention of the government in London to what were experienced in the Netherlands as burning issues. One of the first major issues he raised after returning from London in 1942 was the Arbeitseinsatz, the Nazi forced labour programme. Thousands of men were now being sent to Germany to perform slave labour. According to Visser 't Hooft, these people felt abandoned and deserved an encouraging word from the prime minister or the queen: 'The best government declaration cannot, in such times, measure up to a personal fatherly word.'[67]

In December 1942, Visser 't Hooft wrote a brochure for his contacts in the form of an anonymised overview of the Dutch church situation.[68] Here he went to work in a rather normative way. In his view, the task of the church in circumstances of war was to direct itself to the people by means of the preaching of judgment and grace. Only in that way could justice be done to witness and prophecy and the church fulfill its priestly duty to society. Both mercy and discipline were needed to edify God's people – where possible

66 Visser 't Hooft, untitled confidential memorandum beginning with 'De verhouding tusschen onze Reegering in London en ons volk…', no date, but shortly after his visit to London. YDS-12, 20: 'Men weet in London heel wat af van wat er in ons land gebeurt, maar het blijft een uiterlijk weten. Men heeft veel feiten materiaal, maar men weet maar zeer weinig van wat er in ons volk omgaat, wat er geestelijk leeft, hoe men er lijdt en wat men er hoopt. Daarom slaat radio Oranje er zoo dikwijls naast en worden de uitzendingen in Holland zoo critisch beoordeeld. Daarom ook stelt de toon van vele toespraken uit London de menschen in ons land teleur.'

67 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 10 July1942. NIOD 186g-1: 'Ook de beste regeeringsverklaring kan in zulk een tijd niet opwegen tegen een persoonlijk vaderlijk woord.'

68 Visser 't Hooft, 'Die Verkündigung der Kirche in den besetzten Niederlanden', 1942.

as Christians in solidarity with each other across borders. He considered faith in the power of prayer to be essential in this. He trusted primarily in a people's church with a sense of a *Wächteramt* (office of watchman), as he had learned that from Barth. A church like that was a prophetic watchdog, faithful to the Word of God, and, like Elijah, not afraid of the government. Texts about salvation in the Old Testament were not to be used in a primarily nationalistic way with respect to the Netherlands, as often happened, but with respect to Israel as God's covenant partner. The homiletic starting point here for Visser 't Hooft was Matthew 10:16 where Jesus says: 'I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.' For the content of preaching at this time he referred to 1 Peter 5: 6-9, where the young church is told that Satan prowls around like roaring lion. He thought that 'divine permission', i.e., the question why an almighty God permitted evil and suffering, should also be discussed. After questions about God's decisions as ruler, current preaching had to end in trust in God, watchfulness, and a confessing faith.

A vulnerable aspect of the Swiss Road was that the content of the dispatches from London was often disappointing, certainly for Visser 't Hooft. When Lovink left in January 1943 as secretary of the Department of General Warfare and southern France was occupied by the Germans, Visser 't Hooft received less and less material from London. Lack of leadership also played an increasingly larger role. Already during his trip to England, Visser 't Hooft was struck by the fact that the work of those at the different embassies in Bern, Madrid, and Lisbon was hardly co-ordinated. In his view, people worked hard and with commitment in the Dutch diplomatic service, but there was no real oversight.[69] Lovink had said before he left that the diplomat Hendrik M. van Haersma de With would take over his tasks with respect to the Swiss Road, but this was not confirmed. In February 1943, Visser 't Hooft explicitly asked Gerbrandy who he had to report to from now on.[70] Van Haersma de With was a bland but precise civil servant, and Visser 't Hooft knew him from before the war. Nevertheless, he was not entirely at ease with the transfer concerning the dossier of the Swiss Road, a view that would later prove correct. Just to be sure, he subtly brought his own role and view of his task to Van Haersma de With's attention:

> Allow me to briefly communicate to you how I see my task. I see my job as extending across what may be called in the broad sense of the

69 Visser 't Hooft to A.H.J. Lovink, 1 July 1942, NIOD 186g-2.

70 Note by Visser 't Hooft, 7 February 1943, NIOD 186g-2.

> term spiritual contact between our country and the Government. I keep completely out of pure military matters and attempt primarily to see to it that the Government remains informed of the moods in our fatherland and of the major shifts that occur psychologically and morally. It is inevitable that I often enter political territory here as well, but when that happens, I try to act in close contact with H.M.'s Envoy.[71]

Thus, while in the early part of 1943, Visser 't Hooft received documents from the Netherlands almost weekly, he had to continually beg for usable material from London, government reports or plans, in short 'everything that showed that our Government is working for a reborn Netherlands'. What he received continued to disappoint him. There was hardly any adherence by the government in the first part of 1943 to the original agreements put on paper by Visser 't Hooft and Lovink in 1942. According to Visser 't Hooft, this was a great disappointment, not least for 'our people in the Netherlands'.[72]

He began to feel more and more like he was a mentor for the government and proposed, for example, that the government should respond to the declaration of the churches on 21 February 1943 on the fact of young men being taken away by the occupying forces. In March, Visser 't Hooft tried to tempt the prime minister himself to join the staff of the *Vrij Nederland* that was published in the Netherlands. Gerbrandy would be able to make a special contribution to the objective of the paper, which he described as 'radically illuminating the issues of the life of our people on a positive Christian basis without compromise'. *Vrij Nederland* certainly spoke not only to the Christian part of the population and did have its own tone with respect to social questions, according to Visser 't Hooft. Gerbrandy responded in a positive way, but nothing came of it. In May 1943, the dispatch from the Netherlands to London included a commentary on the 'Instructions of the Government'. These were instructions for civil servants, laid down by the third cabinet under Colijn in 1937. These instructions concerned what

71 Visser 't Hooft to H.M. van Haersma de With, 18 March 1943, NIOD 186g-3: 'Ik mag u verder in het kort mededelen hoe ik mijn taak opvat. Mijn opdracht versta ik als zich uitstrekkende over wat men in de wijde zin des woords geestelijk contact tussen ons land en de Regering noemen mag. Ik houd mij daarbij geheel buiten de zuiver militaire aangelegenheden, en tracht vooral er voor te zorgen, dat de Regering op de hoogte blijft van de stemmingen in ons vaderland en van de grote verschuivingen, die er op psychologisch en moreel gebied plaats vinden. Het is onvermijdelijk, dat ik daarbij dikwijls ook het politieke terrein betreed, maar wanneer dat het geval is tracht ik in nauw contact met H.M.'s Gezant te handelen.'

72 Visser 't Hooft to H.M. van Haersma de With, 1 August 1943, NIOD, 186-3. See also: Visser 't Hooft to H.M. van Haersma de With, 14 March 1944, NIOD 186g-3.

to do during a possible occupation. An important role was reserved here for the general secretaries of the departments. One of the most important writers of the commentary on the 'Instructions' was the commissioner of the queen who had already been dismissed by the Germans in 1940, L.H.N.F.M. Bosch ridder van Rosenthal (1884-1953), the elder brother of the envoy in Bern. Here he was looking for points of contact for the responsibility of the civil resistance. Prime Minister Gerbrandy responded positively to the commentary in a radio broadcast, but it went no further. Visser 't Hooft found this disappointing: Bosch van Rosenthal and those who shared his views deserved a clear legitimation from London.

For study groups among the Dutch refugees in Switzerland, Visser 't Hooft posed ten study questions in the first part of 1943 that he also put to Gerbrandy. The questions were not very open as such, sounding rather rhetorical, and are actually more theses than questions.

Back to former times or renewal?
Social uncertainty or social security?
Partisanship, authoritarianism, or qualitative democracy?
Empire or commonwealth?
National sovereignty or international rule of law?
Vengeance or maintenance of the rule of law?
Communism as saviour, as ghost, or as question?
Sectarianism, uniformity, or unity in diversity?
Suffering that uproots, or suffering that purifies?
Spiritual anarchy or communal responsibility?[73]

With the last question, Visser 't Hooft was wondering: 'Should we view with little concern the fact that, as a Dutch community, we do not have any strong common foundation? Or should we become aware that we owe a common responsibility to God?' Nothing was done with these questions in London. Visser 't Hooft did not understand why.

Another major theme was the question of a post-war cleansing.[74] Many expected a spontaneous moment of punishment for traitors and friends of

73 Visser 't Hooft to Gerbrandy, 19 March 1943, NIOD 186g-1: 'Terug naar de oude tijd of vernieuwing? Sociale onzekerheid of sociale veiligheid? Partijzucht, autoritarisme of qualitatieve democratie? Imperium of gemenebest? Nationale soevereiniteit of internationale rechtsorde? Wraakoefening of handhaving der rechtsorde? Het communisme als redder, als spook, of als vraag? Hokjesgeest, uniformiteit of eenheid in verscheidenheid? Lijden, dat ontwortelt, of lijden, dat loutert? Geestelijke anarchie of gemeenschappelijke verantwoording?'

74 Van Roon, *Een commissaris in het verzet* (1999), 123.

the occupying forces directly after liberation, a so-called 'Day of Reckoning'. In 1943, the Dutch embassy in Bern requested twelve Dutch citizens of various professions and worldviews living in Switzerland to give their views anonymously in response to questions in a memorandum on this issue, called 'Straf of wraak?' (Punishment or vengeance?). Visser 't Hooft was one of them. To the central question whether there should be popular justice after liberation, the answer of the twelve as summarised by the embassy was: 'No vengeance, but punishment, and quick justice!'. Visser 't Hooft's answer is striking in its nuanced tone. He said he was proud of the characterisation of the Dutch people as 'free, sober, and just' but added: 'Christian'.

> By this I do not mean saccharine love of our enemies but being inspired by a right wish to strive for improvement in accordance with Christian principles. Vengeance is and remains un-Christian and must be rejected as such. Punishment is necessary for those who do not adhere to the laws of the Dutch nation.[75]

He had consulted Dutch people in his circles with respect to various questions and distinguished between opportunists and real traitors. At the same time, he spoke of mitigating circumstances for those who took the law into their own hands and stabbed to death a member of the Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB) who was guilty, for example, of the death of a family member. That could happen, but it was not desirable. An official trial on the basis of an emergency law had to be the norm. Visser 't Hooft did not exclude the death penalty here. What had to be prevented via strong measures was any kind of popular justice taking place. He proposed for consideration that a new chamber of the High Military Court be set up that included both military justices and civilian judges. He cited Deuteronomy 32:35: 'Vengeance is mine, the Lord says.' Finally, he summoned people not to remain stuck in the past but to look ahead.

But there was to be 'no weakness, no compromise', no 'forgive and forget'. Because of the values the Netherlands represented, it was necessary to try traitors and banish them from the national community. Victims had to be compensated. Visser 't Hooft did not exclude corporal punishments

75 Visser 't Hooft (anonymous), 'Straf of wraak?', 1943, 98: 'Ik bedoel daarmee niet zoetsappig liefhebben van onze vijanden, maar het bezield zijn van een rechten wensch om volgens christelijke beginselen te streven naar verbetering. Wraak is en blijft onchristelijk en moet als zoodanig verworpen worden. Straf is noodzakelijk voor hen, die zich niet houden aan de wetten van de Nederlandse volksgemeenschap.'

like beating, running the gauntlet, and the pillory – 'to be understood as punishment, not as vengeance'.[76] Applied with moderation, Visser 't Hooft saw corporal punishment and humiliating work as 'an outlet for the bottled-up resentment of the people, so that they can vent their feelings', and also good for the guilty party. It was never to be forgotten, he felt, that 'humanity' was the best property of the human being.

4.8 In Defence of the Civil Resistance

Visser 't Hooft overestimated his own view of the underground movements.[77] The relationship between the Orde Dienst and the civilian resistance was worsening in 1943. In August of that year, Gerard Slotemaker de Bruïne and Nico Stufkens decided that the editorship of the Swiss Road should be expanded and made more powerful as a 'Political Commission'. They invited Henk van Randwijk and Jaap Cramer to take part, but there was no place for Hebe Kohlbrugge, whom they felt was an amateur lightweight. Kohlbrugge felt excluded and, from that time on, preferred to work with P.J. Six of the Orde Dienst. While Visser 't Hooft still claimed that he was giving a balanced image of the whole underground system, the one-sided composition of the Political Commission did entail a certain monopolisation of the Dutch end of the Swiss Road. Precisely in this period Queen Wilhelmina seemed to be open to the radical ideas of those who came to England with respect to a post-war Netherlands in which everything would be different. She proposed a complete discontinuance of the old political parties and a firmer form of administration. On 24 April 1943, she spoke on the radio about the need for a 'state of siege' immediately after liberation. Her speech on 2 September 1943 was about the government's recognition of a main role to be played by the military authority. Lodewijk H.N.F.M. Bosch van Rosenthal, Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart, Willem Drees (1886-1988), and other leaders of the political resistance were shocked by this – in their view, it was commissioners and mayors who would have an important role to play.[78] In Visser 't Hooft's eyes, such an administration was the best one for optimising the role of the church in post-war Netherlands. A concerned Joop Bartels brought a report

76 Running the gauntlet was a military corporal punishment, applied until sometime in the nineteenth century, whereby someone who was convicted was forced to run barebreasted between two rows of soldiers to be punched by them or beaten with a certain type of rod.

77 De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, part 7 (1976), 1136 and 1138.

78 Socialist Willem Drees was to be prime minister of the Netherlands 1948-1958.

to Visser 't Hooft after a trip to the Netherlands, and he decided to launch a 'counteroffensive' against the – in his eyes – advancing Orde Dienst.

In October 1943 a strongly worded telegram was sent in this spirit from Geneva to the government in London.

> We are attempting to bridge the gap between military and civil groups, hoping that you will emphatically point out to military groups that they are not to work against civil groups and individuals with much greater political experience but to take them seriously.[79]

Visser 't Hooft spiritedly argued to Gerbrandy that the military had to kept away from the administration of the country at all times:

> The situation is that, of the actual leaders of our people, the majority by far have stayed in our country and that with the exception of a small group of government officials, there are primarily younger, more adventuresome Dutch people in England and America. The latter have, in addition, very little perspective on the situation that has now developed in Holland. There is now a fear in our country that this very inexperienced group will call the shots. What has been said by the government about specially educated people in England has intensified this fear even more. The attitude of the OD [Orde Dienst] enters in here as well. … If I am looking at it properly, then this group, which does very important work, is in the hands of military people who have very little understanding of the complications of Dutch society and politics.[80]

79 Copy of a telegram from Bosch van Rosenthal andVisser 't Hooft to Gerbrandy, no date. NIOD, 186g-1: 'Wij trachten kloof te overbruggen tussen militaire en civiele groepen, hopen dat U militaire groeperingen er zeer nadrukkelijk op wijst, dat zij civiele groepen en personen met veel grotere politieke ervaring niet tegenwerken doch ernstig nemen' Cf. Corduwener, *Riem onder de kin!* (2011), 201, and De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, vol. 7 (1976), 1130.

80 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 11 November 1943, NIOD 186g-1: 'De situatie is, dat van de werkelijke leiders van ons volk het overgrote deel in ons land gebleven is, en dat, met uitzondering van een kleine groep regeringspersonen, in Engeland en Amerika zich toch vooral jongere meer avontuurlijke Hollanders bevinden. Deze laatsten hebben bovendien maar zeer weinig kijk op de toestand, zoals die zich in Holland ontwikkeld heeft. Er is nu in ons land een vrees, die toch wel inderdaad goede gronden heeft, dat deze zeer onervaren groep opeens de baas zal komen spelen. Wat van regeringszijde over speciaal opgeleide personen in Engeland gezegd werd, heeft deze vrees nog doen toenemen. Daarbij komt de houding van de OD [Orde Dienst] […] Zie ik het goed, dan is deze groep, die zeer zeker belangrijk nationaal werk doet, in handen van militairen, die uiterst weinig begrip hebben voor de complicaties van de vaderlandse maatschappij en politiek.'

Visser 't Hooft talked tough but at the same time began to feel uncertain about his position. After Lovink's departure in January 1943, the Office of Intelligence in London, under the direction of Lieutenant-Colonel J.M. Somer – actually the Secret Service – began to gain in importance and to operate more autonomously. Visser 't Hooft still did not know in January 1944 if he was to report to Somer as well now.[81] All kinds of misunderstandings arose. In April 1943, the board of the Grootburgercomité, which Visser 't Hooft valued and that Koos Vorrink had filled with promiment members of former political parties, was rounded up by the Germans. Visser 't Hooft advised Gerbrandy to refer new individuals who had been closely related to the Grootburgercomité, to whom the Orde Dienst would then have to report.[82] This could prevent the military figures from acting on their own authority.

> This gives rise to a situation that does not square with the traditions of our political life and that is not accepted by the underground civilian organisations and by the political figures outside the underground circuit. Here lies a problem that cannot be taken seriously enough and on which the future of our country very much depends.[83]

At the beginning of 1944, the Dutch resistance was optimistic. There was a constant flow of rumours from Germany about a coup that was about to take place. There was contact with the German resistance from the Netherlands, such as via the German officer, Major Wilhelm Staehle. But the Dutch government in London wanted nothing to do with it and felt itself bound to the British categorical rejection of every form of contact with the German resistance.

At this time, Visser 't Hooft was completely caught up in the plans of the civil and political resistance for a transitional government. An important role was reserved in these plans for Lodewijk Bosch van Rosenthal, possibly as chairman and the one in charge of forming a new government. Gerard Slotemaker de Bruïne asked Visser 't Hooft to intercede 'with all the authority that you have over there' and to bring the name of Bosch van Rosenthal to the

81 Visser 't Hooft to H.M. van Haersma de With, 21 January 1944, NIOD 186g-3.

82 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, no date, mid-1943 (handwritten by Visser 't Hooft), NIOD 186g-1.

83 Visser 't Hooft to H.M. van Haersma de With, 10 October 1943, NIOD 186g-3: 'Daarmee ontstaat een situatie, die niet strookt met de tradities van ons politieke leven en die dan ook niet aanvaard wordt door de illegale civiele organisaties en door de politieke persoonlijkheden, die buiten illegaal verband staan. Hier ligt een probleem, dat niet ernstig genoeg onder ogen gezien kan worden en waar zeer veel van afhangt voor de toekomst van ons land.'

attention of Gerbrandy and the queen.[84] Visser 't Hooft had never met Bosch van Rosenthal himself but had heard only good things about him. He did not hesitate and recommended him in January 1944 because of his courage, energy, and qualities as a statesman and as 'one of the most indispensable pillars of the national movement'.[85] The Dutch government attempted in vain in the meantime to calm things down by communicating that no one, including the queen, wanted a military dictatorship. A draft for a telegram to Gerbrandy, in which he urged the appointment and authorisation of a mediator, included the following sentence that Visser 't Hooft nonetheless crossed out, probably because he felt it had too much of the air of blackmail about it:

> If this is not taken up, it could lead to a chaotic situation in that the Government lets the old parties, resistance groups, and people all go their own way so that national unity is very seriously put at risk at a critical time.[86]

It was an improvement that in Switzerland, as of February 1944, Major-General A.G. van Tricht, the Dutch military attaché in Bern, took upon himself the task of liaising between the military resistance and the Office of Intelligence in London. Visser 't Hooft remained the one finally responsible for sending material that could be called civil.[87] Van Tricht took care of the material that was of a military nature. This route was called 'Swiss Road B', so the civil route via Geneva was called 'Road A'. If military information nevertheless did sometimes end up in Visser 't Hooft's hands, he passed it on to Van Tricht. Information that was passed on via Road B went to the Office of Intelligence in London that was headed by Somer. The whole was under the direct responsibility of the Minister of General Warfare, Van Lidth de Jeude. Initially, Visser 't Hooft was not happy at all with Road B, but it turned out that he and Van Tricht could work well together. When he himself, however, also began to receive messages from Somer, he began to again doubt the coordination on London's part because he had earlier

84 Van Roon, *Een commissaris in het verzet* (1999), 131.

85 Visser 't Hooft to H.M. van Haersma de With, 2 January 1944 (copy), NIOD, Zwitserse Weg, Z 1 A 37: 'een der meest onmisbare steunpilaren der nationale beweging.'

86 Draft of a telegram from Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 21 March 1944, NIOD, 186g-1: 'Wanneer hierop niet ingegaan wordt dreigt chaotische situatie te ontstaan daar dan Regering oude partijen verzetsgroepen en volk allen eigen weg laat gaan zodat volkseenheid zeer ernstig in gevaar komt op critiek moment.'

87 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 17 September 1944, NIOD 186g-1.

understood that Road B would be used for this. He was afraid that politically sensitive information in his dispatches would not reach the right ministers and decided to continue sending dispatches with such content directly to the responsible people in the government. Through the developments in the war, however, the whole Swiss Road quickly lost its importance now. After D-Day, 6 June 1944, the regularity of the courier service between the Netherlands and Geneva was disrupted by the advance of the Allies and the shifting battlelines. He wrote to Gerbrandy about Somer at that time:

> People are getting the impression, however, that the leader of the Office of Intelligence is the most active figure in the whole situation and thus becoming increasingly more powerful. But we will continue to send political issues to the responsible parties in the Government.[88]

In the spring of 1944, L.H.N.F.M. Bosch van Rosenthal, together with a number of sympathisers in the CHU, wrote the brochure *De Politieke en Maatschappelijke Opbouw van Nederland*. A cautious argument is made here for renewal and a new formation of parties.[89] Bosch van Rosenthal knew that the government wanted the resistance groups to come together and worked hard for a time at getting as many underground organisations as possible to work together, but it was in vain.

At the beginning of 1944, the so-called 'Vaderlands Comité' (Fatherland Committee) emerged in the underground world out of the restarted Grootburgercomité. It was intended to be a united group, in any case of the different forms of political resistance but, if it could, together with the military resistance of the Orde Dienst. In March 1944 Willem Drees became the new chairman of this committee. But the attempt to involve the Orde Dienst, where the civil resistance were spoken scornfully of as citizens who wanted to play Van Hogendorp, was not successful.[90] Visser 't Hooft reported to Gerbrandy that there was also a Nationaal Comité (National Committee) in addition to this Vaderlands Comité that also claimed to be able to function as an umbrella for the resistance. His judgment about the

88 Visser 't Hooft to Gerbrandy, 1 May 1944, NIOD Zwitserse Weg, Z5, P8: 'Men krijgt toch echter de indruk, dat de leider van het Bureau Inlichtingen de actiefste figuur is in de hele situatie, en daardoor steeds meer de dingen in zijn hand krijgt. Wij zullen echter toch de politieke aangelegenheden aan de politiek verantwoordelijke instanties blijven toezenden.' Cited in: Van Roon, *Een commissaris in het verzet* (1999), 140, note 71.

89 Ibid., 140.

90 G.K. van Hogendorp was one of the trailblazers for the restoration of Dutch independence after the French period and a member of the provisional government in 1813.

latter group in March 1944 was damning. The members of this group had 'little authority', were 'non-representative', and any collaboration with them would be difficult.[91] Bosch van Rosenthal, who was connected with the Vaderlands Comité, was, in Visser 't Hooft's view, truly the best. He knew for a certainty

> that it would be difficult to find a better figure, for he combines in his person the administrative experience, courage, and contacts on all sides. The question is whether anyone else in the Netherlands is able to give such a well-considered and objective overview of the underground as he … gave.[92]

But London did not issue any clear instructions, let alone any governmental authorisation for Bosch van Rosenthal. In March 1944 Visser 't Hooft bluntly expressed his critique of the government.

> It is particularly strongly regretted that the flow of material that goes to the other side is answered merely with a single telegram here and there. People are quite jealous of the contact that seems to exist between resistance movements of other countries with their governments on the other side.[93]

While Visser 't Hooft's attempt to get a mandate for Bosch van Rosenthal continued to fail, the lawyer, journalist, and politician G.J. van Heuven Goedhart, an exponent of the civil resistance, went from the Netherlands to London himself. After his dismissal as chief editor of the *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, Van Heuven Goedhart took charge of the underground newspaper *Het Parool.* As a special representative of the underground Grebbe Commission for assistance for war victims in the Grebbe area (Defence barrier East of Utrecht operational during the short war of occupation in May 1940), he wanted to go to England. He was aided in his journey by Jean Weidner and Visser 't Hooft. Van Heuven Goedhart arrived in London on 17 June 1944 via Spain and Gibraltar. He hoped the government would grant him authorisation to

91 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 24 March 1944, NIOD 186g-1.

92 Visser 't Hooft to P. Gerbrandy, 3 May 1944, NIOD 186g-1: 'dat men moeilijk een betere figuur zal kunnen ontdekken, want hij combineert in zijn persoon de bestuurservaring, de moed en de contacten naar alle kanten. Het is de vraag of iemand anders in Nederland in staat geweest zou zijn een zo weloverwogen en objectief overzicht van de illegaliteit te geven als hij […] gaf.' See also: De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, vol. 7 (1976), 1122-1138.

93 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 14 March 1944, NIOD 186g-1: 'Het wordt bijzonder sterk betreurd, dat de stroom van materiaal, die naar de overkant gaat, slechts beantwoord wordt met een enkel telegram hier en daar. Men is enigszins jaloers op het contact, dat blijkt te bestaan tussen weerstandsbewegingen van andere landen met hun regeringen aan de overkant.'

form a working committee for a so-called Great Council of Advice in the occupied Netherlands. In July 1944, he was included in the second Gerbrandy cabinet as a non-party affiliated Minister of Justice.

Just before Van Heuven Goedhart began his dangerous journey, the bomb burst on the Swiss Road. A nasty incident took place that continued to affect all those involved for years afterward. To be brief, the civil and political resistance felt they were being spied on by the military resistance. From September 1943 on, at the request of the Orde Dienst, the photographer W. Prins had made copies of the microfiches that were sent to Geneva. This was done to make sure that no one was secretly censoring the dispatches or sorting them out of political motivation. When P.J. Six wanted to have one dispatch of this copied material brought to London via an alternative route so that the content could be compared with what arrived via Geneva, his courier was arrested by the Germans. Six then sent Hebe Kohlbrugge with the same material to London. She would possibly arrive earlier than Van Heuven Goedhart, but before she could leave, she was also arrested in April 1944 during a train trip. She managed to keep the copied microfilm out of the hands of the Germans by putting it in the pocket of another traveller. The microfilm ended up coincidentally via detours in the hands of Jaap le Poole, a technical man from *Vrij Nederland*. To his surprise, he discovered the same documents that he himself had recently sent to London via Geneva. Henk van Randwijk and Gerard Slotemaker de Bruïne were furious. They felt they had been spied on by the Orde Dienst. Six and Kohlbrugge did not think they had done anything wrong. The tension that already existed between the Orde Dienst and the civil political resistance, especially the group around *Vrij Nederland*, however, was completely beyond resolution. Bosch van Rosenthal and Drees tried in vain to come to a reconciliation with the military resistance.[94] Visser 't Hooft found it necessary to now warn the Dutch government seriously against the Orde Dienst.

> Unfortunately, the situation in this respect has again become more difficult because a serious case has become known in which the OD has had the whole work of another group spied on. The result was that all relations between the OD and this group, with which we closely work, have been broken off.[95]

94 Visser, *De bezetter bespied* (1983), 360.

95 Visser 't Hooft to H.M. van Haersma de With, 3 May 1943. NIOD 186g-3: 'Helaas is de situatie in dit opzicht nog weer moeilijker geworden, daar een ernstig geval bekend geworden is, waarin

On behalf of the political leaders of the Swiss Road in the Netherlands, Visser 't Hooft asked the government in London to ask the Orde Dienst for clarification immediately and to warn the members that they had caused serious damage. Should the courier Hebe Kohlbrugge reach London, she was to be distrusted as 'a born schemer'.[96]

It is understandable that the government in exile could not acknowledge any single person or organisation as representing all. The resistance was not unified enough for that, and the networks were not transparent enough. The reticence of the government concerning a mandate also had to do with the fact that the government expected to play a role itself very soon after liberation. But with Van Heuven Goedhart in the government in London, the civil underground had a good advocate there. Visser 't Hooft congratulated his university friend from Leiden with that but immediately put him seriously on the spot because Van Heuven Goedhart had to defend himself against being partial. The increasing influence of the circle around Bosch van Rosenthal was a thorn in the side of the Office of Intelligence. Somer had in the meantime become acquainted with the material that the Orde Dienst had copied on the Swiss Road and had been sent back to London to be checked. He was not be surprised by the minor differences between the two dispatches but was primarily upset by the fact itself that the dispatch appeared to contain military material. Obviously, contrary to the agreements and in exclusion of the Office of Intelligence, material of a military nature was sent from the Netherlands to London via Road A. Attaché Van Tricht in Bern was told by Somer to speak to Visser 't Hooft about this.

Aside from the fact that it would be hard for Visser 't Hooft to feel responsible for everything that was put in the dispatch, he expected an apology rather than a reprimand. He and his contacts at *Vrij Nederland* were angry because correspondence had obviously been stolen by a rival resistance group in the Netherlands. Gerbrandy tried to smooth the matter over but felt obliged to reprimand Visser 't Hooft as well after the Cabinet had established that Visser 't Hooft had acted outside his brief by obviously selecting material. The prime minister told Visser 't Hooft that he now had to refrain from any kind of censorship and that he had to improve his relationship with the Orde Dienst.[97] Visser 't Hooft responded indignantly.

OD het gehele werk van een der andere groepen liet bespioneren. Het resultaat was, dat alle relaties tussen OD en deze groep, waarmee wij nauw samenwerken, afgebroken [ge]worden is.'

96 Cf. Mulder and Koedijk, *H.M. van Randwijk. Een biografie* (1988), 350.

97 P.S. Gerbrandy to Visser 't Hooft, 29 August 1944, NIOD, 186g-1.

> In your telegram, you also say that it is the intention of the Government that messages from Holland must be passed on completely free of censorship and without any sorting. Don't hold it against me that I am somewhat astounded by this sentence. I mean, namely, that it is obvious from the material that we have sent over the course of time that I have not exercised any censorship.[98]

The only material Visser 't Hooft objected to was what he received from so-called 'wild groups', groups operating completely on their own. He had also thought he had to eliminate 'non-serious or irresponsible talk'. He always sent everything that appeared to be important simply to give a complete picture of the situation, even if it deviated vastly from his own views, and 'as much as possible' in the original wording.[99]

4.9 The Liberation of the Netherlands and the Parliamentary Inquiry

In the autumn of 1944, Visser 't Hooft travelled to England from Geneva via Paris, Belgium, and the liberated southern Netherlands. He was aware that there was criticism in London of how he had operated but was not at all prepared for the cold reception that awaited him. He had to defend himself to Gerbrandy against complaints and insinuations, and Queen Wilhelmina did not want to see him. That hurt him. She thought that Bosch van Rosenthal was too much concerned with his personal ambitions and had to have known that Visser 't Hooft supported him and worked against the Orde Dienst. Visser 't Hooft himself always maintained that Wilhelmina had been irritated by the fact that he had published a book in German about the attitude of the Dutch church during the war, but it is very improbable that this was the true reason for her refusal to receive him.[100]

98 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 17 September 1944, NIOD 186g-1: 'In Uw telegram zegt U ook dat het de bedoeling van de Regering is dat berichten uit Nederland geheel ongecensureerd en zonder schifting doorgegeven worden. U moge mij ten goede houden, dat ik over deze zin enigszins verwonderd ben. Ik meen nl., dat uit het materiaal, dat wij U in de loop der tijden gezonden hebben, wel gebleken is, dat ik generlei censuur toepas.'

99 Ibid.

100 Cf. Van Roon, *Een commissaris in het verzet* (1999), 146. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 148. Cf. H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), *Holländische Kirchendokumente. Der Kampf der holländische Kirche um die Geltung der göttliche Gebote im Staatsleben* (1944).

Van Heuven Goedhart had made himself unpopular with the Office of Intelligence, and his position in the government was immediately disputed, and so he could do little for Visser 't Hooft.[101] Visser 't Hooft explained once again that he had not exercised any censorship, but some letters and messages had to be put into another form, otherwise they would have been incomprehensible for people in London. It was Gerbrandy himself who had constantly asked him for commentary and advice. Not only had he sent on almost everything from the Orde Dienst, but he had also invited this organisation several times to make use of the Swiss Road more often. The only things that had not been sent on were copies of personal letters between himself and the leader of Road A, namely, Gerard Slotemaker de Bruïne. That the Orde Dienst had managed to get hold of some of them by spying could not be a basis for any real complaint. An irritated Visser 't Hooft felt he had done his very best and now wanted to quit the Swiss Road.

> My work is now done, and I would like to request you to accept my heartfelt acknowledgement for the way in which you wanted to support me. Even though it is a disappointment that our work is appreciated least of all in some circles, so it is nonetheless satisfying for me to know that the flow of data that we could pass on from the fighting Netherlands have [sic] not been without influence on the decisions that the Government has made in these years.[102]

On 22 November Visser 't Hooft received a note from Gerbrandy in which the latter accepted his defence, expressed his willingness to support him in case of a possible investigation, and thanked him once more for the services he rendered to the government.[103]

On 12 October 1944, Visser 't Hooft broadcast a radio message in London for a 'Herrijzend Nederland' (The Netherlands Rising from the Ashes).[104] As if he knew nothing of the tensions among the resistance in the Netherlands, he spoke of the envy in less affected countries, where people looked with envy

101 Corduwener, *Riemen onder de kin!* (2011), 258-259.

102 Visser 't Hooft to P.S. Gerbrandy, 14 November 1944, NIOD 186g-1: 'Mijn werk is nu ten einde en ik moge U verzoeken mijn hartelijke dankbetuiging in ontvangst te nemen voor de wijze, waarop U mij hebt willen steunen. Ook al is het een teleurstelling, dat in sommige kringen ons werk allerminst gewaardeerd is, zoo is het mij toch een voldoening te weten, dat de stroom van gegevens, die wij uit strijdend Nederland mochten doorgeven, niet zonder invloed gebleven zijn [sic] op de beslissingen, die de Regeering in deze jaren genomen heeft.'

103 Included in: *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945* (1950), 236-237.

104 Visser 't Hooft, 'Toespraak voor Herrijzend Nederland', 1944.

at the Netherlands as an example of 'everything that appeared possible in the occupied countries, what becomes less rigid, and what new deep layers can be drilled for precious ore.' According to Visser 't Hooft, the horrors of the occupation had led to a fundamental renewal of life. It was important that this legacy would not be lost when liberation occurred but be brought into the new Europe.

In the meantime, also under the influence of the optimistic view as a result of the landing of the Allies in Normandy in the occupied Netherlands, a step forward was made in the cooperation among the resistance. A so-called Contact Committee was formed from the Vaderlands-Comité, partly through Van Heuven Goedhart's influence. It consisted of five members, representatives of the different participating groups, including the Orde Dienst. Willem Drees was the chairman. By order of the Dutch government in London, what became known as the Grote Adviescommissie der Illegaliteit (Large Advice Commission on Underground Affairs) was formed. London appointed five men to form a College van Vertrouwensmannen (Board of Intermediaries), including Bosch van Rosenthal, Drees, and Slotemaker de Bruïne as secretary. But it did not include the Orde Dienst. This board was not intended as a transitional government, but that is what it did look like. For example, allegedly controversial negotiations were conducted with the Germans in April 1945 about a truce and food drops.[105]

In the autumn of 1944, the Board of Intermediaries divided the portfolios, initially with Gerbrandy's approval. But while in the northern Netherlands, after Dolle Dinsdag (Mad Tuesday) on 5 September and the Battle of Arnhem that started on 17 September, it was not liberation that came but the 'hunger winter'. The Orde Dienst, thus the military authority in the resistance, was given even greater authority than the Intermediaries. Part of the Dutch government in exile moved to the liberated Oisterwijk. Bosch van Rosenthal was dismayed:

> In England and in the South, it is nothing but quarreling, disagreements, difficulties, slander, gossip, no one trusts anybody else and everyone tries to show how good he has been. After this time, I would rather quit everything. … Frankly, the worst is in the government in England. It does not understand anything of this and disrupts everything again once it has been settled.[106]

105 Van Randwijk, *In de schaduw van gisteren* (1967), 220-221.

106 Van Roon, *Een commissaris in het verzet* (1999), 165: 'Het is aan den overkant en in het Zuiden, alles ruzie, oneenigheid, moeilijkheid, kwaadspreking, roddelarij, niemand vertrouwt elkaar

With changes in the composition of the government, the social democratic ministers resigned, and the Intermediaries also lost their most loyal support in the cabinet, the non-party member Van Heuven Goedhart. Over the course of time, he came into conflict with the Office of Intelligence and did not return in the Gerbrandy III administration. He was forced to resign in February 1945. He was already seen by the military as the 'manager' in London of Bosch van Rosenthal and those who supported him.

After the capitulation of the Germans on 4 and 5 May 1945, the Board of Intermediaries began to govern in fact. A *Staatscourant* (Government Gazette) was published, and a proclamation posted. But already on 9 May, General H.J. Kruls and his Military Authority, which was making bold moves, took over. A number of decisions made by the Intermediaries were rescinded. The long-feared power vacuum hardly appeared. In the end, however, the Intermediaries were considered superfluous. But the way in which things were done was confusing and disconcerting and painful for those most closely involved. They had been preparing for years for a role that they were hardly allowed to play. When the dust of the withdrawal of the Germans and the arrival of the Allies had settled and the liberation parties were done, with the return of the Dutch government from exile it soon seemed very much like the old Netherlands from before the war. After liberation, Gerbrandy offered his resignation and Wilhelmina appointed an 'emergency cabinet' under Schermerhorn and Drees, which was charged with keeping the peace, getting the economic recovery started, and preparing for elections. Bosch van Rosenthal resumed his work as Royal Commissioner in Utrecht, but it soon proved too much for him, and he had to withdraw. Visser 't Hooft understood after the liberation that his role on this front was over. In the rejoicing over the liberation, the way things went politically left a bitter taste in the mouths of an important group of resistance people. There was a 'breakthrough', but, in Visser 't Hooft's view, it got stuck in the Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid) that, after – in his eyes – a promising start, turned out in the end to be nothing more than a continuation of the pre-war SDAP (Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij, the Dutch Social Democratic Workers' Party).[107]

en ieder poogt aan te toonen, hoe goed hij wel is geweest. Ik wou na dezen tijd het liefste met alles uitscheiden [...]. Het ergste is eerlijk gezegd, de regeering aan den overkant. Deze begrijpt er niets van en stuurt alles wat geregeld is, weer in de war.'

107 Biersteker, interview with Visser 't Hooft, in: *Trouw*, 27 January 1968.

The post-war commission Parlementaire Enquête Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945 (Parliamentary Inquiry on Government Policy 1940-1945) did not succeed in unravelling the complex problem of the underground and the Swiss Road.[108] The analysis of the tensions focused on the lack of direction from London, not on the contradictions in content in the Netherlands. Visser 't Hooft had to appear before the commission on 8 December 1948 to be questioned about the Swiss Road. The chairman was L.A. Donker, a member of the Labour Party; the commission had nine members, including the CHU politician, the Honourable C.W.I. Wttewaall van Stoetwegen. She was not a stranger to Visser 't Hooft but a friend of the family: 'tante Bob'. The next day, 9 September 1948, the Subcommission III, chaired by J. Schilthuis, a member of the Labour Party, questioned him about diplomatic representation in Switzerland and refugee work. He had already been questioned as a witness by the commission, which had been set up in the summer of 1946. Under the direction of the Leiden professor of law, R.P. Cleveringa, an investigation had already been done by order of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shortly after the war into the attitude of the Dutch diplomatic and consular officials to Dutch refugees.[109] Visser 't Hooft did not hide his criticism of Envoy J.J.B. Bosch van Rosenthal. As regards the problems on the Swiss Road, Visser 't Hooft maintained in all the interrogations that any misunderstandings were the result of the fact that it was not clear to him what his relationship precisely was to the Office of Intelligence that was set up on 28 November 1942 – thus after he had begun his work for the government. He had his assignment from Gerbrandy and his agreements with Lovink. No one had ever told him that these agreements were no longer valid after November 1942, given that all communication with the Netherlands fell from that point on under the Office of Intelligence. During his interview, Visser 't Hooft felt that he was not able to analyse the whole question of the complex relation between the civil and political resistance and the military faction of the underground. When he noticed that he had irritated some people in London, he had asked for clarity about his position, but none had been forthcoming. In his *Memoirs* (1973), he does report that it was made clear to him, but he did not say by whom. Without question, however, he meant Van Haersma de With. Nonetheless, he omitted from his *Memoirs* that he himself continued to ask for clarity about his position until well into 1944.

108 *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945* (1950), 197-244.

109 Interrogation of Visser 't Hooft by the Cleveringa Commission, 1946-1950, National Archive 31, 28 November 1947.

> But it is obvious that the officers in charge of intelligence in London were not very happy about the existence of a quite independent service which had direct access to the Prime Minister![110]

In Visser 't Hooft's mind, that was the true reason for the continuing difficulties.

Gerbrandy confirmed Visser 't Hooft's view for the Parliamentary Inquiry commission about the nature of the information sent to London. It originally concerned details of spiritual traditions in the Netherlands.

> This work, according to Mr *Gerbrandy*, has developed into something that, to some degree, ran parallel to what went through the Office of Information. All of this happened, however in good faith, while the plan was made before the Office of Intelligence was set up and Mr *Somer*'s activity.[111]

Visser 't Hooft maintained to the Parliamentary Inquiry commission that he only did what he had been assigned by Gerbrandy himself in 1942. He did do some sorting a few times, but 'Each document was sent unchanged to London'.[112] That contradicts what he himself wrote to Gerbrandy on 17 September 1944 and what he said during the questioning by the Cleveringa Commission when he was asked if he had kept letters back after the agreements with Lovink as well.

> O yes. You often received quite odd items. The reputation of your reporting depended on not sending a lot of material that was of no use to anyone. It had to be material of some importance, for otherwise no one would take it seriously.[113]

He did admit that, at a certain moment, he had decided to ignore the Office of Intelligence and could believe that this had caused irritation.

110 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 145-146. Quote on 146.

111 *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945* (1950), 200: 'Dit werk, aldus de heer *Gerbrandy*, heeft zich tot iets ontwikkeld, dat wel enigermate parallel ging lopen met datgene, wat over het Bureau Inlichtingen liep. Dit alles is echter te goedertrouw gebeurd, terwijl de opzet was gemaakt vóór het instellen van B.I. en het optreden van de heer *Somer*.'

112 Ibid., 237.

113 Interview of Visser 't Hooft by Cleveringa Commission, 1946-1950, National Archive 31: 'O ja. Je kreeg dikwijls heel wonderlijke zaken. De reputatie van je berichtgeving hing er van af, dat je niet een hoop materiaal doorstuurde, waar niemand wat aan had. Het moest materiaal van enig belang zijn, want anders zou niemand het au sérieux hebben genomen.'

But there had been no censorship on his part. Shortly after the war Gerard Slotemaker de Bruïne was able to convince Lieutenant-Colonel J.M. Somer of the Office of Intelligence that Visser 't Hooft's editing of documents on the Swiss Road did not involve any censorship of the documents offered but was a matter of leaving personal friendship correspondence between himself and Visser 't Hooft out of the dispatches. Somer then withdrew his accusations of censorship by Visser 't Hooft. Hebe Kohlbrugge, who was also questioned by the Inquiry Commission, was taken to task by the Commission for viewing Visser 't Hooft as 'a kind of agent for an underground postal office'.[114] In its conclusion, the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission criticised the Dutch government in London as being at fault over coordination and had wrongly established on 22 August 1944, in the view of the Commission, that Visser 't Hooft had acted outside his brief. It was the government that should have prevented competence conflicts from arising between the Office of Intelligence and Visser 't Hooft.[115] It was established that major interests had been served by the sending of messages of both military and civil nature. For carrying out the government assignment, Visser 't Hooft and his staff received 'the highest praise' from the Inquiry Commission, a term that was not used anywhere else.[116] Visser 't Hooft and his staff, however, did not receive any royal honours for their activities on the Swiss Road.

The work of the Parliamentary Inquiry commission was later criticised by the researcher Loe de Jong in part 7 of his *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*. He reproached the Commission for insufficiently distinguishing between censorship and political influence. In De Jong's view, Visser 't Hooft was treated mildly by the Commission and did not deserve 'the highest praise'.[117] De Jong thought that Visser 't Hooft and his staff had monopolised their power position. Visser 't Hooft was indeed not guilty of censorship, but he should have shown the government the letter from Gerard Slotemaker de Bruïne to Visser 't Hooft on 12 January 1944, in which he said that his relations in the Netherlands were preparing 'for their own activity'. Visser 't Hooft disputed this criticism and informed De Jong in 1976 that he read much too much in that one little sentence. In the interview with Herman van Run in 1977, he said:

114 *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945* (1950), 247: 'een soort kantoorhouder van een illegale P.T.T.'

115 Ibid., 249.

116 Ibid., 251.

117 De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, vol. 7 (1976), 899-909; 1122-1138. Cf. the response by Visser 't Hooft. Ibid., 1135.

> Ah, these are all old cases. I would say that we all made mistakes and, fortunately, have not had too bad an influence on the work.[118]

And that was where he wished to leave it.

4.10 Coach for the Government

In summary, it can be noted that, from the summer of 1942 to the Allied advance in 1944, the so-called 'Swiss Road' was one of the few effective forms of communication between London and the occupied Netherlands and that Visser 't Hooft had played a central role in it. He laid the foundation for it immediately after the German occupation, thus not only in 1942, beginning on his own initiative with what he called 'Geestelijk Contact'. He hoped – precisely in circumstances of war – for a Christian revival and a flourishing church in the Netherlands. The social relevance of churches needed to be promoted where possible and as inclusively as possible with respect to preparations for reconstruction. Qualitatively high forms of resistance by people with an elitist background who could be viewed as leaders with real content had to be supported wherever possible. In practical terms, the reason behind this was his favourable position in Switzerland. But Visser 't Hooft had his own agenda with respect to content, which concerned his own view of the war and the role of the church with a view to the future. In Visser 't Hooft's thinking and acting, his ideas of ecumenicity were inseparably connected with those of the moral edification of the liberated Netherlands under a civilian government. His view of a constructive role for the German resistance fitted into this as well. The Dutch government was reticent on moral edification, while clearly rejecting his promotion of the German resistance.

He was not planning to follow this up by becoming a participant in politics and seeking politcal influence, but that is precisely what happened. Initially, he was concerned with improving the – as a result of the war – defective communication between the Dutch people in occupied territory and those elsewhere. In 1940, Visser 't Hooft decided to use his network as much as possible so that, after the shock that the occupation had brought, people

118 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Ach, 't zijn allemaal ouwe zaken. Ik zou het zo zeggen, we hebben er allemaal fouten bij gemaakt en gelukkig heeft het niet al te veel slechte invloed op het werk gehad.'

would not lose heart and would develop a vision that reflected what resistance was all about and provided content for the future of the Netherlands. Gradually, an additional purpose emerged of helping to break through the – in his view – concerning isolation of the Netherlands government in exile so that it would be more involved with what was happening at home. The irritation over the lack of content in the Radio Oranje broadcasts, expressed by contacts in the Netherlands and by Visser 't Hooft himself, played a major role here.

Prime Minister Gerbrandy stimulated him in his initiatives, appreciated his advice, and even entrusted Visser 't Hooft with a government assignment. Visser 't Hooft considered himself representative, well-informed, and capable of providing the Dutch government with commentary on the material that came from the Netherlands. Actually, he saw himself as the informal 'coach' of the government, but in this respect he overestimated himself and his contacts in the Netherlands. Visser 't Hooft had lived in Geneva since 1924 already and came from the privileged upper crust of Dutch society. His romanticised picture of the Netherlands did not square with reality, and his expectations of the post-war future and the role of the church in that connection were too high. Also, he had only a limited view of the Allied war strategy, which made him cherish expectations about the reception of ideas from the German resistance that were not realistic. He was not aware of a good part of what was happening among the different resistance groups in the Netherlands, whereas he presented himself in London as an expert in this respect. He felt called to 'coach' the Dutch government, not only as a communications expert but also with respect to content. He could offer support to some ministers. Visser 't Hooft gradually began to behave more and more like a mentor who had to make the Dutch government aware of the problems and to protect it from slipping up.

In the summer of 1942, helped by men and women who risked their lives, Visser 't Hooft set up the Swiss Road from out of Geneva, which – with the help of many – grew into a reasonably efficient courier service. In this, through rising tensions between the civil resistance and the military Orde Dienst that grew out of the Dutch mobilisation, Visser 't Hooft became embroiled in complicated political conflicts whose consequences he could not oversee. There was no clear direction from London, and the various groups each followed their own plans. His natural allies in the occupied Netherlands were active in the civil resistance, but in London it was the military and the intelligence service that were increasingly pulling the strings. He had proposed that he would primarily look after the 'spiritual contact' between the government in exile and the people in the occupied

Netherlands. In that way, he suggested, he could make a contribution to a constructive response of reflection and repentance to the judgment of God that had come to light in the occupation. He saw attention to the revival of the churches and plans for renewal of the political order as topics for the Swiss Road in this spiritual context. Concrete effects of this on the question of how to deal with traitors and the new political order of Europe and how the Netherlands would fit into that were part of that. When concrete plans for the Netherlands took shape for arriving at a transitional civil government, to which the Orde Dienst would be answerable immediately after the capitulation of the Germans, Visser 't Hooft openly supported these initiatives and attempted to get the prime minister's support.

It is understandable that the Dutch government in London was careful with responses, encouragements, and mandates for groups in the occupied Netherlands. A clearer moral leadership was perhaps desirable, but the way in which Visser 't Hooft proposed the topic was not feasible. The post-war Parliamentary Inquiry Commission critiqued the deficient leadership the Netherlands was receiving from the government in exile and declared that Visser 't Hooft had not made any serious mistakes and accorded him the highest praise. Someone else might have perhaps, with Geneva as a coincidental post, done nothing more than send on the messages. But that was impossible for Visser 't Hooft. He felt called to exercise spiritual influence and in this context thought of the prophets in ancient Israel.

5 Towards a World Council of Churches

Reconciliation and Reconstruction, 1945-1948

Abstract
Chapter 5 concerns itself with the foundation of the World Council immediately after the war. It shows how the World Council, under Visser 't Hooft's unique style of 'diplomatic' leadership attempted to deal with issues such as meeting the needs of post-war society and reconciliation, with respect to the notion of the 'responsible society'. The chapter reveals how Visser 't Hooft's earlier theological development came to fruition in this period and shows his strong practical approach in the various aspects of the World Council's programmes. The days of provisional acting and improvisation were over, and professionalism and institutionalisation gradually took over.

Keywords: reconciliation, Church reconstruction, German rehabilitation, Responsible society, Assembly Amsterdam 1948

5.1 Introduction

For Visser 't Hooft, the unity of the church was not an ideal to strive for but a starting point –a reality, in his view, given by God in Jesus Christ to humanity. Just as there was one Jesus Christ, so there was one God, and one world, available for one humankind. For him, it was not only a task but the duty of the churches to acknowledge their unity and, based on that, to work at healing the divisions in the world. The word 'must' appears quite often in his lectures and sermons in this period. The tension between reality and that task was great. A battered Europe was licking the wounds left by the war, and the world was not sitting around waiting for Visser 't Hooft to tell it what to do. Nevertheless, there was also a yearning for a message of hope, and he threw himself into the development of the World Council of Churches, working on founding it officially; here he found help for this with

Zeilstra, Jurjen A., *Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985: Living for the Unity of the Church*.
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a new permanent staff and a continually growing ecumenical network. While the refugee problem required immediate assistance, the two major fields where the notion of ecumenical unity was tested were reconstruction and reconciliation.

In the first years after the war, the nascent World Council of Churches had to operate with very few staff members at the office in Geneva, but American money was quickly available and new enthusiastic people could be hired. That gave Visser 't Hooft the opportunity to shape the action-oriented side of the World Council into a medium to large international non-governmental organisation, which was for him a necessary profiling of churches in action. That he had integrated ecumenical refugee work into the World Council already during the war meant that he was personally closely involved in this. In this chapter, we will explore what his priorities were in post-war refugee work (5.2). A second major theme that had to be promoted was reconciliation. All through the war, Visser 't Hooft stayed in constant informal contact with leading figures in the German church who had distanced themselves from Hitler. Because of that, it was not difficult to pick up the thread again, and the German churches would be able to participate fully in the founding of the World Council in 1948. How Visser 't Hooft dealt with the question not only showed the importance he attached to reconciliation but also his view of the reconstruction and unity of post-war Europe (5.3). In the ecumenical context, many problems could arise during the processing of the war and which Germans could be trusted (5.4). The fact that an ecumenical contact who had had a good reputation had to appear before the tribunal in Nuremberg was a source of confusion when Visser 't Hooft was confronted with it (5.5). During the war, Visser 't Hooft had learned the lesson that church attention for the people of the world should move beyond moral indignation. Now, together with some others, he focused on setting up a first-rate commission of the World Council for international affairs (5.6). He was dedicated to training young people by means of study and international encounters. He was constantly working therefore on developing an international ecumenical institute, where education and encounter would be central (5.7). The climax, not only of these post-war years but of ten years of ecumenical work, was the foundation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. He was the driving force behind this major international conference that made such a great impression so shortly after the war (5.8). Two major churches were lacking in Amsterdam, and he could not let that be (5.9).

Figure 26 From 1945 until 1965 the offices of the World Council of Churches were located at17 Route de Malagnou, Geneva. Visser 't Hooft's office was on the right above the entrance.



5.2 Assisting Recovering Churches

During the war, the nascent World Council had to make do with a handful of staff, no more than eight; but, after the war, the number of staff members quickly expanded. Co-ordination was necessary, especially for refugee work and the countless activities for supporting churches that were involved in the work of reconstruction. The World Council had an important role in the work of distributing the money that the American churches made available for refugee work and reconstruction. It was also American money that allowed the purchase, before the end of the war in 1945, of a villa in a park-like garden that could be used for their office. The address was 17 Route de Malagnou, on the east side of Geneva, one of the arterial roads leading to the French city of Annemasse. The building quickly proved to be too small, and the growing World Council also bought the adjoining properties in 1946 and 1947, and a few other properties on the Route de Malagnou were added later.[1]

1 Numbers 15 and 39, Route de Malagnou. Barracks were also placed in the garden later, and even the smallest corners of the attic were used.

Visser 't Hooft now saw golden opportunities to develop the World Council of Churches as a network that could be used for reconciliation and aid in a number of places, not only in Europe. Not only was money available, but people also seemed to be open to the churches taking on another role. In the view of many, the war had relativised dogmatic differences, and the benefit of collaboration between churches was clear. There was a great deal of interest in a well-reasoned vision of the revival of the church. Geneva established and made contact with Protestant churches in almost all European countries and North America and via the International Missionary Council and participating churches, with many 'daughter churches' in the colonies. The ecumenical network had survived the war intact, and the existing contacts now needed to be confirmed and expanded. To that end, Visser 't Hooft attended the first post-war synod of the Dutch Reformed Church at the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam as a guest.[2] As a distribution hub, the World Council was not only able to see to it that money from American churches was used in reconstruction programmes but also to place its own staff members on projects. The chairman of the reconstruction committee was the Swiss minister Alphons Koechlin. Visser 't Hooft himself was personally closely involved with many projects. Dutch examples, set up with the help of the World Council, were the Kerk en Wereld (Church and World) institute in Driebergen, under the leadership of Wim Kist, and the educational centre associated with that, De Horst, based on ideas formulated by Jopie Eijkman.[3]

Church buildings had been destroyed or poorly maintained and run down. There was often no money to pay ministers. But, as far as Visser 't Hooft was concerned, spiritual renewal was primary. He presented it as follows: the churches had emerged from the war purified and had learned an important lesson. He considered the continuation and deepening of this awareness essential, not only for the reconstruction of Europe but also for a sustainable world peace. In 1947, in connection with a draft of a four-year plan intended for primarily American donors, he wrote in an analysis:

> I have no doubt that there is more *real* Christianity to-day in Europe than 20 or 50 years ago. In Norway, Holland, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Greece there are movements of *renewal* such as have not been

2 *Wat er gebeurde in de Nieuwe Kerk op den Dam rond 31 October 1945* (1945).

3 After the foundation conference of the World Council in Amsterdam, the first stone of the Eijkman house was laid in September 1948 by the moderator of the Presbyterian Churces of the USA, which had given the gift via the World Council that made the building possible. Cf. Zeilstra, 'Van evidente betekenis. De oprichting van de Wereldraad van Kerken en de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk', 1998, 38.

> seen for many generations. This is especially true among intellectuals. The Student Christian Movements are alive. The various types of professional lay associations show that large numbers of Christians mean business. And we have not had so much vitality in the *theological* realm for (perhaps) centuries. Do not give our American brethren the impression – which many have anyway – that Europe must be written off. It is important to show (and this is true) that there are churches *worth helping in Europe*.[4]

Visser 't Hooft found that the present projects in the draft brochure, intended for the Americans, were described much too theoretically. He knew how Americans thought and argued for more facts and concrete illustrations, examples, and figures. Only those things would impress the Americans. Projects like evangelisation in Hungary, theological education in Berlin and programmes for training lay leaders like Kerk en Wereld in the Netherlands had to be 'sold', as it were, to the Americans.

As general secretary, Visser 't Hooft wrote an estimated 50,000 longer and shorter letters.[5] As a rule, he dictated them by heart to his secretaries who usually spoke several languages. During the period when the World Council was founded, that was Simone Mathil, and Aat Guittart was his support and mainstay in the end. Visser 't Hooft could work well in general with men he considered his equals. When he was hired by the YMCA in 1924, he had to reinvent the wheel there too, and so he now threw his staff into the deep end right away.[6] He wanted to inspire them but left the details and the organisation to them. But when it was a question of policy for which he as general secretary was responsible, he preferred to keep control of the reins himself. In the meantime, however, everything he had to do was actually too much work for one person. In 1944, Visser 't Hooft was given permission by the administrative committee to look for an assistant general secretary. For a time, he thought he had found a good candidate in the New Zealand minister Herbert Newell,[7] who was secretary of the National Council of Churches in New Zealand. He was originally a congregationalist but had transferred to the Anglican Church. Newell had also been active in missions. Visser 't Hooft knew him from the Student Christian Movement, and he seemed to be a promising candidate. But nothing came of it, and the position was not filled.

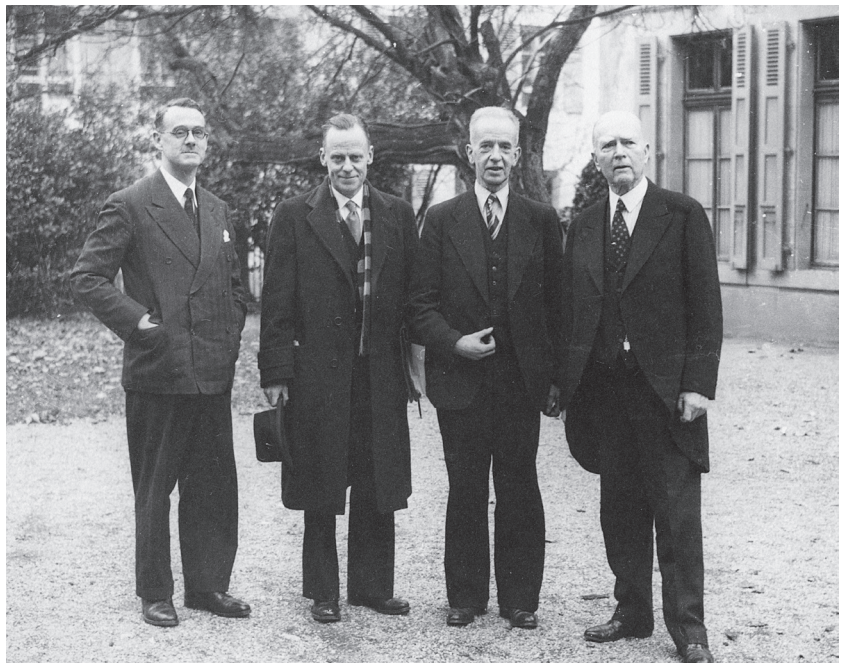
4 Visser 't Hooft, 'Notes on the Draft Four Year Plan', 15 July 1947, WCC general correspondence 797.

5 Van der Bent, 'Visser 't Hooft, Willem Adolf', 1991, 1058-1060.

6 Zeilstra, interviews with A.H. van den Heuvel, 23 April 2013, and B.C. Sjollema, 4 February 2015.

7 Visser 't Hooft to the members of the administrative committee, 11 September 1946, in: Besier, G., *'Intimately Associated for Many Years'* (2015), 344.

Figure 27 Four successive secretaries of the WSCF: Robert Mackie, Wim Visser 't Hooft, Henri-Louis Henriod, and John Mott, standing in front of the building that had just been acquired for the World Council, 17 Route de Malagnou, Geneva, 1946



To make the ecumenical refugee work that had been set up by Life and Work in the 1930s more effective, reorganisation and a close integration into the World Council as a whole was needed. In the final year of the war, Visser 't Hooft worked closely with the American Samuel McCrea Cavert to achieve this. On 12 October 1945, this resulted in the new World Council Department of Reconstruction and Interchurch Aid. The above-mentioned reconstruction committee fell under this. The Scot James Hutchinson Cockburn was the director of this department. The following individuals, among others, also served consecutively as directors of the refugee work: Adolph Freudenberg, Elfan Rees, Wolfgang Schweitzer, Richard Fagley, and Boudewijn Sjollema. They worked closely with the United Nations in several countries.

In Rome, Vienna, and Athens, so-called 'field offices', small offices, were established close to where the refugees were found. The accent lay on practical assistance without regard for persons. Most attention was paid in the first years after the war to German refugees. The German population in Poland and East Prussia went through horrible times under the Russian occupation.

Millions of Germans who lived on the eastern side of the Oder-Neisse border had to leave and from 1945 on were transported in cattle wagons to what was left of Germany. It is estimated that two million people died. A new category arose: the *Heimatvertriebenen* (expellees).

For a long time, effective assistance was almost impossible. An important contact person for Visser 't Hooft in Germany and a staff member for the refugee work of the World Council was the former Lutheran minister of the American church in Berlin, Stewart W. Herman. Herman had been doing refugee work since 1939. Heinrich Kloppenburg, a member of the High Consistory of Oldenburg who had been active in the Confessing Church, became the German secretary for refugee work in the World Council in 1947. He maintained contact with Protestant churches in the rural areas of the Russian zone of occupied Germany and reported on them to Visser 't Hooft.[8] The latter did what he could to support the workers in the field but often felt powerless. Along with the German victims, he had to deal with the catastrophe that Hitler had left behind and concentrated on reconciliation with the German churches. He continued to show great interest in the experiences of staff members who worked with refugees.[9]

5.3 Stuttgart 1945: 'Help Us, So We Can Help You'

In the spring of 1945 Visser 't Hooft travelled to the United States. Over a few weeks, he worked through a busy schedule of meetings and lectures and preaching in church services.[10] Despite the fact that the trip was a success, particularly in raising funds, the visit itself was a disappointment for him. People were certainly interested in the ecumenical work among refugees and what was necessary for the reconstruction of Europe and the role of the churches in that. But there was hardly any interest in the United States for his report on the German resistance and the fight fought by that resistance to base European unity on Christian values. There was primarily a feeling of joy over Nazi Germany's defeat. People were full of the 'Victory in Europe', and the surrender of Japan was soon expected. In the meantime, the mistrust of the increasing influence of the Soviet

8 Rapport H. Kloppenburg, untitled, 20 February 1948, YDS-4, 166.

9 Zeilstra, Interviews with R. van Hoogevest, 14 February 2014, and B.C. Sjollema, 20 August 2013.

10 Cf. M.J. Hoffman to Visser 't Hooft, 17 May 1945: 'I was deeply impressed with the Service last Sunday. You are making a lot of friends, not only for the cause so many of us have at heart, but also for the Netherlands, especially in these trying days.' WCC general correspondence 665.

Union in East Europe was growing. Visser 't Hooft realised that the ideals of a united Europe, as cherished during the war by resistance members like Adam von Trott zu Solz and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was now not a good paradigm for characterising the ecumenical movement. The World Council would have to emphasis other things: reconciliation, refugee work, and reconstruction.

That is not to say that Visser 't Hooft abandoned the notion of European unity.[11] But he was level-headed enough to see that a federal Europe serving peace and justice, which the resistance had dreamed of, was not a theme that could achieve results so soon after the war. At the same time, the post-war reconstruction and the continuation of the search for values on which Europe could be based were connected for him explicitly to both the resistance and the revival of the church:

> What then is the true *raison d'être* of European unity? What is the basis on which Europe can stand, be itself and accomplish its mission in the world? That question cannot be answered by historical or cultural analysis alone. For Europe has been visited by a great and terrible judgement of God. And the present mission of Europe can only be understood if we grasp the meaning of that judgement.[12]

To his belief that the church had emerged 'purified' from the war, he connected the hope that an exhausted Europe would discover this church anew as the place where the promise of the kingdom of God was alive. Need taught them to pray. During the war, the churches had been full. Now they could seize the opportunity and make a real contribution through their involvement to new spiritual foundations for society. Collaboration was the current reality of the ecumenical task. Small pioneering groups of men and women would be able to break through impasses. As far as Visser 't Hooft was concerned, these groups could consist just as well of socialists who realised that workers did not have enough on bread alone as Christians who understood that moral advice and correct theology were insufficient. He hoped that Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity would all be involved and expected that churches would really give their ecumenical vanguard a chance.

11 Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 332-379.

12 Visser 't Hooft, 'Europe', Lecture read at Gex, conference on reconstruction, March 1949. Cf. Leustean, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Making of the European Community* (2014). Schubert, *Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985). Ökumene und Europa* (2017).

According to Visser 't Hooft, Europe was not a concept to be defended but an idea of unity to be immersed in. He read in § 6,7 of *The Epistle to Diognetus* from the second century about Christians that they 'hold the world together':

> The soul, shut up inside the body, nevertheless holds the body together; and though they are confined within the world as in a dungeon, it is Christians who hold the world together.[13]

Visser 't Hooft believed in a special timeliness of what he called 'the office of reconciliation'. In his view, people had an urgent need for reconciliation with God, with themselves, and with others. True reconciliation was thus, according to him, only possible at the cross of Christ, that is, after the willingness as a human being to confess one's sins to God and in the belief that Christ had suffered so that forgiveness was possible. People should not be afraid of others thinking they are 'antiquated peculiarities'.[14] This, according to Visser 't Hooft, is how one showed one's faith while living in a secularised world. A Christian had to demonstrate this wherever the problems were the greatest.

Germany formed, in his view, the first great challenge in which the reconciliation between God and people in Christ needed to be made concrete in the conflicts between people. In 1945, Germany was shattered – both spiritually and materially. Millions had been displaced. The German churches had come out of the war heavily battered, internally torn, and morally damaged. The fear of nihilism, advancing moral decay, and totalitarian communism was great. People worried in particular about German youth: the values they had grown up with in Nazi Germany had been tarnished through Germany's fall. Visser 't Hooft must have experienced feelings of déja vu sometimes when he thought back to the years after 1918. Once again, there were all kinds of assistance and recovery programmes. But now he was in a much more influential position than then, and he was determined to make maximum use of it. The big question was how to deal with the German churches. The majority of German Christians had believed that the government had its own responsibility. They had supported Hitler and had held to the experience of their faith as a spiritual matter. Not until the

13 'Epistle to Diognetus' (1968), 137-151, quote on page 145. Ἐγκέ-κλεισται μὲν ἡ ψυχὴ τῷ σώματι, συνέχει δὲ αὐτη τὸ σῶμα. Καὶ Χριστιανοὶ κατέχονται μὲν ὡς ἐν φρουρᾷ τῷ κόσμῳ, αὐτοὶ δὲ συνέχουσι τὸν κόσμον.

14 Visser 't Hooft, *Heel de kerk voor heel de wereld* (1968), 13.

government issued an occupational ban (*Berufsverbot*), thereby prohibiting ethnic Jews from being Christian ministers did they become indignant. A small minority had resisted, but the reputation of the Confessing Church did not make much of an impression. Nevertheless, few German church leaders were convinced Nazis. The number of church leaders, such as the bishop of Hannover, A. Mahrarens, who paid lip service to the regime for tactical reasons, was greater. Now it was time for cleaning up, also in the church. After the collapse of the Third Reich, reform-minded church leaders began working quickly on reform in order to turn the Deutsche Evangelische Kirche (German Evangelical Church) into the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Evangelical Church in Germany, EKD) which had been purified as much as possible. How could the German Protestants find a way to link up with the international ecumenical network?

For Visser 't Hooft, there was no doubt that these reformers deserved a positive response from the international ecumenical movement. He was still convinced that the German Protestant church had to be rehabilitated as quickly as possible after the war. For the sake of the reconstruction of Germany, the development of the ecumenical movement, and the peace of Europe, feelings of hatred and rancour had to be denied any chance of taking root. In 1945, therefore, connections and ties had to be energetically re-established. He told anyone who would listen, both within and outside the World Council, that he believed that the German Protestant church would emerge strengthened from this 'time of trial'. Here Visser 't Hooft did need 'good Germans' urgently. The network of Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA) and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) was very useful in this search.[15]

Visser 't Hooft saw the Protestant Church as the only institution, 'the only coherent body' in Germany, that was suited for assistance and social work. Only this church, without any striving for power, was able to connect the necessary political consequences to the Christian message. A new, more 'agressive', form of evangelisation was necessary to fill the spiritual and moral vacuum. Church collaboration with the Allies was a sore point here. The extensive bombing of German cities in the final years of the war had left a great deal of bad blood. Christians were afraid of being seen as traitors if they worked with the Allies. But there was no better institution than the church to promote new, untainted politicians. One of these 'untainted politicians' was Gustav W. Heinemann, who was later the president of the

15 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Place of the German Church in Post-War Reconstruction', 1945, in: *Christianity and Crisis*, 11 June 1945, 4-7, YDS-4, 29.

Federal Republic of Germany, in whom Visser 't Hooft recognised a true ally in ecumenism. But the new German church leaders could not immediately act as representative, and Visser 't Hooft understood that they needed more time. But there was not much time to lose. Disappointed by the nihilism of the Nazis, people were searching and open: they could be reached with dangerous propaganda but also with the Gospel. Visser 't Hooft saw people everywhere in Germany who were embracing the Christian faith anew. There was some wishful thinking here, but there was also a new sense of urgency.

German church leaders who understood that their people bore a heavy responsibility and were prepared to deal with the consequences now saw 'nationalism' as a pagan power that also had to be critiqued by the church. Visser 't Hooft included Otto Dibelius, Theophil Wurm, and especially Martin Niemöller among these leaders. Reinhold von Thadden-Trieglaff became the permanent representative in Geneva of what was now called the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland. But the most important 'good German' for Visser 't Hooft was Martin Niemöller (1892-1984). He was a conscript and submarine captain during World War I, and after the war he became a theologian and minister. He was once a member of the Nazi party, but after Hitler introduced the so-called 'Aryan paragraph' in 1933 that allowed organisations to turn away Jews, Niemöller turned into one of the fiercest church critics of the Nazi regime in 1934. That led to a seven-year prison sentence with the status of 'personal prisoner of the Führer', which led to his becoming widely known outside Germany.

In August 1945, the leaders of the Lutherans, Reformed churches, and Uniatists met at Treysa, where they decided to prepare for the founding of the EKD. The first official meeting with a delegation from the nascent World Council followed quickly on 18 and 19 October in that same year in badly damaged Stuttgart. The arrival of non-Germans surprised the Germans. Visser 't Hooft had not been able to announce the visit because of defective communication channels, but the agenda was immediately adjusted. Without any extensive consultation with the member churches, the general secretary was planning to promise a complete restoration of ecumenical relations. The only people he had discussed this with were the members of his delegation. But it was not clear beforehand if they would succeed in finding enough common ground with the German church leaders. As far as Visser 't Hooft was concerned, everything depended on their willingness to acknowledge guilt in such a way that the foreign guests could convince their constituencies that the Germans were sincere. A moment of confessing 'public' guilt, because nothing else would do, also fitted *pars pro toto* into his theological presuppositions, but afterwards people could face each other with heads held high.

Once in conversation, people were impressed with each other's good intentions. The ice was actually already broken by Niemöller's sermon on Jeremiah 14:7-11 on the first day, 17 October, in which the Nazi period was presented as a divine judgment on everyone and to which, Niemöller also declared, only the confession of guilt could be a fitting response. In this service, Niemöller asked forgiveness from God for the German people and for the church as part of that. This set the tone for the discussions the following day.

The German representatives heard Visser 't Hooft make an urgent appeal: 'You said: Help us. That is what we want to do, but we will ask a question in return and say: Help us so that we can help you. That is the purpose of our dialogue.'[16] These words were suggested to him by his good friend and pastor Pierre Maury. He called the German church leaders to a clear public confession of guilt in the form of a statement that could be referred to. He wanted to hear clear statements about the guilt of the German people, a condemnation of the regime of terror and the German occupation of a large part of Europe. The suffering that this led to for the churches and the Jews had to be stated explicitly. In Visser 't Hooft's view, such a declaration was necessary to summon the inclination to forgiveness and to be able to organise foreign aid for the German churches.[17] He was heeded, even though it did not go completely as he wanted, as he would say later: 'Then they spontaneously said: we want to compose a statement'.[18] One of the most important originators of the confession of guilt in Stuttgart was, in addition to Niemöller, the minister of Berlin-Schöneberg, Hans Asmussen. In the middle of the war, in 1942, he had written a long letter to Visser 't Hooft in which he expressed his confidence with the words: 'Gott arbeitet unter der Oberfläche' (God works below the surface). Questions of guilt had to be dealt with sincerely by the churches and should not be left to political

16 Minutes by H. Asmussen, untitled, Stuttgart, 25 October 1945, YDS-4, 31. 'Sie haben gesagt: Helfen Sie uns. Und wir wollen das auch tun, geben aber das Wort zurück, indem wir sagen: Helfen Sie uns, dass wir helfen können. Das ist der Sinn unseres Gesprächs.'

17 Visser 't Hooft always denied that the German confession of guilt was a condition for the re-entry of the German churches into the ecumenical movement: cf. Reinhold von Thadden-Trieglaff and Kurt Scharf, in: *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 21 July 1985. But that was the impression that had been given: cf. Frits Groeneveld, who asserted that after the war Visser 't Hooft had 'forced' the German churches to confess guilt for their lack of resistance against godless national socialism. *NRC*, July 1985, and K. van Oosterzee, in: *De Bazuin*, 20 September 1985: Stuttgart 1945 made Amsterdam 1948 possible.

18 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

propaganda.[19] This letter made a deep impression at the time on Visser 't Hooft, who also constantly referred to the spiritual struggle behind the visible world.

This attitude was now translated into a declaration. The famous beginning of the confession of guilt of Stuttgart reads:

> We are all the more grateful for this visit because, with our peoples, we not only know of a large community of suffering but also solidarity in guilt. With great sorrow we say: our guilt has brought infinite suffering to many peoples and countries.[20]

The members of the German delegation thus confessed guilt while they identified with their people as a whole. But their status was not clear. Did they represent churches or a German ecumenical council? They could not of course claim to speak for the German people as a whole. But it could not be said of the foreigners either that they were operating under instructions and consultation. Getting visas for this small group was already very difficult; it was a pluriform group that had been put together with some improvisation. Visser 't Hooft was in Stuttgart together with the Dutchman Hendrik Kraemer, who had been in a concentration camp himself. For the rest, the delegation also consisted of Visser 't Hooft's French friend, Pierre Maury, the American representative for the ecumenical movement. Samuel McCrea Cavert, the American Lutheran Sylvester C. Michelfelder, the Swiss Alphons Koechlin, and the British Anglican bishop George Bell. A Norwegian had been expected in Stuttgart, but he did not make it in time.

Stuttgart was a disputed milestone, but in 1945, for the German Protestant churches, Visser't Hooft was the 'man with the outstretched hand'. They were grateful to Visser 't Hooft because he avoided reproaches. Niemöller spoke of a 'substantial contribution' and 'diplomatic skill'. At the low point of German history, Visser 't Hooft showed what ecumenicity could mean. He presented the ecumenical delegation as members of European churches that had suffered from German agression and who

19 H. Asmussen to Visser 't Hooft, 13 December 1942 and Visser 't Hooft to H. Asmussen, 9 October 1947: 'Es freut mich wieder feststellen zu dürfen, wie Sie schon drei Jahre vor Stuttgart die eigentliche Basis für das Stuttgarter Zusammenkommen gelegt haben.' YDS-4, 29.

20 Notulen H. Asmussen, untitled, Stuttgart, 25 October 1945, YDS-4, 31. Cf. Besier and Sauter, *Wie Christen ihre Schuld bekennen* (1985). 'Wir sind für diesen Besuch um so dankbarer, als wir uns mit unserem Volke nicht nur in einer grossen Gemeinschaft der Leiden wissen, sondern auch in einer Solidarität der Schuld. Mit grossem Schmerz sagen wir: Durch uns ist unendliches Leid über viele Völker und Länder gebracht worden.'

spoke 'from their churches', but they were looking for the restoration of brotherly relations with the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Evangelical Church in Germany). Fascism had brought an end to a promising start to international ecumenism in the 1930s, but personal contacts continued. It was important that Visser 't Hooft, on behalf of the World Council, now invited the Evangelische Kirche to be become a full member of the nascent World Council as soon as possible. He scribbled in his personal notes on the discussions in Stuttgart:

> Now want resume *full* relations for a) We need the witness of German Church in the ecumenical movement; b) We desire to help in the reconstruction of church life in Germany and to do our share in meeting the physical needs of the German people as churches and through the churches.[21]

He certainly saw obstacles, but these had to be cleared out of the way as quickly as possible. The mistake that should not in any case be made was, as had happened after the First World War, to allow the ecumenical atmosphere to become poisoned by endless discussions on guilt that would take years. In Stuttgart, not only did Visser 't Hooft ask the Germans to confess guilt, he himself also made a modest confession of guilt.

