

‘Intimately Associated
for Many Years’

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*George K. A. Bell’s
and Willem A. Visser ’t Hooft’s
Common Life-Work in the
Service of the Church Universal –
Mirrored in their Correspondence
(Part One 1938-1949)*

By

Gerhard Besier

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By Gerhard Besier

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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

The letters have fundamentally been reproduced in their original form – including any grammatical and spelling mistakes. Likewise, words that had been crossed out have also been included in their crossed out form, and underlined words or sections have also been marked according to the original. Handwritten comments in typed letters have been italicised. In addition, references marked with * in any particular letter indicate whether the original document involved handwritten or typed text. All editorial insertions that have not been referenced in the footnotes have been placed in square brackets, while marginal comments in the original document have been italicised and annotated with a marginal note. As far as possible, the first reference to a name is provided with a short biography of the relevant person. The alphabetical index of names includes only surnames and first names, listed with page references. The two major correspondents, Bell and Visser't Hooft, are not listed in the index of names. Numbers indicated with forward slashes (for example: /2/) refer to a page change in the original document.

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Stanford, Fall 2014
Gerhard Besier

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY: LIFE, TRAITS AND THEOLOGICAL ATTITUDES

Among his wide range of obligations and interests George Bell (1883-1958) also belonged to the pioneers of the Ecumenical Movement.¹ As a relatively young man he represented the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, during the conference of *The World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches* in Oud Wassenae in 1919.² Bell was then the Archbishop's private chaplain. Nathan Söderblom³ remembered his first meeting with Bell in 1931:

1. Cf. Günter Gloede (ed.), *Pioniere und Plätze der Oekumenischen Bewegung*. [Pioneers and Places of Ecumenical Movement], Hamburg 1974, p. 80 (portrait of George A. Bell); p. 127, (portrait of Willem A. Visser't Hooft). See also Jürgen Wilhelm Winterhager, *George K. A. Bell*, in: Günter Gloede (ed.), *Oekumenische Profile. Brückenbauer der einen Kirche*, Stuttgart 1961, pp. 217-232; Ronald C. D. Jasper, *George Bell. Bishop of Chichester*, London 1967, esp. pp. 94 ff.; 201 ff.; 315 ff.; Andreas Lindt (ed.), *George Bell – Alphons Koechlin. Briefwechsel 1933-1954*, Zürich 1969; Kenneth Slack, *George Bell*, London 1971, esp. pp. 40-49; Jaakko Rusama, *Unity and Compassion. Moral Issues in the Life and Thought of George K. A. Bell*, Helsinki 1986; Edwin Robertson, *Unshakeable Friend. George Bell and the German Churches*, London 1995, esp. pp. 1-7; Ans J. van der Bent, *George Allen Kennedy Bell, 1883-1958* in: Ion Bria/Dagmar Heller, *Ecumenical Pilgrims. Profiles of Pioneers in Christian Reconciliation*, Geneva 1995, pp. 32-36; Paul Foster (ed.), *Bell of Chichester (1883-1958). A Prophetic Bishop*, Chichester 2004, esp. pp. 25-30; Peter Raina, *Bishop Bell: The Greatest Churchman. A Portrait in Letters*, London 2006; Andrew Chandler (ed.), *The Church and Humanity. The Life and Work of George Bell, 1883-1958*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012.

2. Cf. Harmjan Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen 1914-1949. Eine ökumenische Friedensorganisation*, Frankfurt/M. 2001, pp. 124-142. See also G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 2 Vols., Oxford 1936.

3. Cf. Stephen C. Neill, *Brothers of the Faith*, New York-Nashville 1960, pp. 29-41 (Nathan Söderblom and Life and Work); Bengt Sundkler, *Nathan Söderblom. His Life and Work*, Lund 1968, esp. pp. 221 ff.; Eric J. Sharpe, *Nathan Söderblom and the Study of Religion*, Chapel Hill-London 1990.

