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Citation for published version (APA):
Brydan, D. (2021). Antagonistic Internationalists: Catholic Activists and the UN System after 1945. In D. Brydan, & J. Reinisch (Eds.), *Internationalists in European History: Rethinking the Twentieth Century* Bloomsbury Academic.

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Download date: 14. Jan. 2025

Antagonistic Internationalists: Catholic Activists and the UN System after 1945

David Brydan

In 1952 the head of the International Federation of Catholic Men, Jean le Cour Grandmaison, wrote an article on the relationship between Catholics and the new international system built around the United Nations. The principle of international cooperation, he argued, was now self-evident. 'Peace, war, liberty, prosperity are, from this time forward, world affairs.'[1] And as a result there was a clear necessity for 'international or supranational institutions capable of translating into action this solidarity of the world's peoples in confronting the questions which are vital to all.' But while the principle of international cooperation was lauded, the article was far less positive about the 'structure, methods, spirit and activity' of the UN as it had developed over the preceding six years. Like other post-war Catholic activists, Grandmaison lamented the 'error', 'failures', and 'defects' of the UN and its specialized agencies. Such defects, he felt, were rooted in the organization's secularism and the absence of Christian values among its leadership. 'It is no secret', he wrote, 'that the U.N. was born in an atmosphere of religious neutrality and that several of its directors, not the least influential, have more or less materialist viewpoints.' For these reasons, Grandmaison acknowledged, many Catholics felt deeply antagonistic towards the UN system. But he argued that with effort and commitment, international organizations could be reformed. In order to make that happen, Catholics had a duty support both international cooperation in general and the work of the UN and its agencies in particular.

It was this duty, Grandmaison felt, that explained the rapid recent development of a group of Catholic NGOs known at the time as International Catholic Organisations (ICOs), whose raison d'etre was 'to ensure the indispensable participation of Catholics in international activity.' The essential duty of ICOs, he argued, was to 'sow the seed of the Gospel in the work of world reconstruction undertaken by the U.N. and its specialized agencies.'[2] It was a task in which they were often strikingly successful. As this chapter will

[1] American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Washington, D.C. (ACUA), US Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of the General Secretary (USCCB), series 1, box 51, folder 18.
[2] Ibid.

show, ICOs and the activists who led them played an active role in the development of internationalist ideas in the post-war era, and were deeply involved in the work of the UN and its specialized agencies. But they also reflected the profound ambivalence of many Catholics towards post-war internationalism – enthusiastic advocates of the ideals and language of international cooperation, but often deeply distrustful of international organisations in practice. 'Sowing the seeds of the gospel in the work of world reconstruction' was a core task of post-war Catholic internationalism, but one driven as much by antagonism towards international organisations as by a positive embrace of internationalist ideals.

The immediate post-war period witnessed an explosion of international Catholic activism, manifested most visibly in the work of ICOs. The kind of lay Catholic internationalism they represented was a not a new phenomenon. Most ICOs had emerged during the interwar period, with some tracing their origins back to the 19th century or earlier, and in that sense they were part of the wider emergence of international society from the mid-19th century.[3] But these organisations, and Catholic internationalism more generally, reached the peak of their influence in the aftermath of the Second World War.[4] By the mid-1960s there were almost 40 ICOs recognized by the Vatican, claiming to represent millions of Catholics worldwide.[5] They included organisations representing specific groups, like the students' and intellectuals' organization Pax Romana; organisations in particular fields of activity such as social work or migration; and campaigning and humanitarian organisations such as Caritas.

Their attitudes and activities demonstrate the profound influence of religious ideas, organisations and values on the history of post-war internationalism and international organisations. Studies of the post-1945 era often focus on secular developments and ideas, from human rights and technology, to planning and atomic power. More recently, historians

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[3] Vincent Viane, 'Nineteenth-Century Catholic Internationalism and Its Predecessors', in Abigail Green and Vincent Viane (eds.), *Religious Internationals in the Modern World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 82-110.

[4] On the history of Catholic internationalism, see Vincent Viane, 'International History, Religious History, Catholic History: Perspectives for Cross-Fertilization (1830-1914)', *European History Quarterly*, 38, 4 (2008), 578-607; Giuliana Chamades, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade: The Vatican's Battle to Remake Christian Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2019). See also Carmen Mangion's chapter in this volume.