> Our own churches and the World Council have not recognised sufficiently early and sufficiently clearly the evil force which had been let loose and have therefore not acted sufficiently courageously when there was still time to act. And we are too clearly aware of the witness and suffering of many in the German Church. We see clearly in what happened to the German nation and church 'both the kindness [Güte] and severity of God [Ernst Gottes]'.[22]

Thus, with respect to the World Council, the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland cast itself in Stuttgart as the representative of associated state churches, including the Lutheran churches. That caused a great deal of confusion within the German church. The most prominent objection expressed was that the delegates had nevertheless given the impression that they could speak on behalf of all the German people. Many in Germany, as

21 Visser 't Hooft, personal notes Stuttgart 1945 and 'Main points to be made by World Council delegation in Stuttgart-discussions' (draft), no date, YDS-4, 29 and 30.
22 Ibid.

well many in countries that had suffered under German occupation, felt that such a moment of reconciliation had come too quickly after the war.

Visser 't Hooft was fully aware that a meeting with a handful of church leaders did not mean that reconciliaton had found its way into the hearts of people. But he primarily saw a growth in awareness. The composition of the Barmen Declaration in 1934 and reflection on the role of the church in post-war German society in Treysa in 1945 had had a unifying effect, and that was why the confession of guilt in Stuttgart was possible. Now the Evangelische Kirche began a new phase, and they could work on getting the support of their constituencies.[23] On 31 October Visser 't Hooft gave a report on the discussion with the Germans in a turbulent meeting at the general synod of the Dutch Reformed Church.[24] In November 1945, he related via a memorandum to those involved in the ecumenical movement how things stood with respect to the German church. In his view, the foundation had already been laid in Barmen, and they could now build on that. Thus, he was also responsible for the German church struggle becoming an important element for 'the format', i.e., the paradigm, of the World Council. In other words: the way in which the World Council was now organised by Visser 't Hooft and his fellows was prompted by the priorities developed during the time of the German church struggle.[25]

5.4 Dealing with the Past: Niemöller as Ecumenical Prophet

In Visser 't Hooft's eyes, Martin Niemöller was the German who managed to hit the right note in Stuttgart. After that, he brought him into the foreground internationally as a reliable representative of the other Germany. The purpose was to have the reconciliation of Stuttgart take effect in churches in countries that had been occupied by Germany. For Visser 't Hooft, Niemöller was the post-war face of the German church as a partner in the ecumenical movement and the contemporary prophet that Europe needed. In March 1946 he asked Niemöller to work for isolated

23 There was always criticism. According to the journalist Frits Groeneveld, Visser 't Hooft had 'forced' the German churches to confess their guilt for their lack of resistance to Nazism, and nothing was said about the persecution of the Jews. F. Groeneveld, in: *NRC Handelsblad*, 5 July 1985.

24 Ter Haar Romeny, *De geschiedenis van de eerste oecumenische raad in Nederland -ook in zijn internationale context-, 10 mei 1935-10 mei 1946* (1989), 259-261.

25 Cf. Visser 't Hooft, 'Can E.K.I.D. [EKD] be considered as a Church in the sense of the constitution of the World Council of Churches?' 26 november 1945, YDS-4, 11.

German churches and provide pastoral care for prisoners of war for two months that summer out of the World Council office. The energetic and engaging Niemöller did not disappoint him. Visser 't Hooft could count on him, also in connection with prickly questions, as in the case of the Lutheran bishop Theodor Heckel (1894-1967), who had promoted the foreign relations and thus the international ecumenical affairs of the Deutsche Evangelische Kirche since 1928. Heckel had not been a Nazi but had helped with Hitler's anti-Jewish measures. From 1939 on, he had also been tasked with working among German prisoners of war. When, after 1945, he simply continued and kept on contacting, in ecumenical contexts, German ministers in Italy, Visser 't Hooft felt that this was definitely harmful to the international image of the German church. He asked Niemöller to pressure Heckel into withdrawing, and Niemöller did so. Niemöller had personally reconciled with Heckel but, like Visser 't Hooft, thought that Heckel's collaboration with the Nazis had made him permanently unsuited to act on behalf of the German church in the international ecumenical movement.[26] Heckel withdrew as the representative for the ecumenical movement and only stayed active in a commission for pastoral care among Germans who were prisoners of war of the Russians. He would later, however, assume a number of important church positions in Bavaria. For Visser 't Hooft, Heckel's departure was a relief, for he could not stand him, and Heckel could have been a permanent stumbling block for the contact between the World Council and the revived German churches.

In the summer of 1946, Niemöller wanted to explain himself with respect to his actions in the Third Reich in the United States. When the Allies prevented him from travelling because he was German, Visser 't Hooft used his quiet diplomatic skills and did what he could to prevent Niemöller from being 'crippled'. Niemöller finally succeeded in travelling to the United States, and his appearances there in 1947 were a great success. Visser 't Hooft was enthusiastic:

> My question really amounts to this: are you quite sufficiently grateful for the quite wonderful work for which you are being used? There is almost no other man in the world whose word and work is so clearly and visibly blessed.[27]

26 M. Niemöller to Visser 't Hooft, 8 July 1946, WCC 42.0059.

27 Visser 't Hooft to M. Niemöller, 17 February 1947, WCC general correspondence 1026 and WCC 42.0059.

Not only did Niemöller seem to be a worthy ambassador for both Germany and the ecumenical, but he was also an important advisor for Visser 't Hooft. When the date of the foundation of the World Council, 23 August 1948, approached, he warned Visser 't Hooft that he had to make sure that the German delegation did not end up standing in the dock. That would increase the existing tension. Visser 't Hooft was in agreement. When Karl Barth and Thomas Mann reproached the German churches for self-pity, Visser 't Hooft fully supported Niemöller and guaranteed that the Evangelische Kirche could send twenty official delegates to Amsterdam.[28] They would not be accused and could participate fully, without any restrictions, in all parts of the assembly. Two extra places were reserved for the German Mennonites and Old Catholics.

In the meantime, there was still a great deal of resentment against the German people in the first post-war years, in the churches as well. Visser 't Hooft and Niemöller were both aware of this, and this was still the case after the conciliatory discussions in Stuttgart. Visser 't Hooft asked for patience.

> The great question is … what will happen when the time comes for a frank discussion. At that time two dangers will arise, namely, that the German Church should deny or minimize the particularly heavy responsibility of the German nation for the suffering of these years and that the other churches should take a Pharisaical attitude to the German Church.[29]

The great suffering that had now come over the German people was understood by Visser 't Hooft as a punishment of God. But he felt that there was no point in adding to that suffering. In connection with the shortage of reliable church leaders and ministers, he argued for an early release of theologians who were prisoners of war because they had served in the German armed forces.

Not until 1947 did the World Council receive permission from the Allied authorities who administered Germany to name a permanent representative for the German churches, who could travel freely and have a permanent position. Visser 't Hooft found the Danish Lutheran minister, Halfdan Høgsbro willing to accept this difficult position. He settled in Bad Homburg, near Frankfurt am Main in the American zone and reported on his work directly

28 Visser 't Hooft to M. Niemöller, 30 May 1947, WCC general correspondence 1027 and WCC 42.0059.
29 Ibid.

to Visser 't Hooft. Høgsbro quickly advised him that the World Council had to become more involved with the American and British trials of German war criminals. Many Germans, he had observed, had no confidence in a fair trial. Visser 't Hooft responded that the people in Geneva had neither the expertise nor competence to get involved in those issues. But the German church leaders themselves, he wrote, could appeal to the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs that was chaired by the American Lutheran O. Frederick Nolde.[30]

There was a great deal of mutual distrust among the German churches, Visser 't Hooft noted. The Lutherans were very attached to their identity, and many in the Evangelical Lutheran state churches were afraid of losing regional independence. They feared a weakening of the confessional character of the church. In a formal sense, the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland was not a church but a federation of several churches. Having every state church as an individual member of the World Council was not feasible and would not look good. But many German church leaders were very principled on this question and not very flexible. Everything depended on the credibility of the EKD representation in the ecumenical bodies, which was arranged in article 18 of the church order for the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland. When the occupation zones gradually changed into two countries, East and West Germany, the trustworthy Otto Dibelius was chosen, to Visser 't Hooft's joy, bishop of Berlin in 1949. Finally, to his relief, the umbrella Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland was accepted – also by the leaders of the state churches – as the church body that would represent Protestant Germany in the World Council.

In the meantime, the processing of the German war trauma was not an easy process, not for those who were actively involved in the ecumenical movement either. The past of Germans who were involved in the World Council was not unblemished. In addition to the above-mentioned bishop Theodor Heckel, *persona non grata* in the ecumenical movement, other German ecumenical contacts, such as Eugen Gerstenmaier, who was Heckel's right-hand man, and Hans Schönfeld, the study secretary of Life and Work in the ecumenical movement, were more or less tainted as well.[31] Visser 't Hooft found Schönfeld to be a difficult man but had never given up on him. He wrote to Adolf Keller from Interchurch Aid, with whom he collaborated a great deal in refugee work during the war:

30 Visser 't Hooft to H. Høgsbro, 6 December 1948, WCC general correspondence 672.

31 Documents on E. Gerstenmaier, YDS-4, 40-42.

> I am sorry to read about unpleasant discoveries which you have made. But I believe that you should keep in mind that it has become very clear in the last few months that Schönfeld has always had an abnormal element in his make-up. The most sad situation in which he is today is obviously not simply an illness which has overtaken him recently, but rather the breaking out of certain abnormalities which have made his life difficult for a very long time and which made cooperation with him such a very real problem. I believe that we cannot quite hold him responsible for certain things which he has done.[32]

As the study secretary of Life and Work during the war, Schönfeld played a double game, whereby he had to give his superiors at the foreign desk of the Lutheran Church in Berlin, such as Heckel, the impression of being useful to them, while he, according to Visser 't Hooft, primarily promoted the ecumenical ties with his dangerous trips. He made handy use of the diplomatic post between the German consulate in Geneva and the office of Ernst von Weizsäcker, state secretary from 1938 to 1943 under Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin. But when less attractive things came out after the war about Schönfeld's behaviour and his health quickly declined, Visser 't Hooft could no longer keep him on in Geneva.

5.5 'We Do not Wish to Call Wrong Right'

A more serious situation arose with respect to Schönfeld's contact at the ministry, Ernst H. Freiherr von Weizsäcker (1882-1951). He was a naval officer and diplomat, one of the people with whom Visser 't Hooft had been in contact in the first years of the war via Schönfeld and who had played a role in the background in the ecumenical peace initiatives of the Norwegian bishop Eivind Berggrav in 1940.[33] He came from an aristocratic family of lawyers and theologians. His membership in the SS and his function as diplomat was supposed to have been his cover for his resistance work. The ecumenical movement was shocked when this committed member of the Evangelische Kirche, who had appeared to be a 'good German', had to appear before the tribunal in Nuremberg in 1947 for war crimes. Since 1943, Von Weizsäcker had been the German envoy at the Vatican. The story

32 Visser 't Hooft to A. Keller, 18 September 1950, WCC general correspondence 744.

33 See 3.3.

was always that he had used his position as a cover for his own resistance activities and those of others. Now he was accused of active participation in the preparation of the German invasion in Czechoslovakia and giving the order for a Jewish transport from France to Auschwitz. His son Richard von Weizsäcker, a lawyer, mayor of West Berlin, and president of the Federal Republic from 1984 to 1994, defended him during the so-called Ministries Trial (Wilhelmstrasseprozess). But it was to no avail. In 1949, the Military Tribunal IV sentenced Von Weizsäcker to seven years because of crimes against humanity, which in the end became five years. After more than three years, including remand, he was released in 1950 in an anmesty and died in 1951.

Many in the ecumenical movement could not believe that Von Weizsäcker was guilty. Bishops, like the Norwegian Berggrav and the Briton George Bell, argued for his innocence. Bell even wrote a letter to President Truman.[34] According to Schönfeld, it was because of Von Weizsäcker that Bonhoeffer, Von Trott zu Solz, Gerstenmaier, and Schönfeld himself could travel internationally during the war and could develop their activities that undermined national socialism.[35] Thanks to officers like Von Weizsäcker, some ecumenical assistance could be given in Germany among prisoners of war and refugees during the war. Von Weizsäcker himself stated that he did know something about situations of 'Jewish slave labour ending in death' in Eastern Europe. But he claimed that he did not hear about the gas chambers of Auschwitz until the summer of 1944, when he was in Rome. Adolph Freudenberg, who had been active in the refugee work of the World Council since 1939, who himself had a Jewish wife and was seen as an expert on the background of the persecution of the Jews, stood up for him. In Von Weizsäcker's defence, he argued that the Swiss press only reported on the eradication of the Jews in 1943 and then initially primarily about the ghetto of Warsaw and not about Auschwitz. A petition started by friends to have Von Weizsäcker released was signed by Freudenberg but not by Visser 't Hooft, possibly because Bishop Heckel had signed it.[36]

As far as the German invasion of Czechoslovakia was concerned, Von Weizsäcker's defence was that he was in no way actively involved and had secretly worked more against the Third Reich than helped it. Regarding

34 G. Bell to H.S. Truman, 19 May 1949, YDS-4, 38. This letter was sent on to the Military Governor of the American zone in Germany.

35 H. Schönfeld to Visser 't Hooft, 11 July 1945, YDS-4, 41. Visser 't Hooft to G.K.A. Bell, 7 June 1949, in: Besier, *'Intimately associated for many years'* (2015), 530-532.

36 Petition to Military Governor for Ernst v. Weizsäcker, 28 April 1949, YDS-4, 39-40.

the Jewish transport that left under his orders in March 1942 from France to Auschwitz, he claimed that he had understood that the Jews would be safer in the East than in the West. Visser 't Hooft was also called to appear as a witness for the defence in the Von Weizsäcker case.[37] But in the end he did not testify.[38] Possibly, he did not want his position as general secretary of the young World Council to suffer if Von Weizsäcker was convicted. Just before the trial went to appeal he must have seen that the chance of a conviction was quite great. But the fact that Visser 't Hooft was planning to defend Von Weizsäcker is apparent from the fact that he had prepared himself seriously for this. He wrote the following for his witness statement intended for the tribunal but which he thus never made in court:

> As President of the Commission for Prisoners of War of the World Council of Churches, and as such their only delegate to prisoner of war camps in Germany from 1940 to 1942 … I realised forcibly in Germany itself, that without the help of someone like Mr von Weizsäcker it would have been impossible to fulfil my mission. I witnessed the dangers to which those who helped us in our task exposed themselves, and I cannot express strongly enough my admiration for them. … There is also a second reason. After visiting Germany twice in recent months, I realise strongly that to in the first place try to develop in the Germans a sense of justice, without exercising justice towards them, is a hopeless task. Surely we do not wish to call wrong right, but confronted as we are by such an astounding sentence [seven years], we think that the verdict far from developing a sense of justice, will tend rather to atrophy it.[39]

37 Major Schäffer to Visser 't Hooft, telegram 12 August 1949, YDS-12, 78.

38 See: *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law*, no. 10, vol. XII, (1946-1949), 243: W.A. Visser 't Hooft was named as a witness, but he does not appear later in the documents. Cf. A. Keller to Visser 't Hooft, 25 April 1949. WCC general correspondence 743: 'I believe […] I remember that you or the Ecumenical Council have already testified for Mr von Weizsäcker, namely with the reference that a good part of our work for refugees and prisoners was possible only through his friendly attitude to our work and thus obviously also through his attitude that was not friendly to the Nazi system in any way.' ('Ich glaube […] mich zu erinnern, dass Du oder de Oekumenische Rat bereits schon für Herrn von Weizsäcker eingetreten seid, namentlich mit dem Hinweis, das sein guter Teil unserer Arbeit für Flüchtlinge und Gefangene nur möglich war durch seine freundliche Stellung zu unserer Arbeit und damit selbstverständlich auch durch seine Gesinnung, die dem Nazi-System durchaus nicht freundlich war.')

39 Visser 't Hooft, untitled, no date. YDS-4, 38.

Von Weizsäcker's assertion that he did not know until very late about the existence of the extermination camps turned out to unbelievable not only for the tribunal. Documents discovered later show that Von Weizsäcker and others at Foreign Affairs must have been thoroughly informed at an early stage of the large-scale nature of the murder of the Jews in the Polish concentration camps. Also, criticism increasingly appeared of the view held for years that the Berlin Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and particularly the 'Abwehr', the espionage branch of defence, had to be seen as a bulwark of resistance against Hitler. This view was characterised as a myth by the notorious 2000 study, *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit* by Eckhart Conze.[40]

5.6 Diplomacy Based on a 'Genuine Meeting of Minds'

In 1945 the victorious Allies decided to set up a new, more decisive organisation to replace the League of Nations in which human rights would be given an important role. This United Nations Organization included 51 countries when it was founded. In ecumenical circles, it was often argued that the League of Nations lacked a spiritual root or even 'a soul'.[41] Visser 't Hooft was convinced that the new World Council had to be that soul to the UNO. The challenge was not only to equip the Council for that purpose with respect to organs but also to provide a staff out of the churches with the knowledge and spiritual baggage to be able to take on that role. In a plan from 1943 on the post-war tasks of the World Council, Visser 't Hooft argued for a permanent organ of top theologians and lawyers where fields of international tension could be be discussed. Collaboration had to be striven for especially in the area of human rights, refugees, and freedom of religion. Building and maintaining informal contact should prevent the Vatican and the World Council from contradicting each other in public.[42] This body would not be concerned with exercising power, but with building up influence through the ecumenical movement on the basis of consensus among experts. Visser 't Hooft was a major proponent of active ecumenical diplomacy – largely behind the scenes, for every suspicion that churches were becoming involved in politics had to be nipped in the bud.

40 Conze, Frei, Hayes and Zimmermann, *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (2010), especially 388ff.

41 Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995), 6.

42 Visser 't Hooft to W.W. van Kirk, 28 May 1946, WCC general correspondence 772.

In February 1946, the provisional committee of the World Council founded the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). The idea for this foreign commission had emerged from the conference of lay specialists that the nascent World Council had organised in July 1939 in the hotel Beau Séjour near Geneva. That conference was unable to do anything to prevent the outbreak of war, but Visser 't Hooft later saw this as the start of realistic ecumenical thinking about international affairs. Shortly after the foundation of the CCIA in June 1946, international tensions increased considerably because of the Cold War. Some were even afraid that a third world war would break out, and there were calls from various quarters for a prophetic word from the churches that were united in the nascent World Council. But Visser 't Hooft was reluctant at this point and gave a typical response for him:

> Now I do not believe in statements that are just drawn up in this office or by one or two offices and which have not grown out of a genuine meeting of minds.[43]

He wanted to wait until August when the CCIA would meet officially for the first time, which was expected to lead to a clear statement based on consensus. But that proved much more difficult than he thought, for there also appeared to be great differences of opinion within the CCIA on, for example, the question how Christianity and totalitarian systems were related.

The CCIA was set up as a common organ of the International Missionary Council and the World Council together. Visser 't Hooft considered the Missionary Council very important in this connection because of its close-knit network in the colonies. The secretariat of the CCIA was made up of Visser 't Hooft and the American Walter W. van Kirk on behalf of the American Council of Churches, but in fact it was Visser 't Hooft who, as a diplomat, was the face of the policy. His demand that the members of the commission always be well informed about what was going on in the world of international relations and that they refrain from pious sermons set the tone. He was convinced that what people sought in politicians and diplomats was not moral indignation but to be helped on the basis of expertise and an ethics informed by Christianity. In addition, according to Visser 't Hooft, concrete proposals and recommendations were needed. They had to be value-driven, based on Christian convictions but also comprehensible to all.

43 Visser 't Hooft to W.W. van Kirk, 4 June 1946, WCC general correspondence 772.

It was experts, however, who could play a pioneering role here, not church leaders. His friend, the experienced and scholarly professor of international law in Leiden, Frederik M. baron van Asbeck, was, in Visser 't Hooft's eyes, the foremost example of the type of expert he had in mind. Van Asbeck's tenure as chairman of the CCIA, from 1948 to 1965, lasted for almost of all Visser 't Hooft's time as general secretary.

With the CCIA, Visser 't Hooft wanted to make sure that the voice of the church would be taken seriously in the international arena. He set himself and his staff the task of exploring whether the World Council needed to make a public statement whenever a serious international crisis arose. Where possible, the CCIA could intervene, in, for example, the form of informal explorations of opportunities for peace. Some argued for a separate International Committee on Religious Liberty, but Visser 't Hooft did not find that a good idea. He was a proponent of an integrated approach in which religious argumentation and other motives were considered together. The executive committee consisted of the Englishman Kenneth Grubb, chairman from 1946 to 1968, and the American O. Frederick Nolde, director from 1946 to 1969. They succeeded in regularly making the voice of the churches heard in the world of international diplomacy. The CCIA was one of the first non-governmental organisations to receive a consutltative status in the economic-social council of the Unitied Nations. Visser 't Hooft was happy with it, but he did find that the CCIA had to remain strictly independent and had to be careful to avoid becoming involved in the decision-making process of the United Nations. Whatever the World Council brought to the United Nations, it could not be idealism. That was never Visser 't Hooft's intention: he believed in an approach that combined Christianity and realism, not in international idealism.[44]

5.7 A Study Centre at Bossey: Towards a New Science of Ecumenism?

Visser 't Hooft expected a great deal from study to develop the unity of the church. Misunderstanding would decrease through knowledge over time. The chances of consensus would increase. He took his zeal for work among Christian students, developed by the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), with him to the World Council, especially in the Life and Work study department. But it did not stop at that – he also wanted to nourish an

44 See 2.6.

ecumenical impulse that would have an effect across the board theologically. For example, in 1945, Visser 't Hooft gave a series of lectures at the Theological Faculty of the University of Geneva on biblical social ethics, in which he placed the emphasis on exegetical methods that could help students derive a contemporary message from Bible texts.[45] According to Visser 't Hooft, a good reader understood that the Bible was not a book with ready-made rules and solutions but required hard study of the texts so that one would gradually become aware of what God's salvific plan was, both for the personal life of the reader and for the world.[46] The criticism made in 1948 that the World Council had no interest in Christian education hit him hard. The person who sent this message was F.L. Knapp from New York, general secretary of the World Council of Christian Education (WCCE), a successor of the Sunday School Association. Visser 't Hooft responded indignantly.[47] Not until 1971 would the WCCE became part of the World Council of Churches.

Already before the war, Visser 't Hooft had been planning to set up an international ecumenical study centre. The lectures he gave in 1945 also helped to breathe new life into this plan. The first courses started in October 1946. It was intended to be an 'energising centre' of encounter and study, a place for training people in ecumenicity, an 'ecumenical laboratory'. The great themes in the early years here were also reconciliation and reconstruction in Europe. Students were trained to be able to play an important role in these respects in their countries of origin. The missiologist Hendrik Kraemer, Suzanne de Diétrich, and Henry-Louis Henriod – the latter two experienced WSCF staff members – were in charge of the institute, while numerous well-known guest instructors with ecumenical experience were recruited. There was a course for laymen, for which there were thirty enrollees when it opened, but the focus was on the theologians' programme, which was aimed at older students of theology and young ministers. The ecumenical institute was established in 1950, thanks to a gift by the American John D. Rockefeller Jr. to Visser 't Hooft for this purpose, in the Bossey castle near

45 Visser 't Hooft, 'Quelques Etudes sur l'Ethique Sociale de la Bible', Syllabus 1945.

46 Ibid.

47 Visser 't Hooft to F.L. Knapp, 23 November 1948, WCC general correspondence 785. They did collaborate throughout the years, but the WCCE would not become part of the World Council of Churches until 1971.

Figure 28 With his friend Marc Boegner, one of the first presidents of the World Council and president of the Fédération Protestante de France, in front of the Château de Bossey in Geneva during the conference celebrating 450 years of Calvin, 1959



Céligny.[48] Visser 't Hooft himself gave guest lectures with great pleasure into old age.[49]

He hoped that Bossey and those who were educated would contribute to a new theological discipline that he himself called ecumenism but would later, in the Netherlands for instance, often be called 'oecumenica'.[50] This discipline was to focus on the study of the dynamic relations between the churches in which social questions played a great role. In connection with this, Visser 't Hooft would give a speech in Melbourne in February 1956 in whic he argued for 'ecumenism' as a new theological discipline:

> Ecumenism is the discipline which seeks to provide a comprehensive description of the faith and life of the Christian churches, as well as

48 Cf. http://ge.ch/grandconseil/memorial/seances/540202/55/17/.

49 For example, lecture notes of A. Parmentier-Blankert lectures on 'Social concern of the ecumenical movement' by Visser 't Hooft. Bossey, 28-30 November 1973. In the author's possession.

50 Hoedemaker, Houtepen and Witvliet, *Oecumene als leerproces. Inleiding in de Oecumenica* (1993).

> the ways in which they co-operate and manifest their unity and which also deals critically with the issues which have arisen as a result of the encounter between the churches for the churches themselves and the ecumenical movement.[51]

According to Visser 't Hooft, this discipline should involve more than 'descriptive ecclesiology'. He thought of a dynamic and motivational curriculum that could also fit well into the education programme of missiology if there was a good manual. The ecumenical movement needed the help of vibrant seminaries to reflect better on the deeper questions that the World Council was now confronted with.[52] Most church historians were, according to Visser 't Hooft, too much influenced by secular historiography. What was needed then was what he called a 'theological criticism' of church history. He found the volume on the history of the ecumenical movement, which was edited by Ruth Rouse and to which he himself had contributed an article on the word 'ecumenical', too factual.[53] The argument for the engagement of the academic scholar, something on which he had often written and spoken already in the 1930s, was revived again.[54] He himself wanted to contribute to such 'theological criticism' with his article 'Our Ecumenical Task in the Light of History': 'We should dare to make theological judgements about historical happenings.'[55] An ecumenical-theological analysis of the Reformation seemed to be a good starting point for him. To what extent was this sixteenth-century movement a true renewal of the church and to what extent the work of the devil because of the division and violence it led to?

In various Dutch churches – and not least in the Dutch Reformed Church, soon to be Visser 't Hooft's own church – the resolution of the leaders of the World Council to have the foundation conference of the World Council take place in Amsterdam in August 1948 was greeted with enthusiasm.[56] In the

51 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Implications of the Ecumenical Movement for Theological Education', 1956. WCC, 994.2.15/30.

52 One example of such a centre was the Centre for Intercultural Theology, Interreligious Dialogue, Missiology, and Ecumenics (Centrum voor Interculturele Theologie, Interreligieuze Dialoog, Missiologie en Oecumenica [IIMO]), that existed from 1969 to 2004 in Utrecht. In 1968, Visser 't Hooft officiated at the opening of an ecumenical centre in Rotterdam that bore his name, where academic theology and business together would research norms and values in business, but this was closed again after a few years.

53 Visser 't Hooft, 'The word "Ecumenical"- its History and Use', 1986, 735-740.

54 See 2.5.

55 Visser 't Hooft, 'Our Ecumenical Task in the Light of History', 1955.

56 Zeilstra, 'Van evidente betekenis. De oprichting van de Wereldraad van Kerken en de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk', 1998, 21-39.

run-up to the foundation, it became clearer and clearer that many countries and churches recognised Visser 't Hooft as one of the main players in the ecumenical movement. In 1947, he was invited to give the Stone Lectures at Princeton in the United States.[57] With the theme 'The Kingship of Christ', Visser 't Hooft gave an overview of the most important theological developments in the interbellum. He sketched the clash between the church and the totalitarian state, particularly in Germany, but he also gave examples from Norway and the Netherlands. With respect to the theological impasse between European and American theology, on which he had written his dissertation in 1928, he was now optimistic. An important lesson had been learned on both sides of the ocean. People were thinking more practically in Europe now, whereas a theological deepening had occurred in the United States. In this period Visser 't Hooft expected a quick breakthrough in ecumenical dialogue. A concentration on the kingship of Christ would lead to rapprochement. With such an approach, Visser 't Hooft managed to influence the orientation of the World Council in a Christocentric sense. That would be apparent not only during the foundation meeting in Amsterdam in 1948 but also from the ambitious theme of the second assembly in Evanston in 1954: 'Christ, the Hope of the World'. Visser 't Hooft decisively rejected the criticism that ecumenism would lead to relativism: 'The ecumenical conversation must be a struggle for truth. Excessive politeness is sometimes a greater hindrance to ecumenical advance than frank facing of difference.'[58] The question of truth itself was at stake here. In the summer of 1948, Visser 't Hooft was ordained as a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, and, after having done the colloquium pro forma, he became a minister in general service without salary. For a while he was a little worried about being accepted for ordination, for his Hebrew had become quite rusty.

5.8 Amsterdam 1948: A 'Responsible Society'

Shortly after the war, Visser 't Hooft began to develop strategies and to set out a time schedule for the definitive foundation of the World Council of Churches. In February 1946, the provisional committee of the Council organised a modest and deliberately plain 'conference of Christian unity' in the St. Pierre Church in Geneva. Visser 't Hooft saw to it that Martin Niemöller was also present. It was here that the decision was made to hold

57 Visser 't Hooft, *The Kingship of Christ. An Interpretation of Recent European Theology* (1948).
58 Visser 't Hooft, 'Ten Ecumenical Questions', 21 October 1947, WCC 994.2.11/19.

the foundation meeting of the World Council in Amsterdam in 1948. Other preparatory meetings of the provisional committee occurred in Buck Hill Falls in the United States, in Geneva, and in London. The plans became increasingly concrete.

There was also a matter of concern. Faith and Order and Life and Work had both been absorbed into the World Council but did not always make an equal contribution. The work of Faith and Order was allocated to a department, whereas Life and Work often seemed to give form and content to the whole, and there was also a Life and Work study department. It was not without reason that people from Faith and Order claimed that the practical work was often higher on the agenda than the content of the faith. Canon Leonard Hodgson, a professor at Oxford, attacked Visser 't Hooft personally about this point in March 1948. As the secretary of Faith and Order, he felt that the Life and Work study department had been given too much room in the new Council. But Visser 't Hooft stated that all organs of the World Council were in fact organs of the churches themselves and that there was no reason at all to fear that Faith and Order would be snowed under.[59]

One crucial aspect was the invitation policy for the assembly in Amsterdam. Visser 't Hooft preferred to have all first-class speakers, leaders in their area. It was important for him that the intended speakers thought in terms of the church. He was delighted that Karl Barth, who personally wanted to have little to do with the World Council as such, was willing to speak. Some found that Visser 't Hooft's list of speakers was determined too much by his preference for 'Barthians'; this was true to a certain extent, but not completely. The American Henry Van Dusen and the Swede Anders Nygren could not be called Barthians. Anglicans especially, who had been raised in natural theology, such as the World Council president, Geoffrey Fisher, and the Bishop of Chichester George Bell, played an important role. But the dialectical method, which Barth firmly endorsed and in which the revelation of God was presupposed as opposed to human culture, did have great influence through Visser 't Hooft himself and others as well.[60]

Some speakers were not welcome – including dialectical thinkers – even if they were influential theologians. For example, Paul Tillich was not invited, even though he had made an important contribution to the Life and Work conference in Oxford (1937). Visser 't Hooft and Tillich did not get along, but, more importantly, Tillich did not think in church terms: he was not really interested in the institutional side of church unity, which was precisely

59 Visser 't Hooft to L. Hodgson, 9 March 1948, WCC general correspondence 659.
60 Cf. Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue* (1981), 310-311 and 318-319.

Figure 29 Leaders at the opening ceremony of the foundation meeting of the World Council of Churches in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam, 22 August, 1948: S. Germanos, J.R. Mott, W.A. Visser 't Hooft, E. Eidem, D.T. Niles, G.F. Fisher, and M. Boegner



what Visser 't Hooft was insisting on. Tillich felt unpleasantly passed over in 1948.[61] The Swiss Reformed theologian Emil Brunner, who was also a dialectical theologian, felt himself set aside in a similar fashion.[62]

The Amsterdam assembly began on 22 August 1948, with a service in the Nieuwe Kerk. Visser 't Hooft had difficulty believing that, after ten years, the time had finally come. The actual foundation of the World Council of Churches took place the following day in the Concertgebouw with the solemn proclamation of the foundation text by Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury. This was the milestone they had been looking forward to for more than ten years. With the memories of the war still fresh in their minds, there were tears in many eyes while the text was being read. Members of very different churches felt bound together and ready for

61 Cf. Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich. His Life and Thought* (1989), 194-195.

62 Cf. Jehle-Wildberger, *Adolf Keller* (2008), 499: 'It seems that Visser 't Hooft wanted to marginalise theologians who did not unconditionally support Karl Barth's line ('Es scheint, dass Visser 't Hooft Theologen, die die Linie Karl Barths nicht bedingungslos vertraten, an den Rand schieben wollte.')

a common mission in a quickly changing world. The important thing seemed to be that modernisation and renewal were thus not the same thing as secularisation. Churches united in the World Council accepted the challenge of a new age with complete self-confidence. At least, that was how their leaders – who were, for the most part, white Protestant men from Europe and North America – experienced it. Despite the feeling of connectedness, however, the differences remained visible. For example, in that week, churches from the Calvinistic Reformation celebrated the Lord's Supper in the Nieuwe Kerk, while other denominations like the Lutherans, Anglicans, and Greek Orthodox held their celebrations in other churches in Amsterdam.

Amsterdam meant consolidation and completion of the policy that was developed in Oxford, Edinburgh, and Utrecht. A few important pioneers, such as the Anglican archbishop William Temple, had died. But the continuity was great. When the Council was actually founded, most members of the provisional committee of the nascent World Council moved to what would now be called the central committee. Visser 't Hooft felt that the period of 13 days that was reserved for the assembly itself was actually too short. So incredibly much had to be done. For example, a series of far-reaching decisions were made about the nature and function of the new Council. He was keen to establish that Amsterdam was free to 'invent itself'; after all, there were no precedents and therefore, in principle, no church order stipulations from participating churches could be violated. It was decided that there would, in principle, be a major assembly every six years, deliberately not called a synod or a council, with delegates from all member churches. During an assembly, the general secretary, who daily supervised a growing number of staff members, was required to give an account of the Council's activities, finances, etc. at the assembly. The central committee would consist of a hundred members chosen by the assembly and would meet annually. This committee would, in turn, choose the small executive committee. The general secretary was officially also the secretary of both the central committee and the executive committee. The staff worked in departments under directors who reported directly to the general secretary. The parallels with the organisational structure of the United Nations were striking. But Visser 't Hooft wanted to temper the high expectations. Clear statements were expected from Amsterdam, but it would not be easy to reach a consensus on the major themes. He was also aware that 'World Council' was a huge word for an organisation that had almost no representatives from Africa and South America, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. He was keen to present

Amsterdam as a start. A World Council existed – that was a fact. But the real work still had to begin.

The theme of the Amsterdam assembly, 'Man's Disorder and God's Design', was a heavy one. It was subdivided into four sections, and in each section the unity of the church was brought to bear on one aspect of the chaos in the world: The Universal Church in God's Design, The Church's Witness to God's Design, The Church and the Disorder of Society, and The Church and the International Disorder.[63] Everything that happened during this foundation meeting could be interpreted in a political way by the outside world, even though it was intended in a spiritual sense. The supporting concept 'responsible society' was conceived by Visser 't Hooft and John Oldham and defined as follows:

> A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it.[64]

In coining the concept 'responsible society', they were looking for a link between the ethics of divine command that came out of revelation theology on the one hand and a more teleological contextual ethics that came out of the tradition of natural theology. Visser 't Hooft was a proponent of the former approach, but he wanted to do justice to the latter approach as well.[65] Again and again, the World Council would, in the following decades during the Cold War, return to the concept of 'responsible society' in order to defend its independent position between East and West.

Visser 't Hooft gave a report at the foundation meeting on the ten years since Utrecht. Reassuring statements were made to the effect that the World Council was not a superchurch with authority over the member churches and that it would not strive after political goals were important.[66] He himself found that such a large assembly with an overloaded programme should not expect any deep clarification concerning reflection on the nature of the Council. But he himself was astute and organised careful press times and facilities and – for that time – modern interpreters' services with portable

63 *Man's Disorder and God's Design. An Ecumenical Study Prepared under the Auspices of the World Council of Churches*, 4 vols. (1948).

64 Grenholm, 'Responsible society', 1991, 866-867.

65 Ibid. See also: 3.5.

66 Visser 't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (1982), 66-68.

Figure 30 Foundation meeting of the World Council of Churches in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, 23 August 1948



receivers for the 351 delegates, the specialists, the guests, and the press. Nevertheless, moments of confusion, conflict, and misunderstanding could not be prevented.[67] For example, the American John Foster Dulles came into conflict with the Czech theologian Josef Hromádka. During the war, Dulles had done important ecumenical work as chairman of the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace set up for the American churches and would soon become Secretary of State under President Truman. Hromádka was viewed by Visser 't Hooft as an independent thinker who could help the World Council steer an independent course between East and West. Visser 't Hooft got along well with both of them. But while Dulles became increasingly fiercely anti-communist, Hromádka called for Christians to work together with moderate communists. To Visser 't Hooft's satisfaction, Section 3 on the church and the disorder of society in the final declaration called upon the churches to reject the ideologies of both communism and laissez-faire capitalism.

The unity of the church was, as far as Visser 't Hooft was concerned, to be regarded as a gift from God. This was what the churches were now rediscovering. The basic formula laid down in 1938, 'Jesus Christ God and Saviour', was

67 Visser 't Hooft, lecture at Theological Conference, 29 December 1947-2 January 1948.,WCC 994.2.12/9

Figure 31 Visser 't Hooft reports on the formation period 1938-1948, 23 August 1948



adopted without too much opposition as the basis for the World Council. That was very reassuring for Visser 't Hooft. O. Frederick Nolde, director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), wrote an important contribution on human rights and the Commission's collaboration with the United Nations and other international organisations 'as essential for a stable world order'. In the policy of Visser 't Hooft, Nolde, and Grubb, the accent lay on a realistic approach. With regard to human rights, freedom of religion and the freedom to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends

of the earth were central.[68] They explicitly asserted that there were three determinative, special components for Christians. The first was that the belief that the human being is created in God's image constituted the basis for the Christian concept of freedom. As the second component, it was stated that the dignity of the human being that was claimed in human rights, as listed in the Charter of the United Nations, was confirmed in God's love for the human being and visible in Christ. The third component consisted in the right of every human being to freedom to respond to God's call. It was stipulated that the most important source was the revelation of God and that arguments on the basis of natural law had only supplementary value.

In the run-up to the assembly, in the spring of 1948, Visser 't Hooft was watchful: anything could go wrong. A number of major themes were prominent in international politics. The Russians were threatening to isolate West Berlin from the rest of the world. The threat of a nuclear war was on many people's minds. The decolonisation process was going much faster than the European powers had expected, and tensions were running high. The partition of British India in 1947 into an Islamic West and East Pakistan and a largely but not completely Hindu India claimed hundreds of thousands of victims. The Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies was followed by the Bersiap Period (1945/1946) and an Indonesian struggle for independence that few in the Netherlands understood. The foundation of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948 had provided a home for Jews, but it also meant a history of flight and eviction full of suffering for Palestinians. Visser 't Hooft feared chaotic scenes during the assembly. The number of plenary meetings also had to be limited, and there had to be room in the working groups for discussion. There had to be good interpreters, familiar with church jargon. It was not only during the actual assembly in Amsterdam, which took place from 22 August to 4 September 1948, that Visser 't Hooft was busy and under pressure. The nascent World Council held its last meeting of the provisional committee in Woudschoten near Zeist on 20-21 August before the opening of the assembly. The new central committee of the World Council met for the first time on 5 and 6 September immediately after the assembly. An ecumenical youth conference took place from 6 to 9 September; on 7 and 8 September the commission concerning the study department met; from 7 to 13 September the conference of theology students linked to the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF); from 8-10 September the conference of the International Missionary Council; and, finally, in September, the meeting of the International Committee on the Christian Approach to the

68 Nolde, 'Freedom of Religion and Related Human Rights', 1948, 143-189, especially 146-148.

Jews. Though Visser 't Hooft could not be everywhere, he did coordinate everything. He worked hard on the preparations and involved everyone he knew in the Dutch churches. He controlled countless strings behind the scenes, including during the assembly itself.

5.9 Two Rejections Become Two Challenges

In 1948, 147 churches from 44 countries joined the World Council when it was founded. Most of the churches were Protestant. Visser 't Hooft felt it was essential for the ecumenical character of the council that a number of Orthodox churches wanted to be 'co-founders': the Church of Greece, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, a number of small Eastern Orthodox churches, the Russian Orthodox Church in exile, and the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America. Shortly after the council's foundation, the ancient patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem associated themselves with the World Council. Visser 't Hooft interpreted the successes of Amsterdam as a victory of the Holy Spirit over the weaknesses of people and their mutual division, seeing Amsterdam as a high point in the history of the church during an extremely vulnerable phase of world history. But he also saw the darker sides. There were two important rejections. While the contact with the Greek Orthodox Church and with the Orthodox churches under Constantinople's authority was still good, this could not be said for the relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church. This church, and those associated with it in East Europe, rejected the invitation to Amsterdam. From Moscow, it was reported that they could not work with the council 'in the present form'. Visser 't Hooft could have accepted this if it had happened for political reasons, given the Cold War. But an unacceptable theological argument had been used. The Russian church leaders asserted that the World Council would try to gain power over member churches and thus submit to the temptation that Christ had resisted. Visser 't Hooft stated openly that they did not understand what the World Council was all about. He considered it a challenge to convince the Russian church leaders of the opposite and was planning to build up his contact with the Russians in a strategic way. Numerically, with tens of millions of adherents, the Russian church represented by far the largest part of Orthodoxy. During the 1950s, he made one small step after another until he reached his goal.[69]

69 See chapter 8.

That the World Council under Visser 't Hooft's leadership was determined to have a unique approach to East and West was not really understood in the White House in Washington either. Prior to the foundation conference, Visser 't Hooft received – to his surprise – a visit from the American diplomat Myron Taylor, who was studying, on President Truman's orders, how religious movements could be mobilised in the struggle against communism.[70] This clumsy attempt at lobbying, together with the Russian rejection in which, in addition to its theological argument, he suspected the influence of the communist state, confirmed for Visser 't Hooft that the World Council had to follow a strictly independent path and not be the lackey of either the West or the East. That he possibly underestimated, in this consideration, the dangers of totalitarianism in the East, fitted in with his strong conviction that the true threat was secularism and moral uprooting in East and West. For a long time, Visser 't Hooft concentrated on rapproachement between the World Council and the Russian Orthodox Church, seeing here the means for a breakthrough. Because of that focus, he did not have much interest initially in setting up the Conference of European Churches in which the accent was on contact between all European churches. That would change later.[71]

The second rejection came from the Roman Catholic Church. It was not expected that it could be a co-founder, but Visser 't Hooft knew that there were individual Roman Catholic clergy who were very interested. A Roman Catholic *monitum* (an official warning from the church) issued on 5 June 1948, however, stipulated that no Roman Catholic could attend an international meeting organised by the World Council without official permission. The request by the Dominican Yves Congar to Cardinal Jan de Jong from Utrecht to allow 14 Roman Catholic observers to attend the foundation meeting of the World Council of Churches was in vain.

After the foundation of the World Council, the Roman Catholic Church responded with an instruction from the Holy Office: *De motione ecumenica*.[72] This instruction now recognised the value of the non-Roman Catholic ecumenical movement and viewed it as inspired by the Holy Spirit. But the Vatican's reaction was reserved for the rest. Visser 't Hooft was disappointed: Roman Catholic observers would have been more than welcome at the foundation meeting. Nevertheless, there were some interested Roman Catholics in Amsterdam while the meeting was going on. Without being literally present at the consultations, they remained at some distance from

70 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 207.

71 See 7.7.

72 *De motione oecumenica*, Instruction of the Holy Office, 20 December 1949, WCC 4201.1.1/6.

the sessions in a hotel. They were carefully kept up to date by Visser't Hooft and provided with material.

5.10 The Firm Pragmatist

There was much to do in the world of 1945. Both on the national and the local level, churches needed support to be able to play a role anew in post-war Europe. That was primarily where Visser 't Hooft and his nascent World Council directed themselves immediately after the Second World War. For him, in 1945, it was a major challenge to make the World Council of Churches visible and relevant for post-war society. First, the council had an important contribution to make to the alleviation of need in the world. The most important means here were a closely-knit international network, good ideas on reconciliation, and looking out for each other. Many creative people and American money helped in this. In the years after the war, activities concentrated on reconstruction, work among refugees, and steps towards reconciliation with the German churches. With continually more means at their disposal, financed by primarily American sources, Visser 't Hooft could expand the capacities of the new council. He kept firm hold of the reins in the central leadership and was anything but someone who simply carried out the ideas of others. He gave his staff a great deal of responsibility, demanding from them their own initiative. But he did have a well-defined perspective on the future, and, as general secretary, he organised the nascent World Council according to his own insights. He was gradually transforming the small office into a well-oiled global player, able to speak as a non-governmental organisation on behalf of the member churches in the world of international relations. Justice and peace should, in his view, flourish if the churches were revived and if this was accompanied by the conviction that God would build his kingdom on earth in the deeds of people. For example, in refugee work he combined a strong Christocentric belief with realism and pragmatism. There could be no credible witness concerning the love of Christ for people without deeds. For him, important principles in assistance were that help was done when possible in colloboration with those needing help and that the coordination would occur close to the field.

In the first years after the Second World War, Visser 't Hooft saw reconciliation as a major task, an office actually. He chose the way of personal contacts, improvisation, and the outstretched hand and sensed that a formal mandate on behalf of the churches and consultation so soon after the war could overload the process of reconciliation and could even bring it to a

halt. Germany was a country in crisis, and a rancorous attitude did not fit in with the churches, certainly not with the ecumenical movement. He felt that it was essential that a positive report be released to the world quickly to the effect that there were representative Germans with a sense of guilt, and that church delegates from the Alllied countries were willing to forgive them. Help and collaboration had to be organised as quickly as possible, and, to get the best result, a firm and pragmatic approach was necessary.

Visser 't Hooft used deliberately sympathetic identification figures to demonstrate that reconciliation in Europe was possible. He pushed the 'good German' Martin Niemöller into the foreground and took the group of church leaders around him seriously. Because of this, Visser 't Hooft made it possible for the largest German Protestant church (the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland) to join the World Council in 1948, while the World Council was given the chance to approach Germany and, where possible, to help in time of need. By being able to accept Germany without rancour as quickly as possible as a reliable European partner and a suitable building block for the unity of a stable Europe, Visser 't Hooft acted in the spirit of Adam von Trott zu Solz and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He found dealing with Germans who had collaborated with the Hitler regime problematic to a lesser or greater degree: there was a large grey area between right and wrong. Visser 't Hooft had to deal with this carefully. Ernst von Weizsäcker's trial for war crimes in front of the war tribunal in Nuremberg deeply shocked the ecumenical movement. After all, he was known as a 'good' German. Visser 't Hooft was inclined to testify in his favour but did not do so. The risk of bringing the World Council into discredit so shortly after the war was too great.

A strong commission for international affairs was indispensable for the World Council, and Visser 't Hooft was constantly searching for experts. He did not want too many theologians on the Commission of the Churches for International Affairs (CCIA). The constant publication of ecumenical statements whenever there were international tensions was meaningful only if they had sufficient support in the churches, and they could make an impression on the responsible politicians and diplomats only if there was a consensus among experts who had been hired. The CCIA formed the basis for Visser 't Hooft to now develop into a church 'diplomat'.

Visser 't Hooft invested in the training of young men from countries that until shortly before had been at war with each other, by means of study programmes and international encounters. He wanted young men to learn not to shun debate with those who held different views but to be able to serve peace with well-founded arguments and by being informed. For example, he wanted to train young men in a value-driven but not unscientific

'ecumenism'. Together with Hendrik Kraemer and others, he set up an ecumenical institute that would be established after a few years in the Bossey Castle near Céligny in the Geneva canton.

The foundation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 in Amsterdam was a high point for Visser 't Hooft, a success that he also could count among his achievements. Without any fuss or opposing candidates, he became the general secretary of the new organisation as a matter of course. This position fit him like a glove. Through his gift for organisation, and the way in which he was able to translate theologically based insights into social questions, he seemed to be the right person to lead the new World Council. He was both well known in the Netherlands and the most well-known Dutch theologian outside the Netherlands. The period of provisionality and formation that began in 1938 ended in the definitive establishment of an ecclesiastical international organisation with worldwide aspirations. While 147 churches were members, the accent still lay strongly on Europe and North America, but Visser 't Hooft again and again emphasized that all churches were welcome as members. Together with John Oldham, he coined the concept 'responsible society' as the core of the task. As general secretary of the World Council, he now had an ironclad position in the ecumenical movement. Many young men who had been active in the YMCA and WSCF in the 1920s and 1930s ended up in leading positions in church and society in this period. Everyone knew Visser 't Hooft, and Visser 't Hooft knew a great many of his former members. Personally, he saw the blessing of God in the foundation of the World Council of Churches. Amsterdam gave him the confirmation he needed to get to work. The unity of the church had been tested by schism and war but had now received a fixed form. The new World Council of Churches seemed to have been enthusiastically received by the world, and the provisionality and improvisation now belonged to the past. Step by step, it was now increasingly a matter of professional, institutionalised work. Visser 't Hooft saw a lot of heavy work before them in 1948 but also a very promising future.

Two large churches, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church were missing at the foundation meeting in Amsterdam. This could not have been a surprise. That they made this public in a condescending way was disappointing, but Visser 't Hooft saw this primarily as a challenge. He attributed it to ignorance and and misunderstanding concerning the questions of what the council was really about and was certainly not planning to leave it at that. He was intent on devising a strategy to have these churches join the new World Council as soon as possible.

6 General Secretary of the World Council of Churches 1948-1966

Abstract
This chapter explores the central role Visser 't Hooft played in the World Council from 1948 to 1966, showing how his vision and style influenced the direction the World Council took in dealing with issues like syncretism. We see the strong practical bent of the World Council in topics like the Cold War and international crises such as South Africa, Cuba and Cyprus. The chapter traces how Visser 't Hooft involved the missionary nature of the church at every turn. We also learn how the revival he hoped for did not materialise. Instead, after 1960, secularisation grew, and Visser 't Hooft's ability to appeal to younger generations began to wane.

Keywords: Visser 't Hooft family life, Assembly Evanston 1954, International Missionary Council (IMC), Ecclesiology, International crises, Assembly New Delhi 1961

6.1 Introduction

Visser 't Hooft's position at the helm of the World Council was undisputed during most of the 18 years that followed its founding. With the council now having left the stage of continuous improvisation behind it, his leadership of the quickly growing international religious organisation was energetic. That did have consequences. He had never been at home much, but now, when the children were leaving home one after the other, his work became all-consuming. In contrast, Jetty accompanied him less often and withdrew more and more (6.2). On the one hand, Visser 't Hooft was a manager, but he was also the man with the vision on the other. He was quite demanding, but he did know how to motivate his staff by letting them feel that their contribution was indispensable to the larger whole (6.3). In the early 1950s, Visser 't Hooft was almost completely absorbed in preparations for the

Zeilstra, Jurjen A., *Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985: Living for the Unity of the Church*.
Taylor & Francis Group 2020
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second assembly of the World Council of Churches, which would be held in Evanston near Chicago. The intention was that this assembly would deal with the problem of the Cold War from the World Council's own perspective, a perspective that transcended division. That was too much to ask, however (6.4). After 1948, he took the lead in responding to all kinds of questions concerning the identity of the new council. The CCIA began to think more actively, professionally, and systematically on international developments. With new crises continually arising on the international stage, the World Council did not suffer from any shortage of occasions to speak out in public. But Visser 't Hooft and his staff made ready use of quiet diplomacy. The CCIA's approach was usually business-like and down-to-earth, but, as far as Visser 't Hooft was concerned, it needed to speak like the prophets, to give a warning and a guiding word to the world. There was no shortage of situations in which the Council made its voice heard that could be discussed in this biography. We will look at four themes that, together, give a good picture of both the strengths and weaknesses of Visser 't Hooft's approach as general secretary in these years. One issue in which he had to tread carefully was that of Israel and the Palestinians; with respect to racism in South Africa, he believed in a committed but moderate approach; the Cyprus crisis revealed the lack of unanimity in the World Council itself and Visser 't Hooft had to walk a tightrope between these positions; the Cuba crisis showed the dilemma between acting quickly but at the same time being able to speak in a representative way, working on gaining support and having Visser 't Hooft respect the responsibilities of others (6.5). Missions continued to have a major emphasis for Visser 't Hooft at this time. This task had become trapped between decolonisation in the East and secularisation in the West and, as a result, was experiencing an identity crisis. Visser 't Hooft did not discern that immediately and in reaction clung to old values that ultimately failed to save classical missions. What he did achieve was that young churches, no longer the 'daughters' of Western churches, could see their new status confirmed in joining the World Council (6.6). Around 1960, young people began to act differently, and Visser 't Hooft was unable to reach them as effectively (6.7). The third assembly was held in New Delhi in 1961, where the integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC) into the World Council was arranged. The Russian Orthodox Church, together with a few other Eastern Orthodox churches, joined the Council, the pinnacle of Visser 't Hooft and his staff's efforts and policy. But New Delhi was also a moment of alienation. For the first time, it became clear that Western churches, together with Visser 't Hooft's generation, were losing their dominance (6.8). Visser 't Hooft's habit of thinking in slogans was both his strength and

his weakness. A number of fundamental ecclesiological starting points on which his work was built were challenged at the beginning of the 1960s by experts, which cut him to the quick. Nevertheless, he saw new opportunities as well. Just before his departure as general secretary of the World Council, a major Life and Work conference on church and society was held in 1966. While thinking about the church in terms of an institution, a line of thought he was associated with, had already come under critique, he and his people succeeded in mobilising new forces and in raising a new contemporary voice. As long as the balance between attention for faith and attention for the questions of the world could be guaranteed, this seemed to him to be the formula for the future (6.9).

6.2 'Atta' at Home and 'Le Patron' at the World Council

During the war, many Protestant churches had strongly relativised their denominational forms of organisation, which often included a nationalist component. Visser 't Hooft saw the concrete foundation of the World Council in 1948 as a tangible result of this relativisation. In the 1950s, ecumenicity seemed to have turned into an acceleration of globalising thinking connected with the renewal of the churches. Protestantism now began to focus, also with respect to church institutions, more and more on international collaboration. Not everyone saw it that way, and a number of small conservative churches remained on the sidelines, but both friend and foe had to acknowledge that the World Council, which had been founded in 1948 and was under Visser 't Hooft's leadership, had become an important non-governmental religious organisation. The historian James Kennedy speaks of 'a particular kind of religious international'.[1] Causes that were traditionally viewed in Protestantism as important, such as evangelisation and missions, social justice, education for the disadvantaged, and humanitarian aid, were presented – much more than before the war – as a joint project, i.e., a shared challenge for which people together shared responsibility. The World Council had the look of renewal about it and played a major role not only in the churches but also in the media.

People expected a great deal from Visser 't Hooft. He was fully aware of that and stepped wholeheartedly into the role of inspiring leader who knew how to use the media, thereby radiating knowledge of affairs and authority. A great many photos and films were made of the general

1 Kennedy, 'Protestant Ecclesiastical Internationals', 2012, 292-318; quote 295.

secretary sitting behind his large desk with, from the perspective of the visitor, his large bookcase on the left and a reproduction of the Isenheimer altar on the right, while the top of his desk was strewn with important papers, Gauloises cigarettes, and the ashtray near his hand.[2] He combined erudition with practical diplomacy and the style of a manager who would always be an aristocrat and fraternised with bishops, other church leaders, statesmen, and rulers with apparent ease. Trained as a theologian, with a great deal of experience in the youth movement, he now stood at the head of a quickly expanding organisation with a number of field workers in many countries. Visser 't Hooft readily left the daily management of finances of the World Council to his right-hand man, Frank Northam, head of the department of finance and administration since 1948. He could always fall back on the Swiss banker Gustave Hentsch (1880-1962), who supported the World Council anonymously with his own money. Visser 't Hooft did consult regularly with both of them on business issues.

Visser 't Hooft took the opportunity of his fiftieth birthday on 20 September 1950 to take stock. The felicitations and memories of others led him, as if it was simply a matter of course, to reflect on his position and his career. The Swiss minister, Nils Ehrenström, director of the study department from 1948 to 1955, confronted him with the fact that he had now dedicated precisely half of his life to the ecumenical movement:

> Most people think either that I am far younger or that I am far older. … Ehrenström put it to me in the form that it was also my twenty-fifth anniversary in the ecumenical movement, for I was privileged to attend the Stockholm conference in 1925. So on that day I … remembered with gratitude how the ecumenical work has grown in these 25 years and what a joy it is to be allowed to do this work.[3]

For Visser 't Hooft and his wife Jetty – the children called them Atta and Mammie – the month of September 1950 was one of rare rest.[4] The

2 See the photo on the dust jacket of this book. Karl Barth also had the Isenheimer Altar of Matthias Grünewald, with John the Baptist pointing at the crucified Jesus, hanging above his desk. Busch, *Karl Barth. Lebenslauf* (1975), 128 and 423.

3 Visser 't Hooft to H. Høgsbro, 22 September 1950, WCC general correspondence 674.

4 Visser 't Hooft was called Atta by his children and later their spouses. The term came from Homer. In chapters 16 and 17 of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus' son, Telemachos, calls the leader of the shepherds 'Atta', i.e., Little Father. It started as a joke, perhaps because Visser 't Hooft, like Odysseus, was always travelling.

Figure 32 Wim and Jetty, ca. 1950



general secretary was home in Geneva for the whole month with his wife and his three children who were now on the threshold of adulthood. Their childhood years had flown by. At the end of the 1930s and during the war, when he had to assume full leadership in his work for the World Council and activities for the Dutch government without much staff and travelling a great deal, he had put raising the children completely in

Jetty's hands. She often found that too much and was helped by a nanny, like Germaine, or the deaconess, *Sœur* Yvonne. Jetty wanted to support her husband and was present in Amsterdam in 1948, where, at her urging, special attention was given in a workshop to the relation between men and women in society. But the tragedy here was that she herself did not thrive in this period. She was an intelligent woman, who read a great deal and thought and published articles in which she defended women's rights. Not without reason, she often had the feeling that she was not heard, and that bothered her. She was something of a dreamer. She participated in a World Council Wives group but did not enjoy standing next to her husband at busy ecumencial receptions and playing hostess time and again to other church leaders and prelates. As Atta and Mammie, Wim and Jetty were parents who loved their children, but sometimes neither of them noticed when one of their children was hurt or had a problem. Nevertheless, the large house on the Chemin de Crêts-de-Champel was a good place for the children to grow up, with a large garden where they could play with the shepherd dog Miro.

The Visser 't Hooft children left the parental home, one after the other, at the beginning of the 1950s. Anneke studied theology in Leiden. Hans left for Paris in the autumn of 1950, after which he continued his law studies in Leiden. Only the youngest son, Kees remained at home for another year. Of the three children, he was the one most interested in technology and had his own hobby room in the attic. But in Visser 't Hooft's view, university was the only serious education and theology the best subject. He was a strict and usually distant father, and it was very difficult for him to take an interest in Kees. Without realising it himself, he could sometimes give people the feeling that what they were interested in was not that important, and that was true also with respect to Kees. Looking back later, Visser 't Hooft did regret not having had the time he wanted to give to his wife and children. He then also expressed his gratitude, with apparently some slight amazement, that the children were nevertheless doing fine.[5]

The three Visser 't Hooft children now each went their own way. Anneke married the Italian Mario Musacchio in 1953, who entered the ministry in the Waldensian church in Riesis in Sicily. They had two daughters, Erica and Martine. The family lived in different places in Italy, but Mario became dissatisfied with the work of a minister and began to question the faith. Anneke taught Dutch at the university in Trieste. Hans (1930-2008) earned

5 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

Figure 33 With his grandchildren Erica, Marcus, and Martina, ca. 1957



Figure 34 At the doctoral defence of his son Hans, Leiden, 11 December 1957



his doctorate in law on 11 December 1957 in Leiden.[6] He married Emilie Harriët, baroness of Randwijck (1926-2013) in 1959. They had three children: Caspar, Noor, and Willem. Hans occupied the chair in philosophy of law and methodology of law in Utrecht from 1977 to 1992. Kees (1931-2009) enrolled in a programme at the Hautes Études Commerciales in Geneva and, in October 1954, married the American Patricia Adams Jenkins in the United States. After a period in Wiesbaden, Pat and Kees settled in Heiloo in the Netherlands, where Kees became a businessman and where their four children Marcus, Steven, Ben, and Mila grew up. In 1953 or 1954 Wim and Jetty moved from the large residence on the Crêts-de-Champel to another rental property on the Avenue de Miremont, number 11, a house that no longer exists.

At the World Council, Visser 't Hooft felt he was the right man in the right place. He, a Dutchman, became rooted in Geneva. He had good friends here, such as the artist and minister Max Dominicé and Henri d'Espine, instructor in practical theology and chairman of the Fédération des Églises Protestantes de Suisse. When the missionary theologian Hans Hoekendijk approached him in 1953 to become the ecclesiastical professor of practical theology in Utrecht for the Reformed Church, he was indeed flattered but could not be tempted. Nor was he, in his own view, a suitable candidate for a church professorship. It was with a bit of false modesty that he gave his reasons for his decision, but he also meant them.

> Because of a marvellous course in my life, my relationship with theology has been a wonderful mixture of personal interest and dilettantism. But the emphasis has to fall on dilettantism, given that, in all those years, I have had to abandon all forms of systematic study. In addition, an ecclesiastical professor has to have church experience, and that means in an actual congregation. If I were a student, I wouldn't take a professor seriously if he had never been responsible for a church but taught practical theology.[7]

In the 1930s, he had always said 'no' to positions that were offered to him in the Netherlands or in the Dutch East Indies. Although he did occasionally yearn for a quieter and more focused job, Visser 't Hooft felt that he was where he should be in Geneva. The executive committee informed him that

6 Visser 't Hooft, H.P., *Les Nations Unies et la conservation des ressources de la mer. Etude des rapports entre le codificateur et le milieu politique* (1957).

7 Visser 't Hooft to J.C. Hoekendijk, 16 December 1953, WCC general correspondence 663.

it would like to see him stay until the third assembly. The World Council needed continuity, and the experience of the first years, the committee found, had to be processed into a more permanent structure of the work.

To the staff, as their supervisor, Visser 't Hooft was *le patron* or 'Doctor Visser 't Hooft', words that were said with a sense of awe. On the one hand, his leadership style was authoritarian and demanding, whereas he gave his staff a great deal of latitude within boundaries he set on the other.[8] Some were afraid of him or found him authoritarian, but most of them were overcome with admiration. With his dark piercing eyes, it seemed as if he wanted to transfix everyone who came into his office. The economist and ethicist Harry de Lange, who was a member of the central committee after Visser 't Hooft retired, stated on the occasion of his death that the highest form of praise he regularly received from Visser 't Hooft was a reprimand.[9] But Marjolaine Chevallier, one of the staff, pointed to his smile, which compensated for his sternness.[10] When he sensed a 'mischievous' answer coming to a journalist's question, his eyes sparkled and the corners of his mouth curled up. He himself was always precisely on time at his office, 8:30 a.m., and had already read *Le Monde* by then. Staff who arrived too late could expect a reprimand from *le patron*. From his office above and to the right of the entrance, he could observe the path to the front door of the villa on the Route de Malagnou. Latecomers or staff members who were not, in his view, appropriately attired received a scolding. He once sent someone who showed up at work on a hot day in lederhosen home to change.[11]

Although he was known to be authoritarian, he could listen well in debate and often unfailingly set out and chose a middle position. Staff member Albert van den Heuvel described how he often wrote something on a small scrap of paper or on the back of a cigarette pack, read it out loud, and then spoke the legendary words: 'Is this possible, do you think?'[12] He treated people of his own age who were on a comparable level with him in a friendly way, but at the same time he preserved a certain formal style and was not entirely open, which betrayed his elitist upbringing. His speech always retained some affected 'Leiden' quality. There are numerous anecdotes on

8 Interview by R. Foppen with A.H. van den Heuvel, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives.

9 Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel, and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON Radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.

10 *Istina*, 42.

11 Zeilstra, interview with B.C. Sjollema, 20 August 2013.

12 Interview by R. Foppen with A.H. van den Heuvel, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives.

how he dealt with younger people or less experienced contacts both within and outside the World Council. The Dominican René Beaupère felt extremely 'provincial' when he visited Visser 't Hooft for the first time in the 1950s at his office. He began to get nervous when Visser 't Hooft's secretary told him he had to wait. Sitting across from Visser 't Hooft later, he felt completely outdone in age and life experience and had the feeling that he only asked stupid questions. Later, however, he began to appreciate him more and more as 'le conférencier au parler simple'; 'le prédicateur chaleureux' and 'le commensal agréable' ('the speaker of plain language', 'the fervent preacher', and 'the agreeable table companion').[13]

The experience of being outdone or feeling uncertain around him was the experience of many. Boudewijn Sjollema joined the staff of the World Council in 1958 in connection with the migration issue. Not only does he remember his first interview very well, he also remembers how impressively it went.

> Everyone was actually a little bit afraid of him. Visser 't Hooft was a closed and very direct man. I called him: 'I would like to make an appointment.' Visser 't Hooft: 'I don't have any time right now. I will call you this afternoon at 2.' I sat expectantly beside the phone. Visser 't Hooft called at 2: 'Come now!' You were expected to give a logical coherent account. No small talk. Don't talk about the weather. That was time wasted. Don't write anything down – you can do that later from memory. Large desk, large window behind Visser 't Hooft, by which you saw his profile in the light. Piles of books left and right. You were offered a very old sagging armchair which you sank into completely. He thus sat higher and after a bit began to walk around the room. After I explained the complex issue [on competence issues] Visser 't Hooft finally sat down next to me, thus on my level and began to answer. The ecumenical movement is like a diamond, a brilliant whole, with all kinds of colours and facets. You are one extraordinarily small piece, but nevertheless one of the many facets of that large diamond. After that, Visser 't Hooft began citing a list of ecumenical topics that the migration issue was a part of and finally fit in. After it was over, my boss came up to me and asked: 'Tu as vu le patron?' (Have you seen the boss?)[14]

Visser 't Hooft could also have sudden outbursts of anger. During a cruise in 1971, after a lecture near Antioch on Paul and the early church which the audience responded to enthusiastically, Visser 't Hooft, to everybody's

13 Beaupère, 'Rencontres avec W. Visser 't Hooft', 2003, 35 and 38.

14 Zeilstra, interview with B.C. Sjollema, 20 August 2013.

amazement, was extremely irritated. After he was on-board ship, he exploded because no attention had been paid in the lecture to the preaching of John Chrysostom (345-407) against the debauchery that the people in Antioch had engaged in in his time.[15] It is remarkable that justifications of Visser 't Hooft's behaviour often followed negative characterisations of him. When the journalist Bert Stoop spoke with him on the occasion of his 60th birthday, he observed:

> There are people who are afraid of him. That isn't strange, for he can be unreasonably angry, temperamental, and rude sometimes, even though these uncontrolled responses were the result of a justified feeling of disappointment or protest. … On the outside, Dr. Visser 't Hooft does not stand out. Only his eyes are striking. They look at you as if he sees through you completely. His always somewhat red mouth, which was given a sense of doggedness by his lips pressed together, is deep and heavily wrinkled.[16]

Many people accepted his occasional lack of self-control by the general secretary as something that was inseparably connected with his decisiveness and heavy responsibilities. It made it difficult for him sometimes to be patient with people whom he felt thought 'more narrowly' than he did or who missed an aspect he thought to be precisely important. Most forgave him.

6.3 The Vision

In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, a general secretary usually implements the agreed upon policy more than taking the initiative. Visser 't Hooft, however, did not view himself at all as someone who simply executed what others had put together. Taking a wait-and-see attitude was not for him. In 1950, for instance, he put five priorities on the agenda during an important meeting of the central committee to decide policy in Toronto. As a 'religous international' with churches, the World Council was a new phenomenon, and Visser 't Hooft understood that the mission and vision of the World Council had to be crystal clear. These priorities were interchurch solidarity, mobilising support, interchurch dialogue, stimulating joint witness, and the articulation of the meaning of mission for ecumenicity and vice versa. The five starting points

15 Beaupère, 'Rencontres avec W. Visser 't Hooft', 2003, 39. St John Chrysostom was a famous preacher and Archbishop of Antioch 398-403 AD.

16 B. Stoop, interview with Visser 't Hooft, in: *Het Vrije Volk*, 17 September 1960.

were unanimously approved.[17] The basis for these points was a confidential study that Visser 't Hooft had published as early as October 1947, before the actual foundation of the World Council, called 'Die Bedeutung des Oekumenischen Rates' (The Importance of the Ecumenical Council). This text was later included as a chapter in *The Universal Church in God's Design*, the first part of the material that was used in the foundation assembly in Amsterdam.[18] Following this line, the central committee accepted an important declaration in Toronto, whose central point was to refute the misunderstanding that the goal of the World Council was to form a superchurch. Directly connected with that was the stipulation that becoming a member of the World Council could never mean recognising all other member churches as fully church.[19] In Visser 't Hooft's view, this Toronto declaration was only the beginning of a fundamental ecclesiological reflection on the significance of membership in the World Council. One reason behind this was to do away with objections to the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

But the suspicion would not go away. The word 'misunderstanding' regularly appears in the defence articulated by Visser 't Hooft in the 1950s.

> One dangerous misunderstanding consists in the presupposition that the only alternative for disagreement would be a monolithic, centralist, and imperialist superchurch, a kind of clerical Leviathan.[20]

According to Visser 't Hooft, the insinuation that the World Council was set on organising a superchurch could only be refuted by showing that true 'fellowship' between the various churches was possible. He saw the method for seeking consensus through discussion as an important tool in this. He disputed the view that, as critics asserted, that unity could only come at the expense of truth. These critics argued that churches that thought differently about matters of faith would necessarily deny their faith when meeting each other.[21] They did not trust the claim of the World Council that the autonomy of every church would be completely respected.

17 Visser 't Hooft, 'De Wereldraad van Kerken. Huidige situatie en uitzicht', 1950, 439-450.
18 Visser 't Hooft, 'Die Bedeutung des Oekumenischen Rates (der Kirchen)', October 1947, WCC 994.2.12/3. Visser 't Hooft, 'The Significance of the World Council of Churches', 1948, 177-200.
19 Visser 't Hooft, 'Statement on "The Church, the churches and the World Council of Churches": The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches', IV,4. Toronto 1950, added as appendix V to: Visser 't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (1982), 112-120.
20 Visser 't Hooft, 'De grondslag van onze eenheid', sermon on Hebrews 3:1, Oberlin, United States, 1957, in: *Heel de kerk voor heel de wereld* (1968), 269-274. Quote on 271-272.
21 *The First Six Years, 1948-1954* (1954), 12, WCC 994.2.15/5.

Figure 35 Wim Visser 't Hooft, staff member Bob Bilheimer, and Eugene Carson Blake, who would succeed Visser 't Hooft in 1966, ca. 1948



In his defence of the World Council, Visser 't Hooft stated expressly that neither the so-called *notae ecclesiae* of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity nor the essential attributes of *koinonia*, the New Testament word for fellowship, were not (to be) applied to the World Council.[22] The World Council was what the word said: a *council*, nothing more and nothing less. According to him, therefore, the council had no pretensions or ambitions to be or become a superchurch. Such a varied collection of member churches could not allow a complete joint confession of faith and the full fellowship of the sacraments as real objectives. That was why the base formula of the World Council was not a 'confession' in the true sense of the word.

> The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of Churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour.[23]

22 The four *notae ecclesiae* (marks of the church) were set by the Council of Constantinople and refers to 1 Corinthians 12:27; *koinonia* is the Greek word used in Acts 2:42 to indicate the fellowship of the first Chrstian community.

23 Rouse and Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* (1986), 705.

Many suggestions were put forward after the meeting in Amsterdam in 1948 to reformulate this sentence, but not one proposal was accepted. For Visser 't Hooft, the meaning was that the Lord of the Church had come to people in Christ and was still building his Church himself by bringing his children together in the body of Christ. Nor was there any actual joint message covering proclamation. But such a unanimous New Testament *kerygma*, proclamation or news, could not be expected from the World Council either.[24] That was the task of the member churches. The World Council itself was both a task and promise at the same time and had to address the world both prophetically and in terms of content. The council itself, according to Visser 't Hooft, should see itself as an instrument that the Lord made available to the church in order to achieve his purpose with the churches and the world.

That Visser 't Hooft spoke of 'misunderstandings' in connection with disagreements was one of his deliberate strategies.[25] For example, he could present himself as someone who rose above the problem and knew what the solution was. He did not convince everyone. The former staff member Albert van den Heuvel pointed out decades later that the staff from around 1960 themselves did believe that the World Council was intent on having churches become one with respect to organisation and administration.[26]

Clarity on the foundation of the World Council was certainly needed, and Christ played a central role in this in Visser 't Hooft's view. He viewed the base formula of the World Council as a biblically justified interpretation of the incarnation, i.e., the becoming flesh of Christ as described in John 1. According to Lukas Vischer, director of the Faith and Order department from 1966 to 1979, the base formula was also essentially Visser 't Hooft's own personal 'confession of faith'. In any case, he always strongly defended this, but he did not take it ill of any one if he or she had difficulty with this basis. The base formula, which was accepted in Utrecht in 1938 and expanded in a trinitarian sense in 1961 at New Delhi, was critiqued right from the beginning. That Jesus Christ was presented as God and Saviour was a dogmatic interpretation that many thought went too far. Not everyone was as tolerant as the Dutch liberal Lutheran professor C.W. Mönnich, who viewed the base formula as an unfortunately formulated 'pietism' that

24 Cf.. Romans 16:15.

25 Cf. *The First Six Years, 1948-1954* (1954), 12, WCC 994.2.15/5.

26 A.H. van den Heuvel, interview, IKON jubilee programme '60 jaar Wereldraad van Kerken', broadcast 24 August 2008. Zeilstra, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 13 April 2013.

churches should not allow to keep them from joining the World Council.[27] Visser 't Hooft refused to abandon the base formula, but he always looked willingly at criticism from, for example, Czech Protestants or Unitarians in the United States.[28] He understood that the base formula was not perfect, but at the same time he saw these imperfections as an indispensable sheet anchor for keeping the World Council in balance.

Visser 't Hooft was a man with a vision. At no time would he have been content to be a manager, plant foreman, or just 'le patron' of a bureaucracy. For him, it was a question of imposing the fundamental unity of the church not only on the division between the churches but also on that of the world. He realised that the Greek term *oikumène*, from which the modern terms ecumenism and ecumenicity derive, was a neutral term in the Hellenic world in which the New Testament came into being. In the New Testament itself, the word *oikumène* meant something like 'the inhabited world' or 'mankind'.[29] Gradually, however, it became a term for the unifying force of faith in God and the significance of that for the world, particularly with respect to the seven great ecumenical councils of the Christian Church (325-787). The Lutheran Book of Concord of 1580 referred to confessions of faith as 'ecumenical'. Visser 't Hooft could point to various times in the 19th century in which the concept 'ecumenical' was used in a more deliberate way, more in the sense of a subjective attitude and a desire, than as a fact. Since 1846, the term 'oekumene' had been used in Evangelical Alliance circles. But in Visser 't Hooft's view, the modern meaning in which it concerned making the world church visible as *Una Sancta* in word and deed only became clear during the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910.[30] He himself used the definition from the Oxford Life and Work conference of 1937 in his own work:

> [The churches] are ecumenical in so far as they attempt to realise the Una Sancta, the fellowship of Christians who acknowledge the one Lord.[31]

From this perspective, he saw the churches as active subjects that had been called together to give shape to their calling, i.e., unity in Christ, in the World Council.

27 Mönnich, *Jezus Christus God en Heiland. Proeve ener beschouwing over de basisformule van de Wereldraad der Kerken* (1948).

28 *The Washington Post*, 30 November 1953, WCC 994.1.35/1.

29 Visser 't Hooft, *The Meaning of Ecumenical* (1953), WCC 994.2.14/28. Cf. Luke 2:1.

30 Visser 't Hooft, 'De Oecumenische Beweging', 1958, WCC 994.2.16/15.

31 Visser 't Hooft, 'Ecumenism', 1958, 90-95.

6.4 Evanston 1954: Hoping … but for What?

The 1954 assembly in Evanston near Chicago was the first major international meeting of the World Council after its foundation in Amsterdam. The theme of the conference was 'Christ, Hope of the World'. Visser 't Hooft would have liked to have seen the World Council giving a spiritual foundation, with an eschatological, Christocentric perspective, to the hope for a breakthrough in the many impasses of the time. People in World Council circles were convinced that many in the first half of the 1950s were holding on to false hope, both in the West and in the East.[32] Capitalism and the free market could offer no redemption from misery, and the same was true of state communism and a command economy. The theme was thus intended in both a critical and a constructive way, but it proved difficult to keep any kind of balance. The discussion on this was very lively at times even during the preparatory stages. Visser 't Hooft wanted to elaborate on the relation between the Kingdom of God and history with a view to the contemporary situation and the impasse world politics was stuck in, and in that way, they could continue to build on the foundations that had been laid in Amsterdam. But the theme was full of pitfalls. If Christ was the hope of the world, what was the content of this hope? While some clung to a literal expectation of the second coming of Christ, others viewed this as a flight into 'otherworldly thinking'. Visser 't Hooft and his staff had no control over the confusion that followed.

The World Council attracted increasing attention in this period, certainly in Europe and the United States. Even though it took place in the nervous atmosphere of the witch hunt for suspected communists, the new media in the host country, in which television as the new medium played a continually greater role, showed a great deal of interest in the assembly. Visser 't Hooft participated in the televised course 'Man and Religion' broadcast by the American broadcasting company NBC before the Evanston assembly. He viewed the second assembly as a wonderful opportunity to raise an alternative Christian voice. In one of his speeches during his preparatory travels, he attacked McCarthyism with its allegations directly. He praised the Presbyterian Church for openly opposing the witch hunt.[33] In his view, the United States was undergoing an intense 'spiritual struggle': 'They learn almost for the first time to distinguish between church and world.'[34]

32 *Evanston Speaks. Reports from the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Evanston Illinois, U.S.A. August 15-31, 1954* (1954).

