

‘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 Two 1950-1958)*

By

Gerhard Besier

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By Gerhard Besier

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432. G. K. A. Bell to R. C. Mackie, January 4, 1950*

4th January, 1950

My dear Mackie,

I am extremely grateful to you for your important confidential letter of the 28th December, based on what Jan Mirejovsky has told you in connection with Czechoslovakia. I am particularly glad to know about Hromadka. I am writing him a friendly letter for the New Year. I felt very drawn to him at Chichester, and never had any doubts about his own sincerity and his determination as a Christian. I can imagine what it costs him to do what he is doing in standing up to the leaders in his own country, representing as he does the Christian cause. It is a great thing to have such a man in Czechoslovakia at the present time.

I have read what is said about the Protestant Churches in Czechoslovakia with the greatest interest. The information there is much fuller: but the information about the Roman Catholic Church does not take one far. Wherever the Roman Church is there are no doubt congregations of some kind. But the government policy concerning complete control is extremely drastic; and it is difficult to think that the situation with regard to Archbishop Beran is quite as simple as that brief paragraph suggests. After all Roman Catholics form 75 per cent of the total Christian population in Czechoslovakia.

By the way, I had a letter from Henry Leiper this morning saying that he has just (December 29th) had a letter from his son in which he states that of the 287 churches of the Presbyterian Synod in Manchuria, only 47 are still open and they are in the big cities. Of the 14 hospitals only four are left to them. I don't know what your latest news of China is? /2/

Incidentally, harking back to my earlier letter in which I stressed the importance of taking Information as a very serious commitment at our meeting of the Executive, did not Wim's remarks about the press at Bangkok

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

rather fail to recognise that immense damage was done both in the Bangkok press and the world press by the McIntire publicity, and the fact that nothing was put up against it at the start? *and that closed session did the damage!*

Yours very sincerely,
George Cicestr:

433. R. C. Mackie to G. K. A. Bell, January 4, 1950*

January 4, 1950.

Executive Committee.

My dear Bishop,

Stephen Neill will be back here at the end of the week, but I imagine he will not be able to write to you before the beginning of next week. I think therefore I should send you a provisional answer.

The idea was that we should all be in residence on Monday night so that we can start at once on Tuesday morning. I think Northam hoped that Bishop Oxnam might be here for part of the Monday so that the financial sub-committee could perhaps even have a first meeting that night.

I do not have many comments on list of topics. I certainly think we should try to let you have a note of matters which are likely to be brought up from the departments. You would certainly be welcome in Geneva on the Monday and I am sure this would be very helpful to Wim and the rest of us.

As regards the ecclesiological paper, perhaps I might say a word as a non-theologian in the General Secretariat. When we last discussed this question, we were all in favour of some consideration of it being given at the Executive. Otherwise it is difficult for Wim to know in what form to put it before the Central Committee. Perhaps this need not be a long discussion, but I think there should be a discussion. I regard some such statement as being very important for a number of reasons:

- a) It is essential in relation to any informal discussion to Roman Catholics and Wim ought to know whether he is taking an approved line in his formal or informal statements on the relationships of the World Council of Churches to the Churches.

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- b) Clearly some such statement is important in our discussion with Orthodoxy, e.g. the Church in Greece.
- c) It is also important in relation to churches like the Dutch Reformed Church of the Cape since there are often false impressions of the nature of the World Council.
- d) My guess is that Wim will come back asking us to a final position in relation to this International Council which has caused /2/ such difficulty at Bangkok. My personal judgment from many years of experience in working in so-called fundamentalist organisations at the student level is that this International Council is only an aggravated form of a real problem which will crop up elsewhere. We have found at the student level that the crux of this problem is the way in which you regard the Church. Consequently I think that the ecclesiological statement is important at this point.

I have not seen the letter from Cuddesdon¹. I entirely agree with you about the importance of the whole matter of worship, not only in the ecumenical world in a whole, but in the life of the World Council. You will be interested to know that we are planning a retreat conference of the senior members of the staff and Church representatives here in March, one of the purposes of which will be [to] look at this aspect of our common life at Malagnou.

As regards travel, I shall see if I can get the process started for a survey of travel undertaken in 1949. I think you would not wish the travel of the staff of this department to be taken into consideration since the staff goes to and from on its errands [sic!] in Europe. Our real trouble is on the inter-church side, we are so reduced that we do not travel enough to keep in touch with the actual situation of the Churches.

I am not sure whether these comments are very useful, but they may be of temporary help to you until Stephen can write more definitely.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely, Robert C. Mackie.

