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From religious freedom to social justice: the human rights engagement of the ecumenical movement from the 1940s to the 1970s – Bastiaan Bouwman

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Abstract

This article contributes to the historiography on human rights and (religious) internationalism by tracing how the ecumenical movement in the post-war decades sought to protect the religious freedom of its co-religionists in Catholic and Muslim countries, specifically Italy, Nigeria, and Indonesia. In cooperation with local actors, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs sought to anchor international human rights in the domestic sphere through constitutional provisions. These activities constituted a significant strand of Christian human rights engagement from the 1940s to the 1960s, which intersected with the Cold War and decolonisation. The article then contrasts this with the turn to a more pluralistic and communitarian conception of human rights in the 1970s, animated by liberation theologies. As the World Council of Churches embraced a ‘revolutionary’ tradition and worked to resist military dictatorships, racism, and global inequality, it gravitated towards Marxism-inflected and anticolonial strands of human rights discourse.

Keywords

Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), human rights, internationalism, religious freedom, World Council of Churches (WCC)

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Introduction

The World Council of Churches (WCC), provisionally founded in 1938, was officially established in Amsterdam in 1948, just a few months before the United Nations promulgated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to Terence Renaud, ecumenical Christians around this time saw in human rights ‘a universalist commitment to defending individual human beings and a global institutional framework for enacting that commitment’.¹ As Pamela Slotte has noted, the ecumenical conception of individual freedom differed from a secular liberal viewpoint in that it was embedded in a religious conception of community: ‘The freedom to which the Christian was delivered was a freedom that was envisioned within the framework and in relation to a life in a community (instituted by Jesus).’² Comparing Protestants to Catholics (who did not join the WCC) in this respect, Renaud has written that in the late 1930s, ecumenists’ ‘Protestant personalism (...) said little about the sort of communal rights and duties that lay at the core of Catholic personalism’ and instead ‘called for a

¹ Terence Renaud, ‘Human rights as radical anthropology: Protestant theology and ecumenism in the transwar era’, *The Historical Journal*, 60, 2, 2016, pp. 3.

² Pamela Slotte, “‘Blessed are the peacemakers’”: Christian internationalism, ecumenical voices and the quest for human rights’, in Pamela Slotte and Miia Halme-Tuomisaari, eds., *Revisiting the origins of human rights*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 327, 311.

universal community of faith that would recognise no distinctions based on nation, race, or class'. American ecumenists like John Foster Dulles and O. Frederick Nolde, empowered by the abundance of resources and influence of the American ecumenical movement, then led the way in coupling this desire for a 'universal church' with designs for a post-war international order, a key feature of which would be human rights.³

Religious freedom featured as the linchpin of such an order, because without it all other rights would lose their meaning. Linde Lindkvist has recently described how Nolde, as a non-governmental consultant at the drafting of the Universal Declaration, worked with fellow ecumenist and drafter Charles Malik, the Lebanese Ambassador to the UN and to the US, to shape the secular language of the Universal Declaration in such a way as to promote a Christian agenda. The outcome was a text that distinguished between inward freedom of conscience on the one hand and outward manifestations of religion on the other; that included an explicit freedom to change one's religion or belief; and that focused, despite a reference to manifesting one's religion 'in community with others', on individual rights. The latter point ran counter to ecumenical objectives, which had envisioned greater room for corporate rights, to better protect the rights of churches. But the former two represented achievements of the ecumenists' lobby, which was based on the concern that mere freedom of 'worship' would enable regimes hostile to religion to curtail religious freedom, and the specifically missionary worry that in Islamic countries, missionary activity would be hampered by prohibitions of conversion.⁴ The

³ Renaud, 'Human rights', pp. 8 and 20. Cf. Samuel Moyn, *Christian human rights*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. On the ecumenical movement and on religious freedom see John Nurser, *For all peoples and all nations: Christian churches and human rights*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005; Andrew Preston, 'Peripheral visions: American mainline Protestants and the global Cold War', *Cold War History*, 13, 1, 2013, pp. 109-30; Andrew Preston, *Sword of the spirit, shield of faith: religion in American war and diplomacy*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012; Anna Su, *Exporting freedom: religious liberty and American power*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.

⁴ Linde Lindkvist, *Religious freedom and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Universal Declaration's Article 18 became the cornerstone of religious liberty promotion by ecumenists and others.⁵

How did ecumenical human rights promotion develop from the 1940s onwards? How did the relationship between religious liberty and human rights evolve over time? And what does this tell us about the wider arc of ecumenical internationalism through the 1970s? These questions are important not only for the history of the ecumenical movement but also for the recent historiography on human rights. This historiography has sought to trace continuities and discontinuities in human rights discourse and to relate these to wider international histories.⁶ The 1940s and the 1970s have received particular scrutiny as sites of supposed human rights 'revolutions' or 'breakthrough' moments. The ecumenical movement, which represented hundreds of millions of Christians in the West and increasingly worldwide, represents an important but understudied aspect of this history.

Most literature on the ecumenical movement, and the limited amount of work that has been done on its human rights engagement, has focused on its relationship to communism in the context of the Cold War.⁷ One reason for this has been the process of the WCC's own reckoning with its position in the Cold War; another has been scholarly interest in (American) Christian anticommunism and a focus on evangelical rather than ecumenical Christians.⁸ While not denying the importance of religious freedom in communist countries, the first part of this article calls attention to the two other pillars of ecumenical human rights engagement from the 1940s to the 1960s: religious liberty in Roman Catholic and Islamic countries. The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), of which

⁵ See Ninan Koshy, 'The ecumenical understanding of religious liberty: the contribution of the World Council of Churches', *Journal of Church and State*, 38, 1, 1996, pp. 137-54.

⁶ See *inter alia* Samuel Moyn, *The last utopia: human rights in history*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010; Jan Eckel, *Die Ambivalenz des Guten*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014; Mark Philip Bradley, *Reimagining the world: Americans and human rights in the twentieth century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

⁷ Július Filo, ed., *Christian world community – and the Cold War: international research conference in Bratislava on 5 – 8 September 2011*, Bratislava: Comenius University, 2012; Dianne Kirby, 'The impact of the Cold War on the formation of the WCC', in Joachim Garstecki, ed., *Die Ökumene und der Widerstand gegen Diktaturen: Nationalsozialismus und Kommunismus als Herausforderung an die Kirchen*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2007, pp. 135-58; Katharina Kunter, *Die Kirchen im KSZE-Prozess 1968-1978*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2000.

⁸ Cf. David A. Hollinger, 'After cloven tongues of fire: ecumenical Protestantism and the modern American encounter with diversity', *Journal of American History*, 98, 1, 2011, pp. 22.

Nolde served as director from 1946 to 1968, alongside its chairman, the British layman Kenneth G. Grubb, was the central actor in this respect.⁹ A small non-governmental organisation with consultative status at the UN, it represented not only the WCC but also the International Missionary Council (IMC). After the adoption of the Universal Declaration, it continued its work at the UN, as recently described by Karsten Lehmann.¹⁰ But beyond the UN, extensive contacts with Christian (mostly Protestant) organisations and religious leaders allowed the CCIA to engage on a national level. In this sphere, the universal norms elaborated at the UN had to be reconciled with local circumstances, as mediated by local actors. To investigate the relationship between religious liberty and human rights in such specific cases, the first part of this article looks at Italy, Indonesia, and Nigeria. Ecumenical activity in relation to these and other countries constituted a substantial strand of ecumenical human rights engagement from the 1940s through the 1960s.

The second, shorter, part addresses the WCC's rethinking of its internationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, which went hand in hand with fundamental shifts in its membership and ideology. These shifts redirected the ecumenical movement's political alignment to take account of the Non-Aligned Movement, initiatives for a New International Economic Order, and perspectives emanating from or focusing on what was referred to as the Third World more generally. This development culminated in the propagation of a new human rights conception in the mid-1970s, which downgraded the importance of religious liberty and elevated social, economic, and collective rights, in line with precepts derived from Latin American liberation theologies. The article engages recent interpretations of this new ecumenical approach to human rights and argues that several of its features represented important discontinuities. Whereas it had previously focused on aiding co-religionists, the WCC now framed a wide range of causes in terms of human rights. In a departure from the more institutional and legalistic

⁹ On the formation of the CCIA, see Matti Peiponen, *Ecumenical action in world politics: the creation of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), 1945-1959*, Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2012. For more on the early WCC, see Jurjen A. Zeilstra, *European unity in ecumenical thinking 1937-1948*, Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1995.

¹⁰ Karsten Lehmann, *Religious NGOs in international relations: the construction of 'the religious' and 'the secular'*, New York: Routledge, 2016, ch. 5.

approach of the 1940s and 1950s, the ecumenical movement now incorporated human rights into the core of its social ethics and sought to support grassroots struggles for emancipation, especially in the Third World.