“He was sitting just opposite to me. He uttered scarcely anything without having been asked. Then, after reflection, he gave a notable answer which always proved reliable. His countenance is dominated by two large round eyes, glowing with his soul’s fire and disclosing a rich inward life. It is my opinion that nobody is more important to the ecumenical revival than this silent Bell. This Bell never rings for nothing. But when it does ring, its tune is silver-clear. It often seems to travel from another sphere and makes itself heard. It reaches farther than any shouting voices. He never begins to speak without having something to say. The strong spirituality of his nature characterizes everything he does.”⁴

In Stockholm in 1925 Bell served as editor of the conference report and drafted the message of the conference.⁵ It was at this conference that the twenty-five year old YMCA delegate Willem Adolf Visser’t Hooft (1900-1985),⁶ then the youngest member of the conference,⁷ first met George Bell. Bell himself was now dean of Canterbury,⁸ and in the perspective of Visser’t Hooft he was already one of the prominent participants of the conference. It was simply by chance that Visser’t Hooft was invited to a dinner with Countess von Rosen.⁹ “One of the other guests”, he later wrote in his Memoirs, “was a young looking Anglican clergyman with a most innocent look. But in conversation he proved to be extraordinarily well informed and full of forward-looking ideas. It was [...] George Bell, who would become a pioneer and builder of the World

4. Quoted according to Franz Hildebrandt (ed.), *‘And other Pastors of the Flock’. A German Tribute to the Bishop of Chichester*, Cambridge 1942, p. VII. See also Jakko Rusama, *Unity and Compassion* (op. cit. note 1), p. 30. Ref. the relationship between Bell and Hildebrandt see Holger Roggelin, *Franz Hildebrandt. Ein lutherischer Dissenter im Kirchenkampf und Exil*, Göttingen 1999, pp. 125 ff.; 173 ff.

5. ‘The conference message, in the drafting of which George Bell had a considerable share, was adopted with only very few dissenting votes.’ Willem A. Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs*, Geneva ²1987, p. 26.

6. Cf. Philip Potter/Thomas Wieser, *Seeking and Serving the Truth. The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation*, Geneva 1997, p. 96, passim.

7. Cf. Stephen Neill, *Men of Unity*, London 1960, pp. 143-154; here: p. 143.

8. Cf. W. A. Visser’t Hooft, Bishop Bell’s Life-Work in the Ecumenical Movement, in: *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XI, January 1959, No 2, pp. 133-140; here: p. 135.

9. Maud Ella Clara Lillian von Rosen (1902-1988) was Countess of Rosen-Engberg and participant in the Art competitions at the 1932 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

Council and with whom I would be intimately associated for many years.”¹⁰

According to Visser’t Hooft Bell belonged to the “foundation pillars of the World Council”¹¹. Bell, too, estimated Visser’t Hooft highly. In 1954 he praised him for possessing “theological insight” that could be “brilliant”¹². Jaakko Rusama finds that Visser’t Hooft had “observed Bell’s pronouncements especially in the House of Lords and in the *Times* and did not spare his friendly and constructive criticism whenever it was necessary. Visser’t Hooft’s unselfish, tireless and loyal attitude towards the good of the ecumenical movement and of the leaders of it, including Bell, cannot be underestimated.”¹³

10. Quoted according to Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p. 24 f. See also Werner Simpfendorfer, *Ökumenische Spurensuche. Porträts*, Stuttgart 1989, pp. 17-35; Ans J. van der Bent, *Willem Adolf Visser’t Hooft (1900-1985). Une présentation biographique*, in: Jacques Maury (ed.), *W. A. Visser’t Hooft pionnier de l’œcuménisme*, Genève-Rome, Paris 2001, pp. 15-42 (the English version of this article appeared already in 1992 in *Encounter* 53, pp. 1-35); Jurjen A. Zeilstra, *European unity in Ecumenical Thinking. 1937-1948*, Zoetermeer 1995; Dietrich Ritschl, Willem Visser’t Hooft. Zeuge und Architekt der ökumenischen Bewegung, in: Christian Möller et al. (eds.), *Wegbereiter der Ökumene im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2005, pp. 214-231. Ref. the theological thinking of Visser’t Hooft cf. Francois Gérard, *The Future of the Church. The Theology of Renewal of Willem Adolf Visser’t Hooft*, Pittsburgh 1974; Rolf-Ulrich Kunze, Die ganze Kirche für die ganze Welt: Willem Adolf Visser’t Hooft und der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus, 1933-1949 in Joachim Garstecki (ed.), *Die Ökumene und der Widerstand gegen Diktaturen. Nationalsozialismus und Kommunismus als Herausforderung an die Kirchen*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007, pp. 32-46; Wolfgang Lienemann, Reformierte Identität im Kontext der Ökumene und des interreligiösen Dialogs: Willem Adolf Visser’t Hooft (1900-1985) in Marco Hofheinz/Matthias Zeindler (eds.), *Reformierte Theologie weltweit. Zwölf Profile aus dem 20. Jahrhundert*, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2013, pp. 127-148. In 1971 there appeared a book in honor of Visser’t Hooft: Robert Nelson (ed.), *No Man Is Alien. Essays of the Unity of Mankind*, Leiden 1971, esp. pp. 264-330 (Bibliography of the Writings of Visser’t Hooft, 1918-1970). Originally there was planned a German like ‘Festschrift’ with a great many of contributors. Cf. World Council of Churches [WCC] Archives Geneva, File Festschrift Dr. Visser’t Hooft 1971.