1. Ripon College Cuddesdon is a Church of England theological college in Cuddesdon, a village 5.5 miles (8.9 km) outside Oxford, England. It is the largest ministry training institution in the Church of England. See: Mark D. Chapman (ed.), *Ambassadors of Christ: Commemorating 150 Years of Theological Education in Cuddesdon 1854–2004*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2004.

434. St. C. Neill to G. K. A. Bell, January 14, 1950*

14th January 1950.

My dear Bishop,

After consultation with my colleagues, I am now able to send you a tentative draft of the agenda for the Central Committee. I shall be very glad to have, at an early date, your criticism and suggestions.

In view of your earlier correspondence with me and Mackie on the subject, I do not think that many lengthy comments are called for. I agree with Mackie that the ecclesiological significance of the World Council should be included, but we need not spend much time on it. The purpose of the discussion at the Executive Committee will be merely to consider whether fuller discussion should be held at the Central Committee, and if so, in what form it should be planned. I think this is important because of the widespread impression that the World Council itself is not interested in questions of Faith and Order and has simply side-tracked them into the Faith and Order realm. The Faith and Order section is itself partly responsible for this misunderstanding, but we need to keep Faith and Order questions at the very heart of World Council proceedings, if the real proportion of our activities is not to be obscured.

Visser 't Hooft was away when the letter from the two Cuddesdon students arrived, so it came to my table and was answered by me. I had no idea that their letter would reach you, or I would have sent a copy of my answer to you. I must confess to having read the letter with considerable irritation. Such young friends are always welcome here, but I do think that the Cuddesdon students might have taken the trouble to see one responsible person at headquarters and to find out what is happening before penning their letter.

As you will remember, one of the first things that was done after my arrival here in September, 1947, was the /2/ starting of daily prayers for the staff. These have been carried on without intermission, except in holiday time, since that date. I would not claim that the present state of affairs was in any way satisfactory, but it has been discussed from time to time in meetings of the staff, and we are agreed that for the present we should carry on on the present system. The attendance at prayers is never very large, but it

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

is representative and many members of the staff do come at least occasionally. If we can find a way to improve on the present situation, we are open at any time to do so.

Of course the provision of a proper chapel at headquarters would be one of the very best things that could happen. I have put a note about it in the diary of the Council in the current "Ecumenical Review"², but it has to be recognised that, from the point of view of the majority of the members of the staff, the expenditure of money on a chapel would be regarded as a concession to Anglican prejudice and not as the meeting of a widely-felt need. The majority of the staff, both here and at Bossey, are quite content with things as they are. I do not in the least mean that we should cease to press for a chapel – part of our duty is to create a sense of need where it does not exist, and in this no doubt some progress has been made – but the idea that the staff here as a whole is waiting with extreme eagerness for the provision of a chapel does not in any way correspond to the facts. Our Anglican witness has to be maintained under certain difficulties. I think that our position is better understood than it was, and respected, but still we are to some extent a voice crying in the wilderness.

Before the meeting of the Executive Committee, I will prepare short memoranda giving information about some of the questions to be discussed, and will send these out, duly numbered, in good time to the members of the Committee.

Yours ever,

ENC: Stephen Neill

(Dictated but not signed, owing to Bishop Neill's departure)

Copy to Dr. Franklin Clark Fry

435. St. C. Neill to G. K. A. Bell, January 18, 1950*

18th January 1950.

My dear Bishop,

It looks as though we might be a little short of material for the next number of "The Ecumenical Review". I do not want to leave Wim, on his return,

2. The note did not appear.

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

with the problem of finding writers and material at the last moment. I wonder whether it would be possible for you to write a short article on your impressions of the South India Church. I am sure that you will be writing a good deal in other places, but the subject attracts very wide interest and I believe that the "Ecumenical Review"³ might well devote some space to it at as early a date as possible. I would suggest anything up to 2,000 words as a suitable length.

If you can do this for us I shall be very grateful.

Yours ever,

Stephen Neill.

436. St. C. Neill to G. K. A. Bell, January 23, 1950*

23rd January 1950.

My dear Bishop,

I am sending you herewith the report on the visit of Dean Högsbro⁴ to the President of the East German Republic and my covering letter sent out therewith to members of the Executive and others. I think you will agree with me that this is a most interesting and important document and may point to a way out of the deadlock on the question of a World Council centre in Germany.

I write now to ask your permission to include this on the agenda for the Executive Committee, as I think that it ought to be further discussed as soon as possible.