[5] La Conferencia de las Organizaciones Internacionales Católicas y el Comité Permanente de los Congresos Internacionales para el Apostolado de los laicos (eds.), *Los Catolicos en la vida internacional* (Madrid: Vicentius Tena, 1960).

have begun to challenge these secular narratives, exploring, for example, the influence of Christian ideas and thinkers in the development of human rights, or the role of the Vatican in European reconstruction and integration.[6] The history of ICOs offers new perspectives on these developments. Firstly, it highlights the diversity of Catholic internationalism as a phenomenon which incorporated the Vatican and the church hierarchy, but which was often driven by the overlooked work of lay activists, both elites and 'ordinary' Catholics from a wide range of backgrounds and professions. In particular, it foregrounds the role of women and women's organisations in international debates. Secondly, it shows how Catholics succeeded in influencing the UN and other post-war international organisations, forming transatlantic alliances of NGOs, activists, church officials and Catholic-majority states to promote Catholic policies and values on the world stage. Finally, it shows how the history of post-war internationalism was not driven solely by the efforts of Anglo-American liberal internationalists who still dominate much of the scholarship, but by organisations and individuals with often profoundly illiberal values whose international work was driven as much by their fear of and hostility towards international organisations as by their embrace of stereotypically internationalist values.

This chapter will begin with an overview of post-war Catholic internationalism and its relationship with the UN. It will then use two post-war controversies involving Catholics and the WHO as case studies to explore the impact of ICOs and Catholic activists on the UN system. The WHO sat at the conjunction of a series of issues which were regarded as crucial for post-war Catholic activists – development, maternal and infant health, rural health, venereal diseases, and, above all, population and birth control. As such, it became the focus of intensive Catholic lobbying, led by ICOs. And by the mid-1950s it was the case study which Catholic internationalists such as Grandmaison were pointing to as evidence of the 'extremely encouraging' influence that ICOs could exert over the work of international organisations.[7]

The first controversy concerned the recognition of the international Catholic nursing organisation by the WHO, which became a focus for conflict between Catholic activists and leading international health experts. At the heart of this debate were divergent views over

[6] Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Samuel Moyne, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).
[7] ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 51, folder 18.

the nature of international expertise. Secular international health leaders viewed the question as a purely technical or scientific one, whereas Catholic activists argued that only religious health workers could provide the moral expertise which was required to truly address international health problems. The second issue concerned proposals for WHO involvement in international birth control and family planning, plans which met fierce and coordinated resistance from Catholic lay activists, ecclesiastical bodies and statesmen. Their success in ultimately blocking the WHO's work in the field was widely held up as an example of the influence that Catholics could exert on the international stage.

These case studies also provide a new perspective on the role of Europe and Europeans in post-war internationalism. Catholic internationalism was dominated by a familiar transatlantic alliance of North Americans and Western Europeans until the 1960s. And in the context of the Cold War, much of the work of ICOs was driven by anti-communism and a defence of the perceived values of the Christian West. But the global dimensions of the Catholic faith and the unusual alliances which developed over issues such as birth control meant that European Catholics often saw secular Europeans as the greatest threat to Catholic values on the international stage, instead seeking alliances with Catholics and other faith communities from beyond Europe to promote their vision of world order.

ICOs and the United Nations

Many Catholics were enthusiastic supporters of the new post-war international system built around the UN, and of Catholic participation within it. The Spanish Catholic intellectual Carlos Santamaría, who worked with a range of ICOs and secular international organisations, argued in 1949 that participating in international congresses, conferences and organisations was 'at the same time the most human and the most Christian work that can be carried out today.' It was the world's Catholics, he argued, thanks to their sense of citizenship and their consciousness of the universality of mankind, who were 'best prepared for international collaboration'.[8] For Santamaría, this collaboration needed to take the form both of international cooperation between Catholics, and active Catholic participation in secular international institutions. But he was careful to distinguish this model of Catholic

[8] Carlos Santamaría, 'Notas para un dialogo', *Documentos: Conversaciones Católicas Internacionales*, vol. 3 (1949), 87-101.

internationalism from its secular counterparts, particularly on the left. During the early stages of the Cold War Catholic internationalism still revolved around the anti-communism which had defined it in the interwar period, and by the long-running political battle between Catholics and the secular left.[9] For Santamaría, embracing international cooperation should not mean undermining the diversity among nations or imposing a form of 'Catholic Kominform', but merely recognising the primacy of the 'essential' sentiment of humanity over the 'accidental' sentiment of nationality.[10]

As Jean le Cour-Grandmaison had advocated, Catholic engagement with post-war internationalism was often focussed on countering the perceived anti-religious and anti-Catholic elements latent within the UN system. UNICEF, for example, was seen by many Catholic internationalists as potentially the most important and effective specialized agency, at its best mirroring the 'spirit and practice of charity' embodied by religious NGOs working in the field of child welfare.[11] But it was also seen as vulnerable to 'infiltration' by groups such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation, which advocated birth control, or the World Federation of United Nations Associations, which many Catholic activists feared had been infiltrated by communists.[12] On the ground, its technical assistance programmes were dominated by non-religious NGOs which, their Catholic counterparts feared, genuinely believed that religion was divisive and had the lobbying and organisational skills to successfully embed their beliefs within UNICEF's structures.[13] UN agencies like UNICEF thus became central to the work of post-war Catholic internationalists, a vehicle for developing Catholic projects and defending Catholic interests. And within these organizations, battles over representation, legitimacy and influence often played out over the minutiae of bureaucratic rules and procedures, or debates about the make up of international committees.