Religious freedom in Catholic countries: Italian Protestants, human rights, and the constitution

Protestant ecumenists, seeking to safeguard freedom for their co-religionists in the post-war period, saw several threats in the Catholic world. The three most important cases in which Protestants faced religiously motivated discrimination or repression were Italy, Spain, and Colombia. Allegations of collusion with international communism were an important factor in branding tiny Protestant minorities suspect. But fundamentally, Protestantism was perceived as a threat to the moral foundations of Catholic societies, in which the Church played a prominent and pervasive role. To the Roman Catholic Church at this time, ‘religious freedom’ was anathema, because ‘error has no rights’.¹¹

The CCIA worked with local church leaders or missionaries, using a mixture of public and private engagement to pry open greater space for religious practice and evangelisation in the face of what was frequently referred to as Catholic ‘totalitarianism’. Changes in constitutional and other legal provisions were the most important means of doing so. The 1950 WCC Central Committee meeting, which discussed a study on ‘Religious Freedom in Face of Dominant Forces’, which the CCIA had produced at its request, focused on such safeguards.¹² The example of Italy shows how the ecumenical movement could appeal to human rights as part of its efforts to advance religious freedom. Yet even more so, it shows how contingent resort to this tactic was. Other sources of moral and legal authority, most importantly the 1948 constitution, despite its flaws, presented more promising opportunities. Even so, the hegemony of Catholicism in Italy and other Roman Catholic countries proved hard to dent, let

¹¹ Quoted in John Pollard, *The papacy in the age of totalitarianism, 1914-1958*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014, pp. 476.

¹² WCC, *Central committee of the World Council of Churches: minutes and reports on the third meeting*, Geneva: WCC, 1950, pp. 13.

alone dislodge. When the situation for Protestants improved, this was mainly due to the developments surrounding the Second Vatican Council.

After the Second World War, Italian Protestants saw in the country's draft peace treaty an opportunity to obtain guarantees for religious non-discrimination.¹³ American ecumenists were their most important international allies. When Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi, the founder of the Italian Christian Democracy party, visited the US in 1947, the Federal Council of Churches of the Churches of Christ in America appealed to both the draft peace treaty as well as the UN Charter and its own statements on religious liberty in urging him to secure religious freedom in the new constitution.¹⁴ But in the end the peace treaty merely protected 'freedom of religious worship' rather than 'freedom of religion'. This had been the result of Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov's personal opposition to proposals to include the latter clause, which Nolde had pressed the United States to advance.¹⁵ In subsequent approaches, Italian Protestants continued to refer to the peace treaty but also tried to draw on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in addition to the 1948 constitution. In May 1950, the Federal Council of the Evangelical Churches in Italy presented an open letter to the Italian government, asserting that laws favouring the Roman Catholic Church were 'completely opposed' to the Italian constitution as well as 'the international pledge taken by Italy (UNO's Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 15 of the Peace Treaty)'.¹⁶ The Waldensian Professor Mario Rollier, the chairman of the CCIA's Italian counterpart, urged that external pressure be placed on the Italian government to make this appeal more effective. The CCIA responded with a resolution expressing its 'approval and support of the efforts to achieve non-discriminatory constitutional, legal, and administrative safeguards for religious freedom in Italy', and publicised the efforts of the Federal Council of the Evangelical Churches in Italy

¹³ CCIA, *The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs 1950-1951*, London and New York: CCIA, 1951, pp. 32.

¹⁴ World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (henceforth WCCA CCIA) 428 Country files Europe / Italy 1946-1967 / Italy 1952-1953 Human rights, religious liberty [box not numbered], Federal Council of Churches to Alcide de Gasperi, 'Memorandum', 13 January 1947.

¹⁵ O. Frederick Nolde, *Free and equal: human rights in ecumenical perspective*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968, pp. 33-5.

¹⁶ WCCA CCIA 428.4.3 'Memorandum of the Federal Council of the Evangelical Churches in Italy to the Italian Government', 25 May 1950, pp. 1.

to its constituency.¹⁷ Also, in the same year, on the WCC's initiative, the Conference of Protestant Churches from European Latin Countries was established, which brought together Protestants from Portugal to Wallonia. The conference issued a statement which, *inter alia*, expressed the hope that Italian law would be brought into accordance with the 'principles' of the 1948 constitution and called for the Catholic Church to clarify its position on the Universal Declaration's Article 18.¹⁸

Yet by the mid-1950s, appeals to the constitution had displaced human rights language. On the occasion of Italian Prime Minister Mario Scelba's 1955 visit to the US, the Federal Council of the Evangelical Churches in Italy drew up a memorandum which was transmitted to the CCIA, which then liaised with the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (formerly the Federal Council). Human rights language did not play any direct role in either the Italian memorandum or the American one based on it, which was transmitted to Scelba on the occasion of his visit (the Council had attempted to arrange a meeting with Scelba but was rebuffed).¹⁹ The recent American move away from international human rights, under pressure from the Bricker Amendment campaign, may have dimmed hopes for an appeal to human rights. Thus, the Italian memorandum appealed to the 1948 constitution and asserted that 'respect for the rights of minorities of any kind is the test of any true democracy. If this test should fail under the pressure of any sort of totalitarianism – manifest or disguised, political or confessional – the foundations of all liberties would be in danger.'²⁰ The Council thus attempted to burnish its perceived loyalty to the Italian state and place itself alongside the Catholic Church in the fight against totalitarianism. Rather than human rights, it invoked minority rights. This emphasis on an established tradition of minority rights could also be seen in the work of Giorgio Peyrot, the head of the

¹⁷ WCCA CCIA 428.4.3 CCIA, Minutes of the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee, Emmanuel College, Toronto, Canada, 3 – 5 July 1950, pp. 29-30.

¹⁸ WCCA Commission of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service 425.02.08.012.2b, Giorgio Peyrot, 'La liberté religieuse. Son fondement théologique et ses formes concrètes. Deuxième rapport', no date [1958], pp. 102-3.

¹⁹ WCCA CCIA [unprocessed materials] 428 Country files Europe / Italy 1946-1967 / Italy 1952-1953 Human rights, religious liberty, Mario Lucelli to Earl Frederick Adams, 14 March 1955.

²⁰ WCCA CCIA [unprocessed materials] 428 Country files Europe / Italy 1946-1967 / Italy 1952-1953 Human rights, religious liberty, Federal Council of Evangelical Churches in Italy, 'Memorandum on the problem of religious liberty in Italy', 17 February 1955, pp. 6.

Legal Office of the Federal Council of Evangelical Churches in Italy, and highlighted the fact that the concern of Italian Protestants was less with the freedom to evangelise than with the freedom simply to practise their own religion without suffering discrimination.²¹ The American memorandum, signed by Eugene Carson Blake, the future General Secretary of the WCC, likewise referred to the constitution and appealed to the international standing of Italy in the context of ‘the struggle in which we are all engaged, against the menace of atheism and materialism, and, in the positive sense, for justice, freedom and peace’.²² These entreaties were fruitless: in the wake of Scelba’s visit, American willingness to press Italy on religious freedom declined.²³

Italian Christians viewed the 1948 constitution as an effective tool to promote religious freedom. Rather than demanding change in the constitution, they insisted on its implementation. Indeed, a January 1959 memorandum of the Legal Office of the Federal Council of Evangelical Churches in Italy, submitted for the consideration of the WCC’s July 1959 Executive Committee meeting, noted that the constitution’s provisions on the ‘individual’ and the ‘general and collective plane’ were in fact ‘satisfactory’. But on the ‘institutional plane’, the formal equality between religious denominations, the constitution was seen as sorely lacking. Through its Article 7, the constitution was bound by the 1929 Lateran Pacts with the Holy See, which included a concordat that made Catholicism the de facto state church of Italy.²⁴

The long-awaited establishment of Italy’s Constitutional Court in 1956 raised hopes among Italian Protestants.²⁵ Indeed, it led to improvements in the legal protection of Italian Protestants, not least through the abolition of Fascist-era laws restricting church activity and the recognition of the right

²¹ E.g. George Peyrot, *Religious liberty and conditions of evangelical people in Italy*, Rome: Tip. Ferraiolo, 1957.

²² WCCA CCIA [unprocessed materials] 428 Country files Europe / Italy 1946-1967 / Italy 1952-1953 Human rights, religious liberty, Federal Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America to Mario Scelba, ‘Memorandum’, 30 March 1955.

²³ Roy Palmer Domenico, “‘For the cause of Christ here in Italy’”: America’s Protestant challenge in Italy and the cultural ambiguity of the Cold War’, *Diplomatic History*, 29, 4, 2005, pp. 651.

²⁴ WCCA CCIA 428.4.7 Legal Office of the Federal Council of Evangelical Churches in Italy, ‘Report on the position of religious liberty in Italy’, February 1959, pp. 1-2 (italics omitted).

