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‘Blessed are the peacemakers’: Christian
internationalism, ecumenical voices and the quest
for human rights

PAMELA SLOTTE

Introduction

In his book *For All Peoples and All Nations*, John S. Nurser observes that by early 1947, within Protestant Christianity, ‘A “global ethos” of human rights had come to be seen as a credible goal whose achievement would benefit men and women of any faith, and which would be the precondition of a durable “world order.”’¹ The global ethos that Nurser points out as being on the minds of Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican Christians, but surely was also a concern to others involved in the ecumenical discussions at the time, was thought to be something everyone could reasonably agree formed a central component of a ‘good society’.²

However, at this point in time, human rights in a more comprehensive sense was not viewed by mainstream churches as a global ethos or part of a blueprint of what made up a good society, the embodiment of a public morality. Certainly, the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 with its various bodies facilitating international co-operation and protecting human rights marked the beginning of a new political era in which the churches needed to renegotiate their place and mission.³ Moreover, inter-church ventures could draw on a number of initiatives to carry out interfaith dialogue, address pressing societal questions and

¹ John S. Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: the Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), p. 137. The quotation in the title is from Matthew 5:9 (King James Bible, 2000).

² Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 137.

³ Jonas Jonson, *Gustaf Aulén: Biskop och motståndsmän* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma bokförlag, 2011), p. 336.

strengthen the international law that had come about in the early twentieth century.⁴

But a human rights vocabulary was not the predominant way of framing religious and, more precisely, ethical concerns. Church and inter-church pursuits of a good society and a just world order were conceptualised primarily in terms of work for peace and solidarity to the extent that they had an international dimension beyond just missionary work. In light of totalitarian regimes, church leaders also called on states to uphold a rule of law infused by the Christian command of love, to respect international law and to develop international organisations that promoted the common interests of mankind.⁵

More narrowly, freedom of conscience and religious liberty were on the agenda, especially for Protestant missionary societies and minority churches. Under the protection of international law, everyone should be able to enjoy religious liberty and put forward their points of view ‘in free competition without hindrance or privilege in every community in the world’. Religious commitments in various ways related to political commitments.⁶ Yet official explicit human rights work on the part of the world churches amounting to more than single-issue activism, such as efforts to secure religious liberty in the context of missionary work, was still lacking. Moreover, as Nurser remarked with regard to the persons he was studying, e.g. Willem A. Visser’t Hooft and Joseph H. Oldham or O. Frederick Nolde, who represented churches and ecumenical bodies in the international arena from 1938 onwards and worked for human rights and viewed these rights as something of a global ethos and foundation for a new global order:

it is vital not to give the impression that to recount what happened in the metropolitan centers of Protestantism (in London, Edinburgh, Geneva, Toronto, and the Washington–Chicago–Boston triangle in the United States) had any substantial impact in even English-speaking congregations across the world before World War II. Even at the center, the ideas of

⁴ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 13; ‘The “father of missiology,” Gustav Warneck, had been influential in proposing that civilizing all societies had to go forward as an enterprise of “law” alongside preaching the “gospel” of Christ to them as individual evangelism.’

⁵ See e.g. Jonson, *Biskop och motståndsmän*, pp. 198, 202; Staffan Runestam, *Biskoparna och kriget: Kyrkliga aktioner under Andra världskriget med särskild hänsyn till Arvid Runestams insats* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma bokförlag, 2009).

⁶ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, pp. 85, 137. See also e.g. Darril Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement in World Affairs* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 45–55, 68–70.

the ecumenical leaders were widely regarded as experimental and elitist, and not as binding on the loyalty of ministers of their denominations.⁷

Still, despite the low numbers, there were those who carried out this work, feeling that Christians had something to contribute to international affairs and justice. The ecumenical leaders and representatives were highly skilled in diplomacy and well networked. They held religious ideas that strongly motivated them, but they were able to recast their agendas in a language that was reasonable and feasible in terms of public policies. They took a pragmatic attitude to the work and came to rely on secular argument. Of course, some experienced the tension between 'religious' and 'secular' phrasings more acutely than others. So too did some of the organisations with which these persons were associated when the links of international work to the Christian mission were increasingly diluted for reasons of promoting human rights over faith borders.⁸

Every embodiment of conceptual goods is, of course, unique. Each interpretation of faith is an understanding marked by self-understanding and the comprehension of reality of the person carrying it out. Still, this chapter is an exposé of what made the activism imaginable by looking at how such activism – despite being partly framed in secular terminology – was embedded in contemporary religious and theological discourse. The chapter suggests that the argumentation for human rights or international law, peace and international order more generally picked up thinking at the time that developed into a dialogue with the contemporary world and in response to challenges that theology and the church found themselves confronting.⁹

For early twentieth-century theology was in crisis. Established teleological outlooks, belief in providence and optimism about the world's transition towards a better future had been crushed.¹⁰ This crisis was

⁷ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 6. See also David P. Gaines, *The World Council of Churches: a Study of its Background and History* (Peterborough, NH: Richard R. Smith, Noone House, 1966), pp. 196, 327–30.

⁸ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, pp. 97–8. As Nolde noted, at the time, 'freedom demands a broader base than can be offered by religion alone'; cited in David Little, 'Foreword' in Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. xi.

⁹ I do not want to claim to be able to pinpoint instances of direct influence (although the men in question do mention specific theologians to whom they considered themselves indebted). Rather I point to overlapping ideas.

¹⁰ Cf. Nathanael Berman, "'The Sacred Conspiracy': Religion, Nationalism, and the Crisis of Internationalism', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 25 (2012), 10–11; quoting Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul* (translated by Dana Hollander (Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 62.

discernible already at the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹ A gradual change in sensibility with consequent revisiting and reconsideration of theological patterns of thought took place. The section below offers an exposé of how ecumenical work involving societal and international issues evolved during the first half of the twentieth century. The next section and its parts in turn explore patterns of thought in time that were theologically central and constituted a conceptual backdrop for contemporary men and women, for ecumenical conversations and action for a more just world order, for optimism ‘despite everything’, for the answers that were formulated. The chapter thus highlights conceptual preconditions that had a bearing on, made possible, facilitated and possibly even compelled the kind of imagination and human rights work that persons in the ecumenical movement carried out.

By drawing attention in this fashion to points of resemblance between theological currents of the time and the thinking of persons who were influential in international work for human rights, among other things, the chapter is also a study of involvement with and religious reflection on human rights preceding the official wide-ranging involvement of the world churches that chiefly is of a later date.¹² The chapter puts forth a way of approaching and interpreting those years prior to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, a time before the human rights vocabulary achieved the hegemonic status that many attribute to it today, before an extensive international legal framework existed and before churches sought to adjust their visions to the

¹¹ Torsten Bohlin, *Tro och uppenbarelse. En studie till teologins kris och 'krisens teologi'* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1926). Bohlin was an influential Swedish theologian in the early twentieth century.

¹² As Wolfgang Huber has remarked, Christian theologians began to take a serious interest in human rights only in the 1970s, partly in order to reflect on and clarify the foundations for the work for human rights, which began on a grander scale within the world churches from the 1960s onwards, and partly because of the debate carried out then as now about whether these rights are ‘universal’. See Wolfgang Huber, ‘Human Rights and Biblical Legal Thought’, in John Witte, Jr. and Johan van der Vyver (eds.), *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective* (The Hague/Boston, MA/New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers), p. 47. It is also possible to see the developments in churches and in theology as a response to the surrounding world in which the human rights rhetoric was establishing itself in a more serious fashion.

Moreover, this chapter complements other studies such as Nurser’s ‘The “Ecumenical Movement” Churches, “Global Order,” and Human Rights: 1938–1948’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 25 (2003), 841–81, and Nurser’s *For All Peoples*, as well as Matti Peiponen’s dissertation, *Ecumenical Action in World Politics: the Creation of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), 1945–1949* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2012), by taking an explicit theological perspective on the issue.

dominating framework of conceptualising human worth and dignity. Instead of seeking to mediate religious and 'secular' human rights visions, this chapter studies examples of the entwining of religion with human rights through the vernacular offered by instances of international activism of a more limited segment of Christianity. The focus here is on tendencies in the ecumenical community of Protestant (comprising Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican), Orthodox and Old Catholic believers, including the strong influence of liberal American Protestants.¹³

From despair to discipleship

To start with two anecdotes, in April 1934, Max Huber, the former President of the World Court at The Hague as well as President of the International Red Cross Committee, took part in a conference on 'The Church and the State of To-day' in Paris. The optimism and enthusiasm of the meeting made an impact on Huber. Contrary to what he had experienced for more than twenty-seven years in participating in 'conferences and commissions of international character – diplomatic, juridical, and scientific', he 'left without a feeling of having been disillusioned' and 'with a new confidence in the possibilities of international co-operation'.¹⁴ The future US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was also struck by the optimism permeating ecumenical circles when he attended the meeting of the ecumenical Life and Work movement (hereafter Life and Work) on 'Church, Community and State' in Oxford in 1937.¹⁵

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Christians had already initiated some international and inter-denominational co-operation, for example, on questions of Christian social action and international problems, such as were discussed at The Hague Peace Conference in 1907. This co-operation came to form the backdrop for the work later carried out by Life and Work and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches (hereafter World Alliance).¹⁶ So too

¹³ For a study of Catholic thinking as regards these matters, see e.g. the contribution to this volume by Annabel Brett.

¹⁴ Nils Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work 1925–1948', in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948*, 4th edn (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993 [1954]), p. 582.

¹⁵ See e.g. Peiponen, *Ecumenical Action*, pp. 67–8.