Catholic engagement with post-war international organizations was channelled through new structures designed to coordinate relationships with the UN and its specialized

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[9] On the history of Catholic internationalism and anti-communism, see Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade*.
[10] Ibid.
[11] 'Resolution in regard to the international children's emergency fund', 4 November 1947, ACUA, USCCB, Series 1, Box 51, folder 15.
[12] NCWC Office for UN Affairs, 10 May 1954, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 51, folder 20.
[13] NCWC Office for UN Affairs, 'Meeting of the International Catholic Organizations Representatives, 20 October 1958, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 51, folder 22.

agencies. Catholic influence over the UN was exerted in three different ways. The first were the Vatican's efforts to both monitor the work of international organisations, and where possible to influence them through direct lobbying and the mobilization and coordination of Catholics on a national level. The Vatican enjoyed observer status with a number of international organisations and UN agencies, and regularly sent official delegates to international conferences and events. The second was through national Church hierarchies, particularly in the US as the country which dominated the post-war Western system. At the heart of these efforts was the US bishops' organization, the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC). The NCWC had its origins in efforts to coordinate the activities of American Catholics during the First World War. It comprised the annual meeting of American bishops, and a permanent secretariat which included departments of social action and lay organizations. NCWC officials were involved with the creation United Nations in various ways, and in 1946 the organisation established a UN Office in New York.[14] According to its director Catherine Schaefer, the office was designed to 'integrate Catholic principles into the formal action and atmosphere of the United Nations and of international life, and to inform Catholics of developments to which these principles might be applied.'[15]

The third strand were International Catholic Organizations. Like the Vatican they sought to mobilize their members to influence policy and governments within their specific fields. But they also sought to coordinate amongst themselves. The origins of these efforts lay in the creation of the Conference of International Catholic Organizations in 1927, which had brought together the directors of 11 ICOs and which had worked closely with the League of Nations up until the outbreak of the Second World War.[16] In 1950 the Conference opened an ICO Information Centre in Geneva (*Centre d'Information des Organisations Internationales Catholiques*), the counterpart of the NCWC's New York office, to monitor the work of international organisations based there.[17] And in 1951 it established a Permanent Secretariat based in Fribourg, Switzerland. By 1953 over 10% of the non-governmental organizations granted official status with the UN were ICOs, including organizations

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[14] On the NCWC and the UN, see Joseph S. Rossi, *Uncharted Territory: The American Catholic Church at the United Nations, 1946-1972* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

[15] Ibid., 26. For more on Schaefer, see Joseph S. Rossi, '"The Status of Women": Two American Catholic Women at the UN, 1947-1972', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 93, 2 (2007), 300-324.

[16] Conferencia de las Organizaciones Internacionales Católicos, *Los católicos en la vida internacional: misión de la O.I.C.* (Madrid: Artes Gráficas Iberoamericanas, 1967), 16-18.

[17] ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 74, folder 17.

representing Catholic intellectuals and students, social workers, migration experts, journalists and workers.[18] ICOs worked closely with both the Vatican and with national church hierarchies in their efforts to influence the work of international organisations.

The activities of ICOs after 1945 could not be separated from their Cold War context. In the immediate post-war era Catholic internationalism was dominated by North American and Western European actors. It 'thought' globally in the sense that it was interested in what was going on in the rest of the world, and thanks to the global scale of the Catholic Church it could draw on ideas and activists from Asia, Africa or Latin America. But until the 1960s it was an internationalism primarily of and within the Cold War West. ICOs and Catholic activists declared that their work with the UN and its specialized agencies was about promoting 'spiritual' ideas and values on the international stage. But such values were not necessarily neutral or universal. Rather, in the context of the early Cold War they were often conceived and presented specifically as the values of Western civilization, of the Christian West or the *Abendland*.[19] Many ICOs and Catholic activists were driven as much by their anti-communism as by their philanthropic or religious mission, and their work was inextricably bound up with the political projects of Cold War western states. Interwar Catholic internationalism, whether pursued by the Vatican or by lay elites, had been driven by a militant anti-communism which often drew Catholics into alliances with fascists and the far right.[20] By pursuing humanitarian action after 1945 focussed on the 'victims of communism' and the defence of a spiritually-rooted vision of Western civilization, ICOs helped to forge the transnational ties which underpinned the Cold War Western bloc, as well as disseminating a popular understanding of the West as a spiritual community united by its shared Christian heritage. The challenge for Catholic activists at the UN was to defend these values against both the communist powers, and against other forms of secular materialism which they feared were becoming increasingly influential in Western society.