33 *The Washington Post*, 18 November 1953, WCC 994.1.35/1.

34 Visser 't Hooft to J.C. Hoekendijk, 16 December 1953, WCC general correspondence 663.

The theologian behind the theme 'hope' that was chosen for the second assembly was the Swiss Emil Brunner who now – in contrast to the first assembly – contributed a great deal. He argued for a balance between a 'futuristic' interpretation of a kingdom of God that would some day arrive in the distant future and a 'realised' eschatology that was fulfilled in the present.[35] Some, however, found 'hope' too vague, and Visser 't Hooft had to admit that the word 'hope' by itself could be used in all kinds of ways. In contrast to that, he introduced the New Testament hope that, according to him, meant certainty: 'Christian hope is counting on the completion of the plan of God as it is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.' And then it was not a matter of supernatural events but the victory of Christ over sin and death becoming manifest in a torn world.[36]

For Visser 't Hooft himself, in his role as general secretary, Evanston was a time of trial with many problems and crises. The international political situation was full of incidents. The war in Korea had ended a short time before through a ceasefire, but the war in Vietnam would soon break out. In retrospect, the location was not very appropriate, but the choice to have it in America was obvious. American churches had contributed significantly to the World Council both financially and with respect to content. They were also in a position to give this conference allure: dramatic national events occurred prior to the conference. Meeting on a campus close to a major city was more practical than meeting in all kinds of various buildings spread throughout the city centre, as in Amsterdam during the first assembly. But the United States was one of major parties in the Cold War, and the mood was tense.

Visser 't Hooft did not have the idea that President Eisenhower understood much about the ecumenical movement. Eisenhower attended a church service at the end of 1953 in Washington that had the theme 'A Living Hope'. The service was led by Visser 't Hooft during the weeks that he was in United States to prepare for the conference in Evanston. The only thing that Eisenhower is reported to have said after the service was: 'That was a good thought.' This was, in the mind of the general secretary, a little superficial.[37] Nevertheless, he was honoured when he, together with the head of Northwestern University in Evanston, was later allowed to accompany Eisenhower on a ride through the city before the president addressed the

35 *The Ecumenical Review*, vol.VI, 1953/1954, 332-333; Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (1954).

36 Visser 't Hooft, *Summary of Address to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.*, May 1954. WCC 994.2.15/13.

37 Presbyterian Life, 26 December 1953, WCC 994.1.35/1; Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 250.

Figure 36 Visser 't Hooft, the president of Northwestern University in Evanston, and the President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954



assembly. Visser 't Hooft was quite satisfied with Eisenhower's call to the delegates to pray for peace because the president thereby gave the impression that he had confidence in the churches.

The delegates from the 160 churches that were members of the World Council in 1954 met in the stifling hot college classrooms of Northwestern University. According to Visser 't Hooft, only listening to God's Word would enable them to rise above division.[38] But division could not be avoided all the time, as when electing the new members of the presidium. Visser 't Hooft wrote to the missionary theologian Hans Hoekendijk: 'at this Assembly we learn better every day that we are not in control. Sometimes, it's as if we're just sitting there watching what happens.'[39] Visser 't Hooft was deeply impressed by the secretary-general of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld. The latter argued in his speech that, as a unique basis of hope, the cross of Christ was to be invoked not exclusively for the church but inclusively, that is, for all humankind. That was a different Christology than Visser 't Hooft himself had, but he was intrigued by it. Not until after Hammarskjöld's sudden death in 1961, when the publication of his book

38 Visser 't Hooft, 'The General Secretary's Statement to the Assembly' in: *The Evanston Report* (1954), 73-83, reference, 79.

39 Visser 't Hooft to J.C. Hoekendijk, 16 June 1954, WCC general correspondence 663.

Figure 37 Wim and Jetty at Niagara Falls, 1954



Markings made his mysticism public, did Visser 't Hooft – who himself was sometimes called 'the Hammarskjöld of the churches' – have a better idea of what Hammarskjöld had intended in his speech.[40]

An assembly always had to end in a *Message*. In the Message of Evanston, the delegates sought for an answer to the division of the world in the unity of Christ. But that was too vague for Visser 't Hooft – it did not make the contemporary translation he had been hoping for.[41] In his view, the hope in Christ given to people had to be concretely visible by involving the unity of the church in identifiable oppositions in the world. It was clear that the churches fell short here and shared the responsibility for the tragic impasses of the arms war, racism, migration streams, and food shortages in which the world found itself. To reach that goal, the church had to be renewed.

Renewal was also a topic in the years around 1948, but after Evanston Visser 't Hooft began to emphasise this theme more and more. He wanted to raise the question again of the old *semper reformanda* of the Reformation, i.e., that a living church is always reforming itself. In 1955, he devoted the Dale Lectures, lectures that he could give in Oxford, to this theme.[42] The unity of the church itself was, Visser 't Hooft argued, a given and should be gratefully accepted as a gift of God. But that acceptance created obligations. He considered it a sin to do nothing with that gift. The Christian task was not to prove the existence of God but to take the incarnation of God's salvation in Christ very seriously. Belief in Christ involved a personal God. Any relativisation of that reduced Christ to an ethical system and thus denied the community among people that Christ wanted to found. The key term was: *koinonia*, fellowship.[43] He found one of the most important images of this in 1 Corinthians 12, where the apostle Paul speaks of one body of Christ that consists of many members, with varied gifts.[44] He considered a restoration of church appreciation for these charismatic gifts, that is, these capacities given by God out of grace, to be essential. He emphasised the importance of the mutual recognition that different people could not do without each other if they wanted to do God's will: the different Christian traditions could learn from and supplement each other. He spoke of an 'economy of the charismata'. Some thought this sounded very dogmatic, but others

40 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 251. Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (1964).

41 *Evanston Speaks. Reports from the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (1954), 9-11.

42 Visser 't Hooft, *The Renewal of the Church. The Dale Lectures Delivered at Mansfield College* (1956).

43 E.g,. in Acts 2:42. Cf. 6.3 and 9.12.

44 Visser 't Hooft, 'Renewal and Wholeness', 1950.

saw a kind of theological *lingua franca* in Visser 't Hooft's neo-orthodoxy, a kind of colloquial way of speaking that actually did help in ecumencial encounters.[45]

6.5 The World Council as Watchman

The World Council of Churches wanted to raise a prophetic voice on the international stage. Visser 't Hooft had learned the importance of this in the war. To enable the churches to speak, they needed to keep a close eye on world events and to explain them in light of God's intentions with human beings and the world. For the most part, he seemed to ignore the fact that the prophetic voice in the Old Testament usually went precisely against the institutionalised religion of temple and priests. The desire of the World Council to speak prophetically did not only mean that there was an important role for the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), under the leadership of quite down-to-earth analysts like Kenneth Grubb and O. Frederick Nolde, but also for general secretary Visser 't Hooft himself. There were a considerable number of international crises on the agenda of the World Council during the 1950s and 1960s. Visser 't Hooft understood that, in order to have a voice in the international world, they had to deal sparingly and diplomatically with 'speaking prophetically' and be completely up to date. There also had to be sufficient support for a statement, first in the relevant committees of the World Council, particularly the international affairs committee, the CCIA, but also among the member churches.[46] At the same time, the experience of the church's speaking out against Nazism had taught him that the World Council could speak not always *on behalf of* the church but *to* the church as well. In his conclusion as general secretary to the report of the period 1954-1961 – in retrospect, actually the time in which he was able to achieve most of his ideas – he summarised it as follows:

> There are things which the Spirit says to the churches when they submit themselves together to the revealed truth of God. When the churches speak and act together there is that 'plus,' that new dimension which

45 Gérard, *The Future of the Church: The Theology of Renewal of Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft* (1974), 189.

46 Members of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs at the end of the 1950s were: A.D. Micheli in New York, A. Booth in London and in Geneva: K. Grubb, W. Kägi, J. Leimena, O.F. Nolde, W.R. Parvin, R.M. Fagley, and E. Rees.

Figure 38 Behind his desk in his office, 17 Route de Malagnou, with a reproduction of the Isenheimer Altar by Matthias Grünewald behind him



> belongs to the mystery of God's unity and fellowship and through which the divine truth is seen in fuller proportion. And so the voice of the Council is at the same time a voice *of* the churches and a voice *to* the churches. It is both institution and movement, instrument and leaven; its calling is both to serve and to challenge.[47]

The claim that the World Council was an instrument of God's Spirit to speak the truth on behalf of and to the churches went along with a warning by the general secretary about the rising danger of ecumenical institutionalism. Now that there were hundreds of personnel working for the World Council in Geneva, care had to be taken to avoid turning it into a bureaucracy that was removed from the actual church.

Nor did Visser 't Hooft hesitate to take the opportunity to turn himself with full conviction into a church diplomat in a short time. It was no mean feat to look at contemporary history with an active role for the churches. But he had the spirit of the times with him. At this time there were, relatively speaking, quite a few politicians who respected the church, who would at

47 Visser 't Hooft, 'Epilogue', in: *Evanston to New Delhi. 1954-1961* (1961), 189-192, quote on 191.

least listen politely to what the World Council had to say, albeit very rarely with approval. It also helped that, after the war, dozens of men and a few women from Visser 't Hooft's extensive network, built up when he was active in the ecumenical youth movement, were appointed to responsible positions in the international world.

When Visser 't Hooft spoke in December 1957 on Radio Bern on the efforts of the church for world peace, he described church talk about peace as being committed to total peace, by which he meant peace between God and humankind, between people and between the individual and his conscience.[48] Through the message of the Gospel, so he argued, the churches had a special contribution to make to the development of an international ethos that was suited for a strong international rule of law. They also needed to exercise what he called by the Barthian term *Wächteramt*, i.e. 'office of watchman'. Here he meant that they had to speak a warning and give instruction in the spirit of the biblical prophets when it had to do with concrete decisions that nations and governments had to make with each other. In that way, he put into practice what Karl Barth had always urged. Despite the tensions that had existed between them and the fact that Barth was not at all enthusiastic about the ecumenism of the World Council, Visser 't Hooft was convinced that Barth's theology was indispensable. At Barth's 70th birthday in Basel in 1956, Visser 't Hooft declared that the ecumenical movement was inconceivable without Barth's theology.[49] In working this out later, he emphasised human rights in addition to the notion of the responsible society.[50] But in the first half of the 1950s, the concept of human rights had not yet been used very much by the World Council. In that period, it usually concerned one of the human rights in particular, namely, the right to *freedom of religion*. That linked up with Barth's view.

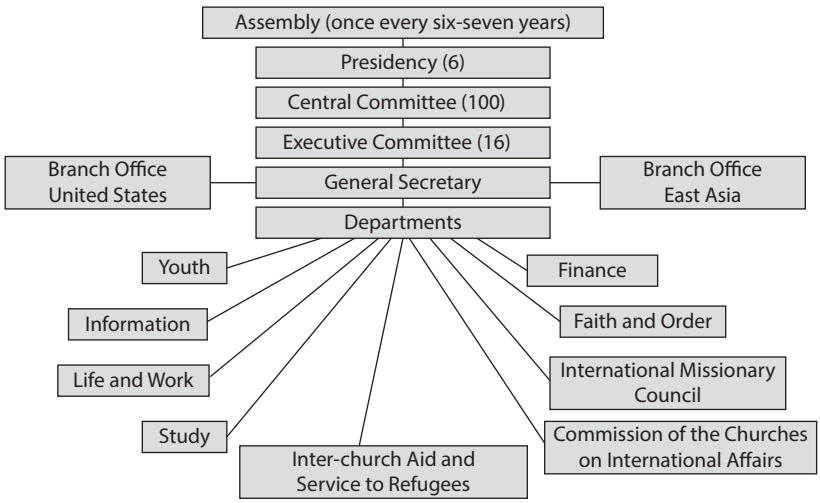
The precise effect of the statements of the World Council and the interference of the general secretary with what took place on the world stage cannot be measured. But there certainly was influence. To give a complete overview of all activities which the general secretary and his staff developed in the

48 Visser 't Hooft, 'Bemühungen der Kirchen um den Frieden', Sendung Radio Bern, 11 December 1957, in: *Die Friedens-Warte* (1958), WCC 994.2.16/12.

49 Visser 't Hooft, 'Message Oecumenique' in: *Remède de Cheval* (1956), 43-45, quote on 44: 'Ce qui est vrai, toutefois, c'est que le mouvement oecuménique serait tout à fait inconcevable en dehors de la théologie de Karl Barth' (It is true, nevertheless, that the ecumenical movement would have been utterly inconceivable without the theology of Karl Barth.). Cf. 'Karl Barth 80 jaar', NCRV Radio, 9 May 1966, Sound and Vision Archives.

50 Visser 't Hooft, 'Church and State in the History of the Ecumenical Movement', lecture at Bossey, 1977, WCC 994.2.29/35.

Figure 39 Organisation chart of the World Council of Churches, ca. 1962 (derived from 'Geef ze de ruimte', E. de Vries (director), IKOR Television, 18 February 1962)



1950s is impossible within the confines of this book. There are, however, four important dossiers that – each with a different aspect of working this out – illustrate well how Visser 't Hooft gave content – with varying degrees of success – to his vision and his view of his own task in that. The four examples here chosen are: Israel and the Palestinians, racism in South Africa, the Cyprus crisis, and the Cuba crisis.

I A Difficult Topic: Israel and the Palestinians

On 14 May 1948, a few months before the World Council of Churches was founded, on the day before the expiry of the British Mandate, the State of Israel was founded. That event made a deep impression on many, not only from a historical point of view but also from a theological one. Was this a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy? Could something of God's eternal covenant with Israel be seen here? But what did that mean for others? Visser 't Hooft would rather have given this event an ecumenical interpretation, but he was not successful. There were a number of reasons. First, the mission to the Jews was still an important topic in ecumenical circles. Nor was there any basis for consensus in the World Council on a theological view of Israel.

In 1931 the International Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews was founded. This was a semi-independent organisation with its

own budget, allied with the International Missionary Council. When the American missionary Conrad Hoffmann, who had worked with prisoners of war and and Jews, was made the director, it became a joint commission of the World Council and the Missionary Council. Visser 't Hooft bore some of the responsibility for the programme that Hoffmann set up, called 'The Christian Approach to the Jews'. The conversion of Jews to faith in Jesus Christ was central to this. The provisional committee of the World Council met in Presinge from 2 to 4 February 1947, where Visser 't Hooft got them to agree on the line set by Hoffmann. The discussion concerned primarily the methods to be used, but nothing about starting points. Hoffmann argued for a humble attitude on the part of Christians, but conversion to the Jews was the objective. The extremist violence of Zionism in Palestine was seen by him as a consequence of the insufficient Christian aid to Jewish refugees during the period of persecution under Hitler's regime.[51]

At the foundation meeting of the World Council in Amsterdam in 1948, the view regarding Israel came up, particularly in section II on 'The Church's Witness and God's Design' in a chapter that the French committee had written on the witness to Israel, called, 'The Approach to Israel'.[52] That chapter dealt with both combatting anti-Semitism as well as engaging in evangelisation among Jews. Hoffmann concluded in his report:

> We believe that the Jews as a people are a symbol as no other people of the disorder of man both in the past as in the present. We further believe that the Jews – Israel – are in some mysterious and divine manner, most intimately a factor in the design of God for mankind. To change the disorder in our relationships with the Jews to a state in accord with the design of God, will require Christ-like living. It is because of this conviction that we feel the Church through the World Council of Churches should share with the International Missionary Council the responsibility for the Christian Approach to the Jews. If Christ is the supreme revelation of God's will for man, then the Church must so proclaim to the Jew as to the gentile.[53]

No special attention was paid in Amsterdam to the foundation of the State of Israel, probably because the organisers of the assembly assumed that it

51 C. Hoffmann to N. Ehrenström, 9 March 1948, WCC general correspondence 666.

52 'The Approach to Israel', in: *The Church's Wittness to God's Design* (1948), 190-199.

53 C. Hoffmann, 'The Christian Approach to the Jews', and the short version 'The Church and the Jews', 20 November 1946, WCC general correspondence 666.

would be seen as a purely political matter by the delegates. The topic was too sensitive, and there was too little time to come to a well-balanced view. The organisers kept a deliberate distance from the mutually exclusive claims that reigned in the Middle East.

But Visser 't Hooft was not satisfied. Despite his efforts, he did not manage in the years following to ask the committees of the World Council to investigate what theological significance the founding of the Jewish state could have. In the eyes of most participants in the ecumenical conversation, Israel had been replaced by the church as the people of God, and the claim of universal salvation, which was central to the ecumenical movement, had taken the place of the particular claim of the Jews.[54] Under Visser 't Hooft's leadership, in close collaboration with staff members Frederick Nolde and Elfan Rees of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), the World Council continued to follow critically, in a more than theological way, the developments concerning Israel in a humanitarian sense. For example, from 1 to 8 May 1945, a conference on the Palestinian refugee problem was held on the campus of the American University in Beirut, under the auspices of the World Council and the International Missionary Council. The statistics showed 750,000 Palestinian refugees who could not and would not be ignored. It was unanimously established that these people were being treated unjustly. There was a strong sense of urgency. Visser 't Hooft was struck by the hopelessness because no hope was offered to people who thought in 1948 they would be able to return home soon. In the meantime, resentment in the Arab world against the West was great. The feeling had arisen that people were saddled with a European problem: the Western countries seemed to accept the foundation of the State of Israel because of their guilty conscience about what had been done to the Jews in Europe in the Second World War.

After the conference in Beirut, Visser 't Hooft and Robert C. Mackie, director of the Department of Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid, made a trip through Israel. As a delegation of the World Council, they were received by the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, where, according to Visser 't Hooft, they had a meaningful discussion. But he was surprised at the lack of knowledge among responsible Israeli leaders concerning the extent and seriousness of the Arab refugee problem. Visser 't Hooft then had an encounter with the Austrian-Jewish philosopher of religion, Martin Buber (1878-1965), with whom he spoke about reconciliation between Jews and Arabs, and the importance of conducting dialogue. Visser 't Hooft was

54 Dauermann, *Converging Destinies: Jews, Christians, and the Mission of God* (2017), 98.

particularly impressed by Buber. In his reflections on the I-Thou relations, on becoming aware between distance and nearness, Visser 't Hooft found the tone that the World Council also needed to acquire:

> I have come back with the strong conviction that we must build up groups of Christians who approach the whole problem of Israel and the Arab nations in a non-partisan spirit and refuse to let themselves be used for propaganda on either side.[55]

But he could not manage it. For Visser 't Hooft, where Israel was concerned, a piece of unprocessed theology stood in the way. At Evanston in 1954, when they discussed the hope of the people of God, it was exclusively the Christian church that was meant. But was that completely right? Was there not still another people? To Visser 't Hooft's regret, a reference to Romans 9-11 did not make it into the Message of Evanston at the final vote. In that text, the apostle Paul speaks about the still to be expected fulfilment of the promises of God to Israel. Visser 't Hooft was struck by the fact that most of those who voted against any reference to that text came from countries that had not been occupied by the Nazis. Most of those who voted for it were too well acquainted with German anti-Semitism. He felt that this was not a coincidence and said to himself: 'the spectre of Hitler is present'.[56] Visser 't Hooft heard the proponents and opponents talking past each other, and emotions ran high. Some felt that special attention for Israel was itself a form of discrimination. Others held that leaving out any concrete reference to Israel was a denial of the significance of the Jewish people. There were 24 delegates, almost all of them Europeans or Americans, including a few friends and kindred spirits of Visser 't Hooft, such as the promising Dutch theologian Hendrik Berkhof, who found a reference to Israel indispensable. They could not accept the failure at having such a reference included in the Message, and they proposed a statement on the hope for Israel, which was added to the closing documents of Evanston.[57] The writers emphasised that their intentions were 'purely biblical'and should not be confused with any political position regarding the State of Israel. Visser 't Hooft sympathised with the initiative but observed, as general secretary, that Israel was not a fruitful topic for the World Council because it brought about more division than unity.

55 Visser 't Hooft to W.W. Van Kirk, 19 May 1951, WCC general correspondence 773.
56 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 248.
57 *Tweede Vergadering van de Wereldraad van Kerken* (1954), 196-198.

At the assembly in New Delhi in 1961, Visser 't Hooft wanted to prevent a repeat of Evanston. The Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews was now called the Commission on the Church and the Jewish People, a controversial change because the element of the mission to the Jews had now disappeared into the background. Visser 't Hooft attached a great deal of value to a resolution being accepted that condemned anti-Semitism as a sin against God and people. This modest declaration, which was prepared by a committee under the leadership of Robert Mackie, stated that the events that led to the crucifixion of Christ should not be attributed to the Jewish people, but that humanity as a whole was responsible. The acceptance of the resolution did not happen easily, however. A number of delegates wondered why one form of racism had to receive special attention. Others, in contrast, such as the American John C. Bennett of the United Churches of Christ, wanted to involve more theological aspects of the relation between Christians and Jews. They wanted to have it mentioned that anti-Semitism was partly the result of the misue of the teaching of the church and of church confessions. The Swiss C. Schnyder of the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches asked for a clause in which it was stated that the Jews were still God's people. But Visser 't Hooft cut the discussion short. He pointed to the great differences of opinion that had been already established earlier, which meant that discussion on such a proposal was pointless.[58]

The World Council, with Visser 't Hooft at the helm, was reproached for not doing justice to the question of the Jews and Israel.[59] Adherence to a general humanitarian ethos would blind people to the particular significance of the Jewish people, first theologically but then also concretely in terms of righteousness. Christian replacement theology was viewed as the most important cause of this blindness. Christian baptism had replaced Jewish circumcision. This theology in fact denied Jewish people the right to existence by presenting the church as 'the new people of God' in which all Old Testament prophecies were being fulfilled. That the World Council subsequently regularly defended the rights of the Palestinians did not make the council any more popular among these critics. But Visser 't Hooft did not have a lot of latitude. Like many of his generation, he felt obliged to witness to the redeeming salvific work of Christ, to Jews as well. But he was primarily dependent on a majority in the assembly and the central committee with respect to policy. And after he retired as well,

58 Visser 't Hooft (ed.), *Neu-Delhi 1961. Dokumentarbericht über die Dritte Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen* (1962), 48 and 167.

59 Dauermann, *Converging Destinies: Jews, Christians, and the Mission of God* (2017), 99.

there was never a majority that wanted to attribute theological significance to the existence of the State of Israel. One could ask whether the leaders of secular Israel were really interested in such a development. During a consultation in 1965, organised by the Committee on the Church and the Jewish People and held in the ecumenical study centre at Bossey, one of the Jewish delegates present summarised the problem as follows: 'Most Christians are unable to engage in dialogue about faith and most Jews are unwilling to do so.'[60]

II A Moderate Approach: Apartheid in South Africa

Visser 't Hooft had more success with the apartheid question. There was wide support in the World Council for an active policy concerning racism, particularly in South Africa. The 'office of watchman' could be exercised to its full extent. As early as the 1920s, John Oldham had published a critical study in which he condemned racism in general on the basis of the Christian faith.[61] The central committee of the World Council felt it was a good idea to send an ecumenical, multiracially composed delegation to South Africa to talk about apartheid. But such a delegation was refused in advance by a number of churches in that country. As a compromise, the general secretary was then sent, and Visser 't Hooft made a visit to the South African churches in the spring of 1952.[62] It was an extraordinarily intense trip for him. According to Visser 't Hooft, he gave 57 speeches and had countless meetings and discussions with individuals and groups. The six denominations in South Africa that were members of the World Council were, in addition to the Dutch Reformed Church of Transvaal, the Reformed Church, the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Congregational Union. But Visser 't Hooft also visited various Bantu churches, black churches where the services were in one of the Bantu languages as well as in English. He took an explicitly moderate line: his goal was to form a good picture of the situation and to attempt where possible to remove 'misunderstandings', as he himself like to call them. White supporters of apartheid, however, greeted him with suspicion.

Visser 't Hooft saw the 'trek' of Bantu workers to the great industrial areas as one of the major problems – this move disrupted the social coherence of

60 Newbigin, 'Mission to Six Continents', 1986, 171-197, quote on 195.

61 Oldham, *Christianity and the Race Problem* (1924).

62 Visser 't Hooft, 'A Visit to the South African Churches in April and May 1952', 1952/1953, 174-197.

their society: communities had disintegrated, and families had fallen apart. Nevertheless, Visser 't Hooft was not against apartheid in an absolute sense.

> But apartheid does not necessarily mean such discrimination. It can mean separate development of the races so that each may have the fullest opportunity for growth.[63]

This view had been previously defended by the diplomat Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, sister of the Indian Prime Minister Nehru, and many missionaries working in South Africa held this view as well. According to Visser 't Hooft, not much constructive work could be done at that point because of the African National Congress, which organised resistance to apartheid. In his view, an impasse had come about in which everyone was talking past each other, and the white Afrikaans-speaking minority felt trapped. Visser 't Hooft pleaded for understanding and for less sensationalist reporting on South Africa. Since he could understand Afrikaans because he was Dutch, he considered himself better able to understand how church and society were intertwined among the white Afrikaans-speaking population group. In his eyes, the Dutch Reformed Churches followed the Afrikaans-speaking politicians relatively uncritically. Primitive justifications of white domination, such as Ham theology, he thought, no longer played any meaningful role. In that theology, blacks were presented as the descendants of Ham, whose father, Noah, had cursed him and thus condemned him to a life of slave labour.[64] Visser 't Hooft recommended that the World Council invest in ecumenical contacts and to temporarily postpone sending a multiracial delegation.

UNESCO (Organisation of the United Nations for Education, Science and Culture) showed interest in Visser 't Hooft's trip to South Africa. His analyses were published in 1954 in a series on racism.[65] In this booklet, Visser 't Hooft looked at the historical backgrounds of racism, not only in South Africa but also in Nazi Germany and in the United States. His primary purpose was to give insight into the involvement of churches in the problem and to explain how difficult it was for ecumenical conferences to make clear statements about race issues. In the second part of the booklet, he discussed, among

63 Ibid., 181.

64 Cf. Van der Linde, *Over Noach met zijn zonen. De Cham-ideologie en de leugens tegen Cham tot vandaag*, (1993).

65 Visser 't Hooft, *Le mouvement oecuménique et la question raciale* (1954). See also: Visser 't Hooft, 'Sozialprobleme der Rasse', 1954, 828-832.

other things, the Christian conceptualisation of race, the relations between the races in the society and the pros and cons of ethnic churches. According to Visser 't Hooft, it was not primarily ignorance and prejudice that was to blame for racial discrimination. At bottom, what was lacking was a true sense of fellowship among people, which was precisely what the churches were called to as the new people of God. He referred to Charles Darwin's theories to demonstrate that racial pride was connected to the human instinct for survival. But in their ecumenical connectedness, churches were equipped to bridge the gaps that divided humanity in the awareness of one brotherhood recognisable in the Christian faith.

The most important preparatory work for discussing racism during the assembly at Evanston in 1954 was carried out by Frederick Nolde of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). Section V concerned for the most part the question of being church in the midst of racial and ethnic tensions. The most difficult problem, Visser 't Hooft felt, was churches that profiled themselves in an explicitly ethnic way. By doing that, they were choosing an identity that was at odds with the essence of the church because they viewed themselves as privileged by God with respect to other groups in society. Reflection was needed. He formulated the following as a task for the churches worldwide: churches needed to understand their mission in the world as the new people of God on the road, whereby they actually gave an answer to racism.[66]

In the meantime, tensions were rising in South Africa. Many people were killed during the Sharpeville Massacre in March 1960, and a state of emergency was declared. All that Visser 't Hooft wanted to do was to stimulate the network of the South African churches, with the World Council as catalyst, to come up with a peaceful solution. In December 1960, they succeeded in bringing delegates from eight South African churches for a multiracial meeting in Cottesloe College of the University of Witwatersrand near Johannesburg. This 'Cottesloe Consultation' was prepared with a great deal of difficulty by the American secretary of the World Council, the Presbyterian theologian Robert S. Bilheimer. The delegation from the World Council consisted of the Americans Franklin Fry and Charles Parlin, the Briton Ernest A. Payne, the German Wilhelm Niesel, the Ceylonese Lakdasa de Mel, and Visser 't Hooft. A text was composed during the discussions that most of those present could agree with, the draft for which came from the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk and was moderate in tone. Among other things, there was no biblical command against racially mixed marriages but

66 Visser 't Hooft, *Le mouvement oecuménique et la question raciale* (1954), 67.

they were also not recommended. No one could be denied parliamentary representation or participation in a church on the basis of colour or race. 'Every adult male' had the right to participate in the government of the country he lived in.

For Visser 't Hooft, this was an example of what he called 'the ecumenical method'. Churches that lived past each other had been brought into contact and had formulated a joint position. Visser 't Hooft was very satisfied with Cottesloe.[67] But the South African government thought very differently about it and considered the work of the World Council as unwanted foreign interference in South African affairs. There was also a setback in that not only did the small South African Reformed Church leave the World Council in protest after Cottesloe, but the synods of the Dutch Reformed Church of the Transvaal and the Cape could not agree internally about the results of the conference. A positive response came from the Dutch Reformed minister C.F. Beyers Naudé. He founded a Christian institute to work out what had been achieved in Cottesloe.

Time and again, Visser 't Hooft tried to place the problem of racism in the perspective of world historical development. At the large colloquium on racism that the World Council organised in Notting Hill in London in 1969, he presented a historical overview of ecumenical activities for combatting racism from 1925 to 1968.[68] The American minister Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968), was supposed to attend the World Council Assembly of 1968 in Uppsala but was assassinated a few weeks beforehand. Visser 't Hooft was not really a proponent of the great emphasis that followed in the World Council policy on combatting racism in the special Programme to Combat Racism. He was not much of a believer in separate action programmes; he believed rather in a church that combatted racism on the basis of the universal Christological foundation given to it in its very being.

He would rather have seen the struggle against racism embraced in an integral sense as part of the ecumenical work as a whole of the church.[69] While he had not argued originally for the immediate rejection of apartheid, he did move in that direction – also under the influence of the hardline South African governmental policy. Beyers Naudé, Alan Boesak, and Desmond Tutu were prophets in his eyes. Visser 't Hooft remained moderate in his own statements about apartheid. Nevertheless, over the course of the

67 Visser 't Hooft, Report to the central committee, St Andrews, August 1960.

68 Visser 't Hooft, 'Réflexions sur l'action du COE dans le domaine des relations interraciales', May 1969, WCC 994.2.24/25.

69 Interview Zeilstra with B.C. Sjollema, 20 August 2013.

1960s he began to more and more clearly reject apartheid as irreconcilable with the Gospel and with the notion of a 'responsible society', especially because all inhabitants of a country had to have the chance to bear actual responsibility.[70]

III Through the Eye of a needle: The Cyprus Crisis

The third example in which the office of watchman had to be practised and showed very well how Visser 't Hooft dealt with such matters was the prolonged Cyprus Crisis that the World Council paid a great deal of attention to in the latter half of the 1950s. It was a problematic case for Visser 't Hooft, for he was personally attacked by the rank and file of the member churches themselves for the position the World Council took, especially in the Anglican Church, and thus ended up in a thorny situation. Already in 1954, the World Council publicly declared that it supported the right of the island to self-determination, which was the wish of primarily the Greek majority on the island. The Turkish view, however, was that Cyprus – where a considerable Turkish minority also lived – belonged to Turkey because of its geographical position. But the Greek government viewed Cyprus historically as a Greek island and was supported in this by the Greek Orthodox Church. There were violent incidents regularly between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The British, who governed the island as a Crown colony until 1960 and had made the island their most important base in the Mediterranean Sea, did not consider leaving and sent troops who themselves were attacked by Greek insurgents. The Greek archbishop and ethnarch of the island, Makarios III, refused to condemn the Greek attacks on the British and was thus seen by the British as instigating terrorism.

On 6 and 7 September 1955, Turkish gangs in Istanbul engaged in a violent pogrom of the Greek inhabitants, leading to a Greek exodus from that city and threatening the ancient Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Patriarchate had joined the World Council in 1948 and, along with some twenty scattered Orthodox churches, represented a venerable tradition. Visser 't Hooft pressed the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey F. Fisher, to show support by the Anglican Church for the partriarch.[71] Up until a short time beforehand, Fisher had, been president

70 Visser 't Hooft, in: 'Een ton d'r op', VPRO Television, 5 May 1966, Sound and Vision Archives. See: 9.3.

71 Visser 't Hooft to G. Fisher, 23 September 1955, in: Besier, *'Intimately Associated for Many Years'* (2015), 1007-1008.

Figure 40 Wim and Jetty on Patmos (Greece), travelling to the monastery by donkey, 1959



of the executive committee of the World Council, and in 1948 he was the one who pronounced the solemn words of foundation. Visser 't Hooft hoped a sympathetic declaration by Fisher would prevent a threatening conflict between the Orthodox and Anglicans in the World Council, but he was disappointed.

A declaration of solidarity by Visser 't Hooft on behalf of the World Council concerning the riots in Istanbul was later approved. The CCIA then demanded at the beginning of 1956 that the United Kingdom recognise the right of the Cypriot people to self-determination. They also proposed a transition period of self-government until the Cypriots themselves would be able to choose what the future of their island would be.[72] But the British authorities in Cyprus had no interest and banished Makarios, whom they accused of political incitement, to the Seychelles in March 1956. The Greek Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople were deeply offended, especially because the dignity of an archbishop had been violated. They therefore put the World Council under great pressure to protest against this sacrilege.

72 *Evanston to New Delhi, 1954-1961: Report of the Central Committee to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (1961), 138-139.

Visser 't Hooft, who cherished the good contacts the World Council had with Orthodoxy, felt that what had happened was unacceptable.[73] Because he could not reach the then chairman of the executive committee, Franklin Fry, who was in Russia, he personally assumed responsibility for presenting a declaration in which he requested that Makarios's banishment be revoked. This was done with the approval of the vice-chairman, Ernest A. Payne. The affair quite quickly became very complicated for the World Council, primarily because of internal division. Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher was furious. On 15 March 1956, there was a debate on the question of Cyprus in the House of Lords, and English bishops took opposite sides. The Anglican bishop of Chichester and good friend of Visser 't Hooft, George Bell, called the banishment of Makarios a major blunder by the British government. He went further than Visser 't Hooft on this question, but the impression was that Visser 't Hooft thought about it in precisely the same way.[74] Fisher criticised Makarios because, in his view, he was not acting like a bishop but like a politician. He also made no secret of the fact that he thought Visser 't Hooft had gone too far and presented his own peace plan. He wrote Visser 't Hooft an angry letter that the latter experienced as a rap on the knuckles.[75] He was not used to being treated this way by the leader of one of the most important member churches. Visser 't Hooft did not apologise but explained his position in a polite letter to Fisher and delicately pointed out that there were quite a few friends of the United Kingdom who had the same view and also condemned Makarios's banishment.[76]

He hoped that he could still play a mediating role in the Cyprus question and went to Ankara to talk to the Turks. It was quiet diplomacy, and thus he had to be careful about publicity. His most important contacts in Greece were M.C. King and Professor Hamilcar Alivisatos, the secretary of the Greek Inter-Church Aid Comité. But in March 1957, Archbishop Dorotheos of the Greek Orthodox Church suddenly demanded that all communication from the World Council was to be conveyed from that point on via him personally and via the synod of the Greek Orthodox Church. Visser 't Hooft acceded to this unreasonable demand against his will. He attempted to see a positive sign in that the Greek bishops wanted to take the work of the World Council

73 Visser 't Hooft to M.C. King (the representative of the Greek Orthodox Church in the World Council), 4 April 1956, WCC general correspondence 760.

74 G.K.A. Bell to Visser 't Hooft, 16 March 1956, and Visser 't Hooft to G.K.A. Bell, 16 March 1956, in: Besier, *'Intimately Associated for Many Years'* (2015), 1028-1031.

75 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 297.

76 Visser 't Hooft to G. Fisher, 16 March 1956, in: Besier, *'Intimately Associated for Many Years'* (2015), 1032-1033.

seriously, but he did call it an 'ecumenical earthquake' and felt it was tragic that Alivisatos, who had been in charge of the ecumenical relations between the Greek Orthodox Church and the World Council, was now dismissed.[77] It would come down to making a virtue out of necessity and to involve this church, which had always been so strongly internally directed, more in the content of the topics the World Council dealt with.[78]

Through everything, Visser 't Hooft viewed it as his task as general secretary to keep the relationship of the World Council with the Greek Orthodox Church and thus with the rest of the Orthodox world as intact as possible. There were major interests at stake. The Greeks symbolised the fact that the World Council was more than a purely Protestant movement. Behind the scenes, progress had been made in having the Russian Orthodox Church join the World Council. But the undiplomatic Fisher, who had been correctly associated by the Greeks with the World Council because of his role in and after its foundation, threw a spanner into the works again. In the summer of 1958, he accused Makarios of being a bad man and a political powerbroker. Visser 't Hooft was shocked. Not only did he think that it was unwise of Fisher to speak out in that way, but it was, in his view, untrue. Makarios was not a bad person in his eyes, but he was trapped and did not have an independent mind.[79] For a moment Visser 't Hooft feared that the Greek church would leave the World Council.[80] He felt forced to distance himself on behalf of the council from former president Fisher, a painful matter for him. At the beginning of December 1958, the Greek bishops accepted a pointed declaration in which they condemned what they saw as the weak position of the World Council. But that was primarily rhetorical, and it went no further than that.

The meddling of the World Council by Visser 't Hooft and his staff with the Cyprus question was meaningful, as can be read in the report of the assembly in New Delhi in 1961.[81] The World Council gained access not only to the highest government representatives and the United Nations but also to the people it affected. For example, representatives of the World Council made a fraternal visit to Cyprus itself in January 1959. The crisis did not end with Cyrus joining either Greece or Turkey but a provisional agreement

77 M.C. King to F.H. House, 8 March 1957, WCC general correspondence 762.

78 Visser 't Hooft to M.C. King, 14 May 1957, WCC general correspondence 762.

79 Visser 't Hooft to G.K.A. Bell, 30 June 1958, in: Besier, *'Intimately Associated for Many Years'* (2015), 1121.

80 Visser 't Hooft to M.C. King, 28 June 1958,WCC general correspondence 763.

81 *Evanston to New Delhi, 1954-1961. Report of the Central Committee to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (1961), 139.

about the independence of the island was reached in 1960. Makarios became president of the Greek part, and in August 1959 the executive committee of the World Council met on Rhodes. There was peace once again between the World Council and the Greeks, but Visser 't Hooft had the feeling that he had crawled through the eye of a needle.

IV Procedural Problems: The Cuba Crisis

Whenever a major international crisis developed, an emergency meeting took place in Geneva at the World Council headquarters, and a decision had to be made as to whether it made sense to make a statement. Timing was very important here. Because there was usually no chance to present a draft statement to the hundred-member central committee, and even the executive committee could often not be consulted, a very small number of staff members had to make the decision. The three main figures were the chairman of the executive committee, the vice-chairman, and the general secretary. But if possible, the leaders of the international committee, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), could weigh in as well. This is how declarations were made on the initiative of leaders of the World Council on the Suez crisis (2 November 1956), the Hungarian crisis (5 November 1956), anti-Semitism (6 January 1960), and the nuclear tests that Russia carried out (8 September 1961). But major difficulties arose during the Cyprus crisis, also through the solo activity of Visser 't Hooft. Because of that, a number of new rules were instituted during the assembly in New Delhi in 1961. It was recalled that, just as William Temple expressed it in Utrecht in 1938, declarations by the World Council derived their authority from the weight they had as a result of their own truth and wisdom.[82] Only in exceptional emergency situations could a statement be issued purely on the authority of the chairman of the central committee, after consultation with the vice-chairman and the general secretary. Such a statement could not conflict with the policy followed up to that point by the World Council.[83]

These seemed to be clear agreements, but in the hustle and bustle of international relations, it could be difficult to put them into practice. In 1962, Visser 't Hooft made an error of judgement. A conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union concerning Cuba, where Fidel Castro

82 Cf. Visser 't Hooft, 'Various Meanings of Unity and the Unity which the World Council of Churches Seeks to Promote' in: *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. VIII, 1955/1956, 18-29. See also 2.9.
83 Visser 't Hooft (ed.), *Neu-Delhi 1961. Dokumentarbericht über die Dritte Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen* (1962), 469-470.

had recently assumed power, got seriously out of control in October and the threat of nuclear war loomed large. The boycott of Cuba by the United States that followed was deplored in a statement from the World Council. Internally, however, this occasion led to an intense debate. In the member churches there appeared to be more different views on this issue than had been suspected.[84] Visser 't Hooft was reproached for allowing the statement to be issued before the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs was consulted. Staff members of this department found the statement one-sided and felt embarrassed. Various measures were taken to limit the damage, but the damage had been done. The disagreement, including that between member churches, could not be hidden from the outside world. Visser 't Hooft defended himself by claiming that solidarity and commitment to victims sometimes merited priority above formal procedures.

But he also understood that it had not gone well, and he proposed that he himself draft a few strongly limiting rules, in addition to those made at New Delhi. First, the World Council Assembly and the central committee would from that point on have to adopt a position on the issue on which a statement was to be issued. Second, the problem presented should not be too filled with technical-legal jargon, as, for example, in terms of international legalities, so that it could be understood by other people and not just experts. Third, a statement by the World Council would be rejected if it was expected to lead to more rather than less international tension. That he himself proposed these very limiting measures was a shrewd strategy by the general secretary. It is difficult to understand that he did indeed want to limit his own freedom of movement so much, but he wanted to show that, for the sake of the relevance of the statements, the World Council had to accept a certain risk.

After long discussions, the executive committee shied away from implementing the strict rules: they would restrict far too much the possibilities of responding adequately to world news. This confrontation with the dilemma was exactly what Visser 't Hooft had in mind: 'It was in the nature of the case that you could not elaborate a "crisology".'[85] The playing field continued to be determined by the guidelines that were accepted in New Delhi. It was emphatically stated that staff members had to do their utmost to consult the CCIA or other committees that were relevant for the topic. The lattitude to respond quickly was retained, but Visser 't Hooft would from that point

84 Visser 't Hooft, 'Memorandum on Statements by the WCC Officers at Times of International Crisis'. February 1963, WCC 994.2.19/5.

85 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 308.

on take some time to think before he bypassed the committee. Prophetic speech could not do without a careful use of the procedure.

More than a year and a half later, Visser 't Hooft led a memorial service in the Cathedral de St. Pierre in Geneva on the day after the assassination of the American president John F. Kennedy. He preached on Psalm 142:2-3, a lament to God, and praised Kennedy for his courage and imaginative power 'not merely to speak of peace, but to act in such a way that the international climate began to become less intolerable.'[86]

6.6 The Indispensability of Mission

Visser 't Hooft had a warm heart for mission. Here he saw the missionary shape of the church become clearly visible. When T.Z. Koo, in 1933 a representative of the then still flouishing Chinese mission in the student movement, proposed bringing the various Asian Student Christian Movements, thus national and colonial departments of the WSCF (World Student Christian Federation), together for a conference on Java, Visser 't Hooft was immediately enthusiastic. It was an unforgettable trip for him. There were participants from China, India, Japan, Burma, the Philippines, Ceylon, and the Dutch East Indies. A Javanese chapter could thus be constituted as a Student Christian Movement of the WSCF and therefore as the Indian counterpart of the NCSV. Here Visser 't Hooft became acquainted with the struggle for independence that thrived among Asian youth.[87] Some friends from this time were ultimately given leadership positions in the new Indonesia.

That Dutch authority could not be restored after the Japanese withdrew in 1945, despite so-called 'police actions' (*politionele acties*), which were in fact military operations, had great consequences for missions. Neither in the Netherlands nor in the International Missionary Council, according to Visser 't Hooft, did people understand that it now had to do with the inevitable process of an Indonesia that was discovering itself.[88] He considered the Dutch action a tragic mistake and felt directly involved. When the second World Conference of Christian Youth took place in Oslo in 1947,

86 Visser 't Hooft, 'Sermon preached by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft of the World Council of Churches at a Memorial Service for President John Fitzgerald Kennedy at the Cathedral de St Pierre Geneva, 23 November 1963', HDC-PE, NCSV 725-3.

87 See 2.8.

88 Visser 't Hooft to J.C. Hoekendijk, 24 April 1946, WCC general correspondence 661.

Visser 't Hooft distanced himself as speaker openly and publicly from the violence that the Netherlands was then using in Indonesia. In his response at the end of the conference, the Indian theologian Madathilparampil M. Thomas said that Visser 't Hooft's words had aroused in him a sense of the communal human guilt before God so that his own judgement about the behaviour of the Dutch crumbled.[89] But a wave of indignation welled up in the Netherlands at Visser 't Hooft's words, and he damaged his goodwill for a long time for many.

While the World Council was founded in Amsterdam in 1948, the struggle for Indonesia was not yet over. Visser 't Hooft, who was aware of the ambivalent feelings of the Indonesians present, proclaimed a confession of guilt at the assembly.[90] Because he did not want the Indonesian participants to decline their reception by the queen, Visser 't Hooft used Karl Barth, who did manage to get the Indonesians to the point that they went to the palace, by stating that he himself was also going as a republican. When Visser 't Hooft visited Java again in 1949 after the conference, his attitude regarding Indonesian independence in 1947 in Oslo and in 1948 in Amsterdam appeared to have strengthened friendships there.

Daughter churches in the new states, such as Indonesia and India, were becoming autonomous denominations. During the trip that the general secretary made with others through Southeast Asia in the winter of 1949/1950, he was impressed by the energy that the decolonisation process released, but he was shocked when he saw that, along with the rediscovery of their own identity, all kinds of new religious forms with old roots were flourishing. For example, Gandhi, the Indian champion of self-government and non-violent resistance who was assassinated in 1948, was regularly depicted as surrounded by the Buddha, Krishna, and the crucified Christ. The Holy Spirit was compared with the principle of the Advaita, the identity principle of Hindu pantheism. Visser 't Hooft could not accept that. In his view, this did not do enough justice to the exclusive uniqueness of Christ 'crucified under Pontius Pilate'.[91] He saw this as syncretism, by which he understood the mixing of elements from different religions, without the contradictions being resolved or reaching a deeper synthesis. Such syncretism, which was sometimes officially propagated by the state to give coherence to the country, filled Visser 't Hooft with great concern. He saw a secular indifference in

89 Van den Berg, *De Nederlandse Christen-Studenten Vereniging, 1896-1985* (1991), 184-185.

90 H.M. de Lange, in: *NRC Handelsblad*, 8 July 1985.

91 Visser 't Hooft, 'Kerken in Azië stellen ons vragen', lecture for the Nederlandse Hervormde Predikanten Vereniging (Association of Dutch Reformed Ministers), 17 April 1950.

this and an agnostic form of absorption, whereby a proper awareness of the problem was lacking, actually a form of abuse of religion. During this trip, Visser 't Hooft attended a conference of East Asian Christian leaders, which was held from 4-11 December 1949 in Bangkok under the auspices of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches. The Indian Protestant Paul D. Devanandan pointed to the importance of interreligious dialogue.[92] Visser 't Hooft respected Devanandan, whom he knew from his work with students, but he was in no way planning to trade mission for interreligious dialogue in the World Council. He did understand that he could not demand that the new churches blindly take over Western theology, but the uniqueness of Christ was non-negotiable. Here he forgot that his thinking was also based on a concept of Jesus that was also contextually determined and interpreted in a certain way in West European culture.[93] He never used the term 'syncretism' in a more objective sense of the term nor did he recognise that every form of religious appropriation had syncretistic aspects by definition. Scholars have pointed to power factors in the exclusive claim to have the true interpretation of Christ, for example, as church or to represent mission organisations. In the interest of interreligious dialogue and the full participation of 'laymen', i.e., non-religious people who were involved professionally and officially, in the religious discourse and the experience that is part of that, it is relevant in this context if the clergy or other professionals do not exclusively monopolise religion. The idea of a 'pure', 'uncontaminated' religion should be viewed as a fiction.[94] A self-assured missionary with well-organised supporters who worked in an underdeveloped colony could afford a superiority that had more to do perhaps with power than with truth. Visser 't Hooft did feel that missions had to abandon this attitude in the context of decolonisation but adopted the attitude of the apostle Paul on the Areopagus, who sought dialogue with the Greeks in a certain symmetry of respect but without betraying the conviction of being right.[95]

Visser 't Hooft felt that he had a duty to warn against syncretism, and he did quite often wherever he went. After his journey through Asia, he

92 In 1956 Devanandan became the director of the Centre for the Study of Hinduism in Bangalore.

93 Cf. Brinkman, *The Non-Western Jesus: Jesus as Bodhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer?* (2009), 11.

94 Droogers, 'Syncretism: The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem', 1989. See also: Ringgren, 'The Problems of Syncretism', 1969.

95 'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse' (Romans 1:20 (translation NIV)).

expressed his concerns in February 1950 in a confidential report to the central committee of the World Council. Syncretism seemed to have become the new semi-official religion of Asia.

> Syncretism happens to be the easy and superficial solution to the religious problem and is now advocated in the most influential quarters. It does not unfortunately stop before the doors of the Churches and makes its influence very definitively felt among the younger generations of Christians. The only answer to this syncretist philosophy, taught as it is in leading intellectual circles, is a clear theological one. And that answer must not take the form of a mere repetition or imitation of Western theology. It must be a creative answer expressed in terms which are fully relevant to the Asian spiritual and ideological situation. That is why it is no exaggeration to say that to a large extent the future of the Christian Churches in Asia will depend on their ability to produce a living, relevant, but at the same time truly biblical and Christocentric theology.[96]

He did not feel that Western churches or missionary societies were doing much to stimulate such a sound theology in Asia. To his regret, he observed that most theological training in the new states was still given by Western missionaries, whereas the solution, in his view, had to come from native theologians.

According to Visser 't Hooft, a healthy mission could not exist without youth. Just as in the 1930s, young people were called during youth conferences to become missionaries, but the call was no longer sounded just in Europe and North America. He admired and romanticised the simplicity of young people in Asia, who were building their churches with great enthusiasm. In his eyes, the somewhat naive way in which many young East Asian theologians believed was an example for Western Christians who had been 'affected' by what he called Western 'scientism'.[97] He respected the tradition of missions being organised by societies but felt in principle that mission was part of the church itself. This vision, i.e., that the church itself was to be fundamentally a missionary movement, was well received in the Netherlands as well. After a long period of preparation, the Dutch Reformed Church adopted a new church order in 1951 that attempted, in a variety of areas, to loosely connect a decidedly national and yet ecumenical orientation.

96 Visser 't Hooft, 'Concerning the theological situation in Asia', 13 February 1950, WCC 994.2.13/24.

97 Visser 't Hooft, 'Universality of the Bible in Relation to Missions', no date, probably 1937.

The missiologist Hendrik Kraemer was also responsible for the fact that the 'apostolate' preceded the confession of the church, which showed the desire to state that the missionary attitude was more essential than the precise wording of the confession of faith with respect to the identity of the church. In the same light, the International Missionary Council (IMC) should by nature be at home under the roof of the World Council of Churches.

The integration of the World Council and the Missionary Council that Visser 't Hooft strove for was not without its difficulties, however. The Orthodox were afraid of a new wave of the Protestant compulsion to convert others, of proselytising, while the conservatives feared a further watering down and decline of the mission to preach the Word. Still others warned of a paralysis of both the World Council and the Missionary Council because they believed that organisations of such a colossal size would collapse under their own weight and turn into bureaucratic monstrosities. The most important players in the area of Protestant missions were divided. Committed Americans supported integration, but the English were primarily against it because they felt that an independent missons organisation would be more effective. Many objections could be traced to the fact that, traditionally, mission organisations were not set up by churches but had flourished in the form of 'societies'.[98] While daughter churches, which had grown out of mission posts in former colonies, were now independent churches where 'being missionary' was part of their identity, churches that had existed for a long time had to discover and develop anew their missionary character. All of that, Visser 't Hooft felt, had to come together in one dynamic mission-oriented World Council.[99]

In the 1950s, Visser 't Hooft saw people everywhere – in the East and the West, the North and the South – searching for new ways and experimenting with new mission methods. Hans Hoekendijk and Steven van Randwijck were important correspondents for him on this topic. 'It looks as if,' he wrote to the missiologist Hoekendijk in Indonesia, 'we have arrived in a period in which a new crystallisation process can begin, and I am very grateful that we will now have the chance to play our role."[100] Van Randwijck had been the director of missions of the Verenigde Nederlandse Zendingscorporaties (United Dutch Missionary Societies) in Oegstgeest, a position he would hold until 1951, when he became secretary-general of the Dutch Reformed Church's Council for Missions, where he would stay until 1966. In 1949,

98 Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (1984), 410-413.

99 Visser 't Hooft, cited in Newbigin, 'Mission to Six Continents', 1986, quote on page 183.

100 Visser 't Hooft to J.C. Hoekendijk, 1 April 1949, WCC general correspondence 662.

Hoekendijk assumed the leadership of the Secretariat for Evangelisation at the World Council. After his departure in 1953, he felt there was only one aspect of the faith that was important: the diaconal. Hoekendijk saw the church at this time purely as an instrument of Christian service in the world and increasingly rejected the ecumenical structures.[101] For Visser 't Hooft, that went much too far, and he was very disappointed in Hoekendijk. In his view, it was precisely the ecumenical movement that was able to give a true ecclesiastical answer to the consequences of decolonisation and the crisis of missions.

To his joy, he succeeded in bringing the International Missionary Council and the World Council continually closer to each other at this time. Questions about proclamation, service, and fellowship (the New Testament term *koinonia*) were reflected upon again in a 'joint committee'. The intention was to decontaminate the word 'missions' in its association with colonialism. But it was not only the situation in the former colonies that increased the insecurity about the legitimation of Christian mission – the rise of secularism in Europe contributed to this as well. Visser 't Hooft found it difficult to evaluate its significance properly. What was to be proclaimed? By whom to whom? He did want to change with the times but did not actually change much. On 2 May 1958, he delivered a passionate plea for missions at World Expo '58 in Brussels and, as he always did, against syncretism. What was striking here was that he asked for understanding with respect to the role communism played in the former colonies in Asia. There he saw people without many possessions reaching for communism as an ideal to make something of their lives. That was, nevertheless, much different than communism as a system of repression, as in Hungary.[102] He called upon the Asian churches to confidently give their own answer to the call of Christ by actively taking part in the ecumenical movement.[103] He also saw more and more sharply that an enormous and unstoppable process of change was occurring. But what was the right answer to that?

Long ago, at the great missions conference organised by John Mott in Edinburgh in 1910, it was their optimistic intention to win the world for Christ in one generation. Now, however, this much was clear to Visser 't Hooft: Edinburgh was not the beginning, but the end, of an era. The last years before the First World War were the final days of the era of Emperor Constantine

101 Hoekendijk, *De kerk binnenste buiten* (1964).

102 Visser 't Hooft, 'WCC General Secretary Speaks at Protestant Pavilion', 1 May 1958.

103 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Significance of the Asian Churches in the Ecumenical Movement', 1959. Visser 't Hooft, 'Asian Issues in Ecumenical Setting', draft of second J.R. Mott Lecture, 1959.

in which church and state were still closely connected, according to Visser 't Hooft in 1959. The First World War had suddenly brought an end to the cultural optimism of the time. Never again would Europe be rightly seen as an obvious centre of Christian values that deserved to be spread across the world. Following the Indian writer and historian Raimundo Panikkar, Visser 't Hooft spoke of the age of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer who had discovered the sea route to India and thus became a symbol of the possibility of spreading the Christian faith around the world in the wake of the political and commercial interests of European countries. But at no time did Visser 't Hooft condemn missions itself as a form of ethical imperialism. To the contrary, he used Panikkar's argument for his own advantage. It was the liberal protagonists of Christian Europe who had neglected to develop a critical prophetic attitude, thereby robbing Christianity of its essence. They, and not the missionaries, the proclaimers of the Gospel in the field, were the cause of the general identification of missions with Western cultural and economic penetration. Looking back at what has been called the golden age of missions, Visser 't Hooft spoke of a truce between 1850 and 1950, in which the natural opposition he saw between church and world was less fierce. Despite the fact that that time was now gone forever, he nevertheless continued to expect major new opportunities for missions in the 1960s, but that required the reorientation and awareness of the churches.[104] The United Nations designated the 1960s as the 'Development Decade', and the churches became actively involved. Visser 't Hooft and his staff were looking for new forms and distinguished between mutual services between churches, the alleviation of world need, and activities geared to social reform. In missions, activities of the Department for Inter Church Aid and forms of diaconal aid were discussed more and more in terms of development aid. The content slowly changed along with the change in label, but Visser 't Hooft was decidedly no propontent of turning classical missions work into Christian development aid.[105]

Syncretism continued to be the great taboo for him in the 1960s. In 1963, he felt called to publish a comprehensive study on this problem called *No Other Name*, in which he described how waves of syncretism had washed over the world in the course of history.[106] The church's *raison d'être* was, however, of a different nature. God's gift of grace to people was at right

104 Visser 't Hooft, 'Missions as the Test of Faith', 1964, quote on 253.

105 Visser 't Hooft, *Heel de kerk voor heel de wereld* (1968), 20.

106 Visser, 't Hooft, *No Other Name. The Choice between Syncretism and Christian Universalism* (1963).

angles to all those waves, in Visser 't Hooft's view.[107] He raised the rhetorical question in this book as to whether the integration of various elements, as happened in art and science, could also happen in religion. His answer was that this could indeed be the case if religion was experienced as a form of expression of human struggle and need. But if God had truly spoken, then that revelation should not, according to him, be compared with a work of art produced by humans. Here he referred to Aldous Huxley's 1945 work, *Perennial Philosophy*, in which Huxley is looking for the largest common denominator of all theologies.[108] Huxley thought he would find the truth in that, but, according to Visser 't Hooft, Huxley had – paradoxically enough – instead exposed the tragedy that this had been a step backward because all that was left was nothing more than a thinly watered down morality. Any ethics based on this was bound to fail.

It was a defensive argument. Visser 't Hooft was making a point he had already made so often. He did not succeed this time with producing any truly new insights when it came to missions but retreated to well-known positions. He did so, for example, in 1963 during the great missions conference of the IMC in Mexico City, where the theme was 'Mission to Six Continents'. There it was stated that Europe and America now had to be viewed as mission fields themselves because of secularisation. In his contribution, Visser 't Hooft cited the challenges that emerged from this and said: 'Life is a continuous examination, and God is the examiner.'[109] He considered a dynamic missionary witness in this context to be a specific touchstone for a living church. In his view, the descent of an actual God should be witnessed to as an established fact. Effective missions would show that the Word of God cannot be bound to a particular culture. Nevertheless, the section 'The Witness of Christians to Men of Other Faiths' did not lead to any consensus or clear recommendations.[110]

Visser 't Hooft deplored the fact that Christian missions were increasingly rejected in public, also by intellectual supporters of universal tolerance. Writers like Simone Weil, Simon Vestdijk, Arnold Toynbee, Carl G. Jung, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and Aldous Huxley ridiculed missionaries and, in his view, did not understand the nature of mission in their criticism. In the modern novel, the missionary was a narrow-minded figure who understood nothing of the people and the culture he worked with. He did

107 Ibid., 75.
108 Ibid., 89-90. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945).
109 Visser 't Hooft, 'Zending als toetssteen van het geloof', 1964.
110 Newbigin, 'Mission to Six Continents', 1986, 194-195.

understand that Christians who acted as if they had a monopoly on truth were to be dismissed as arrogant.[111] But the critics did not understand the essence of the problem because it was not a question of the messengers who made mistakes but one of truth itself. For Visser 't Hooft, all this meant that a new time of testing for missions had dawned: believers should not be surprised if they were hated by the world.[112] He attempted to find an answer by pointing out it was precisely on the eve of the Second World War, at the moment that the church began to take on universal characteristics and took to heart the significance of missions, that the world began to prepare itself for a violent battle. That could not have been a coincidence. Visser 't Hooft saw a pattern and attempted to clarify the crisis with his old arguments. Now as well, an untrustworthy world was doing what the world was good at, but Christians should not allow themselves to be duped.

6.7 'Angry Young Churchmen'

Around 1960, the world of young people and students in Western Europe and North America began to change radically. Visser 't Hooft was not well prepared. He saw it happening but did not know how to respond. On 14 April 1956, he gave a speech in the Dom in Utrecht for the Nederlandse Christen Studenten Vereniging (NCSV – Dutch Christian Student Society), which was celebrating its 60th anniversary.[113] That was a 'home game'; he spoke as he had in the 1930s about the past and future, about the crisis in missions, as well as about the battle being fought for the hearts and minds of intellectuals at universities. In no way did he express any concern about the future of work among Christian students or attempt to sharpen the students' thinking about the future. The speed with which the Christian youth movement collapsed in the 1960s caught everyone off guard, including Visser 't Hooft.[114] He looked at it differently later, but at that time Visser 't Hooft still wanted nothing to do with pluralism. Only in a joint view of the task of all Christians could the mission of the church of Christ, in witness, service, and fellowship, end in the unity and integrity of God's people on earth. That was also the heart of a number of lectures that Visser 't Hooft

111 Visser, 't Hooft, *No Other Name. The Choice between Syncretism and Christian Universalism* (1963), especially 116-117.

112 Cf. 1 John 3:13.

113 Visser 't Hooft, 'Feestrede zestigjarig bestaan NCSV', 14 April 1956.

114 The NCSV was dissolved in 1985, and the WSCF (World Student Christian Federation) became a shadow of its former self.

gave in September 1957 as the Taylor Lectures at Yale Divinity School.[115] And that was also his message for the world conference of the World Christian Student Federation (WCSF) in Strasbourg in July 1960.

But the student world was changing rapidly in this period. At the end of the 1950s, the universities were filling with young people from all strata of society. The value of specific Christian organisations and thought was increasingly criticised by students. The theme of the conference in Strasbourg was 'Life and Mission of the Church', where the emphasis lay on Christian education, but most students appeared to want to hear more about the world than about the church. An experiment was tried with interactive group discussions, and Visser 't Hooft did not perform badly, as this random snapshot by the Belgian Jan Grootaers shows:

> Visser 't Hooft had a great ability to feel and translate the mood of the moment and to maintain direct contact with young people. That is how we also experienced him in Strasbourg during 'informal talks' with some forty students who were seated in a large circle around the veteran from Geneva. His answer to the burning questions that were asked sounded candid but balanced, multifaceted but sharp, often with some humour to soften the sharp edges. We have never forgotten the experiment of this discussion: it always sounded exciting, sometimes dramatically charged, always contemporary with the major issues of the time that were examined: Congo, Africa, the Catholic Church, religious relativism in Asia, Cuba, South Africa, the 'One Church'. This was not the 'institutional' but completely 'the prophetic' Visser 't Hooft in conversation with the young people of 1960.[116]

But the long monologue that Visser 't Hooft presented for NCRV television in response to the somewhat obligatory question asked by a young person did not show that he was adept at new forms of communication.[117] Many did not find Visser 't Hooft's lecture convincing: it was too theological, too binding, and too demanding of obedience, and above all too much directed at the church. The proclamation of biblical images as an objective revelatory reality to which the experiential world of young people only had to find some connection no longer worked at a youth conference like that in 1960.[118]

115 Visser 't Hooft, *The Pressure of our Common Calling* (1959).

116 Grootaers, 'Het gesprek van De Maand met Dr. Willem A. Visser 't Hooft', 1963.

117 Visser 't Hooft on the world youth conference in Strasbourg, NCRV Television, no date, 1960, Sound and Vision Archives.

118 Van den Berg, *De Nederlandse Christen-Studenten Vereniging, 1896-1985* (1991), 182.

The time that young people were willing to listen patiently to the answers of the experienced church expert was over.

That could be seen when Visser 't Hooft gave the William Belden Noble Lectures in December 1963 at Harvard University. He spoke on, among other things, the theme 'Preparing the Churches for Full Unity'.[119] After proclaiming the fundamental biblical motifs of unity that could be found in, among other places, John 17 and 1 Corinthians 1:13, Visser 't Hooft argued that the spirit of the past had to be overcome and sometimes Christians had to be liberated from age-old complexes. Ecclesiastical self-examination, the confession of sins, and the display of remorse were, according to him, unmistakably a part of this process. The fear of unity needed to be banished. Visser 't Hooft used the word 'exorcising' in this lecture. But there were young people who found that all too slow: to them, whom Visser 't Hooft called 'angry young churchmen', he argued that a great deal had already happened in the last 30 years.[120] To demand at this time a completely new start for ecumenism, as some young men were doing, was not realistic, he felt. According to Visser 't Hooft, a choice would need to be made between a slow death and an active attitude of evangelisation. But precisely now the walls between churches could of themselves become transparent, he said, if people dared to witness to the faith.

6.8 New Delhi 1961: A Crowning Success and an Estrangement

Now a period of harvests and high points began for Visser 't Hooft. Because the number of staff members of the World Council continued to grow – the office in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva had as many as 200 staff – they had to look for larger accommodation. Visser 't Hooft used his influence and authority where possible and did his utmost to explain to the public that there truly were no other options and that a major leap forward had to be made.[121] Their location on the Route de Malagnou was simple and pleasant, and the garden gave it an informal atmosphere. But it was no longer suited

119 Visser 't Hooft, draft text, 'The Substance of the Ecumenical Encounter', Harvard, United States, 3, 4, 5 and 6 December 1963, WCC 994.2.19/25.

120 A.H. van den Heuvel, in: *Wending*, October 1963. Albert van den Heuvel, who became head of the Youth Department of the World Council in 1958, was himself one of the impatient 'angry young churchmen'.

121 To prevent criticism, a documentary was made that was broadcast in the Netherlands: 'Geef ze de ruimte', director: Erik de Vries, IKOR (Dutch inter-church broadcasting: Interkerkelijk Overleg Inzake Radioaangelegenheden, later IKON) Television, 18 February 1962, Sound and Vision Archives.

Figure 41 Behind his desk in his new office, the Ecumenical Centre, 150 Route de Ferney



for a professional, international organisation. After the war, the CCIA, youth work, Faith and Order, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Presbyterian Alliance joined the World Council. For some time they were unable to find a site on which they could build. Geneva was expensive for an office complex, and they considered moving the headquarters to another city. Finally, with the co-operation of the city council, they managed to buy some land in the district on the west side of the centre, close to the airport.[122] After a few years of designing and building, the offices of the new Ecumenical Centre in Grand-Saconnex was opened in April 1964. On 11 July 1965, the official opening occurred with an initiation celebration in the chapel, which had to do double duty as a place of meeting and mutual equipping. Visser 't Hooft preached the sermon.[123] He was happy that the chapel had been completely

122 http://ge.ch/grandconseil/memorial/seances/540202/55/17.

123 Visser 't Hooft, 'Sermon on the occasion of the Dedication of the Ecumenical Centre', 11 July 1965.

Figure 42 Family home since the end of the 1950s, 13 Chemin des Voirons, Chêne-Bougeries, Geneva; photo taken February 2015



integrated into the building, so that prayer and working would go together: *ora et labora.* From his new office he had a clear view of Mount Blanc in the distance.

It was at the same period, the end of the 1950s, that Wim and Jetty bought a house for the first time. The most important criterion that their

Figure 43 J. Zeilstra on the steps, 13 Chemin des Voirons, Chêne-Bougeries, Geneva



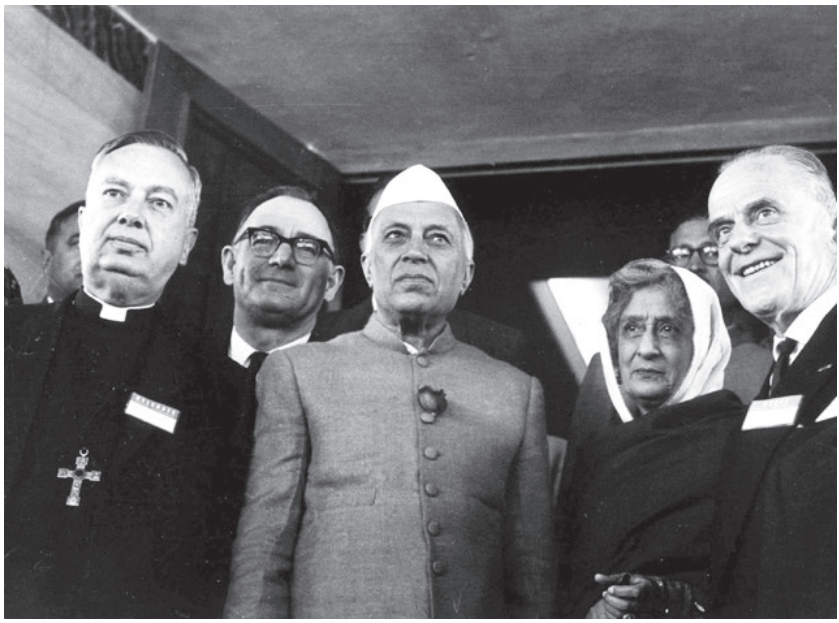
son Kees had been given in looking for a house for his parents was that the rooms had to be high enough to accommodate the large antique cupboard, an inheritance piece with blue vases. The house he found was located at 13 Chemin des Voirons in Chêne-Bougeries, a free-standing villa on a

no-through road.[124] The villa had a large garden bordered by a railway line and was located to the east of the city centre of Geneva. Jetty accepted the move with some reluctance. She became more anxious and withdrew more and more.

During this period, Visser 't Hooft was busy with the preparations for the third assembly of the World Council to be held in New Delhi. The conference was to take place in November 1961 in the Vigyan Bhavan, an enormous conference centre, with the theme 'Jesus Christ: Light of the World'. Visser 't Hooft had high expectations of this conference and compared the rooms of the centre with the meeting rooms of the United Nations in New York. But the programme was overfull, and it would once again be a challenge for Visser 't Hooft and his staff to manage it properly. In contrast to the two previous assemblies, the member churches, including many young churches, were now expected to a make relatively large contribution. The encounter of Christianity with other religions was also on the agenda for the first time. As such, the assembly itself was a manifestation of the new multifacetted nature of the World Council. The word 'dialogue' was used more and more in this period. There was now a true need for a more precise description of the purpose of unity and the concrete tasks in society, such as youth work and the reception of refugees. The brochure 'Jesus Christ, the Light of the World' was published in 32 languages. Visser 't Hooft was proud when the Indian premier Jawaharlal Nehru, whom he had once met in 1953, gave a speech. Nehru warned against thinking in terms of camps that were connected to the Cold War, which Visser 't Hooft could personally appreciate. Nehru was always seen by Visser 't Hooft as a great man because he felt that, in contrast to, for example, the Indonesian Kusno Sukarno, the Indian leader was always himself, true to his principles and never thought too highly of himself.[125] The assembly at New Delhi was a success, but Visser 't Hooft had great difficulty with the lack of organisation at the meeting. Evanston was difficult because of the lack of consensus, but New Delhi was chaos. The discussion went in all different directions. No longer was it older white men, theologians, intellectuals, who could determine the agenda of the assembly with their questions, answers, and discussion style. Of those who had been working in the World Council already before the Second World War, Visser 't Hooft was one of the last who were still active. His old network had unravelled, and that was alienating.

124 This house still exists and was inhabited until the summer of 2018 by their daughter Anneke Musacchio-Visser 't Hooft and her husband, Mario Musacchio, their daughter Erica and her husband.
125 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

Figure 44 Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, visits the World Council assembly in New Delhi, 1961



Personally, he went to great pains to ensure that a number of Eastern Orthodox churches joined the World Council in New Delhi and that the International Missionary Council was integrated into the World Council and was constituted as the Division of World Mission and Evangelism. He expected that this would contribute to many young member churches, which were the fruit of mission activity, quickly feeling themselves to be full members of the World Council. But he did understand that this process would change the Council radically. How could this continually growing ecumenical movement be held together both organisationally and in terms of content? After 1961, in his final years as general secretary, Visser 't Hooft would be intensely preoccupied with this question. He sought for footing in stimulating dialogue, letting himself be inspired by Martin Buber, whom he had met in Israel and who had called dialogue the basic form of all human relations.[126] Visser 't Hooft felt that it was important that the World Council remain 'Christ-centred' after New Delhi. As far as he was concerned, it was a narrow path between remaining true to starting points, not becoming

126 Buber, *Ich und Du* (1923). Oldham, *Real Life is Meeting* (1942). Visser 't Hooft, Speech Buck Hill Falls, April 1962, WCC 994.2.18/20.

introverted and totally turned inward but neither so turned outward that the Christian churches would lose themselves in their contact with the world.

6.9 No Ecumenical Consensus on Ecclesiology

At the beginning of the 1960s, it was very important to Visser 't Hooft that he seek an ecumenical consensus within the World Council on ecclesiology, i.e., the teaching about the significance of the church. In 1962, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council. Visser 't Hooft believed there was a possibility of the Roman Catholic Church joining the World Council; he would never say it openly, but that is what he hoped.[127] From Karl Barth he had learned that the unity of the church could only be built on the unity of Scripture. In relation to this, he saw the 66 canonical books of the Bible as a close unity in which God had revealed his will and continued to reveal to good readers. The conceptual building blocks that were given in Romans 12: discernment, prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, communicating, giving leadership – everything from which the idea of church was compiled – could thus, in his view, not be a compilation that arose through coincidence but were inspired by the Holy Spirit.[128] These characteristics were, as the Roman Catholics asserted, recognised in the tradition of the church, but, as far as he was concerned, Scripture was the norm. He would rather have given the cohesive power of the World Council a permanent root in the theology of Karl Barth. Liberation theology, feminist and 'black' theology had a certain contextual and challenging value for him, but he saw them as one-sided and passing in nature. Rudolf Bultmann had pointed to relative and time-bound elements in the biblical text itself. When students of Bultmann, like the German theologian Ernst Käsemann, started to contradict him increasingly in this area and pointed to all kinds of ecclesiologies in the Bible, Visser 't Hooft became furious. This was not how a church was built; it only led to confusion.[129] That could not be the task.

This happened in the summer of 1963, when, during a Faith and Order conference in Montreal, the ecclesiological significance of the World Council of Churches was again on the agenda. It was the first conference in which

127 See 8.7.

128 In studying the Bible, Visser 't Hooft attached great value to Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 10 volumes (1933-1979).

129 Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel, and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON Radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.

the Eastern Orthodox played an important part, and it was precisely these churches that, with respect to this topic, were very sensitive and concerned. They were afraid that the World Council, despite earlier assurances, would begin to apply the traditionally defined marks of the church, the *notae ecclesiae*, to itself and that it secretly viewed itself as a world church in the early stages. That would contradict the Toronto statement of the central committee in 1950 and was also not the intention, but it is very telling that there were concerns about it. The Orthodox had an exclusive view of the true church, which they applied to their own churches, and argued for an emphasis on the Trinity instead of Christocentrism, and striving for unity was not a goal for them in the concrete sense of the word.[130]

The German theologian Ernst Käsemann from Tübingen particularly articulated the challenge that the ecclesiological problem posed to the World Council. He put his stamp on the conference when he demonstrated that the New Testament has not one but seven ecclesiologies, i.e., theologies of the church that could not be easily harmonised. Käsemann pointed out that, for example, an 'early Catholic' ecclesiology can be formulated on the basis of the letters by Paul to Timothy and Titus, with the emphasis on office and sacrament. On the other hand, there are writings that can be understood as the precursors of more activist forms of being a community, such as the letter of James. Käsemann himself opted for what he called 'Christ outside the gate', based on Hebrews 13:12, a non-churchly form of being church, outside of the customary frameworks. In sharp contrast to the discussions on the Bible during the conference, serious race riots were taking place at the same time in the United States, and the American staff member Eugene Blake, who was very involved with the demonstrations against racism, could not leave it alone and applied Käsemann's view to that situation. The response to the context was, in his view, determinative for the value of the community of Christ. Visser 't Hooft was very upset.

> If the unity of the Bible is denied, that means that the unity of the church loses its necessity. A Bible that is viewed as a collection of various Christologies and ecclesiologies cannot be a basis for our call to unity. Our movement can only be a dynamic movement for more unity if we together listen to the one voice that gives us our marching orders.[131]

130 See 6.3 and 7.6.

131 Visser 't Hooft, 'Na de expansie: Verdieping', Rapport centraal comité 1966, in: Visser 't Hooft, *Heel de kerk voor heel de wereld. Balans van de oecumene* (1968), 382-390. Quote on 385: 'Wanneer de eenheid van de bijbel wordt ontkend, betekent dat dat de eenheid der kerk haar noodzakelijkheid

To his friend, the Dutch dogmatist and biblical theologian Hendrik Berkhof, who was also present at this conference, he said that if Käsemann had been right, his whole life's work was undermined. Berkhof attempted to alleviate his concern by pointing out that in the New Testament this unity was reached only via the detour of diversity and that both were just as essential. He also explained 1 Corinthians 12 on the diversity of gifts in the church in this way.[132] But a shocked Visser 't Hooft was not reassured. He was afraid of letting go of the simplicity of biblical ecclesiology and losing sight of the unity of the church.[133] His Christocentric ecclesiology thus hampered him in interreligious dialogue. He also found it difficult to integrate new expressions, like black theology and the theology of revolution in the United States, and liberation theology in Central and South America, into his older thought.

At the meeting of the central committee of the World Council in August 1963 in Rochester, New York, Visser 't Hooft flatly opposed the French Roman Catholic theologian and journalist Bruno Chenu and the German Lutheran theologian and social ethicist Ulrich Duchrow. They saw the super church in the Toronto declaration of 1950 simply as a diplomatic solution to bring various churches together in the World Council. An indignant Visser 't Hooft distanced himself from every suspicion of strategic opportunism. He pointed out that the description of the young church in Acts 4:32 mentions unity of heart and soul and that an ecclesiological approach by the World Council was possible.[134] The confusion remained. Albert van den Heuvel said in retrospect, on the commemoration of the 69th anniversary of the World Council:

> The motto of the World Council that churches should be administratively and organisationally one, thus one large organisation with the Pope at its head or whatever, with one large synod. … it was a major lowpoint for me when I discovered that this was not adequate. That was what we believed. I had also worked for years for that.[135]

verliest. Een bijbel die wordt opgevat als een verzameling verschillende christologieën en ecclesiologieën, kan voor onze oproep tot eenheid geen basis zijn. Onze beweging kan alleen een dynamische beweging voor meerdere eenheid zijn, wanneer wij tezamen luisteren naar de éne stem die ons ons marsbevel geeft.'