¹⁶ Nils Karlström, 'Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work 1910–1925', in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948*, 4th edn (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993 [1954]), p. 509; Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 5; Darril Hudson, *The World Council of Churches in International Affairs* (Leighton Buzzard: The Faith Press, 1977), p. 24.

did the Student Christian Movement (Young Men's Christian Association [YMCA], Young Women's Christian Association [YWCA] and the World Student Christian Fellowship), which was influential at the turn of the century and active in missionary work and out of which came many persons who would be influential in the inter-church movement, in Life and Work and elsewhere, and made 'ecumenical careers'. Among these were the likes of Nathan Söderblom, Visser't Hooft and Oldham, to name but a few of those who figure in this chapter.¹⁷

Aside from the necessity of working together in missions and in order to solve social problems, these and other individuals contributed to the momentum gained by the issue of world peace in the years before the First World War. The mounting tensions in Europe were acknowledged and collaborative efforts to foster 'friendly relations' and 'better understanding' between the peoples of Great Britain and Germany, as well as in other countries, were launched. The mood was still hopeful, even in Europe in the spring of 1914, only months away from the outbreak of the Great War. People believed in human progress.¹⁸

But the two anecdotes above that testify to optimism and an internationalist spirit in church circles relate to the situation after the First World War, when Christians had found themselves on opposite sides and the notion of Christian unity had suffered a terrible blow. After the US entered the war in February of 1917, the responsibility of carrying on the 'Christian work for mutual understanding' was left to the Scandinavian nations in particular, under the leadership of Söderblom, Archbishop of Uppsala, Sweden.¹⁹ Söderblom made appeals for peace and Christian unity, and in December 1917 he convened a small Neutral Church Conference in Uppsala, which 'was significant mainly for its formulations of his thoughts on ecumenical social action'.²⁰ The conference participants concluded that social and political activities did not constitute separate autonomous fields, but rather were of immediate concern to the Christian faith.²¹

¹⁷ John Nurser, 'A Human Rights "Soul" for a Secular World of "Faiths": a Contradiction, or Just a Paradox?', *Political Theology*, 6 (2005), 52.

¹⁸ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 40–1; Karlström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 511–13. For example, the Associated Councils of Churches in the British and German Empires for Fostering Friendly Relations between the Two Peoples was founded in 1910. Hudson, *The World Council*, pp. 24–5; Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 41; Karlström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 512.

¹⁹ Karlström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 519. See also Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 35.

²⁰ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 44.

²¹ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 43–4, quoted from the conference proceedings; Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, pp. 34–5; Hudson, *The World Council*, pp. 26–7; Karlström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 519–20, 522, 528, 530. There

This work included supporting the development of international law, which was needed for the purpose of solving international conflicts, and for a lasting peace. It was God's will that churches help establish 'a lawful order as between states, in order that their common life may be founded "on the principles of truth, justice, and love"'.²²

Likewise, the World Alliance, established in 1914 just two days after Germany declared war on France, repeatedly called for the strengthening of international law as a solution to international disorder. International law was the sphere in which the World Alliance, according to its spokesmen, could best carry out the work of peace. It welcomed the establishment of the League of Nations. Söderblom was also important and influential here.²³ Under Anglo-Saxon domination, the World Alliance took a broad interest in world politics beyond the questions of strictly mission and religious liberty.²⁴

The co-operation continued and the meeting that attracted some 600 delegates from 91 denominations in 37 countries, including significant representation from the Eastern Orthodox Churches, was the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work in Stockholm, held 19–30 August 1925. Söderblom played a leading role in the preparations and organisation of the conference, whose goal was to investigate 'the responsibility of the churches to cooperate with "all men of goodwill" in working for a better "social order"'.²⁵

The meeting in Stockholm led to the establishment of the 'Life and Work' ecumenical body that in 1938 together with 'Faith and Order' went on to form the World Council of Churches (WCC).²⁶ Life and Work's prime objective became 'to perpetuate and strengthen the fellowship

was also a significant pacifist strand in ecumenical circles, importantly embodied in the Fellowship of Reconciliation founded in Great Britain in 1914; see Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 44; Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, pp. 61–2.

²² Karlström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 527.

²³ Karlström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 515, 532–4, in reference to a document by the World Alliance from its meeting at Oud Wassenaar, 30 September to 3 October 1919. See also Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, pp. 30–2, 58. Over time, the attitude to the League of Nations and its endorsement of 'the concept of unlimited national sovereignty' became more critical. Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 563–5.

²⁴ Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, pp. 73–4.

²⁵ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 46–9; Hudson, *The World Council*, p. 27; Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 545, 548–9.

²⁶ The Stockholm meeting appointed a 'Continuation Committee' with Söderblom as president, which carried on the work that had been started. In 1930, the committee was 'reconstituted as a permanent body, the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work'. Hudson, *The World Council*, p. 27; Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 552–4. The two organisations, the Continuation Committee of the World Conference

between the churches in the application of Christian ethics to the social problems of modern life'.²⁷ In 1928, the movement set up headquarters in Geneva, thus establishing itself within easy reach of interchange with the League of Nations, the International Labour Office and other world Christian organisations.²⁸ Here, the organisation saw itself as directly representing the churches.²⁹

In 1927, Life and Work established an International Christian Social Institute to carry out research on social and international matters.³⁰ In 1933, Life and Work also set up a theological committee whose task became to revisit and explore the 'biblical foundations for Christian social work' from the standpoint of 'The Kingdom of God', for example, and 'The Church',³¹ and to place the movement on a firm theological foundation.³² The committee's creation was connected with the relationship of the church to the state, which was the subject of serious debate and reinterpretation by the World Alliance and Life and Work in the early 1930s, especially given what was going on in the German Church. At the conference called 'The Church and the State of To-day' held in Paris in April 1934, for example, Life and Work decided that the classical manner of approaching such matters in terms of state–church relationships or religious freedom would not suffice in the current political situation. A perspective of faith demanded a broader focus. The whole of human life was of concern to the church.³³

Life and Work's second conference took place in Oxford, England, in July 1937. German church leaders were all but absent. The meeting

of Faith and Order and the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, performed complementary tasks. Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 15.

²⁷ *Minutes . . . Continuation Committee of Life and Work, Chexbres, Switzerland, September 1930*, pp. 16ff.

²⁸ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 54. See also Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 579–81.

²⁹ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 59. The Continuation Committee had not had this mandate. See Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 553.

³⁰ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 555, 579. In 1930 Nils Ehrenström became the second permanent worker in the institute, which studied e.g. the League of Nations and the International Labour Office and tried to influence 'international social legislation', following the example of the Federal Council of Churches in Christ in America. Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 579.

³¹ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 56.

³² Hudson, *The World Council*, p. 28; Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 557.

³³ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 582; Preface to the conference report, *Die Kirche und das Staatsproblem in der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1934); Hudson, *The World Council*, p. 28.

signified a shift in balance in world Protestantism towards the American and the 'younger churches'.³⁴ The theme of the conference was 'Church, Community, and State'.³⁵ Recognising the need to counteract totalitarian tendencies and reinstate an alternative meaning of life, the delegates analysed the relations between the Christian faith and the Church and society, the State, the economic and the international order, and the contribution of Christian faith in relation to these. The whole of life was given a religious framework, in line with what had become the views within Life and Work. Simultaneously, the delegates emphasised that the church had to assert its independence over and against the 'rising statism'.³⁶

The conference also importantly underlined the role of lay Christians in carrying out the work of the church in social ethical matters, both as regards theoretical matters and practical work.³⁷ According to Ehrenström, this was to have important consequences in the future.³⁸

On the eve of the Second World War, the churches still accepted 'national communities as part of God's purpose to enrich and diversify human life', noting that '[e]very man is called by God to serve his fellows in the community to which he belongs'. However, its downsides, 'national egotism' were denounced. 'The deification of nation, race or class, or of political or cultural ideals' was idolatry. War was denounced as sin. The ultimate loyalty of any Christian was to God.³⁹

There were also other initiatives intended to formulate a response to the international crisis on the part of the churches and individual Christians. In July 1939, the Department of International Justice and Goodwill of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (hereafter FCC) organised a meeting in Geneva in co-operation with the Provisional Committee of the WCC and the World Alliance. The meeting on 'The Churches and the International Crisis' assembled thirty-five delegates from eleven

³⁴ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, pp. 53–4.

³⁵ The theme had been decided at the meeting at Fanø; Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 583. Oldham led the preparations; Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 156. See also Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 584.

³⁶ Oldham in *The Churches Survey Their Task*, pp. 9–10, who further refers to an article by Christopher Dawson in *The Tablet*, 26 June 1937. See also Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 70; Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 585, 592. They also prepared the way for the merger of the two organisations into what would become the WCC; Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 71; William Adams Brown, *Toward a United Church: Three Decades of Ecumenical Christianity*, edited by Samuel McCrea Cavert (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946).

³⁷ *The Churches Survey Their Task*, p. 44.

³⁸ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 592.

³⁹ *The Churches Survey Their Task*, pp. 58–60.

countries, including a 'high-powered' American delegation that included Dulles. The delegates formulated a memorandum to the churches, in which the task of the churches in wartime was explicated.⁴⁰ The meeting concluded that:

Political power should always be exercised with a full sense of responsibility. Since all human beings are of equal worth in the eyes of God, the ruling power should not deny essential rights to human beings on the ground of their race or class or religion or culture or any such distinguishing characteristic. Since there can be no government without law, and no law can exist without an ethos, that is to say, a sense of obligation in the conscience of the members of the community, there must be some form of international organization which will provide the machinery of conference and co-operation.⁴¹

In 1946, the Provisional Committee of the WCC and the International Missionary Council co-operated with the American Commission on a Just and Durable Peace in convening a Conference on International Affairs in Cambridge. Anglo-Americans dominated the preparations and also made up the majority of the delegates. But Europeans were also just recovering from a devastating war. Assuming that Christians needed to speak with a clear voice about international affairs in the post-war world, the delegates assigned this task to a special body, thus complementing other forms of international collaboration.⁴² The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) was set up to carry out the work in the field of international relations on behalf of the Provisional Committee of the WCC and the International Missionary Council. Dulles was elected vice-chairman and Nolde was elected associate director. Sir Kenneth G. Grubb was elected director.⁴³

The CCIA identified certain 'particular responsibilities' for itself. Among these were to inform and instruct churches about their duties regarding international affairs and to work for international justice,

⁴⁰ Max Huber also attended; see Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 173 (n. 13); Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 54.