²⁵ WCCA Secretariat on Religious Liberty 4226.5.65 Giorgio Peyrot, ‘Relazione annua dell’Ufficio Legale. 1 Luglio 1956 – 30 Giugno 1957’, no date, pp. 48.

of non-Catholic denominations to open their churches to the public without prior government approval.²⁶ Yet the court's rulings did not immediately challenge the legitimacy of the Lateran Pacts, and it would take many years for a decisive breakthrough to occur. Constitutional Court rulings in 1971 and 1982 forced the establishment of a new concordat between the Vatican and the Italian state, which cleared the way for the signing of long-desired church-state agreements that recognised a number of minority religions; the Waldensian Church was the first of these, in 1984.²⁷

Meanwhile, however, the Vatican moved towards a much more tolerant attitude, which reduced the incidence of religious discrimination in Italy and elsewhere. The encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963) signalled a new Catholic attitude to the concept of human rights. When the Second Vatican Council adopted its declaration on religious liberty in 1965, *Dignitatis Humanae*, the WCC's authority on the subject, the Spanish former Jesuit and theologian Dr A.F. Carillo de Albornoz, voiced disappointment over such omissions as the freedom to change one's religion or belief 'without consequent social, economic, and political disabilities', as recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reiterated at the New Delhi Assembly, and noted that the declaration allowed leeway for the state to repress efforts at proselytising. Carillo also criticised the Vatican's declaration for emphasizing certain corporate rights while omitting reference to individual rights, in contrast to the Amsterdam statement. But all in all, he welcomed the declaration as a manifestation of Christianity putting its house in order, furthering its 'moral leadership'.²⁸ The Catholic Church's turn marked the beginning of the end of Carillo's work at the WCC. The Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC concluded in May 1967 that 'though the theological justification may still differ from one church to the other, there is basic agreement on what the principle of Religious Liberty requires in practice', and in the same year the Secretariat on Religious Liberty was disbanded.²⁹ The visit of Pope Paul VI to the

²⁶ Giovanni Bognetti, 'Political role of the Italian Constitutional Court', *Notre Dame Law Review*, 49, 5, 1974, pp. 989.

²⁷ Marco Ventura, *Religion and Law in Italy*, Alphen aan de Rijn: Wolters Kluwer, 2013, pp. 46-50.

²⁸ WCCA CCIA 428.15.3.2.3 Offprint of A.F. Carillo de Albornoz, 'The ecumenical and world significance of the Vatican declaration on religious liberty', *The Ecumenical Review*, 18, 1, 1966, pp. 4-6, 16-7, and 26.

²⁹ WCCA WCC 4201.4.2 WCC Central Committee, 'Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the

WCC headquarters two years later illustrated how much Protestant-Catholic relations had improved. While the position of Protestants in Catholic countries remained unequal or tenuous in many places, the issue of religious freedom in these societies was no longer the priority it had been.

Bracing for independence: postcolonial constitutions and Muslim-Christian relations

Within the ecumenical movement, missionaries were often the first to seek to distance themselves from the imperial structures that had enabled much of their work in the first place. During the interwar period many ecumenists had come to see imperialism as arising from nationalism, which the universal church was meant to restrain.³⁰ World War I had shaken their confidence in Europe's moral standing, and World War II delivered another crushing blow. To restore Europe's Christian character, ecumenists like Malik and WCC General Secretary W. A. Visser 't Hooft thought Christianity would have to extricate itself both from nationalism at home and imperialism abroad.³¹ The confrontation with communism and its real and perceived appeal to colonised peoples, moreover, forced ecumenical Christians to come to terms with their ties to empire. If communism represented a threat because of its materialism, its promise of universal equality also forced Protestants to scrutinise their own connections to the racialised hierarchies inherent in imperial rule.³² For missionaries, the imperative to disassociate themselves from empire became stronger as prospects for independence drew closer. If they were to have any hope of continuing their work in postcolonial societies they would have to redeem themselves from the affiliation with colonialism.³³ According to the missionary historian

World Council of Churches, Second Report', August 1967, pp. 10.

³⁰ Michael G. Thompson, *For God and globe: Christian internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2015.

³¹ Udi Greenberg, 'Protestants, decolonisation, and European integration, 1885-1961', *Journal of Modern History*, 89, 2, 2017, pp. 314-354.

³² Gene Zubovich, 'The Protestant search for "the universal Christian community" between decolonisation and communism', *Religions*, 8, 17, 2017.

³³ For a case study of this process in France and Algeria, see Darcie Fontaine, *Decolonizing Christianity: religion and the end of empire in France and Algeria*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. On how Jews in northern Africa dealt with similar questions, see Nathan Kurz, "'A sphere above the nations?': The rise and fall of international Jewish human rights politics, 1945-1975", PhD thesis, Yale University, 2015, ch. 4.

Adrian Hastings, the IMC and the WCC, as well as the Catholic Congregation de Propaganda Fide, were the most important bodies worldwide in cultivating a turn away from ‘missionary nationalism’.³⁴

At the same time, the ecumenical movement as a whole was slow to endorse self-determination as a principle, let alone as a right. At a 1956 discussion of the CCIA Executive Committee, which intended to clarify the concept of self-determination, the participants distinguished between self-determination as a ‘principle’ and as a ‘concrete right’ that came into being under ‘certain conditions’ but failed to enunciate these to a significant degree. Nolde had to admit in retrospect that because of disagreement among the WCC’s constituency on ‘the proper tempo and scope of the decolonisation process’, the CCIA took ‘a rather cautious, quite possibly an over-cautious approach to most of the colonial issues’.³⁵ Indeed, the CCIA and the churches it represented shared much of the paternalistic outlook of colonial governments which legitimated continued colonial rule by reference to nebulous criteria of the ‘fitness’ or ‘preparedness’ of the colonised for even limited forms of self-government. The CCIA insisted on obtaining the ‘voluntary’ cooperation of colonial powers rather than risk ‘alienating’ them, ‘having in mind the objective of a voluntary rather than a coerced acceptance by all nations of their responsibilities for the well-being of dependent peoples’.³⁶

Meanwhile, the missionary movement sought to use human rights language to safeguard their position in newly independent countries. Missionaries had described religious liberty as a ‘human right’ as early as the 1928 Jerusalem conference of the IMC – though they had then paired it with a second ‘human right’, ‘the maintenance by each nation of law and order for all within its bounds’. At the 1938 Tambaram conference, influenced by the 1937 Oxford conference, the IMC addressed the tension between these two rights by putting forward religious freedom as a condition for the legitimacy of

³⁴ Adrian Hastings, ‘The clash of nationalism and universalism within twentieth-century missionary Christianity’, in Brian Stanley and Elaine Low, eds., *Missions, nationalism, and the end of empire*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, pp. 15-33.

³⁵ O. Frederick Nolde, ‘Ecumenical action in international affairs’, in Harold E. Fey, ed., *The ecumenical advance: a history of the ecumenical movement, vol. 2: 1948-1968*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993, 1st edn. 1970, pp. 278-9.

³⁶ CCIA, *The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs 1952-1953*, London and New York: CCIA, 1953, pp. 35.

states: ‘an essential element in a better international order is freedom of religion’.³⁷ In the post-war period, during which processes of decolonisation accelerated, the CCIA would assist numerous constituents in lobbying for constitutional provisions in line with the Universal Declaration’s Article 18 and ecumenical statements on religious freedom. The CCIA distributed two documents widely to church leaders, one providing advice on how to lobby for religious freedom in constitutions and one providing an overview of recently adopted provisions.³⁸ In a 1961 article on religious liberty, Nolde argued that human rights could be most effectively protected through ‘the mind and will of the people as reflected in constitutions, law, courts, and practice. It follows that action to promote the observance of human rights, if it is to be meaningful, must be domestic.’ He saw international action as complementary to this, especially ‘the very knowledge that the eyes of the world are upon the local scene and that world public opinion is increasingly ready to condemn or to commend’.³⁹

But in practice the CCIA’s activity straddled the domestic and the international spheres. Through its activity in influencing constitutions, the ecumenical movement sought to inject its ideals directly into the groundwater of the domestic sphere. A key area of ecumenical concern for religious freedom was in majority Muslim societies in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.⁴⁰ This section discusses two key cases in which ecumenical human rights discourse played a role in negotiating the future relationship between Muslims and Protestants in majority Muslim countries: Indonesia and Nigeria. Each represented a large Muslim population (in Indonesia’s case, the world’s largest). While in

³⁷ Quoted in John Stuart, ‘Empire, mission, ecumenism, and human rights: “religious liberty” in Egypt, 1919-1956’, *Church History*, 83, 1, 2014, pp. 118, 121.

³⁸ WCCA CCIA 428.15.3.2.2.2 O. Frederick Nolde, ‘Notes on procedures for securing constitutional safeguards for religious liberty’, 26 October 1954; and WCC CCIA 428.6.24 CCIA Country files / Nigeria [unnumbered first box; alternative designation, per inventory by Dwain C. Epps: 428.16.1.38] CCIA, ‘Constitutional provisions for religious liberty: a compilation of provisions in constitutions recently adopted and in constitutions operative for a transitional period’, 1957.

³⁹ WCCA CCIA 428.15.3.2.2.3 Offprint of O. Frederick Nolde, ‘Religious Liberty Considered as an International Problem’, *The Ecumenical Review*, 13, 4, 1961, pp. 5.

⁴⁰ On Egypt, see Stuart, ‘Empire, Mission, Ecumenism, and Human Rights’.