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[18] Rossi, *Uncharted Territory*, 80.

[19] On post-war Catholics and the idea of the *Abendland,* see Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2014), ch. 3; Vanessa Conze, 'Facing the Future Backwards: "Abendland" as an Anti-liberal Idea of Europe in Germany between the First World War and the 1960s', in Dieter Gosenwinkel (ed.), Anti-liberal Europe: A Neglected Story of Europeanization (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 72-90; Rosario Forlenza, 'The Politics of *Abendland*: Christian Democracy and the Idea of Europe after the Second World War', *Contemporary European History*, 26, 2 (2017), 261-286.

[20] Giuliana Chamedes, 'The Vatican, Nazi-Fascism, and the Making of Transnational Anti-Communism in the 1930s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51, 2 (2015), 261-290.

Perhaps the clearest example of the success of their efforts was in work of the WHO. As well as the relevance of its work to ICOs and Catholic activists, it was also the organisation where many Catholics felt the UN's secularist bias was most evident. As the founder of the ICO Information Centre in Geneva and leading activist in the International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues, Jadwiga de Romer,[21] argued in 1950, the WHO offered 'a deplorable picture from the standpoint of Catholic interests', its Executive Committee apparently dominated by atheists and freemasons.[22] For de Romer this was in no small part due to the 'anti-Catholic attitude' of the WHO's director-general Brock Chisholm, who was something of a bogeyman for Catholic internationalists of the era. The Vatican shared this interest in the work of the WHO, as well as concerns about the 'strong anti-Catholic bias' of its leadership.[23]

Catholic Nurses and Moral Expertise

One of the major sources of tension between Catholics and the WHO during the period was the debate over whether or not to grant consultative status to the international Catholic nursing association CICIAMS (*Comité International Catholique des Infirmières et Assistantes Médico-Sociales*). Although the issue appeared to be an obscure one, it had significant practical consequences for the organisations and activists involved; NGOs with consultative status received subsidies, and enjoyed opportunities to work on WHO projects and committees. But it also reflected a fundamental disagreement between Catholics and their secular counterparts over the work of the UN's specialized agencies and the nature of international expertise. For many Catholic activists, the problems inherent within the UN system stemmed from a narrowly technical view of international problems which could only be resolved by adopting a more expansive understanding of expertise combining both technical and ethical dimensions.

CICIAMS had been formed in the 1930s as the group representing Catholic nurses and social workers, organising international conferences, study trips and publications. Although it had global ambitions and extended its reach to North and South America, the

[21] Sometimes known as Hedwige de Romer.

[22] 'World Health Organization and Catholics', de Romer to NCWC, 3 Mar 1950, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19.

[23] Archbishop of Laodicea to Paul Tanner, 25 May 1949, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19.

majority of its member organisations were in Western Europe.[24] Its leading activists were often experienced international figures who were also active within other ICOs and secular international organizations. They shared the same enthusiasm for international cooperation of many of their co-religionists, as well as their antagonism towards the UN and its specialized agencies. Addressing the CICIAMS annual conference in 1949, one delegate denounced UN organizations for not respecting 'the laws of moral life' and forgetting that 'man has moral value', calling on Catholics to intervene in organisations like the WHO to make clear that they are 'not the master of the world, but that they must be at the service of the world.'[25] CICIAMS had originally lobbied for recognition by the WHO in 1946, but was rejected on the grounds that there should only be one affiliated group for each medical profession, and that nurses were represented by the 'neutral' International Council of Nurses (ICN). Although CICIAMS was an active member of the ICN executive board its relationship with its secular counterpart was complicated, with CICIAMS members consistently lobbying the organisation to adopt a more 'spiritual' and 'religious' approach to nursing.[26]

The WHOs decision was partly driven by practical concerns that admitting CICIAMS would open the gates to a flood of other religious and sectional NGOs. But it also reflected a deep-seated belief among its leadership about the purely technical nature of the organisation's work. Most of the WHO's founders and early leaders had longstanding experience of international health work. Many had worked with or for the WHO's predecessor, the League of Nations Health Organization, which had been beset by the political tension which hamstrung the League in the 1930s. When it came to establish a new post-war health organisation, therefore, their priority was to cordon it off as far as possible from political debates, and to protect its status as a purely technical, apolitical body.[27] That meant refusing to engage with any of the national, religious or geopolitical controversies of the immediate post-war years, and when it came to questions like the criteria for NGO affiliation, that only technical considerations should be taken into account. Admitting a

[24] *CICIAMS News: Bulletin of the International Catholic Committee for Nurses and Medico-Social Assistants*, 2, (1983), 7-18.
[25] María Rosa Cardenal, 'Impresiones del Congreso Internacional de Enfermeras y Asistentas médico-sociales en Amsterdam, *Salus Infirmorum*, 9 (1949), 22-23.
[26] Ibid.
[27] David Brydan, *Franco's Internationalist: Social Experts and Spain's Search for Legitimacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), ch. 2.