⁴¹ *The Churches and the International Crisis* (Geneva, 1939), pp. 12 ff, cited in Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 174.

⁴² Hudson, *The World Council*, pp. 29–31, 47–8. For a thorough account for the setting up of the CCIA, see Peiponen, *Ecumenical Action in World Politics*, pp. 81–187.

⁴³ O. Frederick Nolde, 'Ecumenical Action in International Affairs', in Harold E. Fey (ed.), *The Ecumenical Advance: a History of the Ecumenical Movement, volume 2, 1948–1968*, 3rd edn with updated bibliography (Geneva: The World Council of Churches, 1970), p. 268. Set up in 1946, the CCIA was 'declared in existence' on 1 January 1947; see Hudson, *The World Council*, p. 34.

world order, human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly religious freedom. The work the CCIA was to carry out in the UN was central.⁴⁴ As the meetings with the WCC and the International Missionary Council were few and far between, the staff obtained the right to speak in their own name in order to be able to react to various matters in a timely manner. Nolde was in charge of human rights matters during the early years of the CCIA, and later on 'for disarmament and tension points'.⁴⁵

In the years 1946–8, the 'provisional phase' of the CCIA, its main purpose was to 'rally Christian influence in support of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights'.⁴⁶ The CCIA was afforded consultative status in the drafting of the UDHR, and took a special interest in the article on religious freedom. The CCIA attended all the meetings and made statements during them. Christian leaders from all over the world made an impact on the views that the CCIA expressed, regarding the article of religious freedom that the Human Rights Commission drafted, as did the drafting process itself, in relation to which the views of the CCIA were adjusted. It was clear that religious freedom belonged to everyone in equal measure.⁴⁷ The phrasing of religious liberty that Nolde would work for was an inclusive, broader term: 'freedom of religion' rather than 'freedom of religious worship'.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, Report* (New York/London: The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, 1949–1950), p. 7. The CCIA set up offices in London and New York. Early on national committees were also established. They co-operated and exchanged information with the head offices related to e.g. human rights, refugees and religious freedom; see Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 190–1, 207; Nolde, 'Ecumenical Action in International Affairs', pp. 265, 272, Hudson, *The World Council*, pp. 44–7.

⁴⁵ Nolde, 'Ecumenical Action in International Affairs', p. 268. See also Hudson, *The World Council*, p. 43.

⁴⁶ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 555.

⁴⁷ O. Frederick Nolde, *Free and Equal: Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective. With Reflections on the Origin of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by Charles Habib Malik* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), p. 39; Nolde, 'Ecumenical Action in International Affairs', pp. 269, 271; Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 555; Alf Tergel, *De mänskliga rättigheterna och Kyrkornas världsråd*, Series: Tro and Tanke vol. 5 (Uppsala: Svenska kyrkans forskningsråd, 1998), pp. 13, 16. For a short overview of the position of the CCIA as to what religious freedom encompassed, see Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, pp. 39–40. For a recent study of the lobbying activities and their ambitions, see also Linde Lindkvist, 'The Politics of Article 18: Religious Liberty in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights', *Humanity*, 4 (2013), 429–47.

⁴⁸ Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, pp. 32–3, 35. In 1947, the Joint Committee on Religious Liberty (JCRL) in the United States also adopted a memorandum

Following the Geneva session of the Human Rights Commission in December 1947, Nolde, by now director of the CCIA, and Grubb in his capacity as chairman, pressed for a declaration to be submitted to the UN General Assembly in Paris in 1948. The CCIA wanted a preamble to be acceptable 'from the Christian standpoint', even if it was not necessary to mention Christianity as such. The goal was not to have the UN endorse Christianity. This was neither 'expected nor desired'.⁴⁹

The character of the declaration itself, securing the rights of everyone irrespective of faith, would be 'juridical, social', it being an 'instrument relating to the exercise of rights in society'.⁵⁰ However, the CCIA regarded human rights as something that governments had to *recognise* (as opposed to *grant*) that man possessed 'by virtue of his being and destiny'. It linked religious liberty to other rights and freedoms and considered human rights inter-connected and inter-dependent. 'The rights and freedoms which tend to make religious liberty meaningful in varying degrees impinge upon or pre-suppose other generally applicable rights and freedoms.'⁵¹

At the same time as the drafting process of the UDHR entered its final, intense phase and, shortly before the UN General Assembly's session in Paris in 1948, the WCC convened its Constituting Assembly in Amsterdam. The main theme was 'Man's Disorder and God's Design'. On the eve of the plenary sessions, Dr. G. K. A. Bell, Bishop of Chichester, 'reviewed the Life and Work program since the Stockholm Conference in 1925, with its threefold objective: "common endeavor on behalf of international brotherhood and the organised unity of nations, common Christian principles and work for the renewal of society, and a common voice for the Christian conscience in social and political life"'.⁵²

The work of the Assembly was divided thematically into sections. Among other things, the WCC discussed the issues that would come up in Paris, and produced various reports and resolutions regarding those matters. Law and international institutions were once more viewed as vital means. Churches should condemn and counteract human rights violations and work together 'and through international institutions of

championing broad religious freedom and warning against the pitfalls of narrow phrasings. Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, pp. 33–4.

⁴⁹ Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 38; Nolde, 'Ecumenical Action in International Affairs', p. 271.

⁵⁰ Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 39.

⁵¹ Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, pp. 38–9.

⁵² Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 238–9.

legal order'. The report of the Assembly's Section IV called upon nations to 'acknowledge the rule of law'. States should incorporate human rights in law. International institutions were needed for international law to be effective. Ultimately, however, the issues were given a theological framework. The source of human rights was God, and the rights came with reciprocal responsibilities. The report reaffirmed 'that all men are equal in the sight of God'. Human rights was linked to the idea that man had to be free in order to seek God and 'do the will of God'. With this purpose in mind, the churches should work 'for an ever wider and deeper understanding of what are the essential human rights'. The report ended with a few sections mentioning vocation and pointing out that international policies were matters of faith too and as such, of concern to Christians.⁵³

Compared to the reports of other Assembly sections, human rights appeared in a more systematic way as a vernacular for justice in the report of Section IV. Yet, looking back at that report, the Executive Committee of the WCC noted in 1949 that 'the treatment of rights and liberties in Section IV had tended "to be somewhat formalistic and unrelated to the actual evolution of some of the churches"'. The reason was that while '[f]reedom was taken for granted in America and largely in Britain and certain other countries', in many other parts of the world this was not the case.⁵⁴

The First Assembly of the WCC adopted a resolution in which it commented on the ongoing work of the UN. It found that a non-binding declaration on human rights was a desirable goal, but urged the UN to adopt an international bill of human rights, including 'provisions for the recognitions, and national and international enforcement, of all the essential freedoms of man, whether personal, political or social'; it also

⁵³ Report of Section IV, *The Church and the International Disorder*, reproduced in *The Church and International Disorder: an Ecumenical Study Prepared under the Auspices of the World Council of Churches* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1948), pp. 226–7. The report condemned totalitarianism and 'aggressive imperialism – political, economic or cultural', and underscored that Christianity could not 'be equated with' any economic or political system; *The Church and the International Disorder*, pp. 223–4. Nolde co-chaired Assembly Section IV, 'The Church and International Disorder', which discussed matters generally under the aegis of the CCIA. The CCIA had collaborated in articulating the themes for the First Assembly; Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 215. See Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, pp. 42–50, for a short recapitulation of his work as the representative of the CCIA at the meeting of the UN General Assembly in Paris in 1948.

⁵⁴ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 411; *Minutes of the meeting of the Central Committee at Chichester*, 1949, pp. 80ff. Hence, the understanding had to be fleshed out in context. In this respect the work had progressed slowly since the Amsterdam meeting; Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 411.

called for other conventions on human rights, for example, related to genocide.⁵⁵

At the assembly in Amsterdam, the WCC also adopted a Declaration on Religious Liberty, with the freedom of everyone, regardless of faith, in mind.⁵⁶ Soon after, the International Missionary Council adopted the same declaration. A comparison between the declaration and what became Article 18 of the UDHR on religious freedom shows the close resemblance in the understanding of what the freedom should entail.⁵⁷

It is worth pointing out that in the message adopted by the Assembly, which had been prepared by a special committee and was addressed to fellow Christians, the term ‘human rights’ did not appear. All the same, the message strongly condemned war, racial discrimination, terror and nationalist-infused hatred and called on all Christians to work for peace and justice, standing up for prisoners, refugees and anyone who had no voice, as well as holding to account those in power. The message also expressed hope in the final triumph at the ‘end of history’ of the Kingdom of the God who had ‘broken the power of evil once and for all’. While ultimately only God had the power to change conditions, Christians were

⁵⁵ The resolution is reproduced in *The Church and International Disorder: an Ecumenical Study Prepared under the Auspices of the World Council of Churches* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1948), pp. 228–9. The CCIA continued to press for the completion of legally binding covenants on human rights after 1948 and the adoption of UDHR; see Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 50; Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 555.

⁵⁶ Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 42; *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, adopted by the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam and by the International Missionary Council in Oesgstgeest, the Netherlands, in September 1948, reproduced e.g. in *The Church and International Disorder*, pp. 229–32. See also Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 298–301. Thirteen years later, during its Third Assembly, the WCC adopted a ‘Statement on Religious Liberty’; see Nolde, ‘Ecumenical Action in International Affairs’, p. 271.

