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## LOCAL AND GLOBAL: RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES, CATHOLIC INTERNATIONALISM AND THE PERU MISSION

Carmen M. Mangion, 'Local and global: women religious, religious internationalism and social justice', *Europe's Internationalists: Rethinking the Short Twentieth Century* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2020)

'become more conscious of being part of Mercy – on all levels: local, Latin America, International'<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Women's religious institutes operating as religio-cultural networks were important contributors to the Catholic International. Individual religious congregations of sisters, often centralised with a female General Council directing its actions, expanded their remit internationally for the sake of evangelisation and mission. Even enclosed, contemplative orders of nuns, managed autonomously, crossed national borders in founding new communities to expand their order's mission of prayer. Both modes of religious life were influenced by their international connections and transnational encounters and had a long history of internationalism, but the meaning and understandings of their internationalism shifted from the 1940s, but particularly in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter explores how, as part of the Catholic International, female Catholic religious institutions were influenced in the 1970s and 1980s by a discourse of social justice influenced by liberation theology and linked to social justice for and solidarity with the poor. Women religious (sisters and nuns) questioned socio-economic structures, gender relations and the dynamics of power and authority from within the convent and in the wider world. As part of a shift towards considering systemic change, they repositioned their work from solely the spiritual and corporal works of mercy to the politics of mercy using the language of social justice. From the 1970s, some British religious institutes left their institutional work running large schools and hospitals to move into new ministries. New ministries were both local and global, as women religious united by their emphasis on the marginalised worked locally utilising the global ideals of social justice. The first section of this chapter examines how understanding the Catholic International adds to the broader scholarship on internationalism, exploring the religious and secular developments that motivated the shifts in Catholic internationalism. The case study that follows in the second section analyses Catholic Internationalism in the foreign mission field interrogating how the Sisters of Mercy in England operated as internationalists working in the barrios of Peru.<sup>3</sup> Missionary work

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<sup>1</sup> Archives of the Union Sisters of Mercy, Great Britain (Handsworth, Birmingham) (henceforth RSM Union): MISS/1, 'Common Criteria for Formation Programs in L.A.'

<sup>2</sup> For my article on shifts in women religious 'being' internationalists see Carmen M. Mangion, 'A New Internationalism: Endeavouring to "Build from This Diversity, Unity", 1940-1990', *Journal of Contemporary History* (2019).

<sup>3</sup> The Sisters of Mercy are an international congregation founded by Catherine McAuley in Dublin in 1831. They expanded rapidly in the nineteenth century, following the Irish

was one of the earliest forms of internationalism and intrinsic to the Catholic International but the Peru mission offered a different way of 'doing' internationalism. They shared (with Peruvians) their technical expertise, personal labour and access to funding to create networks both in Peru and in England. Such quotidian practices linked to global ideas, reminds us how the paradigm of internationalism was enacted and lived locally by internationalists on the ground. This chapter argues that missionary work was in flux in the last half of the twentieth century. The Peru mission as both a local mission 'done globally' and a global mission 'done locally' was a response to global religious and secular developments that in emphasising social justice strayed from the top down imperatives of nineteenth-century internationalism to underscore solidarity and collaboration with both the peoples of Peru and other international missionary groups.

Employing a combined methodological approach using archived documentary sources and oral testimonies allows for a more nuanced analysis. The repositories accessed, diocesan and congregation archives, include circular letters and correspondence that give a sense of the day-to-day activities and experiences.<sup>4</sup> Oral narratives were utilised to move past the official decision-making and corporate ideals of the archived documents. They offered more emotive and subjective meanings, and a view from 'ordinary' sisters who would be unlikely to create corporate documents. All this, of course, gives oral sources their value, but also leaves them open to questions of reliability, authenticity, subjectivity, marginality and representativeness. There is a distinctive subjectivity in these oral sources. The three sisters interviewed spent between 14 and 28 years in Peru. They contrast their lives before and after their experiences in Peru suggesting the intensity of the Peru mission; and this time as a radical marker of their lived knowledge of social justice. The Peru mission offers a prism with which to piece together the twentieth-century shifts in Catholic understandings of internationalism, particularly as it operated in the missions. However, this chapter is distinctively one sided in that sources of how the mission was received by Peruvians of the barrio in their own voices do not exist in the archives. The transnational exchanges between different groups of missionaries are examined here, but the reception of the Catholic International is a gaping hole in the larger historiography of internationalism.