religious group when the nursing profession was already represented by the ICN, WHO leaders felt, would represent an unjustifiable concession to sectional, sectarian interests.[28]

But Catholic nurses and other Catholic activists saw the question very differently. For them, viewing international health as a purely technical field overlooked the vital ethical components of healthcare in general, and of nursing in particular. The WHO's conception of nursing, a group of Spanish Catholic nurses argued, was 'too materialist', and it needed to be reminded that 'man is composed of body and soul, and only by attending to both can the nurse fulfil her mission'.[29] As Jadwiga de Romer described it, 'the nurse the more so because of her more technical and professional qualifications, enters into the intimacy of the life of individuals and families and from this fact she should inspire confidence and correspond to the mentality of the sick.'[30] If the WHO refused to recognise Catholic nurses it would be incapable of winning the support and trust of the world's Catholics, and would be left with a partial and incomplete understanding of the major health challenges of the era. 'If the WHO', she argued, 'understands that the nurse to whom one entrusts delicate problems relating to the beginning of life or to its last moments, must inspire the confidence placed in her and in the accomplishments of her functions, the confidence of Catholic women could be won.'[31] Fundamentally, many Catholics suspected, the refusal to recognise CICIAMS was driven by the secular prejudice of the WHO's leadership, which was exploiting the language of technical expertise to discriminate against their religion.

These arguments about the ethical and technical dimensions of health expertise crystallised around a debate over human rights and sterilization.[32] In 1949 the UN Human Rights Commission had asked the WHO to contribute to its work on provisions against mutilation and scientific experimentation. When the WHO consulted on the question with its affiliated NGOs, the ICN submitted a report on behalf of the nursing profession which suggested that medical procedures might be needed to prevent the spread of diseases, even in certain cases where patients didn't consent.[33] There were also suggestions made during

[28] Untitled report, 26 Jan 1950, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19.
[29] 'CICIAMS', *Firmes*, 15 (July 1956), 19.
[30] De Romer, 'The Conversation with Dr. Hafezi of the World Health Organization', 13 May 1949, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19.
[31] Ibid.
[32] On debates about Catholicism and sterilization prior to 1945, see Marius Turda and Aaron Gillete, *Latin Eugenics in Comparative Perspective* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), ch. 4.
[33] World Health Organization Executive Board, 'Proposed Rewording of Article 7 of the International Covenant of Human Rights', 30 December 1949, ACUA, USCCB, Series 1, Box 56, folder 19.

the debate that exceptions might be necessary to allow the sterilization or castration of dangerous sex offenders. These arguments were bitterly opposed by CICIAMS and by the International Union of Catholic Womens' Leagues, and were eventually rejected by the relevant WHO committee.[34] But as Jadwige de Romer reported to her NCWC colleagues, the episode reflected the fundamental limitations of an organisation which refused to accept the relevance of ethical expertise in its work. 'Whatever the medical qualifications of its distinguished members', she reported to ICO leaders, 'there was evident a real helplessness before ethical or philosophical concepts.'[35]

The argument about a distinct ethical or moral form of health expertise, however, ran up against the practical difficulties which Catholic internationalists faced in identifying Catholic experts. Much of the work of ICOs concerning the UN and its specialized agencies, and particularly of the ICO Information Centre in Geneva, involved 'counting heads' – identifying Catholic experts who could be relied upon to defend and uphold religious values. A committee of ICOs working in the field of health was set up in 1950, for example, with the aim of 'instilling Catholic thought' in the WHO by lobbying national governments to appoint Catholic delegates and by identifying Catholic experts across various medical fields in each country.[36] But often, activists lamented, the Catholic delegates who were involved with the WHO failed to defend Catholic values, such as the delegates from the Philippines and Brazil who voted against the recognition of CICIAMS. The struggle, then was to identify and promote Catholic experts who would reliably prioritise the interests and policies of the Church ahead of any competing professional or technical demands. Such figures were variously described in ICO correspondence as experts 'who can be counted on to defend Catholic principles', 'Catholics as Catholics', or even 'accredited Catholics'.[37]

Sometimes the most supportive experts were not even Catholics at all, but members of other faiths. The Iranian doctor who was the liaison between the WHO and health NGOs, explained de Romer, 'as an Iranian faithful to Allah, has probably more understanding for

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[34] N.C.W.C. News Service, 'World Health Group Rejects Legal Sterilization Upon Protest of Catholic Nurses', 2 June 1950, ACUA, USCCB, Series 1, Box 56, folder 19.
[35] De Romer letter, 31 January 1950, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19.
[36] 'Meeting of International Catholic Organizations interested in health problems', 30 April 1950, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19.
[37] De Romer, 'Memorandum from the Information Center of the International Catholic Organizations', 2 April 1952, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.