⁵⁷ Nolde, ‘Ecumenical Action in International Affairs’, p. 271. The Lebanese Orthodox Christian and philosopher Charles Malik, who is generally viewed as one of the chief architects of the UDHR, and especially Article 18, considered the work that Nolde carried out during the drafting process of the UDHR as important. Malik observes, e.g. ‘Article 18 of the Declaration on the freedom of religion was principally his [Nolde’s] fashioning’; see Charles Habib Malik, ‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, in Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 10. See also Tergel, *De mänskliga rättigheterna*, p. 13. Malik and Nolde became friends, and Nolde persuaded Malik to become involved in ecumenical work as well. Nurser, *For All Peoples*, pp. 124–5 (n. 33), 170 (n. 15). See also Habib C. Malik (ed.), *The Challenge of Human Rights: Charles Malik and the Universal Declaration* (Oxford: Charles Malik Foundation/Centre for Lebanese Studies, 2000), p. xi. See also Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 559, 570, 743.

urged to show obedience and 'on earth set up signs which point to the coming victory'.⁵⁸

This indicates that the vocabulary of human rights was not fundamental or decisive to theological discussions of the time; there were also other more immediate ways to phrase the concerns of the churches.⁵⁹ However, it did not exclude the fact that for some within the ecumenical movement, human rights became the term for voicing some of those same concerns in the international arena.

A specific category of Christendom

During the Assembly in Amsterdam, the Secretary General of the WCC, Visser't Hooft, addressed certain misunderstandings about the newly established organisation. According to him, it was not true that the WCC pursued 'political ends... Our task is to prove in word and deed that we serve a Lord whose realm certainly includes politics but whose saving purpose cuts across all political alignments and embraces men of all parties, all lands'.⁶⁰ His words give the first hint of diverging views about what was going on and should go on theologically and, consequently, also politically. International work in collaboration with the UN was viewed more or less sceptically. As regards the more affirmative voices, Nurser observed that the persons who represented the 'ecumenical-movement churches' in the work for human rights during the creation of the UN in the 1940s stood for a *specific* tradition of Christendom.⁶¹

Nurser underscores the novel languages in which the 'new' Christianity was couched. He identifies a phenomenon that he labels a kind of secular Christendom and among whose spokespersons he counted Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), based on the character of Maritain's ideas about human rights. Yet, perhaps first and foremost, he counted Protestants like Oldham who, on behalf of the missionary councils, lobbied in the

⁵⁸ The *First Assembly of the World Council of Churches: Message*, in *The Church and the International Disorder*, pp. 217–19.

⁵⁹ For example, Nicholas P. Wolterstorff has studied the indexes of seminal works by theologians of the time, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Ethics*) and Reinhold Niebuhr (*The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols.), and found that neither of these includes the word 'right'; see Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, 'Modern Protestant Developments in Human Rights', in John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (eds.), *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 155–6.

⁶⁰ Reproduced in Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 273.

⁶¹ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 11.

newly established League of Nations for religious liberties, for example, in the context of mandate agreements.⁶² What Nurser appears to have had in mind in discussing the Christian message, albeit couched in new terminology, was the deep-seated view that the idea of a Christian nation had to be abandoned. The Church was also called to carry out something more than a strict 'evangelising' mission. Persons working in the field of international politics rephrased and broadened the calling more in general terms of justice, the very thing that upset those for whom the missionary calling was inappropriately downgraded. The new view of mission was policy orientated and intended to establish social structures that conveyed the Christian doctrine of humanity, to paraphrase Nurser. A Christian understanding of life and a vision of societal welfare was reinterpreted in terms of public policies, and the concrete inter-faith endeavours presented above in section two testify to this reinterpretation.⁶³

I want to draw attention to the shift in focus and the fact that Christian international activism acquired a *particular* theological and social ethical framing. That Christian and ecumenical initiatives through their international actions would seek to safeguard the human 'person' is not surprising. Indeed, this was the obvious way for them to take a stand against a libertarian modern subject on the one hand and against a sort of totalitarian society on the other hand. It became a natural point of connection with 'secular' protection initiatives. However, in order to truly understand the theological framework and the foundations for Christian discipleship in the international sphere, the view also must highlight ideas about a God that creates and redeems and calls upon man (the 'person') to follow.

The turn from the national to the international plane that took place in ecumenical circles had been anticipated and instigated by theologically versed individuals who conceptualised social ethical responsible action in a so-called non-Pietistic sense. This chapter suggests that one source for this turn can be found in liberal theology, not least in the form it took within American Protestantism in the 'social gospel' movement. This section looks at the nineteenth century and the development of this vein of theological thinking, whose early leading representatives were predominantly German. At that stage the nation still formed an important point of reference, although there were pointers beyond the state. Many

⁶² Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, pp. 41, 44–5. For a discussion of Maritain's thought, see the contribution to this volume by Brett.

⁶³ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, pp. 16–7; Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, pp. 44–55, 63.

of the theologians were not 'democrats', but rather supported a political system that could be likened to an absolute monarchy. Yet their ideas provided inspiration to future generations.⁶⁴

Theology in a time of crisis

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a stance that later became known as natural theology engaged humanists, theologians, naturalists and scientists. The goal of natural theology was to harmonise different sources of knowledge, the up-and-coming natural sciences and a theology that was feeling compelled to defend its position.⁶⁵ The 'facts' to which the Bible attested and its account of God's intention for the world did not satisfy the new scientific criteria for what could count as knowledge.⁶⁶ The scientific developments posed challenges to the writing of theological history where redemption followed creation and the destiny of humankind would be sealed and history fulfilled with the coming of the Kingdom of God. According to Hans Frei, intellectually the loss that the biblical narrative suffered as regards the preferential right of interpretation of reality was 'the ground upon which the problem of history grew', the meaningfulness of which, as we will see, twentieth-century theologians and churches sought to regain.⁶⁷

Theologians tried to place theology on a secure footing and present claims to objectivity that could stand 'alongside those accorded to natural science.'⁶⁸ It was about not yielding to 'a secularism that makes the discovered this-worldly structural laws the overall criteria for what is real',

⁶⁴ Moreover, it was the focus on the nation by German liberal Protestant theologians that eventually became a point of sharp criticism. According to critics, liberal theology showed itself inept as a starting point for a critique of totalitarianism. See e.g. Arne Rasmussen, 'Historiography and Theology: Theology in the Weimar Republic and the Beginning of the Third Reich', *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*, 20 (2007), 155–80.

⁶⁵ Donna Bowman, 'God for Us: a Process View of the Divine-Human Relationship', in Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman (eds.), *Handbook of Process Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), p. 13.

⁶⁶ Helmut Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit: die großen Systeme der Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1983), p. 37; Terrence W. Tilley, *History, Theology, and Faith: Dissolving the Modern Problematic* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), pp. 70–1.

⁶⁷ Tilley, *History, Theology, and Faith*, pp. 70–1, referring to Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: a Study of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 124–54, 307.

⁶⁸ Philip Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory* (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 37.

including criteria regarding the reality of God (author's translation).⁶⁹ Without entering into an in-depth study of the conditions for theological thought in the nineteenth century, in the context of this chapter the following points are important. From the 1860s onwards, the tide in Germany turned to a 'loosely defined' group of Protestant theologians; it took its name from a professor of theology in Göttingen, Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89), and represented a kind of mediation theology. The Ritschlians published a leading theological journal, *Die Christliche Welt* ('Christian World', published 1889–1941). Their mission was to carry out a liberal reform of the church and a social reform of society.⁷⁰ These two issues were related. The social questions that industrialisation had brought with it were of great concern, and in the attempt to formulate adequate answer to the societal challenges, certain theological positions were refuted and new avenues explored.⁷¹

The task of theology was linked to the object of religious knowledge, namely God, what was good and the overall structure and goal of life. Ritschl refuted a theology that, in keeping with traditional confessional metaphysics, looked for realities 'beyond' the presentation of God and Christ, which could be found in Scripture and tradition. What we find here is a faith and a theology that emphasised morality and value judgments and whose concept of knowledge was connected to these.⁷²

⁶⁹ Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, p. 40: 'Der Säkularismus macht die entdeckten Strukturgesetze des Diesseits zum Kriterium von Wirklichkeit überhaupt, dann aber natürlich auch zum Kriterium der Wirklichkeit Gottes.'

⁷⁰ John E. Wilson, *Introduction to Modern Theology: Trajectories in the German Tradition* (Louisville, KY/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), pp. 16–18. 'Mediation theology' broadly designates theologies in the nineteenth century whose basic method was stated by Friedrich Schleiermacher in his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, namely, that Scripture and tradition must be understood or interpreted in terms of the language of the time. Mediation theology covers a relatively broad and varied spectrum, including both more conservative and more liberal theologies. Ritschl was a student of several representatives of early mediation theology; see Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 101. Thielicke considers Ritschl the second most important theologian in the nineteenth century after Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, p. 353.

⁷¹ Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, p. 356.

⁷² Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, pp. 126–8; Albrecht Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und der Versöhnung*, 3 vols., 4th edn (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1895), Vol. III, pp. 14–25, 194, 207–9. See also Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, p. 357. Ritschl was a neo-Kantian. Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 125.

The key to comprehending God and the purpose of human life lies in human being’s discernment in making value judgments. Science and religion are “different functions of the spirit.” While “religious knowledge” consists in value judgments, “scientific knowledge seeks to discover the laws of nature and spirit through observation.”⁷³

Thus, Ritschl and others had a two-fold concept of truth, ‘one of natural science, which is limited in what it can know, and one of value’.⁷⁴ In defence of faith and theology, Ritschl claimed that we have to presuppose the existence of a moral creator and a highest good, a God who ‘sets the final end before us’ in order to be able to talk of ‘human moral freedom’ and the ‘hope of happiness’. This is nothing we can ‘prove’, but something we must accept.⁷⁵ Faith offered freedom and independence, offsetting a ‘fusion’ of man with nature and society.⁷⁶

Given the stress on faith as value judgment, it is no surprise that Ritschl and others who followed him placed emphasis on formation and vocation, in other words, discipleship. 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). It was not about individual freedom.⁷⁷ It was about being delivered to freedom in the service of and in the world (*vocation*) and in the personal, societal and political contexts where one lived.⁷⁸ ‘There was for Ritschl no serious

⁷³ Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 127; Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre*, Vol. III, pp. 194, 207–9.

⁷⁴ Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, pp. 153–4; Albert Schweitzer, *Civilization and Ethics*, translated by C. T. Campion and Charles B. Russell, 3rd edn (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1946), pp. 203–13.