11. Quoted according to Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p. 184.

12. George K. A. Bell, *The Kingship of Christ. The Story of the World Council of Churches*, Harmondsworth 1954, p. 97.

13. See Rusama, *United and Compassion* (op. cit. note 1), pp. 36-37.

It is significant that Visser't Hooft, as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, did not represent Bell's own approach in matters of theology, in ethical questions or in organizational and basically doctrine issues. Fluent in four languages and able to read several others, Visser't Hooft served Bell as mediator and interpreter. In spite of the fact that Visser't Hooft was still a young man at the close of the 1930s, he often thought and worked like a skilled and pliant diplomat. Bell, on the contrary, tended to express his convictions, even without reserve. Once he had found his own perspective he could state it clearly, even insist on it – and persist. Often Bell's ambitious projects failed because he was not realistic enough. For example, in the summer of 1939 he assumed that it must be possible to start a common peace initiative with the Pope.¹⁴ When he got a negative answer from Rome he was deeply disappointed. Not so Visser't Hooft who "had not really expected a positive reply"¹⁵. In January 1940, during a meeting of some churchmen in Appeldoorn, Bell supported proposals that peace be concluded between the western governments and Hitler. For his part, Visser't Hooft and others dissented from entering into negotiations with the National Socialist regime.¹⁶ It might be recalled that Bell had no reservations about staying in private contact with Rudolf Hess and his English-speaking spouse in pre-war times¹⁷ – an acquaintance that would have never been acceptable for Visser't Hooft. And if Bell attracted admirers, he also earned critics. Sir Kenneth Grubb, President of the Church Missionary Society from 1944 to 1969, characterized Bell severely:

"He was by no means easy to work with. He was a vigorous man of peace, and such men like to have their own way. If he did not secure it, he would go off on his own, ignore his colleagues, and navigate his own canoe, sometimes landing on the rocks. He would not scruple to take up the time

14. Bell to Visser't Hooft, 14 June 1939, WCC Archives Geneva, 42.0007, Folder 8. Cf. Lambeth Palace Library [LPL], Bell Papers, 103 (Roman Catholicism, 1941-1958). See also Bell, *The Christian Standard. A Bishop's Tribute to the Pope*, Letter to the Editor of *The Times*, 29 March 1940, p. 6; idem, *The Pope's Appeal*, Letter to the Editor of *The Times*, 17 April 1941, p. 5.

15. Quoted according to Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p. 107.

16. Cf. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), pp. 117-118.

17. Cf. Gerhard Besier, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich*, Vol. III: Spaltungen und Abwehrkämpfe 1934-1937, Berlin-Munich 2001, pp. 337 f. See also Hess to Bell, 11 July 1937, LPL London, Bell Papers 10 (Martin Niemöller, 1937-1952), pp. 23 ff.; Bell to Hess, 18 September 1938, *ibid.*, p. 138. See also Peter Raina (ed.), *Bishop George Bell. House of Lord Speeches and Correspondence with Rudolf Hess*, Oxford 2009, pp. 210-212.

of very busy people with a proposal which, it was obvious, would be soundly defeated in the end. He would similarly initiate schemes without discovering that others had worked on them, or without reference to their findings. For George Bell the value of a proposal rested not simply on its merits, but on the fact that he had thought of it. It often seemed to me that this truly great man over-argued his case. In 1939-45, that a war had to be won did not seem to worry him excessively; he was entitled to take up everyone's time in discussing with what arms it should be fought and what should be done when it was over. This did not in the least diminish his thorough detestation of all that Hitler stood for."¹⁸