our Christian convictions than western secularism.'[38] In her report on one of the early WHO debates over CICIAMS in 1950, de Romer also argued that the Turkish delegate Dr. Tok 'showed the most Christian (evangelique) spirit of all in stating to the President of Catholic Nurses and to myself that he thought a nurse could accomplish her mission with zeal only if she is prompted by religion.'[39] For Catholic activists the dividing lines over this controversy, as with so many other post-war international issues, was not simply between Christians and non-Christians, or between the Western and non-Western worlds, but between spiritual and religious values on the one hand and 'materialism' on the other. On the international stage, transatlantic Catholic internationalists often felt they had more in common with Muslims or people of other faiths than with their secular rivals in the West.

Although apparently a minor issue, CICIAMS recognition became a major front in Catholic efforts to instil Catholic thought within the WHO. It was an effort led by ICOs and by the ICO Information Centre in Geneva, but one which also involved both national governments and the Church. Indeed the Vatican declared itself 'deeply interested' in the question of CICIAMS recognition as early as 1949, discussing the matter regularly with ICOs and asking the NCWC to lobby the US government on the issue.[40] Every World Health Conference between 1949 and 1953 witnessed a row over the question, which was finally resolved in CICIAMS' favour in 1953 when the World Health Assembly agreed to accept the principle of plurality in the recognition of NGOs. The influence of Catholic lobbying efforts was evident in the words of Brock Chisholm, who complained that he had been forced to change his mind on the issue because 'outside pressures and corridor intrigues multiplied to a surprising degree… they had degenerated into direct attacks against WHO in the press, in public meetings even within Parliamentary Assemblies... [The] WHO was accused of discrimination against a religious sect'[41]. But Catholic activists had their eyes on an even greater controversy. At the same time as the CICIAMS debate was taking place, a wider battle was being waged over the WHO's approach to birth control.

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[38] De Romer, 'The Conversation with Dr. Hafezi of the World Health Organization', 13 May 1949, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19.
[39] De Romer, 'World Health Organization and Catholics', 20 March 1950, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19.
[40] Archbishop of Laodicea to Paul Tanner, 25 May 1949, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19.
[41] Information Center for International Catholic Organizations, 'WHO Executive Council – Discussion of NGO Status', 9 April, 1953, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.

'The insidious efforts of the family planners'

Population, particularly the dangers posed by overpopulation, were among the chief concerns of the UN and its specialized agencies in the post-war years. As historians such as Alison Bashford and Matthew Connelly have shown, the issue of global population, both its size and distribution, had been an ongoing concern of international organisations and networks from the start of the twentieth-century, standing at the nexus of debates about food, nutrition, health, migration and eugenics.[42] The post-war era witnessed renewed fears that peace, order and reconstruction would be undermined by a population explosion, which would have a particularly harmful impact on developing states. A number of different international agencies were involved in population debates, working through the UN Population Division to coordinate their work. Many leading international experts, including Brock Chisholm at the WHO, had ambitious hopes for a globally coordinated programme of population control which would include family planning advice and contraception.[43]

These international efforts were supported by states such as India and Ceylon which saw overpopulation as their overriding development challenge and sought international support to address it. In 1951 India requested that the WHO send experts to advise on potential family planning programmes. The result was a proposal for the WHO to lead a pilot study in India on the effectiveness of the rhythm method of birth control.[44] At the same time, Ceylon, the WHO Regional Committee for Southeast Asia, and the UN Population Division all formally requested that the WHO begin to systematically study the health aspects of population questions.[45] Chisholm and other leading WHO experts regarded these as relatively modest proposals, but ones which could potentially be scaled up in the future.

[42] Alison Bashford, 'Population, Geopolitics, and International Organizations in the Mid Twentieth Century', *Journal of World History,* 19, 3 (2008), 327-348; Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 2008). On the wider history of global population policies and ideas, see Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Heinrich Hartmann and Corinna R. Unger (eds.), *A World of Populations: Transnational Perspectives on Demography in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

[43] Information about these plans, and details about the birth control debate within the WHO which is explored in the rest of this section, can be found in Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, ch. 4.

[44] The 'rhythm method' is a natural form of family planning which involves tracking the menstrual cycle and abstaining from sex when a woman is most likely to conceive.

[45] NCWC Office for UN Affairs, 'Confidential Notes', 21 November 1951, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.

For Chisholm, indeed, ‘over-population’ was *the* major health problem for the post-war world, and one which the global community had so far failed to face up to.[46]

But right from the start they met concerted opposition from the Catholic Church and from Catholic activists. The ICO Information Centre in Geneva had established a committee of ICOs to discuss ways to influence the WHO and raise awareness of the dangers of certain WHO policies in 1950. From 1951 the committee, which included leaders from CICIAMS, the Caritas health branch Salubritas, and the international secretariats of Catholic doctors and pharmacists, became central to efforts to mobilise Catholic activists around the world against the WHO’s plans.[47] Jadwiga de Romer and the ICO Information Centre closely followed debates within the WHO in Geneva, and produced regular reports which were circulated among ICOs and Church bodies around the world.