Indonesia, ecumenists' initial success soon faced setbacks, the protections of religious freedom applied in Nigeria were emulated in numerous other countries emerging from British colonialism.⁴¹

Religious freedom and the Indonesian transition to independence

In late August 1945, the newly proclaimed Republican government in Jakarta adopted a constitution that had been drafted before the Japanese surrender, by the Japanese-established Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence. The constitution was 'short and skeletal (...) more like notes for a constitution than a comprehensive basis for a new state'.⁴² The Committee had initially envisioned an obligation in the constitution's preamble for Muslims to abide by Islamic law (part of the so-called Jakarta Charter) as well as the requirement that the head of state should be a Muslim. According to M. C. Ricklefs, a warning from the Japanese Navy 'that Christian Indonesians in its area would disapprove of any special role for Islam' led nationalist leaders to abandon these proposals, though they would come back to haunt the government in the late 1950s.⁴³ In Article 29, the constitution established the religious foundation of the state in language acceptable to both Christians and Muslims, and set out a provision for freedom of religion: 'The State is based on the belief in the Divine Omnipotence. (...) The State guarantees the freedom of every resident to profess his own religion and to worship according to his religion and belief.'⁴⁴

Facing the prospect of independence, Christians in Indonesia were apprehensive about their future as a small and in many places tiny religious minority. At an August 1946 meeting on the future of mission in Indonesia, the sociologist and missionary pastor C. L. van Doorn argued that Dutch Christians should avoid taking a defensive posture. This would require them not to cloister themselves

⁴¹ On British missionaries and decolonisation in Africa more generally, see John Stuart, *British missionaries and the end of empire: east, central, and southern Africa, 1939-1964*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011.

⁴² Simon Butt and Timothy Lindsey, *The constitution of Indonesia: a contextual analysis*, Oxford: Hart, 2012, pp. 2.

⁴³ M.C. Ricklefs, *A history of modern Indonesia since c. 1200*, 3rd edn., Palgrave 2008, pp. 262.

⁴⁴ I use here the official translation, but draw from Herbert Feith, *The decline of constitutional democracy in Indonesia*, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur: Equinox Publishing, 2007, 1st edn. 1962, pp. 98.

or to adopt an air of superiority but instead to join Indonesians “in the establishment of an Indonesian state, governed by the rule of law”, guided by the gospel’.⁴⁵ However, the second speaker, the missionary consul J. C. Hoekendijk, focused on the issue of religious freedom, on the basis of a memorandum drafted on his initiative by the ecumenical *Contact Commissie Kerk en Zending* (Contact Commission Church and Mission). This memorandum expressed worries about the possibility of Islamic pressure outside the main islands of Java and Sumatra. In his accompanying address, Hoekendijk cited historical examples from the Middle East in which Christians were relegated to second-class citizenship and gave an overview of ecumenical discussions on the issue of religious freedom.⁴⁶

The memorandum was sent to Lt. GovernorGeneral H. J. van Mook, the head of the Dutch East Indies government. The churches and missionaries quoted as their point of departure the 1944 San Francisco statement of the American Joint Committee on Religious Liberty (JCRL), a precursor to the Universal Declaration’s Article 18. They explicitly rejected the possibility of safeguarding religious freedom through a system of minority rights, because history had shown ‘that the maintenance of the rights of a minority in fact never rises above permitting the status quo to be maintained’, whereas religion contained a ‘dynamic element’, as revealed through its ‘missionary-expansionary character’.⁴⁷ The letter then went on to invoke the UN Charter’s provisions for religious freedom, which the letter asserted went beyond freedom of worship to include observance, organisation, and (missionary) activities, within the boundaries of the law. The Charter in fact merely mentioned religion in its non-discrimination clauses, but the UN’s involvement in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict after January 1946 made it a salient point of reference. The authors also distinguished between a set of six rights that the church was due as a religious body, from the establishment of its own liturgy to the freedom to carry

⁴⁵ Quoted in Hans van de Wal, *Tot op het bot verdeeld: Nederlandse protestanten, de zending en de Indonesische revolutie* [Hopelessly divided: Dutch Protestants, mission, and the Indonesian revolution], Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012, pp. 119.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

⁴⁷ Archives *Raad voor de Zending*, Utrechts Archief (henceforth RZ-UA) 7213 Memoranda en correspondentie betreffende godsdienstvrijheid in Indonesië, 1946-1947, *Raad voor de Zending* to Lieutenant-Governor-General Van Mook, 1946, pp. 2.

out philanthropic work, and five rights of individual believers, including the right to change one's religion and to spread one's faith through witness and education (stopping short of an explicit right to propagate or evangelise). The call to recognise the corporate rights of the church reflected the legacy of pre-war ecumenical statements on religious freedom, coming ahead of the Amsterdam Assembly's greater emphasis on the individual believer in its 'Declaration on Religious Liberty'.

From 1-12 October 1946, the Dutch East-Indies government held a conference at which it solicited the views of minorities on their future in a federal Indonesia. The Dutch theologian J. Verkuyl made an appeal not only to religious freedom but to 'human rights', while referring to the UN Charter and the JCRL's statement.⁴⁸ According to Hoekendijk, as a result of Verkuyl's efforts 'the short Statement on Religious Liberty was officially adopted as a general directive'.⁴⁹ In November, Verkuyl and Hoekendijk's replacement, U.H. van Beyma, again petitioned the Dutch East-Indies government, this time more specifically to safeguard religious freedom in the future Indonesian constitution.⁵⁰

The efforts by Dutch missionaries seem to have turned from the Dutch to the Indonesians since, in the November 1946 Linggadjati Agreement, it was agreed that drafting the provisional constitution would be up to the Indonesians.⁵¹ Hoekendijk recollected that after an address on religious liberty that he had given at a missionary conference in Batavia in August 1946, a number of 'the Indonesians present took this address with them to Eastern Indonesia [with its substantial Christian populations] and accepted the statement with our interpretation'. He also wrote that 'the memoranda prepared by our group found there [sic] way through under ground [sic] channels to Djokja [Yogyakarta]', the Republican capital. And Hoekendijk recounted, with pride, that he and colleagues including Verkuyl had successfully introduced the JCRL's statement on religious liberty 'into one of the recommendations of an [unspecified] *official political* meeting', a fact which they had then referenced

⁴⁸ Quoted in Van de Wal, *Tot op het bot*, pp. 173.

⁴⁹ WCCA [unprocessed materials] CCIA Country Files / Asia / Indonesia 1948-1968, file: Indonesia, Republic of, 1948-66, A.L. Warnshuis to Nolde, Roswell P. Barnes, and Wynn C. Fairfield, 24 January 1950, enclosure, pp. 1.

⁵⁰ Van de Wal, *Tot op het bot*, pp. 173.

⁵¹ P.J. Drooglever, 'The genesis of the Indonesian constitution of 1949', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 153, 1, 1997, pp. 81.

to build further support. He also noted the particular utility of having an ecumenical statement to which they could refer: ‘We never gave it in Dutch and always pointed to the fact that this was not a Western, but an *ecumenical* principle.’⁵²

Between 1947 and 1949, the Netherlands undertook two major military offensives to quash the Republic of Indonesia, severely damaging the prospects of future bilateral relations and prompting international outrage. Dutch missionaries were more critical of these developments than the vast majority of churches in the Netherlands, leading to conflict with those who refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of Indonesians’ desire for full-fledged independence. At the same time, they continued their efforts to promote religious freedom in the federal constitution. In a 1949 memorandum, the ecumenical *Raad voor de Zending* [Missionary Council] quoted Searle Bates’ 1945 *A Study of Religious Liberty* – Hoekendijk, who had received a copy from the American missionary leader A. L. Warnshuis after a 1945 visit to New York, would later say it had been ‘our textbook’⁵³ – which stated that Indonesia’s Muslims ‘are less fanatical than the more intense people of the Near East’. Yet while the Dutch missionaries agreed, they held that ‘throughout all of Islam there [is] visible a certain inclination, tendency, with regard to the way in which the community of Christ is approached’.⁵⁴ Protestants saw a desire to enable government restriction of missionary activity in attempts by the Indonesian Muslim Party to preserve a legal provision known as article 177, which required the Governor-General to give missionaries permission to operate in a given area.⁵⁵ Another indicator was a recent parliamentary session in the *Negara Indonesia Timur*, the Dutch-established ‘State of East Indonesia’, in which Muslims, joined by Bali Hindus, had passed a law that allowed the interdiction of missionary activity if it threatened ‘public order’.⁵⁶ For the missionaries, abandoning evangelisation

⁵² Warnshuis to Nolde, Barnes, and Fairfield, enclosure, pp. 1 (italics in original).

⁵³ Warnshuis to Nolde, Barnes, and Fairfield, enclosure, pp. 1.

⁵⁴ RZ-UA 3376 *Raad voor de Zending*, ‘Aantekeningen over godsdienstvrijheid met inachtneming van de situatie in Indonesië’, 1949, pp. 7.

⁵⁵ RZ-UA 7213 Gerard Slotemaker de Bruijne, ‘Artikel 177 en de Islam’, n.d. [probably late 1947].