132 H. Berkhof, in: *Hervormd Nederland*, July 1985.

133 Cf. Holtrop, 'De Kerk, de kerken en de Wereldraad van Kerken', in: Augustijn, *Kerkhistorische opstellen aangeboden aan Prof.dr. J. van den Berg* (1987), 207-221.

134 Wind, *Zending en oecumene in de twintigste eeuw*, 2a (1991), 208-209.

135 Albert van den Heuvel, interview, IKON jubilee programme '60 jaar Wereldraad van Kerken', broadcast 24 August 2008: 'Het devies van de Wereldraad dat kerken administratief en organisatorisch één zouden moeten zijn, dus één grote organisatie met de Paus aan het hoofd, of weet

There were fierce debates on this in Rochester in 1963, but it proved to be a rearguard action. It was not a question of what the church was or had to be that was central in the following years. Over the course of the 1960s, interest in key discussions on the more precise ecclesiological relationship between member churches and the World Council quickly declined.[136] Visser 't Hooft would later often complain that the media did take interest in the controversial actions of the World Council but scarcely any for the content of the theological discussion. Nevertheless, there was also an occasion in Rochester for Visser 't Hooft to give a speech. More than 25 years after the meeting in Utrecht in 1938, where it was decided to found the World Council, he presented a historical review in which he expressed once again his trust in God's leading in the history of ecumenicity.

> History is in the last analysis a mystery and church history is a particular mystery within that general history. We have been led into it. We have been used for purposes larger than we had in mind.[137]

These words must have sounded like an imploring answer at the time to Käsemann and other critics. What was being done was not a matter of coincidence. In answer to what, in Visser 't Hooft's eyes, was an excess of relativism, he asserted that the ecumenical movement was God's work in which the staff members were led by the grace of God.

Including the period before the actual foundation of the World Council, that same year, 1963, Visser 't Hooft had himself worked for the World Council for 25 years, and his colleagues put together a jubilee book called *The Sufficiency of God*. Visser 't Hooft thanked them warmly in a circular. Various chapters had helped him to have a better understanding of the last 25 years. The contribution of staff member Mackie, who came from the WSCF and with whom he had worked since the beginning of the 1930s, touched him in particular.

> [A]bove all Robert Mackie's all too generous appraisal of my work have made me even more deeply astonished and grateful that I have been drawn in to a movement and used for a purpose of such profound meaning and

ik wat, met één grote synode. [...] het was een groot dieptepunt voor mij toen ik ontdekte dat dit niet deugde. Dat geloofden wij. Daar had ik ook jaren voor gewerkt.'

136 Wind, *Zending en oecumene in de twintigste eeuw*, 1 (1984), 243.

137 Visser 't Hooft, Report of the General Secretary, August 1963, WCC 994.2.19/17.

> a movement in which so many of completely different backgrounds have come to an interpretation of each other's minds.[138]

In addition to being a tribute to him, the book formed an encouragement and a confirmation for a general secretary who understood very well that he had entered his final years in that role.

While Visser't Hooft was nonetheless becoming more and more well-known in this period, it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to interpret new developments and to give meaningful ecumenically grounded answers. This had been noted by sharp observers since the 1950s. In an article in *The Observer* on the occasion of the ten-year anniversary of the World Council, a journalist noted as the complaint of an American professor: 'Wim thinks in slogans.'[139]

> He has the defects of his virtues. He upsets some people, usually self-opinionated people, by his brusque way of insisting upon his own views or dismissing theirs. And his mind, though extremely quick, likes sharp, clear concepts more than subtle distinctions.[140]

This was clearly both Visser 't Hooft's strength and his weakness. He knew his strength very well; he knew that he was a good speaker. In 1963, for example, Visser 't Hooft heard the famous German-American theologian Paul Tillich speak at a party on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the weekly news magazine *Time*, before almost a thousand 'celebrities' from the world of politics, sports, film, and theatre. All those still living who had once been on the cover of *Time* had been invited. Visser 't Hooft was extraordinarily proud that he had once been on the cover of *Time* as 'World Churchman' with the tag 'Second Reformation'.[141] But Tillich's 'profundities' were lost on someone like the boxer Jack Dempsey, one of the young Visser 't Hooft's heroes. According to him, Tillich completely missed the point on this occasion. The philosophical discourse went completely over the heads of the celebrities. Visser 't Hooft would have liked to have addressed the guests instead of Tillich with what he considered to be a comprehensible word of proclamation for everyone. In his view, Tillich's speech was a missed

138 Visser 't Hooft to Dear Friends, Reinhold Niebuhr, 17 September 1963, WCC 42.0059. General correspondence 1023.
139 *The Observer*, 6 April 1958.
140 Ibid.
141 *Time*, 8 December 1961.

Figure 45 On the cover of *Time*, 1961



opportunity at *Time*'s gala dinner. He heard in that speech a confirmation of his choice as a young man to distance himself from such scholarly cultural theology.[142] He enjoyed it when he spoke first with the Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida during the great *Time* gala, and immediately after that with

142 Visser 't Hooft, *Leren leven met de oecumene* (1968), 77-78. On Visser 't Hooft's relation with Tillich, see Zeilstra, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 23 April 2013.

Cardinal Francis J. Spellman, the Roman Catholic archbishop of New York, and with the politician Pierre Mendès France. He loved being seated next to the American general and diplomat Maxwell D. Taylor at the table.

But his retirement as general secretary of the World Council was approaching with alarming speed. In anticipation of it, Visser 't Hooft, whom Société d'Études et de Publications Économiques included as one of 250 persons who made up the intellectual elite of the world, was asked to fill in a questionnaire, intended to be the basis for an article in the international magazine *Réalités*.[143] Every respondent was expected to give fascinating answers in pithy phrases to a series of core questions. The answers Visser 't Hooft gave provide insight into his thinking shortly before his retirement. Visser 't Hooft pointed to the tensions between rich and the poor countries as the most important question of the coming 20 years, agreeing with the views of the secretary-general of the United Nations, U Thant, whom he received in the offices of the World Council in 1966.[144] As the most important problem in his own area, he cited, not surprisingly, the unity of the church. The meaning of the history of humankind was, for Visser 't Hooft, that it was a preparation for the kingdom of God, of which there were clear signs, he felt, in the present time. He was against euthanasia because he felt that people had seen in the time of Hitler what that meant. When asked if he would rather live under American, Russian, or Chinese domination if it was necessary in order to avoid nuclear war, he answered that a Christian had to be prepared to live in a world as it was, whoever the dominant power was. But, he added, a world dominated by one power would always be a world of tyranny and that should always be resisted. Here, in his answer, Visser 't Hooft combined the insights of both Luther, who pointed out that a person had to submit to the government, and Calvin, who assumed not only the right but also the duty to resist a tyrannous government. Visser 't Hooft did not think that putting a man on the moon deserved high priority. He felt that it was much more important to develop a just and peaceful world. When he met the Apollo 9 astronaut Russell L. Schweickart a few years later, in 1969, Visser 't Hooft asked him if the time had not come to use the money that was spent on space travel from now on to solve the problem of poverty in the ghettos of the United States. Schweickart did not think so: the exciting dream of the exploration of space was, in his view, an essential human need.[145] Visser 't Hooft's opinion was very different.

143 *Réalités*, June 1966, WCC 994.2.21/26.

144 This topic occupied him very much during this time. Cf. W. de Jong, interview Visser 't Hooft, VARA Radio, 23 July 1966, Sound and Vision Archives.

145 Visser 't Hooft to Dear Family and Friends, 12 June 1969. Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.

Figure 46 With the secretary-general of the United Nations, U Thant, Ecumenical Centre, Geneva 1966



For him, as he responded to the questionnaire, finding meaning in life was more important than 'happiness', which he found a meaningless term. It all depended on the definition. Although people were not equal, in his view, they had to be treated as equal. Fundamental moral values that should not be transgressed could be found in the ten commandments. These were summarised in *agape*, the love commanded by Christ in the New Testament. The human being was not free but could be freed by the truth.[146] For human beings, death did not mean a total disappearance into nothingness nor did it mean the survival of part of his being. For Visser 't Hooft, the hope of Christians was the 'resurrection of the dead', as promised in the Bible. When he was asked for the names of ten great men who had served humanity, he listed the following: Moses, Socrates, Paul, Augustine, Dante, Martin Luther, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Pascal, and Dostoyevsky. He added: 'I have not included Jesus Christ, because he does not belong in any list. His name is above every name.'

The ecumenical movement as well as the churches was more and more explicitly confronted with pluralism. In the year he retired, 1966, Visser 't Hooft felt called to give an analysis of pluralism in an article called 'Pluralism

146 John 8:32.

– Temptation or Opportunity'.[147] It was a very significant argument in which the retiring general secretary expressed his well-known slogans, while also wanting to point to the opportunities that presented themselves at that time. Societies were more and more strongly developing a pluralist character, after all. To long for a restoration of an exclusive Christianity would, according to Visser 't Hooft, be a mistake. It was the inclusive character of the Christian faith that had to be emphasised without relativising values. If pluralism meant that everyone was right to a certain extent and converting others would be pointless, then Christians needed to resist it as much as if the devil himself was behind it.

> For it would then breed a race of spiritually spineless human beings who would live in the sort of night in which all cats are grey. No one would any longer have to face the ultimate questions of life. One would not have to answer the questions of Jesus: 'Who do you think I am?' and 'Will you follow me?' It would be a terribly dull world in which one would begin to long for a serious spiritual conflict. Fortunately we do not live in that world. We live in a world where the man who wants to live responsibly must choose, whether he likes it or not.[148]

Visser 't Hooft thought it was a healthy human trait to try to convince others of one's own position and a sign that they were defending their view and understanding of truth. The church had to accept a pluralistic society without regretting the bygone time of the *Corpus Christianum*. But the church also had to realise that a credible witness, precisely in that plurality, could be comprehensible if church unity was visible as *Corpus Christi*: 'The pluralistic world society is too tough for a divided church.' It is striking that in this analysis Visser 't Hooft abandoned Dietrich Bonhoeffer, especially his modern disciples:

> Bonhoeffer and his followers are wrong in thinking that revelation can live without religion. We need a new Christian civilisation and it is perfectly possible to pass from a traditional type of Christian society to a renewed Christian society without passing through the stage of dechristianisation.[149]

147 Visser 't Hooft, 'Pluralism – Temptation or Opportunity', in: *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. XVIII, April 1966.
148 Ibid. Quote on 140. See also WCC 994.2.20/28.
149 Ibid. Quote on 136.

It was during this period that the radical interpretation of Bonhoeffer and the so-called 'God is dead' theology began to arise. Visser 't Hooft wanted nothing to do with it.

Despite secularisation, Visser 't Hooft took into account the possibility of what he called a 'genuine renaissance' of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam in this order. The role of these world religions was far from finished.

> [I]t is clear that for many years to come the main historic religions will be powerful factors on the world scene, that all of them are developing increasingly a consciousness of world-wide missionary responsibility; and that, just as Christianity has penetrated into territory, so they will penetrate into territories which have been traditionally Christian.[150]

But, in Visser 't Hooft's view, if there was something people in the ecumenical movement could learn, it was that the future did not belong to people. In the last major speech he gave as general secretary, in Buckhill Falls in April 1966, he presented the church as an example of the responsible society. The purpose was not 'institutional unification' but fellowship as intended by the New Testament term *koinonia*, and that had to be constantly clarified. This shift in accent was remarkable for someone who had always been working on an institution. What was also new was the attention he paid to ecumenical relations between the generations. This had to do with his imminent retirement but also with his concern about the growing generation gap.

> I do not believe that there has been any other period in the history of the ecumenical movement when the danger of estrangement between the generations has been as great as it is today. This is of course part of the wider problem of our time: the tension between a younger generation which takes nothing for granted, which does not trust any established values or institutions and an older generation which seeks to defend often without strong conviction or good reasons these values and institutions.[151]

The dialogue between the generations was the new test of ecumenicity. Should older people be prepared to listen to the 'often irritating questions' of the young people? Should people make a distinction between what needed to be defended because it belonged to the essence of the Christian truth and

150 Ibid. Quote on 132.

151 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Shape of Things to Come in the Ecumenical Movement', 1966.

what could be dropped because it belonged to the status quo? And were people prepared to show that the ecumenical movement intended to put practice first and that the institutional church was intended to serve and not to dominate or 'freeze' the work of the Holy Spirit? It is also interesting that, for the first time, he now felt the freedom to argue for taking seriously the concerns of conservative evangelicals, who very quickly had the idea that striving for unity went at the expense of the truth.

But, in the view of the departing general secretary, the World Council needed to speak more clearly than previously concerning world problems, such as, for example, human rights, disarmament, and Vietnam. And the struggle against racism was far from over. There was no room for defeatism. Visser 't Hooft felt that the most important thing was that churches had to communicate a clear faith. In response to those who asserted that God was dead or dying,[152] he asked: 'Which God is dying?' According to him, the answer was clear: the God that was dying was the 'self-evident God'.

> It is the self-evident God, the God of natural theology, the God that everyone believed in, the God whom we exploited in our speeches as the guarantee of our human purposes. But it is hardly news that that god is not alive. Through the combined efforts of Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Freud and Marx, but also of Kierkegaard, Barth and Bonhoeffer we have learned not to put our faith in such a god. But does that affect the faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Jesus Christ, not of the philosophers, of Pascal, the faith in the God who gives 'the light of revelation, the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'?[153]

The future of the ecumenical movement and of the Christian faith as such depended, in his view, on willingness to be directed to the centre of the Christian message, and that was the coming of Christ in an uncertain world.

The influence of what at this time was called the 'Third World' was becoming more strongly noticeable in ecumenical committees. That became particularly visible during the Life and Work conference on church and society that was held in Geneva in 1966 and where, for once, it did not deal with ecclesiological questions at all. This was the last major conference organised under Visser 't Hooft's responsibility. The American Baptist Paul B. Abrecht, staff member since 1949, took care of the organisation and the follow up. Delegates from

152 Robinson, *Honest to God* (1963), and Cox, *The Secular City. Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (1965).

153 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Shape of Things to Come in the Ecumenical Movement' (1966).

Western churches were no longer in the majority here. Four hundred and twenty delegates met in Geneva from 12 to 26 July 1966. Most of them had been sent because of their expertise, not as clergy. While the war in Vietnam was raging, racial conflicts flaring up in the United States and in South Africa led to indignant reactions, and faltering disarmament talks between East and West dominated the news, current social issues like hunger, social oppression, and injustice were discussed. The participants were asked to speak without instructions or consultation. 'We ask you to speak to us all', Visser 't Hooft said at the opening of the conference, and he hoped that primarily long-term tasks would be formulated.[154] The major discussion was on the meaning of contextuality. This question cut right across the denominations, he noted. How should the biblical message be translated in constantly changing circumstances? Once again, just as in Amsterdam in 1948, the call for a 'responsible society' was sounded. A newer, higher degree of organisation of world society required a new application. Visser 't Hooft referred to the vision of the Old Testament prophet Amos, who had to pass on the Word of God:

> 'I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.' That is the warning. But the Lord says also: 'Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.' These are our marching orders.[155]

Geneva 1966 was a critical conference that not only posed questions but also dared to give answers. Purely quantitative economic growth as a goal was rejected. The 'developing countries' were called to not simply imitate the industrialised ones: a contextual approach and forms of qualitative growth were recommended.[156] Visser 't Hooft was satisfied and viewed the conference as a great success, in any case externally, because the gap between rich and poor countries, which was an underestimated threat to world peace, was dealt with here.[157] He felt he could retire at a high point in the development of the World Council.[158] But it needs to be remarked that it was buzzing with revolutionary ideas, which Visser 't Hooft simply seemed to ignore.[159] The concept of 'responsible society', which had been coined by Oldham and Visser 't Hooft, moved to the background.

154 Visser 't Hooft, 'World Conference on Church and Society', 1966.

155 *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. XVIII, no.4, 425. See also WCC 994.2.21/24.

156 *World Conference on Church and Society, July 12-26. Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of our Time. The Official Report* (1967).

157 Wim de Jong, interview with Visser 't Hooft, VARA Radio, 23 July 1966, Sound and Vision.

158 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 362.

159 Shaull.'Die revolutionäre Herausforderung an Kirche und Theologie', 1966.

6.10 The Theologian as Diplomat

In the period between 1948 and 1966, Visser 't Hooft played a central role as general secretary in the World Council of Churches. This was the flourishing period in which the World Council quickly developed into a global religious non-governmental organisation (NGO) with hundreds of staff. Visser 't Hooft did not fit into an existing profile of general secretary; rather, the position was written for him. He had built the organisation from the start and was also much more than a supervisor after it was founded. Visser 't Hooft was not only an erudite theologian; he was also someone who knew how to tackle issues, who gave firm leadership to the office, grew into an able diplomat, developed vision and strategies and responded in an alert way to current developments in the world. His enormous network and his immense knowledge of the issues contributed to his increasing authority in these years. In addition, he adhered to his 'Barthian' training in a Christocentric ecclesiology and his strong rejection of syncretism, which was almost his trademark at this time. It was rigid but also clear, and it held together in one way or another, in his view, the many divergent types of Christianity recognisable in the hundreds of churches that were members of the World Council.

The general secretary did not always succeed, however, in giving the concrete form he wanted to the connection between theology and the role he saw for the World Council on the world stage. To have more conservative churches involved more in the work of the World Council, to resist secularisation, and to increase the support of the member churches, he dedicated himself very much in the 1950s to the necessity of the renewal of the church. He sometimes overplayed his hand or had unrealistic expectations. The latter happened in Evanston, where the choice for the theme of hope seemed too much at the time of the Cold War. Basically, Visser 't Hooft's concerns really regarded nothing less than the salvation of this world. The unity of the church could not only be a marginal or purely internal church matter in that world in need. Hiding behind his optimistic nature was a saviour complex and a very definite view of truth. This would make him vulnerable when it became clear that the concrete renewal of the church that Visser 't Hooft had so strongly expected in the 1950s did not continue and would ultimately not turn the tide of secularisation.

Every time an international crisis arose in the 1950s, the World Council and the general secretary felt called to produce warning and guiding public statements. Sufficient support in the churches was needed for such statements. When that was lacking, Visser 't Hooft usually responded in a

Figure 47 At Hong Kong Airport, ca. 1965



reserved way, as in connection with the biblical meaning and legitimation of the modern State of Israel. In South Africa, he could gain trust for a time with a diplomatic approach. But internal tension arose with the Anglicans during the Cyprus crisis. In the case of the Cuba crisis, the general secretary

had to recognise that he had spoken out of turn, but he finally achieved the mandate to continue on the path chosen.

That Visser 't Hooft was so attached to the missionary shape of the church, to a Christocentric proclamation, and continued to resist any recognition of possible positive aspects of syncretism became clearly visible in his struggle to retain mission in its classical form. He did see that mission had declined a great deal in that period and had to be renewed, but he did not really know how to set about this. A fundamental insecurity in the West was accompanied by new, self-chosen ways of young churches in the East. Visser 't Hooft worked hard for the integration of the International Missionary Council into the World Council in 1961, hoping for a revival of mission. But he could not deal successfully with the growing emphasis on development aid and interreligious dialogue between equal partners, which slowly began to replace misson.[160]

After 1960, Visser 't Hooft felt increasing tension with young people who thought that it was all taking too long and saw too few concrete results. The discussion on the theologically defended and institutional unity of the church seemed to be of increasingly less interest to a new generation. He did want to understand that, but his response was primarily a call for patience. Social ethics, forms of liberation theology, and the more activist call for justice and room for young people were becoming more important as themes in the ecumenical movement. Visser 't Hooft understood that he had to respond, but his urge to preach always got in his way when he truly wanted to listen to the experiences of young people. There were only a few of his own friends from before the war present at the third assembly in New Delhi. The meeting was also less dominated by old white men from Europe and North America. Nevertheless, for Visser 't Hooft, it was the crowning of years of work when the Eastern Orthodox churches joined the World Council and the International Missionary Council was integrated into the World Council

Visser 't Hooft had always connected his view of the unity of the church with his trust in the unity of the body of Christ in the world, the unity of the Bible, and, most fundamentally, with the unity of God. When theologians began to tell him that there were various models of the church possible on the basis of the Bible, he had great difficulty with it. An all too nuanced approach felt to him like the sweeping away of an indispensable foundation from under his feet. He did not accept this and for a long time continued to protest against a more cultural historical and thus relativising approach. That seemed to him to be the pitfall he had vaulted over in his youth.

160 Cf. Gort, *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (1989), 13.

The major conference on church and society in Geneva in 1966 was the last one in which he could make a major contribution as general secretary. Together with his staff, Visser 't Hooft managed to bring hundreds of experts together, most of whom were laymen. There were also many delegates from the 'Third World' at that meeting. Current burning issues on the world stage were discussed extensively. During this last, great meeting that was organised under his leadership, the topic was not so much the church itself but 'the church' was the occasion to give space to topics of world significance. Visser 't Hooft considered the conference a success, but he needed to understand that an important paradigm shift had occurred, away from the concept of a 'responsible society' as set by himself and Oldham. Revolution was now the buzzword. Was this the future of the World Council?

7 The Cold War, the Unity of the Church and Eastern Orthodoxy, 1948-1966

Abstract
Chapter 7 traces Visser 't Hooft's activity as a (controversial) bridge builder during the period of the Cold War, on the unity of the church, and Eastern Orthodoxy. Despite the Cold War, which prevented Eastern Orthodox churches from joining the World Council, Visser 't Hooft held firmly to the direction set by the World Council as a third way between East and West, utilising insights he laid out in earlier publications. At the same time the World Council had to deal with the question of churches recognising other churches as true. In this chapter we see how Visser 't Hooft inspired people to apply ecumenicity across the East-West divide. The chapter also looks at criticism of Visser 't Hooft's approach.

Keywords: Cold War, Eastern Orthodoxy, communism, Russia, religious persecution

7.1 Introduction

In his 1933 book *Le catholicisme non-romain* Visser 't Hooft had already concluded that Eastern Orthodoxy was an indispensable part of the world church. In the period after the Second World War, when the Cold War made contact considerably more difficult, he had resolved to do what he could to draw the Eastern Orthodox churches into the World Council. He had built up many Orthodox contacts in his youth and student work, and these contacts played a major role in policy while he developed a strategy with the tacit but preset goal of having the Russian Orthodox Church join the World Council. He took great care not to annoy the Russian contacts that did exist but to appreciate their presence (7.2). His personal fascination with Orthodoxy helped him to win over church leaders. But how did that work out in practice, including those aspects that had to do with fundamental

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theological beliefs? (7.3). During that period, the world seemed obsessed with the opposition between communism and capitalism. How did Visser 't Hooft deal with this politically paralysing divide while trying to strengthen the ties between the World Council and the Eastern Orthodox churches? Over the course of time, he did manage to break through the impasse at least in the area of ecumenics (7.4). The attention he paid to the Orthodox churches was not separate from the concrete experience of a crisis in Europe. Everything seemed to revolve around Berlin. Visser 't Hooft dealt with this in an extremely cautious though committed and especially independent way. He was concerned with looking at what the churches could do for peace in the 1950s (7.5). To convince the leaders of the Russian Church, he returned time and again to the starting points that the central committee of the World Council had adopted in Toronto in 1950. The World Council was not a super church, and becoming a member did not mean explicitly recognising other member churches as fully church (7.6). Everyone knew that the KGB was looking over the shoulders of the delegates from the Church of Russia who received permission from the Soviet authorities to form contacts in the outside world. How did Visser 't Hooft deal with this? (7.7). A breakthrough was reached in 1961: the Russian Orthodox Church became a member of the World Council and, with an estimated membership of 50 million, was by far the largest member church. Some other Eastern Orthodox Churches followed in its wake. How did Visser 't Hooft himself evaluate the significance of this then and later? (7.8). How did others assess this development? (7.9).

7.2 Building on Old Contacts

With respect to Orthodoxy, it was not only Visser 't Hooft's desire to connect as many churches as possible to the World Council that played a role here. In Orthodoxy he saw a precious aspect preserved of what it is to be church that the West urgently needed. This aspect had attracted his attention already when he was a young man. It was not theology but Russian literature, particularly Dostoyevsky, that first awakened Visser 't Hooft's fascination in the 1920s with the world of the Orthodox. It was not the church, but the experience of faith that was central here. In 1920, Germanos, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople who presided over about twenty non-autocephalous Greek Orthodox churches all over the world, had addressed an encyclical to Christians everywhere with the purpose of setting up a 'fellowship of churches' that would offer spiritual support to the League

of Nations. This call went unnoticed by the young Visser 't Hooft at that time, but the autocephalous Orthodox churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Romania became involved in the then still informal ecumenical movement. In his work for the YMCA and the WSCF, Visser 't Hooft had met representatives and members of these churches everywhere in the Balkans, and the discussion about the ecumenical call of 1920 had taken place. He later often referred to the importance of this Orthodox encyclical, and – also after 1948 – constantly underscored its, in principle, ecclesial character.[1] The question remains whether all his Orthodox dialogue partners – if they were already familiar with the content of the encyclical – shared the conclusions he drew from it or the implications that he attached to it in connection with the significance of the World Council of Churches. As far as he was concerned, the foundation of this organisation was the decisive answer to the 1920 call of the Patriarch and all Orthodox churches belonged in the World Council.

Visser 't Hooft gradually learned through his experience in the 1920s and 1930s a great deal about the wealth of the Orthodox tradition and Orthodox sensitivities. Shortly after the First World War, the Orthodox churches had followed the missionary activities of the Protestant YMCA in East European countries with a critical eye. These activities quickly resulted in Orthodox accusations of proselytism, attempts to convert the youth to Protestantism. Russian and Bulgarian churches even forbade their youth from participating in YMCA activities. That led Visser 't Hooft to become involved in a whole series of encounters between YMCA and WSCF leaders on the one hand and the Orthodox on the other in, among other places, Denmark 1926, Sofia 1928, Thessaloniki and Athens 1930, and Bucharest 1933, in which the most important objective was to calm the fears of the Orthodox. In these meetings, the Russian Student Christian Movement, primarily active among Russians outside communist Russia, informed the Western Protestants of the specific situation in each country. In 1933, a settlement could be reached between the YMCA and the Orthodox churches. It was agreed that the activities of the YMCA in Eastern Europe would, in principle, be Orthodox in character, albeit with room for contributions from other confessions. Bible studies would be carried out in line with the Orthodox view of Scripture. Every form of proselytism was explicitly rejected, and the activities of the YMCA would be supported by the Orthodox church. This agreement was accepted at the time by the Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek, and Alexandrian

1 'Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere', Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in: Visser 't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (1982), 94-97.

churches and by part of the Russian émigré hierarchy, that is, by the Russian Orthodox clergy who had left Russia because of state communism. As a result, there was fruitful collaboration between the YMCA and the Orthodox in the Balkans for some time.

Visser 't Hooft was a personal friend of Athenagoras I, the metropolitan of Corfu, who hosted a youth conference on this island in the winter of 1929. In 1931, Athenagoras was the Greek Orthodox archbishop of America and then Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople from 1948-1972, a title that he, Visser 't Hooft felt, did justice to. While the Church of Russia did not join in the work of the WSCF, the Russian Orthodox refugees did. The young Russian émigrés were in the process of rediscovering their faith, a process that fascinated Visser 't Hooft. This revival was an important topic of discussion at a conference on religious upbringing and education that he organised in Sofia in 1930. The Orthodox tradition seemed to be very vital in a spiritual sense among these young people, but secularisation was quickly taking root in the Orthodox countries. Visser 't Hooft became more and more convinced during this year that it was would be of great value to strengthen both the contacts between East and West and the contacts between the Orthodox churches. The 1933 study *Le catholicisme non-Romain* was the book in which he referred to Orthodoxy as an authentic and indispensable part of the ecumenical movement. Promoting the modernity of the twentieth century and the major questions that accompanied that could only truly be done on the basis of the roots that gave nourishment in a continuing Christian tradition. As far as Visser 't Hooft was concerned, the doctrines of the Orthodox Church were part of that, and the West had a major interest in learning to understand them better. Visser 't Hooft felt personally called to work on this, and in 1947 he argued before the provisional committee for the recognition of the value of the 'objectivity' of the Eastern Orthodox churches:

> [T]he Eastern churches have maintained a sense of the objective reality and the cosmic dimensions of the drama of salvation which the Western churches need to recapture.[2]

But while there was clear rapprochement between the World Council on the one hand and the Ecumenical Patriarch and the autocephalus, i.e. the administratively and spiritually independent, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian churches on the other, the distance between the World Council and the Russian Church was the greatest for a long time.

2 Patelos, *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement* (1978), 210.

The network that he built in the Balkans in the 1930s served him well after the Second World War. Many who were in involved in youth work at the time ended up in high positions. Germanos Strenopoulos (1872-1951) was active in the WSCF and Faith and Order and was the archbishop of Thyateira, with his seat in London, and exarch of West and Central Europe. The Greek Orthodox Professor Hamilcar Alivisatos from Athens, Professor Stephan Zankov from Bulgaria, Bishop Ireneus from Novi Sad, and Patriarch Athenagoras from Constantinople were all men he had early learned to appreciate and trust. Already during the war, in 1942, Visser 't Hooft could establish on the basis of his information sources that most Orthodox churches would probably accept an invitation to have themselves represented by a consultative conference.[3] And, indeed, with the foundation of the World Council in 1948, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the Greek Orthodox Church, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem joined and became members immediately.

In a quantitative sense, the Orthodox were completely overshadowed by the Protestants in the World Council, which meant that the Orthodox voice was scarcely heard in the early years. To his regret, after some time, Visser 't Hooft had to conclude that an Orthodox minority complex did exist. The limitation of Orthodoxy to Greek and Eastern Orthodox was, he felt, not the contribution to ecumenical dialogue that this venerable tradition was owed, given its place in church history.[4] Germanos Strenopoulos was chosen in Amsterdam to be one of the presidents of the World Council. He was a striking figure, a defining presence as he sat at the table on the podium at the World Council's foundation. But Germanos died in 1951. On the one hand, there was now the danger of the Orthodox members becoming 'inhibitors in permanent employ'. Visser 't Hooft sensed that the conservative Orthodox could stand in the way of clear ecclesial statements. On the other hand, Visser 't Hooft was concerned that the World Council could be seen primarily as a 'pan-Protestant' movement.

That other Orthodox churches, in countries under communist rule, responded negatively to the foundation of the World Council caused unrest in the Greek Church. The Greeks made it clear to Visser 't Hooft that people in their church doubted whether they should continue their membership if there was so little Orthodox influence. A major stumbling block was that the Greeks were very hesitant about the status of other churches that had

3 Visser 't Hooft, 'Notes on the Situation of the Eastern Orthodox Churches', 1942.

4 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 254: 'the contribution to the ecumenical dialogue which they [the orthodox churches] were entitled to make in view of their place in church history.'

joined the World Council. Were all those Protestant denominations true churches? How could that be? The Orthodox collaboration with the World Council threatened to become a short-term phenomenon, something that Visser 't Hooft did not at all approve of. In 1951, there was a major festival in Athens and a pilgrimage to Athos in honour of the apostle Paul who had proclaimed the Gospel on the Areopagus 1900 years previously. Visser 't Hooft rejoiced that he had succeeded in strengthening the bonds with the Greeks during this festival. But, in his eyes, it was still extremely important to bring the Eastern Orthodox churches into the World Council. The key to that was the Russian Church.

7.3 Theology and Practical Reality

The programme was ready. Visser 't Hooft had outlined his theological presuppositions in the much-read book that he had written in 1937 with Joseph Oldham for the Life and Work conference in Oxford. He described a palette of churches and their position with respect to church unity, in which the ecclesiology that the Orthodox churches espoused had an important place.[5] It was precisely in the Orthodox faith that Visser 't Hooft found a profound view of the church as the living image of eternity in time. The Orthodox based their view of unity on respect for the tradition as a means of revelation by God. In that respect, they were close to the Roman Catholics. But in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the church was the mystical and sacramental unity of all believers, past, present, and future, of which Jesus Christ was the head. The visible hierarchy, synods, and bishops were primarily a reflection of that unity in Christ the head. The unity of the church's members was expressed in the liturgy of this church more than it was in doctrines. The Russian concept of *sobornost* described this spiritual unity that was attributed to the church and often placed in opposition to Western individualism. The Russian philosopher in exile, Nicolai Berdyaev, had pointed this out to Visser 't Hooft already around 1930. It was in these terms that Visser 't Hooft argued for his inclusive view of the importance of concretising church unity in a language that could be understood in the East. He underscored the catholicity of the local or national church on the one hand and the vertical dimension of universality that the Orthodox faith fostered on the other. While the highest authority was ascribed to the pope in the Roman Catholic Church and to the Bible in Protestantism, in the

5 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Various Doctrinal Conceptions of the Church', 1937, 32-35.

Eastern Orthodox tradition, the church itself, as the criterion of catholicsm and apostolicity, was central. Eastern Orthodox churches recognised other churches as true but defective parts of the body of Christ, and this was a problem. Already in 1937, however, Visser 't Hooft asserted in hopefulness that, while sacramental unity could be achieved only through doctrinal agreement, the Orthodox could work closely with other churches on practical matters. There was always a shared confidence that God used the church to change the world from the inside out in line with his purpose for creation.

But the invitation to join the World Council of Churches when it was founded in 1948 was rejected by the Moscow conference of Orthodox church leaders.[6] It was precisely in that year that they celebrated 500 years as an *autocephalous* church. The Vatican, the Anglican Church, and the World Council that was to be founded were all subjected to criticism in strongly worded resolutions. In a response, Visser 't Hooft indicated that the rejection of the invitation by the Russian Orthodox Church and associated churches was deeply disappointing and in his view ultimately based on a mistake. On the one hand, the Russian Church's non-participation was a consequence of the state forbidding it. On the other hand, the church leaders were under the mistaken impression that the World Council of Churches was striving for power. After writing that response, Visser 't Hooft expressly kept the door open for the Eastern Orthodox churches. Misunderstandings had to be cleared up, something to which he felt personally called.[7] But there was a serious problem. The Russian Church kept its distance from society:

> At the same time we should not close our eyes to the fact that between Moscow and ourselves there stand not only a series of misunderstandings, but also a very real divergence of conviction as to the role of the Church in the world. Since its very beginnings … the ecumenical movement had believed that the Church has to proclaim the Lordship of Christ over the world and has the right and the duty to speak its mind concerning the affairs of this world. But the present leaders of the Church of Russia deny this. According to them the Church must abstain from any judgement concerning the state or society.[8]

6 Kirby, 'The Impact of the Cold War on the Formation of the World Council of Churches', 2007.

7 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Moscow Patriarchate', 1949, 188-197. This interpretation by Visser 't Hooft found support. V.T. Istavridis, 'The Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement, 1948-1968', 1986, 304.

8 Visser 't Hooft, 'Report of the General Secretary to the Executive Committee', 1949.

Was the 'otherworldly' theology of the Eastern Orthodox churches inherent to the church itself? In Visser 't Hooft's view, that was indeed the case. The focus on the internal spiritual life of the church and the purity of age-old doctrines could not be understood only as a survival strategy. Orthodox churches experienced an almost complete expression of Christian life and of the church in liturgy and mysticism, where the Eucharist was central. Visser 't Hooft expected that rapprochement would take a long time. In the meantime, the World Council had to set its own course and, as had also been decided in Amsterdam, reject choosing sides in the Cold War. The 'third way' had to be worked out again and again with respect to content. He felt that people should not allow themselves to be thrown off when they were possibly misunderstood in the East and the West but continue to hope and especially persevere in prayer.[9]

Visser 't Hooft knew that the Russian Orthodox Church had not had a strong tradition of exercising its prophetic role over against the powerful in the time of the czars either. He also saw that people were afraid of losing the few privileges that Stalin had granted the church during the war. Nonetheless, Visser 't Hooft continued to believe that Eastern Orthodox churches were not the petrified, cumbersome structures that many in the West felt them to be. He pointed to a yearning in these churches for spirituality and to a new generation that wrestled with current issues against the background of secularisation that held both Eastern and Western Europe in its grip. With a sense of hope, he also felt that he could already assert that the ecumenical encounter with the Western Protestants brought together various Orthodox churches that had hardly any mutual contact outside the World Council.[10]

7.4 A Third Way between East and West

For years, Visser 't Hooft worked purposefully on a strategy to reach the Eastern Orthodox churches. He was convinced that he had to begin in Moscow. If the Russian Orthodox Church could be won, other Orthodox churches would follow. The isolation into which state communism had brought it had to be broken. Visser 't Hooft's most important source of information on the Russian Church was, until his death in 1948, Nikolaj Berdyaev, and for a time, after the Second World War, Father Seraphim

9 Visser 't Hooft, 'Notes on the World Council of Churches as between East and West', 1949.
10 Cf. Istavridis, 'The Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement, 1948-1968', 1986, especially 292-293.

Rose, an Orthodox priest who lived in Paris. But Visser 't Hooft also needed other people with current contacts in Eastern and Central Europe. In 1946, he managed, after after considerable persistence, to convince the Czech theologian Josef L. Hromádka to return to Prague from Princeton, where he was a professor. In Visser 't Hooft's view, the Czech Protestants could play a major role here and needed strong leaders. Hromádka would have a unique position in Prague and exercise great influence through his place in the Hus faculty. Visser 't Hooft wrote:

> [W]e would turn to you very often for your help in all matters related to the Church in Central Europe as well as the delicate problems of relationships between the Churches of the West and those of the East orthodox countries.[11]

The year the World Council was founded – 1948 – was a turbulent year for Czechoslovakia. Hromádka refused to condemn the new communist regime in Prague and argued for a dialogue between Marxists and Christians. That was going too far, even for Visser 't Hooft, but he defended Hromádka constantly in these years.[12] When Hromádka went even further in the 1950s and accepted money from the Russians for setting up the Christian Peace Conference, he became less interesting for Visser 't Hooft as a contact person. But Visser 't Hooft continued to appreciate him as a theologian.[13]

Visser 't Hooft himself saw four possible positions: Russia and communism, the West and capitalism, a position in between, or a retreat into an 'other-worldly realm of the spirit.' He argued for the active development of a third way between capitalism and communism. In January 1948, he spoke on this topic to students in London, where his message was that young people had to accept the existing fronts and had to open up a third front: 'Tertium datur'.[14] The church was not above the chaos of the world but was now being sucked into the division of the Cold War. Only the Gospel could produce a breakthrough in a sterile political dilemma. Only through conversion and taking a radical position, which was to be expected from the new generation, would true Christian solidarity come to light. Visser 't Hooft saw it as a good sign that the World Council was being attacked by both communists

11 Visser 't Hooft to J.L. Hromádka, 5 March 1946, WCC general correspondence 686.
12 Visser 't Hooft to J.L. Hromádka, 12 March 1948, WCC general correspondence 686.
13 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 365.
14 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Christian in World Affairs', 1948.

and supporters of capitalism. He saw the fact that the criticism came from both sides as confirmation that the World Council really was setting its own course. At the meeting of the central committee in the summer of 1949, in Chichester, every type of capitalism was condemned, whereas no side in the Korean conflict was chosen. Visser 't Hooft regularly repeated the lesson that had been taught in the Second World War: that God's acts with his people took place as a specific salvation history behind the scenes. The World Council thus did not have to let its agenda be prescribed by the catastrophes of the world.[15]

A weak and vulnerable church was busy setting itself up on a global scale and learned, once again, what it was to carry out a spiritual battle. Becoming aware of its roots thus enabled the church to act as the most important guardian of human values – not theoretically but in practice. In Eastern Germany and in the countries of Asia that were experiencing unrest, he heard the young saying that the church was the only place where they felt they were still taken seriously as people. According to Visser 't Hooft, this confirmed something essential that Dietrich Bonhoeffer had called attention to. It was up to the World Council to emphasise as much as possible the inclusive community in which both East and West were involved. Bonds between churches on both sides of the Iron Curtain had to be strengthened and maintained. Churches had a special capacity for peacebuilding that was sorely needed in the world.

Visser 't Hooft continued to defend Hromádka, even when he took a position in 1948 that was diametrically opposed to that of the American John Foster Dulles, an important figure in American ecumenism at the time, and became even more radical in the succeeding years.[16] Hromádka stretched the principle of the third way to its utmost, and even Visser 't Hooft had serious disagreements with him about this.[17] But Visser 't Hooft praised Hromádka repeatedly for his sincere ecumenical attitude and viewed him, with his great interest in Eastern Orthodoxy, as a valuable advance post eastwards for the World Council that had to be preserved. Hromádka was living proof that the World Council was truly impartial. Even when Hromádka came under heavy criticism because he refused to condemn the Russian invasion

15 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Church in the World of Nations', 1950.

16 Visser 't Hooft to R. Niebuhr, E. Berggrav and others, 23 April 1948, WCC general correspondence 686. Hromádka defended his position in the memorandum 'Between Yesterday and Tomorrow', 1948, that was sent with this letter. Ibid. Visser 't Hooft to J.L. Hromádka, 31 December 1948, WCC general correspondence 687.

17 Visser 't Hooft to J.L. Hromádka, 6 April and 18 October 1950, WCC general correspondence 687.

of Hungary in 1956, Visser 't Hooft still tried to take his side. He did find that Hromádka now confused a Christian view of history with a political interpretation.[18]

7.5 What Can the Churches Do for Peace?

Not everyone could agree with the independent course of the 'third way' of which Visser 't Hooft was such an advocate. The Cold War rhetoric in the West was strongly anti-communist. For example, there was fierce criticism in the Netherlands from Arie Kok, secretary-general of the small International Council of Christian Churches, which presented itself as the fundamentalist counterpart of the World Council and was intentionally also founded in Amsterdam – shortly before the World Council – on 11-19 August 1948. Kok published an article called 'De vijand in het kamp; modernisme en communisme binnengedrongen in de jonge zendingskerken van Z.O.-Azië' ('The Enemy in the Camp: Modernism and Communism Invading the Young Missionary Churches of Southeast Asia') in 1950[19] that attacked the World Council for refusing to take a position on the side of the 'free world' towards communist states, particularly the atheistic Soviet Union. Visser 't Hooft felt called to justify himself. In his analysis of communism, he distinguished between three different phenomena.[20] First, he saw a major world movement in which the less privileged of humanity asserted their existence. There were millions looking for recognition and improvement of their lot, and Visser 't Hooft could undertand why some of them reached for the communist paradigm. That held a certain power of attraction for them, and who could hold it against them that they desired a social revolution? Second, Visser 't Hooft characterised communism as an illusionistic philosophy that had originated in the nineteenth century with Karl Marx and reflected the brotherhood of people but did not truly understand the spiritual needs of people. A third type was communism as a contemporary political phenomenon that attracted not only power-hungry regimes in countries like the Soviet Union and China but also liberation movements in colonies.

18 Visser 't Hooft to G.K.A. Bell, 30 September 1957, in: Besier, *'Intimately Associated for Many Years'* (2015), 1096-1098.

19 Kok, 'De vijand in het kamp', 1949-1950. Published as a brochure by the extremely conservative International Council of Christian Churches.

20 Visser 't Hooft, 'Communism', 1950.

According to Visser 't Hooft, Christians would do well not to confuse these different meanings of communism. They were not to look at the mistakes of communism but to look seriously at the needs of people everywhere where possible, not only the material needs but also the spiritual needs. Resisting communism was good, but it had to be done in the right – for him the Protestant – way by going to God and first confessing one's own sins, accepting God's judgment, and showing the fruits of repentance in one's behaviour to others. Where it concerned state communism as a temptation for young countries that had just been decolonised, Christianity had the answer, according to Visser 't Hooft. As church, people had to demonstrate in everyday life that religion in the form of the Gospel was not at all the opium of the people that Marx had claimed it was; to the contrary, it was the only power that guaranteed a liberated personal life.

In February 1950, Martin Niemöller, as president of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Evangelical Church in Germany, EKD), entreated Visser 't Hooft to address the synod to be held in April in Berlin in the Russian sector. Reinhold Niebuhr had cancelled.[21] Acting in his personal capacity, Visser 't Hooft gave a speech in Berlin called 'Was können die Kirchen für den Frieden tun?' ('What Can the Churches Do for Peace?'). The chairman was Gustav W. Heinemann, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic in the Adenauer government. It was a tense period. Shortly before, the Russians had attempted to isolate West Berlin, and in 1949 first the Federal Republic was declared, and a few months later the German Democratic Republic, resulting in two German states. In the part of Germany under Soviet domination, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany was attempting, with Russian support, to gain power, while West Germany, stimulated by American help, seemed to embrace capitalism. In the East, they hoped for a clear position by the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, which still brought representatives from all across Germany together.

Visser 't Hooft said that what preoccupied people in 1950 was not so much a matter of being for or against peace. It was a struggle between two ideologies. Precisely now churches had to raise a clear independent voice. The fear complex that dominated the world and divided it into camps had to be forcefully combatted – the task Christians were charged with was to be reconcilers. Christ was king, high priest, and prophet, and the focus on him was essential. Absolute sovereignty, of whatever country, was pride, and the community of states could not correspond to any ideal but was intended to serve humanity which was created by God as a unit. Every

21 M. Niemöller to Visser 't Hooft, 9 February 1950, WCC 1030-24.0059.

justification of a possible war between East and West therefore had to be rejected in principle.

> The man of 1950 has to experience that he is taken seriously as a person in the church. The church cannot be silent if refugees or members of a certain race or a certain class are treated as second-class people. … Whoever remembers what happened in the last war will reject all war propaganda as the worst temptation. The atom and hydrogen bombs are a question we cannot avoid. The answer of the church can be nothing else than a strong 'No' to every game that has the possibility of becoming a war.[22]

His conclusion was that the church had to distance itself from every form of power politics.

Visser 't Hooft made a deep impression with his lecture in Berlin. There was a Western-leaning paper that would rather have heard words about liberty and the struggle against communism from the general secretary at this time than peace: 'The church … must, if it is not to lose its influence and its significance, also join the community of fighters against communism.' There was no getting around it.[23] Diametrically opposed to that was the criticism of the communist newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, which accused Visser 't Hooft of inconsquential theological word games: 'Through … theological-diplomatic tricks, Visser 't Hooft invalidated the warning that he so eloquently directed at the atomic politicians.'[24] Visser 't Hooft had submitted his text to the leaders of the German synod in advance, and the synod accepted a statement that closely reflected his words. In a church service in a packed St. Mary's Cathedral, Visser 't Hooft called the Protestant youth of Berlin not to leave actual missionary witness to ministers but to

22 Visser 't Hooft, 'Was können die Kirchen für den Frieden tun', 1950: 'Der Mensch von 1950 soll es in der Kirche erfahren, dass er als Person ernst genommen wird. Die Kirche kann nicht schweigen, wenn Menschen als Flüchtlinge oder als Glieder einer gewissen Rasse oder Klasse als Menschen zweiten Ranges behandelt werden. […] Wer die Ereignisse des letzten Krieges bedenkt, wird jede Kriegspropaganda und jedes Spiel mit der Möglichkeit eines dritten Weltkrieges als schlimmste Versuchung ablehnen. Die Atom- und Wasserstoffbombe stellt eine Frage dar, der wir nicht ausweichen dürfen. Die Antwort der Kirche kann nur ein energisches Nein zu jedem Spiel mit der Möglichkeit eines Krieges sein.'

23 *Der Telegraf*, 25 April 1950, YDS-4, 17: 'Die Kirche […] muß, wenn sie ihren Einfluß und ihre Bedeutung nicht ganz und gar verlieren will, mit eintreten in die Gemeinschaft des Kampfes gegen den Kommunismus.'

24 *Neues Deutschland*, 30 april 1950, YDS-4, 20. 'Durch […] theologisch-diplomatischen Künste hob Visser 't Hooft die Mahnung faktisch wieder auf, die er zungengewandt an die Atompolitiker richtete.'

take action themselves and courageously proclaim themselves members of a church.[25]

He remained cautious. When the Danish bishop Halfdan Høgsbro began to organise unofficial meetings at this time across the Iron Curtain, Visser 't Hooft did not think the time was ripe for the World Council to support this action. The wrong impression could easily arise in Eastern Europe that the kind of collaborators were being encouraged who were busy 'selling out the church'. The greatest challenge was to build up real contact with the Russian Orthodox Church.

> The question of a representative from the Moscow Patriarchate is already far more difficult, for they are likely to send a man who represents more the position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs than the position of the Church.[26]

Visser 't Hooft advised Høgsbro to try to convince Metropolitan Nicholas Boris Dorofeyevich Yarusevich,(1892-1961), and metropolitan of Krutitsky and Kolomna since 1947, and the chairperson of the department of external ecclesial relations, to send 'a true churchman' from Russia.

Visser 't Hooft took the situation in Berlin to heart. In August 1951, he was in the city again, now for the church congress of the Evangelical Church.[27] He based his speech on Romans 8:35-39: 'Wer will uns scheiden von der Liebe Gottes' ('Who shall separate us from the love of God') and later gave a meditation in the Olympic Stadium on 2 Corinthians 13:4: 'Ob er wohl gekreuzigt ist in der Schwachheit, so lebt er doch in der Kraft Gottes' (For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power). He told his audience that a few weeks earlier he had stood on the Mount of Olives opposite Jerusalem and there saw a torn city in a torn country. In Visser 't Hooft's view, the cross of Christ was as much in the midst of the world in the city of Berlin as it was in the Holy Land. By crucifying the peacebuilder Christ, Visser 't Hooft proclaimed, 'a city without peace and a world without peace' had made clear that they would not tolerate any interruption of their violent plans. People could not endure God's peacebuilder Christ, and they had rejected him. But Visser 't Hooft also related how he had stood on the Areopagus in Athens with thousands of Christians and celebrated the Feast of St. Paul. He had realised then that,

25 *Der Tag*, 26 April 1950, YDS-4, 18.
26 Visser 't Hooft to H. Høgsbro, 29 November 1951, WCC general correspondence 674.
27 Visser 't Hooft, speech at the church congress, Berlin, 1951, WCC 994.2.14/6.

after an initial failure, it was, in the end, the message of Paul (Paul, the apostle) about this 'Christ and him crucified' that had conquered strife among people.[28] He characterised this development figuratively as the victory of the small bare rocky hill of the Areopagus, the symbol for the wisdom of the Gospel, over the powerful Acropolis, the wisdom of the world. God's peace movement was thus stronger than the enmity of people as was so clearly experienced in Berlin.

7.6 A Strategic Thinker in Toronto

When it was a question of winning new churches for the World Council, Visser 't Hooft understood that it would be detrimental for the council to claim too much for itself. An ecclesiological approach that reached too high would deter candidate churches that viewed themselves as the complete and full body of Christ. That could apply to some small Reformational churches, but it obtained in particular for the large Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. It came down to making clear that membership in the World Council would in no way harm the belief of any church that it was the embodiment of the pure church. It had to remain clear that membership did not imply that the church in question recognised that all other member churches were fully church. But the council could not be an informal platform of encounter either. In short, the ecclesiological implications of the World Council constituted an important issue.

The tone for the discussion with the Orthodox was determined by the important policy document, 'The Church, the churches and the World Council of Churches'. This was the result of the discussions in the central committee in 1950 in Toronto, where Visser 't Hooft managed to find support for his diplomatic approach to the ecclesiological meaning of the World Council.[29] This was not the beginning of a super church, nor was it an informal encounter platform or an assistance organisation. Visser 't Hooft deliberately did not start by raising the bar too high: 'The World Council exists in order to deal in a provisional way with an abnormal situation.'

> The member churches of the World Council consider the relationship of the other churches to the Holy Catholic Church which the creeds profess as a subject for mutual consideration. Nevertheless, membership does

28 1 Corinthians 2:2.

29 Cf. Holtrop, 'De Kerk, de kerken en de Wereldraad van Kerken', 1987, especially 210.

> not imply that each church must regard the other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word.[30]

This formulation for allaying fears was very controversial at the time – some found it unacceptable for member churches to look at each other in that way. But it was Georges Florovsky, an émigré Russian Orthodox priest from Paris who presented the problem in a clear fashion and demanded this formulation. Visser 't Hooft understood that it was the only way to provide room for the Orthodox to take part. Nevertheless, he would also work at raising the World Council above this ecclesiological minimum of Toronto, without it being unacceptable for the Orthodox.[31] He hoped that this would promote rapprochement with the Roman Catholic Church, but that would prove even more difficult than with the Eastern Orthodox churches.

7.7 Searching for Saints in Russia

It came down to a question of building up contacts with reliable people in the Russian Church. Visser 't Hooft was confident that opportunities would present themselves. Martin Niemöller was a valuable pioneer behind the Iron Curtain, but not everyone in 'the free West' appreciated him. First as an ecumenical leader and then as a German, he visited the Soviet Union after the war in December 1951 and January 1952. He had been invited by Alexi I (1877-1970), who was Patriarch of Moscow from 1945 to 1970, the officially recognised (by the state) head of the Russian Church. Niemöller carefully investigated the possibility of developing relationships between the patriarchate and the ecumenical movement but received no answer to the question whether the church in Russia served Stalin or Christ in the first place. In 1927, Alexi was one of the signatories to a document in which the synodical members promised unconditional loyalty to the Soviet state. A hardline atheistic policy was implemented for years, but in 1943 Stalin had given the church a bit more room, with a view to the war effort. That did not mean that Alexi could act against Stalin. When the patriarch spoke, the Committee for State Security, the KGB, listened attentively.[32] Visser

30 Visser 't Hooft, 'Statement on "The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches". The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches', IV,4. Toronto 1950, added as appendix V to: Visser 't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (1982), 112-120.

31 Raiser, 'Orthodox Theology and the Future of the Ecumenical Dialogue', 2003.

32 Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (1986), 270.

Figure 48 With the icon of St Oecumenius, bishop of Trikala (990 A.D.), ca. 1960



't Hooft did not feel it advisable to invite the Russian Church to the World Council assembly in Evanston in 1954. But he did send all documentation to Russia, and there were two Eastern Orthodox observers present.[33] Although

33 Istavridis, 'The Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement, 1948-1968', 1986, 306.

Evanston recommended that the contacts with the Eastern Orthodox be developed further, Visser 't Hooft could only take small steps, for there were differences of opinion right up into the central committee of the World Council itself. The Russian observers found the whole approach to the unity of the church as presented at Evanston completely unacceptable.[34]

Nevertheless, after Stalin's death in March 1953, something truly changed, and after 1954 Visser 't Hooft slowly but surely made progress in improving the contacts between the World Council and the Russsian Orthodox Church. An open question here was whether the better contacts with the World Council would help or harm the freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. The World Council attempted via various means to establish contacts, for example, via leaders of the Russian Church in the United States, who could speak out more freely.[35] Visser 't Hooft continually received new signals that, despite the many things that could be condemned, the Russian Church fought a true fight for the Christian faith.[36] Contact was finally made with the Patriarchate of Moscow via the Russian Orthodox bishop of Berlin, and Visser 't Hooft understood that the whole process of rapprochement would stand or fall with reliable Russian clergy who were willing and able to act as contact persons for the World Council.

When it finally appeared that a personal meeting between delegates would occur, a popular uprising broke out in the latter part of 1956 in the People's Republic of Hungary. The World Council supported the right of self-determination for the Hungarians in a statement. But 13 days later, on 4 November, Soviet troops invaded Hungary and the uprising was put down with a hard hand. Under such circumstances, the Russian Church leaders had to cancel, and the meeting was postponed. But Visser 't Hooft did not give up. He was helped by leaders in the field such as Timiadis Emilianos, who was active in Western Europe and was the permanent representative in Geneva of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the American Metropolitan Iakovos Coucouzis, titular bishop of Malta, and especially the archpriest Vitaly Borovoy, who was part of the staff of the World Council and became the director of the liaison office of the Russian Church in Geneva in 1962, the Greek Nikos A. Nissiotis, former WSCF member, and the American Lutheran Franklin C. Fry, moderator of the central committee and the executive committee of the World Council from 1957 to 1968. On 5 December, 1957,

34 'Verklaring van de oosters-orthodoxe gedelegeerden behorende bij het rapport van Sectie I', in: *Tweede Vergadering van de Wereldraad van Kerken* (1954), 199-202.

35 Visser 't Hooft to W.W. Van Kirk, 16 November 1955, WCC general correspondence 773.

36 Visser 't Hooft to H. Hauge, 9 October 1956, WCC general correspondence 622.

in a press release intended for the journal of the Russian Orthodox Church, Visser 't Hooft called for this church to contribute its own voice and identity in the ecumenical movement with no reservations.

> I can testify that I have received and learned from them many things in the realm of theology and of spiritual life which I consider essential parts of my own existence. It is sometimes said that the ecumenical movement needs the Orthodox in order that it may not become a pan-Protestant movement. That is true, but it is a superficial truth. The ecumenical movement needs the Orthodox and the Orthodox need the ecumenical movement in order to be true to the mandate given to the Church of Christ – to manifest that the Lord gathers his scattered children.[37]

He threw his full weight into the struggle by reporting that he had been in contact with Orthodox churches for more than 30 years.

For Visser 't Hooft, the fundamental unity of Europe was an important footing in this connection.[38] In the late 1950s, he related his previously formulated ideas on this to the division in Europe into two parts, and he worked them out in a speech in Sankt Gallen on 29 April 1958 on Christianity as a shaping power.[39] The tensions with the communist East, in his view, had to be seen as a challenge to take up the struggle in a spiritual way rather than in a military or economic way, and so regain not only peace but also the soul of the European man. He thus looked forward to a Europe that had learned to discern that it had to be about people and that was prepared to serve the world as Europe. When the initiatives of the World Council were thwarted by the foundation of the Conference of European Churches, Visser 't Hooft was unpleasantly surprised. The goal of this more informal organisation, which the president of the Evangelische Kirche of Westphalia, Ernst Wilm and the Dutch secretary of the Hervormde Kerk (Reformed Church in the Netherlands), Egbert Emmen, started to work on in the mid-1950s, was to work towards reconciliation, dialogue, and friendship between churches from all European countries, including those in the Eastern bloc. While Visser 't Hooft and his staff were thus completely occupied with the Russians, this initiative arose outside the World Council. And then yet another Christian peace conference was founded in Prague by Josef Hromádka and the German

37 Visser 't Hooft, 'For the Russian Orthodox Journal', 5 December 1957, WCC 994.2.16/9.

38 Cf. Zeilstra, *European Unity in Ecumenical Thinking* (1995).

39 Visser 't Hooft, 'Das Christentum als Gestaltende Kraft Europas', Sankt Gallen, 29 April 1958, WCC 994.2.16/22

Hans Joachim Iwand. It all became very complicated. He did not think that what Hromádka did was very wise, for it increasingly stood in the way of what Hromádka could do for the World Council. From that point on, Visser 't Hooft ignored him as much as possible.[40] But he was very displeased with the initiative of Wilm and Emmen. He found the idea of the Conference of European Churches badly timed, amateurish and inadequately thought through with respect to strategy. For some time he kept his distance and took care that the World Council did not establish any formal ties. But in 1959, he agreed to address the first official conference in Nyborg in Denmark. He did see opportunities but also warned against neglecting the global ecumenical movement.[41] This rapprochement with the Conference of European Churches led to fierce criticism of the World Council by those who were afraid that the latter was risking its connection with the free West.[42] But Visser 't Hooft was not concerned about that; he continued to advocate an independent course and addressed the Conference of European Churches various times in the 1960s.

As for relations with the Russians, for a long time time it seemed like carrying coals to Newcastle, but Visser 't Hooft slowly began to make headway. On 7 August 1958, concrete exploratory talks at the Hotel des Pays Bas in Utrecht were organised, with a serious Russan delegation present led by Metropolitan Nicholas. The World Council sent Franklin Fry, Metropolitan Iakovos, and Visser 't Hooft, who used all his charm, to represent it. Gifts were exchanged and stories told. Visser 't Hooft's starting point was still that it was primarily misunderstandings that needed to be cleared up. The basic formula of the World Council was not a creed. A talk on the value of Trinitarian expressions, which the Russians valued so highly, was always possible. But the World Council itself did not want to be a church and could not be accused of watering down the nature of the church of Christ. The latitude Toronto offered could be exploited. Visser 't Hooft gave a speech in Utrecht on the World Council's striving for peace, but he made it easy for the Russians by deliberately avoiding current politics. In the end, nothing more than a vague final communiqué could be produced. But step by step, the Russians were won for the World Council.

Visser 't Hooft sought for some kind of footing in his belief that there was still so much true Christianity among the Russian people.[43] He knew that

40 Visser 't Hooft to G.K.A. Bell, 7 October 1957, 10 October 1957, and 20 November 1957, in: Besier, *'Intimately Associated for Many Years'* (2015), 1098-1104.

41 Visser 't Hooft, 'Die Bedeutung der regionalen kirchlichen Zusammenarbeit', 1959.

42 Schubert, *Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft* (2017), 112.

43 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

there were collaborators among the leaders of the church, but there were also leaders for whom he had the greatest respect because of wisdom they showed in dealing with their difficult position. Half jokingly, Visser 't Hooft once said – no one knows exactly when – to his fellow staff members Lukas Vischer, Nikos Nissiotis, and Albert van den Heuvel: 'Go to Russia and find me some saints!'[44] They went and found one, the scholarly theologian and archpriest Vitaly Borovoy (1916-2008), who made a fascinating impression on them as a man of integrity, 'a living Dostoyevsky', both witty and pious, and someone who was willing to affiliate with the World Council. Visser 't Hooft was very taken with him. In the next meeting of the central committee on Rhodes, Borovoy was one of the Russian Orthodox observers. The theme was the significance of the Eastern and Western traditions for Christianity. When opening the meeting, Visser 't Hooft reminded the committee of how 40 years ago, in 1920, the Synod of Constantinople had issued the famous encyclical that called for an ecumenical league of churches. Russia joining the World Council was very important in light of that call.

Shortly afterwards, Patriarch Alexi I of Moscow issued an invitation, and in December 1959 a delegation from the World Council travelled to Russia. Apparently, the Soviet regime had decided to allow the Orthodox Church to establish these contacts. Visser 't Hooft was excited and experienced the visit as an important breakthrough. The patriarch appeared to speak good French, and he asked Visser 't Hooft interested questions about the ecumenical movement and the World Council. Visser 't Hooft had the impression that he had now convinced the Eastern Orthodox that their claim to be the undivided church of Christ was not in conflict with the objectives of the ecumenical movement but would come into its own in that movement precisely. Visser 't Hooft's capacities as a diplomat proved useful in dealing with the hierarchy that was so important in the Russian Church. He was respectful, patient, and accepted entirely that the leaders in the church considered themselves representative, both in a spiritual and a material sense. If he was at all irritated by all the ceremony, he did not let on. He managed to avoid difficult questions and praised Russian hospitality and the deep faith he saw everywhere in Russia. When some of his staff sometimes found it all very formal and wondered where the church and believers could be found in all of this Orthodox structure, he reprimanded them strongly.[45] It was not unimportant that, during his visit to Russia in 1959, Visser 't Hooft was able to respond not only to the Russians

44 Zeilstra, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 23 April 2013.
45 Ibid.

but to all Orthodox on the issue of the basic formula. During a breakfast in Leningrad, he suddenly understood that what the Russians asked for was not at all that a dogmatically, precisely formulated descriptive confession should be inserted in the basis of the World Council. All they wanted was the Christology to be expanded into a Trinitarian doxology, and he, as he himself later stated, dashed off his solution on a menu.[46] Visser 't Hooft proposed supplementing the existing basic formula that was adopted from Faith and Order in Utrecht in 1938 and accepted in Amsterdam in 1948, i.e. 'a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour,' be supplemented by 'and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'

This formulation would be accepted in 1961, at the assembly in New Delhi, with the addition 'according to the Scriptures' as the expansion of the basic formula of the World Council of Churches.[47] In his report to the central committee on the visit to Russia in 1959, Visser 't Hooft noted with amazement that the Russian Church had withstood the test of the great persecutions under totalitarian communism and had not made any bad compromises. He had confidence in the Russian Orthodox Church as a genuine church of Jesus Christ.[48]

> One of our companions quoted to me the remark of an Orthodox professor: 'The Russian Orthodox Church has passed the test.' This is an interesting remark because it would seem to be true in one sense and untrue in another. It would seem to be true in the sense that, when the great persecutions came, it was expected that the Church would collapse, but it did not do so. It remains a tremendous fact that the Russian Orthodox Church exists and that is not all, for it is also important that the Church has not become a syncretistic body as were the deutsche Christen in the National Socialist period in Germany. One does not get the impression that any attempt is made to create a synthesis between Christianity and Marxist ideology. But to say that the Orthodox Church has passed the test would seem to be wholly untrue if it means that this is the only test which it will be asked to pass during this period of history. It would seem that one of the biggest tests is yet to come, namely, whether the Orthodox Church

46 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Basis: Its History and Significance', 1985, 173; Raiser, 'Orthodox Theology and the Future of the Ecumenical Dialogue', 2003.

47 'The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'

48 Visser 't Hooft, 'General Secretariat' in: *Evanston to New Delhi* (1961), 19.

> has anything relevant to say to Marxist or post-Marxist humankind. The great issue would seem to be whether, in spite of its unmistakable spiritual life, the Church may not in fact become an anachronism. Its strength is in its faithful adherence to its tradition. But this strength may become a weakness if that adherence is not only to the spiritual content of that tradition, but also to its forms.[49]

Not everyone appreciated this smoothing out of the wrinkles. A well-known Dutch critic of this policy was the theologian and ecumenial specialist J.A. Hebly. Hebly felt that the World Council was blind to the paradox that it was precisely when ecumenical contacts between East and West were flourishing that believers in the Soviet Union were suffering from domestic persecution and the limitation of religious freedom.

It was not true that the Russian Orthodox Church had not made any bad compromises. Alexi was the personification of the church that had adjusted to the totalitarian state. He rapped the knuckles of every bishop who spoke up against injustice or had them retired 'because of bad health'.[50] While Visser 't Hooft worked on strengthening the connections of the World Council with the Russian Orthodox Church, the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev unleashed a new era of religious oppression in 1959 that would last till 1964. The West was not immediately aware of this, nor could Visser 't Hooft be aware of it at that time. Nevertheless, that he did not mention this serious discrepancy in his *Memoirs*, which he wrote at a time when he did know, came across as harsh.[51] The greatest test for Orthodoxy would, according to Visser 't Hooft, come when the current situation had to be addressed by the World Council. But an effort to participate in this respect had to come from the Russian Church itself.

During the visit to Russia in December 1959, the World Council representatives were accompanied by the same five Russians for the whole trip, and this led to an informal atmosphere. Visser 't Hooft spent a lot of time with Archimandrite Boris G.R. Nikodim (1929-1978). Nikodim first had a sceptical attitude towards the World Council, but after long discussions with Visser 't Hooft, he began to come round.[52] Visser 't Hooft truly thought he had achieved something and had changed Nikodim's mind.[53] But it is

49 Visser 't Hooft, report on trip to Russia, 1959; cited by Hebly, 'The State, the Church, and the Oikumene', 1993, 120-121.

50 Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (1986), 263.

51 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 254-276.

52 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 268.

53 Nikodim always denied that religious persecution existed in the Soviet Union. In 1975, he was chosen as one of the presidents of the World Council.

not at all clear whether that indeed was what had happened. Nikodim was an intelligent theologian, but he was also a career clergyman, a true Soviet functionary with good contacts with the KGB and answerable to Metropolitan Nikolai. Nikodim climbed up the ladder quickly, from assistant to the metropolitan in the department of foreign affairs of the church, to the head of that department, which he would remain from 1960 to 1972. In 1964, he himself was Metropolitan of Leningrad and later had the opportunity to succeed Alexi I. Visser 't Hooft is reputed to have said: 'How do we get Nikodim to the point that he would make Borovoy his teacher?'[54]

The encounters led to official requests for the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox churches of Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland to be admitted as members. In 1960, Visser 't Hooft sent a report to the central committee of the World Council and recommended that these requests be accepted. He received a great many compliments for this result. Friends who were initially critical, such as Eelis Gulin from Helsinki, Bishop of Tampere since 1945, whom Visser 't Hooft had had good contact with in the winter of 1940, were now enthusiastic: 'You have made a wonderful service there.'[55] The nomination would take place during the assembly in New Delhi in November 1961. But when Metropolitan Nikolai objected in April 1960 to Khrushchev's antireligious campaign, he suddenly fell out of favour with the Kremlin and disappeared shortly thereafter. The 32-year-old Nikodim was now the head of the delegation of the Russian Church. Right up to the last moment, it was unclear whether the Eastern Orthodox churches would indeed join. A riot broke out during the Orthodox church service preceding the assembly when the delegation from Moscow walked out of the church because the émigré bishop of San Francisco, which had split with Moscow, participated in the service. The next morning Visser 't Hooft called Nikodim for an explanation, spoke to him severely, and said that people could not treat each other in that way in the World Council. Nikodim offered his excuses but also said that he could not have done anything else.[56]

At the end of 1961, while the Cold War became focused in Berlin and the Berlin Wall was being built, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox churches of Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland joined the World Council. The applications for membership, not only from these churches but also those of 19 others, primarily African churches, were accepted in New

54 Zeilstra, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 23 April 2013.

55 E.G. Gulin to Visser 't Hooft, 2 January 1960, WCC general correspondence 605.

56 Blake, 'The World Council of Churches: East-West Church Relations', 1981, especially 5-6.

Delhi by an overwhelming majority.[57] The change in the basic formula of the World Council was also accepted.[58] Visser 't Hooft was relieved that the Russian delegates, notwithstanding earlier tensions, had in the end acted primarily like church people in New Delhi.[59] Borovoy was a permanent representative of the Russian Orthodox Church and a staff member at the World Council in Geneva from 1962 to 1966 and even later in a period from 1978 to 1985. Nikodim became a member of the central committee in 1962 and would become one of the presidents of the World Council in 1975.[60] He turned into a loyal supporter of the World Council.[61] But his predecessor, Metropolitan Nikolai, died a week after the assembly under suspicious circumstances.[62] At the same time that the Soviet Union was showing a milder side by giving the church the opportunity to establish international contacts, persecutions were taking place in Russia. This had everything to do with a redefinition of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union under Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev.

Visser 't Hooft was excited about the Eastern Orthodox churches joining the World Council. In his eyes, their long isolation had come to an end.[63] The concern about their continued existence and freedom of action was, from that point on, shared with churches all over the world. This meant, according to them, that governments from communist countries had to take world opinion concerning religious freedom into account. But that appeared to be wishful thinking. One of the most important experts on the Soviet Union to advise the World Council at this time was P.B. Anderson. He wrote a memorandum, dated 20 February 1962, in which he warned the staff of the World Council about what was going on in the Soviet Union.[64] While Visser 't Hooft's good intentions and those of his staff did not need to be doubted, the value of the quiet diplomacy he strove for was limited.

57 The membership of the Russian Orthodox was accepted with 142 votes for, 3 votes against and 4 abstentions. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), *Neu-Delhi 1961. Dokumentarbericht über die Dritte Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen* (1962), 16-17.

58 Ibid., 178.

59 Barkey Wolf, interview with Visser 't Hooft, in: *Elseviers Weekblad*, 3 February 1962.

60 Nikodim died suddenly in Rome in 1978, at the age of 49 of a heart attack, during an audience with Pope John Paul I.

61 Van der Bent, *Historical Dictionary of Ecumenical Christianity* (1994), 293.

62 Bourdeaux, 'The Russian Church, Religious Liberty and the World Council of Churches', 1984, 6. Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (1986), 263: Nikolai 'was widely believed to have been murdered.'

63 Visser 't Hooft, 'The significance of the new ecumenical situation for religious liberty', 9 April 1963, WCC 994.2.19/9.

64 Hebly, 'The State, the Church, and the Oikumene', 1993, 110.

Analysts pointed out that the wool was being pulled over the eyes of the staff at the World Council.[65] Put more strongly, a certain 'ecumenical' paralysis emerged with respect to religious persecution or discrimination in the Soviet Union and the satellite states. This state of affairs recalled the problems faced by the German church in the years shortly before the Second World War. The policy Visser 't Hooft followed definitely cost the World Council a certain amount of credibility.

7.8 The World Council Enriched?

Visser 't Hooft focused on the content of the faith. As far as he was concerned, the Orthodox presence enriched the World Council immediately, particularly with respect to the Easter faith and its strong Trinitarian character. With its sense of the mystery of the faith, Orthodoxy helped in his view to keep the more activist side of the World Council in balance. At the end of his career, Visser 't Hooft signalled the danger of the World Council becoming a bureaucratic institution that could, over time, even become a hindrance for the progress of the ecumenical movement. He expected that the Trinitarian basis could function repeatedly as an inspiring reason for reflection.

> The basic question actually always concerned and concerns a very simple question: How can we make clear what it is that keeps us together and does not let us rest until we actually coexist? The answer can only be: It is the Lord who died on the cross 'to gather the scattered children of God together' (John 11:52). Only a living Lord can do that. And the Lord lives as the Son of the Father and does his work through the Holy Spirit. Thus, living ecumenicity can only exist where it is seen in the light of the belief in the three-in-one.[66]

65 For example, Bourdeaux, 'The Russian Church, Religious Liberty and the World Council of Churches', 1984, 7.

66 Visser 't Hooft, draft of a preface for: Theurer, *Die trinitarische Basis des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen* (1967). WCC 994.2.22/17. 'Es ging und geht in der Basis-Frage eigentlich immer um eine ganz einfache Frage: Wie können wir deutlich machen, was uns zusammenhält und uns nicht ruhen lasst bis wir wirklich zusammenleben? Die Antwort konnte nur sein: Es ist der Herr, der am Kreuze gestorben ist, damit 'er auch die Kinder Gottes, die zerstreut waren, zusammen brächte' (John 11:52). Das kann aber nur ein lebendiger Herr tun. Und der Herr lebt als Sohn des Vaters und tut sein Werk durch den Heiligen Geist. So kann es nur lebendige Ökumene geben, wo sie gesehen wird im Lichte des trinitarischen Glaubens.'

Figure 49 With Patriarch Pimen (Sergey Miharlovich Izvekov, 1910-1990) of Moscow and of Russia, 1969



From 1961 on, Geneva seemed – metaphorically – to lie between Constantinople and Rome. In a number of respects, regarding both content and liturgy, the Orthodox churches were closer to Rome, but they rejected the idea of the church as having only one head and traditionally had great appreciation for the concept of conciliarity, i.e., the idea that God's Spirit worked through the gatherings of the Church. This notion played an important role in the World Council. With more than half of all Orthodox believers in communist countries, the reception of what truly happened in the World Council was not simple. In Russia itself, Nikodim did not receive much attention for the questions he dealt with in Geneva.[67] Actually, there were two filters, one for the government, and one for himself. Nikodim and his fellow church leaders held that not everything by far that was thought to be important in Geneva should be passed on to the clergy and laity of the Russian church. They were aware that the Soviet authorities kept a close eye on them and that they had very little latitude.[68]

67 Istavridis, 'The Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement, 1948-1968', 1986, 304.
68 Ellis, *The Russian Orthodoxe Church* (1986), 270-271.

Visser 't Hooft could be enthusiastic, but it was a long time before Orthodox theology could make meaningful contributions. That did not prevent friendly meetings, and the presence of the Orthodox was appreciated. Visser 't Hooft spoke of a 'new economic reality'. Nikodim explained these words as if the World Council was 'a sort of embryo of a true *Una Sancta*'.[69] One could wonder if they understood each other. Within the Russian Church, the young Nikodim was well known as an innovator who fought for using Russian in the liturgy instead of Church Slavonic, whereas others, such as his rival archbishop Pimen, saw the strength of the Russian Orthodox Church as lying primarily in the tradition. Nikodim was interested in the Roman Catholic *aggiornamento*, the 'bringing up to date', under John XXIII and also sought an opening here. At the same time, he was completely loyal with respect to the Soviet regime and he was accused of being an extremely successful KGB infiltrator.[70]

In February 1964, the executive committee of the World Council, under the chairmanship of Franklin Fry and at the invitation of Nikodim met in Odessa in Ukraine. On the preceding Sunday, the representatives in Moscow were received by Patriarch Alexi. Visser 't Hooft preached during a service in the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul in which he praised the Russian Church for holding fast to the faith in all circumstances. That Eastern Orthodoxy now came into contact for the first time with the new churches in Asia and Africa was, in his view, an enriching challenge for all involved. Thus, new opportunities arose for the reconciliation between peoples and races. It had to do with help for refugees in various African countries and about religious freedom worldwide and the imminent successor to Visser 't Hooft.

What it did not concern, at least not publicly, was the appeal by the anonymous group of Russian Orthodox believers to the executive committee of the World Council and in which attention was asked for the persecutions in Russia.[71] The leaders of the World Council ignored this group. After their discussions, the members of the executive committee were received by the local chairman of the Soviet district governing council, Piotr Ivanhuk. Visser 't Hooft subtly solved the problem that no typewriters were made available by casually remarking that it would make a strange impression in the West that a country that made such impressive achievements like space flight suffered from a shortage of typewriters. The absence of typewriters was

69 Nikodim, 'The Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement', 1978, especially 270-271.

70 Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (1986), 228-229.

71 Ibid., 291.

very quickly rectified. He therefore felt he could get other things arranged as well.[72] But it did not escape Western journalists that, at the same moment that the World Council was arguing through Frederick Nolde for religious freedom worldwide, the representatives of the Soviet Union in the United Nations were arguing for the freedom to be atheist.[73] But Franklin Fry declared afterwards that the hospitality of the Russians was unsurpassed, and a return visit followed quickly. On 24 September 1964, Visser 't Hooft was able, as general secretary, to address His Holiness Patriarch Alexi I of Moscow, who was received with ceremony in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. Visser 't Hooft received the Order of St. Vladimir of the Orthodox Church of Russia in 1964 and became a commander in the Order of St. Andreas of the ecumenical patriarch. Not everyone could see that as a high point, however, for the religious persecutions continued in Russia in the meantime.