In connection with Germany and the German Church Struggle Jaakko Rusama depicts "differences over the interpretations of natural law"¹⁹ between Bell and Visser't Hooft. "Bell's theology was neither 'Anglo-Saxon' optimism nor the 'social Gospel' of American liberal Christianity. The bishop of Chichester firmly represented the historical Anglican theological tradition, the theology of Incarnation."²⁰ Clearly influenced by William Temple he was convinced that Incarnation touched the whole human life both physically and spiritually, drawing it into "The kingship of Christ". Visser't Hooft's observed that Bell's theology "was to help confused modern man to understand Gospel, unity was to make the Christian Church a better servant of humanity, organizations existed to serve the cause of Christ."²¹ Nevertheless, Bell's practical grasp of matters dominated. He avoided deliberately complex theological issues. Indeed, this might be one of the reasons why he and Visser't Hooft thought differently – some believe that the latter was a Barthian²² and this is surely

18. Kenneth George Grubb, *Crypts of Power. An Autobiography*, London-Sydney-Auckland-Toronto 1971, p. 172. After the meeting of the Central Committee in Rolle in September 1951 Grubb wrote a negative article with 'unpleasant remarks' about Visser't Hooft. Cf. Visser't Hooft to Bell, 29 September 1951, WCC Archives Geneva 42.0008, Folder 6.

19. Rusama, *Unity and Compassion* (op. cit. note 1), p. 80.

20. Rusama, *Unity and Compassion* (op. cit. note 1), p. 196. Cf. Arthur Michael Ramsey, *From Gore to Temple. The Development of Anglican Theology between Lux Mundi and the Second World War, 1889-1939*, London 1960; Charles J. Stranks, *Anglican Devotion. Studies in the Spiritual Life of the Church of England between the Reformation and the Oxford Movement*, London 1961; Max Keller-Hüschmenger, *Die Lehre der Kirche in der Oxford-Bewegung. Struktur und Funktion*, Gütersloh 1974.

21. Address by Visser't Hooft at the Memorial Service for the late Bishop George K. A. Bell, October 14, 1958, WCC Archives Geneva, 42.0009, Folder 3.

22. Rusama, *Unity and Compassion* (op. cit. note 1), p. 203; Marianne Jehle-Wildberger, *Adolf Keller (1872-1963): Ecumenist, World Citizen. Philanthropist,*

true during his early years²³. Yet this difference never caused earnest problems in what was a truly bilateral relationship. When eleven German church leaders published the so called Godesberg declaration on 26 March 1939, pronouncing that “All supra-national or international churchliness of a Roman Catholic or World-Protestant type is a political degeneration of Christianity” they added a further sentence: “The Christian faith is the unbridgeable opposite to Judaism.”²⁴ Karl Barth as well as Bishop Bell protested against these obviously unchristian affirmations.²⁵ When two drafts of a protest declaration prepared by Temple and Barth arrived at Geneva, Visser’t Hooft found them fundamentally consistent but completely different in style and terminology. Nevertheless he succeeded in harmonizing them in a new version which accommodated both.²⁶ Despite the theological differences which clearly existed, Bell was “one of the few English Church leaders who right from the early stages of the conflict stressed the positive and justified character of the German confessing Church. It is obvious that the idea of a Christian society and the use of natural law played important roles in Bell’s argument.”²⁷

Eugene (OR): Cascade Books, 2013, pp. 149 ff; Cf. W. A. Visser’t Hooft, Karl Barth und die Ökumenische Bewegung, in: *Evangelische Theologie* 49 (1980), pp. 2-24; *Karl Barth – Visser’t Hooft. Briefwechsel 1930-1968*. Ed. by Thomas Herwig (Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe, Abt. V. Briefe, GA 43), Zürich 2006, pp. 3-5; 120; 124; 128 ff.; 165. During WWII Barth heavily criticized Bell’s attitude as too pacifistic. „He is not a pacifist in the strict sense, but in practice he has got much of a pacifist idealism in his theological attitude’ (ibid., p. 120, self-translation). Visser’t Hooft’s position would be in-between Bell’s and his own (ibid., p. 124). Bell, he stated, would be more interested in „the maintenance of the community than in the concrete testimony’ (ibid., p. 162, self-translation). See also Thomas Herwig, *Karl Barth und die Ökumenische Bewegung. Das Gespräch zwischen Karl Barth und Willem Adolf Visser’t Hooft auf der Grundlage ihres Briefwechsels 1930-1968*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1998, esp. pp. 25 ff.