⁵⁶ WCCA CCIA 428.15.3.2.1.4.16 J. Verkuyl and C.O.A. van Nieuwenhuyzen, ‘Indonesia: background’, March 1950, in CCIA, ‘Religious freedom in face of dominant forces: part III: religious domination: reports on selected areas’, July 1950,

was not an option, because ‘this would mean the death of the church (...). So this freedom will have to be fought for continuously.’⁵⁷

The arsenal from which missionaries drew the weapons to fight for their conception of religious freedom was, as in 1946, largely provided by the ecumenical movement’s work on religious liberty, now expanded with the Amsterdam Assembly’s 1948 declaration, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and a WCC document about ‘The Marxist Conception of Religious Liberty’ (the inclusion of this cautionary assessment reflected concerns that communism might become a major force in Indonesian politics). Most importantly, the *Raad* indicated its support for the religious freedom provisions suggested for the future Indonesian constitution by Verkuyl in his 1948 dissertation.⁵⁸ The memorandum claimed that Verkuyl’s proposal ‘certainly was a source of inspiration in [the constitution of the] N[egara].I[ndonesia].T[imur]’, the provisions of which were also provided in full. Verkuyl’s proposal included the freedom to evangelise and the right to change one’s religion. According to the *Raad* it was a ‘maximum elaboration of the the [sic] definition of San Francisco’. While its full adoption was considered unlikely, it was considered the ideal outcome for which to strive.⁵⁹

At the July 1949 Inter-Indonesian Conference in Yogyakarta and Batavia, the Republican and Federalist factions among the Indonesians worked out a provisional constitution, in which they decided to include the full text of the Universal Declaration’s Article 18.⁶⁰ The Dutch accepted this draft without significant change at the Round Table Conference in October.⁶¹ Nolde observed that the 1949

pp. 6.

⁵⁷ RZ-UA 3376 *Raad voor de Zending*, ‘Aantekeningen over godsdienstvrijheid met inachtneming van de situatie in Indonesië’, 1949, pp. 7.

⁵⁸ J. Verkuyl, *Enkele aspecten van het probleem der godsdienstvrijheid in Azië* [Some aspects of the problem of religious liberty in Asia], Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1948.

⁵⁹ RZ-UA 3376 *Raad voor de Zending*, ‘Aantekeningen over godsdienstvrijheid met inachtneming van de situatie in Indonesië’, 1949, pp. 7, 16.

⁶⁰ ‘244. Besluiten van het tweede gedeelte van de Inter-Indonesische Conferentie gehouden te Batavia van 31 juli tot 2 aug. 1949.’, in P.J. Drooglever and M.J.B. Schouten, eds., *Officiële bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische Betrekkingen 1945-1950. Negentiende deel, 1 juni 1949 – 15 september 1949* [Official documents concerning Dutch-Indonesian relations 1945-1950. Volume nineteen, 1 June 1949 – 15 September 1949], The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1994, pp. 441.

⁶¹ Drooglever, ‘Indonesian constitution of 1949’, pp. 78-81.

constitution's provisions on human rights were 'encouraging'.⁶² This constitution lasted only a few months, as the federal state was overturned in favour of a unitary one, but it was the basis on which the 1950 provisional constitution was drafted.⁶³

Yet while both the 1949 and 1950 constitutions included human rights provisions based on the Universal Declaration, the 1950 constitution was far less explicit regarding freedom of religion. While the 1949 constitution had copied the Universal Declaration's Article 18, the 1950 constitution truncated the language to focus only on 'inner' freedom: 'Everyone is entitled to freedom of religion, conscience, and thought.' A separate provision, Article 43, maintained language from the 1949 constitution on the religious nature of the state and religious freedom. The government claimed that the two articles combined sufficiently covered 'the intention of' the Universal Declaration's Article 18, in allowing for evangelisation, the right to change one's religion, and parental choice in religious education.⁶⁴ Ecumenical Christians worried, however, that the freedom to 'profess' one's religion and the only implicit recognition of the right to change one's religion constituted a substantial reduction in the scope of the freedom to manifest religion in Indonesian society. Questioned in parliament, Prime Minister Mohammed Hatta explained that the article had been shortened because the previous formulation 'could be interpreted as a kind of recommendation to change one's religion', as a church periodical reported; it added the supposition that Muslim pressure likely explained the change.⁶⁵

Religious freedom remained contested through the 1950s.⁶⁶ Even before the constitutional change, Dutch ecumenists saw the newly established Ministry of Religion as 'nothing but a Ministry

⁶² WCCA, unprocessed materials, CCIA Country Files / Europe / Germany 1947-1950 / File: Germany/CCIA Correspondence 1946-1950 New York Office, Nolde to Wilhelm Menn, 9 November 1949.

⁶³ Butt and Lindsey, *The constitution of Indonesia*, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁴ R. Supomo and Garth N. Jones, trans., *The provisional constitution of the Republic of Indonesia: with annotations and explanations on each article*, Ann Arbor, MI: Cornell University Modern Indonesia Project, 4th edn., 1964, pp. 20, 31-2.

⁶⁵ WCCA [unprocessed materials] CCIA Country Files / Asia / Indonesia 1948-1968, file: Religious liberty, M.H.

Bolkestein, 'Godsdienstvrijheid in Indonesië', *De Hervormde Kerk*, no date [25 November 1950], pp. 3.

⁶⁶ Henk Schulte Noordholt, 'Indonesia in the 1950s: nation, modernity, and the post-colonial state', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 167, 4, 2011, pp. 396-7.

for Moslem Interests'.⁶⁷ When the process of formulating a permanent constitution began in the late 1950s, Indonesian Christian representatives, both Protestant and Catholic, pushed for the insertion of the Universal Declaration's Article 18.⁶⁸ Indonesian Christian leaders such as Rev. W. J. Rumambi and J. C. T. Simorangkir, who were also leaders of the Indonesian Council of Churches (founded in 1950), participated in the debates and called for the secular nature of the state to be maintained.⁶⁹ These debates became deadlocked, because Islamic representatives attempted to insert the Jakarta Charter's phrase on Islamic law while others resisted this.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, Sukarno proposed the establishment of a governmental system termed 'Guided Democracy', and in 1957 he effectively suspended the constitution. On 5 July 1959 Sukarno reinstated the 1945 constitution by decree and stated that the Jakarta Charter did not form a legal part of the constitution, thus ensuring the secular character of the state.⁷¹ Yet the return to the 1945 constitution meant a further reduction in the constitutional protection of religious freedom and a blow to ecumenical aspirations (as well as a general slide into authoritarianism).

Kenneth Grubb and religious freedom in Northern Nigeria

Nigeria, and especially Northern Nigeria, was an important focus of the CCIA's work in the 1950s, because of the missionary and Christian minority interests there. While the country as a whole was characterised by significant religious diversity, including large Christian populations, the North was almost two-thirds Muslim, with most others 'following their tribal beliefs and a small Christian

⁶⁷ Verkuyl and van Nieuwenhuyzen, 'Indonesia', pp. 7.

⁶⁸ Thomas van den End and Jan Sihar Aritonang, '1800-2005: a national overview', in Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink, eds., *A history of Christianity in Indonesia*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008, pp. 199.

⁶⁹ Jan Sihar Aritonang, 'The ecumenical movement in Indonesia with special attention to the National Council of Churches', in Aritonang and Steenbrink, *Christianity in Indonesia*, pp. 843.

⁷⁰ Ricklefs, *Indonesia*, 321.

⁷¹ Yong Cheong, 'The political structures of the independent states', in Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge history of southeast Asia, vol. 2: the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 423-4.

minority'.⁷² The CCIA had a long-established connection with the churches through the Christian Council in Nigeria (founded in 1930). This section focuses on the role of the ecumenical movement in bringing about Nigeria's 1959 bill of rights, which included provisions on religious liberty in line with ecumenical desiderata. Once the constitution had enshrined religious freedom, ecumenical leaders in independent Nigeria saw in these provisions a key instrument to preserve 'the right to propagate our faith' (at least until the military coup in 1966, which is beyond the scope of this article).⁷³

While constitution-making in Nigeria had a long history, with respect to human rights, it entered a new phase in the 1950s. In 1953, the Methodist Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the Action Group, which represented Nigeria's Western Region, had taken the initiative in crafting a bill of rights for Nigeria. A London-trained lawyer, as well as a teacher and trade union leader, Awolowo enlisted the support of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, which controlled the Eastern Region, led by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe. Their joint proposal drew inspiration from the Indian constitution (which had in turn drawn inspiration from the United States) and included provisions on the freedom of religion. However, the Northern Region opposed the idea of a bill of rights and the Colonial Office's view at the time was that bills of rights were ineffective or even dangerous. According to Stanley De Smith, the Secretary of State for the Colonies responded to the proposal of a bill of rights 'by laughing the idea out of the conference room'.⁷⁴ By 1955, however, as described by Charles Parkinson, the Secretary of States for the Colonies and the Governor General of Nigeria had both been replaced by officials more sympathetic to bills of rights. The new Governor General, Sir James Robertson, also convinced the Northern People's Congress that a bill of rights could protect the population of the Northern Region from discrimination by the southern regions. Thus, the alignment of forces had shifted and the notion of a bill of rights started gaining traction. At this time, the Christian

⁷² Charles O. H. Parkinson, *Bills of rights and decolonisation: the emergence of domestic human rights instruments in Britain's overseas territories*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 134.

⁷³ WCCA General Secretariat documentation / Nigeria [unprocessed materials], S.I. Kale and H. Hogan, 'Christian responsibility in an independent Nigeria', no date [probably 1962], pp. 100.

⁷⁴ Stanley De Smith, *The new Commonwealth and its constitutions*, London: Stevens & Sons, 1964, pp. 167. My thanks to Roger Clark for drawing my attention to this work and the case of Nigeria.