⁷⁵ Albrecht Ritschl, *Three Essays: Theology and Metaphysics: Prolegomena to the History of Pietism: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, translated and edited by Philip Hefner (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1972), pp. 219–24; Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 127.

⁷⁶ Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre*, Vol. III, pp. 17, 198; Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zollikon/Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947), p. 604; Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, pp. 360–1. Thielicke suggests that Ritschl here primarily refuted reductionist theories of man, an understanding of man that reduced him to being solely a societal being and likewise a specific way of deducing a notion of the human from nature; see Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, p. 362.

⁷⁷ Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre*, Vol. I, p. 555; Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 128. See also; Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre*, Vol. III, pp. 391–406; Ritschl, *Three Essays*, pp. 20–24; Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, pp. 371–2; Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie*, p. 604.

⁷⁸ Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 128; Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre*, Vol. III, pp. 194–5. See also e.g. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie*, p. 604.

contrast between church and world, not in terms of task or calling and not in terms of essence.’⁷⁹

Ritschl also included relations between Christian nations in this work for the ‘moral Kingdom of God’. The moral Kingdom would be ‘prepared in history by the development of “the moral fellowship of the family, national fellowship in the state, and, lastly, the combination of several nations in the World-empire.”’⁸⁰ Too much should not be read into the allusions to inter-state relations. The idea of a Christian nation (which was not necessarily a democratic nation) still formed the primary frame of reference for social ethical thought, including, among other famous Ritschlians, Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) and Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918).⁸¹

In the United States, Rauschenbusch became a prominent representative of this line of theological thinking, which grew in influence, especially after the 1890s. He was a father of the so-called social gospel movement with which, among many ecumenical dignitaries, the FCC would come to be identified and for which it would be criticised (for its supposed liberalism). Like Ritschl, Rauschenbusch refuted asceticism and other movements that in various respects withdrew from societal life. In view of the social crisis he urged people to abandon Christian individualism, which had ‘lost sight of the great idea of the kingdom of God’ and the church’s ‘larger mission to humanity’.⁸²

Rauschenbusch identified the Kingdom of God with a truly humane society. By practicing Christian ethics, this kingdom could become a reality. Even if Jesus was no social reformer, Rauschenbusch found in his life the roots of a new social and political order. The Kingdom of God progressively materialised in history. ‘Jesus’ “scientific insight” was

⁷⁹ Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 130. Thielicke here talks about a moralisation of Christianity in the ideas of Ritschl and others of the same school of thought and observes that it has not totally been abandoned since; see Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, p. 52.

⁸⁰ Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 129; Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre*, Vol. III, pp. 309, 311–13, 316. The Kingdom of God ought to become a reality here and now, even if its completion lay beyond this time. Ritschl, *Three Essays*, pp. 1ff, 17, 76–7; Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre*, Vol. III, p. 52. See also Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 129; Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, p. 363.

⁸¹ Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 139; Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), p. 139. Or rather, they still consider a strong national state a desirable goal.

⁸² Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, pp. 339–40; Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 138.

his recognition of the "law of organic development," the progressive, gradual growth of the kingdom of God. Christian history is the progressive development.⁸³ The reason for Rauschenbusch's optimism was that God was at work in Christians. 'Christianity bases all human relations on human love, which is the equalizing and society-making impulse.'⁸⁴

But many more Ritschlians held important posts in theological seminaries and divinity schools in the US.⁸⁵ For example, Nolde considered himself indebted to Ritschl.⁸⁶ As Nolde was a professor of religious education, it is not hard to see how a theology with a comprehensive focus on formation and vocation would have appealed to him.⁸⁷ It is clear where Nolde's optimism about work for social reform, peace and justice found its theological sources of inspiration. Furthermore, the emphasis on the freedom of personal judgment is easy to link with a defence of freedom of religion and conscience. What we find in Nolde, if he is read in the Ritschlian tradition, is a liberal theological position that takes its point of departure from human life and experiences in elaborating on fundamental theological precepts and whose focus is moral action and social reform.

Affirming history and emphasising co-creation

With Rauschenbusch and Nolde, we have already entered the twentieth century, when theologians continued to deliberate on how they should relate to the authoritative texts and in what ways it was meaningful to talk about religion and ascribe meaning and credibility to faith and religious propositions. What was at stake were the conditions for faith in the contemporary world and the question of what could no longer be taken as

⁸³ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, pp. 59–60, 71, 91; Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 138. Despite this apparent immanent vision, he also held on to the eschatological vision of the return of Christ. Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, pp. 103–11.

⁸⁴ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, pp. 309–10.

⁸⁵ Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 18. See also Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism and Modernity, 1900–1950* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), Chapters 1–3.

⁸⁶ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 36.

⁸⁷ In his doctoral thesis, Nolde developed ideas about how a specific theological seminar could be developed that would offer appropriate training and prepare the students for the educational aspects of their future work; see O. Fred Nolde, 'The Department of Christian Education in the Theological Seminary: a Type Study of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Philadelphia (1929).

self-evident in the same way without jeopardising credibility.⁸⁸ But while ‘ethical-immanent, culturally-optimist and evolutionistic interpretation of Christianity’ had characterised many prominent theological writings in the previous century, belief in progress had now been shaken.⁸⁹ It is visible, for example, in Rauschenbusch’s later texts, written partly in the midst of the First World War. There was still optimism because of faith, but ‘false optimism’, taking the form of an overestimation of reason, for example, was rebuffed.⁹⁰

Theologians put forward descriptions of God and a life in faith that accentuated ‘elements of transcendence’, thus pointing beyond rational, immanent logic and patterns of explanation. Over and against a mechanical understanding of the world, history needed to be presented as a creation by God and by man. What had to be maintained was a certain teleological perspective that informed the everyday practical life of faith in and for this time. The hope was phrased in terms of God having a purpose for the world, even if everything looked bad and scientific results made many things seem contingent and arbitrary rather than part of a grand plan of *history*.⁹¹

Maritain and Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) presented just such ‘Christian-inspired’ positive intellectual outlooks, which engaged with science and in various ways embraced ideas of ‘history-as-progress’.⁹² Whitehead was the ‘founding Father’ of process theology, which developed one response to the crisis that theology was facing. Process theology carried on the legacy of natural theology by engaging with the sciences and formulating ideas about how God could be active in the world in a way that complemented and did not contradict the scientific discoveries.⁹³

Process theologians brought forth notions of God and nature that left/created space for responsible human action and creativity, for creative co-creation.⁹⁴ Among the persons mentioned in this chapter, both

⁸⁸ See e.g. Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, p. 5.

⁸⁹ Torsten Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrkestanken – Under 1800-talet och i nutiden* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups förlag, 1928), p. 6. If not otherwise indicated, all quotations from Bohlin in English are my translations.

⁹⁰ Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 140, discussing Rauschenbusch. See e.g. Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1918).

⁹¹ Cf. Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrkestanken*, pp. 90–1.

⁹² Nurser, *For All Peoples*, pp. 3–4. ⁹³ Bowman, ‘God for Us’, p. 13.

⁹⁴ From Bowman, ‘God for Us’, p. 19, in another context where she talks about grace.

Malik and Oldham considered themselves indebted to Whitehead.⁹⁵ The vision of Christendom represented by Oldham and which, according to Nurser, in reality had guided the ecumenical movement up until 1960, was 'a revisionist concept of "Christendom"', whose basis was an idea of 'the responsible society'.⁹⁶ Oldham noted, 'All talk about a better society is idle daydreaming till it is translated into public policy. To suppose that we can meet the needs of other men today by individual action, except within a very restricted field, is to be blind to the nature of modern society.' He called for 'a "social philosophy" which the church (largely through its laity) would need to midwife "in collaboration with those who do not call themselves Christians."' ⁹⁷

However, the fact that the belief in 'limitless progress' and 'the divinity of man' was shaken as a consequence of the First World War also gave impetus to those theological positions that distrusted 'all human efforts' and emphasised 'the "otherness" of God'. In light of what had happened, they found that theological, liberal 'Enlightenment' positions with their faith in man offered few routes to redress the situation. There was a denominational (re)turn to Protestantism, to Martin Luther and Jean Calvin, a time of self-reflection on their identity in light of and in relation to the contemporary situation. The message of Christianity was clearly differentiated from any human ambitions and aspirations, thus incapable of being translated into social ideals. The 'religious' message was emphasised, as was 'the judgment of God' upon man and his earthly actions. Not surprisingly, Pietism was influential here, 'fortified by the work of conservative theologians and in uneasy relationship with confessional neo-orthodoxy'.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Charles H. Malik, 'A Christian Critique of the University', p. 7; Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 18. Malik wrote his PhD in 1932 at Harvard University on Whitehead's and Martin Heidegger's notions (metaphysics) of time. While indebted to Whitehead, Malik maintained that he had closer affinity with Heidegger's philosophy than with Whitehead's. Charles H. Malik, 'The metaphysics of time in the philosophies of A. N. Whitehead and M. Heidegger', unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University (1937), p. 338. We see it when looking at Malik's conception of man. Malik starts his book *Man in the Struggle for Peace* by referring extensively to Heidegger's understanding of the human condition; see Charles Malik, *Man in the Struggle for Peace* (New York/Evanston, IL/London: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. ix-x. Although as he states: 'I would not be a man if I did not here add that I do not quite find myself in either philosophy'. Malik, 'The metaphysics of time', p. 338.

⁹⁶ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 16. ⁹⁷ Oldham, cited in Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 18.

⁹⁸ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 569.

It was to a large extent Barth who formulated this alternative response on behalf of those who criticised Ritschlians for their optimism about being able to change earthly conditions, for offering too liberal interpretations of the Christian tradition and for being wary of the ways in which Christians engaged with international politics on a 'secular basis'.⁹⁹ In his critique of process theology from the point of view of the new dialectical theology, Barth claimed that God revealed himself in ways that man could neither observe nor verify nor control with scientific methods.¹⁰⁰ The categories of faith were 'irreconcilable with the explicatory framework of the natural world'. There was 'radical discontinuity between creation and Creator', absolute qualitative difference between time and eternity.¹⁰¹ Barth was indeed very sceptical of the whole idea of Christians being able to discover what was good and just and how to act apart from direct revelation. Man was perverted by sin. Human concepts could never be seen as identical with God's revelation. As Barth famously put it, God comes to men 'vertically from above' (*Senkrecht von oben*).