23. Cf. Neill, *Men of Unity* (op. cit. note 7), p. 145.

24. Cf. *Kirchliches Jahrbuch 1933-1944*, Gütersloh 1948, pp. 291 f. See also Karl-Heinrich Melzer, *Der Geistliche Vertrauensrat. Geistliche Leitung für die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche im Zweiten Weltkrieg?*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991, p. 36, fn. 84.

25. Cf. Armin Boyens, *Kirchenkampf und Ökumene 1933-1939. Darstellung und Dokumentation*, vol. 1, Munich: Kaiser, 1969, pp. 257 ff.

26. Cf. *Kirchliches Jahrbuch 1933-1944* (op. cit. note 23), pp. 330 f. See also Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p. 95.

27. Rusama, *Unity and Compassion* (op. cit. note 1), p. 203.

1. The World Conferences of 1937, the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Process of Formation, the German Church Struggle and Resistance

During the Conference on Life and Work in 1937 Visser’t Hooft had to work as an assistant to Archbishop William Temple²⁸ in the production of the official Conference message.²⁹ Beforehand he had been chosen to co-operate with J.H. Oldham³⁰ in writing the preparatory book for the Oxford Conference “The Church and its Function in Society”.³¹ From 1938 Visser’t Hooft was General Secretary of the Provisional Committee for the World Council of Churches (in process of Formation), an appointment was made during a meeting in Utrecht in May 1938. As Bell was Vice-President of the Provisional Committee for the World Council of Churches (in process of Formation) we can be sure that he favoured Visser’t Hooft.³² Moreover Temple’s authoritative endorsement must have influenced those who might have doubted that a young man at thirty-seven was qualified for the task. From August 1938 until Bell’s death in 1958 there was an extended correspondence of about 700 letters between the bishop of Chichester and the General Secretary. It encompasses virtually all the

28. Cf. Neill, *Brothers of the Faith* (op. cit. note 3), pp. 81-94 (William Temple and World-Wide Ecumenism); Frederic A. Iremonger, *William Temple. Archbishop of Canterbury. His Life and Letters*, London 1948; Joseph Fletcher, *William Temple. Twentieth-Century Christian*, New York 1963; F. S. Temple, *William Temple. Some Lambeth Letters*, London-Oxford 1963; Charles W. Lowry, *William Temple. An Archbishop for All Seasons*, Washington D. C. 1982; John Kent, *William Temple. Church, State and Society in Britain, 1880-1950*, Cambridge 1992. In none of these books Visser’t Hooft is mentioned. Temple wrote of Bell: ‘Not only is he one of my oldest personal friends, but he has done more than any other among us to foster the relationships between the Church of England and the Churches of the Continent which we all desire to see established.’ Bell to Eidem, 29 April 1942, quoted according to Rusama, *Unity and Compassion* (op. cit. note 1), p. 82.

29. Cf. Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p. 73. See also Graeme Smith, *Oxford 1937. The Universal Christian Council for Life and Work Conference*, Frankfurt-New York: Peter Lang, 2004.

30. Cf. Philipp Potter, Joseph Houldsworth Oldham, 1874-1969, in: Bria/Heller, *Ecumenical Pilgrims* (op. cit. note 1), pp. 175-181; K. Klements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J. H. Oldham*, Edinburgh: Clerk, 1999.

31. Cf. Neill, *Men of Unity* (op. cit. note 7), p. 143.

32. Cf. Lindt, *George Bell – Alphons Koechlin* (op. cit. note 1), p. 20.

topics which defined these two decades.³³ In spite of what had become a close friendship, in his letters Visser't Hooft always called Bell "My dear Bishop" and not "My dear George" whereas Bell turned to "Wim" or "Vim" (in handwritten letters), Visser't Hooft's nickname, only in later years.

In the context of the German Church Struggle Bell³⁴ and Visser't Hooft mostly acted together.³⁵ The latter was in strong consent with Bell's conviction "that the Christians who were giving clear and courageous witness in Germany expected a word of encouragement and solidarity from the ecumenical family"³⁶. When Bishop Theodor Heckel³⁷, head of the Foreign Office of the German Protestant Church, claimed to be the only proper representative of the German church in contacts with the WCC, and when his office wanted to be recognized as an official secretariat of the WCC, Visser't Hooft received strong help from Bell. The bishop of Chichester wrote to Geneva:

"I find myself quite convinced that it would be undesirable, and in my opinion wrong, to allow the German Evangelical Church to be represented in any way, whether officially or unofficially, by Bishop Heckel or members of his office, if that was to be the only way in which the German

33. Cf. WCC Archives Geneva, Vols 42.0007-42.0009, WCC General Secretariat. General Correspondence, Bell – Visser't Hooft, 1938-1958.

