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To be assured of good academic supervision, the project was listed as doctoral research in history at the Faculty of Humanities at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. I am very grateful to my supervisor, Prof. dr. Fred van Lieberg, professor of the history of religion, and my two co-supervisors Prof. dr. Martien Brinkman and Prof. dr. George Harinck, for their stimulating supervision and constant advice on structure. Moreover, I will always remain deeply grateful to Prof. dr. Anton Houtepen (d. 2010), who was one of the supervisors of my theological dissertation in 1995. He was the one who put me on the road of ecumenicity, and that was where I kept coming across Willem Adolf Visser ‘t Hooft.

In the archives of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, I benefited a great deal from the assistance of the archivists Hans von Rütte and Anne-Emmanuelle Tankam. I would like to express my gratitude to them. The World Council of Churches houses not only its own archives, but the archives of Visser ‘t Hooft himself are found there as well. My stay in Geneva was pleasant, also thanks to the use I could make of the apartment in Ferney-Voltaire that Carien Pluimers and Frans Roselaers made available. Various other archives were
consulted. In particular, I should mention the Archives of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation in Amsterdam, the Historical Documentation Centre for Dutch Protestantism at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and the archives of the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision in Hilversum.

The Visser ’t Hooft family were very warmly disposed towards the project, and various family members contributed intensively to the research. I was given access to articles in the Visser ’t Hooft Family Archives, books of collections and cuttings, and photo albums. Almost all the photos in this book come from these albums. Fifteen come from the archives of the World Council of Churches, and there are some photos I took myself. I was warmly welcomed by Visser ’t Hooft’s daughter, Anneke Musacchio-Visser ’t Hooft at 13 Chemin des Voiron in Geneva, where Visser ’t Hooft lived from the end of the 1950s until his death in 1985. She provided me with a large number of books he had written.

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