Consequently, theology should never sacrifice faith on the altar of science, with science itself denigrating into something resembling half faith and half science, which was how Franz Overbeck (1837–1905), whose own theology can be seen as a nineteenth-century antecedent of dialectic theology, came to characterise the work of mediation theology.¹⁰² For Barth, theology was the Word of God,¹⁰³ and theology and the church should not compromise,¹⁰⁴ 'with culture and its sciences, for this would mean finding some degree of truth in this world rather than in the kingdom

⁹⁹ Cf. Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, pp. 16–17. For a severe critique of Ritschl, see e.g. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie*, pp. 598–605.

¹⁰⁰ Dialectic theology was developed by a group of young theologians in the aftermath of the First World War. 'They agreed with their Neo-Kantians and Ritschlian teachers on the impossibility of a scientifically valid philosophical metaphysics, but in almost all other areas, they were quite critical of them.' They questioned 'the Christian character of Western culture'; see Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 171.

¹⁰¹ Bowman, 'God for Us', p. 16; Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrkestanken*, p. 307; Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 2nd edn (München: Kaiser, 1923), p. XII.

¹⁰² Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 165.

¹⁰³ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated by Edwyn C. Hoskyns from the 6th German edition (Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 422.

¹⁰⁴ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 36–7. He distances himself from Ritschl in no uncertain terms. Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, p. 354; Karl Barth [und] Eduard Thurneysen, *Ein Briefwechsel aus der Frühzeit der dialektischen Theologie* (München/Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1966), p. 80.

of God.¹⁰⁵ Theology should never be held captive to human ideology. Hence, Barth was also sceptical about man's work in this world having any resemblance to the coming Kingdom of God or being able even in a small way to approach in nature this Kingdom.

It is important to acknowledge that the situation looked different on the European continent than in the Anglo-Saxon part of the world. The trends on the European continent did find their counterparts in the Anglo-Saxon world, but they took on expressions characteristic of the countries that had emerged victorious from the First World War. Liberal optimistic theology with its faith in progress kept a longer hold on the population. 'Christians bent their efforts to "hastening" the coming of the Kingdom of God. Some hailed the nascent world community, organized in the League of Nations, as a new manifestation of its glorious advance.'¹⁰⁶ Regarding international affairs, the attitudes of American Protestants could be classified as either 'internationalists', supporting 'an international order of justice, dependent upon economic and military sanctions as a last resort', or pacifists, advocating neutrality and disarmament.¹⁰⁷ The same division could be found in the ecumenical movement.¹⁰⁸

In the Anglo-Saxon world, liberal theology and social gospel theology were influential into the 1930s, at which point criticism of these ideas grew in strength. But the dialectic theology that had grown in influence on the European continent still did not make much headwind overseas. It was 'too uncongenial to the prevailing mood in Anglo-Saxon Protestantism'.¹⁰⁹

However, such opposites as the process theology of Whitehead and others, the liberal theology in a Ritschlian vein and the dialectical theology of Barth made contributions to a larger theological debate within ecumenical circles and further afield on how to relate Christian teachings to the state of the world and to science and how, as churches and believers, to act on this basis. What united the faithful was a realisation that they

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, *Trajectories in the German Tradition*, p. 174. For Barth, Kierkegaard, who criticised mediation theology, provided an important point of reference here: see Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 569.

¹⁰⁷ John A. Hutchinson, *We Are Not Divided: a Critical and Historical Study of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America* (New York: Round table Press, 1941), pp. 205–22; Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 563. For a recent comprehensive account, see Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of the Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012).

¹⁰⁸ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 563.

¹⁰⁹ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 569.

needed to find ways to affirm the contribution of the Christian narrative in order to understand human history and agency as *history*. This need to present and interpret the Christian narrative of creation, redemption and salvation as a complement to secularist explanations of human life was underscored in ecumenical circles, as happened during the WCC's Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. An inspirational and convincing vision of the path forward was needed. This focus is not surprising given that '[p]articularly in North America, many of those who made up the committees of ecumenical bodies and projects held chairs in philosophy of history or of religion in universities and Protestant seminaries'.¹¹⁰

The Kingdom of God as a motive for action

Given the stark divides within theology at the time, it is clear that this common vision was variously interpreted. What is more, a particular type of reasoning featured more frequently among those within the ecumenical movement, who supported and carried out international work on a Christian basis. This can be illustrated by looking at how the questions of eschatology and the Kingdom of God were interpreted as motives for action.

Eschatology assumed a more central place in theological thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹¹¹ Perhaps partly in response to the developing parameters of science and their importance in explaining the world, the question of the Kingdom of God went from being seen as an intellectual problem to becoming a personal-practical problem and a motive for action that should inform the lives of individual believers and the work that Christian churches carried out together.¹¹² This was seen above with Ritschl and Rauschenbusch, for example. Instead of being merely a 'religious-speculative border-concept' of sorts, an eschatological perspective, as Torsten Bohlin formulates it, came to form 'part of concrete life in faith and expresses the peculiar, inescapable polarity or tension of a life in faith', a life in which one struggles to realise here and now something that one hopes for and which is still outstanding ('not yet').¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 55.

¹¹¹ In presenting nineteenth-century theology as a backdrop for early twentieth-century thought, Bohlin largely focuses on the central figure of that time, Ritschl.

¹¹² Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanen*, pp. 2–3; James S. Candlish, *The Kingdom of God Biblically and Historically Considered* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1884), p. 3. Consequently, the questions that will be posed in response to this deal with morality rather than with ontology and epistemology.

¹¹³ 1. Joh. 3:2; Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanen*, pp. 5–6.

The Kingdom of God was conceptualised at one and the same time as a religious, transcendent and immanent social entity, understood to be realised gradually in history in a way that was all-encompassing. Life in this world was determined by life with Christ in God, and theologians considered the new life in brotherly love to be connected with the breakthrough of the Kingdom of God and a sign of it. An indifferent attitude to the world was discarded as a stance incompatible with the Christian faith. At the same time, theologians underlined the tension and qualitative differences between the transcendent-eschatological and the historical ‘event’. Also, the connection and the continuity between this world and the coming glory were understood in different ways. That the new world order would come about through divine intervention did not necessarily suggest a complete and radical break with what theologians saw as ‘organic developments’ in time. Some upheld the idea that this world was evolving towards something better. We even find entirely immanent-historical formulations of the Kingdom of God, akin to a ‘socio-ethical ideal’, such as have been attributed to Ritschl, for example.¹¹⁴

Moreover, to a greater or lesser extent, theologians saw the call for brotherly love as including reforms of social, economic and political conditions and the relations between peoples, to create a good society and a more just world order.¹¹⁵ Either the Kingdom of God was also being realised when social, political and international conditions were shaped in accordance with principles of solidarity and love, in accordance to God’s will, or at least the Kingdom of God was present in the believer and informed his or her personal relationships.¹¹⁶

The former ‘religious-social notion of the Kingdom of God’ was embraced by a primarily ‘practically oriented movement’ within Christianity,¹¹⁷ which found important outlets in England, France, Germany and German Switzerland, as well as in the United States,¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, pp. 169, 186–7, 365, 416–17; Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, pp. 364–5.

¹¹⁵ Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, p. 229.

¹¹⁶ Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, p. 168. See also Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, pp. 205–9, 339, 416–17, 419. Whatever the limits in scope, the notion of *regnum dei* was presented as *reformative* and *performative*, because a personal relationship to God would always take as its moral expression brotherly love; see Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, p. 168.

¹¹⁷ Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, pp. 339–40 (n. 1). The ‘social’ denoted all relations beyond the relationship between God and the individual soul and personal relations between individuals.

¹¹⁸ Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, pp. 341–3; Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 30–4; and Karlström, ‘Movements for International Friendship’, pp. 509–11, referring

where Rauschenbusch, among others, envisioned the future work of the League of Nations as part of a social-ethical activism. It is this vein of theological thought, in which religious connotations were toned down in favour of immanent moral phrasings, and social-ethical questions moved firmly to the centre, that seems to be the sort of tradition that Nurser calls 'secular' Christianity and dominated among people with a positive outlook on Christian involvement in international affairs.¹¹⁹

Significantly, these thoughts found resonance in the ecumenical movement and in the ecclesiastical pursuits in which many, if not most, of those writing in the early twentieth century were involved. In the matter of social-ethical questions, Rauschenbusch exerted a great deal of influence on the American delegates to Life and Work, especially on the older generation of Americans involved there.¹²⁰ Also, Visser't Hooft, the first secretary-general of the later WCC, was impressed by the social gospel movement in the 1920s and went on to write his doctoral dissertation on the topic.¹²¹ As for ecumenical discussions during the first half of the twentieth century, the question of what it means for *regnum dei* to be a 'practical-personal and churchly affair' took centre stage at consecutive ecumenical meetings in the 1920s, meetings that were attended by many of the theologians whom Bohlin discusses in his book on the issue. While not on the original programme, the topic was, for example, the focus of much discussion at the Universal Christian Conference of Life and Work in Stockholm, 19–30 August 1925.¹²²

Charles F. Wishart presented the goals of the American churches as the creation of a societal climate that can hasten the entrance of people into

to von Harnack in the case of Germany, and to the social gospel movement in the US. The FCC, whose main interest would be called 'the social gospel or social Christianity', in its founding year of 1908 published a list of aims for industrial work, including provisions on comprehensive rights and freedoms of workers. This came to be known as 'the Social Creed of the Churches'; see Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 34–6; Karlström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 511. The FCC drew e.g. on the work of Rauschenbusch; see Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 37. The FCC supported the establishment of a Permanent Court of International Justice (1922) and urged the United States to become a member and also otherwise to acknowledge its international responsibilities. Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 38–40.