CICIAMS was particularly vocal in its concerns, arguing that the rhythm method trial in India would inevitably be extended to other countries, and would mean nurses being forced to ‘cooperate in illicit acts.’[48] Indeed, the arguments underpinning the birth control controversy mirrored the debate about CICIAMS membership. One of the chief criticisms Catholic activists made was that family planning and population was not fundamentally a medical question, and that by engaging with it the WHO was reaching beyond its legitimate area of expertise. When the WHO’s expert committee on maternity care proposed integrating problems associated with family planning into their work in 1952, the ICO Information Centre denounced the decision as an ‘invasion of the “medico-cracy”’, an unjustified encroachment of doctors and their advisors ‘outside the specified domain of medicine’.[49]

The NCWC’s UN office in New York was also actively involved in the struggle, and particularly in highlighting the role of Planned Parenthood in the WHO’s plans. The office closely monitored the work of Planned Parenthood within the UN and its specialized agencies, distributing regular updates and copies of the Planned Parenthood bulletin to

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[46] NCWC Office for UN Affairs, ‘Summary of Press Conference held by Dr. Chisholm’, 3 April 1952, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.
[47] ‘Meeting of International Catholic Organizations interested in health problems’, 30 April 1950, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 19. Further related material from the Committee in folder 20.
[48] NCWC Office for UN Affairs, ‘Memorandum – Birth Control projects in India – from the Catholic Nurses’ Association of Canada’, 18 February 1952, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.
[49] Information Center of the International Catholic Organizations memorandum, 5 March 1952, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.

ICOs, and monitoring delegates at international population conferences who were linked to Planned Parenthood or their ideas. It particularly sought to emphasise the fact that one of the WHO experts sent as a consultant to the Indian Ministry of Health in 1951 was Abraham Stone, the vice-president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and director of the Margaret Sanger Research Bureau in New York.[50] His presence stoked Catholic fears that the Indian project was a trojan horse for a global Planned Parenthood programme, and was heavily publicised in the Catholic press.

Indeed, this was a very public controversy played out across the press and the airwaves. Brock Chisholm was an accomplished media operator, regularly defending the WHO's plans at press conferences and on radio broadcasts. He particularly went out of his way to address religious concerns about the Indian rhythm method study. In October 1951 he told a press conference that 'no religious objections have been expressed,' to the project and that 'the rhythm method apparently does not conflict with Moslem or Hindu teachings.'[51] A few months later, in response to Catholic objections, he issued a statement through the UN press bureau presenting the programme as a response to the threat to India's food supplies caused by rapid population growth, arguing that the rhythm method 'does not under clearly specified circumstances conflict with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church', and citing recent comments from Pius XII about the right of families to limit the size of their families through natural means if justified by medical, economic or social reasons.[52] This prompted an angry response from Catholics around the world, including the Archbishop of Chicago who denounced 'the insidious efforts of the family planners to harmonize their nefarious work with Catholic teaching.'[53]

The NCWC issued regular press releases in response to Chisholm's claims, and provided information for articles syndicated in newspapers across the world attacking the WHO's plans. These materials particularly emphasised the opposition which the programme faced from Indian Catholics. The fact that India's government had directly requested the WHO's support was one of the chief obstacles western Catholics faced in opposing the

[50] NCWC News Service, 'U.S. Birth Control Leader to Advise Indian Government', 29 October 1951, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.
[51] 'Birth Control Experiment to be Carried on in India', *New York Times*, 30 October 1951, 18.
[52] UN Press and Publications Bureau, 'WHO Director-General points out that family planning does not conflict with Roman Catholicism', 17 January 1952, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.
[53] Archbishop Casey to Monsignor Carroll, 12 February 1952, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.

family planning programme. Indeed, India was a consistent advocate of family planning across the UN system in ways which were often awkward for Catholic activists and Catholic-majority states. In 1954, for instance, Indian diplomats used the UN Trusteeship Council to argue that Belgium should introduce birth control programmes in the Ruanda Urundi colony in order to boost its development.[54] Indian Catholics, however, offered an important counterweight to the arguments made in favour of the WHO's work. In response to the argument that family planning was vital to address India's projected food and nutrition crisis, the NCWC quoted the (Italian-born) Archbishop of Madras' assertion that 'it is not family planning especially as advanced by birth-controllers, that will save India from its economic anguish, but agricultural and industrial planning.'[55] And against Chisholm's claim that the rhythm method was compatible with Muslim and Hindu teachings, the Canadian Catholic nursing association (who were particularly exercised by the nefarious international activities of their compatriot), cited a statement from Indian bishops that 'not only the Catholic Church, but also the tradition of India has always upheld the sacred character of family life'.[56] In the post-war era transatlantic Catholic activists understood that, for their arguments to gain international traction, they had to demonstrate support from beyond the West.