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diaspora to English-speaking nations and operating as autonomous communities until the twentieth century when communities amalgamated. At the time of the Peru mission, the majority of Mercy communities in Britain operated within three larger bodies: the Federation of the Sisters of Mercy in Great Britain (formed 1969), the Union of Sisters of Mercy in Great Britain (formed 1976) and the Institute of Our Lady of Mercy (1983). *Trees of Mercy: Sisters of Mercy of Great Britain from 1839* (Essex: Sisters of Mercy, 1993), pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to the Union of Sisters of Mercy in Great Britain, the Institute of Our Lady of Mercy and the Diocese of Leeds for allowing me access to their archives. Special thanks go to archivists Jenny Smith, Vida Milovanovic and Robert Finnegan and the individual sisters who agreed to be interviewed. The editors of this volume offered generous feedback that challenged me to broaden the post-war European context. Their combined suggestions have made this a stronger chapter. Any errors are my own. Research trips were financially supported by Birkbeck, University of London.

## The Catholic International

Interactions between nations form the core of the usual definitions of internationalism as international relations, diplomacy and global economics. Internationalism, though, has a broader constituency, one that encompasses social, cultural and religious movements.<sup>5</sup> This expanding scope has spawned a large, growing body of literature where transnationalism and internationalism are often inter-twined.<sup>6</sup> Internationalism has often been interpreted as a liberal and secular project.<sup>7</sup> Scholars on global civil society have persistently ignored religion, often because it did not fit their preconceptions of a global public sphere.<sup>8</sup> This belies the significance of religious internationalism to the reframing of both religious and internationalist identities on a world stage. Vincent Viaene argued that the ‘threat of secularization focused identities and disciplined structures; multiplying the mobilizing force of organized religion’.<sup>9</sup> The Catholic Church’s concerted efforts to strengthen religious identities and to re-assert its authority was demonstrated by stronger church hierarchies, increased weight on doctrinal matters and a rigorous devotional culture. The Catholic International of the nineteenth century was strengthened by the ‘internationalisation of the Catholic masses’ and the resulting modernisation of the Church.<sup>10</sup>

Until recently, women have been marginalised by much of the internationalist historiography. The growing number of studies engaging with a feminist internationalist agenda includes work on the ‘woman question’ as well as political and humanitarian debates of liberal internationalisms.<sup>11</sup> The role of religion is rarely acknowledged in this literature. As my work has shown, women were an intrinsic, though often unacknowledged, component of the Catholic International.<sup>12</sup> Case studies such as this expand our knowledge of internationalism by acknowledging the missionary enterprise as a form of ‘doing’ internationalism and by featuring female-led religious organisations whose

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann, eds., *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Faist, ‘Towards Transnational Studies: World Theories, Transnationalisation and Changing Institutions’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36 (2010), 1665–1687, p. 1667; Patricia Clavin, ‘Defining Transnationalism’, *Contemporary European History*, 14 (2005), 421–39.

<sup>7</sup> Reinisch has noted that ‘non-liberal’ forms of internationalism remain peripheral to the mainstream historiography. Jessica Reinisch, ‘Introduction: Agents of Internationalism’, *Contemporary European History*, 25 (2016), 195–205, p. 197.

<sup>8</sup> Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, eds., *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Viaene, ‘International History, Religious History, Catholic History: Perspectives for Cross-Fertilization (1830-1914)’, *European History Quarterly* 38 (2008), pp. 578-607, p. 579.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent Viaene, ed., *The Papacy and the New World Order (1878-1903)* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> For ‘liberal’ scholarship see Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Mangion, ‘A New Internationalism’.

feminist and political agenda was more muted in the 1970s and 1980s and whose members did not belong to a liberal elite.<sup>13</sup>

The work of Catholic religious institutes fits neatly into both the broader understanding of internationalism and the narrower Catholic International. From the nineteenth century, the transnational engine of the Catholic International were the armies of male and female religious that traversed the globe to recruit and form 'good' Catholics via the building of a Catholic infrastructure of schools and hospitals. Religious institutes became 'international' as a result of their expansionist strategies. Unlike many of the organisations discussed in histories of internationalism, they were not national organisations that came together under an international umbrella with internationalist aims.<sup>14</sup> Instead, their internationalism was a by-product of their growth, not a purposeful coming together.