¹¹⁹ See e.g. Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrörelsetanken*, pp. 369–74, 377.

¹²⁰ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 20.

¹²¹ See www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/press/00/visser-bio.html (last accessed 10 October 2014). However, Visser't Hooft, a Dutch theologian and central figure in the WCC during the decades to come in his role as the organisation's first secretary-general (1948–66), also had 'dialectical' leanings. Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 51.

¹²² Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrörelsetanken*, pp. 1–3.

the Kingdom of God and the earth made as the threshold to heaven.¹²³ Also in line with a more religious-social stance, the Frenchman Wilfred Monod stated that the notion of the Kingdom of God was both a *credo* and an agenda. Christians had to repent ‘morally’ and renew themselves ‘spiritually’. The new life in Christ had to manifest itself already on earth, and it included the requirement that all societal obstacles to the Kingdom must be done away with. Moreover, Christianity and socialism were compatible as visions of life on earth.¹²⁴ In the invitation to the same meeting, Archbishop Söderblom, who some years later was invited to speak at the opening of the League of Nations and who also went on to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930, remarked of the co-existence among nations that:

The burning social problems and the tensions between peoples show how pressing the need is for us as Christians and for the Christian congregation as such to recognize the Church’s duty in the lives of peoples and the coexistence of nations and to purposefully and jointly strive to obey Christ and realize His Spirit. This is no peripheral task. Salvation cannot be owned or kept hold of without us seeking to follow the Master in everything.¹²⁵

The message of the conference findings for the churches was that the Gospel should be applied ‘to all the realms of human life – industrial, social, political and international’. The conference highlighted the need to defend the human being; the Soul was not to be ‘subordinated to the rights of property or to the mechanisms of industry’. It had ‘supreme value’ and ‘may claim as its first right . . . salvation’. The conference had ‘set forth the guiding principle of a Christian internationalism. We have

¹²³ Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, p. 382 (n. 1), in reference to Gustav Adolf Deissmann’s account of the proceedings during the Stockholm meeting; see Gustav Adolf Deissmann (ed.), *Die Stockholmer Weltkirchenkonferenz: Vorgeschichte, Dienst und Arbeit der Weltkonferenz für Praktisches Christentum, 19.–30. August 1925. Amtlicher Deutscher Bericht* (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1926), pp. 137–42. ‘The Anglo-Americans, immersed in nineteenth-century liberal optimism, felt that man could help the arrival of the Kingdom on earth by working hard to attain peace and social justice. The Continental Lutheran concept saw this division of the world into Two Realms maintained until the end of time when the Kingdom of God would cataclysmically appear.’ Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 82.

¹²⁴ Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, p. 345; Deissmann, *Die Stockholmer Weltkirchenkonferenz*, pp. 120–32. For Monod’s place in the more practically orientated movement, see Bohlin, *Den kristna gudsrikestanken*, p. 343; Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, p. 33; Karlström, ‘Movements for International Friendship’, p. 510.

¹²⁵ Nathan Söderblom, *Kristenhetens möte i Stockholm: historik, aktstycken, grundtankar, personligheter, eftermäle* (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokförlag, 1926), pp. 288–9. [My transl.]

affirmed the universal character of the Church and its duty to preach and practice the love of the brethren.¹²⁶

But the encounter over confessional borders made delegates more aware not only of the things they held in common, but also of confessional differences. To some extent the differing positions could most likely be linked to the different outcomes on the part of the home countries of the First World War. The war's outcomes and the Armistice were not forgotten. Possibly the 'most dramatic moment of the deliberations was when Superintendent Klingemann of Germany challenged, both for theological and political reasons, the almost religious fervor with which some delegates had spoken of the League of Nations; and pastor Élie Gounelle implored the Germans not to stand aside from the League, saying, "We await you, we stretch out our hands to you."¹²⁷

The diverging views on theological and consequently social and political matters also showed in how the meeting, as indicated above in section two, was variously received. While the response in Sweden, Switzerland and Germany was generally good, the overall reception to the conference was 'mixed'. Dialectical theologians, Pietists and 'orthodox' Lutherans disapproved. They 'saw in its social idealism and in its vigorous attack upon the ills of society "exhibitions of Anglo-Saxon naïveté and American activism"'. This is not surprising, given that the Pietists conceptualised Christian responsibility in a different way. It was not about building 'a better social order'. Rather, individual Christians had a duty 'to live according to the principles in which their churches instructed them'. In Germany, voices denounced the conference as 'a move of Allied imperialism under the guise of religion'. In the United States and Great Britain, however, much was seen as an 'international endorsement of the concern for the social responsibility of the Churches' for the things that they had already worked for, adding little if anything new.¹²⁸ These divisions would long be a concern of the movement.¹²⁹

Anglo-Saxon pragmatism, a liberal temper and social ethical activism

In his exposé of the history of Life and Work, Nils Ehrenström repeatedly observes how American and European (Continental) points of view

¹²⁶ G. K. A. Bell, *The Stockholm Conference: Official Report of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), pp. 711ff.

¹²⁷ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 549, 569.

¹²⁸ Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 51–2; Hudson, *The World Council*, p. 27; Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 550–1.

¹²⁹ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 547.

differed. Representatives from the continent found the Anglo-Saxon approach overly pragmatic, and hence, non-theological and activist. The European (continental) view differed in important respects:

the American, more concerned with immediate practical applications, and thinking of research in terms of the collection of factual data which could be applied in urgent reforms, the European deeply interested in principles, and looking to research for the education of the ways in which Christian principles can be applied to complex modern problems; the American sitting somewhat loose to the existing Churches, the European deeply aware from the start of the problem of the Churches with their varying confessions and widely differing approach to social problems; the American more empirical, the European more theoretical, or, as the Europeans perhaps would have said, more thorough, in its approach.¹³⁰

What is important in the context of this chapter, however, is that it was the American/Anglo-Saxon liberal Protestants with an internationalist optimistic outlook who came to greatly influence ‘the ideological evolution of the ecumenical movement’.¹³¹ At the Life and Works conference in Oxford in 1937, for example, the Anglo-Saxon dominance was evident. Out of 425 delegates, 300 came from the United States and the British Commonwealth. This was also a point of criticism, that ‘American Protestantism’ dominated the conference, as did ‘Anglo-American non-theologians’.¹³²

The reason for this dominance, however, was hardly down to numbers only. The founding ideas of Life and Work were significant as regards to which persons became powerful in the work. Ehrenström points out the importance of the acceptance of diversity within the Life and Works movement for those willing to work within its parameters. The movement suited a ‘certain Protestant temper, which, professing the simple undogmatic faith of the liberal interpretation of Jesus, was loath to let divisive theories of sacrament and creed obstruct its service to suffering humanity’.¹³³ It attracted those who were bent on overlooking doctrinal differences for the sake of working for a common just cause or those who

¹³⁰ Ehrenström, ‘Movements for International Friendship’, pp. 554–5. The English churches identified their position as somewhere in the middle ‘between the “activism” of the Americans and the “other-worldliness” of the Germans’. Ehrenström, ‘Movements for International Friendship’, p. 551.

¹³¹ Ehrenström, ‘Movements for International Friendship’, p. 569.

¹³² Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 161. The low numbers of representatives for the continental churches was accounted for by the fact that the Nazi regime did not allow the participation of a delegation from the German Lutheran church. There were also few representatives from younger churches, Orthodox churches or other small eastern churches. Ehrenström, ‘Movements for International Friendship’, pp. 588–9.

¹³³ Ehrenström, ‘Movements for International Friendship’, p. 570.

considered themselves firmly rooted in an historical tradition, but simultaneously found joint work for justice, peace and welfare too important to turn away from on grounds of doctrinal differences.¹³⁴ These were sentiments more readily held by Americans than continental Europeans.

It was not that a spiritual foundation was absent in the work; there were attempts to place the movement on a firm theological foundation. But one accepted (on pragmatic grounds or, like Söderblom, as a matter of principle) that the theological bases for common practical action were diverse and that, paradoxically, there was a 'unity amid disunity – a unity not to be created, but accepted and testified to in the fellowship of believers, and radiating through it into the world'. Ehrenström talks of a 'concept of socio-moral ecumenicity', a position critics dismissed as syncretistic.¹³⁵

Thus, the activism that ensued, however 'driven' by Americans, found a theological foundation in a discussion that was already going on. It picked up on existing sentiments and ideas. How to act in this world to realise at least a foretaste of the heavenly Kingdom took central stage. It was about shaping this worldly life in accordance with the principles of love, justice and solidarity. Churches and Christians were called upon to realise God's aims in the world, not just by transforming their individual lives and personal relationships, but in striving to reform social, economic and political structures, and even seek to influence the relations between peoples.¹³⁶

A reigning view became that, because the body of Christ included people from all over the world, 'the Universal Church is committed to serve as an exemplar, a pattern, and a leaven of true world community'.¹³⁷ The Church could contribute to an international and 'inter-racial' peace to the extent that it was united. How to translate this vision for peace into a programme of action remained a matter of debate, which grew in intensity as the 1930s progressed and the perils of nationalism became hard to ignore. For some, the ecumenical movement should remain non-political;

¹³⁴ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 570–1.

¹³⁵ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 557, 571–4, 576.

¹³⁶ Cf. Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 43, who remarks that in a clearer fashion a Christian social ethic was now also explicitly conceptualised as an ethic for groups, communities, rather than in traditional Protestant fashion as an ethic of individuals and inter-personal relationships and then in naive fashion transposed onto the international plane. This was a clear change from the initiatives of Söderblom, the World Alliance and others at the time of the First World War and the two following decades.