7.9 Debating Policy

There has been a great deal of debate on the policy followed by Visser 't Hooft and his staff regarding the Eastern Orthodox churches during the Cold War. To begin with, the Russian Orthodox Church itself assessed the value of ecumenical contacts very differently. Interest was always at a minimum at the base of the church, if anything at all did filter through about what was going on in the ecumenical movement. For the leaders of the Russian church, it was beneficial to be involved and not to be excluded when other Orthodox churches, such as the Greek and the Coptic churches, were included in international Christian networks. But viewed from the ideology of the communist party, the World Council in those years remained a suspicious organisation, part of the Western capitalist system. The political leaders were always looking over the shoulders of the church leaders. What they saw, for example, was that the World Council had many African churches as members as well. A number of new states were emerging at this time in Africa as a result of the decolonisation process. Thus, infiltrating the World Council and other international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation, UNESCO, and the World Health Organisation, was politically interesting for the Soviet Union. Contact with churches from the

72 Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel, and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON Radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.

73 For example: *New York Herald Tribune European Edition*, 14 February 1964.

emerging states was used, where possible, for propaganda and increasing influence. The possibility of this kind of manipulation was, however, seldom stated aloud in the World Council of Churches. But everyone knew that the party leadership in Moscow was not interested in an open dialogue between East and West that was inspired by the churches.

In the meantime, the agenda of the World Council contained all kinds of issues, including subjects for which the Russian Orthodox delegates neither had the required expertise nor the opportunity to discuss them with their own church members. They usually chose a safe attitude for such topics, namely, a religiously conservative approach. That was the case with topics like racism, militarism, faith and science, feminism, and sexism.[74] A topic like liberation theology, which flourished in Central America and was highly valued by the World Council, was much too horizontalist for most Russian Orthodox and, in their view, did not have much to do with the content of real faith. Nor did they want anything to do with the idea of women in ecclesiastical office, which was beginning to play an increasingly greater role in the World Council. They thought about cancelling their membership several times. The Soviet political authorities saw the World Council primarily as a critical Western peace organisation that they felt could easily be used in the service of their own objectives.[75]

In the West, not everyone by far could share in Visser 't Hooft's enthusiasm about the membership of the Eastern Orthodox in the World Council. Some thought the Russian delegates would attempt to exercise political influence in the executive committee, for example, but Visser 't Hooft defended his policy in 1964 by pointing out that only eleven of the 110 members of the central committee were representatives of churches in communist countries and that none of the members in the presidency or among the leaders were from those countries.[76] According to him, the influence of the Russian representatives in the World Council should not be overestimated. Though they represented the largest church, even with the other Orthodox they still only formed a minority among many Protestants. There could be no possible intentional Marxist penetration in the World Council or real manipulation. Visser 't Hooft was well aware that the Kremlin had its own reasons for approving the membership of the Russian Orthodox Church in the World Council. But he appealed to the American ambassador in Moscow, George Kennan, author of the famous 'long telegram' of 1946 that had given occasion

74 Hebly, 'The State, the Church, and the Oikumene', 1993, 113.
75 Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (1986), 270.
76 Visser 't Hooft, 'The World Council of Churches and the Orthodox Churches', 1964.

Figure 50 Mixing with the leaders of the Romanian church, Geneva, ca. 1970



for the politics of 'containment', the Western striving to restrain the Soviet sphere of influence. Kennan had said that what the Kremlin saw as an advantage did not necessarily have to be seen by others as a disadvantage. Visser 't Hooft felt that the World Council did nothing else than draw the consequences from the policy decisions made in Amsterdam 1948 by not admitting, in principle, the primacy of the political lines of division on the world stage. Some, like the French Protestants, openly rejoiced at the admission of the Russian Church, but others, such as Zoltan Beky of the Hungarian Protestant Church in America, warned the World Council as early as 1961 that the World Council underestimated the hidden agenda of the Soviets. His church abstained from voting in New Delhi.[77]

After some years, Visser 't Hooft himself was somewhat disappointed. The Russian Church proved to be more traditional than he had thought, and it was difficult to get a real discussion on faith started.[78] But he continued to believe that it would turn out all right. Under his leadership, the World

77 Visser 't Hooft (ed.), *Neu-Delhi 1961. Dokumentarbericht über die Dritte Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen* (1962), 17 and 74-75.

78 Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON Radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.

Council had followed a middle path and remained true to the commission of Christ. In his eyes, the Russian Orthodox Church could not help ending up in isolation and needed time to learn to play the ecumenical game.

> Unfortunately, a considerable number of the Orthodox churches were being held back enormously. And they were being held back of course by the simple fact that they were so dependent on the communist regimes under which they lived, and that is why it is so terribly difficult to find out what they actually mean in all kinds of areas, for there are all kinds of things they cannot say in order to avoid getting into trouble.[79]

Visser 't Hooft remained convinced that precisely the Eastern Orthodox churches had a lot to offer the West.

> At this time in the West, we are in a period in which we are to some extent losing certain deeper elements of the faith. We have become very … horizontal, very worldly. Such an Orthodox church in which the true religion in the literal sense of the word with all the trimmings is contained, the liturgy, and prayer and the whole spiritual attitude with respect to the religion that plays the central role, we actually need that very much so that our spiritual sources in the West do not dry up.[80]

In the Orthodox faith experience he saw an antidote to the new paganism that had accompanied secularisation.

Visser 't Hooft had always claimed that he had not minced words when it concerned clearly asserting to Russian political leaders and their officials the lack of spiritual freedom in the Soviet Union, his critique of the policy of not being allowed to build churches, the prohibition against religious education and church publications. A Russian bishop who had once listened

79 Interview by L. Pagano and G. Sonder with Visser 't Hooft, Magazine, AVRO Radio, 17 August 1980, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Helaas zit een heel aantal van de orthodoxe kerken met een enorme rem. En die rem is natuurlijk dat ze eenvoudig zo sterk afhankelijk zijn van de communistische regimes waaronder ze leven en dat daarom op allerlei gebieden het verschrikkelijk moeilijk is om erachter te komen wat ze werkelijk menen, want ze kunnen allerlei dingen niet zeggen, om niet in moeilijkheden te komen.'

80 Ibid.: 'Wij zijn op 't ogenblik in het Westen in een periode waarin we zekere diepere elementen van het geloof een beetje kwijt raken. Wij zijn erg […] horizontaal geworden, erg werelds. Zo'n orthodoxe kerk waar de echte godsdienst in de letterlijke zin van het woord met alles wat eraan vast zit, de liturgie en het gebed en de hele geestelijke houding ten opzichte van de godsdienst die de centrale rol speelt, hebben we eigenlijk erg nodig, opdat onze geestelijke bronnen in het Westen niet uitdrogen.'

while Visser 't Hooft had summarised a whole list of complaints, is said to have whispered afterwards: 'Très bien'.[81] One of the concrete examples of the independent course he could, in retrospect, name was that the declarations made about nuclear tests in 1961 were directed against both French and Soviet policy. According to Visser 't Hooft, the World Council constantly fought for religious freedom wherever it was called for in the world, including in communist countries. If the World Council did take a position that was close to that of communist governments concerning the struggle against racism, for example, then that was pure coincidence, in Visser 't Hooft's view, for the World Council consistently followed Christian insights developed in the ecumenical community. He felt that criticism of the Russian church leaders was unnuanced and unjust. They were not to be blamed for the oppression by the state but, instead, were to be helped where possible. Why was China not viewed as critically, where there was infinitely less freedom of religion than in Russia?[82] Various analysts saw it differently and claimed that there was definitely Russian influence on a number of statements by the World Council and pointed to the advantage that Orthodox membership had for the communist party.[83] Others saw that also but also saw the value of the personal contacts, the destruction of prejudices, and the mutual learning process.[84]

Visser 't Hooft was right insofar as the Russian Orthodox Church had never initiated a major social debate of political significance in the World Council and that there was no political influence in this sense. On the other hand, however, topics that could irritate the authorities in the Soviet Union were regularly kept 'small' intentionally. With his own quiet diplomacy, Visser 't Hooft was quite defenceless against this form of paralysis. A major public debate on religious freedom in Marxist socialist countries was not discussed with the Russians at all in Geneva. Most of the Eastern Orthodox delegates were fine with social criticism, especially, however, with criticism of the Western system. As far as the communist East was concerned, they wanted understanding for and confirmation of the legitimacy of the collaboration between the church and the state. In the atmosphere of the 1960s, they joined in Western self-criticism and the uneasy conscience many had regarding

81 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

82 Interview with Visser 't Hooft, Actua, TROS Television, 16 August 1976, Sound and Vision Archives.

83 Fletcher, 'Religious and Soviet Foreign Policy', 1975. See also: Curanovic, *Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy* (2012), 55.

84 Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (1986), 271.

the period of colonialism. For the sake of peace, the World Council gave low priority to the problem of the systematic lack of freedom in the Eastern Bloc countries. In the 1950s, the World Council paid quite a bit of attention to the topic of religious freedom, and a statement was issued on this topic at the end of 1961 in New Delhi. At that time, Visser 't Hooft was fully confident that it was precisely the Russian church's membership that would enable the World Council to defend Christians in the Soviet Union. Looking back, it is difficult to maintain that this was the case. After the Eastern Orthodox churches joined, for a long time the committees in the World Council paid little attention to dissidents and their writings, the so-called *samizdat* literature. Visser 't Hooft was too optimistic. In the meantime, in contrast, a situation developed in the World Council that can best be characterised as self-censorship: the pitfall of Visser 't Hooft's quiet diplomacy.

Two of the 22 members of the executive committee present at Visser 't Hooft's farewell as general secretary of the World Council in 1966 were representatives of churches in communist countries. Of the 99 members of the central committee, eight were from communist countries. According to Visser 't Hooft there were no communists among them.[85] But the special secretariat of the World Council for religious freedom was dissolved in 1968 at the assembly in Uppsala and absorbed into the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. There it had a lower status, and there was always a delegate from the Eastern Orthodox churches. The World Council's attention shifted in the years following his retirement more and more towards 'Third World' countries. For the delegates from the Russian Orthodox Church, this was a relatively safe theme, for it offered a good starting point for criticism of the West. The World Council programme for combatting racism required a great deal of attention. Intense debates on social and political problems in the West were constant. What proved more difficult for a long time was an open discussion in the countries under state socialism in Eastern Europe. One exception was the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, but that led to great problems for the Russian Orthodox delegates at home.[86]

Personally, Visser 't Hooft viewed the membership of the Eastern Orthodox churches in the World Council as one of the high points of his career. He ignored its dark side in his *Memoirs*, idealising the Russian Church, which, in his view, belonged in the World Council. Accidental, historical

85 Visser 't Hooft, 'Questions and Answers about the World Council of Churches and Communism', 1966.

86 Hebly, 'The State, the Church, and the Oikumene', 1993, 115, and Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (1986), 213-214.

circumstances did not change any of that. Unanimity on, for example, a statement by the World Council in reference to the Prague Spring in 1968 could not be achieved. The Eastern Orthodox churches always had to be taken into account. His argument was that the Czechs understood very well that much more could be achieved with 'a personal conversation' than with a public statement.[87]

In 1969 Visser 't Hooft was back in Russia, where he was part of a larger ecumenical delegation. At that time, he found it a relief to be in a country in which there was order. That was quite different in France, where the streets seemed to rule in Paris. To his surprise, he was picked up from the airport by the second man of the Soviet governing committee of Religious Affairs, Piotr Makartsev, one of the five Russians who accompanied the delegation in 1959 and whom he had got to know well.[88] From the hotel 'Russia' he had a fine view of the Kremlin, where he – in the very large hall that was also used for party meetings – attended a performance of the opera *Don Carlos*. At a certain moment, the whole podium was dominated by a large crucifix while the heroine sang her song. Visser 't Hooft was overcome by the feeling that the Russian world would never be able to lose its religious tradition.[89] The foundation for his policy regarding the Russian Orthodox Church was his fundamental trust in the Russian belief in God.

Together with Nikodim, now a member of the central committee of the World Council, he was a guest for an evening in Makartsev's dacha somewhere in the forests near Moscow, where the vodka flowed freely and they could talk without mincing words. Visser 't Hooft wrote in a letter to his family: 'It gives me … a chance to tell him which aspects of the situation here we do not like.'[90] Makartsev knew how to deal with this apparently, for the atmosphere remained good.[91] The high point of the visit was an official reception of the whole international ecumenical group by the 92-year-old and sick Alexi I who had been Patriarch of Moscow for 24 years by then but was not very active in leading the church. It was an honour for Visser 't Hooft to address the prelate. Alexi nodded approvingly while Visser 't Hooft spoke in French about the importance of the role of the patriarch in bringing the Russian Church into the international ecumenical movement.

87 Speech by Visser 't Hooft to the Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in: Kenmerk, IKOR Television, 9 September 1969, Sound and Vision Archives.

88 In 1972 Visser 't Hooft had dinner again with Makartsev and the patriarch. Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear Family and Friends', 7 March 1972, Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.

89 Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear family', no date, probably 1969, Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.

90 Ibid.

91 Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (1986), 15.

Visser 't Hooft enjoyed Moscow and left it with the feeling that a good future lay in wait for the people and church of Russia. At the same time, he was a youth worker by nature, and he understood that a lot more had to change before this arch-conservative and introverted church could appeal to the youth. In his *Memoirs* Visser 't Hooft looked back with satisfaction on the whole process of rapprochement between the World Council and the Russian Orthodox Church. He again showed a deep trust in the salvific strength of this church, both with respect to Russian society and world peace. In the liturgy, after all, this church celebrated the mystery of the indwelling of God. That was indestructible. Because of that, he considered his diplomatic policy, which entailed that the church and state in Russia should not be harshly and openly criticised, completely justified.

Visser 't Hooft's vision endured. The later leaders of the World Council looked back positively on his way of working with respect to the Eastern Orthodox churches at the time of the Cold War. People learned from each other. Protestant students received instruction in Bossey, of which the Greek Orthodox N.A. Nissiotis was director, on the history of the Orthodox churches and studied the Orthodox liturgy. Journals like *Irenikon*, issued by the Benedictine monks of Chevetogne, and *Istina*, issued by the Dominicans in Paris, found their way into the ecumenical network, and caricatures were dismantled at study conferences.The familiar damaging forms of proselytism, the Western compulsion to convert, always a fear among the Orthodox, were actively opposed by the ecumenical organs. John Arnold, president of the Conference of European Churches in the 1990s, stated that Visser 't Hooft's striving was right and absolutely necessary if the World Council was actually to be a representative committee for the whole world. But Arnold did not deny the difficulties. However independent the World Council wanted to be under Visser 't Hooft's leadership in the 1940s and 1950s, just like the United Nations, the World Council was formed in the space that was created by the victory of the Allies and the idealism that was associated with that. Now the priorities had shifted, and that was good for the delegates from the Russian Orthodox Church. Nikodim was both a man who served the Soviet authorities and a believing Christian, a skilled debater who knew how he could paralyse the council when he wanted to prevent sharply worded statements that were to the disadvantage of his fatherland.[92] A price for 'the third way' was definitely paid, paradoxically enough at the expense of a completely independent course.[93]

92 Arnold, 'Kommunistische Diktatur, Dissidenten und die Ökumenische Bewegung', 2007, 159-169, especially 161.

93 Cf. 7.5.

The contribution these churches made to the World Council was greatly appreciated by one of Visser 't Hooft's successors, Konrad Raiser, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches from 1993-2002.[94] Not only did the Orthodox help sharpen the ecclesiological questions and enrich the basis of the World Council with the Trinitarian doxology, they also set in motion a deeper understanding of the church fathers for the churches of the World Council and made the notion 'conciliarity' i.e., that the church understands the wisdom of God's Spirit through councils and discussions that were conducive to church unity. That these councils were at bottom rooted in the Eucharistic community – in other words, the experience of the unity of the faithful as the people of God around the celebration of the Lord's Supper – was an insight that the Orthodox first had. That this community was not yet visible in joint celebrations of Christians from all churches did not stop the Orthodox from contributing greatly in the ecumenical conversation that was conducted in the 1970s and 1980s on baptism, the Eucharist, and the Lord's Supper. In 1982, that resulted in the important Faith and Order-paper 111, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, in which, for example, baptism in churches other than one's own was recognised.[95] Important contributions were made as well with respect to missions and diaconal work, including, among other things, an increasing consciousness of the connection between liturgy and the service-minded form of the church in the world. While the Orthodox delegates saw their participation in the World Council primarily as giving witness to what they considered to be the true apostolic tradition and thus in no way a watering down of the Orthodox claim to be the true church, they were also challenged, however, by their presence in the World Council to join in reflection on current issues. The common great question which remained, Konrad Raiser asserted in 2003, was what it meant at the bottom to be the church.

7.10 The Controversial Bridge Builder

Visser 't Hooft was convinced he had been given an important task. He felt called to break through the impasse of the Cold War using the notion of the ecumenical church. In connection with this, he was privileged to have a network of contacts in the West and the East, albeit his opportunities in the churches that fell under the patriarchate of Moscow were limited. He was determined to use the results of the assemblies in Amsterdam and

94 Raiser, 'Orthodox Theology and the Future of the Ecumenical Dialogue', 2003.

95 See also 9.10.

Evanston as a mandate granted by them to involve the Eastern Orthodox churches in the World Council as far as possible and to nominate them for membership. A deep confidence in the church's own strength drove him in this context to take up the role of a tireless bridgebuilder. Independent of historical circumstances, the membership of the Eastern Orthodox churches in the World Council would represent an intrinsically enriching value for that council. Crisis moments in the Cold War threw a spanner in the work at various times. By firmly holding fast to the World Council's own course between East and West, Visser 't Hooft attempted to convince both the Russian church leaders and, indirectly, the Soviet authorities as well that the people in the World Council were open to talking. Josef Hromádka and Martin Niemöller were two of his most important pioneers in this respect.

The theological insights into Orthodoxy, that he had already set down in publications in 1933 and 1937, came in useful again and again during this process. He succeeded in presenting himself as an expert in this area. He linked the fundamental experience of unity in the Russian Church, in which mysticism, not politics or ethics, took a central place, to the striving for unity in the World Council, and he could thus win trust in both the East and West and act as a catalyst. His view of the Russian Orthodox Church transcended the East-West antagonism of the Cold War. He convinced many but certainly not everyone.

Visser 't Hooft appealed assertively to the independent course of the World Council that was set out in Amsterdam in 1948, and he carried out a consistent policy between East and West. With his defence of Josef Hromádka, who did not want to condemn the Czech communists, he showed that he was serious about this. He succeeded in preventing the World Council from bearing a Western stamp. By speaking various times at mass church meetings in Berlin, when it began to get tense at the beginning of the 1950s, Visser 't Hooft made a deep impression and became very well known, not only in Germany. With his view that the churches were able to break through the impasse of the Cold War, he gave many courage and created support for rapprochement with churches on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

A crucial meeting of the central committee of the World Council took place in Toronto in 1950. There it was laid down that member churches of the World Council did not automatically relativise their own identity. That was of major importance for the churches that were convinced they were the true church, such as the Russian Orthodox Church. By keeping the ecclesiological claims of the World Council itself modest, Visser 't Hooft managed to keep the bar for membership low. The price that that required was a certain vagueness, for if the World Council did not want to be a 'super

church', what did it want to be? The problem was more averted than solved and would play a role explicitly with the rapprochements with the Roman Catholic Church and cause confusion. It was empathically shown in the dossier of Eastern Orthodoxy how much Visser 't Hooft had the gift of connecting with people with whom he could share his objectives. He won the trust not only of a number of Orthodox prelates but also of the largest part of the central committee, of the staff members closest to him, and the delegates of most of the member churches.

A breakthrough was made in 1961. The Russian Orthodox Church became a member, together with various other Eastern Orthodox churches. For Visser 't Hooft personally, this event was the crowning moment of a long period of deep investments. There were objections, however, that had to do primarily with suspicions that the Russian delegates, the staff and workers, could misuse the World Council as a political podium. Visser 't Hooft was willing to listen to those objections but not to be convinced by them. He was fully aware of the fact that the delegates from the Eastern Orthodox churches were usually not free to say in public what they thought about something, and he wanted to have patience with them. But he did have confidence that it would turn out well because of the character of the church itself, the heart of which he saw come to light precisely in the Russian Orthodox Church: the mystery of God dwelling among people.

Critics of Visser 't Hooft's policy were certainly not lacking. Already in 1948, the refusal of the leadership of the World Council to speak openly for the free West called up accusations. The friendly connections with the Russian Orthodox Church, while the Soviet Union was carrying out religious persecutions, discredited Visser 't Hooft's diplomacy in the eyes of many. An early example was the criticism expressed by the Dutchman J.A. Hebly, who wished that the World Council would limit itself to purely faith contacts with the Eastern Orthodox churches. He did not trust the intentions of the church delegates when they were accused of being answerable to the KGB. Moreover, Hebly found it a matter of concern that the World Council, because the Russians were members, was hardly able to defend the faith persecuted in the Soviet Union and the satellite states.

Within the World Council, his successors continued the policy Visser 't Hooft began. Konrad Raiser, who was general secretary from 1993 to 2003, found, in retrospect, that Visser 't Hooft was right to involve the Eastern Orthodox churches in the World Council of Churches, thus promoting the ecumenical challenge that arose at the time of the Cold War. Indeed, the membership of the Eastern Orthodox churches enriched the multi-coloured nature of the World Council. But for that they paid the price that Hebly spoke of.



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8 Roman Catholic Contacts

'Nostra Res Agitur', 1948-1969

Abstract
Chapter 8 deals with Visser 't Hooft's lengthy campaign to have the Roman Catholic Church join the World Council of Churches. It traces developments from the beginning when Protestant ecumenicity was firmly rejected, to the later history from the 1960s onwards. It explores Visser 't Hooft's contacts with the Dutch Roman Catholics Jo Willibrands and Frans Thijssen and early attempts at rapprochement, including the creation of the Joint Working Group. The chapter discusses the difference in agendas, and developments during and arising from the Second Vatican Council. It then relates the history of ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic Church in connection with the Roman Catholic movement under successive popes away from membership of the World Council.

Keywords: Rome, Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Jo Willebrands

8.1 Introduction

For a long time, the position of the Roman Catholic Church regarding church unity was that, although there were Christians outside the church, they were to be seen as 'separated brethren'. The popes Pius XI and Pius XII saw the Roman Catholic Church as the complete church exclusively and the only one in apostolic continuity with respect to Christ. Nevertheless, after the World Council was founded in 1948, Visser 't Hooft saw Roman Catholics showing more and more interest in the Protestant approach to ecumenicity. Formally and dogmatically, the position of Pope John XXIII, who was elected in 1958, towards the World Council was no different than that of his predecessors. But because he convened the Second Vatican Council, a new situation with promising perspectives suddenly emerged.

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As early as the 1930s, Visser 't Hooft attempted to establish contact with Roman Catholics but was only sporadically successful. He had welcomed Roman Catholic observers at the foundation meeting of the World Council in 1948 and was annoyed by the Roman Catholic leadership's failure to appreciate what was going on and by the fact that interested Roman Catholics were forbidden from attending the founding assembly (8.2). More room was granted around 1950 for discussions with Protestants on the content of the faith, and Visser 't Hooft capitalised on this (8.3). The Roman Catholic view of church unity was that the Protestants should return to Rome. There was, in essence, only one church: the Church of Rome. The idea of an unbroken tradition of apostolic succession played an important role here: this succession was thought to have begun with Christ himself in his commission to Peter, who would later be the first bishop of Rome. How did Visser 't Hooft deal with this notion, and what did he expect to come from rapprochement with the Roman Catholic Church? Visser 't Hooft slowly came into contact more and more often with J.G.M. Willebrands as a dialogue partner in the ecumenical movement. How was Visser 't Hooft's agenda related to Willebrands' position? (8.4). That the trust that had required so much effort to be established could also be eroded became apparent in 1959 on Rhodes: Willebrands and the Eastern Orthodox engaged in talks without consulting Visser 't Hooft, and a crisis over the contacts between the World Council and the Vatican ensued (8.5). But these contacts received an unexpected impetus when Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council. How did Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands – who was made secretary of the Roman Catholic Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity – help each other during this time? (8.6). Visser 't Hooft saw the Council as a major opportunity and, with his staff, actively influenced the agenda of the Second Vatican Council on a number of topics important for the issue of church unity. At the same time, precisely in this period, he worked on getting an ecumenical consensus in the World Council on ecclesiology, i.e., the promotion of issues concerning the doctrine of the church. But that was a difficult process (8.7). After Vatican II was over, Visser 't Hooft could point to a few concrete results of the collaboration between the World Council and the Roman Catholic Church. He was hopeful about the future but also cautious (8.8). Because the starting positions were so different, there was bound to be disappointment. A partnership did occur, but the Roman Catholic Church did not join the World Council even after an extended period of mutual contact. The Protestant and Orthodox churches did not return to the mother church (8.9).

8.2 A Source of Irritation: The Roman Catholic Failure to Appreciate the Work of the World Council

The Protestant ecumenical movement that developed in the first decades of the twentieth century was severely condemned in 1928 by Pius XI with the encyclical *Mortalium animos*. A meeting of equals was out of the question, according to the pope, because the ecumenical movement was based on an incorrect 'branch theory' that did not do any justice to the unique position of the Roman Catholic Church. The 'branch theory' held that different variations of the Christian faith could be viewed as equal and parallel. Roman Catholics were forbidden to take part in this ecumenical movement. The only true ecumenicity was the return of members of other churches to the one true church of Christ, i.e., the Roman Catholic Church. This fierce attack evoked indignation among ecumenically inclined Protestants as well as the feeling that Rome obviously felt threatened.

There had been quiet discussions now and then in the World Christian Student Federation in the 1930s about a dialogue concerning content, but it was not until the war years that contacts between Catholics and Protestants started to form here and there. In 1932 Visser 't Hooft visited Rome for the first time and came away feeling that the Roman Catholic world was not as 'solid and monolithic' as Protestants often thought. In his 1937 study, *The Church and its Function in Society*, co-written with J.H. Oldham for the Oxford Conference, Visser 't Hooft discussed the objections to the branch theory that had been rejected in *Mortalium animos*. He relativised that theory: the ecumenical model that the pope rejected, he claimed, was only one of many ways to look at the ecumenical movement.[1] He was determined to search actively for a common agenda in which identities could be mutually respected.

In progressive Protestant circles, the Roman Catholic position of being the only true church was not taken very seriously, and the possibility of intercommunion was even discussed. Together with the secretary of Faith and Order, Leonard Hodgson in Oxford, Visser 't Hooft made futile attempts to get this issue placed high on the Faith and Order agenda at the meeting of the continuation committee of that movement in Clarens in 1938.[2] But an international Commission on Ways of Worship under the leadership of the Dutch professor Gerardus van der Leeuw, which was tasked with studying this topic, could not meet because of the war. Visser

1 Visser 't Hooft and Oldham, *The Church and its Function in Society* (1937), 93.

2 Visser 't Hooft-Hodgson correspondence 1939-1940, WCC general correspondence 656.

't Hooft concluded in 1944 that the sharp opposition between Roman Catholics and Protestants had softened during the war years. People who had grown up in religiously isolated worlds had come to know each other and had helped each other during the war. What this would mean for the future was unclear, but it was worthwhile to explore the opportunities it presented. For Visser 't Hooft, the mutual dismantling of caricatures was the first order of business, and then came the international broadening of the existing Protestant-Catholic initiative that had led to social action in Great Britain and the Netherlands during the war.[3] In his view, most Protestant theologians did not reject Catholicism as such but only the Neo-Thomism that informed Catholic theology, which was largely based on the work of Thomas Aquinas. Natural theology played an important role in Neo-Thomism. He hoped that the Anglicans could act as a bridge in this situation.

But first a setback had to be dealt with. The negative attitude of the Roman Catholic Church during the preparations for the founding meeting of the World Council was a source of irritation for Visser 't Hooft. At the beginning of 1948, he had personally invited ten Roman Catholics, including Yves Congar of the Dominican centre Istina for studies in Orthodoxy, in Paris, who were interested in attending. The archbishop of Utrecht, Cardinal Jan de Jong, informed him, however, that he would decide which Roman Catholics could be invited. But before any decision was made in Utrecht, a *monitum*, a warning, was issued by the pope on 5 June 1948, which indicated that no one could attend the meetings organised by the Protestant ecumenical movement without special authorisation by the Vatican. As a result – unexpectedly – many requests for such an authorisation were submitted. On 18 June, however, it was clear that no one would be authorised.[4] The Jesuit priest, Charles Boyer came closest to attending: he was in a hotel in Amsterdam during the assembly. At his request, he received from Visser 't Hooft not only all documents but also up-to-date reports of what was taking place in the assembly. The Roman Catholic Church remained dismissive, however, and Visser 't Hooft experienced this attitude as a lack of appreciation of the good intentions of the predominantly Protestant movement. But what was clear and encouraging was that there was considerable interest in the World Council among individual Roman Catholics.

3 Visser 't Hooft to L. Hodgson, 15 March 1944, WCC general correspondence 656.

4 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Roman Catholic Church and the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches', 1949, 197-201.

8.3 Ecclesiological Explorations and the Looming Danger of the Super Church

One of the Roman Catholics whom Visser 't Hooft had a lot to do with in this context was J.G.M. Willebrands (1909-2006). This priest and professor at the Philosophicum in Warmond was already enthusiastic about the founding of the World Council of Churches by 1948. Willebrands had earned his doctorate in 1937 with a study on John Henry Cardinal Newman, the nineteenth-century theologian who converted to Roman Catholicism from Anglicanism and in the end became a cardinal. This study motivated Willebrands to abandon classic Roman Catholic apologetics and to develop a more open position towards the Protestant ecumenical movement. He studied the documents of the World Council with interest but also felt that personal encounters were necessary in order to truly understand what was going on there.[5] In 1948 Willebrands was chairperson of the Peter Canisius Apologetics Association, founded in 1962. Under his leadership, this association became the Society of Saint Willibrord. Its purpose was to promote ecumenism and to advise the Dutch bishops in that area. Slowly, things began to change. In 1949, the Vatican issued the instruction *De motione oecumenica*, in which it cautiously responded in a positive way to the founding of the World Council of Churches. Willebrands and his friend, the Utrecht priest Frans Thijssen, read it as an encouragement to invest in contact with Protestants.

From the other side, his contacts with the Roman Catholic Church made Visser 't Hooft more aware of the importance of the question of the Catholic identity of the Church. In September 1949, he was invited by the ecumenical study centre Istina in Paris for a study meeting on ecclesiology. Istina had been founded in 1927 by Dominicans in response to the flight to Paris of many Orthodox émigrés after the Russian Revolution. At the beginning of the 1950s, the institute was under the direction of the Dominican priest Christophe-Jean Dumont. One of the staff members was the progressive Roman Catholic theologian Father Yves-Marie Congar. He was a representative of the Roman Catholic school of theology called Nouvelle Théologie, which recommended a reassessment of the Bible. It was an important discussion with respect to content and valuable for Visser 't Hooft. Not long after, with the papal instruction *Ecclesia catholica* of 1 March 1950, the Roman Catholic Church distanced itself from the critical encyclical *Mortalium animos* of 1928.

5 First draft 'Projet d'un Conseil Oecuménique Catholique', no date, probably 1951, Istina Archives, Paris.

The Catholic Church still held to the view that true unity could only be found in the (Roman Catholic) Church, but there was now public appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit in the striving for ecumenical unity outside the church. Encounters between Roman Catholics and Protestants on an equal footing still needed official permission, however. Visser 't Hooft expressed his joy on behalf of the World Council about the fact that joint prayer and the joint promotion of social justice were now included among the possibilities.[6] He submitted the – in his view – precious 'homework questions' regarding ecclesiology that he was given in Paris to the central committee when it met in Toronto in July 1950.[7] Visser 't Hooft did the preparatory work together with the secretary of Faith and Order, the Anglican Oliver S. Tomkins. The committee now took a position against the idea that the World Council should strive to be a super church. The World Council emphasised that it would not request any authority that would enable the Council to intervene in the church order of any member church. Churches that were members thus did not recognise all other member churches as fully church. Thus, the Roman Catholic questions influenced the policy of the World Council, which hoped to keep the bar for membership low.

The general secretary kept a close eye on every new development in the Roman Catholic Church. In September 1950, there was a major conference of priests and representatives from various orders in Grottaferrata near Rome, whose theme was church unity in East and West. The reassessment of the Bible was an important topic here. Visser 't Hooft was disappointed in the conservative encyclical *Humani generis* of 12 August 1950, which was critical of the Théologie Nouvelle school and emphasised church authority. The doctrine of the Assumption of Mary, which was announced *ex cathedra* by Pope Pius XII on 1 November 1950, also created new stumbling blocks for the ecumenical movement. Some Protestants chose to go on the offensive and accused the Vatican of doctrinal errors, bad timing, and lack of ecumenical orientation. Others continued to hope that the ecumenical bonds would be quickly reinforced.[8] In the meantime, Roman Catholic theologians who were open to a dialogue with the Protestants had to take care that they did not get into trouble with their own church.[9] Visser 't Hooft kept his powder dry. Behind the scenes, the contacts with

6 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 322.

7 See also 7.6.

8 Cf. Van der Linde, *Rome en de Una Sancta* (1947).

9 Vischer mentions: Y. Congar, H. de Lubac, K. Rahner, J. Courtney Murray, M.D. Chenu, and P. Yves Féres.

the Roman Catholics on Bible study and the Patristics were growing. Visser 't Hooft felt personally touched and inspired by a visit to the old and sick Benedictine abbot Paul Irénée Couturier in Lyon, a Roman Catholic advocate of church unity among the Russian Orthodox émigrés. He had met him in 1939 when Couturier devoted himself to the preparation of the Week of Prayer for the Unity of Christians in France, as 'the invisible monastery'.

In November 1951 an official meeting was organised in Présinge near Geneva in the run-up to the Faith and Order Conference in Lund, which had been planned for 1952, between eight Roman Catholic theologians and Orthodox and Protestant members of the World Council Commission for Faith and Order. Special permission had been requested and granted by the Holy See, on condition that the meeting would not take place in the Bossey study centre. The participants, including Visser 't Hooft, came 'as private individuals and out of personal interest'. The Toronto statement by the World Council was discussed extensively in Présinge. Various Roman Catholics found it difficult to understand what the World Council meant when it spoke of the desire for the visibility of the one church. Confusion arose on the definition of *nota ecclesiae*, for the Roman Catholics the four classic essential characteristics of the church: unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolic succession. But the approach to the problem of the church via the Calvinistic route was probed, via the *vestigia ecclesiae*, traces of the church that a church in a state of decline could also show. Yves Congar had already demonstrated at the meeting in Paris in 1949 that 'traces' could be found in all Christian churches. But that assertion aroused a great deal of discussion. Were *vestigia* 'ruins' or 'traces' of vitality? According to the Swedish Lutheran Ehrenström, there was no single church that could claim to possess the fullness of the church of Christ. That was, according to him, due to the sin present in every church organisation. Despite that sin, these traces had a worthy place in all churches, pointing to the notion of the true church. Most of the Roman Catholics present rejected this reasoning. The most valuable discussions were the personal discussions in the hallways. The Roman Catholics had to get used to Visser 't Hooft's fierce style of debating, whom he found defending himself quite harshly at times. After this meeting, Father Frans Thijssen was left with a feeling of having to deal with a shrewd dialogue partner: 'Visser 't Hooft seems to me to be a very skilful leader, one you have to be wary of.'[10]

10 F. Thijssen, 'Rencontre de Présinge', no date, Istina Archives.

8.4 Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands: Two Agendas

Visser 't Hooft's goal was to have the Roman Catholic Church become a member of the World Council. At the beginning of the 1950s, however, few people thought that that was possible. Visser 't Hooft went deliberately for the path of personal contacts and quiet diplomacy. Simultaniously, the Vatican slowly began to see advantages in the ecumenical movement. In the 1951 encyclical *Sempiternus rex* by Pius XII, issued on the occasion of the 1500th anniversary of the Council of Chalcedon, Willebrands saw a deep desire for reunification with the traditions that had split from the Roman Catholic mother church. He felt personally spoken to and started working on founding the Catholic Ecumenical Council. The encyclical did not hide the fact that the conversion of 'separated brothers' to the mother church was a central objective here.

> Non-Catholics strive for the unity of the Church as a goal that still had to be found and brought into existence; Catholics strive for the unity of all who believe in Christ, by the return of the separated brothers to the Catholic Church. Both groups strive for their respective goal as a matter of faith.[11]

The goals of Willebrands and Visser 't Hooft's respective agendas were far apart, but that did not prejudice the will of either to meet. In 1952, Willebrands and Thijssen were appointed by the Dutch bishops to be the Dutch delegates for ecumenical work, and thus Visser 't Hooft met Willebrands for the first time.[12] Shortly afterwards, in Fribourg, Switzerland, the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Issues (Conférence Catholique pour les Questions Écumeniques, CCQE) was founded. Willebrands was the first secretary and visited Visser 't Hooft in Geneva with Thijssen in January 1954. For the first time, there was a clearly recognisable Roman Catholic organisation that, although not an official spokesperson for the Roman Catholic Church, could nevertheless be viewed as representative of ecumenically oriented Roman Catholics. Although Visser 't Hooft did understand that the men involved

11 Catholic Ecumenical Council (Katholieke Oecumenische Raad), no place, no date, Istina Archives: 'De niet-katholieken streven de eenheid der Kerk na als een doel, dat nog gevonden en tot stand gebracht moet worden, de katholieken streven de eenheid van allen, die in Christus geloven na, door de terugkeer van de afgescheiden broeders tot de Katholieke Kerk. Beide groepen streven naar hun respectievelijk doel als een zaak des geloofs.'

12 B. Kroon, interview with Visser 't Hooft, IKOR Television, 5 December 1966, Sound and Vision Archives.

here were not truly representative for their church, he did not understand well enough what the consequences of that would be. He himself, because of his background, was not familiar with a truly hierarchical church and retained a deep mistrust of all church power that did not allow itself to be questioned.[13] But Willebrands was enthusiastic and told Visser 't Hooft that the Roman Catholics had kept on with the study of the *vestigia ecclesiae* and continued following the lines set out in the Toronto statement of the World Council. The theme 'Christ, the Hope of the World' of the next assembly of the World Council in Evanston in 1954 was also high on the Roman Catholic agenda. Yves Congar even wrote a paper on that topic, which Visser 't Hooft readily distributed. But he was disappointed in 1954 when, just as the bishop of Utrecht had done in 1948, the bishop of Chicago forbade Roman Catholics in a pastoral letter from attending the World Council assembly in Evanston, even in the capacity of 'church journalists'. A number of Roman Catholic observers attended the Faith and Order conference in Lund in 1952 on the basis of special instructions, however, thus setting a precedent. Visser 't Hooft stated: 'It is surprising to find that this letter makes no reference to the Vatican instruction and shows a serious lack of understanding of our true purposes.'[14]

In the meantime, a special personal bond developed between Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands. In his *Memoirs*, the general secretary described Willebrands as 'a man with deep convictions about our common ecumenical task and with a fine combination of vision and realism.'[15] That was special at a time when restorative thinking prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church. On 1 May 1954, the Bishops' Conference in the Netherlands presented a *mandement* 'De katholiek in het openbare leven van deze tijd' (The Catholic in Public Life at this Time). That was a pastoral work in which separation between religion and public life was rejected and the Roman Catholics were advised against membership of the Labour Party. But Visser 't Hooft was focused on every new opening that appeared on the part of the Roman Catholics. When the Belgian priest Gustave Thils published his *Histoire doctrinaire du mouvement oecuménique* in 1955, it was studied intensively in Geneva.

Visser 't Hooft wondered if valuable common ground could perhaps be found in Erasmus's thinking for dialogue with Roman Catholics. But he was

13 Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON Radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.

14 Visser 't Hooft, 'The General Secretary's Statement to the Evanston Assembly', 1954, quote on 82.

15 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 323.

disappointed. On 6 June 1955, he gave a lecture at the opening of the John Knox House in the Grand-Saconnex district in Geneva. The John Knox House was a hostel intended for students and other people interested in church unity and largely financed by the Presbyterian Church in Denver.[16] Visser 't Hooft claimed in this lecture that, in the early sixteenth century, Erasmus (1466-1536) thought that there were only a minimum number of elements that were indispensable for the church and argued that it would be better to leave people free regarding all other, non-essential elements of faith. But Visser 't Hooft called the unity based on this a unity of the smallest common denominator. In his view, Erasmus reduced the church to more or less the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of people. That was not enough for Visser 't Hooft, and he did not think Erasmus's thinking constituted an important contribution to ecumenicity in the twentieth century. Erasmus did not, in his mind, think enough in terms of the church, nor did he pay enough attention to personal faith. A more fundamental robustness could be expected from both Roman Catholicism and Calvinism than could be found in Erasmus. This problem recurred at the conference of the CCQE in Boulogne-sur-Seine near Paris, which took place from 1-4 August 1955. There they discussed the theme of how the *Corpus Christi*, the body of Christ, was related to the *Corpus Christianum*, Christendom in the broad sense of the word. The results were discussed in Geneva. Another theme in this period was the value of tradition as a source of revelation in addition to the Bible. Visser 't Hooft distanced himself from the Roman Catholic Dominican John de la Croix Kaelin, who stated that the church could the treasure of the Scriptures as a 'wonderful additional gift'.[17] Indeed, De la Croix Kaelin viewed the Bible as an indispensable source of faith but did not think that the church was subject to the authority of the Bible. It was the church, rather, that determined what the ancient texts meant. For Visser 't Hooft, this way of speaking about the Bible *par surcroît*, i.e., as 'extra' as far as he was concerned, was unacceptable. Other topics were the lordship of Christ, sin, and church institutionalism. Willebrands took up the themes that Visser 't Hooft offered him and was relieved of his position of rector at the Philosophicum in Warmond when he was appointed director of the Nederlands Oecumenisch Instituut (Dutch Ecumenical Institute).[18] At the

16 Visser 't Hooft, 'Our Ecumenical Task in the Light of History', 1955.

17 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Bible in an Ecumenical Setting', 1956, 45-51.

18 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 26 October 1956, WCC 994.1.13/3. Cf. Centre for the Study of Vatican II, KU Leuven, CSVII, Archive Willebrands; Declerck, *Inventaire des archives personnelles du cardinal J. Willebrands* (2013).

World Council, the German Lutheran minister Hans-Heinrich Harms began to advocate a more regular exchange of information with the CCQE. That led to an intensive Protestant-Catholic collaboration that was not publicised but was, according to Visser 't Hooft, 'though invisible very real'.[19] In the autumn of 1958, Willebrands was the first Roman Catholic to give a series of lectures at the Bossey ecumenical study centre. A joint study meeting was planned for 1960 in Assisi, where this until then secret Roman Catholic-Protestant dialogue would become clearly visible to the outside world.

But it continued to be a matter of walking on eggshells. Visser 't Hooft was happy that the World Council had continued to clearly distance itself from the 'super church' ideal holding a monopoly position: one society, with the *Corpus Christianum* as the ideal with one central church as institution as well. Church and state legitimated each other in such an arrangement, but that had become impossible in the twentieth century.[20] At the conference of the English Free Churches in Folkestone in 1958, he spoke critically in relation to this of large hierarchically structured churches. In this context, he referred to the Roman Catholic Church as an historical example of a power church that had not understood the simplicity of the Gospel and the attention of Christ for the gifts of individuals. Thus, he wanted to show that all churches in the World Council had their own historical reasons to resist the revival of a domineeringly large and powerful central international church body. But while he put the small English churches at ease, his words were not so well received in Rome. Yves Congar and C.-J. Dumont were shocked. Willebrands did his utmost to soften the negative effect of this speech but felt called to let Visser 't Hooft know how his words sounded to Roman Catholic ears.[21] Visser 't Hooft was shocked and deplored this effect. The contradictions in the two agendas did not, however, mean that he and his partner in ecumenicity, Willebrands, fell out.

8.5 Rhodes 1959: Rules of the Ecumenical Game Violated

In October 1958, the bishop of Venice, Giuseppe Angelo Roncalli (1881-1963), was elected pope, taking the name John XXIII. With respect to dogmatic views, the new prelate did not promote anything at his coronation that was especially innovative in any way. But he was a cheerful man with a

19 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 14 November 1955, WCC 994.1.13/3.

20 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Super-Church and the Ecumenical Movement', 1958.

21 Cf. Henn, 'Willebrands and the Relations between Rome and the WCC', 2012, especially 216.

forthcoming temperament, and he knew and appreciated the Nouvelle Théologie school. But for John XXIII, just like his predecessors, church unity meant a return to the Roman Catholic Church. Visser 't Hooft politely asked Willebrands if the church leaders in Rome wanted to be referred to in World Council documents as the Vatican or as the Holy See, given that the sign at UNESCO in Geneva had recently been changed into 'Saint Siège'. It was indeed the latter, according to Wildebrands; that was the official name. The anticlerical and communist press in Italy often spoke of *il Vaticano*.[22]

When the new pope suddenly announced on January 1959 that he was summoning an ecumenical council for the universal church, only a few people clearly understood right away what he meant.[23] Did John XXIII actually summon all churches to meet in Rome? Within a few days, it was clear that it concerned bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. The term *aggiornamento*, 'bringing up to date', initially referred only to a revision of the canon law from 1917. But there was much that was unclear. At the end of February 1959, in Geneva, Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands discussed what the World Council could expect from the council. When Visser 't Hooft asked how ecumenical this council would be, both in composition and in spirit, Willebrands did not know.

At the same time, Visser 't Hooft was preoccupied with the discussions about admitting the Eastern Orthodox churches to the World Council, and in August 1959, the yearly meeting of the central committee was thus held on the island of Rhodes, where further agreements with the Orthodox were made. Visser 't Hooft thought it would be a good idea to invite some Roman Catholics. Pater Dumont from Istina and Willebrands attended the meetings, formally as *journalistes accrédités* but actually as Roman Catholic observers, and the atmosphere was good. Then the media reported that Dumont and Willebrands had spoken separately with a group of Orthodox prelates on Rhodes without the knowledge of the World Council people. The impression that had been raised was that it was a bilateral ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox. A furious Visser 't Hooft burst out: 'I thought I had invited the two smartest Catholics, but I got the two stupidest!'[24] He became even angrier when Vatican Radio reported on 3 September 1959 that the Roman Catholic Church had invited the Orthodox to a conference in Rome, a report that was taken over by the Reuters news agency. The

22 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 8 January 1959, WCC 994.1.13/3.

23 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 15 February 1959, WCC 994.1.13/3.

24 Cf. Salemink, 'Willebrands' Diaries and Agendas 1958-1965', 2012, especially 82-89; quote on page 85.

accusation was now expressed in the central committee that the Roman Catholic Church was deliberately trying to draw the Orthodox churches away from the ecumenical process with Geneva.[25] Willebrands was shocked and said that it was all an unfortunate combination of circumstances. But he did not make a statement about the content of the meeting in the media.

Visser 't Hooft and Harms found that the rules for ecumenical relations had been violated, and the general secretary spoke of ecumenical amateurism on the part of the Roman Catholics. If Willebrands did not quickly and openly dissociate himself from the statements made by Vatican Radio, the relation of the World Council with the Roman Catholic 'ecumenists' would be threatened. Visser 't Hooft wrote to Willebrands in English:

> I do not for a moment deny the right and duty of the Roman Catholic Church to fulfil its function in the ecumenical realm according to its convictions. I only ask that when the Roman Catholic Church becomes ecumenically active it should do so in a way which does not worsen and confuse, but improve and clarify ecumenical relationships.[26]

Willebrands blamed the press, which, in his view, had made up the report of the Roman Catholic discussions with the Orthodox: no cardinal had ever authorised a press release, and the Protestant press had helped to spread untruths.[27] That was not at all what Visser 't Hooft wanted to hear. On 3 October 1959, he wrote angrily to Willebrands:

> I find your letter disappointing. That you assure me again that you alone had authorisation to attend our meeting does not take us any further. Obviously, this goes without saying. Also, that you tell me again that the report by Vatican Radio was not official or was semi-official is completely inadequate.[28]

25 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 9 September 1959, copy of an English letter on the occasion of reporting by Vatican Radio, 3 September, copy to various members of the central committee.
26 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 9 September 1959, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Ik wil geen ogenblik iets afdoen aan het recht en de plicht van de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk om haar functie op het vlak van de oecumene te vervullen overeenkomstig haar eigen overtuigingen. Ik vraag slechts of de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk, wanneer zij oecumenisch actief wordt, dit zou willen doen op een wijze die geen verslechtering en verwarring, doch verbetering en verheldering van oecumenische relaties brengt.'
27 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, (in French) from Rome, no date, but certainly after 15 September 1959, WCC 994.1.13/3.
28 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 3 October 1959, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Uw brief stelt me teleur. Dat u mij weer verzekert, dat U alleen een autorisatie had om onze zitting bij te wonen, helpt ons niet verder. Ik neem dat gaarne aan. Ook dat u mij weer zegt, dat de uitzending van radio Vaticaan niet officieel, of officieus was, is geheel onvoldoende.'

As far as Visser 't Hooft was concerned, it was a question of the ecumenical credibility of Willebrands. He demanded from Willebrands nothing less than a public rectification. He was personally convinced of Willebrands' good intentions, but he pointed out that he could easily be misunderstood in his own church.

The ecumenical study meeting that was to take place in the spring of 1960 in Assisi and was to be the culmination of joint efforts was now cancelled by the World Council. Staff member Hans Harms spoke of a price that the Roman Catholics now had to be prepared to pay. Willebrands viewed that as an expression that had originated in the world of secular power politics and was inappropriate for religious relations. The two Roman Catholics had been surprised on Rhodes by an innocent Eastern Orthodox invitation. When the press gave a wrong impression of what the meeting was about, the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox should have issued a joint statement immediately on the following day to clarify matters. But it was Visser 't Hooft himself who, after the first report, urgently requested the Roman Catholics not to speak to the press on pain of being sent away from the island. As a result, Dumont and Willebrands could not prevent Vatican Radio from broadcasting the disputed report on 3 September, thus strengthening the misunderstanding. Thus, as far as Willebrands was concerned, it was not a matter of paying a price but of restoring trust and, if necessary, forgiving the mistakes made out of good intentions. He sincerely hoped for a new beginning.[29] In various publications, he finally issued his report of the events on Rhodes that Visser 't Hooft could agree with.[30] Visser 't Hooft and the Dominican Dumont, author of the book *Approaches to Christian Unity*, were never reconciled.[31] Willebrands and Visser 't Hooft cleared the air in personal conversations in the spring of 1960, and their friendship recovered.[32] The Vatican took the incident to heart, and there would soon be better Roman Catholic co-ordination in the area of ecumenicity.

8.6 Two Dutchmen in Strategic Positions

In preparation for the Second Vatican Council, John XXIII founded the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity on 6 June 1960. It was under the direction

29 Willebrands to H.-H. Harms, 3 November 1959, WCC general correspondence 4201.2.2.

30 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 328 and 339. Willebrands, 'Naspel van Rhodos: Het gesprek van Orthodoxen en Katholieken', 1959. Idem, 'Vers l'Unité chrétienne', 1960.

31 Dumont, *Approaches to Christian Unity* (1959).

32 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 30 June 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3.

of a committee, with the German Jesuit Cardinal Augustin Bea as the head and Willebrands as secretary. The latter wrote excitedly to Visser 't Hooft: 'I hope to be able to do even more in this position for the ideal that I have received as a divine mission in my life.'[33] The Vatican now invited the World Council to send observers who could attend sessions of the council. As a consequence, there was reason enough already in the preparatory stage of the council to propose topics for discussion that were important in the ecumenical movement, such as the ecumenical movement itself, mixed (church) marriages, religious freedom, and the Jewish people. In August 1960, Willebrands was invited by Visser 't Hooft to be an observer at the meeting of Faith and Order, now a department of the World Council, and the executive committee in St. Andrews in Scotland. Here he heard that the leadership of the World Council was concerned that the possible formalisation of relations with the Roman Catholic Church at officially agreed upon levels could lead to compromises regarding content.[34] The question was also raised in St. Andrews as to whether the World Council could be a full dialogue partner of the Roman Catholic Church or whether that could be better left to the individual churches themselves in future encounters.[35] Visser 't Hooft argued for channelling such encounters via the World Council; any other course would certainly lead to delays, imbalance, and impractical obstructions. That the World Council was not a church could be seen as a disadvantage, but Visser 't Hooft saw it as an advantage because it did not presume to be a full church and thus did not need to be defended over against the Roman Catholic Church. Willebrands agreed with him.

On the eve of the council, in September 1960, Bea, Willebrands, and a few other Roman Catholic representatives had a meeting on the quiet with members of the central committee of the World Council in Milan, on behalf of the new Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.[36] The Old Testament scholar Bea and the strongly biblically oriented Visser 't Hooft got along immediately. This kind of situation brought out the strategic thinker and diplomat in Visser 't Hooft. He was proud that Willebrands and he, as two Dutchmen, had brought the encounters between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council to a higher level.

> It is nevertheless a remarkable instance of leadership that two Dutch people are in such special 'strategic' positions in the work for unity. And

33 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 4 July 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3.
34 Cf. Vischer, 'The Ecumenical Movement and the Roman Catholic Church', 1970, especially 327.
35 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 4 July 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3.
36 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 13 July 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3.

> there is reason to be very grateful for the fact that we understand each other well and, in my view, also try to be true Dutch people in the sense that we want to remain clear-headed for a good cause. I therefore expect that our collaboration will prove fruitful.[37]

As if he was nipping a new Rhodes incident in the bud, Bea emphasised in Milan that there was now a separate secretariat for contacts with the Orthodox churches. As head of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Bea would not concern himself at all with the Orthodox churches. In a somewhat mischievous way, Visser 't Hooft added a parenthetical note in his internal evaluation:

> My impression is that since Bea and Willebrands know how to deal with inter-church relations and the people of the Eastern Congregation are, to say the least, inexperienced and clumsy – the situation is that there will probably be more activity on the R.C.-Protestant front than on the R.C.-Orthodox front.[38]

Not churches but individual observers would be invited to the Vatican Council.

Visser 't Hooft was constantly wary of disappointment. Journalists regularly engaged in wild speculation about ecumenicity at this time. Shortly before that, eight French Roman Catholic bishops had met with 60 Protestant ministers in Taizé. According to Visser 't Hooft, it was incorrectly suggested that this was the first Roman Catholic-Protestant meeting in France to discuss the content of faith in four centuries. This kind of unrest caused by the press could lead to a great deal of damage and, Visser 't Hooft felt, had to be prevented wherever possible. When the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, visited Pope John XXIII in the autumn of 1960, Willebrands

37 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 15 July 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Het is toch een merkwaardige leiding, dat twee Nederlanders in zo bijzonder 'strategische' posities zijn in het werk voor de eenheid. En er is reden tot grote dankbaarheid, dat wij elkander goed verstaan en, naar ik meen, in dit opzicht ook echte Nederlanders proberen te zijn, dat we in ons werken voor de goede zaak nuchter willen blijven. Zo verwacht ik, dat onze samenwerking niet zonder vrucht zal blijven.' Cf. Visser 't Hooft, *Leren leven met de oecumene* (1968), 105: 'I said once that no one will ever be able to write the history of the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the ecumenical movement without first learning Dutch.' ('Ik heb wel eens gezegd, dat niemand ooit de geschiedenis zal kunnen schrijven van de betrekkingen tussen de rooms-katholieke kerk en de oecumenische beweging zonder eerst Nederlands te leren.'). Cf. Schelkens, 'Pioneers at the Crossroads', 2016.

38 Visser 't Hooft to F.C. Fry and E.A. Payne, personal, 3 October 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3.

cautiously informed Visser 't Hooft of this.[39] He warned that it had to be made clear in the reports that, although contacts were smooth, there was no consensus on substantial questions.[40]

On 12 November 1960, Visser 't Hooft discussed the soon to be held Council with the Archbishop of Freiburg im Breisgau, Hermann Schäufele. He shared the eight ecumenical points that he submitted to Schäufele with Willebrands in a memorandum. He thus attempted to influence the agenda of the council. Visser 't Hooft began the meeting with a request to the Roman Catholic Church to allow observers at the assembly in New Delhi the following year. Second, he raised the issue of religious freedom. Visser 't Hooft claimed that there were still countries where small Protestant minorities were treated like second-class citizens, such as Spain and Colombia. Third, he asked that attention be paid to the fact that there were almost no theological meetings outside Europe between Roman Catholics and members of other churches. Fourth, Schäufele and Visser 't Hooft discussed the possibility of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council perhaps presenting joints statements from time to time in the future. Fifth, Visser 't Hooft hoped that Rome would appoint itself co-organiser of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, for which Couturier had done so much. Sixth, a missionary strategy with respect to Islam was discussed, and, seventh, a possible joint action in the future with respect to bringing the Christian message through the media. The eighth and final point was the status of the non-Roman Catholic observers during the Second Vatican Council. The bishop expected that members of other churches would be able to contribute, but he warned that the expectations raised by the widely sold book by the Swiss theologian Hans Küng would not be fulfilled.[41] But Visser 't Hooft was satisfied: 'At the end of the interview he spoke of the great desire of the Pope to create a new atmosphere between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches and said: "We must help the Pope".[42]

Willebrands was able to tell Visser 't Hooft halfway through January 1961 that, during his visit to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, John XXIII had said that unity among Christians had a high priority for him. For Willebrands himself, it was clear that the desire for this unity was actually the pope's most important reason for convening the council, and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity could play a major role in this

39 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft. 31 October 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3.
40 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 3 November 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3.
41 Küng, *Konzil und Wiedervereinigung* (1960).
42 Memorandum Visser 't Hooft, 14 November 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3.

context.[43] There was room for initiatives with various parts of the agenda that touched on unity, such as the role of bishops and the status of non-Roman Catholics. Observers would be welcome not only in the public and plenary meetings but also in the workgroups where a real discussion was intended to take place. As far as the guests were concerned, they had primarily professors or office-bearers from other churches in mind, but not bishops since that would be too complicated from the point of view of protocol. For Protestants, this would probably not entail too many problems. It was indeed a disappointment that the Holy Office did not permit Roman Catholic observers at the World Council assembly in New Delhi in 1961. Bea and Willebrands successfully protested against that decision.[44] The pope did then give permission, but only on condition that no members of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity would attend. Visser 't Hooft thought it was a great shame that Willebrands himself, one of the Roman Catholics who knew the most about the World Council, could not be one of the observers in India.[45] According to Willebrands, the reason for this was the fact that members of the Curia felt passed over by Bea's secretariat. Willebrands and Visser 't Hooft discussed this question in Geneva in confidence.[46]

Willebrands admired what Visser 't Hooft had achieved in getting the Russian Orthodox Church to join the World Council.[47] Just like the Greek Orthodox, the Russians initially decided not to send any observers to the Second Vatican Council. But Visser 't Hooft intervened, and they decided to do so after all.[48] After some bickering, it was determined that Archpriest Vitaly Borovoy and Vladimir Katliarov could attend as observers. Borovoy, who became a member of the central committee after the Russian Orthodox joined the World Council in 1961, informed Willebrands that it would be better to approach the Moscow Patriarchate directly and not via Constantinople. More could be achieved perhaps when sensitivities were respected, as happened previously in the World Council under Visser 't Hooft's leadership, and could now quickly lead to a normalisation of the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Russia. The liberation of the

43 Notes conversation Visser 't Hooft and Mgr. Willebrands, 18 January 1961, WCC 994.1.13/3.

44 Visser 't Hooft, Personal and confidential memorandum concerning conversation with Willebrands in Geneva, 5 August 1961, WCC 994.1.13/3.

45 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 31 July 1961, WCC 994.1.13/3.

46 Handwritten notes by Visser 't Hooft on Willebrands' visit to Geneva, personal and confidential, 5 August 1961, WCC 994.1.13/3.

47 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 28 April 1961, WCC 994.1.13/3.

48 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 12 July 1962 and Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 20 September 1962, WCC 994.1.13/3.

Roman Catholic Metropolitan Joseph Slipyi from the Soviet Union in 1963 was celebrated by the Vatican as a breakthrough in stalled relations. The Council refrained from statements about communism, as was common practice at the World Council. Willebrands had undoubtedly learned the art of quiet diplomacy from Visser 't Hooft.

8.7 Vatican II: 'Nostra Res Agitur'

Until shortly before the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, Visser 't Hooft did not know what the agenda was nor what the working method of the council would be. Willebrands was unable to enlighten him any further. One of the concrete, often occurring and pressing issues that Visser 't Hooft would have liked to have seen discussed at the council was that of religiously mixed marriages. The World Council produced a memorandum about this problem, which Visser 't Hooft sent to Willebrands.[49] The latter was himself uncertain if the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity would succeed in getting the point of mixed marriages on the agenda. The memorandum argued for the universal and unconditional recognition of the validity of marriages solemnised religiously between two Christians, even if they were from two different churches. It was stated that the specific Roman Catholic conditions that Roman Catholics adhered to with respect to marriage did not as such imply that mixed marriages were inferior by definition. Other churches could accept that the Roman Catholic Church viewed marriage between two baptised members of the Roman Catholic Church as a sacrament. But it was also stated that the Roman Catholic Church *de facto* did recognise marriage between two baptised non-Roman Catholic Christians as valid. After all, civil marriage, not just religiously blessed marriage, was also recognised by the Roman Catholic Church, albeit as a valid 'contract' between two people. The Roman Catholic Church held that, even if a marriage had not been solemnised in church, divorced people could not enter into a religious marriage with someone else if their spouse from the civil marriage was still alive. The rhetorical question was now posed almost in the form of a syllogism as to whether a marriage between two Protestants or a mixed religious marriage between a Roman Catholic and a Protestant was truly a marriage.

This argument by the World Council came down to a quest for maximum reciprocity. Visser 't Hooft felt that the churches should stimulate

49 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 'Some considerations on mixed marriages', 1 August 1960, WCC 994.1.13/3.

the marriage partners' respect for one another's life principles. On this point, an appeal was made to human rights as not being in conflict with the principles of the Roman Catholic canon law, which declares that no one should be pressured into accepting the Roman Catholic faith against their will. A Roman Catholic person should not be encouraged by his or her church to convert his or her spouse while the opposite was completely forbidden. The Roman Catholic requirement that the children be brought up Catholic was in fact a direct threat to the parental power of the non-Catholic partner and also impeded the freedom of the child. The ecumenical spirit of mixed-marriage parents needed to be strengthened. The children should never become an issue in a religiously nurtured conflict between the spouses.

Although Willebrands had to disappoint Visser 't Hooft initially, a critical Roman Catholic reflection was initiated, and mixed marriages were thoroughly discussed during the Council. Visser 't Hooft did understand that the council could not simply contravene canon law on this issue. 'With regard to mixed marriages the difficulty is that little can be done without a full revision of the Codex. The council cannot do this. All that may be done is to give greater latitude for local decisions.'[50] But he hoped that intervention by the World Council would enable the Catholic Church leaders to see that this was a major pastoral problem.

John XXIII used the apostolic constitution *Humanae salutis* to announce, during Christmas 1961, that the council would convene in the spring of 1962 and that observers from churches that had split from Rome were welcome. Not much more than that was clear at the time.[51] In January 1962 Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands discussed what the specific status of the observers would be during the council and in what ways they could participate. Would they actually be permitted to attend non-public sessions? They would not have the right to speak during the meetings but would be permitted to speak in the corridors. Spontaneous questions would be allowed during separate informative meetings. Willebrands expected a maximum of 25 Protestant observers to be invited, but no church leaders. The World Council itself would also be requested to send an observer. Visser 't Hooft was permitted to draw up a list, but the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity could object.

Aside from mixed marriages, the World Council finally did manage to place, via the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, the issues of religious

50 Visser 't Hooft, Conversation with Mgr Willebrands (Confidential), 19 March 1963, WCC 994.1.13/3.

51 Visser 't Hooft, Memorandum gesprek Willebrands-Visser 't Hooft, 3 January 1962, WCC 994.1.13/3.

freedom for small minorities and joint participation in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on the council agenda. On 3 April 1962 in Geneva, at the invitation of the World Council, Willebrands was given the opportunity to explain to the secretaries of the confessional world organisations just what the intention was by having observers. The Baptist World Alliance was the only one to respond to the invitation to send an observer. Keeping the organisation of the council in mind, Willebrands asked Visser 't Hooft for the programme booklet with the files used to organise the plenary discussions during the assembly in New Delhi.[52] Thus, the Roman Catholics also made practical use of a method employed by the World Council.

During the meetings of the central committee of the World Council in Paris in August 1962, Visser 't Hooft did express his concern about the space for true dialogue with the Roman Catholics, but he also pointed out the unique opportunity for church unity here: 'Nostra res agitur': it is our business they are discussing here.[53] In other words: We must be present; this has to do with us; we cannot stay away.[54] On 31 August 1962, Aad van Dulst interviewed Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands in Paris about the council for the Hilversum 2 programme 'Wijd als de wereld' (As Wide as the World). Van Dulst asked: 'Monseigneur Willebrands. Is it not also because of this development, the almost total entry of the Eastern Orthodox churches into the World Council, that the attention of the Vatican also became more centrally focused on the World Council?' Willebrands was forced to admit he was right. His rather verbose reply clearly reveals the ambivalent nature of his aim:

> Since the Orthodox world is now present in the vast majority of its members and member churches in the World Council, the World Council has

52 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 17 March 1962, WCC 994.1.13/3.

53 In Horace, *Epistolae* I, 18.84. See also: 9.10. Cf. interview with Visser 't Hooft, in: 'De onverwachte bloei' (Unexpected Blossoming), KRO Radio programme, 20 June1962, Sound and Vision Archives. Visser 't Hooft: 'We are not so naive as to think that there will suddenly be major sensational changes, that within a short period of time there will be sudden changes between the Roman Catholic Church and any other churches. … What we wonder is this: Will this council create a true opportunity for a dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the other churches?' ('Wij zijn niet zo naïef om te denken dat er opeens grote sensationele veranderingen zullen komen, dat er opeens in korte tijd kerkherenigingen zullen komen tussen de Rooms-Katholieke kerk en enige andere kerken. […] Wat wij ons afvragen is dit: Wordt op dit concilie een werkelijke mogelijkheid geschapen tot een dialoog tussen de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk en de andere kerken?') The encyclical *Aeterni dei sapientia* of 11 November 1961 appeared to be a continuation of the monologue.

54 Visser 't Hooft, 'Report of the General Secretary to the Central Committee', August 1962, WCC 994.2.18/29.

> without a doubt become a centre of ecumenical activity that more or less encapsulates all others and can determine a specific orientation, and, for us especially, that's the most important centre of this work. What we see as seeking to build up the unity of all Christians in the church of Christ, even though we differ from other churches on this ecclesiologically and thus also from the member churches of the World Council, we do not differ to the same degree with regard to the ideal and with regard to the submission required from each of us individually and as a community in order to work in this direction.[55]

It was a time of euphoria. During this phase, neither Willebrands nor Visser 't Hooft wished to acknowledge the paradox of the ideal. Both wanted to entrust the discrepancies between their agendas to God. They also believed that, by winning each other's trust, sharp contrasts would disappear as a matter of course. The evening before the council, the members of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the leaders of the World Council shared their concerns about secularisation and the major issues of the time and spent some time together. Good will was present everywhere. The churches were delighted by the media's increasing attention. Visser 't Hooft was aware of this and was very careful, working towards careful coordination with his Roman Catholic discussion partner. When he collaborated on a broadcast about the council by the Dutch Katholieke Radio Omroep (KRO, Catholic Radio Broadcasting) and by an Italian radio programme a few months prior to the council, he informed Willebrands of this beforehand. He stated that he would speak freely about delicate issues such as mixed marriage and religious freedom. Willebrands replied that this was not a problem but did warn that it must not appear as though the World Council was making demands of the Second Vatican Council: 'A consequence of this could be that it appears as if you are evoking a reaction against those who are most willing

55 Transcript of Wijd als de Wereld, radio programme Hilversum 2, under the supervision of Aad van Dulst, Paris, 31 August 1962, WCC 994.2.18/30: 'Nu de orthodoxe wereld in de overgrote meerderheid van haar leden en ledenkerken in de Wereldraad aanwezig is, is de Wereldraad ongetwijfeld een centrum van oecumenische activiteit, dat alle andere min of meer samenvat en een bepaalde oriëntatierichting bepalen kan, en dat voor ons zeker het belangrijkste centrum van dit werk is. Wat wij zien als met ons zoekende om de eenheid van alle christenen in de kerk van Christus op te bouwen, ofschoon wij daarover ecclesiologisch verschillen met andere kerken, dus ook met de ledenkerken van de Wereldraad, verschillen wij niet in dezelfde mate omtrent het ideaal en omtrent de overgave die gesteld is aan ieder van ons en aan ons als gemeenschap, om in deze richting te werken.' Cf. *Trouw*, 1 September 1962, and *Amersfoortse Courant*, 1 September 1962, WCC 994.1.35/2.

to agree with your positions.'[56] There was yet another incident in the summer of 1962. According to a press release in the *Osservatore Romano*, Visser 't Hooft had been publicly critical of the Vatican. Willebrands had responded unperturbed: 'We are of the opinion … that the emphasis in ecumenism lies on level of pastoral work first of all and that it should not be defined as a dogmatic movement, even though naturally there are a few theological principles that can be indicated and part of our pastoral scheme.'[57] He felt he was supported in this approach by no one less than the pope himself.[58]

On 12 October 1962, John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome with 2540 bishops from around the world in attendance. The young Reformed staff member Lukas Vischer (1926-2008) from Bern who, like delegates from various member churches, was present as an observer on behalf of the World Council, believed the pope's address was 'a turning point.'[59] It was as though a door had been opened to other churches. By giving the council room, where necessary, to reformulate the legacy of faith, it was possible to use inclusive language. Although the observers had been told to keep their distance, they were constantly conversing informally with members of the Secretariat. Vischer felt that the freedom of the observers grew as the council progressed. After a month, Willebrands reported to Visser 't Hooft that he was very satisfied with the observers' contribution and thanked him for his investment in the preparatory process, which made this possible.[60]

In January 1963, Visser 't Hooft himself was a guest of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, where he was received by Bea and Willebrands. Bea was also enthusiastic about the observers and spoke of a new era in relations between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches.[61] Once again, Visser 't Hooft was very impressed by Bea: he appeared to have a personal influence on the council and was open-minded. With respect to ecumenicity, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity was able to play

56 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 4 July 1962, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Als gevolg daarvan zou het gevaar kunnen ontstaan dat u een reactie oproept tegen degenen die het verste met uw standpunten willen meegaan.'

57 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 19 July 1962, WCC 994.1.13/3.

58 Visser 't Hooft, Memorandum, 11 August 1962, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Wij zijn 'van mening […] dat het oecumenisme in de eerste plaats op het vlak van de pastoraal ligt en dat het zich als beweging dogmatisch niet laat definiëren, ofschoon natuurlijk enkele theologische principepen zijn aan te geven, welke ook in ons pastorale schema niet ontbreken.'

59 Vischer, 'The Ecumenical Movement and the Roman Catholic Church', 1970, 330.

60 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 16 November 1962, WCC 994.1.13/3.

61 Visser 't Hooft, Memorandum visit to Rome, 8 January 1963, WCC 994.1.13/3.

an increasingly important role during the council. It had a major voice in the final results of the special commission on ecumenicity. Initially erected as a temporary body, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, was reorganised, and Visser 't Hooft was glad to hear that it would certainly be given a permanent place in the organisation of the Roman Catholic Church after the council. But Bea needed to be careful. If a curia cardinal became the chair of the secretariat, it could lose its relative independence. Bea told Visser 't Hooft that this was why that it should not become a congregation. During this encounter, Visser 't Hooft proposed establishing a permanent group of Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic theologians who could publish reports jointly on theological issues after the council.

Cardinal Bea might have been an extraordinarily wise man in Visser 't Hooft's eyes, but the so-called agapè meetings organised for students of all religions in Italy and the United States of America by the Pro Deo University and which Bea assisted in arranging were not well received at all by the leaders of the World Council. Visser 't Hooft felt he had to protest against the use of the word agapè in this context. The altruistic and self-giving love was a fundamental Christian term from the New Testament, but Bea's meetings were open to all. Visser 't Hooft saw a dangerous syncretism in this and warned the Roman Catholics not to relativise everything that was outside their church by generalising about it. This would place the honest intentions of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in a bad light. Visser 't Hooft wrote:

> We would encounter great difficulties if the impression arose that we are actually seeking a 'broader' ecumenicity that involved all religions. This would be very dangerous in America, in particular, with its syncretistic schools. We therefore sincerely hope that your secretariat will make a very clear distinction between Christocentric unity and these more general religious meetings.[62]

Willebrands defended Bea by pointing out that the agapè meetings had existed for a very long time already and that Bea had only given a speech in a personal capacity on the importance of religious freedom. That personal

62 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 18 February 1963, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Wij zouden grote moeilijkheden krijgen, wanneer de indruk ontstaat, dat we eigenlijk een zogenaamd 'breder' oecumenisme zoeken, waarbij het gaat om alle godsdiensten. Vooral in Amerika met zijn syncretistische stromingen is dit uiterst gevaarlijk. Wij hopen daarom zeer, dat er door Uw secretariaat een uiterst duidelijk onderscheid gemaakt zal worden tussen de Christocentrische eenheid en deze meer algemene religieuze bijeenkomsten.'

speech had attracted great interest. According to Willebrands, Visser 't Hooft need not worry. Roman Catholics were perfectly capable of distinguishing between Christian unity and the relationship with other religions.[63] In this response, Willebrands gave voice to an important difference in emphasis with Visser 't Hooft with respect to the attitude towards other traditions. Because the Roman Catholic Church considered itself to be the complete, true church, everyone outside it merited the church's attention. Outside of church services, Bea could discuss and work with adherents of other religions just as easily as he could with Protestants and the Orthodox. Visser 't Hooft could not do so and felt this approach was naive.

Visser 't Hooft regarded the above-mentioned Faith and Order conference in Montreal in 1963 as a Protestant counterpart of the Second Vatican Council, primarily because it took place at the same time.[64] The concept of the church was high on the agenda. In fact, the Second Vatican Council set the ecumenical debate on ecclesiology promoted in the World Council alight. New relevance was given to everything because of what happened in Rome. A reorientation took place, with a revaluation of the concept of church paired with a debate on the exegetical value of the tradition. The awareness grew more than ever that the question of how the Bible was read also depended on one's tradition and that therefore no standard could be declared to be absolute. The Roman Catholic cardinal Paul-Émile Léger from Montreal was invited as a guest and was welcomed by Visser 't Hooft to address the participants – a minor ecumenical breakthrough. The well-known American Roman Catholic exegete Raymond E. Brown was one of those invited to speak. The fact that the Protestants appeared to have overcome their trepidation of tradition as a source of revelation of God's salvation in addition to the Bible affected the resumption of the discussion in the Vatican Council and led in the end to the working document *De divina revelatione* (Divine revelation). But Visser 't Hooft was disappointed in the result: a great deal of discussion but no consensus and no substantial advance in understanding tradition as far as rapprochement with Rome was concerned.

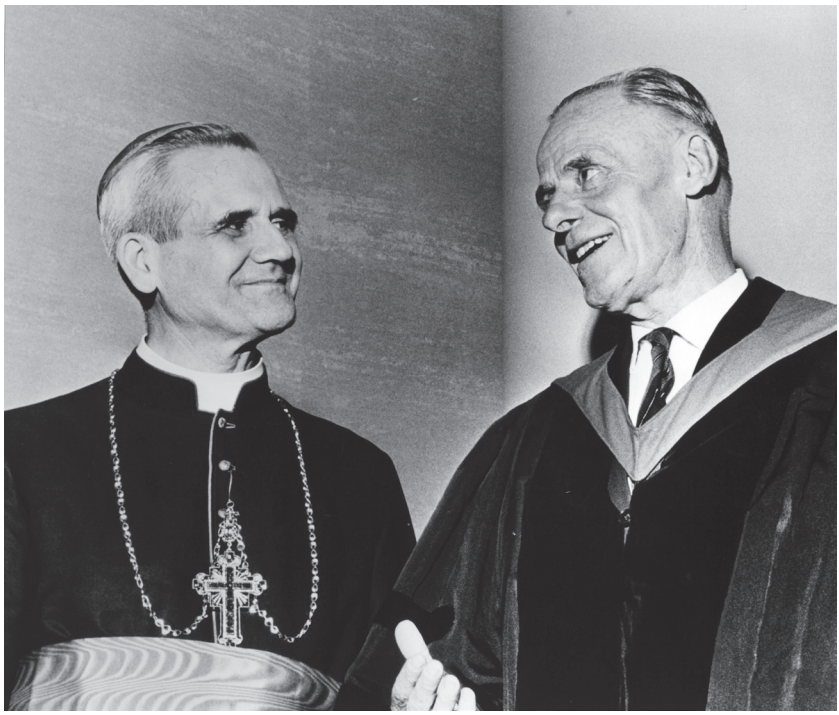
8.8 The Continuous Efforts at Mutual Convincing

John XXIII died suddenly shortly after Pentecost 1963. Visser 't Hooft remembered him as the pope of the new dialogue: 'I am certain that

63 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 1 March 1963, WCC 994.1.13/3.

64 Visser 't Hooft, 'The General Ecumenical Development since 1948', 1970, especially 7.

Figure 51 With the Roman Catholic Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger of Montreal, during the Faith and Order Conference of 1963



people will remember John XXIII as the pope who made new dialogue possible.'[65] He was succeeded in June of the same year by Giovanni Battista Montini (1897-1978) as Pope Paul VI, who opened the second session of the council. Roman Catholic ecclesiology increasingly took central place. Other churches and religions around it were viewed in terms of their being closer to or further from the centre, with the result that ecumenical reflection became fragmented. Visser 't Hooft was concerned. After the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* was published with high expectations in August 1964, Visser 't Hooft indicated that the emphasis on the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches would have to be built up gradually in the coming years. In his opinion, no one should expect a

65 Visser 't Hooft, Response to the death of John XXIII, June 1962. WCC 994.2.19/13. 'J'ai la certitude que l'on se souviendra du pape Jean XXIII comme du pape qui a rendu possible ce dialogue nouveau.'

major step forwards towards unity between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches.[66]

Also Pope Paul VI was cautious. When Martin Niemöller sought an audience in the autumn of 1963, the pope compared the ecumenical developments with the contours of a Gothic church window and said: 'There is something growing in the non-Roman churches and there is something growing in the R.C. Church. We must hope that as in a Gothic window there will be a meeting-point in the top.'[67] Willebrands' continuing faith in this became apparent when the new pope made a pilgrimage to the holy places in Israel in January 1964. Willebrands was allowed to accompany him. He wrote a letter to Visser 't Hooft from Jerusalem, personally expressing his confidence in him.