Catholic internationalism transformed in the last half of the twentieth century. Emblematic of this change was the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), a global event attended by over 2,000 cardinals and theologians from all over the world. As an event, and in its message of 'renewal', its aim was for the Catholic Church to maintain its relevance in a modernising world.<sup>15</sup> Women religious were urged to re-examine female religious life and to relocate it from the narrow confines of a Catholic world to a more prominent place in civil society.<sup>16</sup> Three papal documents were particularly meaningful to religious. *Gaudium et Spes* (the Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World, 1965), suggested a two-way relationship between the Church and the modern world which linked to a global vision and for some, a radical egalitarianism.<sup>17</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (1964) redefined church, not as the hierarchy and clergy or as leaders and followers but as the 'People of God'.<sup>18</sup> Female religious interpreted this as an impetus to remove barriers between themselves and those who they ministered to, especially as they found themselves identified, not with a higher calling, but as laity. *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (1965) called for the renewal of religious life. Renewal included, amongst many things, ministerial renewal.

Apart from the Second Vatican Council, two other developments were fundamental to a shifting worldview. The first development which straddled the religious and the secular

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<sup>13</sup> For examples of the elite membership to some international organisations see Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>14</sup> Rupp, *Worlds of Women*; Christine von Oertzen, *Science, Gender, and Internationalism: Women's Academic Networks, 1917-1955* (Houndsmill: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> The Second Vatican Council had an influential pre-history including the *nouvelle théologie* of the 1930s. Jay P. Corrin, *Catholic Progressives in England After Vatican II* (South Bend, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 70-4.

<sup>16</sup> Cardinal Leon Joseph Suenens, *The Nun in the World: New Dimensions in the Modern Apostolate* (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), pp. 36, 64, 112-3.

<sup>17</sup> John W. O'Malley, SJ 'Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?', *Theological Studies*, 67 (2006), 3-33, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, §33. The English text of papal documents can be found here: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/> accessed 11 October 2019.

worlds was the emergence of liberation theology.<sup>19</sup> The Second Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) held in Medellín, Colombia in 1968, and the later one in Puebla, Mexico in 1979, articulated a particular response to poverty and oppression through the 'preferential option for the poor'. Liberation language became significant to the development of Catholic missions from the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> One tangible response, which will be discussed below, was basic ecclesial communities (base communities), often created by the poor and marginalised, as a church *of* the poor rather than a church *for* the poor.<sup>21</sup>

And the second development was the secular world: Church teachings appeared congruent with some of the ideologies that informed the 1960s social movements. The sixties were not exclusively about personal freedoms or challenging authorities and conventions; social movements of the long 1960s also engaged and acted on questions of social and economic justice for those living with socially constructed inequities.<sup>22</sup> Influenced by these developments, religious ministries relocated some works away from emphasising charity to addressing social problems such as inadequate housing for single women, unliveable wages, limited job opportunities, occupationally compromised health and rationalised educational opportunities. Individual sisters and nuns also engaged with global movements such as ecological campaigns, anti-war movements and civil rights.

The existing scholarship on women religious highlights a major shift in the ministries of sisters and nuns, charting the movement from traditional 'works of mercy' to social justice ministries.<sup>23</sup> My own work suggests a slow transition with a select few individuals leading the way in experimenting in social justice ministries. Demographic factors also undergirded decision-making; the inability to fully staff because of declining numbers many of the large, institutional enterprises female religious managed led to their closure or transfer to outside bodies. New, often smaller, sometimes individual, endeavours reflected a broadening of ministries and the influence of the prominent discourse of social justice and secular social movements. There was both continuity and change from the mid-1970s and 1980s, as

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<sup>19</sup> Liberation theology was a radical movement that emerged from Latin America as a reaction to the poverty and oppression of the poor. Its most well-known theologian was Gustavo Gutiérrez. It has had a chequered history, embraced by many in the 1970s, but concerns of Marxism caused it to fall into disfavour. Timothy Gorringer, 'Liberation Theology' in Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 659-60.

<sup>20</sup> For example, see Barbra Mann Wall, *Into Africa: A Transnational History of Catholic Medical Missions and Social Change* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), pp. 84-90.

<sup>21</sup> Ellen M. Leonard, 'Ecclesial Religious Communities Old and New', *The Way Supplement* (2001), pp. 119-27, p. 123.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Marwick, 'The Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties: Voices of Reaction, Protest, and Permeation', *The International History Review*, 27 (2005), 780-806, p. 791.