Council of Churches in Nigeria and the CCIA, especially its chairman, Grubb – who was also the President of the Anglican Church Missionary Society – began to push for the inclusion of religious freedom, which would result in its inclusion in the 1959 bill of rights.⁷⁵

Ecumenical efforts to include the Universal Declaration's Article 18 in Nigerian constitutional provisions got underway in 1955, as the records of a meeting between Grubb, Nigerian church and missionary representatives, and the regional government of the North illustrate.⁷⁶ It seems likely that such representations were what the Northern Region's governor referred to when he notified the Colonial Office, in August 1955, that 'people were nervous about the prospect of early self-government and the absence, so far, of a Northern "Declaration of Human Rights" with particular regard for religious freedom'. Parkinson credits this missive with setting in motion the Colonial Office's acceptance of the need for constitutional protection of religious freedom, though it did not yet want a bill of rights.⁷⁷ Subsequently, Grubb had lunch with Tom Williamson, the lead on Nigerian affairs in the Colonial Office's West Africa Department, who showed him the draft proposal for a constitution for Northern Nigeria. Grubb made two points regarding religious liberty, namely the need to secure freedom to change one's religion and the right of parents to choose their children's religious instruction, both of which were favourably received. However, reporting on the approach, Grubb noted an important reservation made by Williamson, who had said that he and his colleagues 'did not like to proceed "by reference to the Declaration of Human Rights" but preferred an approach by reference to constitutional provisions which may be obtainable in other colonial constitutions'. Specifically, he had in mind the Sudan Self-Government Statute. Williamson 'attributed this attitude to a general dislike both among parliamentarians and higher officials at the Colonial Office to the activities of the United Nations in regard to dependent peoples', an attitude that reflected a dislike of international scrutiny and

⁷⁵ Parkinson, *Bills of rights and decolonisation*, pp. 135-40.

⁷⁶ WCC CCIA 428.6.24 CCIA Country files / Nigeria [unnumbered first box] Council of Churches in Nigeria and Sudan

Interior Mission, Minutes of meeting with the Civil Secretary of the Northern Region of Nigeria, 20 April 1955, pp. 2-5.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Parkinson, *Bills of rights and decolonisation*, pp. 140-1.

an attachment to established colonial legislation. Nevertheless, Grubb pressed Williamson to promise that he would ‘study Article 18 and other relevant articles in the Declaration’.⁷⁸

Article 18 did make its way into Colonial Office policy, after a church and missionary delegation met with John Hare, the Minister of State (standing in for the Secretary of State for the Colonies), on 16 July 1956. The delegation was led by representatives of the British Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council, but also included Grubb, the Rev. Canon C.A. Forster, Secretary of the Christian Council in Nigeria, and the heads of the Overseas Council of the Church of England and the Free Church Federal Council. Though the CCIA archives do not include minutes of the meeting, a document prepared by the British Council of Churches – an important constituent of the WCC – setting out its requests, opened with a call to include Universal Declaration Articles 18 and 19 into the constitutions being prepared for Nigeria, with special reference to the North, because of its government’s ‘substantial Muslim majority’. A line at the end noted that while the CCIA ‘has been kept informed (...) [it] seemed more convenient to make the present approach through the British Council of Churches’.⁷⁹ The meeting prompted the Colonial Office to add the Universal Declaration’s rights to change one’s religion and to propagate it to the religious freedom provision of the Sudan Self-Government Statute. Pressure from the three Nigerian regions at the 1957 constitutional conference then contributed to the expansion of this minimalist commitment into a full-fledged bill of rights, a departure from long-established British policy.⁸⁰

The following year, Grubb spent almost a month in Nigeria. In his report on religious liberty he wrote that Nigeria was ‘the key area in Christian/Moslem confrontation in Africa’. Grubb worried that in the North, with its majority Muslim population, unlike in the East or the West, ‘the new nationalism’ might ‘turn against the missionary from overseas’. Meeting with Ahmadu Bello, the premier of

⁷⁸ WCC CCIA 428.6.24 CCIA Country files / Nigeria [unnumbered first box] Kenneth G. Grubb to Kenneth Slack, ‘Religious Freedom in Northern Nigeria’, 16 May 1955, pp. 2. Cf. Parkinson, *Bills of rights and decolonisation*, pp. 144.

⁷⁹ WCC CCIA 428.6.24 CCIA Country files / Nigeria [unnumbered first box] British Council of Churches, ‘Nigeria – Religious Liberty and Human Rights’, July 1956.

⁸⁰ Parkinson, *Bills of rights and decolonisation*, pp. 145, 150.

Northern Nigeria, Grubb asked him to confirm the right to change one's religion, to which Bello 'emphatically' assented while voicing a qualification with respect to 'law and order'. Grubb felt that Bello's expressed support for rights and freedoms was 'probably only words'. At a subsequent meeting, the Acting Governor of Northern Nigeria indicated that he shared Grubb's scepticism.⁸¹

In Lagos, Grubb met with the newly established Minorities Commission, headed by Henry Willink, which had been tasked with addressing calls for minority protections. The otherwise pressured and overburdened body indicated that it was eager to receive a memorandum from the Christian Council in Nigeria. With Grubb's assistance in drafting, the Council sent a memorandum to the Commission in December 1957, expressing its desire that 'the Federal and Regional constitutions of our country should contain satisfactory guarantees of human rights and freedoms', in the interests of 'the peaceful development of the country and the religious interests of all', given its nature as a 'multi-communal state'. It echoed ecumenical wording in asserting that in such a society, 'no religion should claim or possess rights, privileges, or freedoms which are denied to any other religion'. The appeal listed seven specific religious rights, including the freedom to change one's religion, the freedom of parents to choose their children's religious education, and the freedom 'to establish and operate institutions for religious and charitable purposes', all long-standing priorities of the CCIA. The Christian Council followed up these religious rights with a set of four more general human rights, most importantly non-discrimination: 'the equality of all before the law, regardless of race, tribe, religion, or sex'. The document clearly showed the influence of the CCIA, through the focus on particular religious rights and the actual wording, as well as through their connection to human rights in general.⁸²

The intervention by Grubb and his Nigerian-based colleagues dovetailed with the interests of the Minorities Commission and the Colonial Office. The report of the Willink Commission made

⁸¹ WCC CCIA 428.6.24 CCIA Country files / Nigeria [unnumbered first box] Kenneth G. Grubb, 'Religious Liberty in Nigeria', December 1957, pp. 1-4.

⁸² WCC CCIA 428.6.24 CCIA Country files / Nigeria [unnumbered first box] Council of Churches in Nigeria to the Minorities Commission, December 1957, pp. 1-3.

repeated reference to the ‘Christian bodies’ that had made representations on ‘certain fundamental rights’, which it singled out for positive comment, as opposed to ‘almost all the witnesses’, who ‘were insistent that nothing but a separate state could meet their problems’. These ‘Christian bodies’ were in fact only Grubb and the Christian Council in Nigeria, since no other group had called for a bill of rights as a means of protecting minorities.⁸³ The Commission’s report adhered closely to the desiderata put forward in the Council’s memorandum. The drafters of the proposed bill of rights had not taken the Universal Declaration as a source but instead (in the absence of a British bill of rights) drawn on the European Convention on Human Rights. However, since the latter’s Article 9 was virtually identical to the Universal Declaration’s provision, this mattered little with respect to religious freedom. The Minorities Commission also included two clauses on religious education borrowed from the Pakistani constitution. Strikingly, the report even went on to list six religious rights that it recommended be specifically taken up in drafting the constitution, a list apparently lifted almost directly from the Council’s memorandum.⁸⁴ While the Colonial Office refused to take up these latter rights, for fear of incurring Muslim outrage, the remaining protections fulfilled ecumenical hopes.⁸⁵ The Nigerian bill of rights then served as a model for many other British overseas territories obtaining independence: Sierra Leone, Jamaica, Uganda, Kenya, Malta, British Guiana, Aden, and Nyasaland (of Commonwealth countries, only Ghana and Tanganyika did not enact ‘justiciable bills of rights’).⁸⁶ Thus, the activities of the CCIA and the Council of Christian Churches in Nigeria had obtained a major coup in securing religious freedom provisions in decolonising countries.

⁸³ Parkinson, *Bills of rights and decolonisation*, pp. 151.

⁸⁴ *Nigeria: report of the commission appointed to enquire into the fears of minorities and the means of allaying them*, London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1958, pp. 98 and 102-3.

⁸⁵ Parkinson, *Bills of rights and decolonisation*, pp. 161-162.

⁸⁶ De Smith, *The new Commonwealth and its constitutions*, pp. 193-6.

Human rights as social justice: the ‘revolutionary’ recasting of ecumenical internationalism

Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the nature of the ecumenical movement changed fundamentally, as it became both ‘globalised’ and ‘politicised’. Its membership became less Western, and the churches adopted more forthright political stances on an increasing number of issues, with an emphasis on questions facing the Third World.⁸⁷ What Justin Reynolds has termed a ‘revolutionary’ tradition in ecumenical thought that had simmered below the surface since the 1940s, primarily in the World Student Christian Federation, came to the fore.⁸⁸ This was showcased by the 1966 Geneva Conference on Church and Society, presided over by the Indian theologian M.M. Thomas. Nearly half the delegates were from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, eight observers from the Roman Catholic Church attended, and the majority of those present were laypeople (experts on economics, law, sociology, but also technical and natural sciences).