34. Between 1933 and 1945 Bell wrote 11 Letters to the Editor of The Times and 4 articles in The Times, dealing with German Church Affairs (The Times, 14 June 1933, p. 10; 3 July 1933, p. 10; 17 January 1934, p. 8; 5. February 1934, p. 11; 20 March 1934, p. 10; 12 May 1934, p. 7; 7 September 1934, p. 13; 4 August 1936, p. 11; 2 January 1937, p. 6; 27 March 1937, p. 13; 3 July 1937, p. 15; 24 October 1938, p. 16; 8 December 1938, p. 17; 27 July 1939, p. 15; 23 July 1945, p. 5).

35. Ref. Bell's attitude cf. Andrew Chandler (ed.), *Brethren in Adversity. Bishop George Bell, the Church of England and the Crisis of German Protestantism, 1933-1939*, Woodbridge-Rochester 1997. The Swiss Theologians Alphons Koechlin and Adolf Keller belonged to Bell's most important advisers in German church affairs. Cf. Jehle-Wildberger, *Adolf Keller* (op. cit. note 21), pp. 181 ff.

36. Cf. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p. 73.

37. Cf. Besier, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich* (op. cit. note 16), pp. 431 f; 475-477; 553 f.; 558-560; 615 f.; 621-623. See also Heckel's politics against the US-American Federal Council of the Churches of Christ: Gerhard Besier, *Religion, State and Society in the Transformations of the Twentieth Century. Modernization, Innovation and Decline*, Berlin-London 2007, pp. 137 ff.

Evangelical Church could be represented. I would, in fact, prefer that there should be no Germans attending.”³⁸

Instead, he suggested a threefold representation, consisting of members of the Lutheran Council (Hanover, Bavaria and Wurttemberg), the Confessing Church (Dahlem!) and Bishop Heckel’s office.³⁹ During the war Bell and Visser’t Hooft strongly differentiated between the National Socialist regime and the German people (while in Britain others, most conspicuously Lord Robert Vansittart, did not).⁴⁰ This would prove to be crucial. A refusal to make such a distinction made it extremely difficult for the German resistance circles to count on the support of the Allied Governments. Even for Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁴¹ with whom Bell and Visser’t Hooft alike kept in permanent touch,⁴² it was important to receive

38. Bell to Visser’t Hooft, 13 July 1939, WCC Archives Geneva, 42.0007, Folder 8. See also Bell to Visser’t Hooft, 15 August 1939, LPL London, Bell Papers 9 (German Church, 1937-1949), p. 348.

39. Cf. Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs*, (op. cit. note 5), p. 98.

40. Cf. Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p. 150. See also Robert Gilbert Vansittart, *Lessons of my Life*, New York 1945, esp. pp. 144 ff.; 220 ff.; Jörg Später, *Vansittart. Britische Debatten über Deutsche und Nazis 1902-1945*, Göttingen 2003, pp. 73 ff. Frederick August Voigt who had been one of the early scholars in the research of totalitarianism is to be regarded as one of Vansittart’s ‘Waffenbrüder’ [Weaponed Comrades]. Ibid., pp. 113 ff.; pp. 214 ff. See also Gerhard Besier, Der Gebrauch des Totalitarismusbegriffs in Karl Barths Kirchlicher Dogmatik, in: Norbert Clemens Baumgart/Gerhard Ringshausen (eds.), *Philosophisch-theologische Anstöße zur Urteilsbildung*. Festschrift für Werner Brändle, Berlin 2007, pp. 45-64.