<sup>23</sup> Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 639-41; Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007); Mary Beth Fraser Connolly, *Women of Faith: The Chicago Sisters of Mercy and the Evolution of a Religious Community* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

religious communities attempted to both maintain current ministries and accommodate the desires of sisters and nuns who requested permission to experiment with new ministries. Much of the social justice work done by religious institutes was initially ad hoc; by the late 1980s and 1990s, after a few decades of experimentation, many religious institutes developed more strategic ministerial visions. The determination to stand with the poor and marginalised was intrinsic to experimental ministries that would be political, without being overtly activist or protest-oriented.<sup>24</sup>

## THE PERU MISSION

Renewed Catholic Internationalism, initiated by lay Catholics as well as female and male religious reflected the interconnectedness between Catholics and the social movements of a post-war Catholic and secular world. The case study in this chapter examines Catholic internationalism in the foreign mission field interrogating how the Sisters of Mercy in England, sought the 'reform of society and politics by way of transnational cooperation'.<sup>25</sup> In doing this, it highlights first, the ways in which Catholic foreign missions operated in the twentieth century, reworking nineteenth-century models of mission linked with salvation to embrace a post-war emphasis on social justice. This case study shows how concerns for social justice were addressed locally in Peru, and globally through the new thinking on foreign missions which was often based on the idealism of liberation theology. Second, the Sisters of Mercy operated a corporate mission interacting within a Catholic International connected with their international Mercy family and with other Catholic religious institutes, male and female, operating in Peru. This dynamic of connections has broader implications for how we can try to make sense of internationalism in practice.

The Catholic Church has always self-identified as a missionary church engaged in the salvation of souls through charitable work often educating the poor or healing the sick.<sup>26</sup> It rarely questioned poverty, assuming its inevitability and valorising its participants. Pope Pius XII's encyclical letter *Evangelii praecones* (On the Promotion of Catholic Missions, 1951) introduced a different way forward for Catholic foreign missions. In criticising both communism and capitalism and highlighting social justice, it proposed that charity was not enough: social and economic reform was necessary.<sup>27</sup> Pius XII's encyclical to Catholic bishops, *Fidei Donum* (On the Present Condition of the Catholic Missions, 1957) called for a

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<sup>24</sup> Carmen M. Mangion, *Catholic nuns and sisters in a secular age, Britain 1945-1990* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), Chapter 7.

<sup>25</sup> This essay uses Paul Wende's definition of internationalism as a means to 'create international identities, and to reform society and politics by way of transnational cooperation, and the process of internationalizing cultural, political, and economic practices'. Paul Wende, 'Foreword', in Geyer and Paulmann (ed.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism*, p. v.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Pasture, 'Dechristianization and the Changing Religious Landscape in Europe and North America since 1950: Comparative, Transatlantic and Global Perspectives', in *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, ed. by Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 367-402, p. 371.

<sup>27</sup> Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the Industrial Age, 1740-1958* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), pp. 282-3.



'keener interest in the missionary apostolate among your priests' and for bishops to make priests available for missionary activities.<sup>28</sup> Pope Paul VI also encouraged the Catholic missionary enterprise. Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples, 1967) highlighted the injustice of poverty and promoted development (with certain caveats). Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelisation of the Modern World, 1975) connected proclaiming and witnessing the Gospel with social justice. The Latin American episcopal conferences, particularly the ones in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), added another dimension to missiology which identified with the 'church of the poor', linking together the poverty caused by injustice. Latin American bishops insisted that evangelisation would not occur without transformation of the structures of Latin American society. They encouraged conscientization, the development of a critical consciousness through a process of reflection and action.<sup>29</sup> These documents and meetings encouraged a re-thinking of missions from the nineteenth-century focus on salvation and a universalism that insisted on uniformity to a European way of being Catholic to an openness to re-think missionary praxis influenced by Latin American missiology.

### **'doing' internationalism**

In 1961, Bishop of Leeds, George Dwyer (1908-1985) responded to the *Fidei Donum* appeal by sending diocesan priests to work with the Missionary Society of St Columban in Peru.<sup>30</sup> One of these priests, Gerald Hanlon, wrote requesting sisters to work with him in Tahuantinsuyo, a locale on the fringes of Lima, Peru.<sup>31</sup> In 1969, the Sisters of Mercy agreed to send a multi-community team of four sisters to the *barriada* of 30,000 in Tupac Amaru.<sup>32</sup> In 1984, another group of Sisters of Mercy founded a second mission at Villa Sol, also on the outskirts of Lima. Both groups began their ministries as they did in their founder Catherine McAuley's time by visiting the poor and sick, keeping in mind her admonition regarding visitations: '[...] act with great tenderness [...] relieve distress [...] promote the cleanliness, ease and comfort of the sick person since we are always better disposed to receive advice and instruction from those who show compassion for us.'<sup>33</sup> In continuity with how ministries had operated throughout their history, evangelisation was still a core feature of

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<sup>28</sup> *Fidei Donum* §4.