3. See: G. Bell, A Visit to South India, in *Ecumenical Review* no. 3, Spring 1950, pp. 250-253.

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

4. Halfdan Raunsøe Høgsbro (1894-1976) was a Lutheran theologian from Denmark. From 1950 until 1964 he was Bishop of Lolland-Falster. After WWII he was head of the common Danish ecumenical council from 1945 to 1948. Furthermore he was in charge of the Danish church service to refugees and a member of WCC's Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees. He served also as delegate of the WCC (liaison officer) for Germany. See: *Den Store Danske*. Dansk Biografisk Leksikon, 1979-1984.

May I remind you that I shall be glad to have your comments on the draft agenda as soon as possible? I want if possible to get the agenda in working form before Visser 't Hooft's return, so that he does not have to bother with such details of administration in the brief period between his return and the meeting of the Executive Committee.

Yours ever,

Stephen Neill

437. G. K. A. Bell to St. C. Neill, January 24, 1950*

24th January, 1950

My dear Stephen

Agenda

Many thanks for your letter of the 14th January with the draft agenda.

I should have thought that item (17) should come under (7), as it is nearly connected with press and publicity, and is obviously a report of the secretariat. So I should be glad if you could see your way to putting it up.

I have been asked by various people whether the Executive could take into consideration the present position with regard to war criminals. I am putting the point to Grubb. He may prefer that it should come up under CCIA. But it perhaps deserves an item by itself; and is perhaps something one which we ought to advise one another not necessarily for public action, but for private representations to the governments concerned. I suggest that it might follow immediately after item (8).

Further, does not "Oecumenical Worship" (Item 14) come better immediately after Item (9) – Buildings, etc.

I am hoping to send you an article on South India in the next day or two.

Yours ever,

George Cicestr:

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

438. G. K. A. Bell to St. C. Neill, January 26, 1950*

26th January, 1950

My dear Stephen,

Executive Committee

I propose to come by air on Sunday, February 19th, arriving at Geneva at 13.25. I should be glad if accommodation could be reserved for me in Geneva for the Sunday night. (I take it that from Monday night the accommodation will be at Bossey). This would give me a chance of going to Evensong in the English Church; and also of seeing 't Hooft and yourself and others some time on Sunday, and on Monday. I propose to return by air on Friday, February 24th.

Yours ever,

George Cicestr:

439. G. K. A. Bell to St. C. Neill, January 26, 1950*

26th January, 1950

My dear Stephen,

I have read Dean Högsbro's report with the greatest interest. Certainly it should find a place on our agenda, and pretty high up. There must of course be a political reason for this forthcomingness on the part of the East German government. I think there is obviously much to be said in favour of the right kind of representative of the W.C.C. But he would need to be a man very much on his guard.

I enclose an article *or CSI* for the *Oecumenical Review*⁵. I hope it will be of use.

Yours ever,

George Cicestr:

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

5. See: Bell, A Visit to South India, in *Ecumenical Review* no. 3, Winter 1950, pp. 250-253.

440. St. C. Neill to G. K. A. Bell, January 26, 1950*

26th January 1950.

My dear Bishop,

I am sending you herewith the Agenda for the Executive Committee in the form in which, unless you have further criticisms, I propose to send it out to the members of the Committee early next month. I shall be grateful if you will let me know immediately whether any further modifications are required. As you will see, I have accepted all your proposals with regard to modifications.

I send herewith a note I have prepared for Visser 't Hooft as to the points on which I think he will be required to introduce reports or discussions. Will you be responsible yourself for the introduction of the subject of war criminals, item No. 10? If you prefer, Nolde would probably be prepared to introduce it, but as it is very much on your mind it might come with greater force if you put Dr. Fry into the chair for that session and led the discussion yourself.

I am sending you a purely tentative plan for the allocation of the time during the three days of the sessions of the Committee. You will remember that a good deal of criticism was expressed at Chichester of the frequent interference of business with the time set apart for worship. When the days are so crowded, it is difficult to maintain an exact time-table, but I would suggest that the time for worship be rigidly adhered to, and if it is found absolutely necessary the session should be continued after the close of the period of evening worship.

Yours ever,

Stephen Neill.

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

441. St. C. Neill to G. K. A. Bell, January 28, 1950*

28th January 1950.

My dear Bishop,

I note that you will be arriving at Geneva on February 19, and will arrange for a room to be reserved for you for Sunday night. A car will take you out to Bossey on Monday.

Ordinarily we have Evensong in the English Church here only in the summer months, owing to the great expense of heating the Church in winter. But I would greatly welcome the opportunity of having an ecumenical service in our Church, if you felt able to preach, on the evening of February 19. It is some time since we had a joint service with the Old Catholics, and I believe that many of our Protestant friends would also turn up if an ecumenical service were announced with some parts at least of the service in French.