41. Cf. Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologian – Christian – Contemporary, London 1970, pp. 626-795, esp. pp. 661-676. Shortly before his death in 1958 Bell inspired Collins publisher, London, to translate the then forthcoming biography of Bonhoeffer, written by the German minister Bethge, cf. ibid., Publisher’s Note. See also John W. de Gruchy, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Cambridge 1999; Résistance et soumission. Hommage à Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Foi & Vie. Revue de culture protestante* no 2, mai 2008; Mark Thiessen Nation/Anthony G. Siegrist/Daniel P. Umbel, *Bonhoeffer the Assassin? Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peacemaking*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2013; Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory. A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014; Reggie L. Williams, *Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014; Guido de Graaf, *Politics in Friendship. A Theological Account*, London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2014 (on Bell and Bonhoeffer).

42. Cf. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, esp. vols 11-16, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006-2013.

an assurance from the Allies that the overthrow of Hitler would lead to a peace which would not mean the annihilation of Germany. As is well known such an assurance was never given. After Bonhoeffer had met Visser't Hooft in Geneva in March 1941 the latter wrote to Bell that, according to Bonhoeffer's reports, the Confessing Church's fundamental position had not changed at all,⁴³ a somewhat euphemistic estimation, which both believed.

During the war Visser't Hooft travelled several times to London in order to maintain contacts between the churchmen in Great Britain and abroad. In May 1942 he handed to the leading Labour politician Sir Stafford Cripps a memorandum by Adam von Trott zu Solz, whom he had known since 1928.⁴⁴ The authenticity of this was confirmed a fortnight later by Bell, and Visser't Hooft received the answer he should encourage von Trott in his preparations for the overthrow of Hitler - on the basis, however, of Germany being defeated.⁴⁵ Bell, again, belonged to the very few in Britain who showed a more positive interest in the message of the German resistance. Shortly thereafter Visser't Hooft had to transmit a report of a conversation on the German resistance movement held by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hans Schönfeld and Bell in Sweden in the last days

43. Cf. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p. 151.

44. Cf. Henry O. Melone, *Adam von Trott zu Solz. Werdegang eines Verschwörers 1909-1938*, Berlin 1986, pp. 30-32; 181; 223-224; Giles MacDonogh, *A Good German. Adam von Trott zu Solz*, New York 1992, pp. 226-234; 243 f.; Tobias Hoh, *Widerstand und internationale Beziehungen. Die außenpolitischen Initiativen von Adam von Trott für die deutsche Opposition, 1937-1944*, Marburg 2003, pp. 103-132; Henric L. Wuermeling, *Doppelspiel – Adam von Trott zu Solz im Widerstand gegen Hitler*, München 2004; Benigna von Krusenstjern, „dass es Sinn hat zu sterben – gelebt zu haben“. *Adam von Trott zu Solz, 1909-1944*, Göttingen 2009, pp. 417 ff.; 452 ff.

45. Cf. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), pp. 157-158. See also Visser't Hooft to Bell, 18 September 1956, WCC Archives Geneva, 42.0008, Folder 12: 'The document handed by me to Paton in May 1942 is almost certainly the document which Adam von Trott brought to Geneva in the early spring of 1942 and which he asked me to transmit to the British Government, preferably to Sir Stafford Cripps. I had an appointment with Sir Stafford and gave him the document personally. He asked me to come back after a few days. When I returned he told me that Churchill had personally studied the document and written on it 'very encouraging'. But Churchill was unwilling to send any reply. You can imagine that when I came back to Geneva von Trott was very deeply disappointed though I tried to explain that the British government could hardly take any other line at that time.'

of May 1942.⁴⁶ Bell himself had given a report of this conversation to the British government in mid-June⁴⁷ and sent the depressing results which it secured to Visser’t Hooft on 1 July 1942: “Interest undoubted but deeply regret no reply possible.”⁴⁸ Both churchmen had worked in vain. The Allies had had committed themselves to the unconditional surrender of Germany.

The security of this correspondence had become vitally important. Because these letters did not come by the regular post, and because he was afraid that the German Secret Service would read them, Visser’t Hooft sent encoded circular letters in a familiar style via the Embassy in Bern to London and New York. It was in this form that Bell received information on the state of health of his friends. News of Bonhoeffer, Niemöller⁴⁹ and others – came as follows:

“Dear Friend, Just a few lines to tell you about some members of the family in whose welfare you are so deeply interested. Martin [Niemöller] is all right. His family sees him quite regularly and he is full of courage. As to D. [ietrich Bonhoeffer], his situation is unchanged. We had hoped that he might by now be completely restored to health, but in spite of all doctors have tried to do he has not made any progress. On the other hand, the situation is not worse and we have no reason for special anxiety in this connection. We are glad to hear of Henry’s [Smith Leiper]⁵⁰ visit to you all. He informed us somewhat vaguely concerning the plans made with regard to the succession of Bill [Paton]⁵¹. I should be very glad if I might