> I have seldom felt so connected with others as I do with you because of the openness and confidence inherent in this connection not only in moments when joy in the Holy Spirit prevailed due to a favourable development, but under circumstances in which the difficulties inherent to the ecumenical work or caused by the spirit of lies and division made themselves felt so very strongly.[68]

During the years when the Vatican Council was meeting, a personal friendship developed between Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands that could withstand a jolt or two – and there were such times. Early in 1964, a new incident arose with the press when American newspapers reported that there were preparations in Rome for establishing a 'pan-Christian bureau'. This new body would allow all churches to acknowledge the pope as *primus inter pares* and accept him as the spokesperson for Christianity in decisive ethical world issues. Irritated, Visser 't Hooft wrote to Willebrands: 'I cannot think what is behind all of this. However, it appears as if there is a group that intends to use the situation created by the council and Jerusalem trip so that Rome becomes the centre of ecumenical initiative.'[69] The general

66 Visser 't Hooft, 'Statement on Ecclesiam Suam', 11 August 1964, WCC 994.2.19/40.

67 Visser 't Hooft, Memorandum gesprek met M. Niemöller, 16 October 1963, WCC 994.1.13/3.

68 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, Jerusalem, 4 January 1964, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Met weinigen echter heb ik mij zo verbonden gevoeld als met U, wegens de openheid en het vertrouwen welke deze verbondenheid eigen waren niet alleen in ogenblikken waarin vreugde in de H. Geest wegens een gunstige ontwikkeling overheerste, maar ook in omstandigheden, waarin de moeilijkheden eigen aan het oecumenisch werk of veroorzaakt door de geest van leugen en verdeeldheid, zich met alle kracht deden gevoelen.'

69 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 5 February 1964, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Nu weet ik niet, wat hier allemaal achter zit. Maar het ziet ernaar uit, of er een groep is, die plannen aan het maken is om

secretary warned that such an initiative would be counter-productive. By showcasing the leadership of the pope in such a manner, Rome would cause a 'showdown' and everything that had been built up over the past years would collapse. He requested Willebrands to have the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity warn those concerned that they would be destroying more than they would be building.

It was precisely at this time that Willebrands was working on the final editing of the important council documents *De oecumenismo* and *De libertate religiosa*. He believed this was being done in an ecumenical yet realistic atmosphere without any vague optimism: 'In our work, we have studied the comments of the observers and the writings of the World Council and taken them seriously into account.'[70] In Willebrands's eyes, a so-called 'pan-Christian bureau' was being established in Rome. He himself could not trace the various statements back to a common source, policy, or group. It was possible that the journalists had misunderstood the fact that, as had already been planned, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity would now become a permanent body, alongside a similar secretariat for non-Christian religions. Certain ideas had probably been worded awkwardly. Willebrands could not deny that there were people in Rome who would prefer to see the heart of the ecumenical movement shift to Rome. He could understand that Visser 't Hooft was upset but saw no opportunity for silencing those voices. There would always be people with illusions. He felt that Visser 't Hooft should not forget that they could also come up with ideas at times 'that might be useful or important to us.' Time and again, interpretations were given in the media in 1964 in which the Second Vatican Council was presented as a prelude to an imminent shift in ecumenicity. Visser 't Hooft was annoyed and was constantly tempering expectations. In his view, Geneva was not shifting to Rome. Speaking on German radio, he spoke about the World Council as a helpful instrument for unity among churches worldwide and not as an ecclesial centre of power in Geneva. The World Council was a valuable 'line of communication' that would only disappear in its current form once the unity of the church had been accomplished.[71]

de door Concilie en Jerusalem-reis geschapen situatie zo te gebruiken, dat Rome het centrum van oecumenisch initiatief wordt.'

70 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 21 February 1963, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Wij hebben bij ons werk ook de bemerkingen van de waarnemers en het schrijven van de Wereldraad bestudeerd, en daarmee ernstig rekening gehouden.'

71 Visser 't Hooft, 'Genève tussen Constantinopel en Rome. Radiotoespraak voor de Norddeutsche Rundfunk' (1964), in: idem, *Heel de kerk voor heel de wereld* (1968). Quote, 442.

But such overstrained messages began to have a negative affect on the relations with the Roman Catholic Church. The air was cleared, however, during a new encounter in Milan on 15 April 1964 on the draft decree of the Second Vatican Council on ecumenism. Visser 't Hooft and Vischer were able to reach agreement with, among others, Bea and Willebrands about the establishment of the Joint Working Group (JWG). This permanent collaborative venture by the World Council and the Vatican would allow for the study of and elaboration on theological issues and practical collaboration. The member churches of the World Council were consulted on this in the summer of 1964. Lukas Vischer was still the official representative of the World Council at the council. That summer he wrote a 'Working paper on the basis of cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church'. It was a promotional document that valued the Roman Catholic Church as a full partner in the search for the unity the World Council was seeking. It did not deny that the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council were not equals. This was precisely what made this collaboration unique. The main question concerned the extent to which the Roman Catholic Church would be able to participate in the activities of the World Council. In Vischer's working paper, 'equality in dialogue' among the churches was an essential principle.

In the session on 21 November 1964, the Second Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism called *Unitatis redintegratio* was accepted by an overwhelming majority. The most striking aspect of the document was a renewed ecclesiological approach. The focus now lay on the fundamental unity of Christians as the people of God and on pastoral attention for 'brethren separated from the church'. A warning was issued against 'irenicism', i.e., the search for peace simply for the sake of peace without consideration for the truth and thus with no consideration for the various barriers that existed between the Roman Catholic Church and the others. In 1965, in a speech that he gave in the United States, Visser 't Hooft stated that the Roman Catholic Church continued to believe that the sole true religion could only be found in the Roman Catholic Church; at the same time, however, the Second Vatican Council's statement on religious freedom was accepted. He felt that this belief was paradoxical, difficult to understand in the light of the ecumenical involvement of the Roman Catholic Church that was professed in the Vatican Council's ecumenical decree. According to the general secretary, one fact would remain: 'We simply cannot help but attempt to convince one another.'[72]

72 Visser 't Hooft, 'Pluralisme – Een kans of een gevaar?', 1965. Quote, 29: 'Wij kunnen eenvoudig niet anders dan trachten elkander te overtuigen.'

Although Visser 't Hooft remained cautious in public, he personally continued to expect much from the ongoing theological discussions. The scandal of the division of the churches undermined the credibility of the church's witness in evangelisation and mission. That was easily apparent. It was necessary to demonstrate that, fundamentally, the ecumenical movement was not a movement of restoration but one of renewal. When discussing major social issues, the churches should not hesitate to assume joint political responsibility; the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity would soon be able to initiate permanent forms of contact with the World Council through the Joint Working Group.

A new era had begun. Visser 't Hooft believed that, with the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church was abandoning for good the notion of the *Corpus Christianum*. The advocates of the view that the church's task was to defend a collective Christian culture, widely present in the 1950s, had become a minority. He saw positive results in this context in the area of religious freedom. The church had let go of the desire for temporal power.

> [The Roman Catholic Church] accepts the new world that the Protestant and Orthodox churches have already to a certain extent adopted in principle, although by no means sufficiently. In this framework all European churches must clearly and unequivocally distance themselves from all privilege. But if we then state that we have waived all privilege, then we have the right to demand complete freedom of action and witness![73]

The central committee adopted the proposal to establish the Joint Working Group, with eight members from the World Council and six Roman Catholics, in Enugu, Nigeria in 1965. Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands, who was now a bishop, would be co-chairs. In February 1965, Visser 't Hooft welcomed Cardinal Bea during the first official visit by a Roman Catholic cardinal to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva in a euphoric mood.[74] Cardinal Bea declared solemnly: 'Blessed are the peacemakers' and Visser 't Hooft spoke of the most important

73 Visser 't Hooft, 'Christenen in de volkerenwereld,' 1964. Idem, *Heel de kerk voor heel de wereld. Balans van de oecumene* (1968), quote on 12: '[De Rooms-Katholieke Kerk] accepteert integendeel de nieuwe wereld die de protestantse en de orthodoxe kerken tot op zekere hoogte principieel, hoewel geenszins in voldoende mate, reeds hebben aangenomen. In dit kader moeten alle Europese kerken duidelijk en ondubbelzinnig van alle privileges afstand doen. Maar wanneer wij dan verklaren van alle voorrechten af te zien, dan hebben wij daartegenover het recht, volledig vrijheid van handelen en getuigen te eisen!'

74 Report of the reception of A. Bea at the World Council, B. Kroon, KRO Television, 20 February 1965. See also: Kenmerk, IKOR Television, 1 March 1965. Sound and Vision Archives.

Figure 52 With Cardinal Augustin Bea, president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and Marc Boegner, president of the Fédération Protestante de France, Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, February 1965



moment since the Reformation. For a very brief moment, it appeared as though there had been a breakthrough. The JWG met twice annually and was regarded as the core of an alliance that could do nothing but grow. The basis was to be found in the concluding documents of the Second Vatican Council, which had now appeared in their definitive form. In reality, however, the JWG became more of a study group than a negotiating body, action group, or a group leading the way to Roman Catholic membership in the World Council.[75]

In the final month prior to the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, in November 1965, Visser 't Hooft himself was able to attend a session with Willebrands. Willebrands escorted him in without a pass and, much to the surprise of the observers in the galleries, he suddenly appeared and wandered through St. Peter's Basilica. He was very impressed and once again uttered the historic words 'nostra res hic agitur'.[76] At the close of the council, the pope

75 Cf. Willebrands, in: Confidential draft ninth meeting, Gwatt, Switzerland, 12-17 May 1969, 3, WCC 4201.4.

76 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 335. Interview by L. Pagano and G. Sonder with J. Willebrands, Magazine, AVRO Radio, 17 August 1980, Sound and Vision Archives.

lifted the excommunication of the Orthodox Church that was pronounced in 1054, a statement that Willebrands, as the leading executor of the Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism, was permitted to read. An end had come to more than 900 years of anathema and the centre point of the schism that had torn Eastern and Western Christianity apart. Ecumenical bodies at a national level recommended important policy priorities and the Roman Catholic recognition of baptism in other churches. When the Second Vatican Council was concluded on 8 December 1965, after four sessions that took place in the autumn and each of which lasted for months, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity was given definitive status, allowing it to promote the Vatican's relationships with other churches at a structural level. Looking back on 1965, Visser 't Hooft determined that the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of itself as the people of God had changed, with much less emphasis on the institution. Its attitude towards other churches had also changed, and this appeared to create new possibilities for true dialogue. Renewal in one church influenced other churches. Yet Visser 't Hooft quoted a World Council staff member as saying: 'The glaciers are melting but the Alps remain.'[77]

Optimism prevailed nevertheless. In January 1966, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was established as an annual activity for the Roman Catholic Church. The impression that a new era had truly arrived was strengthened when, on 18 March 1966, the papal instruction *Magnum matrimonii sacramentum* was published, which discussed the new view of the Roman Catholic Church on mixed marriage. But, even though marriage between a Roman Catholic and a Protestant would now be recognised as valid if requested, the marriage of a Roman Catholic to a person who was not baptised remained invalid as a church marriage, according to Roman Catholic canon law. Visser 't Hooft was hopeful about other improvements in general. In his opening speech at the World Council conference on church and society in Geneva in the summer of 1966, he expressed his expectation that, with respect to urgent social issues, the participants would be able to find 'a common language' that could 'be spoken by the churches of the World Council *and* by the Roman Catholic Church.'[78] Willebrands acknowledged the importance of this conference by stating that it was in agreement with the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* of December 1965, as two examples of how the churches were occupied with 'restoring the contact with people and their world.'[79]

77 Visser 't Hooft, in: Terugblik 1965, NCRV Radio, 29 December 1965, Sound and Vision Archives.
78 Ibid., 48.
79 Willebrands, 'Address given to the European Circle for Evangelical Information', no date, WCC 4201, Joint Working Group.

Figure 53 Visser 't Hooft was an enthusiastic swimmer



During the meeting of the central committee in Enugu, Nigeria, in 1965, he and the Dominican Jean Jérome Hamer, then secretary of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, took a dip with the local youth.

The fervour slowly waned after Visser 't Hooft's retirement in 1966, however. Willebrands called repeatedly for patience. Upon his own departure from the Joint Working Group in 1969, when he succeeded Bea as the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and his becoming a member of the curia as a cardinal, Willebrands described the JWG as 'an observatory rather than a body empowered to give directives.'[80] Visser 't Hooft would never have said that. On 25 September 1966, Bea and Visser 't Hooft together received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in St Paul's Church in Frankfurt am Main, and this became an occasion for Visser 't Hooft to give a speech of thanks with a passionate plea for the solidarity of Christians with humanity.[81] The legal scholar and CDU politician professor Paul Mikat pronounced the *laudatio*, which acknowledged the relationship of God with humans as the

80 Willebrands, 'The Relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to the World Council of Churches 1965-1969' (1969).

81 Visser 't Hooft, 'Solidariteit van de christenen met de mensheid' (1966), in: idem, *Heel de kerk voor heel de wereld* (1968), 50-53, and Bea and Visser 't Hooft, *Ansprachen Anlässlich der Verleihung des Friendenspreises des deutschen Buchhandels* (1966).

Figure 54 At the presentation of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, Frankfurt, September, 1966



basis for solidarity between humans. Both the task and the possibility of viewing one another as humans came from God. Any form of syncretism was rejected, and this was entirely in line with Visser 't Hooft's thinking.[82] Mikat had paid good attention to him.

82 Mikat, 'Laudatio', 1966.

8.9 The Papal Visit 1969: 'Mon nom est Pierre'

A comparison of the report by the Protestant Lukas Vischer, the most important observer for the World Council during the Second Vatican Council, with the study by the Roman Catholic W. Henn shows them to be completely different.[83] Vischer's frustration can be heard in every sentence. In contrast, W. Henn sees mainly positive developments and is full of praise for Willebrands's contribution. Visser 't Hooft never had exaggerated expectations, but he was still disappointed. In May 1969, a special committee of the Joint Working Group concluded that Roman Catholic membership in the World Council was not being discussed.[84] Although it could not be ruled out entirely in the future, no time could be set for a declaration. Shortly thereafter, on 10 June 1969, Pope Paul VI was in Geneva for the 50th anniversary of the International Labour Organisation. He also visited the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva for an hour. After the reception, at 5 p.m., some room had been set aside in the programme for a 'private discussion' in the offices of the new general secretary Eugene Carson Blake.[85] The retired Visser 't Hooft had hoped for a dialogue on substance, albeit in the corridors. But he encountered a prelate who said: 'Mon nom est Pierre, et Pierre est l'église'.[86] Visser 't Hooft wanted to respect the pope as the leader of a global church but not acknowledge him exclusively as holding the office of Peter and thus the one universal leader of the true church. The pope appeared to be claiming just that, thereby antagonising not only all Protestants but the Orthodox as well.

Although he viewed the pope as a prisoner of protocol and it did not appear that he could be tempted to step out of that role, Visser 't Hooft did think that his speech, which – according to him – did indeed contain some parts written by the pope himself, was important. During the chaotic course of events with the pope's boat trip across Lake Geneva after his visit to the World Council, Visser 't Hooft suddenly found himself face to face with Paul VI. While all the others could see the funny side of it or were excited because of the high waves, Pope Paul VI remained utterly serious and could not be

83 Henn, 'Cardinal Willebrands and the Relations between Rome and the World Council of Churches', 2012, 211-226. Vischer, 'The Ecumenical Movement and the Roman Catholic Church', 1970, 311-352.

84 JWG, (Draft) The relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to the World Council of Churches, May 1969, 21, WCC 4201.4.

85 'Visit of Pope Paul VI', 10 June 1969. WCC 4201.2.12.

86 N. Verkerk, Interview with Visser 't Hooft, Ander Nieuws, NCRV Television, 10 August 1978, Sound and Vision Archives. See also Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 338-339.

enticed into making any spontaneous remarks. Visser 't Hooft wrote to his friends that he pitied this friendly man who had to bear such a heavy burden alone. In his eyes, the report of the papal visit in the *Tribune de Genève* was mostly a report of the outward display. Editor-in-chief George Henri Martin, who had an appointment with Visser 't Hooft to hear his impression of the visit, was given a dressing down. The latter accused him of having lent his newspaper for old-fashioned Roman Catholic propaganda. Visser 't Hooft had to turn to *Le Monde* or *Le Figaro* if he wanted a modern view of the new Catholicism. Martin apologised to Visser 't Hooft.[87]

The pope promised that the question of future Roman Catholic membership in the World Council would be studied further. This was done in the Joint Working Group. But, as time went on, there was less and less response from Rome to the ecumenical documents with respect to content. After Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger became prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1981, Visser 't Hooft no longer expected any improvement, and he realised that he would never live to see Rome take any new steps towards membership. Staff members of the World Council performed a skit at a birthday party thrown by Visser 't Hooft. A general secretary is sitting with his back to the public, smoking. The telephone rings – Rome is calling. A crackly voice is heard: 'Mon nom est Pierre.'[88] The real Visser 't Hooft roared with laughter. But he could not let the problem go, and he often asked himself where things had gone wrong. Was it a lack of spiritual depth and dynamics? Or was it due to the 'institutional immobilism of the ecclesiological structure' – in other words, the organisational rigidity of basic ecclesiastical forms? Or was it both? In 1963, the World Council's Faith and Order department did make a serious attempt to tackle the Roman Catholic issue concerning the concept of church. In addition, the issue of tradition as a source of revelation next to the Bible, which the Roman Catholic Church strongly defended, was also intensely studied. But to Visser 't Hooft's sorrow, the much desired consensus was not forthcoming: 'it cannot be said that adequate answers have been given to the basic issue.'[89] Visser 't Hooft often thought of the Roman Catholic Paul Couturier, champion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. He had always believed true ecumenicity was primarily not a matter of reasoning and theology but 'spiritual emulation', the path of prayer, the work of the Spirit: 'mutual stimulation to deeper and better Christian obedience and discipleship,' that is, 'as Christ wanted it and with

87 'Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear Family and Friends', 12 June 1969. Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.
88 Zeilstra, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 23 April 2013.
89 Visser 't Hooft, 'The General Ecumenical Development since 1948', 1970, quote on page 10.

the means that he chose.' Visser 't Hooft wondered: 'Had people forgotten about this?'[90] He was disappointed by the papacy itself. In August 1978 he said:

> I believe that the fact that [as pope] you are shut up in the Vatican [is problematic], even though you travel every now and then, but that does not help very much because then you are so tied up in a fixed programme that you do not make real contact with people. An audience with the pope is not so much *give and take* but much more listening to what the pope says. … I believe that the man in the Vatican does not understand the new things that are happening in the world. I, personally, feel it is a shame that the pope [Paul VI] has waged a battle on issues I feel are second-class.[91]

When asked what he meant by this, Visser 't Hooft mentioned the birth control pill and celibacy. Of course, he was ignoring the fact that more substantial issues, such as the sanctity of life and the nature of the ministry, were at issue here. He asserted that, as a matter of first order, it should have concerned faith in the God of the Bible and of Jesus Christ. This faith had to be emphatically contrasted with the new pagan movements. With the election of a new pope in 1978, he hoped that, in contrast to Paul VI, Albino Luciani (1912-1978) who as pope took the name John Paul I would have earlier in his life undergone 'a great deal of human experience'. But John Paul I died suddenly, shortly after his election, on 28 September of that year.

8.10 The Architect of Faltering Dialogue

In 1948 Visser 't Hooft truly hoped that the Roman Catholic Church would permit several individual Catholics to attend the establishment of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. Just before the meeting, however, it

90 Ibid.

91 Interview by N. Verkerk with Visser 't Hooft, Ander Nieuws, NCRV Television, 10 August 1978, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Ik geloof dat het feit dat je [als paus] in het Vaticaan opgesloten zit [problematisch is], ook als je af en toe een reis maakt, maar dat helpt nou niet zo erg want dan zit je weer in een zo vast programma, dat je niet in een echt contact met de mensen komt. Een audiëntie bij de paus is niet een *give and take*, een geven en nemen, maar veel meer een luisteren naar wat de paus zegt. […] Ik geloof dat de man in het Vaticaan niet zo aanvoelt wat er in de wereld voor nieuwe dingen aan de gang zijn. Nu geloof ik persoonlijk dat het jammer is dat de paus [Paulus VI] een strijd gestreden heeft over wat naar mijn gevoel tweederangs kwesties zijn.'

became apparent that not a single Roman Catholic would be given permission. He then provided documentation and reports to the few Catholics who had nevertheless travelled to Amsterdam. His strategy was to claim that the Roman Catholic Church leadership suffered from 'misunderstandings' that could be removed through good talks, and he remained alert to any openings.

After a moderately positive reaction by the Vatican to the establishment of the World Council, Dutch Roman Catholic priests like Jo Willebrands and Frans Thijssen dared to seek contact with Protestants from within the Willibrord Society. Visser 't Hooft eagerly took advantage of this. During a conference in the ecumenical centre Istina in Paris, he came to the realisation that many of the Roman Catholic objections to the ecumenical movement had to do with the Protestant concept of church. In the World Council, therefore, Visser 't Hooft requested that a clear position be taken with respect to ecclesiology as well as more study on this topic. He hoped that rapprochement would occur via knowledge of and respect for how Roman Catholics dealt with tradition as a source of revelation next to the Bible. For Visser 't Hooft, the value of the Bible as the highest authority was non-negotiable in this.

Visser 't Hooft's objective was to have the Roman Catholic Church join the World Council of Churches. In his opinion, this would not only help bring a spirit of renewal to Rome but also provide the Protestant churches with a deeper awareness of the value of church unity. Willebrands had an entirely different idea for the World Council of Churches. He made no secret of the fact that his agenda was to convert Christians outside the Roman Catholic Church and to lead them back to the true church. Things went fine as long as the paradox of objectives did not become too concrete. Neither Visser 't Hooft nor Willebrands recognised in advance that this could not continue. Both wanted to leave the most difficult questions to God. On that they wholeheartedly agreed.

At times, things went wrong because of a certain carelessness. One example of such occurred in 1959 on Rhodes, when Willebrands and the priest Dumont did not realise that they were violating Visser 't Hooft's rules by meeting separately with the Eastern Orthodox during a conference of the World Council with the latter. A good result of this incident, however, was that Rome realised that ecumenical activity required co-ordination, which meant that Visser 't Hooft was assigned a fixed point of contact for the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Nevertheless, Rhodes was more than an incident. For a brief moment, it became clear here how different their objectives were. Willebrands was completely unaware of doing anything wrong when he acted contrary to Visser 't Hooft's refined strategy.

Developing an active ecumenical strategy when convening an international Roman Catholic council matched Pope John XXIII's own policy. He

wanted to use the large and lengthy council to teach his church to be aware of what it was doing when dealing with the new challenges of the time. In 1960, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity was established, with Bea as president and Willebrands as secretary. The collaboration between Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands became increasingly close during the preparations for the Second Vatican Council. Through him – as well as through other Roman Catholic Church leaders – Visser 't Hooft attempted to have themes he believed were important placed on the council's agenda. He continued to be cautious outwardly and always asserted that there could be no true church unity. But if the monologue would give way to a dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the other churches, he did expect a great deal to happen as a result.

There was some movement on a few important issues during the Second Vatican Council: mixed church marriages, religious freedom for minority churches in Roman Catholic countries, and ecumenism. But Visser 't Hooft believed ecclesiology to be the truly big theme of this council. With no change in the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of itself, it would be impossible to modernise the Roman Catholic Church. But this did not apply only to this church. Much to Visser 't Hooft's dismay, the World Council of Churches failed to reach consensus during the Faith and Order conference in Montreal in 1963. In the period after 1948, there was indeed progress, but it was not enough. The Second Vatican Council led to new and more flexible rules on the part of the Roman Catholic Church for mixed church marriages. Agreements were made on religious minorities in predominantly Roman Catholic countries. The council's deliberations on ecumenicity were followed by the establishment of the Joint Working Group with members of the World Council and of the Roman Catholic Church. This working group, for which expectations were high, was led jointly by two Dutchmen: Visser 't Hooft and Willebrands.

And yet, Visser 't Hooft, the architect of the dialogue, was disappointed. After his retirement in 1966, it became apparent within a few years that the Joint Working Group had studied a great deal and that practical collaboration on certain issues was possible, but fervour concerning renewal in Rome appeared to have waned. The discussion continued to falter. As always, Willebrands asked for patience and did receive it from the World Council. But when Pope Paul VI visited the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, he presented himself as the apostle Peter and avoided all real dialogue. Visser 't Hooft concluded that the dynamic period had ended and that a new stasis had arisen in relations with the Roman Catholic Church. This insight could not have been entirely unexpected. Visser 't Hooft was familiar with Rome's concept of church and Willebrands's agenda.



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9 Obsolete Institutionalism?

The Twilight Years, 1966-1985

Abstract
In this chapter we look at Visser 't Hooft's continuing involvement in the World Council of Churches after his retirement and developments in the World Council itself. The chapter shows how prominent perspectives from the beginning such as Christocentrism and the radical rejection of syncretism were subjected to increasing pressure. Chapter 9 also traces Visser 't Hooft's declining influence, culminating in Nairobi where he felt he was outside the main discourse. His activities outside the council, such as his memoirs, travelling, and his involvement in the Groupe Bellerive are also discussed. Attention is also paid to his declining health and the suffering and loneliness old age brought.

Keywords: Assembly Uppsala 1968, Assembly Nairobi 1975, Old age, value of institutions, isolation, death

9.1 Introduction

Visser 't Hooft would have liked to leave a good legacy, at a stable moment in history, but he knew that the work he had to let go was vulnerable. Even though the conference on church and society in 1966 was a success in his eyes, church organisations were coming under increasing pressure. It was clear to him that the process of secularisation was not stopping at all and that the church revival that occurred after the war had failed to turn the tide. But it was not only churches that were being negatively affected – all institutions across the whole of Western society were being subjected to criticism. Younger people especially began to see the World Council as outdated. For the radicals among them, Visser 't Hooft was no longer the innovative church leader he wanted to be but the representative of an obsolete bureaucratic apparatus. After his retirement, he was confronted with people who viewed

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the World Council as a bulwark of white, highly educated men, authority figures, who were focused on preserving the status quo.

Visser 't Hooft himself knew that he had been a unique general secretary, and it would be difficult to find a successor who had similar qualities and experience. That was in fact so, and the transference of his duties to someone else proved to be extremely difficult, which meant that Visser 't Hooft had to stay on a year longer. In the end, retirement was a wonderful, if not vagarious, experience for him: he received many accolades. But hovering over his life at this time was the death of his wife Jetty. He could not sit still and for a long time was a daily presence at the World Council offices (9.2). During the fourth World Council assembly, which was held in Uppsala in 1968, he presented his last report as general secretary, and was elected honorary president. It was also the last assembly where he gave an important speech, which caused quite a stir (9.3). He worked hard on his memoirs, which he wanted to use to answer the criticism of ecumenical institutions (9.4). Over the course of the 1970s, he distanced himself somewhat from the World Council, travelling and asking more reflective questions (9.5). The assembly of the World Council in Nairobi in 1975 was the last one he attended. He was critical of what was said there and felt isolated (9.6). In those years he devoted himself to various current topics like postmodernism, environmental issues, and Western triumphalism, and, together with others, sought for ways to take action. For instance, he participated in the Groupe de Bellerive which he co-founded. In this period, he also worked on his own contribution to a new theology of creation (9.7). In 1980 he turned 80 years old: Was he now 'an angry old man' who knew better than anyone else? (9.8). If emancipation led to the undermining of the fatherhood of God, this entailed, in his view, the loss of a precious good. In his last major book, Visser 't Hooft gave an analysis of what he saw as the looming loss of authentic fatherhood in theology and society (9.9). In his final years, the major theme that he took up again was the relation between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. He sought diligently to discover where it had gone wrong and what the chances for a breakthrough were. He set his hopes on academic theology and pleaded for a better reception of the results of that theology in the church (9.10). He understood that he was approaching the end of his life, but he was not afraid of death; he kept working right up until the last weeks of his life and clung to his faith (9.11).

9.2 A Farewell that was not a Farewell

Finding a successor for Visser 't Hooft became a major problem. At the beginning of 1964, the 16-member executive committee, which was appointed in

its entirety as the nomination committee, nominated the Scottish Episcopal minister Patrick C. Rodger (1920-2002) as the only candidate. Before the central committee, which was due to meet in Enugu in Nigeria in January 1965, could respond, his candidacy was publicly announced. Rodger had been the head of Faith and Order since 1961 and, though he was well known as a kind man, he did not have any powerful charisma.[1] This awakened the impression that the executive committee was looking for a less authoritarian general secretary who would be more pliable.[2] Staff members from the World Council in Geneva, various member churches and a pressure group objected to the procedure that had been followed. Visser 't Hooft kept quiet in public but was not enthusiastic either. He spoke to the chairman of the central committee, Franklin Fry, about it and did nothing to prevent staff members' criticisms.[3] As a result, the central committee rejected Rodger's candidacy and asked Visser 't Hooft to stay on a year longer.[4] They wanted freedom of choice and more time to define the position of general secretary. Some argued for dividing the position among two or more individuals.[5]

Finally, after a great deal of indecision, the American Eugene Carson Blake (1906-1985) was chosen, almost unanimously, as the new general secretary, a position he would hold from 1966 to 1972. Visser 't Hooft was given a farewell dinner, but Blake, who was almost of the same generation as his predecessor, asked him to stay on as advisor after officially stepping down. Visser 't Hooft would probably have been wiser to politely turn down this role. But he was all too willing. He was convinced that he was leaving a large vacuum behind and thought it would be great if he could continue to have daily contact with the World Council. Others were only too eager to confirm the departing general secretary in this. Younger staff members looked up to him: in Visser 't Hooft they saw a theologian with extraordinary erudition – theologically, politically, and culturally – who, through his strategic thinking and personal authority, had been able to neutralise a number of tensions in the ecumenical movement over a long time.[6] Some spoke of the end of an age.[7] When the Dutch reporter Bob Kroon asked Visser

1 Cf. interview with Rodger in: *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 6 August 1964.

2 To his sorrow, Lukas Vischer was passed over. Zeilstra, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 23 April 2013.

3 Ibid., and Zeilstra, interview with B.C. Sjollema, 4 February 2015.

4 Wind, *Zending en oecumene in de twintigste eeuw*, 2a (1991), 212.

5 Krüger, 'The Life and Activities of the World Council of Churches', 1986, especially 49.

6 Raiser, 'Le pasteur Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, pionnier de l'oecuménisme Genève-Rome', 2003, especially 32-33.

7 E. Rasch in: *Berliner Sonntagsblatt*, 4 December 1966, WCC 994.1.36/1. Aftreden Visser 't Hooft, AVRO-KRO Radio, E. Boshuizen and B. Kroon, 11 February 1966.

Figure 55 During his retirement, ca. 1966



't Hooft if he was going to withdraw completely, Visser 't Hooft answered as follows:

> It does mean that I will withdraw completely from administrative tasks. But it's not possible for me … to withdraw from the major ecumenical questions, for the simple reason that my whole life is bound up with them and that I have no other major interests in the world than this. Thus, with

> respect to speaking, writing, and giving advice, I can still contribute to the ecumenical movement.[8]

After his farewell, many of the tensions within the World Council came to the surface. But it was not only a decline: one of Blake's first steps was to give the staff a substantial salary increase.[9]

Visser 't Hooft hoped that his retirement would help ease his constant bad conscience about things he had not done but should have done. That obtained in particular for the situation at home. Jetty was an extraordinary woman. As early as 1934, she had resisted the then oft-used theological support for the subordinate role of women and had spoken and corresponded with Barth on this issue. In 1971, Visser 't Hooft sent his niece Clan a list of 26 publications by Henriette Visser 't Hooft-Boddaert, most of which were about the position of woman in society. Jetty wrote these articles between 1936 and 1962.[10] The rejection she met with – not only from Barth – led her to turn more and more inward. She adopted a stoic attitude and let the pressure of the world pass her by. Visser 't Hooft felt that he had fallen short with his wife Jetty for a long time, and – also because her health was failing – he resolved in the future to spend more time at home. Their difference in temperament could hardly have been greater. While Wim was always busy and travelling, Jetty hardly left the house in the 1960s. She often wandered dreamily through the living room in the morning in her red velvet dressing gown with a diamond brooch. One of her memorable phrases – that the family joked about – was: 'Women were not created to do dishes."[11] In 1964 Wim and Jetty celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. Their daughter-in-law Pat came to Geneva a little earlier to help prepare for the party and found a passive mother-in-law, lying on the ground doing her breathing exercises and letting everything happen around her.

8 Sound and Vision Archives, 7059: '.Het betekent wel dat ik mij helemaal zal terugtrekken uit de administratieve taken. Maar het is me niet mogelijk om mij [...] van de grote oecumenische zaken terug te trekken, om de eenvoudige reden dat mijn hele leven daarmee verbonden is en dat ik geen andere grote interesses in de wereld heb dan dit. Dus op het gebied van spreken, schrijven en raadgeven, kan ik nog verder aan de oecumenische beweging meewerken' Bob Kroon found every successor less suitable than Visser 't Hooft; according to him, it was the loss of a 'God-given architect'.

9 Zeilstra, interview with B.C. Sjollema, 4 February 2015.

10 H. Visser 't Hooft-Boddaert, *Eva waar zijt gij?* (1934). Moltmann, 'Henriëtte Visser 't Hooft', 1990. Visser 't Hooft to J.C. Visser 't Hooft, 5 February 1971, in this author's possession. They were articles, Visser 't Hooft wrote, that 'cost her much time and energy'. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 362.

11 Zeilstra, interview with P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, 21 October 2017.

Figure 56 Visser 't Hooft family picture, 1967



Standing, from left to right: niece Willemijn Visser 't Hooft; Guus Dorhout, husband of niece Clan Visser 't Hooft; son Hans Visser 't Hooft; Ans Rouwenhorst, wife of nephew Wim Visser 't Hooft; daughter-in-law Emijet Visser 't Hooft-van Randwijck, wife of Hans Visser 't Hooft, sister-in-law Wil Visser 't Hooft-Scheurleer; brother Hans Visser 't Hooft; niece Visser 't Hooft Clan Dorhout-Visser 't Hooft; granddaughter Martina Musacchio, granddaughter Erica Musacchio; daughter Anneke Musacchio-Visser 't Hooft; nephew Hans Visser 't Hooft.
Sitting, from left to right: Atta (Wim Visser 't Hooft), grandson Willem Visser 't Hooft; Mammie (Jetty Visser 't Hooft-Boddaert, probably the last photo of her); granddaughter Leonora Visser 't Hooft; grandson Caspar Visser 't Hooft; nephew Wim Visser 't Hooft

Visser 't Hooft loved her and imagined that, after his retirement, he and Jetty would spend more time being grandparents for their nine grandchildren. But there was a great deal of publicity after his farewell in 1966, and not much came of the peaceful life he had imagined. There were a number of tributes and a great deal of attention by the media, and he was constantly being asked to do this or that. He was proud to receive the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in Frankfurt am Main, together with Cardinal Bea in September of that year. He was somewhat shy with some other tributes, such as the bronze medal of the Family of Man Award for Excellence that he received a month later because of his 'unceasing promotion of freedom of worship'. He was actually happy that he was unable to receive this award in person because of a trip to Southeast Asia. When the American president, Lyndon Johnson – who

was not there himself either – was honoured for his work for civil rights, a demonstration against the Vietnam war took place outside the hotel in New York where the gala dinner was held. The demonstrators included a number of Protestant ministers.

After the farewell party at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, 'le patron's' office was cleared out to make room for his successor, E.C. Blake. But Visser 't Hooft was given another room where he would still spend several hours almost every day behind a desk piled with files and books. The farewell included a concert and various smaller parties and times when he was honoured by not only the leadership of the World Council but also by the staff of the YMCA, YWCA, and the WSCF. The most important party occurred on 29 November 1966. For Visser 't Hooft, this was 'the party of all parties', with 'the best ecumenical "revue" that I have ever seen."[12] A small exhibition was held in the Ecumenical Centre that displayed a selection from his wide correspondence.[13] Visser 't Hooft was also informed that he would be made an honorary citizen of Geneva in 1967. The pensioner expressed his ambivalent feelings at all festivities as follows:

> And then the most incisive experience of all, namely *not* to go to the office at 8.15 in the morning after having done so for 42 years! And that queer mixed feeling of relief that one is no longer the man of all jobs and all responsibilities together with a sense of loss.[14]

But the departing general secretary did not want to be sombre – it was not all for nothing. He wrote to his friends:

> Something important has happened in the life of the churches and I have had the extraordinary privilege to be used for a long time to help in bringing this important thing into being. I have said several times: do not use the word 'architect' which has somehow come to be attached to my planning. It has been the following of a path the direction of which was not known in advance. It has been the cause that worked for us more than that we worked for the cause. … I have throughout these years been

12 Described in a circular letter, Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear Friends', no date but probably December 1966. Family archive Visser 't Hooft.

13 *De Rotterdammer*, 7 December 1966, WCC 994.1.35/3. See also: 'I am not the architect', NCRV Radio, 30 November 1966, Sound and Vision Archives 6939.

14 Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear Friends', no date but probably December 1966, Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.

> part of a fellowship of men and women who have inspired me, encouraged me, forgiven me my faults, in short carried me along.[15]

He saw himself more as diplomat rather than as architect, though as an ethically qualified diplomat. During the Quaker International Seminar, in July 1967 in Clarens, he pleaded for ethics in diplomacy.[16] Diplomats could not, he said, leave their conscience at home – they had to contribute to the international ethos. The common goal was to act according to the golden rule from the Gospel: 'Do to others what you would have them do to you', from Matthew 7:12: not only 'co-existence' but 'pro-existence'.

His wife Jetty's health continued to decline, however. She had still published an article in 1962, in which she compared the 'I-Thou' relations as described by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber with her view of the husband-wife relationship.[17] But she was almost constantly sick and seemed to be more and more difficult to reach mentally because of her despondency. Jetty had a large collection of medicines on a tray on the table which constituted a danger for the grandchildren. She was admitted to hospital repeatedly with complaints that were difficult to define. Jetty died on 6 January 1968. The death of his wife affected Visser 't Hooft deeply; it was the only time that his daughter-in-law Pat saw him cry. He had, he said, 'suffered the great blow.'[18] Visser 't Hooft felt guilty that he had left her alone so often with the children, commenting later that she had led the life of the wife of 'a ship's captain'. He himself saw it as follows: while her introverted nature increasingly gained the upper hand, he became more extroverted.[19] A great silence now descended in the house on the Chemin des Voirons. In all the busyness because of interest from outside, there were now moments of loneliness at home.[20]

Something of that paradox was also apparent with the church he belonged to. For someone who had always attached such a great importance to the church, it was not easy for him to be just an ordinary church-member. During the last decades of his working life, he had not (or hardly) been involved in a local church.[21] The church where he was now a member was the Dutch Protestant Church around the Lake Geneva. He had preached at the service

15 Ibid.
16 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Ethics of Diplomacy as Public Service', 1967.
17 Visser 't Hooft-Boddaert, H, 'Co-humanity and the Covenant', 1962.
18 Interview J.A. Zeilstra with P.A. Visser 't Hooft, 21 October 2017.
19 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 363.
20 Interview J.A. Zeilstra with J.C. Visser 't Hooft, 26 September 2013.
21 Interview J.A. Zeilstra with A. Musacchio-Visser 't Hooft, 3 February 2015.

when the church was founded in 1955. Wim attended services on Sunday every now and then or went to the Temple de Chêne-Bougeries, close to his home. Up until 1980, he led services once in a while. One instance in which he did so was in November 1973, when he preached on hope, quoting the poet Charles Péguy (1873-1914), who spoke of the immortality of hope. The text was Romans 15:13: 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.' In the eyes of Visser 't Hooft Péguy did not go far enough and that a Christian had to continue to hope, even if he knew that it would not really be better tomorrow: 'The Christian knows very well that it will not be better tomorrow. But he continues to hope.'[22] But for someone who always had something to bring, it was difficult to receive, and Wim found it hard to go to church and sit in the pew alone.

His best friend and pastor Pierre Maury had already died in 1956. The bishop of Chichester, George Bell, a leader of Life and Work and for Visser 't Hooft a true ally in ecumenicity, had died in 1958.[23] More and more of Visser 't Hooft's old friends died in this period, including Karl Barth and Hendrik Kraemer. A world was slipping away, piece by piece. He was aware that losing friends was part of this phase of life, and he wanted primarily to show an attitude of gratefulness. But it caused him pain to see their ideas now becoming increasingly less influential. Visser 't Hooft sensed that a change had occurred. He wanted to remain true to the insights he had shared with his friends, without turning his back on the new period. He read the papers, studied, gave lectures and interviews, wrote articles and books. For a long time, he regularly gave a kind of private course on the history of the ecumenical movement to young staff members of the World Council, such as Albert van den Heuvel, Konrad Raiser, and Boudewijn Sjollema. He largely neglected his home and garden, but not for reasons of frugality. He simply was not interested. The shutters eventually began to hang loose from their hinges, the paint faded, and the garden chairs began to rust. His children were worried about his safety because electric cables hung loosely along the wall from the hooks of the paintings. Those who came to the house could see him reading in the closed porch, where he liked to receive old acquaintances. He spent many hours on his memoirs at home and in his office at the World Council. The research this required proved to be a much bigger job than he initially thought, and he spent whole days

22 Visser 't Hooft, 'Message paroisse Chêne-Bourg', 1973: 'Le chrétien sait très bien que demain ça n'ira pas mieux. Mais il continue à espérer.'

23 Visser 't Hooft, 'Appreciation of W.A. Visser 't Hooft for G.K.A. Bell', no date, probably 1958.

Figure 57 With Karl Barth, ca. 1966



in the archives behind the Ecumenical Centre on the Route de Ferney in Grand-Saconnex.

As he got older, Visser 't Hooft's appearance changed. In the 1930s he came across as an energetic young man with a vision, but around 1970, in the eyes of a new generation, he turned into a monumental figure of the old school. On the one hand, he was charming, erudite, even dashing, with his large hat and dark clothing; on the other, he looked old-fashioned, quasi-careless, speaking Leiden Dutch with a slight French accent, 'angular' and a bit threatening with his bony physique.[24] In the afternoon, around teatime, he had his own table in the staff restaurant of the World Council. In the beginning after his retirement, staff workers would often come to him to ask his advice. After some time, however, he resembled an oracle more and more. He could often just walk in on meetings, listen attentively for a quarter of an hour, point out

24 The term 'Leidenaren' (people from Leiden) was pronounced as 'Leienaren', 'wilden' (wanted) as 'wouwen' en 'oecumene as 'ecumene'.

Figure 58 Among the leaders of the Armenian church, Geneva, ca. 1970



what he thought had been forgotten or was not correct, and then leave.[25] Not everyone appreciated that. Despite his high status and the great respect that staff members had for him, the distance between them and him slowly increased. After some time, he began to get in the way of his successors in their work, and there were some painful moments. People felt obliged to arrange among themselves who would sit with Visser 't Hooft at teatime on a given day.[26]

Visser 't Hooft continued to feel personally responsible for his legacy, right up until his death. Just as he had experienced the rise of the ecumenical movement in the prime of his life, now the end of his life seemed to coincide with the decline of the movement. He could not and did not want to hide his disappointment when young people no longer saw the value of what had been built up in his time and had come to see an international church organisation as superfluous or, worse, as the ballast of a status quo that stood in the way of progress. In lectures, sermons, and articles, Visser 't Hooft acted as an advocate of what had been achieved. His many appearances in

25 Berkhof, 'Herdenking van Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft', 1986, 219.

26 On Visser 't Hooft's difficulty in distancing himself from the World Council, see Zeilstra, interviews with B.C. Sjollema, 2013 and 2015; Oostveen, 'De bittere spijt van W.A. Visser 't Hooft', 1985, and Berkhof, 'In memoriam', 1985.

the media were intended by him to connect old and new insights with each other. In these speeches, he pleaded for seeing the treatment of poverty in the world as a spiritual issue. Technological developments had to serve humanitarian values. He tried to view pluralism and modernity in a positive way, as in the four radio talks he gave in February and March 1967 for the BBC Home Service.[27] Visser 't Hooft now understood the growth of more religious pluriformity to be characteristic to the times and that it had to be accepted. For example, he pointed to the advantages during the round table conference of the International Political Science Association in Istanbul from 28 May to 2 June 1967.[28] Churches that managed to liberate themselves from expectation patterns imposed on them had become more flexible and would be better able to carry out God's commission to be the living body of Christ in a more genuine way. His warning however, was that the cohesion of society would be in danger if there was no consensus on norms and values. For the sake of responsible citizenship, churches had to contribute to dialogue and respect. At Pentecost 1967, Visser 't Hooft preached to young people in Taizé about the truth of Jesus and the Comforter that he sends. His text was John 16:7: '[I]t is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.'[29] Here he also related a story about a church service in Africa. In that service he preached the shortest sermon of his life – every time he spoke a few words about Christian joy, everybody would jump up and dance. He added hastily that he did not expect his listeners in Taizé to jump up. But he felt it could be a bit more unruly than it usually was, especially at Pentecost. Nevertheless, he was irritated later by the statement made by this young people's assembly that included the line: 'For us, ecumenicity is a calling, not an appended institute.'

9.3 Uppsala 1968: The Turning Point

In the years after his retirement, Visser 't Hooft's status was very high internationally. In the Netherlands, there were many who were proud that Visser 't Hooft was a compatriot. He was often asked to comment for Dutch television on current religious events, especially on the inter-church television programme *Kenmerk* beginning in 1963.[30] In the first half of 1968,

27 Visser 't Hooft, *Christians for the Future* (1967).

28 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Inevitable Development Toward Pluralism', 1967.

29 Visser 't Hooft, 'Taizé, Pentecôte 1967', 1967.

30 Broadcast by IKOR, Dutch inter-church media organisation.

in preparation for the World Council assembly in Uppsala, NCRV radio broadcast twenty Sunday evening lectures by Visser 't Hooft under the title *Leren leven met de oecumene* (Learning to Live with Ecumenicity).[31] The lectures were bound in a booklet with the same title.[32]

But in the summer of 1968, his communication skills were severely tested. The theme of the fourth World Council assembly, which took place from 4-19 July in Uppsala, Sweden, was 'Behold, I make all things new.'[33] In May 1968, precisely when preparations for Uppsala were underway, there were mass student protests in Paris. Other European university towns and cities were also buzzing with criticism of the established order by radical students and workers. Thus, the theme was more topical than could have been expected at the time of the preparations. Visser 't Hooft saw both dangers and opportunities here. He had to report to this assembly about his last years as general secretary and was elected honorary president of the World Council. For the last time, he gave one of the keynote speeches. For him, this was to be a turning point.

He raised the question of the meaning of striving for church unity in such a pluriform society. But he found it difficult to strike the right note. Where should believers first direct their attention and energy – to the church or

31 Translator's note: in Dutch, the term *oecumene* can, as a noun, refer to both ecumenicity and the ecumenical movement. See also the Introduction to this volume.

32 Visser 't Hooft, *Leren leven met de oecumene* (1968). A large number of longer and shorter recordings with Visser 't Hooft for radio and Television from 1939 on are available in digital form in the archives of Sound and Vision in Hilversum. See also: N. van Gelder, 'Alle dingen nieuw', interview with Visser 't Hooft, NCRV (Dutch Protestant Christian Broadcasting Association) Television, 28 June 1968, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Uppsala will be difficult. … If you mix all kinds of chemicals with each other in a chemical laboratory it is difficult to know what exactly will happen. That will also be the case here to a certain extent. We live in a time of theological confusion. … Right now, if you have a good representation of the youth, and we will have that, they no longer keep quiet, and that's good, and I think that they will then ask the question that they raise everywhere: What are your priorities? Do you actually give top priority to the most important things? Or … does the economic and the technological have far too much say in the world of today, whereas it is the human nevertheless that has to be first? 'What do Christians have to say about that?' ('Uppsala zal moeilijk zijn. […] Als je in een chemisch laboratorium een heleboel chemische stoffen door mekaar gooit, dan is het een beetje moeilijk te weten wat er precies gebeuren gaat. Dat zal tot zekere hoogte hier het geval zijn. We leven in een tijd van theologische verwarring. […] Als je tegenwoordig een goeie afvaardiging van jeugd hebt, en dat zullen we ook hebben, dan houden ze hun mond niet meer, en dat is maar goed ook en ik denk dat ze dan ook de vraag zullen stellen, die ze overal stellen: Hoe staat het met jullie prioriteiten? Zetten jullie de werkelijk belangrijkste dingen in de eerste plaats? Of is in de wereld van tegenwoordig […] het economische en het technische veel te veel de baas, terwijl het menselijke toch in de eerste plaats moet komen. Wat hebben de christenen daarop te zeggen?')

33 Revelation 21:5.

to society? In principle, Visser 't Hooft refused to play the one off against the other. Theologically, he clung to the productiveness of the connection between the two that he saw as a great commission from God himself. As far as he was concerned, 'horizontal' progress was impossible without a 'vertical' orientation; the secret of the Christian faith was that humankind is in the centre precisely because God is in the centre.[34] For him, the renewal by God that Uppsala was looking forward to entailed the unity of the church as a preparation for the unity of humankind – at least he wanted to grasp the opportunity to come to a contemporary translation at this point. The need of the world demanded urgency. In an attempt to underscore the contemporary relevance of that message to society, Visser 't Hooft used the concept 'heresy' in his speech before the assembly to refer to Christians 'who deny in fact their responsibility for the needy in any part of the world':

> It must become clear that church members who deny in fact their responsibility for the needy in any part of the world are just as much guilty of heresy as those who deny this or that article of the faith. The unity of mankind is not a fine ideal in the clouds; it is part and parcel of God's own revelation. Here if anywhere the vertical, God-given dimension is essential for any action on the horizontal, inter-human plane.[35]

That resonated in the ears of his audience. But the language about a contemporary form of 'heresy' made more of an impression than the somewhat obligatory focus on God. For a moment, the retired general secretary seemed to agree with the radicals. He referred explicitly to the unrest at universities. The students were right, he said, to demand a larger share in the responsibility for content, method, and organisation of their education. He expressed his appreciation that young people wanted to challenge the whole structure of political-social action worldwide. According to Visser 't Hooft, it was shortsighted of experienced politicians, business people, and directors and parents in state and church – out of fear of chaos – when they rejected the challenge voiced by the students as unrealistic and dangerously subversive. When students asked questions, the churches needed to listen. Here as well the saying *nostra res agitur* was applicable. But the ecumenial movement should not only address young people, it also needed to warn them. They needed to come up

34 *Trouw*, 6 July 1968.

35 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Mandate of the Ecumenical Movement', *The Ecumenical Review* 70 (1): 105-117. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/erev.12343.

with alternative plans, and that was what was lacking. What were their constructive contributions to the question of the meaning of life beyond the materialism of production and consumption?[36] There was a youth delegation at the assembly that – be it without a vote – participated actively. Visser 't Hooft approved, but he was annoyed by the Swedish youth and by the stencilled leaflet *Hot News* that the young people handed out daily during the conference to tell the participants what they thought. In Visser 't Hooft's view, they had 'a bit of a big mouth' and were 'arrogant'. He felt that the churches themselves should have included more constructive young people in their delegations.[37]

According to many, Visser 't Hooft pleaded in Uppsala for the development of political and social engagement. The old leader seemed to have changed his mind, and a great deal of discussion ensued on his warning against that modern heresy: words without deeds.[38] While some were pleasantly surprised, Visser 't Hooft's words led to astonishment in others. How were these words related to his life's work? What was the value of the World Council of Churches in the world of 1968 in which the word 'church' was questioned in so many ways? Had Visser 't Hooft been wrongly understood?

Internationally, the speech attracted a great deal of attention, and the Dutch newspaper *Trouw* spoke of a 'brilliant speech':

> He spoke of the mandate of the ecumenical movement and his speech was a magistral embrace of all kinds of tendency in church and society that seemed to contradict each other but still belonged together.[39]

The Protestant minister A. van Es, who published a volume of documents from Uppsala, was lyrical and went even further in his assessment:

> Without exaggeration, one can say that Dr. Visser 't Hooft spoke like Moses who supervised the way through the desert and looked forward to the promised land.[40]

36 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Mandate of the Ecumenical Movement', 1968.

37 D. de Vree, Uppsala interview with Visser 't Hooft, KRO Radio, no date, 1968, Sound and Vision Archives.

38 Oostveen, 'De bittere spijt van W.A. Visser 't Hooft', 1985.

39 *Trouw*, 6 July 1968: 'Hij sprak over het mandaat van de oecumenische beweging en zijn rede was een magistrale omhelzing van allerlei tendensen in kerk en samenleving, die elkaar lijken tegen te spreken, maar toch bijeen horen.'

40 Van Es, 'Uppsala '68', 1968, 6: 'Zonder overdrijving kan men zeggen dat dr. Visser 't Hooft sprak als Mozes die de weg door de woestijn overzag en vooruit schouwde naar het beloofde land.'

The journalist Gerhard Rein was deeply moved in 1968 and fifty years later still felt that Visser 't Hooft got at the very heart of the matter: 'I do not know of any other sentence that so challenges one's own identity as a Christian as this one.'[41]

Visser 't Hooft himself was shocked at the time by the reactions. He had tried to use connecting language, with respect to both global contradictions worldwide and to generations. But personally, he was irritated by the undisciplined attitude of young people and the way in which lectures were interrupted by 'rebellious youth' during the conference. They were often poorly informed, made a great deal of noise, and appeared to have little respect for experience. He spoke to them in a fatherly way:

> If you just want to break down the existing structures, all you can count on is a Gaullist victory. Then the masses will gather to save the status quo.[42]

What he definitely had not wanted to say was that the vertical approach had to be absorbed into the horizontal or that the encounter with God had to be sought from then on exclusively in the contact with people. He had already clashed on this issue with the American sociologist Harvey Cox, author of the notorious book *The Secular City* published in 1965. Visser 't Hooft attempted to correct the one-sided interpretation of his words in Uppsala in the *International Review of Missions.* The horizontal and the vertical needed each other. All in all, Visser 't Hooft experienced Uppsala as a disappointment. Lay conferences, such as the one on church and society in 1966 in Geneva probably had more of a future, and in March 1969 he made some recommendations in this direction.[43] He remained convinced that, co-ordinated by the World Council, the churches had genuinely started the ball rolling for change internationally with respect to a 'responsible society'. He felt that it was now important to translate that starting point into action for the anti-racism programme and the issue of poverty.[44]

The World Council Programme to Combat Racism often concerned boycotting countries, businesses, and institutions that supported racism.

41 Rein, 'Willem A. Visser 't Hooft. The Future of Peace', 2018, 103.

42 Van Capelleveen, in: *Nieuwe Leidse Courant*, 11 November 1968: 'Als jullie alleen maar de bestaande structuren wilt afbreken, dan kun je op een gaullistische overwinning rekenen. Dan zullen de massa's te hoop lopen om de status quo te redden' Translator's note: 'Gaullist' refers to the reactionary Gaullist party of Charles de Gaulle.

43 Visser 't Hooft, 'Notes concerning ideas on the structure of the WCC', 1969.

44 B. de Ronden, interview with Visser 't Hooft, IKOR Radio, 8 July 1969, Sound and Vision Archives.

Visser 't Hooft was well aware that this programme was controversial, also within the member churches themselves. It was a point of contention especially when, after the assembly in Uppsala, the World Council began to support organisations like the Angolan liberation movement Frelimo, the African National Congress, and the Patriotic Front of Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo which also took up armed resistance. Nevertheless, he understood that, after the accent had lain for so long on contentual issues of the Christian faith, it was inevitable that concrete forms of solidarity and taking positions would be discussed at the World Council.[45] Time and time again, he loyally explained that money given by the World Council to liberation movements did not go to the armed struggle itself but was intended for education, aid to refugees, and medical work. Other organisations like the Red Cross did the same but were much less criticised than the World Council.[46] Nonetheless, Visser 't Hooft was certainly afraid of a bad image and that a one-sided political leftist image of the World Council could lead to alienation and polarisation. That did indeed happen, especially in Germany.[47]

A small success in this period was the application, after much ado, by the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, established in 1892) for membership of the World Council, after Visser 't Hooft had given positive advice to the World Council central committee.[48] He gave an interesting speech in the 'De Blije Werelt' conference centre in Lunteren in The Netherlands, in 1969, for a synod audience, consisting of all men, almost all of them smoking behind high stacks of synodical documents. In this speech he, in retrospect, seemed to agree with the view of Ernst Käsemann as given in 1963:

> In my view, there is no chance at all for plans for unity that have a strongly uniform character. I believe that the only chance is for plans for unity with a strongly pluriform character, and I personally believe that we are beginning to see more clearly now that that is also actually much

45 Interview with Visser 't Hooft, Onderweg, IKON Radio, 12 October 1975, Sound and Vision Archives.

46 L. Pagano and G. Sonder, interview with Visser 't Hooft, Magazine, AVRO Radio, 17 August 1980, Sound and Vision Archives.

47 Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel, and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON Radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.

48 Kenmerk, IKOR Television, 27 January 1971, Sound and Vision Archives, Visser 't Hooft, address to the central committee: 'I do not believe that there is one single church in the world that has struggled for a longer period, more consistently and solidly with the question as to whether it should become a member of the World Council.'

> more in line with the New Testament, which itself displays a remarkable plurality of forms and thus for that reason the unity we seek. Much more rests on the fact that we agree with each other on the basic questions of being church in the world, the basic questions of what the Gospel is in the world, the basic questions that deal with the essence of the church, that everything else regarding the forms and structures of the church can be left to the various churches.[49]

After 1968, Visser 't Hooft would never again succeed in presenting the ecumenical movement's right to exist in the form of the World Council with the cogency of the period before that. Around 1970, the question was raised repeatedly – and in his view often shockingly – as to whether the institution of the World Council of Churches should not be considered an outdated ideal. There was talk of 'the post-ecumenical era' and 'secular ecumenism'. Visser 't Hooft felt personally addressed and set himself the task of seriously examining the question. When he was invited to give the Gallaghar Lecture in Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1970, he asked the question: 'Has the Day of Ecumenical Structures Passed?'[50] He did indeed understand that he could not pretend to be the most suitable person to answer this question in an unbiased way. He chose thus the strategy of historical witness, i.e., the demonstration from the past, while saying he was willing to acknowledge the weakness and mistakes of the ecumenical structures to which he had devoted himself. He had wanted to pass on a flawless legacy. But to whom? And was that legacy still intact? Visser 't Hooft realised that the time of the great prophets and pioneers of the ecumenical movement was gone for good. On the one hand, more traditional 'church' types had taken their place. He did not mention any names but had to be thinking of people like Franklin Fry and Eugene Blake, both of whom were more managers than theologians. On the other hand, he must have felt abandoned by rebellious critics, such as the missionary

49 Address by Visser 't Hooft to the Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, in: Kenmerk, IKOR Television, 9 September 1969, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Voor mijn gevoel is er geen schijn van kans voor eenheidsplannen die een sterk uniform karakter zouden dragen. Ik geloof dat de enige kans is voor eenheidsplannen die een sterk pluriform element hebben en ik geloof persoonlijk dat we ook steeds duidelijker beginnen te zien dat dat ook eigenlijk veel meer in de lijn is van het Nieuwe Testament, dat zelf een merkwaardige pluriformiteit van vormen kent en dus daarom de eenheid die wij zoeken. Veel meer ligt op het punt dat wij het met elkaar eens worden over de grondvragen van het kerkzijn in de wereld, de grondvragen wat het evangelie in de wereld is, de grondvragen die komen tot het wezen van de kerk, dat we dan al het andere wat de vormen en de structuren betreft tot de vrije keuze kunnen laten van de verschillende kerken.' Cf. 6.9.

50 Visser 't Hooft, 'Has the Day of Ecumenical Structures passed?', 1970.

theologian Hans Hoekendijk, from whom he once expected great things. In 1960, Hoekendijk had, ironically and actually derisively, written off the councils in which the churches met as an 'alibi for immobility'.[51] Everything depended on commitment. The World Council could accept resolutions, for example, with respect to the Programme to Combat Racism, which had developed after Uppsala. But what was the value of that if they were not taken seriously by many churches? Without structure, Visser 't Hooft warned, the church would not be able to provide the service that no-one less than Jesus Christ expected and meet the challenge connected to it. He felt that such a price was too high for the church to pay to be up to date. He was sympathetic with the German movement *Ökumenisch Pfingsten*, which stimuled the joint celebration of the Lord's Supper by Roman Catholics and Protestants at, for example, the church convention in Augsburg at Pentecost 1971, but he felt it was a questionable development because 'those who wanted to rush forward' neglected the structures already in place, while others stepped on the brakes.[52] A structureless ecumenism would, in his view, inevitably end up powerless and paralysed. Visser 't Hooft had repeatedly warned against 'wild ecumenism' or, as he called it, 'écuménisme sauvage', in which particularly young people, who were no longer content to wait, organised spontaneous church services with forms of intercommunion that formed, in his view, a 'very dangerous development for the ecumenical movement'.[53] He now related the basic word in the New Testament for 'fellowship', *koinonia*, to the fellowship between the churches, polycentric and universal at the same time. He thus hoped that the adage of the Reformation, *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, would once again start to mean something in a creative tension between institutional and non-institutional ecumenism.

9.4 Utrecht 1972: Do Ecumenical Institutions Have a Future?

Visser 't Hooft enjoyed it when he could act as host when a special visit was made to the World Council, as in 1970 during a working visit by Princess Beatrix and Prince Claus to various international organisations in Geneva. Beatrix had been a guest at the World Council in July 1960 as well, for an

51 Hoekendijk, 'Op weg naar de wereld van morgen', 1960, in: idem, *De kerk binnenste buiten* (1964). Quotes 186-187.

52 Hier en Nu, NCRV Television, 7 June 1971, Sound and Vision Archives.

53 B. de Ronden and H. Biersteker, interview with Visser 't Hooft, Vijftig jaar Geloof en Kerkorde, IKON Television, 27 May 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

Figure 59 Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, with his dog, visiting the World Council of Churches in Geneva, at the beginning of the 1970s



internship there related to her studies. She and Visser 't Hooft shared the desire to skip small talk and to immediately engage in a deep discussion.[54] Visser 't Hooft liked her and felt it was terrible that there was initially a great deal of criticism in the Netherlands about her choice to marry the German Claus von Amsberg. He could not understand that some of the Dutch people who worked at the World Council were reluctant to sign the statement of support for the young couple he had composed.[55]

He was quite busy with his memoirs at this time. Visser 't Hooft's intention here was not so much to give a personal retrospective as to provide a powerful defence of the World Council and the ecumenical movement, a 'Fundgrube' of historically documented references for the value of ecumenism. Written not as a theological book for insiders but as an exciting and accessible report, enlivened by anecdotes and related to the larger history, the memoirs were intended to offer – for a new generation, if possible – an inspiring justification of the ecumenical movement. A firm approach focused

54 WCC general correspondence, 1960 and 1970. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 365.

55 Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel, and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON Radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.

Figure 60 A working visit by Princess Beatrix and Prins Claus to the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, 1970



on solutions was central. Whenever another problem rose, the conclusion was that 'Something had to be done', and this was followed by action. This was the spirit in which he had often concluded his speeches at conferences, as if he was addressing troops with a list of 'marching orders', as he had done, for example, at the major youth conference in Amsterdam in 1939.

In July 1971, he was able, with the help of C. Michael de Vries and Aat Guittart, to finish his memoirs in English. The Dutch text was ready, thanks to De Vries, at the same time and was even published first. The subtitle of the Dutch edition *Een leven in de oecumene* (perhaps best translated as: 'A Life in the Ecumenical Movement') was both modest and vague. What distinguished Visser 't Hooft's life from those of many others who devoted themselves to church unity was the totality of his dedication. His own experience was that he lived *for* the unity of the church.[56] German, Swedish,

56 See, e.g., 9.4. Translator's note: The Dutch subtitle of the present book is: *Een Leven voor de Oecumene*, translated for this volume as *Living for the Unity of the Church*.

and French translations followed.[57] Admirers welcomed his memoirs very warmly,[58] and the image of the 'catalyst' that set processes in motion was even used.[59] But there was also criticism. Thorny questions were avoided, such as the role of the ecumenical movement in the relation between Israel and the Palestinians. Had it not also become too much the story of an 'old boys' club'? And was it not clear in the book that Visser 't Hooft had allowed himself to be included too much in the international game of power, that he had been too much of a diplomat?[60] Boudewijn Sjollema was disappointed. Did the book thoroughly analyse the decline in the ecumenical movement now taking place? Or were the critical analyses simply swept under the carpet of the good stories? On some pages, Visser 't Hooft related events as he felt they should have happened.[61]

The memoirs have been used too often almost uncritically since then as a source and norm. For many later publications on the contribution of Visser 't Hooft, little research into the sources has been done, and they depend heavily on the interpretation of events that Visser 't Hooft gave.[62] The choices made, such as that for the church as the building block of ecumenicity, the organisational form of the World Council and Christocentrism, were the choices made by Visser 't Hooft and a specific group of ecumenical leaders under certain circumstances. He usually spoke of Christ and the biblical revelation in an exclusive way without taking into account the consequences for, for example, interreligious dialogue. In the memoirs, the choices he made were presented as logical and the best and almost of eternal value. Anecdotes were often given a justificatory function. The memoirs did not make it easy to analyse the developments in the ecumenical movement that took place in the decades after they were published.

On 17 and 18 May 1972, Visser 't Hooft gave the Berkelbach van der Sprenkel Lectures in Utrecht called: 'Heeft de oecumenische beweging toekomst?' (Does the ecumenical movement have a future?).[63] Everyone

57 The German title of the memoirs is *Die Welt war meine Gemeinde* ('The world was my congregation' following a quote from John Wesley, the founder of Methodism.

58 See, e.g., Potter, 'But still it moves', 1973; A.J. Klei, in: *Trouw*, 13 November 1971 and A.G. Barkey Wolf, in: *Accent*, 25 December 1971.

59 Courvoisier, 'Le temps du rassemblement', 1976.

60 Zeilstra, interview with B.C. Sjollema, 20 August 2013. Sjollema cites as an example: Visser 't Hooft, 'The International Civil Servant and Today's World', 1965.

61 Zeilstra, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 23 April 2013.

62 E.g., Giampiccoli, *Willem A. Visser 't Hooft. La primavera dell'ecumenismo* (2015).

63 Visser 't Hooft, *Heeft de oecumenische beweging toekomst?* (1973).

Figure 61 With his personal assistant, Aat Guittart and the first copies of the Dutch edition of his Memoirs, 1971



understood that this was a rhetorical question for the speaker and not only for him. In his introduction, Professor W.C. van Unnik brushed aside without hesitation as irrelevant the critique someone had made of Visser 't Hooft as being out of step with the present. According to Visser 't Hooft, the question was not whether building ecumenical structures still made sense. The proper question was the one raised by the apostle Paul in 1 Corintians 3:12-13, as to whether it was built on gold and silver or hay and straw. But that the machinery of the World Council could be experienced as quite negative was also apparent in August 1972, in that same city of Utrecht.

In that month, Visser 't Hooft was in Utrecht again for the annual meeting of the 100-member central committee of the World Council at the exhibition centre in Utrecht. One of the most important agenda points was the nomination of the Methodist Philip A. Potter (1921-2015), from Jamaica, to succeed Eugene Carson Blake. Potter came from the WSCF and Visser 't Hooft supported his candidacy. Asked on this occasion what the authority of the general secretary actually was, Visser 't Hooft answered (in conversational language):

> What's striking about the general secretariat of the World Council is the fantastic multifaceted nature of the position. This person has to deal with theological questions one moment and study them rather deeply, and then soon after that has to deal with the budget of major operations in the area of assistance for one disaster or another … for refugees. One moment he's talking about church matters, and the next he's in a diplomatic situation where he needs to have a certain feeling for international problems. And it is often without any transition that he has to do all those things at once on the same day. He has to speak. He has to write. He's a pastor for his staff, and a rather large staff at that, a few hundred people. He has to be able to get along with church leaders.[64]

A new generation of staff members at the World Council spoke with respect of the Visser 't Hooft period, but there was also talk of his 'benevolent autocracy'. Philip Potter was convinced that a new start had to be made. Potter said this later about Visser 't Hooft in his own elegant way:

> As a good Dutchman he had a gift for managing, and also managing in the sense of knowing what was essential, not a lot of details. He didn't like detail: the real issues! … He always had a clear programme. To sit around and have a drink and wait to hear what people have to say, wasn't part of his style. Perhaps he lost some real insights because of that.[65]

When Potter was asked at the end of 1977 what he thought about Visser 't Hooft being almost daily present at the Ecumenical Centre, he answered: 'We are his family.' Visser 't Hooft himself discovered that he had no talent for lounging around and considered games a waste of time. He answered the question whether it would not be better just to stop completely as follows:

64 N. van Gelder, interview with Visser 't Hooft, NCRV Television, Ander Nieuws, 18 August 1972, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Het opvallende van het generaal-secretariaat van de Wereldraad is de geweldige veelzijdigheid van de functie. Deze man moet het ene ogenblik werken met theologische vragen en daar vrij diep op ingaan, maar een korte tijd daarna moet hij zich opeens bezighouden met het budget van grote operaties op het gebied van de hulpverlening bij de een of andere ramp […] om vluchtelingen. Het ene moment zit hij over kerkelijke vragen te praten, het volgende moment zit hij in een diplomatieke situatie waar hij een feeling moet hebben voor de internationale problematiek. En het is bijna zonder overgang op één en dezelfde dag dat hij al die dingen door elkaar moet doen. Hij moet spreken. Hij moet schrijven. Hij is een pastor voor zijn staf, en een vrij grote staf toch, van enige honderden mensen. Hij moet om kunnen gaan met kerkleiders.'

65 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.

Figure 62 Having tea with Philip Potter in the cafeteria of the World Council, 1980



'No. Because I've no idea what that means. … Should I then sit in this chair and stare at the ceiling?'[66]

At the opening of the meeting of the central committee on 13 August 1972, the honorary president Visser 't Hooft introduced the theme 'Verplicht tot gemeenschap' (Obligated to Fellowship) in the cathedral church with a sermon on John 12:32-33: 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.' Visser 't Hooft's message was that what had been given form in the World Council was not a fixed idea as long as the cross of Christ functioned as a gathering point for all who were divided. According to him, it was thus no human timebound enthusiasm or idealism around which everything revolved; rather, it was a task given by God himself.[67] But the powerful Christocentric witness by which he wanted to set the tone for the meeting was overshadowed in the media by a very different sound.

A great commotion had arisen in that year about the lack of freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. The writer and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn had written an open letter of protest to the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox

66 Ibid.: 'Nee. Want ik weet helemaal niet wat dat betekent. […] Moet ik dan in deze stoel gaan zitten en dan naar het plafond [gaan] kijken?'

67 Biersteker, 'Centraal comité Wereldraad in Utrecht', 1972.

Church. The World Council formally viewed Solzhenitsyn's protest as an internal Russian matter to which Geneva could best respond primarily through quiet diplomacy. This attitude evoked indignation among many, including theology students in Utrecht. The World Council was reproached for not daring to take a vulnerable position and, as a cold 'church establishment' for not really being sympathetic to the Russian Christians. United in an action group, the students called the World Council to raise its colours and to openly declare solidarity with Solzhenitsyn. For Albert van den Heuvel (1932), this was just before his departure from the central committee to take up a position as secretary of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church). In the magazine *In de Waagschaal*, he defended the cautious line taken by Visser 't Hooft and showed sympathy for the leadership of the Russian church which had to survive under Russian state communism. Solzhenitsyn had attacked the wrong people.[68]

In contrast, the Utrecht professor of early church history, Gilles Quispel (1916-2006), supported the students. It was his belief that a prophet had arisen in the Russian mystic Solzhenitsyn,[69] and he reproached the World Council for its reluctance to speak out against abuses in the Soviet Union and its lack of knowledge about the persecution of Christians. Quispel attacked the leaders of the World Council harshly as non-spiritual managers in an article he submitted on this issue to *De Telegraaf* on the Saturday before the meeting of the central committee. He accused the members of the committee of denying prophecy and compared them with the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus.

> Blake and Van den Heuvel are managers. Just like someone who deals in lightbulbs, so they deal in churches *en gros*. And we know that a manager does not need to be able to read or write. He can be someone with no spiritual qualities. But he has to be able to organise. And the great deed now of the manager Visser 't Hooft was that he brought the Russian Orthodox Church into the World Council. His successors now have the task of maintaining this large area. And then if an individual like Solzhenitsyn stands up and thwarts this strategy, they have to think of the major interests that are at stake for their business. And then they're greatly tempted to say: 'You don't know anything, and you don't understand that it is in your interests if one person dies for the people and the whole people is not lost'.[70]

68 *In de Waagschaal*, no.5, 29 April 1972.

69 Quispel, 'Solsjenitsyn mysticus en profeet', 1972.

70 Quispel, 'Wereldraad, steun Solsjenitsyn', in: *De Telegraaf*, 12 August 1972: 'Blake en Van den Heuvel zijn managers. Zoals een ander doet in gloeilampen, zo doen zij in kerken *en gros*. Een

These words led to a 'furious tirade' by Visser 't Hooft against Professor Quispel on 15 August in the hallways of the exhibition centre in Utrecht. 'Livid with rage', Visser 't Hooft accused him of rude accusations and of ranting in the papers.[71] When Visser 't Hooft then called the student members of the action group 'old wives' because they parroted Quispel unquestioningly, the students were very shocked. They asked Quispel, who had apparently gone too far, to leave the action group. He did so and retracted his accusation of 'managers' at the World Council. There were various discussions between the leaders of the World Council and the students, but the latter stoodby their claim that what was happening in the council was not spiritual but bureaucratic and diplomatic. A banner proclaimed: 'No diplomats but prophets'. That was one of the slogans with which Quispel had ended his *Telegraaf* article – for Visser 't Hooft, a painful echo of Karl Barth. The image that was left in the media was that of a smooth-talking bureaucracy focused only on diplomacy, unable to defend a prophetic voice during times of religious persecution.

Outsiders who made a caricature of the World Council and its leaders could make Visser 't Hooft furious: his legacy was at stake. The World Council had acquired an international status that people should be able to nourish.

> There is no doubt that people are willing to listen to the World Council in all kinds of areas. If the general secretary is thus also a man who sells this in the right way, quite often in personal conversations, as well as sometimes in public statements … in which he actually usually has to work with his fellow leaders, must not act too much alone when he does that, he has a good chance of being listened to.[72]

manager, het is bekend, hoeft niet te kunnen lezen of schrijven. Hij kan een man zijn zonder geestelijk gehalte. Maar hij moet kunnen organiseren. En nu is de grote daad van de manager Visser 't Hooft geweest, dat hij de Russisch-orthodoxe kerk bij de Wereldraad van Kerken heeft gebracht. Zijn opvolgers staan voor de taak dit grote gebied er bij te houden. En als dan een enkeling als Solzjenitsyn opstaat en deze strategie doorkruist, moeten zij denken aan de grote belangen die voor hun zaak op het spel staan. En de verleiding is dan groot om te zeggen: 'Jullie weten niets en jullie beseft niet, dat het in jullie belang is, als één mens sterft voor het volk en niet het hele volk verloren gaat.'

71 *de Volkskrant*, 18 August 1972, and *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, 16 August 1972.

72 N. van Gelder, interview with Visser 't Hooft, NCRV Television, Ander Nieuws, 18 August 1972, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Er is geen twijfel aan dat op allerlei gebieden mensen bereid zijn naar de Wereldraad te luisteren. Als dus de generaal-secretaris tegelijk een man is die dit op de juiste wijze aan de man brengt, heel dikwijls in persoonlijke gesprekken, soms ook in openbare mededelingen […] waarin hij eigenlijk het meest dan moet samenwerken met zijn mede-leiders, niet in z'n eentje te veel moet optreden, wanneer hij dat doet, heeft hij een goede kans dat er naar hem geluisterd wordt.'

Even though he had already been retired for a long time, the honorary president Visser 't Hooft still succeeded even at this time in showing what he thought should happen. For example, he would play a key role at the end of that same year (1972) in the Ecumencial Centre on the Route de Ferney, when the president of the Federal Republic of Germany, Gustav W. Heinemann, made a state visit to Switzerland and had announced that he also wanted to visit the World Council in Geneva. Visser 't Hooft was actually planning to attend the world conference of the United Bible Societies in Addis Ababa, but Eugene Blake was out of the country at the time and Potter was still being worked in, so Visser 't Hooft was asked to act as host to Heinemann. This was shortly after the attack on the Israeli team at the Olympic Games in Munich and security regulations were strict. But Visser 't Hooft enjoyed it. He was well acquainted with his guest from the time after the war. As an active member of the Lutheran church in 1945, Heinemann had been a member of the German delegation during the reconciliation talks in Stuttgart, was a co-founder of the German Christian Democratic Party, CDU, and had participated in the assemblies of the World Council. It was a cordial meeting and strong in content. Visser 't Hooft expressed the hope that the voice of the poor would continue to be heard in the Federal Republic in discussions on development aid and that Europe would continue to work on reconciliation and peace in Europe. He praised Heinemann's devotion in attempting to achieve in his work as president what he and his brothers and sisters in the church and ecumenicity had discovered. Visser 't Hooft welcomed him as a brother: 'Willkommen, lieber Bruder Heinemann in dieser ökumenischen Familie, die auch Ihre Familie ist.'[73] The discussion concerned the World Council programme of combatting racism in particular, which was controversial especially in West Germany, and Heinemann made the effort to speak positively about this. Boudewijn Sjollema, director of this programme, and the Lutheran theologian Helmut Gollwitzer had done their best to influence Heinemann behind the scenes. At the last moment, Heinemann's words were altered by his staff into the intended meaning.[74] 'Well done!' Visser 't Hooft said to Sjollema after it was done. That was how he liked it. It was the way of acting he wanted the World Council to reacquire: diplomacy behind the scenes and at the same time strong on content in public.