I am afraid you will think that I always demand a reply by cable, but it will be a great help to me if you will let me have a wire to say whether you can undertake this or not.

Your letter shows that you had not realised that I am leaving for America on February 3 for University missions and shall not be at the Executive. I am sorry about this. I had agreed to give a month to the American Committee for University campus campaigns, but was a little horrified to discover that [Robert S.] Bilheimer⁶ had fixed the dates in such a way as to make it

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

6. Robert S. Bilheimer (1917-2006) was an American Presbyterian theologian. In his 1947 book *What Must the Church Do?*, he used the phrase "New Reformation" to refer to the ecumenical movement that resulted from the 1910 World Missionary Conference, and this usage became commonplace thereafter. He was one of the co-founders of the WWC. He later gave credit for the most of the founding of the organization to laity and young people. From 1955-1958, he co-chaired a WWC international commission to prepare a document addressing the threat of nuclear warfare during the Cold War. As a WWC delegate, he prepared the Cottesloe Consultation, which took place in December 1960 and saw the WWC meet with representatives from the eight main Christian denominations in South Africa in order to address the issue of apartheid. He served as Associate General Secretary and Director of the Division of Studies of the WWC, Executive Director of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, and Director of the International Affairs Program of the National Council of Churches. He wrote the 1984 book *A Spirituality for the Long*

impossible for me to attend the Committee, all the arrangements for which I have been responsible for making. /2/

Thank you very much indeed for your article on a visit to South India. I will pass this on to Visser 't Hooft immediately on his return. I am inclined to think that it may need a little modification if it is to be published in the "Ecumenical Review". Those of us who have followed South India carefully over many years sometimes forget how astonishingly ignorant even ecumenically-minded people are of the details of any Church union movement in which they have not been personally concerned. I think it may be necessary to expand your statements at certain points to make it clear to the uninitiated what the problems have been and at what points definite progress has been registered. I believe that it will be possible for you, during the time you are in Geneva, to make any necessary modifications without any serious expenditure of time.

Yours very sincerely,

Stephen Neill

442. G. K. A. Bell to St. C. Neill, January 28, 1950*

28/1/50

My dear Stephen,

Many thanks for the Agenda for the Executive. I am grateful for the outline of the modifications. But, while I entirely agree with what you say about devotional periods, I am sure we ought to adhere to the order of items on the Agenda, as far as we possibly can. And clearly, for example, 6 and 7 go together. Also, another example, it is important that Press and Publicity should be taken early, and should go with (i). Indeed my comments were in good part directed to the order of taking the business. I am in touch with

Haul: Biblical Risk and Moral Stand, in which he provides a biblical basis for resisting oppression. He also wrote the 1989 book *Breakthrough: The Emergence of the Ecumenical Tradition*, which was one of several books about ecumenism that were published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (Grand Rapids) in 1989. See: Jonathan Gorry, *Cold War Christians and the Spectre of Nuclear Deterrence, 1945-1959*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, esp. p. 194.

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, handwritten.

Grubb about War Criminals – and shall be ready to take it, if this seems a good plan at the time.

Yours ever,

George Cicestr:

**443. W. A. Visser 't Hooft to G. K. A. Bell,
February 2, 1950***

2nd February, 1950.

My dear Bishop,

I have just returned to Geneva after having made the most stimulating journey that I have ever undertaken for the World Council. I hope that you will forgive me for not writing any personal letters during that period. With the very heavy programme I succeeded only in finding time for the preparation of addresses and the writing of the reports which you will have received.

I was most glad to have your note about the Travancore situation. It was most helpful that you could visit Travancore precisely at the time you did. And I was extremely lucky in that I arrived in Travancore on the very day when the agreement was signed. My report will tell you the full story – and this should reach you in a few days. It was a truly moving experience to be there at a time when, unless the devil gets busy again, the conflict of forty years was concluded by a peace settlement; and it is an astonishing story that the young fellows of the Peace League really succeeded in bringing this about. Because I arrived precisely at that time, I entered into more intimate contact with the leaders of the Jacobites than I could possibly have done at any other time. And it is astonishing, and slightly terrifying to find how much value is attached to the opinion of the World Council in such a matter. In fact, it is one of my general impressions of this trip that, while constitutionally we are supposed to exert no influence whatsoever on our member Churches, the very fact of our existence exerts a very deep influence upon them. And we are taken far more seriously than we deserve to be taken with all our lack of experience and lack of solid common policies. /2/

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

I am extremely glad that before long I will be allowed to share with the Executive the many problems with which I have had to deal during this trip. I take it that you will also give us the benefit of your reflections about Australia, New Zealand, and South India. The Agenda of the Executive is getting very full up. My hope is that since the organisational and financial situation is now very much more settled than it was last year, we may really spend time on some of the deeper issues which have arisen. Your telegram about the hydrogen bomb arrived just after we had cyclostyled the Agenda. But we will, of course, put the matter on the Agenda in connection with other international affairs. Could you possibly send me an indication of the line you want to take in this connection, so that I can reflect a bit about it before the meeting?