On the one hand, the conference considered concerns of the recently decolonised countries, notably ‘the social consequences of decolonisation, such as urbanisation and industrialisation’; on the other, it also discussed secularisation and societal changes in Europe, particularly increases in the role of technology, diversity, and individualisation. Visser ‘t Hooft, who would retire the same month, spoke about the need to expand the concept of the responsible society to that of a ‘responsible world society’. This conception echoed efforts since the late 1930s to articulate a universal ‘international ethos’. Yet this now encountered resistance from delegates from the Third World and those in favour of ‘a contextual ethics’, who responded along cultural-relativist lines: Visser ‘t Hooft’s ‘Western-Democratic’ concept was not universally valid, and what Third World countries needed was systemic change and development aid. Delegates from Latin America, notably the Colombian theologian

⁸⁷ Katharina Kunter and Annegreth Schilling, “‘Der Christ fürchtet den Umbruch nicht’: Der Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen im Spannungsfeld von Dekolonisierung, Entwestlichung und Politisierung”, in Katharina Kunter and Annegreth Schilling, eds., *Globalisierung der Kirchen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014, pp. 24.

⁸⁸ On the roots of the ‘revolutionary’ tradition, see Justin Reynolds, ‘Against the world: international Protestantism and the ecumenical movement between secularisation and politics’, PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2016, ch. 6. See also Reynolds’ contribution to this special issue.

Gonzalo Castillo Cárdenas and the American missionary and theologian Richard Shaull, promoted the theological notion of ‘revolution’.⁸⁹

The rise of the revolutionary tradition sat uneasily with the established ecumenical approach to human rights. Representatives of the former were responding to the severe challenges facing many recently independent countries, which led them to focus on socioeconomic questions, both globally and locally. But, notwithstanding Nolde and his colleagues’ commitment to the development of UN human rights instruments, the CCIA’s human rights agenda remained focused on religious liberty, even as the ground supporting this agenda shifted. For example, significant advances at the UN were made during this time in relation to race, an area which would soon become a focal point for the WCC’s international engagement, yet the CCIA’s reports do not suggest specific interventions, in contrast to its focused work on religious liberty.⁹⁰ As an internal overview of its work acknowledged, ‘Racial and ethnic tensions have not figured very much in the C.C.I.A. business during the first two decades’.⁹¹ Though the 1966 Geneva conference and the 1968 Uppsala Assembly laid the groundwork for some of the changes to come, the predominance of the CCIA’s conception of human rights would only gradually be challenged, a process encouraged by the WCC’s new General Secretary, Blake, who sought to make the WCC more globally representative.⁹²

It was over the course of the early 1970s that the WCC and CCIA undertook to reconcile human rights with the ‘revolutionary’ tradition. The catalyst was provided by ecumenical engagement with Latin America, including the rise of military dictatorships, the language of resistance articulated by liberation theologians, and interaction with international human rights campaigns. As Patrick William Kelly has also shown, the Chilean coup in 1973 spurred the WCC first to set up a massive humanitarian

⁸⁹ Kunter and Schilling, “‘Der Christ’”, pp. 37-45.

⁹⁰ On the UN’s activities on race and religion at this time, see Steven L.B. Jensen, *The making of international human rights: the 1960s, decolonisation, and the reconstruction of global values*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

⁹¹ WCCA CCIA 428.4.10 Richard M. Fagley, ‘The first twenty years in outline: a brief review of CCIA 1946-1966’, no date [1966], pp. 12.

⁹² Cf. Lehmann, *Religious NGOs*, ch. 5. On Blake’s signature achievement, the WCC’s Programme to Combat Racism (established in 1969), see Antti Laine, *Ecumenical attack against racism: the anti-racist programme of the World Council of Churches, 1968-1974*, Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2015.

relief effort that moved roughly 10,000 political refugees out of the country, an effort rivalling that of the UN in size. But once that crisis had abated, in 1974, the WCC's support transitioned into support for human rights activism. The WCC provided the vital funding for the ecumenical Pro Peace Committee (later transformed into the Vicariate of Solidarity) and worked side by side with Amnesty International to support it.⁹³

Unlike Amnesty, which had a rigidly circumscribed 'mandate', the WCC's connections with Latin-American church leaders led it to embrace a wider agenda than civil and political rights. This included efforts at grassroots empowerment and social and economic programs, conceived of both as mitigating the military regime and resisting it. In a meeting with the WCC on 31 May 1974, the Committee's leading lawyer, José Zalaquett (who would upon his exile go on to become head of Amnesty's International Executive Committee), argued that the churches were uniquely well-placed to take a two-pronged approach to delegitimizing the Chilean regime: they should expose 'the sham and the myth behind' not only the 'legality' of the junta but also its 'economic justice', in terms of jobs, inflation, and availability of goods and services. Zalaquett argued that the government had 'in effect isolated itself', alienating even the Christian Democratic party, 'which was behind the overthrow of the Allende government'; 'even the right wing "gremios" – or professional associations – are affected by the economic oppression'.⁹⁴ Meanwhile Harper cast Chilean issues in not only individual but also, and increasingly, in collective terms. For instance, he argued that human rights violations in Chile were 'a mass, and massive problem (...) [which] must be treated, therefore, as a mass problem, and not – as in the past – as a [sic] individual problem, by the churches'. He wrote that the churches ought to be 'the defender of the oppressed- not in terms, primarily, of the individual but in terms of groups of people'.⁹⁵

⁹³ Patrick William Kelly, "'Human rights and Christian responsibility': transnational Christian activism, human rights, and state violence in Brazil and Chile in the 1970s', in Alexander Wilde, ed., *Religious responses to violence: human rights in Latin America past and present*, South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016, pp. 95-122.

⁹⁴ WCCA Human Rights Resources Office for Latin America (henceforth HRROLA) 249.02.02 Charles Harper, 'Situation in Chile', 6 June 1974, pp. 5 and 2.

⁹⁵ WCCA HRROLA 249.02.02 Charles Harper, 'Evaluation and proposals meeting on Tuesday June 11th, 9-11 a.m. Salle III', 10 June 1974, pp. 2-3; Chile Emergency Desk, 'TF meeting Nov. 16, 1973', 20 November 1973.

One way of conceiving of such groups, as in a later HRROLA report, was that of a ‘repressed majority’ pitted against a ‘rich and powerful minority elite’, but more specific groups could also be identified, such as the indigenous peoples of Brazil.⁹⁶ Under the ostensibly apolitical umbrella of human rights, then, the WCC supported much more wide-ranging, religiously-inspired and communitarian goals of social justice. Such an approach also characterised the new conception of human rights it developed in the early 1970s.

As Annegreth Schilling has described, many exiled Latin Americans came to work for the WCC, including the new head of its international representation, the Argentinian-Estonian lawyer Leopoldo Niilus, the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, and the Uruguayan liberation theologian Julio de Santa Ana.⁹⁷ As also described by Christian Albers, Niilus and his Study Secretary, the American Rev. Dwain C. Epps, oversaw a reworking of the ecumenical conception of human rights over the course of several meetings, culminating in a 1974 consultation on ‘Human Rights and Christian Responsibility’.⁹⁸ This meeting foregrounded African, Asian, and especially Latin American perspectives, while also incorporating Eastern European ones. The outcome of this meeting was then endorsed by the 1975 Nairobi Assembly, which indicated a break with previous ecumenical human rights engagement in emphatically including collective rights, such as ‘the Rights to Self-Determination and to Cultural Identity’.⁹⁹ Religious freedom was demoted to one right among others; as the WCC’s Executive Committee would put it in 1979, ‘if it speaks in universal terms, the church cannot isolate for priority consideration the question of its own religious freedom. Conversely, a church

⁹⁶ WCCA HRROLA 249.02.02 HRROLA report to CCIA, August 1978, pp. 2.

⁹⁷ Annegreth Schilling, *Revolution, Exil und Befreiung: der Boom des lateinamerikanischen Protestantismus in der internationalen Ökumene in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016.

⁹⁸ Christian Albers, ‘Der ÖRK und die Menschenrechte im Kontext von Kaltem Krieg und Dekolonisierung’, in Kunter and Schilling, *Globalisierung der Kirchen*, pp. 189-215.

⁹⁹ David M. Paton, ed., *Breaking barriers: Nairobi 1975: the official report of the fifth assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, 23 November-10 December, 1975*, London and Grand Rapids: SPCK and Wm. B. Eerdmans, pp. 104

which struggles for all rights for all people has, often with surprise, rediscovered something of its essential evangelical mission.’¹⁰⁰

The Nairobi Assembly connected ecumenical concerns in areas such as racism, sexism, and development to this capacious conception of human rights. Central to the WCC’s new approach was an analysis, inflected by Marxist and anticolonial modes of thinking, of the ‘root causes’ of human rights violations, which took the form of ‘unjust social structures, expressed through, e.g., economic exploitation, political manipulation, military power, class domination, psychological conditioning’, which ‘create the conditions under which human rights are denied’. The Assembly reiterated that each human being was ‘created in God’s image’, but also stated that to work for human rights meant ‘to work at the most basic level towards a society without unjust structures’.¹⁰¹ The WCC thus fused appeals to the dignity of the individual human being with a contentious interpretation of socio-political questions.