73 Visser 't Hooft, 'Sehr verehrter Herr Bundespräsident', speech, no date, 1972, WCC 994.2.26/19: 'Welcome, dear brother Heinemann to this ecumenical family, which is also your family.'

74 Zeilstra, interview with B.C. Sjollema, 20 August 2013.

9.5 A Pilgrim Welcome among the Elite, but Lost in Mass Tourism

In the first half of the 1970s, Visser 't Hooft made a number of trips to the Eastern Mediterranean area. He had many contacts there and was received everywhere at high level with open arms. On 1 October 1972, he left for Jerusalem, where he attended a meeting of the Alliance of the Orders of St. John, of which he was the outgoing president. He made a day trip to the Sinai desert and on the one hand remembered that this was the birthplace of the biblical faith and on the other wondered how the people of the Exodus could ever have survived there. Of his visit to the St. Catharina Monastery, he later remembered little more than the tourists: the monks hid themselves away, and the library remained closed. He preached on Matthew 28:7b at a church service in St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem: 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee.' With this text, he pointed to the danger that pilgrims might spend all their time looking backward, whereas Jesus was always going forward. In the ecumenical institute of Tantur near Jerusalem, he met the rector Jean-Jacques von Allmen from Neuchâtel, with whom he discussed how ecumenicity and peace initiatives could be brought together here. He was irritated at the 'Garden Tomb' by the 'Custodian' Jan Willem van der Hoeven, son of the secretary of Queen Juliana and founder of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem. Van der Hoeven announced to the visitors in a prophetic tone that a new bloodbath was about to occur in Jerusalem that would reveal God's judgement over all people. Visser 't Hooft thought little of it: 'He is a gifted speaker of the shouting variety.'[75]

On 9 October 1972, Visser 't Hooft was named honorary fellow of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The praise he was accorded during the lunch for his work on behalf of the Jews in the Second World War embarrassed him.[76] He answered that he had not done enough, but the joint efforts of the Dutch churches on behalf of the Jews had brought those churches closer together. Visser 't Hooft understood very well that there were Jews who felt that he, in his role as general secretary of the World Council, had paid little attention to the State of Israel after the Second World War. He expressed himself as follows in a circular letter to the family.

75 Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear Family and Friends', 16 October 1972. Family Archive Visser 't Hooft.
76 Eddo Rosenthal, interview with Visser 't Hooft, IKOR Radio, 12 October 1972, Sound and Vision Archives.

> I came away with the feeling that we must do everything to avoid further polarisation in the Middle East. Too many Christians have become partisans on one side or the other. The only hope is to arrive at some form of modus vivendi. The Arabs and especially the Palestinians must accept the existence of Israel. But the Israelis must learn that there is a real Palestinian problem which must somehow be solved. There are indications that the younger Israelis begin to see that they must give not only economic possibilities to the Arabs, but also a sense of responsible participation in the life of the country.[77]

The ecumenical travel bureau Cleo specialised in modern forms of pilgrimage and cultural exposure. That spoke to Visser 't Hooft, and he joined as a participant expert. While travelling, he gave lectures on, for example, Eastern Orthodoxy and the Roman Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement. He also preached here and there. In 1973, he took another cruise to the Eastern Mediterranean area but began to feel anxious being on a ship together with 600 people. When they came in sight of Istanbul, he remembered arriving there in 1928 with Jetty and his brother Hans in the same way. He was irritated by what he saw as 'the pile of ugly valuables' in the Topkapi Museum but was profoundly impressed by the magnificent simplicity of the Blue Mosque.[78] He was received by the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios of Constantinople. It felt strange for him to sit in the same room where he had so often been a guest of his friend Patriarch Athenagoras. An ecumenical service was held in the theatre of Philippi in which Visser 't Hooft, with Philippians 2 as his text, preached on the serving character of Christ and the unity that he expected from his disciples. The Roman Catholic Mass and the Protestant Lord's Supper were celebrated simultaneously but separately, as Visser 't Hooft expressed it: 'Together and yet not fully together – a true reflection of the ecumenical situation.' After a visit to the Meteora Monasteries, Visser 't Hooft was a guest of Archbishop Hieronomos and the Inter-Orthodox Centre in the Monastery of Penteli. The Cleo group arrived in Rome via the Peloponnese and Naples, where they were received at the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity by Cardinal Jo Willebrands, who, as always, sketched an optimistic image of the ecumenical situation.

In 1974, Visser 't Hooft left on a cruise from Venice, the city where he had had his honeymoon 50 years earlier with Jetty. Now as well there were

77 Ibid.

78 Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear Family and Friends', 19 November 1973, Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.

too many people on board for his liking.[79] The Cleo group now included 60 participants, primarily Protestants. During this trip, Visser 't Hooft gave around eight lectures but was increasingly bothered by the noisy atmosphere of mass tourism. In Athens, he introduced an old friend and staff member of the World Council, Professor Nikos Nissiotis, the director of the Ecumenical Study Centre in Bossey. Nissiotis gave a lecture on the difficulty of being Greek in the modern period, and for Visser 't Hooft, this was one of the nicest moments of the whole trip. The ship sailed to Haifa via Rhodes. In Jerusalem, Visser 't Hooft met Professor Schlomo Avineri, professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University, and they discussed the participation of Israelis in the interreligious encounters organised by the World Council. It was a pleasant trip, but Visser 't Hooft again ascertained afterwards that combining Cleo's pilgrimage objective with mass tourism cruises was not a good idea. He went on a 'croisière oecuménique' in 1975 once more, but it was his last. First however, in the autumn of 1974 he invited about 40 friends, almost all of them from Geneva, and his children with their spouses to the restaurant Perle du Lac to celebrate his coming to live in Geneva with Jetty 50 years before. At this time he had a smart 12-cylinder Jaguar he had taken over from a friend but later sold for 1200 francs because he did not feel like spending a lot of money on new tyres – to the chagrin of his grandsons, who spoke of their grandfather's 'cruelty' to the car. The family was in agreement: 'Atta does not drive a car. He wants to get as fast as possible from A to B.'[80]

9.6 Nairobi 1975: Disappointed and Isolated

After a period in which it seemed as if secularisation was expanding worldwide and that the majority of people would choose to live from then on without any ultimate religious purpose or a religiously interpreted meaning, the second half of the 1970s saw a new interest in religion, even though there was no revival of the church in Western Europe. Visser 't Hooft found it difficult to understand. He pointed out that there had always been an ecumenicity outside the church and that he himself had come out of that.

> I have … never had the feeling that the ecumenical movement only had to involve the church or that it, as it were, had to acquire a monopoly and therefore had to take an offensive attitude to what happened outside the

79 Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear Family and Friends', 15 November 1974, Visser 't Hooft Family Archives.
80 P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, letter to the author, 15 December 2017.

> church structures. The more that happened the better. Just don't let it happen, as it were, in a fight with the churches.[81]

He spoke of the revival of Islam as 'a flash in the pan' that did not actually count. There had always been waves, movements in which at one time Christianity won territory from Islam and at another time the reverse happened.[82] Visser 't Hooft saw an old enemy in new forms and continued with his obstinate resistance to syncretism. 'You accept it, or you deny it, but you don't tinker with it.'[83] Thinkers like Goethe, Rousseau, and Nietzsche had already opened the door of European culture wide to the new paganism, and that was now powerfully ascendant. In Visser 't Hooft's analysis, it was natural theology and the phenomena traditionally associated with that that were now appearing in new forms.

Christianity was no longer able to put its stamp on society. But the great ideologies were quickly decreasing in significance. Forms of idealism that had been influenced by Christianity, such as liberalism and socialism, had lost their power of appeal, in his view. Visser 't Hooft saw the relativising power of postmodernism taking their place, along with indifference to the worldview debate. The result was major fragmentation, self-justification, scepticism, and materialism. By way of preparation for the fifth assembly of the World Council in Nairobi, Visser 't Hooft gave an analysis along these lines of the pagan element in modern culture in his study called 'Evangelism in the Neo-Pagan Situation'.[84] Naive admiration for nature or the glorification of the life force took the place of admiration and respect for the Creator, God. A more explicit theology of nature was, in his view, therefore necessary. The confrontation with the new paganism, 'neo-paganism', was not only an alarming challenge but also, according to Visser 't Hooft, a great opportunity. Just as he had so often done, he now wanted to show again that syncretism, the apparently unquestioning merging of religions, could never be a cogent answer to the spiritual needs of humankind.

81 Interview with Visser 't Hooft, Onderweg, IKON Radio, 12 October 1975, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Ik heb [...] nooit het gevoel gehad dat de oecumenische beweging alléén maar kerkelijk moest zijn, of dat hij, om zo te zeggen, een monopolie moest zien te krijgen, en zich daarom offensief op moest stellen tegen wat er buiten de kerkelijke structuren gebeurt. Hoe meer er gebeurt hoe beter. Alleen, laat het niet gebeuren, om zo te zeggen, in een vechtpartij met de kerken.'

82 Zeilstra, interviews with P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, 7 November 2013, and with C.M.W. Visser 't Hooft, 25 October 2014.

83 Interviews with P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, 7 November 2013: '*You accept it, or you deny it*, maar je sleutelt er niet aan.'

84 Visser 't Hooft, 'Evangelism in the Neo-Pagan Situation', 1974.

One of the concrete themes that he connected to this in this period was that of marriage ethics. Here he saw a dramatic decline in Christian principles with, in his eyes, disastrous results. The proper approach to this problem was then not a defence of Puritanical morality but making a firm stand for marriage as a once-and-for-all relationship, based on faithfulness and a rejection of the sexual morality of pure self-expression. Visser 't Hooft was sometimes asked to officiate at a wedding in the family, as on 29 July 1972 in Bloemendaal, when he blessed the marriage of Jeanne van Hoytema and his nephew Alexander Visser 't Hooft.[85] The sermon was on Philippians 2:3-5, where, according to Visser 't Hooft, the apostle Paul gives some penetrating advice on the attitude that people should take towards each other in order to form a true community. He placed the emphasis on humbly looking up towards each other and described, following Martin Buber, marriage as the school of 'thou knowledge', where it had to be clear whether someone could live with his or her fellow human being in such a way that the partner was not only a continuation of the 'I' but also a 'thou', a different I, that I was not allowed to use or exploit, 'but with whom I could have a continually richer and deeper encounter.'

Another important theme at this time for Visser 't Hooft was the environment. A doctrine of creation based on the Bible was sorely needed.[86] He wanted to contribute to that. For him, creation was not only a question of historical-causal claims about the origin of the earth or the Flood, but a creation ethics grounded in biblical theology. In texts from, among others, Genesis, the Psalms, and Job, he attempted to indicate revelatory givens that provided a basis for the task of humans to care for creation. Entirely in line with Karl Barth, he pointed out that the Bible does not see nature itself as sacred but points to the holy, ultimately God himself. It was the failing human being who brought God's splendid creation under a curse. That was why people lived in a broken creation. But whoever focused on Christ would be enabled by God to heal.

He remembered that only three or four people were still alive who had been at his first ecumenical conference in Stockholm in 1925. He wrote: I belong

> to a kind of species that is dying out at great speed. In that situation, it's a comfort to see that people are nevertheless not forgotten and that, in addition to old friends, there are many new ones as well.[87]

85 Visser 't Hooft, Sermon for the blessing of the marriage of Alexander Visser 't Hooft and Jeanne van Hoytema, 1972.

86 Visser 't Hooft, 'Matériaux bibliques pour l'élaboration d'une théologie de la nature', 1974, especially 105.

87 Visser 't Hooft to 'Beste vrienden', September 1975, HDC-PE, NCSV 725-3.

With such beliefs he looked forward to the Nairobi assembly, the last he would attend:

> I am happy that I will still be of some use and that I can maintain contact with the generation now active (although that is not always easy). The main question is whether in this world as well, which is becoming less and less transparent and whose future, humanly speaking, is so dark, you can still believe that God will have the last word.[88]

It had to be made clear at the assembly whether the World Council would continue the 'horizontal line' that emerged in Uppsala or whether it would arrive at a balance 'between the central faith questions and the practical questions of colloboration and aid to all people in need in this world'.[89] But the assembly in Nairobi was disappointing for Visser 't Hooft personally. He felt isolated and unheard in the Kenyatta Conference Centre. Was this his World Council? The theme was 'Jesus Christ – frees and unites', whereby a connection was made between personal faith in Jesus Christ and the church's task in the world. The intention was to find answers to the questions that remained unanswered after Uppsala and to connect a combative attitude in social-political questions with spiritual development. But what Visser 't Hooft primarily experienced was the ebbing away of ecumenical commitment. The American Presbyterian theologian and activist Robert McAfee Brown argued in Nairobi that Christians who assumed social responsibility for others were therefore liberated people. If they did not do so, they were heretics. When Visser 't Hooft asked him how he knew the members of the assembly were really 'liberated people', McAfee Brown is said to have answered: 'Well, I take that for granted.'[90] An astonished Visser 't Hooft thought back with regret to Uppsala and now knew for certain that what he himself had said had been completely misunderstood by people like McAfee Brown. What had been intended as self-criticism had become self-justification. Good works had taken the place of *sola fide*, the Reformation adage 'by faith alone'. Making this kind of thinking the basis for policy in Geneva would end up being counterproductive, in Visser 't Hooft's view. The World Council seemed to have become a church action group, and more pietistically oriented churches would more and more reject the ecumenical movement. In Nairobi, Visser

88 Ibid.

89 Interview with Visser 't Hooft, Documentaire Nairobi, EO Television, 27 November 1975, Sound and Vision Archives.

90 Oostveen, 'De bittere spijt van W.A. Visser 't Hooft', 1985.

't Hooft could do nothing else than admit they were right to do so and spoke these bitter words about the assembly: 'They sing off-key and there's nobody to hear it.'[91] His tried and tested tactic of quiet diplomacy was also subjected to critique at the assembly. Now, also within the World Council, the criticism was voiced that the council had not wanted to openly accuse the Soviet Union of a lack of religious freedom, and there was a hearing on this issue. The Russians were irritated, abstained from voting, and began to think about leaving. It was decided that the *zone of silence* about religious freedom in Eastern Europe was past and that the general secretary had to report on his activities in this respect to the following assembly. It was no longer left to the leaders to promote interests behind the scenes with secret diplomacy. Visser 't Hooft had secretly hoped that, if the Russian Church felt that it was trusted in the ecumenical movement, a prophetic voice would be awakened in it that would also address its own government. That had not happened.[92]

People did not come together by liberating themselves; Visser 't Hooft held, rather, that scattered people would be united by being liberated by Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd. On 25 August 1978, he gave a lecture to the sisters of the international ecumenical community of Grandchamp in Switzerland, which was connected to Taizé, called: 'Théologie Biblique de Rassemblement' (A Biblical Theology of Assembly).[93] In this lecture he gave his view of the crisis of the times. He had already spoken often of the ecumenical movement as the bringing together of scattered sheep, but now he worked the image out in a more systematic and biblical theological way. He based his argument on a series of biblical texts on shepherding: Jeremiah 32:37, Ezekiel 34:13, Deuteronomy 30:3, and Isaiah 56:7-8. It was always God himself who provided a Messianic shepherd. Jesus showed, according to Visser 't Hooft, what that actually means in his words and deeds. He himself was the Good Shepherd who came to redeem God's promise for all of humanity. There was no room for any neutral attitude in Visser 't Hooft's view here. In the Codex Sinaiticus, one of the base texts of the Gospel, Visser 't Hooft found a very suggestive extra word in Luke 11:23 and Matthew 12:30. Here Jesus says: 'Whoever does not gather with me scatters *me*.'

In an interview by the journalists Barend de Ronden and Henk Biersteker, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Faith and Order in 1977,

91 Ibid.

92 Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel, and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON Radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.

93 Visser 't Hooft, 'Théologie Biblique du Rassemblement', 1978.

he summarised his view of the relation between faith on the one hand and practice as it was dealt with in the department for Life and Work on the other in a concise way:

> [I]f you're dealing with social issues, then you nevertheless have to do that with a good theology. I say, it's a good thing for some tension to continue and that they [Faith and Order versus Life and Work] challenge each other somewhat all the time, then tease each other from time to time and say: You're concerned about church unity while the world burns! It's good if 'church unity' hears that, that it doesn't go about its work too lethargically as if it can spend eternity working on that unity, that it is thus really needed.[94]

In the World Council after Nairobi, he felt the balance was disturbed. But too great a uniformity was not good either. When he visited Asia for the first time at the beginning of the 1930s, he found only a reflection of Western Christianity there. Visser 't Hooft pleaded that people in Asia and Africa be given the room to develop their own cultural forms as long 'the essence' was not lost. One always had to be on guard for syncretism, or else it would turn out badly. But whoever came from a period of uniformity, he now said, did not have to be afraid of that as much and – if it was a question of having bishops in a Protestant church or not – should pay attention primarily to the situation of the church it concerned.

> I believe that you also have the New Testament before you. In the New Testament the questions concerning the forms are much looser. So many different forms can be found in the life of the old churches, while they share one central gospel.[95]

94 B. de Ronden and H. Biersteker, interview with Visser 't Hooft, Vijftig jaar Geloof en Kerkorde, IKON Television, 27 May 1977, Sound and Vision Archives: '[A]ls je met de sociale vragen bezig bent, dan moet je dat toch ook doen met een goeie theologie. Ik zeg, het is een goed ding dat er een zekere spanning blijft en dat ze mekaar de hele tijd een beetje uitdagen. Ik zou zeggen, het is goed dat ze elkaar van tijd tot tijd een beetje plagen en zeggen: wat zit jij met je kerkelijke eenheid op het moment dat de wereld in brand staat! Het is goed als 'kerkelijke eenheid' dat hoort, dat ze maar niet al te gezapig gaan zitten doen alsof zij eeuwig tijd hebben om aan die eenheid te werken, dat het dus werkelijk nodig is.'

95 Ibid.: 'Ik geloof dat je dan ook het Nieuwe Testament voor je hebt. In het Nieuwe Testament liggen de vragen van de vormen veel losser. Er zijn zoveel verschillende vormen te vinden in het leven van de oude gemeentes, terwijl ze wel een centraal evangelie gemeen hebben.'

He had taken over the essence of Ernst Käsemann's ecclesiology; his position on this issue had shifted quite a bit since 1963.[96] But he remained cautious concerning interreligious dialogue. Asked if he did not cling too much to the Christian faith and was not open enough to non-Christian religions, he responded as follows:

> I don't see how that can be proposed as an alternative. I believe that someone who conducts a dialogue with other religions or with other spiritual traditions needs to be very rooted precisely in his own faith; otherwise, he has nothing to discuss. What do I have to discuss with a Buddhist or with a Muslim if I am not a good Christian? Then there's no real discussion at all between the religions.[97]

Most staff members of the World Council who focused on contacts with other religions respected Visser 't Hooft because of his track record, but they did deplore the fact that he always saw the dangers of syncretism so quickly without seeing the possibilities, and that he never wanted to accept the inevitability of a certain amount of syncretism.

9.7 A Member of the Groupe de Bellerive

Since the 1960s, Dietrich Bonhoeffer has often and widely been viewed as the theologian of secular Christianity. That was, according to Visser 't Hooft, a huge mistake. Whoever wanted to turn Bonhoeffer into the theologian of 'the death of God', in the spirit of Nietzsche, missed the point completely of his theology.[98] Because he had been arrested and killed by the Nazis, Bonhoeffer was not able to finish his work. His central ideas were the key to understanding his theology properly. Visser 't Hooft was convinced that Bonhoeffer never stopped thinking Christocentrically. He closely adhered

96 Cf. 6.9.

97 Ibid.: 'Ik zie niet in dat je dat als een alternatief mag stellen. Ik geloof dat ik iemand die een dialoog met andere godsdiensten houdt of met andere geestelijke stromingen, juist heel verworteld moet zijn in z'n eigen geloof, anders heeft hij niets te bepraten. Wat heb ik te bepraten met een boeddhist of met een mohammedaan als ik niet een goeie christen ben. Dan is er überhaupt geen reëel gesprek meer tussen de godsdiensten.'

98 In collaboration with the international Bonhoeffer Committee, the World Council organised a symposium in Geneva from 4-8 February 1976 called 'Werk und Wirkung von Dietrich Bonhoeffer' (Work and Influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer) on the occasion of what would have been Bonhoeffer's 70th birthday. Visser 't Hooft gave an introductory lecture here and defended his view of Bonhoeffer. Raiser and Sens, *A Symposium on Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (1976). See also 3.9.

to the view of Christ presented in Colossians 1 by the apostle Paul as the king who ruled the powers of the world.[99]

A world society that no longer wanted to know anything about the kingship of Christ would sooner or later fall prey to triumphalism and pride. After 1970, Visser 't Hooft was surprised about the naivité in which he saw this happening around him in various areas of society, as in nuclear energy and environmental pollution. Literature was replete with images of idealists who lost sight of any proportion and, as a result, the good they had spoiled. The vain human being who challenged God became a Faust or a Prometheus. Without any kind of self-limitation and feeling for proper relations, Visser 't Hooft saw human beings as a result lapsing into megalomania. For the sake of the integrity of the cosmic order, he felt boundaries had to be respected in the application of scientific knowledge.[100] In their complacency, human beings pulled nature down with them in this fall. To illustrate what he meant, Visser 't Hooft pointed in another article to the difference between respect for nature and reverence for God shown by Francis of Assisi on the one hand and the unbridled worship of the life force by Nietzsche, symbolised in the Greek god Dionysos, the god who triumphed in intoxication.[101]

On 11 February 1977, Visser 't Hooft was awarded the Hanseatic Goethe Prize in Hamburg. This biannual prize is awarded to Europeans who devote themselves outstandingly to bringing nations together in a humanitarian way. In his lecture on this occasion he engaged in a critical treatment of Western triumphalism.[102] He felt less developed countries were right to reproach Europe for complacency. The technological gems of Western civilisation did not bring the promised satisfaction. According to many, an old and paralysed Europe no longer had anything new to offer. Critics had written European culture off and sought solace in the life force of primitive peoples or Eastern religions. Visser 't Hooft saw only one remedy: humility. Over against the powerful medieval pope, Innocence III, was the mendicant monk Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), the preacher of poverty. That was the salvation of the church. This insight, that people were called by God not to rule but to serve, had to be discovered again and again. In the 20th century, this was happening in the ecumenical movement, which could also be understood as a penitential movement by churches that engaged in repentance. The Third World and Europe needed each other.

99 See also Visser 't Hooft, 'An Act of Penance', 1966.
100 Visser 't Hooft, 'Nuclear Mythology', 1978.
101 Visser 't Hooft, 'Dionysos ou Saint François', 1974.
102 Visser 't Hooft, 'The End of European Triumphalism', 1977.

Money and technology would only then become truly valuable if a Europe that was willing to serve discovered its post-triumphalistic mission. The anti-Western attitude and the anti-Americanism in Third World countries he was concerned about should not prevent Europe from beginning a true dialogue with the former colonies.[103]

While Visser 't Hooft continued to feel responsible for the ecumenical movement until his death, he nevertheless began to distance himself somewhat from the World Council of Churches. He sought out other platforms to make his voice heard on the topics that occupied him: the concern for the environment and the consequences of the development of nuclear energy and nuclear weapons. Educated people with insight should not wait but bring their life experience and their knowledge together and take action before processes got out of control. Together with various people in the intellectual circles in Geneva, he decided to form 'a think tank' and platform for action. In October 1977, Visser 't Hooft co-founded the Groupe de Bellerive, twelve men, each an expert in his own field, including physicists, doctors, philosophers, and theologians.[104] A foundation was later attached to this group, which was initially informal in character; this foundation collaborated with British and Scandinavian non-governmental organisations, the World Wide Fund for Nature, and other international institutions. The most important host and president was the religious leader of Persian Nazar Islam and the High Commissioner for Refugees at the United Nations, Sadruddin Aga Khan (1933-2003).[105] The group was named after his castle Bellerive in the village Collonge-Bellerive, on the eastern shore of Lake Geneva. Members included the philosopher Denis de Rougemont, author of *Penser avec les mains* (1936), and the World Council staff member, Lukas Vischer. They met once every few months.

The Groupe de Bellerive saw all kinds of social tensions converging around the nuclear problem. Because of their concern about the nuclear arms race and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the members wanted to bring knowledge and society together on a high level. Bellerive argued for councils of reflection and evaluation with a public character. According to the members, an important change in mentality could be detected around 1970. The gross national product was no longer universally accepted as the appropriate standard for human welfare. At the same time,

103 L. Pagano and G. Sonder, interview with Visser 't Hooft, Magazine, AVRO Radio, 17 August 1980, Sound and Vision Archives.

104 Perrot, *European Security* (1984).

105 Miserez, *Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan* (2017).

a counterculture could be seen rising among young people, as well as the acceptance of equal rights for minorities and women; the rise of a new concern with nature and natural resources and the awareness that resources were scarcer than thought. The member churches expected that those in power would increasingly come into conflict with those who demanded reforms. The anti-nuclear energy movement was seen in the Bellerive group as an exponent of these developments. Serious presentations were given at members' homes and statements were prepared for the public, as in October 1977, May 1979, and April 1981. Visser 't Hooft was not in principle against the peaceful use of nuclear energy, but he did argue for intensive further research into the dangers of radiation and the problems of nuclear waste.[106] Six international colloquia were organised. Visser 't Hooft attended the meetings of the Bellerive Group faithfully, but not when they became too technical in the field of physics – 'I don't understand a thing about that.'[107] Bellerive collaborated as a 'think tank' with Unicef, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Wildlife Fund for the preservation of nature and against deforestation and desertification. There was also aid for climate refugees and efforts at protecting endangered species. In 2006, the activities of the Bellerive Foundation were integrated into the Aga Khan Foundation in the form of the Aga Khan Fund for the Environment, which still exists.

9.8 Eighty Years Old: An Angry Old Man?

On 20 September 1980, Visser 't Hooft turned 80 years old. Congratulations flowed in from all over the world. A festschrift had been prepared for him, complete with a tabula gratulatoria and a foreword by Philip Potter.[108] But it was not an enjoyable time. His health was in serious decline. Shortly after having enjoyed Christmas in 1977 with Hans and Emijet and their children, he was admitted to hospital in March 1978 because of heart problems. Thanks to Aat Guittart, he was eating a little better now. She, along with others, took care that a friend came by every day to dine with him: 'For I

106 L. Pagano and G. Sonder, interview with Visser 't Hooft, Magazine, AVRO Radio, 17 August 1980, Sound and Vision Archives.

107 Schipper, 'Dr. Visser 't Hooft een beetje eenzaam naar de tachtig', interview with Visser 't Hooft, *Trouw*, 2 April 1980. Zeilstra, interview with A. Musacchio-Visser 't Hooft, 3 February 2015, and P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, 7 November 2013.

108 Van der Bent, *Voices of Unity. Essays in honour of Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft on the Occasion of his 80th Birthday* (1981).

am supposed to eat more and for that one needs company.'[109] But it was not only Visser 't Hooft who was having a difficult time; his World Council was also undergoing difficulties. The interest in ecumenicity was decreasing more and more, especially among young people. Visser 't Hooft saw his beloved WSCF fall apart in one decade. Once a flourishing student society with a rich tradition, the Dutch branch, the NCSV, changed into an open discussion platform and would be dissolved in 1985, the year of his death. He gave several interviews in 1980. The journalist Aldert Schipper visited him in the spring in the Ecumenical Centre on the Route de Ferney and noted:

> Willem Adolph [sic] Visser 't Hooft is an aristocrat from head to toe, from the black fedora, via the studied casualness in speech, to the weak handshake when saying good-bye. Whoever talks with him does get the impression, however, that this man suffers from a loneliness that has increased over the years. 'I think often: if only I could ask Hendrik Kraemer about that, or share that experience with William Temple. But they are no longer here. I am the only one who's still left,' Visser 't Hooft says wistfully from behind his imposing oak desk in one of the small rooms in the ecumenical centre in Geneva.[110]

It was not an easy conversation for either of them, and Visser 't Hooft was not very happy about the result in the newspaper. Schipper apologised later on in a letter to him. He sensed that he had annoyed Visser 't Hooft during the interview.[111] The attention of the readers was primarily drawn by remarks Visser 't Hooft made about the decreasing interest in Barth, the harmful sides of Marxism, and his critique of 'Christians for socialism'.

In the interview, Visser 't Hooft said that he was not at all afraid of death. He hoped to meet old friends and to see his dear wife. But he did not have a clear idea of what he could expect. He felt that, as a Christian, one had to be agnostic on that issue. One should not want to know more, he thought,

109 Visser 't Hooft to 'Dear Family and Friends', 6 March 1978, HDC-PE, NCSV 725-3.

110 Schipper, 'Dr. Visser 't Hooft een beetje eenzaam naar de tachtig', interview with Visser 't Hooft, in: *Trouw*, 2 April 1980: 'Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft is van top tot teen een aristocraat, van de zwarte gleufhoed, via het bestudeerd slordige spreken tot het slappe handje bij het afscheid. Wie met hem praat krijgt echter wel de indruk dat deze man lijdt aan de eenzaamheid die met de jaren is toegenomen. "Ik denk vaak: kon ik dat nog maar eens vragen aan Hendrik Kraemer of die ervaring delen met William Temple. Maar ze zijn er niet meer. Ik ben de enige die nog is overgebleven", zegt Visser 't Hooft weemoedig vanachter zijn imposante eikenhouten bureau in een van de kleine kamertjes in het oecumenisch centrum in Genève.'

111 A. Schipper to Visser 't Hooft, 3 April 1980, WCC 994.1.24/10.

than what had been revealed. He understood how people sometimes looked at him: 'I hope that I will be spared turning into a sad old man who rails against the present in the name of the past.' When asked about ecumenicity, Visser 't Hooft did not exclude the possibility that the World Council could ultimately 'fail'. But if it did, something else, according to him, would take its place, 'for the idea itself cannot fail'. Aldert Schipper recorded the words of Visser 't Hooft who spoke like a prophet:

> The essence of the Christian faith includes the unity of the people of God. We have tried to give that a certain shape in this century. It's possible that it has to 'fail' one day in order to find a different shape.[112]

In 1980, Visser 't Hooft did see that ecumenicity had lost the sheen of newness. Major theological uncertainty was accompanied with an open aversion to the institutional aspect at this time. With respect to the latter, he could see that ecumenicity had had its day and had to make room for spontaneous 'ecumenicity on the level of the basic community'. He made an appeal for solidarity in the crisis.[113]

On 17 August, a few weeks before he turned 80, a party was organised in the garden of the Ecumenical Centre. Visser 't Hooft even gave a speech that Aldert Schipper reported on in *Trouw*, without – possibly to make up for the earlier interview somewhat – any critical remarks. Visser 't Hooft asserted that a healthy ecumenicity was impossible without including the churches.

> An ecumenical movment that is completely non-institutional can come up with good ideas about unity but cannot produce any concrete results.[114]

In the same week, Visser 't Hooft was interviewed for *NRC Handelsblad* by Frits Groenendijk. To the latter's question of what the ecumenical movement was actually about, Visser 't Hooft referred – quite strikingly – first to Simon Vestdijk. Visser 't Hooft continued to be bothered by Vestdijk's *De toekomst*

112 Schipper, 'Dr. Visser 't Hooft een beetje eenzaam naar de tachtig', interview with Visser 't Hooft, in: *Trouw*, 2 April 1980: 'In het wezen van het christelijk geloof ligt de eenheid van het volk van God besloten. Wij hebben in deze eeuw geprobeerd dat een zekere vorm te geven. Het kan zijn dat het op een zekere dag kapot moet om een andere vorm te vinden.'

113 Visser 't Hooft, 'The Crisis of the Ecumenical Movement and the Crisis of the Churches', 1981.

114 Schipper, 'Visser 't Hooft: Vertrouwen in kerken nodig', in: *Trouw*, 18 August 1980: 'Een oecumenische beweging die volledig non institutioneel is kan prachtige gedachten over de eenheid voortbrengen, maar kan geen concrete resultaten produceren.'

der religie, which had been written in 1943, but was not published till after the war. He told Groenendijk that he found it an arrogant and irritating book. In Vestdijk's analysis, the ecumenical movement was more or less the writing on the wall that Christianity was quickly nearing its end. The writer spoke of 'a reunion of family members at a deathbed.'[115] According to Visser 't Hooft, that would indeed be the case if it was simply a matter of churches in the World Council just 'crowding together'. But, in his view, that was not the case at all. It was precisely the structure of unity in the World Council that allowed the churches to take a combative attitude in the world. In his eyes, however, there was a world outside the churches that benefitted from their remaining divided, by which he meant isolated, while they let themselves be played off against one another. These divisive powers seemed to be winning in 1980, and that was what he felt the mood in World Council was suffering from. 'There used to be real ecumenical humour here; that was a kind of tradition. On certain occasions I then composed limericks. But right now it is not very amusing here any more.'[116] It had become another world, with another World Council. Churches from the former colonies demanded attention for their own cultural background and increasingly determined the agenda. Visser 't Hooft did understand that there was no choice, but he did deplore the consequences of accentuating the differences.

He sincerely believed that Potter was having a more difficult time than he himself had had. He had been able to 'swim with the current'. Huge steps were constantly being made when he was general secretary. Now that no spectacular results could be demonstrated, it had become a time not only of consolidation but also, institutionally speaking, of malaise and sacrifices whenever something was to be achieved. In his view, many young people had no idea of what it meant that the church was essentially a universal community.[117]

On 28 July 1982, Visser 't Hooft was a guest in Studio Geneva for Saarland Rundfunk (Saarland Broadcasting) in a radio programme called *Die zornigen alten Männer in den Kirchen* (The Angry Old Men in the Churches).

115 Vestdijk, *De toekomst der religie* (1952), 302-303: 'een reünie van familieleden bij een sterfbed.' If there was a future for religion, it would be, according to Vestdijk, in a socially integrated form that had overcome its metaphysical phase. Christianity would not succeed in this. Ibid., 291. Such a view was diametrically opposed to Visser 't Hooft's.

116 F. Groeneveld, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1980: 'Vroeger bestond hier echte oecumenische humor, dat was een soort traditie. Bij bepaalde gelegenheden maakte ik dan limericks. Maar tegenwoordig is het hier niet erg grappig meer.'

117 L. Pagano and G. Sonder, interview with Visser 't Hooft, Magazine, AVRO Radio, 17 August 1980, Sound and Vision Archives.

He stated immediately that he did not see himself as an angry old man and that he expected young people to have a critical attitude. But he did admit that he became angry when he heard people saying that the church was finished. That was nonsense. What was striking now was his appeal for creativity in church services, with room for art. He did this as well on Dutch radio:

> I did think about and worry at this time: Is it really necessary that we always do precisely the same thing every Sunday morning at 10 o'clock? If we had greater flexibility: one time a good sermon. But I am convinced that no minister can produce 52 good sermons in a year. The last sermon that I preached in January I spent about six weeks on. Not six weeks writing but six weeks going over it. Writing it down is the last thing you do. And so a minister can preach about six good sermons in a year. But on another Sunday, a Bible Sunday of introductions to various Bible sections on exegesis of larger passages with the idea of helping people use their Bibles at home again. Then I would personally very much to see an art Sunday where you show films, of course my beloved Rembrandt, but also Fra Angelico and also Chagall's Old Testament works, and also Russian icons, etc. And I would call another Sunday the lay Sunday, and on that Sunday Christians who take part in societal life would talk about the kind of problems they have to deal with there and how they try to solve them.[118]

Thus, he had about eight different ways to fill in a Sunday. He himself attended experimental church services every now and then in the Temple de Commugny on the eastern side of Lake Geneva around 1980.[119] Nonetheless,

118 Interview by R. Foppen with Visser 't Hooft, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Ik heb wel eens gedacht en daar deze dagen nog eens over zitten piekeren: Is het werkelijk nodig dat we elke zondagochtend om tien uur precies hetzelfde doen. Als we nou eens een veel grotere flexibiliteit hadden: één keer een goeie preek. Maar ik ben ervan overtuigd dat geen enkele dominee 52 goeie preken in een jaar kan produceren. De laatste preek die ik in januari gehouden heb, daar heb ik een week of zes over gedaan. Niet zes weken schrijven, maar piekeren. Op het laatst schrijf je hem op. En zo kan een dominee een stuk of zes goeie preken in een jaar geven. Maar een andere zondag, een bijbelzondag inleidingen over verschillende bijbelgedeelten en exegese van grotere stukken met het idee om de mensen te helpen om hun Bijbel thuis weer te gebruiken. Dan zou ik persoonlijk erg graag willen zien: een kunstzondag waarin je films zou vertonen, natuurlijk mijn geliefde Rembrandt, maar evengoed Fra Angelico en evengoed Chagalls Oudtestamentische dingen en evengoed Russische iconen, etc. En dan zou ik een andere zondag de lekenzondag noemen en op die zondag zouden christenen die in het maatschappelijk leven staan vertellen met wat voor problemen ze daar te maken krijgen en hoe ze die trachten op te lossen.'

119 Zeilstra, interview with P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, 21 October 2017.

although he argued for updating the worship service, he continued to hold that churches should not accept all innovations. For example, he expected churches to actively oppose what in his eyes was the strongly increasing disregard of marriage, which Visser 't Hooft called 'die Verleumdung der Ehe' (the defamation of marriage).

> There are still other aspects of church life that an old man can get angry about. If I am seeing it properly, they have their common origin in that we, men and women of the church, are not grateful enough for the gifts that our Lord has given us. But watch out, old angry men: anger can also just be a sign of ingratitude. Anger should not have the last word; the last word is: *benedictus benedicat*, the blessed blesses.[120]

All in all, he fitted well into the format of the radio programme. But family members found him milder in his final years than previously.[121] The truth was that he did not want to complain, but he could not deny either that he felt increasingly alienated from the developments around him.

The theme of the World Council assembly in Vancouver in 1983 was 'Jesus Christ – The Life of the World'. The organisers of this event had deliberately made it more of a 'happening' than a meeting. The old Visser 't Hooft could not travel to Canada, but he followed what was happening there with fascination. He could appreciate the attention it paid to the aspect of encounter as such. But he felt that content was sacrificed for experience.[122] As the years went by, he experienced more and more difficulty breathing and was increasingly housebound. But he continued to read and to study: literature, for example, poems by *De Tachtigers*, in addition to theology and philosophy.[123] In 1983, a vigorous Visser 't Hooft still gave lectures for students at the ecumenical study centre in Bossey.[124] While he did his best

120 'Die zornigen alten Männer in den Kirchen', radio programme Saarland Rundfunk (Saarland Broadcasting), 28 July 1982, transcription WCC 994.2.30/48: 'Es gibt noch manche andere Aspekte des kirchlichen Lebens, über die ein alter Mann zornig werden kann. Wenn ich recht sehe, ist ihre gemeinsame Ursache, dass wir Männer und Frauen der Kirche nicht dankbar genug sind für die Gaben, die unser Herr uns gegeben hat. Aber passt auf, ihr alten zornigen Männer, Zorn kann auch leicht Undankbarkeit verraten. Zorn darf nicht das letzte Wort sein. Das letzte Wort is: benedictus benedicat: der Gesegnete segnet.'

121 Cf. Zeilstra, interview with P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, 7 November 2013.

122 Visser 't Hooft thought that Vancouver was an example of a less schoolmaster-like role of the World Council. Brico, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1984.

123 'De Tachtigers', Dutch movement of poets from the 1880s, concentrating on aesthetics and influenced by early English romanticism.

124 Visser 't Hooft, 'Lecture at the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies', 1983.

Figure 63 Visser 't Hooft family photo 1980 on the occasion of Visser 't Hooft's 80th birthday



Standing, from left to right: grandson Steven Visser 't Hooft; Conny Patijn, Jetty's cousin; Peter-Paul van Lelyveld; daughter Anneke Musacchio-Visser 't Hooft; son-in-law Mario Musacchio; niece Annemarth Visser 't Hooft; grandson Caspar Visser 't Hooft; son Hans Visser 't Hooft; Steven van Randwijck, Jetty's cousin. Sitting, from left to right: Adriana, mother of Peter-Paul, second wife of Steven van Randwijck; daughter-in-law Emijet Visser 't Hooft-van Randwijck; Atta (Wim Visser 't Hooft); daughter-in-law Pat Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins; Aat Guittart, Visser 't Hooft's personal assistant

in the early 1970s to see opportunities in the increasing plurality of society, around 1980 it was mostly the dangers that attracted his attention. Various emancipation movements did have a right to exist, he found. But now they threatened to go too far and to undermine the coherence of church and society. He felt called to make himself heard in this debate one last time.

9.9 Emancipation and the Fatherhood of God

His last major book, *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation*, was published in 1982. The theologian Jürgen Moltmann called it the only

theological monograph Visser 't Hooft had written.[125] It was a culture-historical study with a strong theological slant, peppered with personal observations. What was striking in the book was the homage he paid in it to his wife Jetty, who had died in 1968. She had been right, Visser 't Hooft now felt, to protest already back in 1934 against all too masculine forms of theology, particularly in the thinking of Karl Barth. He now deplored the fact that Jetty's ideas had received so little attention then. They were moderate in proportion and balanced, he now concluded.[126] He viewed radical forms of feminism, such as that found in Mary Daly, with their frontal attack on the male image of God, as going too far. According to him, something essential had been lost in the struggle for emancipiation in this respect, and that was bad for society as a whole. Such a rejection of the biblical image of God could only lead to a return to a pagan naturalistic and vitalistic way of thinking about the divine that he observed in, for example, the ancient worship of Aphrodite or Artemis and in Gnosticism. The revelatory character of the whole Bible was opposed, in his view, to the worship of natural fertility as divine. Although the Bible also used female images to speak about God's love, the Bible writers ultimately transcended all sex differences. Whoever – man or woman – understood this, would now be ready, in freedom, for commitment in marriage, church, and society.

Various friends were given the manuscript in advance to read it, and he worked their feedback into the book. Seven emancipation movements were treated in outline: emancipation from patriarchal rulers in antiquity; emancipation in the master-servant relationship, as in the struggle against slavery, emancipation as decolonisation, emancipation in the women's movement against male paternalism, i.e., the male lust for power and patronisation, emancipation in the youth movement against authoritarian and tyrannical fathers, the struggle for emancipation from ecclesiastical paternalism, and finally, emancipation from paternal morals and the revolt against the fatherhood of God. While each of the first six forms of emancipation needed to be judged on their own merits and had a certain legitimacy, the revolt against the fatherhood of God was a dangerous form of rebellion that would end, in his view, in chaos and nihilism. With the word 'paternalism', he wanted to distinguish manipulation and lust for power – recognisable as oppression in connection with the first six movements – from true fatherhood.

125 Visser 't Hooft, *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation* (1982); Moltmann, 'Henriëtte Visser 't Hooft', 1990, 146.

126 He gave a book on feminist theology that contained a reference to Jetty's work to one of his children and wrote on the flyleaf: 'Mammie's stem wordt nog gehoord' ('Mommy's voice is still heard').

The conclusion was that the fatherhood of God was unique and had to be preserved as an image but without the human inclination towards 'paternalism'. Those who could not accept that had, he felt, let themselves be misled by an unbiblical caricature of God. Thus, it was a fictive concept of God that had been rejected, a concept that did not, in Visser 't Hooft's view, correspond with what was meant in the Bible. All the themes he had ever treated in his earlier works appeared in one form or another in this book. In the spirit of the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, people were led back to the father's house, where order did not mean enslavement and freedom did not mean anarchy. Visser 't Hooft called the book: 'My answer to Mary Daly'.[127] The Reformed (Gereformeerd) missiologist Jo Verkuyl (1908-2001) wrote admiringly in *Centraal Weekblad voor de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*: 'It takes courage to write about these issues as a man. Nevertheless, the author does it and helps men and women in this area to follow the ridge between the two gorges, the gorge of rigid conservatism and that of the wild return to the Artemis cult."[128] But others, like the Reformed (Hervormde) theologian L.W. van Reijendam-Beek, found 'nothing sensational in the book'. She appreciated the fact that such an elderly figure who had so often stood on the right side in the struggle of emancipation movements presented this overview. But, in her view, he wanted to cling too easily to the image of God as father.[129]

Visser 't Hooft's failure to include a psychological approach that went deeper was a serious omission for some readers of the book. Was it not precisely the relation to the paternal that was so psychologically complex? Should the Oedipus complex not have been discussed? Some did concede that the concept of God as father, as attributed to Jesus in the gospels, was indeed liberating and loving and without any 'paternalistic' or oppressive framework. But it was precisely the church that had not worked out this message in an emancipating way in history. Visser 't Hooft paid a great deal of attention to this, but, in their view, it was not enough. Others reproached Visser 't Hooft for not having done justice to feminist criticism, not only of the church, but also of the Bible itself. With respect to Christian paternalism,

127 Visser 't Hooft, *The Fatherhood of God*, 8. Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (1973). Thompson, in: *The Christian Century*, 17-24 July 1985.

128 J. Verkuyl, in: *Centraal Weekblad voor de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, 4 August 1982, 9-10: 'Er is moed voor nodig om als man over deze vragen te schrijven. De auteur doet het toch en assisteert mannen en vrouwen om op dit terrein over de bergrug tussen twee kloven te lopen, de kloof van keihard conservatisme en die van de wilde terugkeer tot de Artemis-cultus.' See also: J. Verkuyl to Visser 't Hooft, 9 March 1982, WCC 994.1.37/3.

129 L.W. van Reijendam-Beek, in: *Trouw*, 31 January 1984: 'niet veel opzienbarends in het boek'.

simply saying 'that is not how it was intended' was not at all convincing. According to them, there were too many examples of the excesses of lusting for power, both in the biblical texts and in the church's organisational forms and ways of acting, to make that case.[130]

No one disputed that Visser 't Hooft had broached a topical theme. But some did note that he himself had never suffered from 'paternalistic' oppression and that he was not writing from experience but from behind his desk. His defensive attitude led to irritation and disappointment among a number of readers. Was Visser 't Hooft's description of feminism not a caricature as well?[131] Would abandoning the image of God as father really lead to moral chaos?[132] No one posed the most difficult question: Had Visser 't Hooft himself not been an authoritarian father – not only literally but also figuratively in his own ecumenical movement?

9.10 The World Council and the Roman Catholic Church Once Again

On 29 May 1975, Willebrands presented Visser 't Hooft with the Augustin Bea Prize 1974/1975, which, sponsored by the Swiss government, the Roman Catholic foundation Humanum had awarded since 1971. This prize, accompanied by the slogan 'unity of mankind in freedom' and bearing the name of the cardinal with whom Visser 't Hooft had worked together so intensively, was awarded to church leaders who had devoted themselves in an extraordinary way to peace and progress in society. Among those who would receive it were Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 1989 and Joachim Meisner, the former archbishop of Cologne, in 2016. In 1975, the choice fell unanimously on Visser 't Hooft. Willebrands spoke quite favourably of the new period in the history of the church to which Visser 't Hooft had made such an important contribution and praised him for his attitude which Willebrands summarised with the now somewhat worn phrase: *Nostra res agitur*.

But the laureate himself had become doubtful. The conservative line taken by Paul VI was, to Visser 't Hooft's sorrow, continued by Karol Józef

130 Comments on *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation*, WCC 994.1.37/3. Cf. Biezeveld, *Spreken over God als vader* (1996), 132-133; Van Gennep, *De terugkeer van de verloren Vader* (1989); Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (1973).

131 Huppenbauer, review, in: *Kirchenblatt für die Reformierte Schweiz* (1982).

132 Cf. review in: *The Expository Times*, vol. 93, August 1982.

Wojtyła (1920-2005), who was elected pope in 1978 and took the name John Paul II. For a brief moment in history there was a chance that a pope would be elected who was ecumenically inclined. When, during the preliminary rounds of the papal election during the second conclave in the autumn of 1978, Willebrands himself seemed to be a serious candidate to succeed John Paul I, Visser 't Hooft's grandchildren joked that their grandfather would shortly be able to address the pope as 'Jo'.[133] But things did not work out that way, and Visser 't Hooft posed three questions after the election of Wojtyła. Would the new pope, who had been in constant conflict with the communist government, not see the whole world situation in light of that conflict? Was this the right man, coming from a church that saw itself as a besieged fortress, to help redefine the relation of the Roman Catholic Church with the world after Vatican II? And could inspiring leadership in ecumenicity be expected from a pope who came from the church in Poland, a church that saw Protestantism as a negligible entity and had a history of hostility with the Eastern Orthodox Church? He wondered if this was not a 'nostalgic choice' that had restoration as its purpose. In Poland, church members were still obedient to their leaders, and the church enjoyed an unbroken relationship with the people that was almost nowhere else in the world to be found. He wondered: 'Is it not that image that led to the choice of John Paul II?'[134]

Physically, Visser 't Hooft's health now began to decline quickly. In the spring of 1978, Willebrands expressed his concern about this via an Easter greeting from Utrecht, where he had been archbishop since 1975, a position he found very difficult. He added:

> You are a sign for us of what the Spirit of Christ can accomplish through one person for the sake of Christian unity, for the witness also of the Gospel of Christ to the world, always attentive to understanding 'the signs of the time' in light of the Gospel. In our last conversation, we still sought to identify possibilities for the Church, in particular the Catholic Church and its leaders, with respect to the problems of this time.[135]

133 Zeilstra, interview with P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, 7 November 2013.

134 Visser 't Hooft, 'Questions about the new Pope', 1978.

135 Willebrands to Visser 't Hooft, 21 March 1978, WCC 994.1.13/3: 'Jij bent een teken voor ons van hetgeen de Geest van Christus door één mens kan tot stand brengen ten bate van de eenheid der christenen, voor het getuigenis ook van het Evangelie van Christus tot de wereld, altijd aandachtig om 'de tekenen des tijds' te verstaan in het licht van dit Evangelie. In ons laatste gesprek hebben wij nog gezocht de mogelijkheden van de Kerk, in het bijzonder van de Katholieke Kerk en haar leiders, ten aanzien van de problemen van deze tijd, op te sporen.'

Visser 't Hooft answered Willebrands as follows:

> I have emerged again from my physical difficulties and can live almost normally again. I just can't travel too much or give too many lectures. But a quieter life also has its positive sides. I don't have to tell you that, by the way, with your many and very different tasks and responsibilities. I am happy to hear that you are getting auxiliary bishops. We would like to see you here more often. Now that I have more time again to read, I am getting the impression that the weakness of the church's witness is largely caused by the fact that the good biblical theology from which we lived in the ecumenical movement is seen by so many younger theologians as outdated. A hyper-critical view of the N.T. has emerged in which not much remains of the picture that the Gospels give of Jesus. I hope, however, that that is a passing phase. The Word of God is powerful enough to make itself heard clearly once again.[136]

While he had major concerns about the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, Visser 't Hooft was positive about its base. That was where the collaboration with other churches flourished. There was now, for example, a French ecumenical Bible translation, and there was almost no department of the World Council without collaboration with corresponding groups in the Roman Catholic Church.[137]

The relation with Rome continued to occupy him, and in the final years of his life he could not let it go and started to study the file again. This, in his view, was where the key for the whole ecumenical movement could be found. He rejoiced over the new decisions that were made in January 1982 in Lima in Peru during the Faith and Order conference on 'Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry'. Delegates from the Roman Catholic Church were also sent to this meeting, and an agreement was reached to mutually recognise the

136 Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 4 April 1978: 'Ik ben weer opgedoken uit de lichamelijke moeilijkheden en kan weer bijna normaal leven. Alleen zal ik niet te veel reizen moeten maken of lezingen moeten houden. Maar een rustiger leven heeft ook goede kanten. Dat hoef ik jou trouwens niet te zeggen met je vele en zeer verschillende taken en verantwoordelijkheden. Ik ben blij te horen dat je hulpbisschoppen krijgt. We zouden je gaarne hier meer zien. Nu ik weer wat meer tijd heb om te lezen krijg ik de indruk, dat de zwakte van het kerkelijk getuigenis grotendeels veroorzaakt wordt, doordat de goede bijbelse theologie, waarvan we in de oecumenische beweging geleefd hebben, door zo vele jongere theologen als verouderd beschouwd wordt. Er is een hyper-critische kijk op het N.T. gekomen, waarin er niet veel overblijft van het beeld dat de Evangeliën van Jezus geven. Ik hoop echter, dat dat een voorbijgaande fase is. Het Woord van God heeft kracht genoeg om zich weer duidelijk te laten horen.' Visser 't Hooft to Willebrands, 7 December 1978, WCC 994.1.13/3.
137 Peereboom, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1980.

validity of baptism by churches that were members of the World Council and baptism by the Roman Catholic Church:

> Mutual recognition of baptism is acknowledged as an important sign and means of expressing the baptismal unity given in Christ.[138]

Visser 't Hooft thought it was fantastic that a basic ecumenical liturgy had been accepted. Major differences remained regarding the difference between ordained offices for life, exclusively reserved for celibate men in the Roman Catholic Church, and the view of other churches on opening the offices to married men and women, in addition to the Protestant offices of elder and deacon in which laypeople could serve. The major stumbling block to communal celebration was still constituted by the Roman Catholic claim for exclusivity concerning the Eucharist as fundamental for the Roman Catholic Church, which saw itself as the only complete church of Christ. Visser 't Hooft observed that, whereas Roman Catholics and Protestants could work together well locally, the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church wanted nothing to do with a symmetrical rapprochement in the way he suggested.

> How long can this situation continue? The tension between pressure on the base and a leadership that attempts to keep everything as it was. Won't that end in an explosion?[139]

John Paul II falsely expected that the harmony and obedience that appeared in Poland could be imposed on the world church. According to Visser 't Hooft, that was a major mistake.

In June 1982 he analysed the relation of the World Council to the Roman Catholic Church in a report he intended for the leadership of the World Council. The leadership was dominated by the belief that, despite Lima, dialogue had yielded disappointing results in the previous decade. What had gone wrong? What had the members of the Joint Working Group expected when they appointed the special committee to study the membership of the Roman Catholic Church in the World Council? What reasons did they have at the time to assume that the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church

138 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry', Faith and Order paper 1982.

139 Interview by R. Foppen with Visser 't Hooft, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives: 'Hoe lang kan die situatie doorgaan? De spanning vn druk aan de basis en een top die alles bij het oude probeert te houden. Krijg je dan niet een soort explosie?

would join under certain conditions? A misunderstanding had arisen. The pope had given his blessing to the Joint Working Group, but at the same time the Vatican announced, albeit somewhat cryptically, that Roman Catholic membership of the World Council in the near future could not be considered. Those who had a good understanding of the situation knew: this was not a postponement but a rejection.[140] That is why, during the meeting of the central committee of the World Council in January 1971 in Addis Ababa, the Dominican Jean Jérôme Hamer, then secretary of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, sought to temper expectations. He explained the Roman Catholic hesitation as caused by the crisis of the churches that had arisen in the meantime.[141] The saying of the Irish cardinal William Conway – 'The hurricane is not the time to change the roof' – fit Hamer's explanation.[142] Ecumenicity was not a priority for a Roman Catholic Church in crisis. Visser 't Hooft did understand that, but he found it difficult to accept. In 1975 he said:

> The situation in the Roman Church has become so difficult on many points, theologically and otherwise, that very many of the people holding responsible positions in the Catholic Church, especially at the top, believe that joining the ecumenical movement completely would make matters even more difficult, would cause an extra complication. My own opinion is somewhat different on this point. I believe that all churches are suffering from this crisis, and that it would be best for all churches to go through this crisis together.[143]

Fortunately, he felt, there were still forms of collaboration, primarily at the local level, that also continued without the Roman Catholic Church formally joining the World Council. In 1978, however, he had to admit that he thought

140 Dumont, in: *Esprit et Vie*, 21 April 1983: 'that it was a postponement *sine die*', i.e., removing it from the agenda.

141 Hamer: 'à cause de la crise de les églises.' Interview of R. Foppen with Visser 't Hooft, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives.

142 Visser 't Hooft, unpublished draft, 'The Crisis of the Ecumenical Movement and the Crisis of the Churches', 1981.

143 Interview with Visser 't Hooft, Onderweg, IKON Radio, 12 October 1975, Sound and Vision Archives: 'De situatie in de Roomse Kerk is op vele punten zo moeilijk geworden, theologisch en anderszins, dat zeer velen van de verantwoordelijke personen in de Katholieke Kerk, vooral aan de top, menen dat een volle aansluiting bij de oecumenische beweging de zaken nog weer moeilijker zou maken, een extra complicatie zou veroorzaken. Mijn eigen mening is een beetje anders op dat gebied. Ik geloof dat alle kerken in de crisis zijn en dat het beste zou zijn dat alle kerken samen door de crisis heen zouden gaan.'

that the World Council had in the meantime also shifted too far to the left for the conservative Roman Catholic Church. In the cultural shift that took place after the Second Vatican Council, it appeared that reforms such as the priest at the altar turning to face the people, liturgies in the vernacular, and 'beat masses' were not enough to turn the tide of secularisation. Rather than a revival occurring, the church had instead become more insecure. The leadership of the Roman Catholic Church seemed to prefer concentrating on familiar church grounds.[144]

Given this context, Visser 't Hooft felt called in his old age to try again to make a constructive attempt at arousing zeal. In 1982 he studied the facts once more and ventured an analysis that he began on a positive note. Many prejudices had been removed, and there was now more contact than ever. After the Reformation, no true dialogue had been possible for 400 years. But when John XXIII opened the windows of the church, Visser 't Hooft said, all kinds of Reformation influences appeared to have had an effect below the surface, such as a new interest on the part of Roman Catholics in the Bible. During the Second Vatican Council, there appeared to be a new willingness to enter into dialogue with other churches. The development of official relations between the Roman Catholic Church and most other churches, however, had stagnated under Paul VI and declined under John Paul II. Primarily, Visser 't Hooft observed, attempts to discuss the office of Peter, i.e, the position of the pope, in plain language, had failed. The public understood little of this. Because bilateral Roman Catholic-Anglican meetings had been so successful, *Time* magazine had optimistically sketched a vision of one large church of Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, Lutherans, and Anglicans. It had been calculated that a billion people, or three-quarters of the world population, would be members of that church. 'O sancta simplicitas,' Visser 't Hooft sighed, and he foresaw another great disappointment. He was right. After 1982, Rome and Canterbury grew further apart, not closer. Topics like women in office, celibacy, and gay marriage were issues that, as exponents of fundamental views, entailed great differences of insight. These issues continued to cause major tensions not only between but also within both churches.

In the meantime, clarity was wanted – especially now. While people outside the process got the impression that various Protestant churches might be prepared to recognise the primacy of Rome as the Roman Catholic

144 N. Verkerk, interview with Visser 't Hooft, Ander Nieuws, NCRV Television, 10 August 1978, Sound and Vision Archives.

Church conceived that, Visser 't Hooft knew that this was not going to happen. The reason for that, he felt, lay primarily in the personal qualities of the energetic Polish Pope John Paul II and his mediagenic activities. Because of that, it seemed that a revival had taken place, while what was in fact going on was a restoration. But the Protestant church leaders themselves had, he felt, played their own part in the mistake. The central questions had been avoided: as far as substance was concerned, it had been nothing more than an ecumenicity of politeness for some time now.

> We have become very polite in the ecumenical world and do not want to use the sharp language of the Reformers about Rome. But can we not learn to formulate our objections to a papacy with universal jurisdiction in such a way that fraternal relations can be maintained? It would seem that one of the results of this development is that the position of those leaders of the Roman Catholic Church who feel that there is no need to make considerable concessions for the sake of unity is becoming stronger. For why should one offer concessions if the other churches are moving anyway in the direction of Rome?[145]

From the perspective of the Reformation, the appreciation for the Bishop of Rome could perhaps be expressed in a united church as a 'primacy of honour', thus, the pope as *primus inter pares*. A report by Anglicans and Roman Catholics from 1982 stated that the primacy in the church had been connected with Rome by divine providence. But Visser 't Hooft wondered if history supported this claim. John XXIII had been an exceptional pope. But the spirit of the Second Vatican Council had, Visser 't Hooft felt, not been continued in the Roman Catholic Church. Even more than the topics concretely discussed at Vatican II, he thought of the open atmosphere, the mutual commitment and the willingness to study current issues with a fresh look.

In Visser 't Hooft's view, no breakthrough was to be expected from the Roman Catholic hierarchy. That had to come from the good theologians, the teachers of the church.

> It is that there is now in the Roman Catholic Church a great struggle about the nature of the magisterium between the hierarchy and the theologians and that the Reformation Churches have strong reason to

145 Visser 't Hooft, 'Remarks on the Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformation Churches', 1982.

> encourage the theologians because they represent a concern which has deep roots in their tradition.[146]

In his view, every plea for the fundamental freedom of the office of teacher of the church, *doctor ecclesiae*, merited Protestant attention and support. He did not mention any names, but he thought of the so-called *doctores periti*, the experts who had caused such a positive upheaval during Vaticum II. Conservative Roman Catholics argued that they had brought modernism into the church, but Visser 't Hooft expected a fresh wind from them and an open attitude with respect to modern questions about life. He thought of scholars like Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009), and Hans Küng (1928), who came into conflict more and more with the Vatican after Vatican II. According to Visser 't Hooft, the conservatives were victorious over the innovators at a crucial Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops in 1971.

Visser 't Hooft was convinced that it was professors like those mentioned above, the *doctores* of the church, from whom a breakthrough could be expected. In particular, he saw in the Swiss theologian Hans Küng, with whom he had become good friends, a leading theologian who represented in academics where it had all started in ecumenicity. He himself preached about Küng's ideas now and then and deplored it very much when the German bishops' conference took away his licence to teach in 1980. During Vatican II, the Roman Catholic bishops themselves asked for 'continuing education' by academic leaders and had also received it. But the modern theologians were hardly involved in the journal *Concilium*, which was founded afterwards to work out the legacy of the council and in which, among others, Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger (1927), later Pope Benedict XVI, published articles. Under John Paul II it became unambiguously clear that the bishops, not the professors, were in charge and set the tone for the church. To Visser 't Hooft, it now seemed highly unlikely that the Roman Catholic Church would weaken the definitions of papal authority in such a way in the foreseeable future that every church could accept it. The Protestants could not make any concession here. The Roman Catholic model of the church was too centralist and hierarchical for the modern age and, in Visser 't Hooft's view, had no future. Nevertheless, the contacts with regard to substance content had to be nurtured. Discussions needed to be held on better understanding, spiritual enrichment, collaboration in missions and evangelisation, and joint action for social justice and peace.

146 Ibid.

For Visser 't Hooft, the actual heart of the crisis in the Roman Catholic Church was a crisis in the teaching authority of the church. With an appeal to 1 Corinthians 12, he pointed out that the early church did not have any monopolistic teaching office but had instead an open charism of *didaskaloi*, free 'teachers'. In the Middle Ages too, it was not the church but the theological faculties that exercised the *magisterium*. Not until the Council of Trent in the 16th century and the resulting Counter-Reformation did the teaching authority come to lie with the office-bearers of the Church themselves, i.e., the bishops. This question was not resolved at the Second Vatican Council, and as a result the teachers of the church became isolated. Nevertheless, they played a decisive role in formulating fruitful doctrines. The council had heralded a 'theological spring' of enthusiastic theologians who demanded and deserved theological freedom. Visser 't Hooft saw 'explosive new ideas' bursting into existence in a period of reflection on the position of the church in society. There was no room here for an index or for excommunication but only freedom to exchange new ideas. The final conservative encyclical by Paul VI, *Humanae vitae* from 1968, which dealt with the value of human life, marriage, and birth control, could not be viewed as an end point in ethical reflection. While he saw primarily loyal opposition in progressive priests and women, who wanted nothing more than to serve the church, he agreed with the Nijmegen professor, Edward Schillebeeckx, who said that true church life in the Roman Catholic Church was now threatened by fear and inflexibility. A new, truly ecumenical theology would not only help Roman Catholics but Christians in all churches. In this respect, Visser 't Hooft also expected a great deal from the New Testament scholar and early church specialist, the Lutheran Oscar Cullman.[147]

This topic continued to occupy Visser 't Hooft right until shortly before his death. In the unfinished and posthumously published *Teaching and the Teaching Authorities*, he summarised his analysis of the crisis of the teaching authority. As far as the Roman Catholic Church was concerned, he concluded that the church authorities were not able to retain the valuable contact that had flourished during Vatican II between the teachers of the church and office-bearers in the church. To the contrary, 'after the council there was a return to the old methods of investigation, intervention and disciplinary measures.'[148]

147 Cf. Visser 't Hooft, 'Crises in the Ecumenical Movement', unpublished, no date, WCC 994.2.30/28.

148 Visser 't Hooft, *Teachers and the Teaching Authorities* (2000), 75. The occasion was the way in which the Vatican treated the theologian Hans Küng, whom Visser 't Hooft greatly appreciated. Küng's work was criticised by Rome, and his licence to teach was removed by the German bishops in 1980. Cf. Raiser, 'Le pasteur Willem Visser 't Hooft, pionnier de l'oecuménisme Genève-Rome', 2003.

Visser 't Hooft attached a certain value to the ecclesiastical teaching authority and, as far he was concerned, clear boundaries as to what could or could not be said in a church. Christ had to be central and the Bible was the source of revelation and should be the basis on which the Kingdom of God was to be proclaimed. But, in Visser 't Hooft's view, academic freedom was required to make that possible. The – in his eyes – reactionary position of the Vatican and the bishops that could be seen in the treatment of Küng, did great damage, he felt, both within and outside the church. Visser 't Hooft agreed with the Italian church historian Giuseppe Alberigo who had called upon the church to now leave the dark times of disciplinary measures definitively behind it.

In his final years too, he continued to observe and reflect on these topics, even though this was increasingly taking the form of fragmentary speculation. He knew that the time of an ecumenical movement led by 'great men' was gone for good and could do nothing more than look back on that earlier period somewhat wistfully.[149] To his regret, he saw how the Christocentric character of the ecumenical movement was being left behind more and more and the concept of ecumenicity broadened to include other religions as if he had never warned against syncretism. He wanted to appreciate more contributions by women, but not without warning that, in the search for greater participation of women in the World Council, it should be recognised that these women were not only competent but also representative regarding content for the churches they came from. He reflected on the now frequently expressed criticism that the World Council could not often speak freely about injustice or oppression in the communist world because a number of member churches came from those countries. Visser 't Hooft defended anew a reasoned choice. Not too much could be expected of the influence of the World Council, and its contact with the Orthodox churches protected them somewhat. Their membership also prevented the World Council from becoming an exclusively Protestant body. But not only old topics drew the attention of the former leader of ecumenicity; there were new areas of interest as well.[150] He found, for example, that it would be justified for the World Council to reflect again on the Toronto declaration of 1950 because of the danger that they would forget that the World Council was only a stopgap solution for the complete fellowship of the churches. Now only part of the Faith and Order department dealt with the actual unity of the church, whereas that theme should have been close to the heart of the whole organisation.

149 Visser 't Hooft, 'Seven Founders of the Ecumenical Movement' no date, probably 1981.
150 Visser 't Hooft, various loose pages, no date, probably 1982, WCC 994.2.31/1.

A Roman Catholic Church that was not skilled in dealing with pluriformity caused frustration and irritation among other churches and active participants in the World Council. Visser 't Hooft felt that even his friend Willebrands had contributed to that in his letter to the assembly in Vancouver. It was from a different direction that results were achieved. Although, after 1969, apart from the Lima report on baptism, the eucharist, and office, few new, meaningful steps were taken, Visser 't Hooft rejoiced over the flourishing of ecumenical groups at the base. He did not expect, however, that these groups would be stable and large enough to replace churches. At this time, Visser 't Hooft appreciated a form of what he called 'church osmosis', informal mutual penetration, which he expected would certainly continue independently of the structures. He sighed once again: 'If we have so much in common, can we not be united?'[151]

A healthy ecumenical movement required per definition, in his view, regional decentralisation at that time. The time for the idea of one universal church across the whole world was over for good. If it was a question of the participation of lay people, women in particular, then a broad renewal was inevitable. But a strong growth in the base movement at the expense of the churches ran the risk of ending in chaos, according to Visser 't Hooft. That alone gave reason enough, in his view, not to turn away from the Roman Catholic Church, despite all the contrasts. Visser 't Hooft saw the internal crisis of the church as a shared ecumenical problem and did not think a strong ecumenical movement was possible without the Roman Catholic Church. Visser 't Hooft appealed again to the Roman poet Horace, but now in an expanded and encouraging sense: 'If your neighbour's house is on fire, that's your concern as well'.[152] In other words, it was precisely now that the church was in crisis that the time was ripe for renewing ecumenical contacts. He recalled how much effort it had taken during the twentieth century to acquire a true view of the other, given how closed off people were, thinking they alone were right. 'Today, in a time of great dangers for church, we are called to realise that there is one single coherent independent cause of Christ in the world.'[153] As far as he was concerned, his life's work was at stake.

Interest in the church appeared to weaken more in the first half of the 1980s across the whole industrialised world. Visser 't Hooft shared his concern with Willebrands in his final letter to him, probably dictated: 'It is very difficult to understand that the period in which there was

151 Ibid.

152 'Nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet.' Horatius, *Epistolae* I, 18.84. See also 8.7.

153 Visser 't Hooft, various loose pages, no date, probably 1982, 1982, WCC 994.2.31/1.

a real rediscovery of the Church and its place in the life of faith and in the life of the world was followed by a period in which people of various theological trends talk as if the Church is of no importance whatsoever."[154] Willebrands himself did not find it easy either. Since 1982, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Ratzinger determined how the Vatican dealt with the issue of church unity. Willebrands became a tragic figure in this period, able to do little else than continue to ask for patience in his contact with people at the World Council.[155] In 1983, Visser 't Hooft himself warned his friend against having high expectations that tact could help to achieve something major in the near future. Visser 't Hooft himself no longer believed in that, given the pontificate of John Paul II. To suggest that a breakthrough was still possible would only lead to disappointment. Concrete church unity seemed further away than ever.

> I must unfortunately confess that I do not see very concrete reasons to justify such an expectation. We have made enormous progress in discussions among the theologians. If we compare where we were at the time when you and I began our contacts, considerable progress has been made. But are the churches going to follow the lead of their theologians? At this point I find the attitude of the Vatican especially disappointing. It seems that the Pope is still at the stage of an ecumenism of friendly words and polite greetings rather than of an ecumenism of definite action.[156]

It was once again the 'ecumenicity of politeness' that bothered Visser 't Hooft. He did not hide this from Willebrands.

The visit of John Paul II in 1984 to the World Council of Churches at the Ecumencial Centre in Geneva was the last great public event that Visser 't Hooft attended. He waited with the staff members in the enclosed garden behind the building while the pope entered by the front door. Fragile, he sat in a wheelchair while the pope spoke about him with great appreciation. It was highly exceptional for the Vatican to give permission for a 'spontaneous' talk lasting an hour. Visser 't Hooft asked John Paul II what he thought of the hierarchy of truths in the decree on ecumenicity of the Second Vatican

154 Visser 't Hooft to J. Willebrands, 18 March 1983, WCC 994.1.13/3.
155 Cf. Fens, *Vaticanië* (2010), 104-105.
156 Visser 't Hooft to J. Willebrands, 18 March 1983, WCC 994.1.13/3.

Figure 64 At the reception of Pope John Paul II, Ecumenical Centre, 1984, with, among others, Cardinal Jo Willebrands and general secretary Philip Potter



Council, but the pope left it to Willebrands to give a diplomatic answer.[157] The pope's visit to the World Council had primarily the symbolic meaning of mutual acknowledgement and primarily respecting and appreciating each other as Christians. For Visser 't Hooft, it went no further than that. He commented later on the visit as follows to the journalist Rex Brico of *Elseviers Magazine*:

> 'It was very, very difficult. I can say it best as follows: it appeared to us that the Pope is not used to dialogue.' Brico: 'Could he not be taught that?' Visser 't Hooft: 'I don't think so simply because he engages in it so little and because the structure of the papacy is a monological structure. On that level – that was apparent – you move forward only very slowly. The Joint Working Group, which the R.C. church maintains with the World Council, is having a very difficult time right now. But there is still another level of ecumenicity, and that is the level of the theologians. And there it's going wonderfully! It's even going too well, they are often so much in

157 Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel, and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON Radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.

> agreement that they get into trouble with their church leaders. Almost all major theologians in the R.C. Church have also gone very far in their proposals about unity.[158]

John Paul II even spoke of a 'fraternal visit' as a sign of his desire for unity. Also because of the expectations raised by Visser 't Hooft at one time, such an approach was viewed as a disappointment. With no hope of any future Roman Catholic membership in the World Council, the motivation on the part of the World Council gradually came under pressure. Nevertheless, Visser 't Hooft wanted to keep investing in it, even though the highest point that could be achieved with respect to dialogue had, in his view, already occurred. One had to be happy with that and continue to work together where possible. It was about fellowship. The institutional aspect needed to be relativised.[159]

Personally, in his final years, Visser 't Hooft felt that the time was now ripe for a joint celebration of the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, with people of various church backgrounds. For him, there was enough consensus on the content of the experience of celebration, and it was not necessary to once more underscore the differences between the traditions from which people came. Although not officially authorized, celebrating at the base was a form he now – unlike in 1971 – felt had to be tolerated as a pioneering experiment.[160] In his experience, the pope would do well to allow room for this. But the applauding masses in St. Peter's Square seemed to give the pope the wrong impression. Many of the people who came to Rome to see him were tourists who were not at all willing to do what the pope said. In Visser 't Hooft's view, the pope was confusing tourists with believers.

158 Brico, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1984: 'Het was héél, héél moeilijk. Ik kan het 't beste zó zeggen: er is ons uit gebleken dat de Paus niet gewend is aan dialoog.' Brico: 'Valt hem dat dan niet bij te brengen?' Visser 't Hooft: 'Ik denk van niet, eenvoudigweg omdat hij er zo weinig aan deelneemt en omdat de structuur van het pausdom een monologische structuur is. Dat gesprek van de Paus met ons liep ook helemaal vast. Op dat niveau – dat bleek wel – kom je slechts heel langzaam vooruit. De Joint Working Group, die de r-k kerk samen met de Wereldraad onderhoudt, beleeft op het ogenblik ook een heel moeilijke tijd. Maar er bestaat nog een ander niveau van oecumene en dat is het niveau van de theologen. En daar gaat het prachtig! Daar gaat het zelfs té goed, die zijn het dikwijls zozeer met elkaar eens, dat ze herrie krijgen met hun kerkleiders. Bijna alle grote theologen van de r-k kerk zijn ook ontzettend ver gegaan in hun voorstellen over eenheid.'

159 Cf. Visser 't Hooft, 'The World Council of Churches as Koinonia and as Institution', 1984.

160 Cf. 9.3.

Figure 65 With John Paul II, Ecumenical Centre, 1984



9.11 'Not Afraid of Death'

Visser 't Hooft wanted to be grateful that he had been able to dedicate his whole active life to such a fascinating theme as the ecumenical movement. He had 'not been bored one day in his whole life'.[161] When someone asked him in 1977 how it was getting old, he answered:

> Not very well. All that cheerful talk that you're only as old as you feel, I believe that that's a bit of deception. I believe that it's something that you simply have to accept and be grateful if you are relatively healthy and can still do a lot.[162]

161 H. van Run, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 'Markant: Visser 't Hooft', NOS Television, 8 December 1977, Sound and Vision Archives.
162 Ibid.: 'Niet zo erg goed. Al dat gejuich dat men zo oud is als men zich voelt, ik geloof dat het een beetje "voor de gek houwerij" is. Ik geloof dat het iets is dat men eenvoudig aanvaarden moet en men moet dankbaar zijn als men nog relatief gezond nog heel wat doen kan.'

In his final years Visser 't Hooft retired to his home on the Chemin des Voirons. He had always smoked cigarettes and now often suffered from shortness of breath. Different people cooked for him, such as Ruud van Hoogevest and Frans Bouwen.[163] He was present when the central committee chose Emilio Castro from Uruguay to succeed Philip Potter. Out of breath because of the condition of his lungs, he affirmed to the camera that he was satisfied because it was a clear choice and Castro was a man with great experience in the field of ecumenicity.[164] From time to time, he was visited by family members, old friends, staff members of the World Council, Rev. A.M.A. de Beaufort of the Dutch Protestant church around Lake Geneva. Sometimes a journalist would come. A half year before his death, the old Visser 't Hooft would express his concerns frankly to the Dutch journalist Rex Brico and engage in speculation. Instead of the renewal of the church, which had been so passionately expected, a 'resounding cultural crisis' had occurred: 'I think that we've become completely bogged down as far as morality is concerned.'[165] In his view, the churches had become lazy. In their zeal to adapt to modern times, they had lost their identity. He considered the churches in Western Europe and North America no longer able to show any kind of meaningful resistance as long this state of affairs continued. In contrast, he pointed to the resilience of the church in China and the flourishing of Christian literature under communism in Eastern Europe. What was now happening there he had already experienced in the 1930s and 1940s during the rise of fascism and the coming of the war. In Western Europe he saw a new 'solipsism' emerging, i.e., making the observer absolutely central. For him, this was a 'complete reversal of the Christian understanding of life'. Instead of an ability to engage in self-denial and sacrifice, there was a new pagan culture of complacency. He saw the theological faculties shrink back from a real analysis of this modern paganism, which meant that what was happening at these faculties was quickly becoming less relevant. He deplored the fact that theology therefore no longer had a critical message that mattered. There were exceptions. He had great respect for someone like the South African Bishop Desmond Tutu who raised a clear prophetic voice.