I find that Archbishop Germanos is not coming to the meeting, and that we have no answer from Metropolitan Panteleimon. I have, therefore, written to Archbishop Germanos asking whether he does not want to designate a person to represent him; and I have also written to Alivisatos to ask whether the Archbishop of Athens would like to nominate a Greek Church leader to come to the Executive. Since the situation with the Orthodox is on the one hand delicate, but on the other hand full of real possibilities I want to avoid a situation in which we hold important meetings without any Orthodox representation at all. This large journey has convinced me again of the fact that the old Churches, Orthodox, Coptic, and Jacobite, need the World Council very badly. And at the same time, we need them if we are to be ecumenic. Robert Mackie will tell you about a number of other matters which I had a chance to discuss with him on Tuesday. I am looking forward to seeing you soon,

Yours ever,

W. A. Visser 't Hooft

**444. G. K. A. Bell to W. A. Visser 't Hooft,
February 6, 1950***

6th February, 1950

My dear Wim,

I was delighted to get your letter of the 2nd February. I can understand what a marvelous, as well as a most stimulating journey you have had.

* WCC, General Secretariat (1914-1995), Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940-1956), Box 42.0008, File No. 5, typewritten.

I have read the circular letters with the greatest interest. I am longing to hear details of the Travancore agreement. It was very touching to meet the younger members of both Churches, and also to realise the great hopes which they had from the World Council. I look forward eagerly to hearing more details.

Of course it will be grand to hear the story of your tour at the Executive; and I am very ready to tell about my tour, if there is an opportunity.

The point about the hydrogen bomb is this. I want the Executive Committee to consider very seriously whether it should not issue a statement, saying that the Christian conscience is outraged by the whole conception of the manufacture and use of the hydrogen bomb.⁷ In former times inhuman

7. With the Soviets successfully testing their own nuclear weapons, the race was officially on. Little more than a month after the "Joe 1" test, the United States began expanding its production of uranium and plutonium. By the start of 1950, President Harry S. Truman announced the U.S. would continue research and development on "all forms of atomic weapons." This "all forms" part was important. Initially, scientists working for the Manhattan Project considered two possible designs for an atomic bomb. They eventually chose to create a fission bomb, in which neutrons fired toward the nuclei of uranium or plutonium set off a massive chain reaction. This type of bomb was used on Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Bikini Atoll. A physicist at Los Alamos, Edward Teller, suggested a thermonuclear fusion bomb, or hydrogen bomb. A fusion bomb operates by forcing together deuterium and tritium, two light isotopes of hydrogen. The resulting explosion would be theoretically many times more than that of a fission device, and almost without limit. Time didn't permit the completion of a fusion bomb, but Teller pushed for a chance to complete the device in order to keep one step ahead of the Russians. On Nov. 1, 1952, the U.S. detonated the world's first hydrogen bomb, code-named "Mike," on the Enewetak Atoll of the Marshall Islands. The resulting explosion was about the same as 10 million tons of TNT, or 700 times greater than the fission bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The cloud produced by the explosion was 25 miles high and 100 miles wide, and the island on which it exploded simply disappeared, leaving nothing but a gaping crater. Again, Klaus Fuchs had delivered early information on the hydrogen bomb designs along with the fission bomb information, and by late 1955 the Soviets tested their own design. One of the more distressing events of the 1950s was another Soviet development – the launch of Sputnik 1 on Oct. 4, 1957. The satellite was the first object to be launched into space by an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), and the achievement caused a great scare in the U.S. If the Soviets could put a satellite into space, they could do the same thing with a nuclear warhead. Now, instead of having sufficient warning time for a nuclear attack by monitoring incoming airplanes, a missile could hit a target in less than an hour. The 1950s also included the expansion of the nuclear "club," or the group of nations with tested nuclear weapons. England had worked together with the U.S. on the nuclear bomb design, but because of limited funds during the war, their contributions were mainly theoretical. This changed on Oct. 3, 1952, when the English tested their first nuclear bomb off the coast of