46. Cf. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 16, pp. 266-273 (Trip to Norway and Sweden in 1942).

47. Ibid., pp. 319 ff. Cf. also Bell’s letter to Anthony Eden, 18 June 1942, *ibid.*, p. 318.

48. Jasper, George Bell (op. cit. note 1), p. 272; Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p.158.

49. Cf. James Bentley, *Martin Niemöller*, Oxford 1984, esp. pp. 131 ff. See also Bell, Arrest of Dr. Niemöller in: *The Times*, 3 July 1937, p. 15; Pastor Niemöller. Bishop of Chichester’s Tribute (News) in: *The Times*, 24 October 1938, p. 16.

50. Cf. William J. Schmidt/Edward Ouellette, *What Kind of a Man? The Life of Henry Smith Leiper*, New York 1986.

51. William [Bill] Paton (1886-1943) was an ecumenist and General Secretary of the National Christian Council of India, Burmah and Ceylon between 1922 and 1927. He played a vital role in the creation of the WCC and became secretary alongside W. A. Visser’t Hooft. See: Nicholas Lossky et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, pp. 886 f.; Margaret Sinclair, *William Paton*. London: SCM Press, 1949; E. M. Jackson, “William Paton”, in *Mission Legacies*:

hear a little bit more about this from you. Through Bill we were in such close contact with the whole family in your part of the world, but now we feel rather cut off. We hope, therefore, that someone will be made definitely responsible for relationships. I have good news from Uncle Marc [Boegner] who wants to be specially remembered to you. On the whole, we may say gratefully that contacts within the family can be kept up to a very large extent and that the spirit of solidarity is greater than ever. I remain with very cordial greetings, Yours ever, Vim.”⁵²

On 15 December 1943 Visser’t Hooft asked if the Anglo-American Allies were aware that their mass bombing of German cities created the impression that their behaviour to civilian populations bore comparison with that of the National Socialists.⁵³ Again, here he was completely in accordance with the bishop of Chichester who made his own memorable speech in the House of Lords on the subject of bombing two months later.⁵⁴ Bell “insisted that Hitler, a barbarian, must not be taken as our pattern, and that we should avoid competition with the enemy in barbarity”⁵⁵. With this, both men had placed themselves in a difficult situation: as strong opponents of the National Socialist Regime they nevertheless pressed that the Allies reckon with moral and spiritual “facts”, and argued that such facts required that civilian life be spared.⁵⁶

Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement, ed. by Gerald H. Anderson et al. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994 pp. 581-590.

52. Visser’t Hooft to some friends, 22 October 1943, LPL London, Bell Papers, 105 (WCC, 1943-1948), pp. 22-23.

53. Cf. Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs* (op. cit. note 5), p. 183.

54. Cf. On Ethics of Bombing. Minister’s Reply to a Bishop in: *The Times*, 10 February 1944, p. 4 and The Bombing of Germany. British Attacks to Increase. House of Lords in: *ibid.*, p. 8. See also LPL London, Bell Papers, 70 (Bombing Policy, 1940-1944). Cf. already Bell, Bombing of Towns. Both Sides in Spain Condemned. Letter to *The Times*, 4 February 1938, p. 10.

55. Quoted according to *The Times*, 10 February 1944, p. 4. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Gordon Lang, distanced himself from Bell’s speech. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 8. Some days later the Bishop of Monmouth, A. E. Monahan, said: ‘Let the bombing go on, and be increased until the Germans have learned the lesson that wars of aggression are devilish and in the end do not pay. Let us assure the R.A.F. and the Americans that we look upon them as gallant knights going forth to battle against the German dragon that is torturing, maiming, and killing innocent men, women, and children.’ Quoted according to: Bishop’s Support of Area Bombing. Lessons for Germany in: *The Times*, 17 February 1944, p. 2.

56. Cf. Bell to Visser’t Hooft, 25 October 1944, LPL London, Bell Papers, 25 (Peace Movements, 1944-1955), p. 43. Bell requested Visser’t Hooft to be with him at the Peace Aims Group: ‘The Archbishop of Canterbury has asked me to deputize for him at the Peace Aims Group to which you are coming on