¹³⁷ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 578.

others saw internationalism and international action as integral to ecumenical work.¹³⁸ In searching for solutions to the problems confronting contemporary societies, the view had to shift to the international plane. The Christian message regarding a just life was interpreted in the present day and age as requiring 'transnational institutions that might . . . be "for the healing of the nations"'.¹³⁹ There was talk, for example, of 'a curative and creative United Nations' and a moral world order that would seek to realise a global ethos as articulated through human rights, among other things.¹⁴⁰

This all radiates optimism, yet the churches did not naively believe that international organisations could cure all evils. From experience they knew that this was not the case. The attitude towards international organisation was thus not uncritical. Instead, what was needed was a *new* world order, and it was exactly here that the churches had a foundational contribution to give, as regards the commitments and values, for example, a global ethos. In 1938 Huber expressed his ideas about a 'supranational ethos of the Universal Church as a source of international law.'

Only Christians as members of the *Una Sancta*, understand the deep foundations of a legal order, which can extend beyond the limits of the national communities. Only on the basis of the *Una Sancta* can a supranational ethos be built up. Without such an ethos, all law, especially international law, which has behind it no power or compulsion or only limited and insecure forces, remains a fragile structure.¹⁴¹

The same ideas figure in the *Report on the Universal Church and the World of Nations*, written under Huber's chairmanship at the Oxford conference of the Life and Work movement in 1937.¹⁴² In line with this, Monod wanted the 'world-wide Church' to provide a soul for the League of Nations in 1932.¹⁴³ These were three examples of how the socio-ethical mission of the Church was translated into an international programme

¹³⁸ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', pp. 577–8.

¹³⁹ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 12. See also e.g. Jonson, *Biskop och motståndsmän*, p. 198.

¹⁴⁰ Nurser, 'The "Ecumenical Movement"', pp. 841–81.

¹⁴¹ Huber, cited in Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 578, in reference to Max Huber, *The Universal Church and the World of Nations* (1938); *The Student World*, 1st Quarter (1939).

¹⁴² Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 159; *The Churches Survey Their Task*, pp. 241–74.

¹⁴³ Wilfred Monod, *L'Eglise peut-elle donner une âme à la Société des Nations?* (Geneva: La Tribune de Genève, 1932). Monod is cited in Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 578.

with a broad focus, corresponding, among other things, to a growing distrust in states and the principle of state sovereignty.¹⁴⁴

While religious liberty concerns were still very much at the heart of the international enterprise, international activism and its scope was thus extended beyond these matters.¹⁴⁵ As Father Edward Duff noted in hindsight, the WCC was encouraged in this effort by the notable success of religious non-governmental actors lobbying at the San Francisco Conference in 1945 for the formal recognition of human rights and a human rights commission.¹⁴⁶ Of course, fundamental freedoms and rights were at this point still rather undefined. The Charter that represented the outcome of the meeting ‘makes only broad reference to man’s rights and freedoms’. It was very much an open question what these rights and freedoms actually were.¹⁴⁷ Yet the vocabulary was adopted in all its vagueness or perhaps it was adopted in part precisely for this reason.

The advance of a new ‘global order’, including human rights and a ‘just and durable peace’, on the part of the ecumenical movement in the years 1943–8 was in many respects, according to Nurser, the work of Nolde, behind whom stood, in the ‘first instance . . . two American Protestant bodies’, namely the FCC and the Foreign Missions Conference of North America (FMC).¹⁴⁸ But the work was shaped ‘in alliance with

¹⁴⁴ Similar ideas about offering a Christian contribution to ‘the common spirit’ and thereby strengthening international institutions can be found e.g. in a paper circulated at the first National Study Conference on ‘The Churches and the International Situation’, organised by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America (FCC) and the Foreign Missions Conference (FMC) in Philadelphia in February 1940; see Nurser, *For All Peoples*, pp. 58–9; Swarthmore College, Peace Collection, Group 48, Series 1, Box 3, National Study Conference, ‘Paper for Discussion at the Seminar on Mission on the World Crisis’.

¹⁴⁵ Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, pp. 35–6.

¹⁴⁶ Edward Duff, *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches* (New York: Association Press, 1956), pp. 276–7. Making an observation about the CCIA having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Nolde notes that it was through the CCIA that the churches of the ecumenical movement could be heard at the UN; Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 35.

¹⁴⁷ Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁸ Nurser, ‘The “Ecumenical Movement”’, p. 842; Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 28. As Hudson puts it: ‘It [the FCC Commission on a Just and Durable Peace] can be considered to have acted for, or at least in the interests of, the provisional World Council, which had still to gather its full forces after the long, hard war’; see Hudson, *The World Council*, p. 31. Commentators also note that the work of the US-based World Alliance lived on in the CCIA even after the World Alliance was dismantled. Hudson, *The World Council*, pp. 46–7; Ehrenström, ‘Movements for International Friendship’, p. 596 (n. 1).

other forces in the United States and in many other countries, whose concerns overlapped to a greater or lesser extent'.¹⁴⁹

Conclusions

In the work by ecumenical bodies, theological views and views about society, as well as the economy and politics were enmeshed. The kind of Protestant and Orthodox Christianity that drove ecumenical actors to conceptualise social-ethical activism so as to include influencing and formulating international law and the new world order in a way that echoed Christian moral ideals was accompanied by distinct views of society, political representation (democracy) and the economy. The advance of international law and human rights would promote a specific type of society, which to the minds of ecumenical actors was the ideal.¹⁵⁰ Human rights was primarily regarded as individual rights. The need to protect individuals from the state was a central concern. Human rights was considered important in the fight against totalitarianism.¹⁵¹ Human rights activism became part of what it meant to act responsibly as Christians.

Foundational theological ideas naturally influenced the role ascribed to Christians and the Christian community in this world and at this time. For the Christian churches, the dignity of man was solidly 'based upon acts of creation and salvation', as were man's responsibilities.¹⁵² Moreover, what is beyond doubt, regardless of the differences between individual theologians and laymen, is that placing the notion of the Kingdom of God firmly within history led to eschatology and ethics being seen as inescapably connected. In ethical thinking about peace and justice, it was possible to build on the notion of the Kingdom of God as coming and as already present. This is not hard to understand, given the way eschatology had become a frame of reference for theology as a whole.

However, a liberal, historically optimistic theological narrative at that point in time did not win over everyone. There was a strong counter-narrative that was neither convinced that the Christian message could be

¹⁴⁹ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁰ Nurser observes that many people working within the JCRL 'expected that a free field for religious advocacy would lead to the choice of their kind of Protestant Christian presence in society as the irreplaceable basis for any economic "progress" or "democracy"'. Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 83.

¹⁵¹ Nurser, *For All Peoples*, p. 83.

¹⁵² Nolde, *Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 51, referring to the CCIA Annual Report 1951–1952, pp. 30ff.

translated comfortably into 'secular' language nor that put much hope in worldly institutions being able to create a better world. Still, the former did become one basis on which international work for peace, social justice and the protection of the inviolability of man, all of which were inter-related, was carried out and legitimated, and human rights became one vocabulary in which to express these preferences.

The liberal optimism that survived the First World War disappeared with the Second World War.¹⁵³ The shift was not dramatic nor was it immediately evident. During the first decades of the CCIA's work, a long-time concern remained the need to undergird international law with an international ethos. The CCIA co-sponsored a 'Conference on the Foundations of International Law in 1950, which attempted to clarify some of the duties and stressed the fact that there was hardly any common ethos binding the large power blocs together'.¹⁵⁴ After the Assembly in Evanston, Illinois, in 1954, the Executive Committee of the CCIA commissioned a study on 'a Christian Approach to an International Ethos', but nothing really came of it apart from some individual papers.¹⁵⁵

While the ecumenical movement through the CCIA continued to work with the UN and related agencies and valued this work, it was becoming clear to the CCIA and others that the UN was not functioning optimally. It reflected the world around it, that is, the member states whose sovereignty the UN had to respect and the imperfections of individual men and women. National interests took over, as did ideological conflicts, and the veto was abused. The UN operated 'on the frontier of international anarchy'.¹⁵⁶ In the end, the hope of an international, global ethos did

¹⁵³ Ehrenström, 'Movements for International Friendship', p. 596.

¹⁵⁴ Nolde, 'Ecumenical Action in International Affairs', p. 283.

¹⁵⁵ Nolde, 'Ecumenical Action in International Affairs', p. 283.

¹⁵⁶ Statement of the CCIA, 'Christians Look at the United Nations' (1953), reproduced in parts in Gaines, *The World Council of Churches*, pp. 553–4; and in the report *The First Six Years 1948–1954: a Report of the Central Committee, of the World Council of Churches on the activities of the Departments and Secretariats of the Council* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1954), p. 96. The issue of how to relate to and view the UN was discussed on consecutive WCC Assemblies in Amsterdam 1948, in Evanston in 1954 and New Delhi in 1961. The CCIA also produced two statements on the topic of 'A Christian Look at the United Nations' (1953), and another in 1965. Nolde concludes, 'On the whole, C.C.I.A. has tended to be critical of world government schemes as unrealistic, finding no viable alternative to improvement and reinforcement of the existing body, the United Nations'; Nolde, 'Ecumenical Action in International Affairs', p. 283. Also the WCC in-house journal, *The Ecumenical Review*, debated the role and contribution of churches in international affairs. See e.g. *The Ecumenical Review*, 6 (October 1953), 1–109.

not materialise. As Nolde concluded in 1960 at a meeting of the Central Committee of the CCIA at St. Andrews:

A positive approach to international problems requires that all leaders of governments accept essential rules of behavior in negotiation. An international ethos is a fundamental prerequisite, but, since no adequate ethos has yet been achieved, effort should be made to win acceptance of a limited number of elementary but basic rules of conduct.¹⁵⁷

A pragmatic stance was now all that the churches could hope for. Back in the early 1940s, the mood had been different. Still, the pragmatic view now taken to the UN and international politics, and the self-critical review that the CCIA and the ecumenical movement carried out regarding its own involvement with international agencies, did not overturn the commitment to human rights. It was quite the contrary, as stated in the introduction. The 1960s was a time when different world churches started to develop a comprehensive view of human rights.

¹⁵⁷ *Minutes of the Central Committee* (St. Andrews, Scotland, 1960), p. 147.