Rex Brico had interviewed Visser 't Hooft earlier in Lausanne in 1974. At that time, the journalist found him aggressive and stern. Now Brico saw him as a purified person. Visser 't Hooft referred to the sociologist Peter Berger when he stated 'modernity is pluralism'. For Visser 't Hooft, the monistic

163 Zeilstra, interview with F. Bouwen, 24 January 2014.

164 Kenmerk, IKON Television, 18 July 1984, Sound and Vision Archives.

165 Brico, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1984: 'daverende cultuurcrisis' and 'ik denk dat we met de moraal volkomen vastlopen.'

Figure 66 During the meeting of the central committee in which Emilio Castro was chosen as general secretary, 18 July 1984



view of the world no longer worked! What remained was unity in diversity. After the euphoric mood of the 1960s, a sense of defeatism was certainly in the air now, but that did not mean there was no hope.[166] He wrote (in Dutch):

166 Brico, 'We hebben gelukkig nog profeten', in: *Af en toe een oase* (1988), 178-186.

So broken as my body is
It is clearly beyond repair.
But in my soul, you, o God,
Always bring new strength with your care.[167]

'La vieillesse est une ruine' ('Old age is a ruin') – that is how Visser 't Hooft often paraphrased Charles de Gaulle who said, 'La vieillesse est un naufrage' ('Old age is a shipwreck'): 'That's how I experience it as well.' He had previously written a poem about the aging person as a traveller:

If the traveller leaves when night falls,
The earthly tapestry withdraws from his sight
But to his great comfort the starry beauty calls,
Awakening his pious wonder with heaven's light
That's how it goes, in our very final days.
Let our bonds with earth now be severed.
For the Spirit of God to us now relays
The prospects for him who hopes for heaven.[168]

When Brico told him that many Christians no longer believed in eternal life, Visser 't Hooft answered: 'I find that very sad. They should do a better job of reading their Bible.' Brico asked: 'You do believe in it?' Visser 't Hooft answered: 'Yes, I believe in it. What is Christianity? It is believing that in Jesus God has given us His light, His truth. And it is not to be doubted that Jesus believed in eternal life. If I thus believe in Jesus, I also believe in eternal

167 'Mon corps est un jouet casé / Personne ne peut le réparer / Mon âme est comme un nouveau né / Car elle respire l'éternité.' (Mijn lichaam is zo erg kapot / Dat niemand het kan maken. / Maar in mijn ziel, doet U, o God / Steeds nieuwe kracht ontwaken). Translated by Visser 't Hooft himself into French; in the possession of P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins.

168 'Le voyageur qui part quand le soleil est bas / Ne verra bientôt plus la beauté de la terre / Mais il est consolé et affermit ses pas / Quand le ciel étoilé lui montre la lumière / Faisons le même voyage quand notre vie s'achène / Les liens avec la terre deviennent moins importants / Mais dans nos âmes ravies une grands vision se lève / Comment le Père au ciel rassemble ses enfants.' ('Vertrekt de reiziger bij 't vallen van de nacht, / Dan zal het aardsch tafreel zich aan zijn zicht onttrekken. / Maar tot zijn grote troost komt nu de sterrepracht, / Die uit de hemel schijnt zijn vrome aandacht wekken. / Zoo moet het met ons gaan, in d'allerlaatste jaren. / Laat banden met de aard' nu worden losgeknoopt. / Want tot ons komt de Geest om ons te openbaren / Het uitzicht van een mensch, die op de hemel hoopt'). Both versions (French and Dutch) are probably from Visser 't Hooft himself; found after his death among his papers and preserved by his daughter-in-law P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins. Cf. Visser 't Hooft in a somewhat different version in Dutch, cited by H. Berkhof, in: Interview by R. Foppen with Visser 't Hooft, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982, Sound and Vision Archives.

life. Brico asked: 'You are not afraid of dying'? Visser 't Hooft answered: 'Not at all! No! I see it more as a gift.' Brico then asked: 'Do you long for it?' Visser 't Hooft answered: 'To be honest, yes.'[169]

In the final months of his life, Visser 't Hooft continued to be occupied with the relations between Rome and the ecumenical movement. Many who visited him in that final period saw him in the closed porch, as annex to his living room, sitting at his desk among all his books, saw the signal of his bony finger, found their way to the backdoor and were surprised at his wiry appearance and determination with which he discussed questions concerning ecumenicity. In the spring of 1985 he hoped to write a historical overview, thus contributing to the analysis of problems and opportunities open to the World Council to improve these relations. He did not hold it against the Roman Catholic Church that it claimed to be the complete church as he did the fact that, after 1969, it had abandoned dialogue about it and avoided discussion.

He had Todor Sabev, Lukas Vischer, Konrad Raiser, Nikos Nissiotis, Philip Potter, general secretary of the World Council of Churches from 1972 to 1984, and Hendrik Berkhof, read his draft text. Berkhof called it a 'black book', with facts that spoke a clear language. According to Berkhof, Visser 't Hooft had never shed his 'deep Protestant distrust of the Vatican'.[170] He thus kept busy in his final days and and in that sense died 'with his boots on'. In this period he was often very short of breath and had his dragées for his cough close to hand but refused to have his bed moved to the ground floor. If he wanted to go upstairs, he rose from his chair in the porch and went up the stairs in one go, only to fall onto his bed on the first floor to catch his breath again.[171] The German journalist Gerhard Rein was one of the last people to visit him at home, on 1 July 1985, a warm and humid day. He found a bulging letterbox and the telegram he had sent to announce his arrival was lying on the street. The house looked deserted, and no one opened the door. But when he looked through the window, he saw a hand that beckoned him to come through the garden and into the closed porch. Surrounded by books and journals, Visser

169 Brico, interview with Visser 't Hooft, 1984: 'Dat vind ik dan erg triest. Ze zouden hun Bijbel beter moeten lezen…'. 'U gelooft er wel in?' 'Ja, ik geloof erin. Wat is het christendom? Het is geloven dat in Jezus God ons Zijn licht gegeven heeft, Zijn Waarheid. En het valt niet te betwijfelen dat Jezus in het eeuwige leven geloofde. Als ik dus in Jezus geloof, geloof ik ook in het eeuwige leven.' 'U bent niet bang voor de dood?' 'Helemáál niet! Helemáál niet! Ik zie hem eerder als een geschenk.' 'Verlangt u ernaar?' 'Als ik eerlijk moet zijn, ja.'

170 Berkhof, 'Herdenking van Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft', 1986, 221: 'oer-protestantse wantrouwen tegen het Vaticaan'.

171 Zeilstra, interview with P.A. Visser 't Hooft-Jenkins, 7 November 2013.

't Hooft lay wheezing under a blanket in a lounge chair. The conversation was about a question that Visser 't Hooft himself had raised: 'Why does the ecumenical movement not move?' Rein wrote down this answer:

> In the ecumenical movement, giving is easier than receiving. Churches tell each other: 'I have so much that I can give you,' instead of saying: 'Please, I am really poor, I need your help.' The danger facing us at the moment is that we remain stuck in an ecumenism of words and everything is much too polite and friendly, but we no longer undertake any major concrete actions together.[172]

A few days later, on 4 July 1985, Visser 't Hooft died of dyspnea caused by pulmonary emphysema in the toilet of his home. In the same month, July 1985, an article on the relations with the Roman Catholic Church which he had worked on until shortly before his death was published, with some editing, in *The Ecumenical Review*.[173]

Right up until the end, Visser 't Hooft had maintained his friendship with Jo Willebrands, who had been appointed archbishop of Utrecht in 1975, a position he held until 1983. Willebrands was one of the speakers on 9 July 1985 who gave their *témoignage* at Visser 't Hooft's funeral in St. Peter's in Geneva, which was conducted by the general secretary of the World Council, Emilio Castro. Willebrands said:

> I was not his only nor his first Roman Catholic friend. But from the very beginning our friendship had a specific character in that it embodied more than simply our own personal relationship. It was part of his, of our, ecumenical faith and hope. His sensitive and perceptive mind made him particularly aware of the importance of the participation of the Roman Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement and the problems it created. Above all, even in difficult moments, he considered it with that profound love for and in Christ which lies at the root of ecumenism.[174]

The burial had taken place prior to the church service with only family members in attendance in the cemetery of the small church of Chêne-Bougeries where Jetty was also buried.[175]

172 Rein, 'Willem A. Visser 't Hooft. The Future of Peace', 2018, 104.
173 Visser 't Hooft, 'WCC-Roman Catholic Relations', 1985.
174 Willebrands, 'Address at the Funeral Service', 1985.
175 The grave no longer exists.

Figure 67 One of the last photos of Visser 't Hooft, together with Margie Beguin, one of the members of the cooking group, in the living room of 13 Chemin des Voirons, April 1985



9.12 The 'Elder Statesman' of the Ecumenical Movement

Visser 't Hooft's farewell from the World Council in 1966 could hardly have been a real farewell – his life was far too interwoven with the development of institutional ecumenicity worldwide, an aspect viewed by him as indispensably giving coherence to ecumenicity as a whole. It was extraordinarily difficult for him to find a successor, and it became apparent precisely after his departure how much he, as a balancing artist, had managed to connect various forces in the field. Thus, not only had he set his stamp on the organisation but, together with his network partners, often – like him – white, Western males, he had also given it a specific direction. The key choice for normative Christocentrism and the combination of what, at

the end of the 1960s, was called horizontalism and verticalism, his radical rejection of syncretism, and the fundamental trust in the value of churches as the elementary building blocks in ecumenicity, all came under increasing pressure in the World Council after his retirement.

The elderly Visser 't Hooft felt called to continue to promote all these familiar foci, even if that meant he would end up as a voice crying in the desert. By appealing to the concept of biblical fellowship, *koinonia*, he attempted to create room for pluriformity and to counter the criticism of institutional ecumenicity. He had to continue alone after the death of his wife Jetty in 1968. It was also because of this that the daily trip to the offices of the World Council retained an important place in the retiree's schedule. He felt the urge to continue to use his expertise to benefit ecumenicity by, among other things, speaking, giving advice, and working on his memoirs.

The World Council granted Visser 't Hooft room to work, both figuratively and literally, after his retirement, and in 1968, at the assembly in Uppsala, he was made honorary president. In his speech to the assembly, he attempted to connect new issues with convictions he had long held. In his view, there could be no sincere attention for the agenda of the world without sincere attention for God. Although the speech was initially well received, misunderstandings appeared inevitable. After Uppsala, his influence on actual developments in the World Council quickly decreased. The institutional aspect of ecumenicity, which he had always so devotedly worked for, was, figuratively speaking, 'taken out of his hands'. He continued to say 'we' when he spoke of the World Council until his death.

The memoirs of the 'elder statesman' of ecumenicity were anxiously awaited by many, but not everyone was enthusiastic about them. Some found them too fragmentary and nostalgic, others too defensive. Nonetheless, he seemed to reach his most important objectives with his memoirs: an apologia of his life's work and a personal record of the development of the ecumenical movement for a large audience. He did not succeed in convincingly refuting the growing critique of the institutional character of the World Council. His natural inclination to refer again and again to the same milestones and examples from long ago alienated a new generation. In the view of many, the 1950s were a much better fit for the World Council he represented, which dealt with issues in a diplomatic way. He defended the council against critics regarding the course it took regarding Eastern Europe. That was moderately successful.

He was able to distance himself somewhat from the World Council through travel and was able to spend more time on personal questions. He enjoyed the deep conversations with intellectuals at special places. But he

got fed up with mass tourism, and after a few years health problems also helped bring his travels to an end. He was disappointed at the assembly of the World Council in Nairobi in 1975 and felt isolated. The attention paid to pluriformity there went too far, in his view. He saw the monster of syncretism lurking life-sized around the corner. For him, the most important speakers no longer saw God as the one who gave the orders and demanded accountability and claimed that he was on the side of people. Visser 't Hooft missed a theologically balanced view of the church; he could not perceive any Christocentrically elaborated core of the assembly. He felt more and more as if he was on the outside of the discourse.

Together with other intellectuals, he sought for ways outside the World Council to take action. He was an active participant in the informal brainstorm sessions of the Groupe de Bellerive, which he cofounded and which was continued by the Aga Khan. The group's purpose was to engage in public debate and take clear action, which did happen in collaboration with, for example, Unicef and the World Wide Fund for Nature. With his attempts at a theology of creation, Visser 't Hooft wanted to contribute to Western self-criticism. He directed his critique at Western triumphalism and a European mentality of complacency, which left the major problems of the world unsolved.

Even though old age brought ailments with it, his 80th birthday was a feast indeed with congratulations from many people. He devoted himself more and more to reflections and the interviews that he gave were not optimistic, even though he took a firm position for the value of the church. He could not appreciate the fact that emotional experience was becoming more and more important in the ecumenical movement at the expense of what he considered the content of the movement.

His last important book, *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation*, was published in 1982. This work is defensive in nature. Visser 't Hooft expressed his concerns about the loss of what he called 'non-paternalistic' fatherhood in society as well as in theology. While he wanted to express appreciation for forms of emancipation that brought liberation, he feared an individualisation that was going too far and the increasing hesitation of people to make commitment in, for example, marriage or the church.

The great theme he was occupied with in the final years of his life was again the relation of the World Council to the Roman Catholic Church. He was convinced that the renewal of the churches and the credibility of the Gospel in the world would benefit greatly from a renewed rapprochement on content between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. He deplored the way in which the Vatican dealt with Roman Catholic professors in theology, which led him to argue for a reassessment of church leadership.

He expected a great deal from this: If the results of academic theology could be properly processed in an unbiased church reception, there was hope, in Visser 't Hooft's view, for the universal church as a whole.

He suffered because of his aging, and he felt very lonely at times. He did not have much contact with local churches. In his final years, he was subject to a great deal of coughing and was often short of breath. He was not inclined to speculate about the hereafter but assumed that heaven was waiting for him.

10 In the Mirror of Rembrandt and the Perspectives of Others

Abstract
Chapter 10 discusses Visser 't Hooft's use of Rembrandt as a mirror for his favourite themes. He recognised profound biblical truths in both the life of the painter and his work. The chapter explores several of these themes. It also traces the sometimes extremely divergent opinions other people had of him. While some could find no wrong in anything he did, others could be quite critical of his approach and style of leadership.

Keywords: Rembrandt, conviction, honorary accolades, critiques of others, summing up

10.1 Introduction

In the summer of 1985, a life that had been inextricably intertwined with the history of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century came to an end. Even though Visser 't Hooft had withdrawn from public life in his last year, he was very well known at that time and was a symbol for many of a particular era in church history. More than any other church leader, he had succeeded in thinking and acting, at a global level, from the perspective of the notion of the fundamental unity of the church as a socially relevant concept. Under his leadership, the World Council of Churches grew into a player on the world stage. But even though the World Council was gaining new members, the restrictions of that model were clear already when he retired in 1966. His name had been synonymous with renewal for years, but that association gradually diminished in the last two decades of his life. For some, he remained the figurehead of the golden age of ecumenicity, for others he became the representative of an antiquated way of thinking in institutions and a model of the church that belonged to the past. This tension will be evaluated below in a series of sketches of his life. During his

Zeilstra, Jurjen A., *Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985: Living for the Unity of the Church*.
Taylor & Francis Group 2020
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726832_CH10

lifetime, Visser 't Hooft had received many accolades. What role did they play? (10.2). Rembrandt had tremendous significance for Visser 't Hooft's understanding of himself. It was through his publications on Rembrandt that his readers came to know Visser 't Hooft (10.3). Why was it that, despite the fact that he wanted to encourage people in their struggles, he did not always do so? (10.4). When he died on 4 July 1985, many people attempted to describe Visser 't Hooft by looking back on his life (10.5).

10.2 Honouring 'The Man of all Jobs and Odd Jobs'

Visser 't Hooft was probably the most well-known Dutch theologian outside the Netherlands in the twentieth century – certainly in Protestant circles. In this regard, only Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Edward Schillebeeckx are comparable figures. Many associated Visser 't Hooft with the World Council of Churches or the ecumenical movement and, around 1960, saw him as the force behind a second reformation, with some even viewing him as having completed the Reformation that had begun in the early 16th century. Even before the war, the University of Aberdeen had bestowed on him an honorary degree on 29 March 1939. Many accolades followed, including Princeton (1950), Trinity College Toronto (1950), Geneva (1951), Yale (1954), Oberlin College Ohio (1954), Oxford (1955), Harvard (1958), Cambridge (1958), Union Theological Seminary in New York (1959), St. Paul's University in Tokyo (1959), Paris (1963), Kirchliche Hochschule in Berlin (1964), Brown University on Rhode Island (1965), the Theological Faculty of the University of Zurich (1966), the Catholic University of Leuven (1967), and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (1972).[1] Honorary professorships were awarded by Budapest (1946) and the Theological Academy of Moscow (1964). Visser 't Hooft did not view all these testimonials as laurels he could rest on. With every new honorary professorship, he enlarged his network. Guest lectures often followed. Festschriften were presented at various parties.[2]

Visser 't Hooft and his colleagues at *Vrij Nederland* did not receive any royal distinctions for their work in connection with the Swiss Road, but in May 1946 he and several others who had worked in Switzerland did

1 *Haarlems Dagblad*, 5 February 1966. Cf. also, a list of Visser 't Hooft's honorary doctorates, without title, and undated, WCC 994.1.31.

2 The most important are Golterman and Hoekendijk (eds.), *Oecumene in 't vizier. Feestbundel voor Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft*, Amsterdam 1960. Mackie and West, *The Sufficiency of God. Essays in Honour of W.A. Visser 't Hooft*, London 1963. Van der Bent (ed.), *Voices of Unity. Essays in Honour of Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft on the Occasion of his 80th Birthday*, Geneva 1981.

receive the Medal of Recognition 1940-1945 from Princess Juliana in Bern. This medal was given to people who had served the Dutch cause during the war by aiding Dutch people or Dutch institutions while not living in the occupied Netherlands. Visser 't Hooft was promoted to Knight of the Order of the Netherlands Lion on 1 September 1948 for the special services he had provided for the development of the ecumenical movement, and was promoted to commander in 1965.[3] In 1958 he received the Grand Cross of Merit with Star and Sash of the Federal Republic of Germany, and in 1959 he became an officer of the French Legion of Honour. In 1962 he received the Wateler Peace Prize for promoting peace through words, whether spoken or written, and the Grande Médaille d'Argent de la Ville de Paris.

Various schools and an institute in the Netherlands were named after him.[4] Visser 't Hooft's portrait appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1961. The accompanying article was called 'Second Reformation'.[5] Several theological faculties and church programmes, including the Reformed church programme in Utrecht, offered Visser 't Hooft a chair in vain. Another moment of recognition was when he was awarded the Cross of Grand Commander of the Holy Sepulchre by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1963. That same year he received the Cross of Athos. He became a bearer of the Order of St. Vladimir of the Orthodox Church of Russia in 1964 and Commander of the Order of St. Andrew of the ecumenical patriarchate in 1965. Visser 't Hooft, together with Cardinal Augustin Bea, was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1966. Also in 1966, he received the Lambeth Cross, the highest distinction in the Anglican Church, from the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Family of Man Award from the Protestant Council of New York City. Along with the former secretary-general of the United Nations, U Thant and Senator James W. Fulbright, he received the Grotius Medal for merit in the spreading of the notion of international law and became Honorary Commander of the Order of St. John in that same year. In 1967, he received the Danish Sonning Prize for his contribution to European culture. In that same year, he also became an honorary citizen of the City of Geneva and a member of the Order of the Prince of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia.[6] In 1968, he was made a Knight of Justice of the Order

3 *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, 2 September 1948.

4 There were schools named after Visser 't Hooft in the Dutch towns of Leiden, Amsterdam, Castricum, Hoorn, The Hague, and Osdorp, and an ecumenical institute in Rotterdam, WCC 994.1.32/11.

5 *Time*, 8 December 1961.

6 The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs J.M.A.H. Luns took special measures to allow Visser 't Hooft to become an honorary citizen of the City of Geneva in 1966 while retaining Dutch nationality.

of Saint John. In 1969, he received the Distinguished Service Medal of the Pacific Lutheran University. In 1975, he received the Augustin Bea Prize, in 1976 the Prix de l'Institut des Sciences de la Paix in Strasbourg, and in 1977 the Hanseatic Goethe Prize. In 1982, he was awarded the Four Freedoms Award in Middelburg in the category of Freedom of Religion.

He could not remain indifferent to so many accolades. Even though he was unable to transfer his legacy properly and witnessed a decrease in the significance of the World Council in the last decades of his life, he knew that he had played a major role and was proud of that. All this attention meant recognition and personal acknowledgement as well as opportunities with respect to the major objective of continuously expanding the ecumenical network. As stated previously, however, he did not believe he was an original theologian or scholar. He believed he had been lucky that his qualities were valued during the phase that he had the health, inspiration, and power to assume many responsibilities. He felt that the ecumenical movement functioned as a supra-national family. That movement was expressed in the World Council as an instrument that served the church, to equip it for the service of the kingdom of God in the world. It was that task that he wished to carry out. Visser 't Hooft once introduced himself as 'not the headmaster, not the general, but the secretary. The man of all jobs + odd jobs'.[7] When he described the work of the general secretary in his memoirs, he used the terms 'administrator', 'policy-making', 'chief liaison officer', 'minister of external affairs', 'interpretation of the nature and work of the World Council and of the ecumenical movement', and 'a good opportunity to oblige me to formulate in theological terms what I had learned in my daily work'. But he also spoke of resolving misunderstandings and giving lectures as 'a good opportunity to formulate in theological terms what I had learned in my daily work.' Above all, however, he regarded himself as the father of a large family, men and women from many nations and churches.[8]

10.3 The Mirror of Rembrandt

In his search for biblical imagery that could reach the youth from various countries linked to the YMCA and make them aware of European culture, Visser 't Hooft discovered the work of the famous 17th century Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rhijn (1606-1669) as early as the 1920s. He

7 Visser 't Hooft, notes for speech, Paris 1 August 1962, WCC 994.1.00/3.1, 1962.

8 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 344-346.

heard that admirers of Rembrandt were impressed not only by the beauty of his painting but felt that the painter had unlocked the Bible in a special way.[9] Rembrandt became for him an evangelist who used the medium of painting for his message, and, in Visser 't Hooft's eyes, his art became a message that transcended international boundaries. As a Dutchman, he understood the art of reaching youth from other countries using Rembrandt. When working for the YMCA, he recommended that youth leaders study art history. He felt that this would enable these youth leaders to alert young people to the idea that knowledge of works of art could introduce what was national and specific to the soul of a country to what he saw as a great international treasury of the arts. In an article in *Jugend in Aller Welt* that included illustrations of Rembrandt's work, he wrote:

> The study of the art of the world furnishes us with the deepest insights into the relationships between the nations. No other domain of human life displays such a connection of national and international influences whose difference in direction and meaning can be contemplated.[10]

In the 1930s, Visser 't Hooft turned this thesis into a larger study. When possible, during his many travels he visited museums, particularly those that had one or more works by Rembrandt on display, as in Paris, Berlin, London, Kassel, and various locations in the United States. In 1937, Visser 't Hooft wrote a lecture on Rembrandt entitled 'Rembrandt et la Bible', which he continue to expand on throughout the years.[11] 'I have … a lecture with very beautiful lantern slides on "Rembrandt and the Bible". Naturally, this lecture covers all of Rembrandt's biblical works and discusses his Old Testament as well as New Testament paintings and etchings. I attempt to demonstrate how Rembrandt understood the Bible and how deeply he delved into it.'[12] In 1939, in a special issue of the YMCA magazine on the

9 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 49-50.

10 Visser 't Hooft, 'Die Kunst, die Jugend und die Welt', 1925. 'Wohl mit die tiefsten Einblicke in die Beziehungen der Völker untereinander gewährt das Studium der Kunst in der Welt. Auf keinem anderen Gebiet des Menschenlebens zeigt sich eine solche Verbindung nationaler und internationaler Einflüsse, deren verschiedene Richtung und Bedeutung betrachtet werden kann.'

11 Visser 't Hooft, 'Rembrandt et la Bible', lecture 1937. Cf. Visser 't Hooft, 'Rembrandt als protestantischer Meister' (1938). Cf. Visser 't Hooft, 'Rembrandts Weihnachtspredigt', 1938. C. Loriaux (secretary of the Hollandse Club in Montreux) to Visser 't Hooft, 25 April 1939, World War II Records of the WCC, YDS-12.

12 Visser 't Hooft to C. Hammelburg, 27 March 1944. YDS-12, 61: 'Ik heb [...] een lezing met zeer mooie lantaarnplaten over "Rembrandt en den Bijbel". Deze lezing gaat natuurlijk over

Netherlands, which was published just prior to the large youth conference in Amsterdam, he wrote:

> The life of Rembrandt … offers us the spectacle of a man whose human nature, with all its richness and all its pride, is progressively mastered and moulded by the Word of God. In one of his last self-portraits, Rembrandt presents himself to us as the Apostle Paul reading the Bible. This unforgettable face shows us that he had to learn obedience through the things which he suffered, and tell us of many of the defeats of the natural man who was called Rembrandt. But this face also tells us that this man would say with St. Paul: 'In all things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us."[13]

The retired Dutch banker Isaac de Bruyn, who resided in Spiez in Switzerland, owned many etchings and old prints in addition to Rembrandt's famous self-portrait as the apostle Paul. Visser 't Hooft enjoyed being his guest. In May 1940, when the Netherlands was occupied by German troops, the preacher W. Cuendet presented Visser 't Hooft with a print of an etching, probably from 1649. Based on Matthew 19, the print depicts Christ preaching. This is the so-called *Hundred Guilder Print*. When he looked at it, he realised that the most important thing was, as he said, that 'everything depends on the most unpretentious figure without beauty or outward power, who stands there in the centre."[14] The etching shows the various reactions of people to Jesus. Visser 't Hooft felt that Rembrandt's message here was that Jesus should not be viewed from a distance; rather one should participate in the circle around him, believe in him. But, as Visser 't Hooft saw it, as a preacher, this Jesus already stood figuratively in the shadow of the cross. He felt that to accept this Christ was to say 'yes' to a God who knew not only glory but also suffering. He was convinced that this was what Rembrandt wanted to teach him as a viewer. It was a message that, in his view, dovetailed with Karl Barth's theology, a call for people to convert and devote themselves to a compassionate God.

het heele Bijbelsche werk van Rembrandt en behandelt dus zijn oud-testamentische en zijn nieuw-testamentische schilderijen en etsen. Ik probeer daarbij te laten zien hoe Rembrandt den Bijbel begrepen heeft en hoe diep hij er in doorgedrongen is.'

13 Visser 't Hooft, 'Notes on the Life of Rembrandt' (1939), 222, WCC 994.2.07/1.

14 C.M. de Vries, interview met Visser 't Hooft, in: 'Rembrandts weg tot het evangelie', IKOR Television, 15 July 1962, Sound and Vision Archives: 'alles afhangt van de onaanzienlijkste gestalte zonder schoonheid of uiterlijke macht, die daar in het centrum staat.' See also: Interview by R. Foppen with Visser 't Hooft, De Kerk Vandaag, NCRV Radio, 1 May 1982. Sound and Vision Archives. The self-portrait as the apostle Paul (1661) by Rembrandt was later donated to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam by De Bruyn.

Figure 68 ***The Preaching Christ*** **by Rembrandt, also called** ***The Hundred Guilder Print*****, ca. 1647-1649**



In 1955, he published a book in Dutch called *Rembrandts weg tot het evangelie*; the English version, *Rembrandt and the Gospel*, was published in 1960.[15] In this book, Visser 't Hooft discusses, among other things, Rembrandt's painting *Self Portrait with Saskia* (generally dated 1636). In this painting he saw Rembrandt, who was completely taken up with partying, as 'a braggart who seemed to have the world in his pocket'.[16] He was a passionate hedonist, with a superficial view of life that, Visser 't Hooft felt, needed to be renounced and was indeed renounced after Saskia's death in 1642. Visser 't Hooft added 1 John 2:16 as a marginal note in the book,

> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (American Standard Version)

15 Visser 't Hooft, *Rembrandt et la Bible* (1947); *Rembrandts Weg zum Evangelium* (1955); *Rembrandt and the Gospel* (1960); *Rembrandts weg tot het evangelie* (1956). There were various television programmes based on the book, such as C.M. de Vries 'Rembrandts weg tot het evangelie', IKOR Television 15 July 1962, Sound and Vision Archives.

16 'Rembrandts weg tot het evangelie', IKOR television, 15 July1962, Sound and Vision Archives.

And he posed the question: 'Is this real joy, or else "the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life"?'[17] Few Rembrandt experts today agree with Visser 't Hooft in regarding this painting as representing the painter's own worldly philosophy. Experts now believe that Saskia and Rembrandt were modelling for a scene from the parable of the Prodigal Son, a painting of which a part is missing.[18]

Visser 't Hooft's book about Rembrandt was ignored by art critics, certainly in the Netherlands, but was well received outside the circle of specialists both at home and abroad. For example, it was favourably reviewed in the journal *Critisch Bulletin* by the Dutch poet Gerrit Kamphuis, who could appreciate that Visser 't Hooft presented Rembrandt as a typical Protestant artist who had been able to wrest himself from 'Roman baroque'.[19] Rembrandt had had contacts with Jews, Roman Catholics, Mennonites, and Calvinists. The small circle who remained faithful to Rembrandt at the end of his life, even under difficult circumstances when he himself 'was no longer a church-goer', consisted of the most pietistic members of the Reformed Church. But because, in Kamphuis's view, Rembrandt presented the pure message of the Bible, his work acquired a universal meaning and Visser 't Hooft's ecumenical interpretation was the correct one. It was not a specific church or theological system that had guided the artist in this.

Visser 't Hooft did indeed see Rembrandt not as a Calvinist but as representing a universal biblical Protestantism. That view is still endorsed by some,[20] but Visser 't Hooft gave this view a moral slant. He sharply contrasted Rembrandt not only with Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) as an exponent of the mostly theatrical baroque but also with the Renaissance painter Guido Reni (1575-1642), who he felt was too sentimental. In his eyes, both Rubens and Reni were examples of painting that focused on the outward aspect of people, whereas the cultured Rembrandt offered access to the inner life of human beings, which is where the life of faith occurs. Visser 't Hooft believed that the young Rembrandt used the Bible only as a source for themes for genre paintings in a forced compromise between form, content, and the baroque style. In the post-1642 Rembrandt, however, he saw a deep personal engagement with Scripture.

17 Visser 't Hooft, *Rembrandt and the Gospel* (1960), 130.

18 Namely, the younger son's squandering of his inheritance from his father, Luke 15:13.

19 Kamphuis, review, in: *Critisch Bulletin* (1956), 269.

20 Cf. Zell, *Reframing Rembrandt* (2002), 195 note 3. Cf. Perlove and Silver, *Rembrandt's Faith* (2009), 373-375.

Here he was following the German art historian Carl Neumann who published a major Rembrandt study which portrayed the painter as a mystic.[21] Visser 't Hooft took over his idea that the religious art of especially the late Rembrandt was so biblical because it deviated from what was customary in the 17th century. Neumann was the one who pointed out that Saskia's death was a major turning point in Rembrandt's life. At that point, faith in God took on a very different and more personal function. Visser 't Hooft spoke of a 'Copernican revolution' that occurred in the period 1642-1648 and that he believed was visible in Rembrandt's self-portraits.

> Self-complacency, self-assertion, lust for pleasure disappear; his eyes become deeper and speak of suffering and loneliness. But at the same time a new strength appears in his features which is drawn from his victory over inner restlessness.[22]

While the Roman Catholic Rubens, as an artistic exponent of the Counter-Reformation, made Christ a 'triumphalist' hero, the Protestant Rembrandt seemed to be aware of the mystery of God's coming in the form of a servant. The older Rembrandt entered into the spirit of the Bible in the same way that Visser 't Hooft himself wanted to. Rembrandt was not a systematician nor a person who was too focused on the institutional aspect of the church. Rather, he was someone who had come to know the depths of faith through crises. Visser 't Hooft felt this approach to the painter was lacking in most of the Rembrandt literature. He was convinced, for example, that the great 19th century Swiss art historian Jacob Burckhardt had not understood Rembrandt at all.

Although Visser 't Hooft was a much sought after speaker on Rembrandt in the 1940s and 1950s – and not only in church circles – and his book sold well, his views influenced only a few serious Rembrandt studies.[23] Even today, in contrast to Visser 't Hooft, there are hardly any contemporary experts who label Rembrandt's choice of subjects and his way of depicting biblical themes as his discoveries. Most of Rembrandt's biblical scenes are now viewed as impressions based on the work of illustrators of the Bible, such as Maerten de Vos and Maerten van Heemskerck.[24] The division of

21 Visser 't Hooft, *Rembrandt and the Gospel* (1960), 20 and 108. Cf. Neumann, *Rembrandt* (1922). Visser 't Hooft used the *vermehrte Auflage* (expanded edition) of 1905.

22 Visser 't Hooft, *Rembrandt and the Gospel* (1960), 12.

23 Zeilstra, interview with E. van de Wetering, 29 January 2016. An exception is the Lutheran minister and art historian Christian Tümpel, *Rembrandt* (1986).

24 Tümpel, *Rembrandt* (1986), 150 and 171.

the painter's life into two periods, with the pre-1642 Rembrandt seen as a painter of the outward aspects of human life, as a representative of the baroque with great public success, has generally been abandoned. According to the view of Visser 't Hooft, it was only after 1642 that Rembrandt turned away from the baroque and became a painter of the inner life. The pursuit of success was supposed to have given way to profound feeling. This way he tried to explain the assumed contemporary misunderstanding of the later Rembrandt. Around the year 1900, a number of authors adhered to this view, including the Dutch art historian and museum director Frederik Schmidt Degener, who was popular in his time and whom Visser 't Hooft regularly quoted.[25] Schmidt Degener believed that the older Rembrandt led an isolated life, and it was in this phase that he arrived at his most profound interpretations of the Bible, with only a small circle of friends who valued his message. Visser 't Hooft concurred with this view:

> Did these friends grasp the true significance of Rembrandt's art? We can only say that at least they grasped more of it than their contemporaries. … But at least it means that in Rembrandt they not only saw the great master of the technique of painting, but also that they became aware that he was the bearer of a message, and of a message, moreover, with which he had been inspired from above, like St Matthew in his painting.[26]

This view of a late or mature Rembrandt as a deeply religious non-conformist says more about Visser 't Hooft than it does about Rembrandt. In turn, Schmidt Degener bases his view on the biography of Rembrandt by Carl Neumann mentioned earlier. The latter calls the Rembrandt after 1642 the 'painter of the soul'. Neumann postulates that the Rembrandt after 1642 shows a certain purity that was also present in the late Middle Ages and can be contrasted with the Renaissance and the baroque style. What makes Rembrandt unique is the fact that he succeeded in overcoming the baroque style and embraced a pure spirituality rooted in the Middle Ages with a disinterested religious orientation.

This is viewed as a 19th century construction today.[27] According to the Rembrandt expert Ernst van de Wetering, one can observe at most a

25 Schmidt Degener, *Rembrandt und der holländische Barock* (1928). Idem, 'Rembrandt en Vondel', in: *De Gids*, Vol. 83, 1919, 222-275

26 Visser 't Hooft, *Rembrandt and the Gospel* (1960), 102. Zeilstra, interview with E. van de Wetering, 29 January 2016.

27 Cf. Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst* (1979), 19 and 23f.; Slive, *Rembrandt and his critics* (1953).

difference in stress: the young Rembrandt appears to have had more of an eye for the physical, for movement, dynamics, and thus for the theatrical. The older Rembrandt, on the other hand, was fascinated by the spiritual and subtle expressions.[28] The 19th century cult of the artist as a misunderstood genius is seen as the background for what is called the increasing 'Christianising of the image of Rembrandt'.[29] Around 1640, Dutch art moved towards the classical style. The fascination with movement, which Rembrandt also exhibited, gave way to what is known as a lighter and more muted way of painting.[30] Van de Wetering prefers not to speak of a development or change in style. Rather, what he sees in Rembrandt is a radical new approach to the question of the imagination. By using an unconventional method of applying paint, thereby allowing for the factor of chance, and the intentional 'incompleteness' of some details, he succeeded in creating a convincing naturalness that brings the observer very close to the scene depicted.[31] The assertion that the older Rembrandt was particularly occupied in his art by the representation of universal truth and higher spiritual concerns cannot be proven. He always paid a great deal of attention to concrete history.[32]

Visser 't Hooft was aware of the criticism by art critics when writing his book but did not think that Schmidt Degener's main thesis had been refuted.[33] The presumed division in Rembrandt's life provided Visser 't Hooft with a tempting framework for interpretation and presentation – and not only for Rembrandt's life. The element of a break, conversion or penance is central here, followed by devotion and commitment in light of God's mercy. He recognised this in the parable of the Prodigal Son and in the life of the apostle Paul and also recognised it in Karl Barth's theology. It was this framework that gave him a way to understand the lives of people and history. It also gave him something to hold on to personally, and it aided him in the structure of his many lectures because it provided a certain clarity even when all kinds of forces were working together in a complex and murky field of tension. Rembrandt thus provided material for Visser 't Hooft's pedagogical framework. His view of Rembrandt is above all an illustration of Visser 't Hooft's conviction that the biblical message is the foundation for a meaningful life marked by a real contrast between joy and sorrow. And yet, there was something

28 Van de Wetering, *Rembrandt. The Painter Thinker* (2016).

29 Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst* (1979), 35. For a modern view of Rembrandt in line with Visser 't Hooft's, see Perlove, *Pursuit of Faith* (2010), 31.

30 Tümpel, *Rembrandt* (1986), 108-109.

31 Van de Wetering, *Rembrandt. The Painter Thinker* (2016), 223-281.

32 Tümpel, *Rembrandt* (1986), 126.

33 Visser 't Hooft, *Rembrandt and the Gospel* (1960), 110.

else. Visser 't Hooft felt a strong affinity with Rembrandt, observing in him a love for the Bible that affected him deeply. It was Visser 't Hooft's view of Rembrandt that was key to understanding his own life. For Visser 't Hooft, Rembrandt himself was an icon of the human being before God.

10.4 'Mein Sach' auf Nichts gestellt'

Visser 't Hooft saw in Rembrandt a supremely gifted person who was perhaps misunderstood by many but who lived like a king. This was the type of person he himself wanted to be. He could be seen as arrogant: while some people looked up to him, were even afraid at times of those piercing eyes that looked right through you, and many respected him without really knowing him, others saw Visser 't Hooft as too self-confident. It could hurt if someone felt Visser 't Hooft did not acknowledge him or her. For example, Hebe Kohlbrugge, a courier on the Swiss Road, felt she was not taken seriously enough by Visser 't Hooft in resistance work and, looking back later, called him 'very *selbstbewusst*' (self-assured), and she did not mean that in a positive sense.[34] For others, the firmness with which he acted gave an impression rather of someone who had persevered and achieved results while others got stuck in details and objections. In 1971, Adolf Freudenberg and Hans-Heinrich Harms, both of whom worked with him intensely for a long time, typified Visser 't Hooft as someone who thought very quickly and was always a few steps ahead of everyone else.

> Visser 't Hooft thinks and responds extraordinarily quickly and is in control of himself. Ideas, which he has in abundance, are cleverly and quickly converted into clear plans and decisions; he is able to give a staff member an assignment in one single sentence that will keep him, and others, occupied for a long time. He is impeccably business-oriented without being spiritless, for he can also be incensed or cold. … He never got lost in details and processed an incredible amount of post and memos at an amazing speed. He listened well, because he took the people and the cause he represented seriously. Those who valued him and faithfully served the one cause that mattered were given royal independence in the work they did in Geneva.[35]

34 Zeilstra, interview with H.C. Kohlbrugge, 6 June 2013.

35 Freudenberg and Harms, 'Willem A. Visser 't Hooft', 1971, 306. 'Visser 't Hooft denkt und reagiert ungewöhnlich rasch und ist Herr seiner selbst. Gedanken, die ihm in reichlicher Fülle

Those staff members whom he respected had a great deal of freedom in doing their work. Many of them, some of whom he worked with for decades, had almost unlimited admiration for him, such as Suzanne de Diétrich (1891-1981), secretary of the WSCF 1935-1946 and later director of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey. In her opinion, students always felt at ease with Visser 't Hooft.[36] De Diétrich recalled her experiences with Visser 't Hooft in the 1930s in particular. At that time, policy and the big picture were less important and personal faith was stressed. From 1934 on, she and Visser 't Hooft ensured that prayer once again played an important role at the conferences, which included compiling a small book on personal and communal prayer, *Venite adoremus*.[37] In an article on the occasion of Visser 't Hooft's 50th birthday, De Diétrich described him as someone who had been selected by God himself for ecumenical work, someone who did not do this work because he himself wanted to but acted out of obedience to God. For Visser 't Hooft himself, the conviction that he was acting out of obedience to God most certainly played a role. Upon Hans Hoekendijk's return in 1946 to the Netherlands from India after disappointing experiences, he wrote to him:

> And yet, there is a different kind of comfort in the fact that there appear to be tasks everywhere in the Church of Christ and in the fact that these do not depend on their location but on obedience.[38]

Everyone who worked with Visser 't Hooft knew that he valued initiative, zeal, discipline, and a punctual daily structure. De Diétrich had difficulty walking, and Visser 't Hooft in his car picked her up every day promptly at six minutes to nine in 1930s so that she could arrive at the WSCF office at Rue Calvin, number 13, at nine o'clock precisely.[39] Later on, when the

zufliegen, wurden herzhaft und schnell zu klaren Planungen und Entschlüssen gestaltet; er konnte einem Mitarbeiter mit einem einzigen Satz eine Aufgabe stellen, die diesen und nicht nur diesen lange in Atem hielt. Er ist unbestechlich sachlich, ohne temperamentlos zu sein, denn zornig und eiskalt kann er auch werden. […] Er versank nie im Detail und arbeitete sich durch die beängstigende Fülle der Eingänge und Memoranden in verblüffendem Tempo hindurch. Er hörte gut zu, weil er den Menschen und die von ihm vertretene Sache ernst nahm. Wer ihn gelten ließ und zuverlässig der einen Sache diente, um die es geht, konnte in Genf mit königlicher Selbständigkeit arbeiten.'

36 De Diétrich, 'Visser 't Hooft als algemeen secretaris van de WSCF' (1950), 430.

37 Weber, H.-R., *The Courage to Live* (1995), 80-82.

38 Visser 't Hooft to J.C. Hoekendijk, 16 September 1946. WCC general correspondence 661. 'Een grote troost is echter nu ook weer op een andere manier in het feit, dat er in de Kerk van Christus overal een taak ligt en dat het ten slotte niet van de plaats afhangt, maar van de gehoorzaamheid.'

39 De Diétrich, 'Visser 't Hooft als algemeen secretaris van de WSCF' (1950), 430.

World Council was located at the Route de Malagnou address, he arrived daily (when not abroad) at 8:30 a.m. in his little Vauxhall and went home punctually at 5 p.m. He generally retired for the night at 10 p.m. when he was at conferences. His strict faith discipline included several simple personal rituals. Before getting into bed, he said his evening prayer, often kneeling at the side of his bed. Every day, before going to sleep and when rising in the morning, he read a passage from the Bible, preferably from his own personal copy of the Greek New Testament.[40]

When Visser 't Hooft was asked by the column 'Ex Libris' of the American magazine *The Christian Century* to respond to the question, 'What books did most to shape your vocational attitude and your philosophy of life?', he listed the novels by Dostoyevsky, Pascal's *Pensées*, Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* and *Credo*, Julius Schniewind's commentaries on Matthew and Mark, E.C. Hoskyns and F. Noel Davey's *The Riddle of the New Testament,* O. Noordmans's *Herschepping*, William Temple's *Readings in St. John's Gospel*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, and Buber's *Die Schriften über das dialogische Prinzip* (including *Ich und Du*).[41] This was only the tip of the iceberg of the books he had read and from which he had processed aspects in his work. Konrad Raiser, one of Visser 't Hooft's later successors as general secretary of the World Council, spoke of 'a theologian of extraordinary erudition'.[42] An academic career would certainly have been a possibility but, according to De Diétrich, Visser 't Hooft was not interested in knowledge for knowledge's sake – he was more interested in the application.[43] De Diétrich described his style as 'dynamic, an atom bomb, but a constructive atom bomb.' Visser 't Hooft himself did not believe he was an original scholar but rather someone who worked with the ideas of others. The Dominican René Beaupère felt Visser 't Hooft was more of a teacher and someone who prioritised vigilance: 'a theological sentinel'.[44] Theological dialogue was important, but not the objective. His objective was to make the unity that focused on Christ visible, via revitalised churches that understood that their *raison d'être* was to be a part of the world church and were actively committed to the unity of church and society.

40 The Greek New Testament Visser 't Hooft would read from daily is now in the possession of his grandson, Caspar Visser 't Hooft.

41 *The Christian Century*, vol. 80, no.18, May 1963, 583.

42 Raiser, 'Le pasteur Willem Visser 't Hooft, pionnier de l'oecuménisme Genève-Rome', 2003, especially 33: 'un théologien d'une éruditon extraordinaire'.

43 De Diétrich, 'Visser 't Hooft als algemeen secretaris van de WSCF', 1950, 431.

44 Beaupère, 'Rencontres avec W. Visser 't Hooft', 2003, especially 40: 'un veilleur théologique, une sentinelle'.

He enjoyed speaking to others about their faith and touched the hearts of many, but, strangely enough, Visser 't Hooft was shy when it came to discussing his own personal faith experience. Nonetheless, at the same time, he made unexpected and enigmatic statements that allowed glimpses into his heart. While travelling in 1968, he stopped in to visit his sick niece Clan, one of the daughters of his brother Hans, a general practitioner who lived in Velp. He sat down beside her bed and said: 'There are three things that you must consider. You have the time to do so right now.' The first was: 'Ich habe meine Sache auf Nichts gestellt.' The second was: 'Be thankful for small mercies.' And the third: 'In an absurd world, only an absurd message of salvation can be believed.' These words made a deep impression on Clan, and she wrote them down in the Bible she took with her when she travelled. She enjoyed going to the church in Rozendaal where the well-known poet-theologian Willem Barnard (1920-2010) served as assistant pastor and gave poetically inspired sermons. She once took her uncle Wim to a service that Barnard led. His comment – in French – was as sobering as it was typical: 'Magnificent! But it is not a sermon.'[45]

The line 'Ich hab' mein' Sach' auf Nichts gestellt' (On nothing have I set my heart) is the opening line of a poem by Goethe, 'Vanitas! Vanitatum vanitas!', a parody on the 16th century Lutheran hymn 'Ich hab mein Sach Gott heimgestellt' (My life I now to God resign) by Johannes Leon. Goethe's text was set to music by Louis Spohr (1784-1859) and became a students' song proclaiming that the entire world belongs to the free person. No money, possessions, women, travelling, fame, or honour can compete with that. The German philosopher Max Stirner (Johann Caspar Schmidt, 1806-1866) elaborated on that idea in his book *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1844):

> My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free, etc., but solely what is *mine*, and it is not a general one, but is – unique as I am unique. Nothing is more to me than myself![46]

The question is what exactly Visser 't Hooft meant in his conversation with Clan in 1968. We should recall that it was a time in which students wanted to go their own way, and it was in that same summer that he gave his famous

45 Zeilstra, interview with J.C. Visser 't Hooft, 26 September 2013. 'C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas un sermon.'

46 Stirner, *The Ego and his Own*, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/max-stirner-the-ego-and-his-own; *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1844). 'Meine Sache ist, weder das Göttliche, noch das Menschliche, ist nicht das Wahre, Gute, Rechte, Freie usw., sondern allein das Meinige, und sie ist keine allgemeine Sache, sondern ist einzig, wie ich einzig bin. Mir geht nichts über Mich.'

speech at the Assembly in Uppsala. He wanted to give a young generation the room to explore the world themselves, but he also felt that thankfulness for small signs of mercy and trust in God were essential.

10.5 Accolades and Critiques on the Occasion of his Death

When he died in July 1985, many people looked back on the life of Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft from many different points of view. After the funeral Mass for Cardinal Bea in 1968, Pope Paul VI had called Visser 't Hooft the 'guardian angel of the World Council'.[47] In 1985, Visser 't Hooft was even compared to the Pope himself, usually in a positive sense but also with a certain negative undertone. This was the case in his homecountry the Netherlands as well as elsewhere. M.H. Gans, who had collaborated extensively with Visser 't Hooft during the war on behalf of the Jewish refugees, spoke of 'the Pope of the Protestants'.[48] The journalist Frits Groeneveld referred to him as 'the diplomat of God' and 'the Pope of ecumenicity'.[49] The journalist Ben Maandag of the Dutch newspaper *Het Vrije Volk* went just a bit further. He wrote: 'Visser 't Hooft *was* ecumenicity'.[50] In the *Leeuwarder Courant*, Visser 't Hooft was called the 'mainspring behind the World Council'.[51] Other similar characterisations were: 'Father of Ecumenism' or 'Mister Ecumenicity', 'Mr. Omnipresent' and 'Mr. Omnicompetent' and the representative of the 'Dutch spirit'.[52] *Nederlands Dagblad* was rather caustic and listed his failures in particular and spoke of the suspicion that the unity for which Visser 't Hooft's World Council had fought at one time was not unlike the unity sought at the time of the Tower of Babel.[53] The term 'architect' of the World Council

47 Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (1973), 337.

48 Gans, in: *Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad*, 26 July 1985.

49 F. Groeneveld, in: *NRC Handelsblad*, 5 July 1985: 'Hij gedroeg zich als een hoge diplomaat – als vertegenwoordiger van het Koninkrijk Gods op aarde.' (He behaved as though he were a senior diplomat – as a representative of the Kingdom of God on earth.)

50 Maandag, in: *Het Vrije Volk*, 5 July 1985: 'Hij sprak nooit van bovenaf, probeerde alleen maar te verzoenen, was een eenvoudige vent, zonder kapsones, maar hartstochtelijk bewogen, je mag zeggen bezeten door de gedachte, dat de scheidingsmuren tussen de kerken afgebroken moeten worden.' (He never spoke down to people, he only tried to reconcile, without being full of himself, yet passionately moved – you could even say possessed – by the idea that the dividing walls between the churches had to be torn down.)

51 *Leeuwarder Courant*, 5 July 1985.

52 Barkey Wolf, in: *Accent*, 25 December 1971.

53 *Nederlands Dagblad*, 6 July 1985: 'Er zit iets erg verdrietigs in het vele werk dat dr. Visser 't Hooft gedurende zijn "leven in de oecumene" heeft verricht.' (There is something sad about all of the work that Dr Visser 't Hooft did during his 'life in ecumenicity.')

was used often. *The New York Times* called Visser 't Hooft a 'bureaucrat' with major influence and praised him for his carefully constructed network of ecumenical contacts:

> His life was testimony to the proposition that a good bureaucrat in the church can exercise one of the most powerful of all ministries, and that personal contacts, patiently and generously cultivated, are a potent force for the shaping of history.[54]

In this paper, he was praised as an engaging speaker with the allure of a statesman, someone who cared little for outward show: 'He was a man of striking appearance and possessed unusual physical alertness and energy even in later years.' That there was an intimidating side to his character had not escaped the newspaper. Another contribution in the same paper described Visser 't Hooft as 'A lean, lanky man with a jutting jaw'.[55]

> Statesman, rather than cleric. He smoked and drank, often having a drink or two of vodka before dinner and a glass of beer before bed, and preferred dark conservative business suits to clerical garb.[56]

Several newspapers called Visser 't Hooft a 'diplomat', in both a positive and a negative sense.[57] The journalist Ko Colijn called Visser 't Hooft a man possessed, a go-getter by the grace of God, always on the go. He remembered that Visser 't Hooft had been called 'a modern Odysseus' at the presentation of an honorary degree in Oxford and was convinced that his death meant the close of an ecumenical era.[58]

In 1985, Albert van den Heuvel, who had long worked with Visser 't Hooft, called him both 'a brilliant strategist' as well as 'a difficult person' and nonetheless someone whose suitcase he would carry to the end of the world if necessary. Visser 't Hooft was, in his opinion, 'hypercritical' but, deep down, a 'shy man' who could also be warm and was true to – often very old – friendships. He remembered Visser 't Hooft's own words: 'I was the hard worker, the one who wanted to get an important job done.' In addition to diplomat, Van den Heuvel also called him a democrat and federalist,

54 *The New York Times*, 5 July 1985.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 E.g., by A.H. van den Heuvel in *Trouw*, 5 July 1985: 'competent diplomat'.
58 Colijn, in: *De Bazuin*, 12 July 1985.

left of centre and true to the royal Dutch House of Orange.[59] Henk Muller referred in *de Volkskrant* to the impatience that Visser 't Hooft himself was well aware of and to his long speeches and spoke of 'a diplomat of the old school' who had insisted on remaining silent about religious persecutions in the Soviet Union at the Assembly of Nairobi in 1975.[60] Robert Kroon of *De Telegraaf* compared Visser 't Hooft with Dutch diplomats like Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart, Adriaan Pelt, the Dutch director of the European office of the United Nations, and Joseph Luns, who had been the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs for years.[61]

The Methodist staff member of the World Council, Betty Thompson, referred to Visser 't Hooft as an 'ecumenical mover and shaker' as well as 'something of a Jehovah-type father figure'. For Thompson, he was representative of what she called the 'theological tribe of Barth, Brunner, Niebuhr'. She found Visser 't Hooft to be 'acerbic, charming, diplomatic, blunt, shy and assured.'[62] He was a Christian 'with a lively mind who was prepared to do the hard work necessary for the realization of some of his dreams.' She remembered how she and one of her colleagues were given a thorough dressing down by Visser 't Hooft, wearing an old-fashioned swimming suit – he loved swimming –,

> for the 'obscene' act of eating ice cream cones in public at a resort in Denmark where the Central Committee was meeting. At the time he was wearing a moth-eaten one-piece bathing suit left over from the '20s – an outfit that seemed to us more deserving of the term.[63]

The journalist Oene Bergher was very critical in *De Tijd*. He felt that Visser 't Hooft was 'an authoritarian figure', 'a world big-boss', 'more of a general than a secretary' who feigned modesty.[64] According to Bergher, Visser 't Hooft himself was guilty of heresy. He was not helpful at all, and he made sure that the majority of the World Council did not pursue a 'responsible society' if this was to be at the cost of its own power. Bergher held Visser 't Hooft personally responsible for the misuse of his words about heresy in 1968. He saw him as the failing official who, at the time, stood in the way of

59 Van den Heuvel, in: *Trouw*, 5 July 1985. See also: Interviews with H. Berkhof, A.H. van den Heuvel, and H.M. de Lange, Brood en Spelen, IKON radio, 6 July 1985, Sound and Vision Archives.
60 Muller, in: *de Volkskrant*, 5 July1985.
61 Kroon, in: *De Telegraaf*, 8 July 1985.
62 Thompson, in: *The Christian Century*, 17-24 July 1985.
63 Ibid.
64 Bergher, in: *De Tijd*, 26 July 1985.

succession by a person from the Third World. He remembered asking Visser 't Hooft whether the international ecumenical monastic community of Brother Roger Schutz in Taizé could be a bridge between Rome and Geneva. Visser 't Hooft had nothing good to say about Taizé and said: 'They cannot go around Geneva,' which sounded very arrogant to Bergher. At that time, so soon after his death, Bergher was one of the few who took such a negative view of Visser 't Hooft's attitude and actions. But even later, there were few who spoke this critically about Visser 't Hooft. As time passed, a more relativising tone became apparent in the assessments, although years later, in 1998, when *de Volkskrant* journalist J.J. Lindner was asked to characterise Visser 't Hooft, he recalled the painful metaphor used by Karl Barth in 1935 when he compared ecumenicity to a circus and called Visser 't Hooft the indispensable 'equerry of the circus of ecumenicity'.[65]

Albert van den Heuvel called the old Visser 't Hooft 'the conscience of the World Council' who was always quick to use the word 'nonsense'.[66] But, in his opinion, Visser 't Hooft could also admit to having lost arguments. 'He would grumble some at first, but once it became apparent that you were right, he would give in.'

> I will not make a saint of him, he was not a great psychologist when dealing with people. He was rather rough with those who needed a pat on the back. His liberal background helped him deal with culture and liberalism. He was very interested in philosophy. Holidays were short. Having a remarkable circle of friends due to his honorary degrees, he discussed books with all of the great theologians of his time, and had the memory of an elephant. He wasted no time; during meetings he would often work on a book, visit museums at conference locations, no small talk, swimming … hesitant to display emotions.[67]

According to Van den Heuvel, Visser 't Hooft's best sermons were at funerals. When the little daughter Suzanne of Boudewijn and Jet Sjollema-van Sandick

65 Lindner, in: *de Volkskrant*, 19 August 1998.

66 R. 't Sas, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 1983, WCC 994.1.36/1.

67 Ibid.: 'Ik zal geen heilige van hem maken, een groot psycholoog in de omgang met mensen was hij niet. Iemand die het meer moest hebben van een schouderklop, daar was hij nogal ruw mee. Zijn vrijzinnige achtergrond hielp hem ook met cultuur en vrijzinnigheid om te gaan. Hij had een grote belangstelling voor filosofie. Vakanties waren kort. Merkwaardige vriendenkring door vele eredoctoraten, besprak zijn boeken met alle grote theologen van zijn tijd, een ijzeren geheugen. Hij morste geen tijd; zat tijdens vergaderingen vaak aan een boek te werken, museumbezoek in conferentieplaatsen, geen small talk, zwemmen […] schroom gevoelens te tonen.'

died after being hit by a train, Visser 't Hooft sympathised deeply. He led the funeral service on 12 January 1963 and spoke about Job who was assured of God's love even though his many questions were not answered.[68]

The very same Visser 't Hooft could be quick-tempered. His daughter Anneke remembered how he, wanting to rest at home after a long trip, could explode when the children were noisy. At times he would be standing yelling at the window if the neighbour's dog was barking. World Council members Albert van den Heuvel and Boudewijn Sjollema recalled that they could often tell by the tea cup held in Visser 't Hooft's hand that a fit of rage was about to occur; it would begin to shake as he became wound up.[69] But outbursts could clear the air and, some time later, the terrified conversation partners would be sharing a table with Visser 't Hooft, enjoying a glass of good wine while laughing and telling anecdotes.

Frans Bouwen, the theology student from Leiden, did an internship at the World Council in Geneva in 1980 and was looking for a room. During the tea break, Visser 't Hooft offered to let him stay in his house if he would be willing to cook for him.[70] Dinner had to be on the table at exactly 6.30 p.m. The conversation always concerned ecumenicity, never the weather or the wine. Visser 't Hooft was often curt and demanding but, strangely enough, became shy if things seemed to become personal. As soon as the conversation turned to something that really interested him, his eyes began to twinkle, he would ask questions and could then talk with great detail, immediately and with humour. In 1984, Bouwen was once again a guest of the old Visser 't Hooft, but this time with a group of young people from the Kloosterkerk in The Hague. One of the young people asked: 'What is the "most beautiful thing" that you every saw or experienced?' Visser 't Hooft replied:

> I find that impossible to answer. You would need to categorise 'beautiful'. 'Beautiful' in your private life, 'beautiful' in your professional life. For me, the high point of ecumenical life was the youth conference of 1939 in Amsterdam. Young people from around the world had gathered there. We had very good representation from Africa and Asia. We knew and felt that the world was about to explode. It was … three weeks before the war broke out. I had met Dietrich Bonhoeffer shortly before and been

68 Visser 't Hooft, 'Toespraak 12 januari 1963', WCC 994.2.19/3. Zeilstra, interview with B.C. Sjollema and H.J.M. Sjollema-van Sandick, 4 February 2015. Sjollema, *Never Bow to Racism* (2015), 23.

69 Zeilstra, interview with A.H. van den Heuvel, 23 April 2013. Beaupère, 'Rencontres avec W. Visser 't Hooft', 2003, 39.

70 Bouwen, in: *Tijd en taak*, 20 July 1985.

> well informed by his friends in the German army, who said that Hitler would attack Poland in September. The atmosphere was such that we had gathered together and experienced the deep unity of people who would be separated, some would disappear in the war, some end up in concentration camps, others in prisons. I will never forget how we sang 'À Toi la Gloire' in the Koepelkerk in Amsterdam. I have never sung it again in the same way. I thought the roof would fly off the building.'[71]

A little while later, Rembrandt prints were passed around while Visser 't Hooft spoke of the old days.

71 Ibid.: 'Dat vind ik eigenlijk een onmogelijke vraag. 'Mooi' zou je, eigenlijk in categorieën moeten verdelen. 'Mooi' in je privé-leven; 'mooi' in je professionele leven. Het hoogtepunt in het oecumenisch leven is voor mij de jeugdconferentie van 1939 in Amsterdam. Daar waren we met de jeugd van de hele wereld bijeen. We hadden een zeer goede vertegenwoordiging van Afrika en Azië. We wisten en we voelden dat de wereld op springen stond. Het was […] drie weken voor de oorlog uitbrak. Ik had kort daarvoor Dietrich Bonhoeffer ontmoet en goede inlichtingen gehad van zijn vrienden in het Duitse leger, die zeiden dat Hitler in september Polen zou aanvallen. het was in die sfeer dat we toen bijeen waren en die diepe eenheid beleefden van mensen die uit elkaar geslagen zouden worden en waarvan er een aantal in de oorlog verdwenen zijn, sommigen in concentratiekampen, anderen in gevangenissen. Ik vergeet nooit hoe we daar in de Koepelkerk in Amsterdam het 'À Toi la Gloire' zongen. Ik heb het nooit meer zo gezongen als toen. Ik dacht dat het dak eraf zou barsten.'



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Taking Stock

An Assessment of a Life Lived for the Unity of the Church

Abstract
This concluding chapter presents final considerations about the significance of Visser 't Hooft's life for the World Council of Churches. It traces the impact of his ideas and approach throughout his tenure. The chapter thus points to the shift in emphasis from individual salvation to solidarity and justice issues, and to the initial success of Visser 't Hooft's church-institutional approach which was later regarded as old-fashioned. In addition, this chapter points to his successful organisation of a non-structured ecumenical movement and the insights he brought to bear through the World Council – with a call to Christian realism – and to how this could be applied to the great issues of the day. This chapter also assesses his role critically.

Keywords: spiritual struggle, church renewal, syncretism, modernity, charisma, vulnerable institutionalisation

Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985) lived for the unity of the church, for *oikumène*. This has been the basic theme of this book. As a pioneer and figurehead of the World Council, he played a major role in the ecumenical movement, i.e., in the movement that focused on and pursued the unity of Christianity and was a burning issue in the twentieth century among Protestants in Europe and North America in particular. Now that this critical-historical biography has described his life, we can turn to examine and understand the life's work of this one individual. What words, oral or written, and what deeds – decisions, positions, and actions – can serve as a basis to understanding the significance of Visser 't Hooft's life for the ecumenical movement in the broad sense of the word, not only for the organisation of the World Council of Churches, but for the mutual relationships between churches in global Christianity in general?

The answer to that question is that Visser 't Hooft succeeded in presenting the idea of the unity of the church convincingly to many as the answer to

Zeilstra, Jurjen A., *Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985: Living for the Unity of the Church*.
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the divisions present in the world. He was convinced that believers could be seen as the living body of Jesus Christ in the world. He himself was a representative of an elite that did not want so much to instrumentalise the idea of a global church for the benefit of world peace, as to give a meaningful shape to church unity in the service of world peace. By placing the problems of the world on the church's agenda, he made a major contribution to a church renewal movement. These problems had to do with major themes, such as processing World War I, totalitarian movements, issues relating to young people, disarmament, work among prisoners of war, anti-Semitism, refugee work, reconstruction, decolonisation, racism, the Cold War, international crises, and secularism. Accepting these challenges affected the churches and it changed the role of the Christian religion in society.

The working definition of the ecumenical movement given in the introduction was:

> The ecumenical movement is a complex of challenges by and reactions to modernity involving the identity of Christianity in the whole of a developing world society, and that gives occasion for an international network of individuals, organisations, and churches, that is capable of a supporting role in shaping institutions.

During Visser 't Hooft's lifetime, the accent in Christian religious experience shifted from concern about individual salvation to solidarity and a concern for justice and peace. In principle, during the 1930s, he increasingly chose the approach of the church as institution. The advantage he saw to that approach was that spirituality and practice enriched one another. The disadvantage was that the decline of the ecclesial form of religion in the 1960s also affected Visser 't Hooft's approach. The attempt to globalise the church, linked to an international institution, became increasingly less experienced as a renewal and more as part of an antiquated way of thinking. Properly viewed, Visser 't Hooft's approach left little room for the positive appreciation of the emancipatory aspects associated with secularisation, such as empowerment.

There was yet another disadvantage. His completely negative interpretation of secularisation placed great stress on what Visser 't Hooft himself called 'the spiritual struggle'. He saw the decrease in the influence of churches and the Christian faith as a moral decline. As a result, he tended to relativise somewhat the tangible forms of totalitarian movements such as state communism, fascism, and Nazism in particular. After all, at issue here was not the struggle against temporary manifestations of dictatorship

but against evil itself. And this evil raged in every country and in every human heart. At times, this approach could be useful for breaking through an impasse. At other times, it later appeared that the manifestation was less innocent and less short that he had expected, as with the contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church during the Cold War. Visser 't Hooft could appear very authoritarian. His defence of God's fatherhood could not be separated psychologically from his own 'paternal role' in the family and in ecumenism. But that demands another study.

As a child of the 20th century, Visser 't Hooft felt called to give shape and content to a Christian answer to modernity. To that end, he, along with others, developed an international programme of religious discussions, assistance, study, and the international involvement of churches. Already as a young man, he was a well-read and erudite figure who stood out because of his knowledge of languages, his vigour, and an ability to speak to young people. In 1924, against the background of the dividing power of World War I and struck by the undermining effect of revolutions and the rise of totalitarian movements, he boldly began to participate in the international Christian youth movement. Leaders of youth organisations like the YMCA, the NCSV, and the WSCF saw him as an intelligent, assured, and resolute young man with great enthusiasm, suitable for acting as a representative of a concerned Christian elite.

Many typified Visser 't Hooft as a man with a striking character. It is somewhat confusing that those who knew him well personally often used opposing terms to describe him. For example, he has been described as acerbic and sharp, while also being seen as extraordinarily charming, diplomatic as well as excessively blunt and self-assured when it concerned explaining a plan, but shy when it came to personal feelings and his faith. He was extremely punctual but was happy to leave organisational details to others, especially finances. He could show honest interest and respond encouragingly, but he could also put people off and ignore their contribution as if it was complete nonsense. Dr Visser 't Hooft, as he was addressed by his colleagues, could analyse complex developments down to the minutest detail, indicate, and connect an action-oriented program to them. But he could also get things completely wrong. He could be strict and authoritarian but relativise issues with a smile, be humorous, unifying and sympathetic. He was someone who called himself a realist, never an idealist. Visser 't Hooft was a complex person and cannot be described with a few strokes of the pen.

He loved a good conversation. But it was also possible that he would not see or hear people who made choices in life that were different from his, including immediate family members or relatives. Interviews have revealed

that Visser 't Hooft was someone who insisted that, when addressed, he was not obliged to respond to what he felt was stupidity. Discussing the weather was not permitted. It remains a mystery how someone with so little talent for 'small talk' could be so diplomatic and move with such ease among the 'great of the earth'.

He understood that creating support among young people and students was indispensable if he wanted organisations to work in a unifying way on a Christian basis and form an alternative to fascist and communist movements. He invested in that for years, and that investment bore fruit. It came down to helping churches discover how the masses could be reached with current issues. He found the answer of idealistic internationalism unrealistically optimistic because the shadow sides of human nature were ignored. He himself did not want to be seen as an idealist but as a Christian realist. He saw international idealism coming to a dead end in the diplomacy of self-interest and short-term thinking during the disarmament talks that the League of Nations organised in Geneva in the 1930s. In the IMC, the YMCA, the WSCF, Life and Work, Faith and Order, and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches he found people who shared his concerns. He felt recognised in his work among young people and called by God to devote his apparently boundless energy to a powerful youth and student movement. One of his great talents here was that he was able not only to build a large international network but also to maintain it through journals, larger and smaller conferences, and personal attention. Leaders in various ecumenical groups very quickly saw in him an enthusiastic and unifying visionary genius. When plans were made in Utrecht to merge Life and Work and Faith and Order into a World Council of Churches, Visser 't Hooft was appointed to give leadership as general secretary to the new organisation. Churches, not movements, were the elementary building blocks. Visser 't Hooft was able to do something with them.

With this task, Visser 't Hooft and his network were successful, precisely in times of conflict and war, in converting a loosely aligned group, a movement with little structure, into a major religious non-governmental organisation with broad support. His goal here was not to form a church action group but to enable churches to engage in joint actions. In the 1950s, the World Council of Churches had a well-established and growing reputation, and the representatives of the council contributed to major international themes. This was – not exclusively but to a large part – due to Visser 't Hooft. He acted and moved like a diplomat. He had wide knowledge, as well as the ability to present church points of concern not as moral indignation but to

introduce them as a constructive contributions to an inspiring conversation. Many acquaintances from his student network in the 1930s later held high positions in society and church and appreciated the intervention of the World Council. At the end of the 1950s, Visser 't Hooft had acquired the image of a charismatic and prophetic leader with great experience.

That there was also a price to be paid was still unseen at that time. The form in which the World Council of Churches was constructed under Visser 't Hooft's leadership was derived from the struggle of the German churches. Armed with the theology of Karl Barth, resistance to the Nazis was carried out on the basis of the church's confession. The revelation thinking of the church was presented as an antidote to the corruption through the natural theology of the *Deutsche Christen*, a theology that had no difficulty in seeing the blessing of Hitler as of a piece with the blessing of God. In Visser 't Hooft's view, God stood over against the human being and called him to account for his deeds. Justice and freedom were therefore not seen as ideals to pursue and perhaps to attain but constituted themes in the framework of self-examination, guilt, and penance. At bottom, justice and peace were gifts that God had given humankind already in Christ, but those gifts were waiting to be discovered. Only by searching for them would there be a new chance after the judgment. This was more than rhetoric. The prophetic voice of the churches together was needed to speak to the churches, and on behalf of the churches. It was needed to point to and combat injustice, and to find the way to reconciliation and peace for the world. The identification of the project of the World Council with the struggle of the German churches fired up the first generation, but as Visser 't Hooft developed things further into an institutionalised form of community, it also made the ecumenical movement dated and vulnerable.

When the free exchange of information was seriously hampered by war and occupation during the 1940s, Visser 't Hooft appeared able to act independently, also outside his Christian connections. He developed into a courageous diplomat, aware, always looking for support but also bold enough to use the informal contacts he had built up in Geneva completely in accord with his own insights where necessary. His working radius was not limited to churches but also extended to resistance circles, prisoners of war, and refugees. Reconciliation and reconstruction became part of this as a matter of course. He managed to build up an office with hundreds of staff members, and directed it, communicated with numerous church leaders and many committees without losing himself in the details. Visser 't Hooft had the gift of being able to motivate a staff member with a short conversation by giving him or her a sense of a goal and a direction.

In the 1950s, he was able to give the World Council and the ecumenical movement a face that many found fitting for the post-war era. Here he was the 'syntheticus', the man who not only brought numerous threads together but also managed to keep them together for a long time, even when the stage began to grow bigger. During a series of international crises, the unity of the church presented as fundamental was, with varying degrees of success, involved through word and image with the great themes of the time, such as reconciliation and reconstruction, the Cold War, apartheid and racial tension, secularisation, depillarisation, and continuing democratisation. Sometimes, the contribution by the World Council was conspicuous, as was the case in Cottesloe, South Africa, in 1960 when the South African churches that were members of the World Council reached a partial agreement on the rejection of apartheid.

He did not succeed, however, in renewing the churches themselves in the 1950s in such a way that they would be able to resist the advancing secularisation. The reality content of religious language was increasingly becoming a problem, not only in Europe but in the whole world. Visser 't Hooft's answer betrayed a certain elitist naivité, in which he clung to an alleged single meaning of the biblical message and thus also of ecclesiology. He was happy with the rise of new churches in former colonies, now new states, but did not know how to deal with the confusion that their membership in the World Council caused. In his final years as general secretary, the World Council was less and less made up of white male theologians who, trained in a certain ecclesiastical diplomatic jargon, set the agenda, gave out assignments, and prepared statements. All kinds of new themes arose, and the style of working and the strategies associated with them could no longer be organised from the top down. There was also criticism from without on milestones that he himself considered to be high points, such as the Eastern Orthodox churches joining in 1961. He himself had a sacred confidence that everything would turn out fine with a church like the Russian Orthodox Church in the World Council. He could not deal very well with the fact that there were critics who rejected quiet diplomacy as the way to respond to religious persecution in the Soviet Union.

While the World Council grew after 1960, the possibilities of giving coherence to the ecumenical movement from Geneva proved more limited than Visser 't Hooft thought. The time in which young people let themselves be collectively told by experienced leaders in ecumenicity how to live or which ideals they could use to give concrete form to their faith was over halfway through the 1960s. Other signs of this were the fact that traditional mission theology had become bogged down and the search for theological consensus

on the question of ecclesiology had failed. The way in which the Eastern Orthodox churches joined the World Council, while the Roman Catholic Church did not, illustrated this impasse. The Orthodox churches sought contact without wanting to change themselves; the Roman Catholic Church shrank back from the consequences of its own Second Vatican Council when it became clear that modernity had begun to take root in the church itself. A wave of emancipation, increasing pluralism, and demands for participation surprised Visser 't Hooft in his last years as general secretary. His attempt to connect a new church engagement with the classical view of biblical revelation theology and a Western Christocentrism, joined by a total rejection of syncretism, was doomed to fail. What Visser 't Hooft insufficiently understood was that with every new interpretation of Jesus and his message, cultural influences from elsewhere, i.e., from a different context than the original stories, played a role. The legitimacy of the repeatability of the inculturation process, which, after all, had once occurred in Europe, was denied by Visser 't Hooft. He was not the only one. He made no meaningful contribution to interreligious dialogue, which had become increasingly more important after the many new churches from the former colonies joined the World Council.

He pleaded for the continuing significance for the fatherhood of God and argued against the misunderstanding of the biblical image. With the word 'paternalism', he wanted to distinguish manipulation and imperiousness, which were recognisable as oppression, from true fatherhood, as the Bible meant it. His argument, however, missed the heart of the problem because, according to many critical theologians, the images of the father in the Bible itself also displayed oppressive and masculine features. He was not successful in integrating new forms of liberation theology and feminist theology in a lasting way into his own theological way of thinking, which was strongly influenced by Karl Barth and focused on God's revelation in Jesus Christ. He distrusted the new forms of religious experience that played an increasingly greater role and supplanted the robust language of faith and thinking in church terms.

Visser 't Hooft represented a European-American elite that wanted to throw itself into the breech to preserve Western civilisation, even when it could no longer be seen as the *Corpus Christianum*. By completely focusing on the *Corpus Christi*, which was being revived as it was undergoing a second reformation and thus brought up to date, he wanted – via the ecumenical movement – to give society a heart again and a soul to the United Nations. But this great project concealed an aspect of compulsion that evoked opposition over time. For a long time, Visser 't Hooft was always able to proclaim

at the end of a speech at major meetings what the 'marching orders' were for the troops. At a certain point in time, that was no longer possible. There were no more 'troops'. The church leaders were no longer representative figures who were obeyed at home. The time when believers thought they knew precisely what God asked of them and could illustrate that from the Bible with texts that they had learned by heart as children was over. Visser 't Hooft's firm, energetic, and authoritarian style became old-fashioned at a time when consultation, inspiration, and equality in interreligious dialogue became increasingly more important. The question of truth itself could no longer be answered in the way in which Visser 't Hooft was used to answering it. He wanted, with Buber as an example, to follow the path of dialogue but became stuck in his own uncompromising resistance to syncretism. How he tried to give academic stature to ecumenicity as a form of normative theology would now be rejected as unacceptable at most universities.

He once attended classes in Leiden in which theology was praised as a culture-historical discipline free of church control. By distancing himself radically from this later, under the influence of Karl Barth, he had a strong, church-based account during the time of fascism and war. That enabled him to resist both indifferent aloofness and absolutising mass movements for a long time. This also fitted within his style of responsible simplification. He was constantly translating theological principles into attachment and decisiveness. When, however, churches were confronted with increasing secularisation and were becoming increasingly unsure of what they stood for at the end of the 1960s, the trusted building blocks fell away for those who thought they could continue to build in the same way as Visser 't Hooft had done. He himself viewed this with concern. With his memoirs he wanted to reap a rich harvest from stories of his experience that would offer inspiration to a new generation.

Visser 't Hooft continued to search for ways to break through the impasses in the areas of secularisation, materialism, and pluralism. He looked for other forms of elitist involvement in major world problems, such as nuclear arms, nuclear energy, and environmental pollution. He also returned again and again to the major question that he had to let go without solving it: the issue of the relation between the World Council and the Roman Catholic Church. At the end of his life, he expected much from progressive Roman Catholic academic theologians and wanted to make a stand for a more constructive reception of the results of their work by the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft was faced with important choices a number of times in his life. He started from the privileged position of an intelligent Dutch boy growing up in a prominent and affluent family. He chose the

NCSV, theology, a deliberate life as a Christian, Jetty Boddaert, the YMCA, Geneva; he chose to have a family, to work for the church, and for the World Council. He gradually became more churchly in his thinking, but the word 'church' was not in any way a symbol for petty bourgeois, pillarised, defensive thinking. In the 1930s, his goal was, where possible, to renew the churches by concretising faith and making it useful with a view to the problems of the world. For a long time, it seemed that the World Council was indeed the uniting place par excellence from which it was possible to successfully combat the disadvantages of modernity and to nourish and further develop the central values rooted in the Christian faith. Visser 't Hooft did his absolute best throughout his whole life to give real importance to speaking prophetically on behalf of and to the churches. In his final years, now with somewhat more distance from the World Council, as well as also deliberately outside it, he continued on resolutely as he had always done, studying and writing until just before his death. The final thing he could hold on to was hope: 'The Christian knows very well it won't be better tomorrow. But he continues to hope."[1]

1 Visser 't Hooft, 'Message paroisse Chêne-Bourg' (1973), WCC 994.2.27/29. 'Le chrétien sait très bien que demain ça n'ira pas mieux. Mais il continue à espérer.'



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