The key moment in the WHO's debate about birth control came at the Fifth World Health Assembly held in the summer of 1952.[57] In advance of the Assembly, a concerted programme of action was put together by the ICO Information Centre in Geneva, the NCWC in the US, and the Vatican. Together they sought to ensure that as many Catholics as possible were appointed to national delegations at the conference, that delegates from key states were lobbied on the issue, and that sympathetic delegates were given points to raise. As a result of these efforts the conference witnessed a strong rearguard action both from the delegates of European states such as Belgium and Ireland, and Latin American states such as Cuba. This included threats that these countries would be forced to withdraw from

[54] NCWC Office for UN Affairs, 'United Nations Newsnotes', April 1954, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 51, folder 18.
[55] NCWC News Service, 'U.S. Birth Control Leader to Advise Indian Government', 29 October 1951, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.
[56] NCWC Office for UN Affairs, 'Memorandum – Birth Control projects in India – from the Catholic Nurses' Association of Canada', 18 February 1952, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.
[57] The events of the Assembly are described in detail in Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 147-153.

the WHO if motions in favour of birth and population control were passed.[58] At a time when the organisation had already been severely weakened by the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and other socialist states, this was a threat which carried real weight. The votes were ultimately deadlocked, forcing the WHO leadership to cancel its India project and to reject plans to collaborate with the UN Population Commission.

This decision marked the complete withdrawal of the WHO from the question of population and birth control, and it was not until 1968 that the World Health Assembly was able to formally endorse family planning.[59] It represented a major blow for those seeking to coordinate a global population control policy through the UN. A similar process was playing itself out in other specialized agencies, and the seminal 1954 Population Conference in Rome was ultimately scaled down to a purely academic event without any major policy debate or outcome.[60] Catholic internationalists, it seemed, were more than justified in holding up the WHO's change of policy as evidence of the real impact Catholics could have by coordinating their work across borders and engaging with international organisations and issues.

The history of Catholic internationalism and ICOs highlights the complex and multifaced nature of the so-called 'liberal world order' which emerged after 1945. This was not a system shaped straightforwardly by commitments to international cooperation, liberal democracy, anti-fascism, modernity, planning, technological development or any of the other forces which are commonly ascribed to it. Rather, it was one plagued by conflict between competing actors, all trying to mould international structures and organisations into their preferred image. Catholic internationalists were particularly clear eyed about this struggle. For them, international organisations were the site of a straightforward contest between Christian values on the one hand, and the forces of atheism and materialism on the other, most obviously represented by communists but also to a greater or lesser extent by secular international experts, European social democrats, or developing world governments. Catholic activists were enthusiastic about international cooperation in

[58] Information Center of the International Catholic Organizations memo, 'Fifth Session of the World Health Assembly', 16 June 1952, ACUA, USCCB, series 1, box 56, folder 20.
[59] Alison Bashford, 'Population, Geopolitics, and International Organizations'.
[60] Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 150-152.

principle, but antagonistic towards the UN and its specialized agencies in practice. For them, international cooperation inevitably involved conflict over divergent ideas and interests. Sometimes these conflicts led to the triumph of 'liberal' ideas, policies of institutions. But at other times they did not.

The geography of Catholic internationalism also highlights the precarious dominance which western Europeans and North Americans still enjoyed over post-war international organisations and networks. ICOs adopted a global rhetoric, but were not genuinely global in either composition or outlook. They were dominated by activists from France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and the United States, and were preoccupied with defending 'Western' interests and values. The global scope of the Church and the Catholic community became important when it could be mobilized within the UN and its specialized agencies, as in the case of Latin American states at the WHO. And Catholic internationalists were able to boost their influence by making common cause with other faith communities against European secularism.

But the period of international influence enjoyed by Catholic internationalists was relatively short-lived, and from the 1960s it had begun to lose both its coherence and its force. Decolonization and the growing assertiveness of Third World states in international organisations challenged Catholic influence. With the arrival of newly independent Asian and African states into UN agencies from the 1950s, for example, Catholics activists could no longer rely on a bloc of western European and Latin American countries to defend their interests. Social and political changes in the West boosted the number and status of secular NGOs. Perhaps most important were the changes within the Church and the global Catholic community itself – including Vatican II and the growing influence of Catholics from the global South. International Catholic opinion, always more diverse than the apparent unity over birth control suggested, became increasingly fragmented. Although ICOs and Catholic activists continued to advocate for 'spiritual' values on the international stage, what this meant in practice became increasingly open to debate.