

World Council of Churches, Geneva General Correspondence Archives

on microfiche



Advisor: Pierre Beffa, Director World Council of Churches Library

The General Correspondence Archives of the World Council of Churches

IDC is pleased to present the complete content of the General Correspondence Archives of the World Council of Churches in Geneva on microfiche. After the records of the International Missionary Council (microfiched earlier by IDC from the holdings of the same organization) another source of great importance to researchers and scholars interested in the ecumenical movement, and church history in general, has now been made available in its entirety for scientific research.

The ecumenical movement

Amongst the various movements of the 20th century, one is of particular interest: the ecumenical movement. It represents the efforts of the divided churches to re-establish contact with each other, to rediscover their common heritage, to explore possibilities for collaboration and to find a new place within society by participating in the foundation of a new world community. In order to achieve this, the churches founded many organizations, including the *International Missionary Council* in 1910, the *Universal Council on Life and Work* in 1925, the *Faith and Order* movement in 1927 and some others. In 1938, the *Life and Work* and *Faith and Order* movements came together to form the World Council of Churches, which was officially inaugurated in Amsterdam in 1948. To this day, the World Council of Churches continues to represent the most important gathering of churches in the world. As its constitution states, it is a fellowship of churches from different traditions: Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist and Pentecostal.

Form and content

The Library of the World Council of Churches, based in Geneva, houses the historical archives of the ecumenical movement. The archives are divided into many different sections, reflecting the various bodies that have been active on the ecumenical scene during the 20th century. The records of the *International Missionary Council*, which have already been microfiched by IDC, are one example of such a section.

We are now able to present the public with another section of the ecumenical archives on microfiche, the collection commonly referred to as the *General Correspondence of the World Council of Churches*. The form and the content of this section as we know it today has been greatly influenced by Dr. Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft, the first General Secretary of the World Council of



Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft

Churches, a highly respected churchman and ecumenical leader.

The *General Correspondence* archives are arranged alphabetically but do not always follow a neat and logical order. However, should researchers be unable to trace a particular document within this collection, there is still the possibility of widening their search to take in the other sections of our library in Geneva also organized by Dr. Visser 't Hooft.

Scientific relevance

The *General Correspondence* archives are of great interest to students of the history of the ecumenical movement and are consulted frequently. The collection contains the seminal letters leading up to the decision to found the World Council of Churches in 1938, the correspondence detailing the Council's formative years until 1948 and goes on to cover the period until 1966, during which Dr. Visser 't Hooft was General Secretary. The oldest letters in the collection date from the 1920s. Taken as a whole, the *General Correspondence*

archives of the World Council of Churches document a period of immense significance, both in terms of the ecumenical movement and indeed the history of the world. They include many letters to prominent politicians and national leaders from the period around the Second World War and may therefore be of great relevance not only to church historians, but also historians in general.

Correspondents

The roll of illustrious correspondents in this collection includes: Professor Alivisatos; Archbishop Athenagoras; Karl Barth; Bishop George Bell, who was instrumental in maintaining relations between the British and German churches; John C. Bennett; Bishop Berggrav, a prominent Christian in the struggle against Nazism; Pastor Marc Boegner, President of the French Protestant Federation; Professor Bulgakoff; Archbishop Germanos; Professor Hendrik Kraemer; Bishop Hanns Lilje; Reinhold Niebuhr; Martin Niemöller; J. Oldham; Denis de Rougemont and Archbishop William Temple.

Safeguard

The transfer of the *General Correspondence* archives to microfiche has safeguarded the future of these historic ecumenical documents and guarantees their availability to future generations. The knowledge that this invaluable resource has been reproduced and disseminated for the benefit of interested researchers is cause for profound satisfaction.

Pierre Beffa

Director, World Council of Churches Library

Scope 36 years of correspondence
 Number of fiche 1,491
 Size of fiche 105 x 148 mm
 Film type Positive silver halide
 Reduction ratio Varies according to the size of the original
 Internal finding aids The name of the relevant correspondent can be found, in alphabetical order, on the eye-legible headers on each fiche
 External finding aids Printed guide with names of correspondents in alphabetical order

Individual fiche available

For information about a flexible purchase plan please contact IDC.