Different interpretations have been offered as to how to understand the WCC’s recasting of human rights.¹⁰² Lehmann has argued that these years saw a process of ‘mainstreaming’ the concept of human rights within the WCC, whereby human rights were adopted as a ‘common denominator’ of WCC activities.¹⁰³ Indeed, different departments and commissions of the WCC could (partly) reframe their work in terms of human rights. Albers has emphasised how the process of redefining human rights served to bring ecumenists from the North and South to ‘see eye to eye’ by speaking a shared language.¹⁰⁴ Though not in relation to human rights specifically, Schilling has argued that the WCC’s

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Ans J. van der Bent, *Christian response in a world of crisis: a brief history of the WCC’s Commission of the Churches on International Affairs*, Geneva: WCC, 1986, pp. 29.

¹⁰¹ Paton, *Breaking barriers*, pp. 102.

¹⁰² For an outspoken critique, see Hedwig Richter, ‘Der Protestantismus und das linksrevolutionäre Pathos: Der Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen in Genf im Ost-West-Konflikt in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 36, 2010, pp. 408-36.

¹⁰³ Lehmann, *Religious NGOs*, pp. 112-4.

¹⁰⁴ Christian Albers, ‘Der ÖRK und die Menschenrechte im Kontext von Kaltem Krieg und Dekolonisierung’, in Kunter and Schilling, *Globalisierung der Kirchen*, pp. 209.

interaction with Christians from Latin America served to create an intermediary ‘third space (...) where theological and cultural differences were articulated and negotiated’.¹⁰⁵

These analyses point to a key feature of the human rights debate within the ecumenical movement at this time: to the ascendant representatives of the ‘revolutionary’ tradition, process mattered more than the achievement of a consensus outcome.¹⁰⁶ Rather than attempting to identify issues from a putatively neutral or universal standpoint, priority was given to understanding opposing viewpoints. This was not only seen as a precondition for meaningful practical engagement but was also necessary as the basis for any true ecumenical fellowship. Shifting notions of ecumenical unity and mission over time enabled this reorientation: unity could be manifested in diversity, at least in theory, and mission should be conceived of as global rather than directed from the West to Third World mission fields. As the WCC’s new General Secretary, Philip Potter, from the British-associated Caribbean state of Dominica, quoted the 1973 Bangkok World Mission Conference: ‘the diversity of responses to Christ is essential precisely because they are related to particular situations and are thus relevant and complementary’.¹⁰⁷

Thus, even though a text like the Nairobi Assembly’s report on ‘Structures of Injustice and Struggles for Liberation’ suggested agreement, it straddled divergent positions. This lack of a unified agenda went hand in hand with a diffusion of agency away from the CCIA and towards other WCC bodies, as well as towards ecclesiastical organizations at the national and local levels.¹⁰⁸ In the increasingly polycentric ecumenical landscape of the 1970s, such diffusion was embraced and even encouraged by the CCIA, which – in the spirit of Nairobi’s emphasis on ‘participation’ – stimulated the agency of local actors and acted as a global coordinator and clearinghouse, for instance by co-

¹⁰⁵ Schilling, *Revolution, Exil und Befreiung*, pp. 275. See also Schilling’s contribution to this special issue.

¹⁰⁶ Reynolds, ‘Against the world’, ch. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Paton, *Breaking barriers*, pp. 251.

¹⁰⁸ See James C. Kennedy, ‘Protestant ecclesiastical internationals’, in Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, eds., *Religious internationals in the modern world: globalisation and faith communities since 1750*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 292-318.

organising regional consultations on human rights.¹⁰⁹ In practice, then, and in a fundamental reorientation from the CCIA's earlier efforts to universalise its definition of religious freedom, the new ecumenical approach invited the 'vernacularising' (to adopt a phrase from Mark Philip Bradley) of human rights as circumstances required.¹¹⁰ As a wide range of ecumenical conferences and documents from the 1970s show, this reorientation meant that whereas previously it had served as a primarily legal language, human rights at this time became a theologically-laden concept in its own right, and a core element of ecumenical social ethics.¹¹¹

Conclusions

The account of ecumenical human rights advocacy from the 1940s to the 1970s given here shows that there existed a significant strand of Christian human rights engagement over the course of this period. Further research on the extent to which the language of human rights 'trickled down' from the work of the CCIA and the WCC is needed, but the extensive contacts with church leaders and missionaries suggest that human rights discourse spread far and wide, if perhaps not always deep. It is important, in this respect, to keep in mind the distinction between ecumenical leaders and their constituencies.

What is most important about this story is how the meaning of human rights changed over time. Initially, the CCIA's advocacy of religious freedom showed how a distinctly Christian understanding of this concept could be married with the secularised human rights of the UN. While the UN's formulation of human rights was universal, the ecumenical movement's primary concern in the post-war decades was with its co-religionists, whereas political Catholicism and Islam were each seen as potentially 'totalitarian' threats. The CCIA's activity in decolonising Muslim countries illustrates how

¹⁰⁹ E.g. All Africa Conference of Churches and WCC, 'Factors responsible for the violation of human rights in Africa', *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 6, 4, 1976, pp. 44-6; WCCA CCIA 428.15.3.5.4/6.1 Christian Conference of Asia, 'Consultation on Human Rights', 14-16 June 1975, Hong Kong.

¹¹⁰ Mark Philip Bradley, 'American Vernaculars: The United States and the Global Human Rights Imagination', *Diplomatic History*, 38, 1, 2014, pp. 1-21.

¹¹¹ For an overview, see Marc Reuver, ed., *Human Rights: A Challenge to Theology*, Rome: CCIA and IDOC International, 1983, pp. 16-20.

the missionary movement's interest in the freedom of evangelisation, as well as concern for the position of Christian minorities, was a major factor in its turn to human rights. The case of Italy, on the other hand, highlights the limits of the appeal of human rights, as efforts to implement and reform the constitution relied mostly on other means. All three cases show how the CCIA and its contacts at the national level strategically mixed human rights language with appeals tailored to specific national contexts.

The CCIA's focus on establishing constitutional religious freedom provisions testifies to the priority it accorded to the domestic sphere, whereas international human rights politics were only seen to play a corrective role. This complicates the distinction often made in the historiography of human rights between international and national rights language. The CCIA's approach can best be understood as a religious variant of what Roland Burke, echoing Samuel Moyn, has recently described as the distinctively 'nationalist species of internationalism' that dominated UN-centred human rights advocacy from the 1940s onwards, which 'marked the final renovation of a liberal nationalist tradition and a renewed confidence in the potential for the sovereign state, were it to be properly constituted'.¹¹²

The understanding of human rights developed by the WCC in the early 1970s, on the other hand, was capacious and pluralistic, as opposed to focused and universalising. It rejected the notion of an international ethos for a contextual one, and framed liberation in communitarian terms. Whereas the emphasis since 1948 had been on individual rights, conceived of as universal and pursued through the international institutions of the post-war order, the new approach saw human rights as an open-ended concept that could be reshaped and deployed to further a plurality of emancipatory projects. Even though the WCC still saw the UN and nascent regional human rights regimes as fora through which change could be achieved, it now conceived of human rights as primarily a moral rather than a legal

¹¹² Roland Burke, 'The internationalism of human rights', in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms: a twentieth-century history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 288. Cf. Moyn, *Last utopia*, ch. 2.

concept. This theological embrace of human rights represented a paradoxical return to a religious conception of rights, which had declined in the 1940s.

The emphasis on transnational co-operation that characterised the WCC's new approach mirrored the contemporaneous rise of grassroots human rights organisations. Yet its explicitly religious nature set it apart from more secular forms of activism, and its communitarian frame distinguished it from the individualistic focus of ascendant liberal organisations such as Amnesty International, which focused on individual cases of imprisonment, with minimal attention to political context.¹¹³ The WCC, by contrast, turned towards an approach shaped by liberation theologies that aimed at both spiritual and social transformation and thus emphatically called attention to the roots of human rights violations. Furthermore, the emphasis on the churches' engagement in their own societies contrasted sharply with Amnesty, which banned its members from working on their own country, to preserve their 'impartiality'. Burke has written that in the 1970s there were 'two poles' in human rights advocacy, one of which was exemplified by Amnesty, the other by the 'New Internationalism', exemplified by calls for a 'New International Economic Order' (NIEO). In Burke's view, the latter 'drifted to grand impersonal structures and high abstractions, all of which were to enhance sovereign power to "do good" (a questionable proposition, given the authoritarianism of its chief proponents) and to create the conditions under which human rights would be realized'.¹¹⁴ The WCC can be understood as charting a course between these two poles: it sought to address the structural causes of injustice while steering clear of the NIEO's authoritarian tendencies. The history of its engagement thus highlights the diversity of human rights discourse in the 1970s.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ On Amnesty in contrast to earlier forms of human rights activism, see Jan Eckel, 'The International League for the Rights of Man, Amnesty International, and the changing fate of human rights activism from the 1940s through the 1970s', *Humanity*, 4, 2, 2013, pp. 183-214.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 311. Cf. Albers, 'Der ÖRK', pp. 209.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, 'Human rights and history', *Past and Present*, 232, 2, 2016, pp. 279-310.

Biographical sketch

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