<sup>29</sup> Timothy McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: Before and After Vatican II, 1878-1993* (Chicago IL: Loyola University Press, 1994), pp. 253-9. The Latin American bishops were not all convinced of the effectiveness of economic development; nor were they all in agreement with a 'preferential option for the poor' or conscientization. Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire has utilized the concept of conscientization, a term grounded in Marxist critical theory and linked to social change, and considers that a critical consciousness can (in theory) be transformed into organised class solidarity.

<sup>30</sup> The Missionary Society of St Columban evolved from the Maynooth Mission to China founded in 1920. In 1951, Columban fathers were missioned to Lima where they were assigned a parish in the north side of the city.

<sup>31</sup> Gerald Hanlon, 'Letter from Lima', *The Far East* (December 1969), pp. 4-6.

<sup>32</sup> Archive Institute of Our Lady of Mercy, Bermondsey (henceforth IOLM): IOLM/PERU/3/1, Peru Mission flyer published by the Leeds Diocese; RSM Union: MISS/1, 'Papers re. Peru mission, 1980s– 2000s, Villa Sol, Lima, Peru'.

<sup>33</sup> IOLM/PERU/3/1: 'Mercy Response to the Cry of the Poor', p. 19.



the missionary enterprise.<sup>34</sup> The Sisters of Mercy nursed the sick and in teaching the Catholic catechism educated children and adults. It was difficult, absorbing work complicated by a language barrier that often took years to overcome.<sup>35</sup> Sisters spoke of their early inept language skills with embarrassment, highlighting their own frustration and the patience and good humour of local inhabitants. Some sisters came and went quickly, finding themselves unsuited for missionary work or succumbing to illness. Others were transformed by this new ministry, committing themselves to sometimes decades of service in Peru.

The Sisters of Mercy's missionary work was reflective of both the old and new ways of being missionaries. It was undergirded by their faith and methods of evangelisation that promoted European ideas of orthodox Catholicism linked to the Universal Church. The church of their youth would have understood universalism as uniformity; the missionary endeavour informed and performed through a European lens focused on the salvation of the 'other'. Embedded in this universalism were hierarchies of ethnicity, class and gender and the superiority of a European Catholicism. These understandings can be read in one sister's report in the early years of the mission: 'The general opinion is that our people [the Peruvians] were baptised but never evangelised. To awaken them spiritually means first of all the eradication of superstition ...'.<sup>36</sup> These thoughts reflected the nineteenth-century views of the role of foreign missionaries to replace 'superstition' with European Catholic practices. However, the influence of social justice, later inspired by liberation theology, led to other understandings and practice of ministry. In Peru, the Sisters of Mercy from England avoided the institutional emphasis that had been characteristic of nineteenth-century Catholic foreign missions.<sup>37</sup> Rather than build large educational or health care institutions that they expected to control and manage in perpetuity, they worked from within the community, encouraging the development of base communities that emboldened a Catholicism that was critically conscious and would become 'Peruvian' rather than 'European'.<sup>38</sup> The Sisters of Mercy did not control directly the knowledge they dispensed;

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<sup>34</sup> RSM Union: MISS/1. 'Papers re. Peru mission, 1980s– 2000s, Villa Sol, Lima, Peru'.

<sup>35</sup> Sisters were sent to the language school run by the St James Society in Lima upon their arrival where they studied for four months; for many sisters, it took years to obtain linguistic proficiency.

<sup>36</sup> Sister Mildred McNamara, 'Our Sisters write from Peru', *Leeds Diocesan Gazette* (August 1971).

<sup>37</sup> Not all foreign missions chose this route. Many, including the Sisters of Mercy from Cork, Ireland opened institutions such as schools. See Phyl Clancy, *A Journey of Mercy: From Birth to Rebirth* (Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, 1994), pp. 153-61. Evelyn Bolster, *Mercy in Cork 1837-1987: A Sesquicentennial Commemoration* (Tower Books, 1987), pp. 59-63. I am grateful to archivist Marianne Cosgrave of the Mercy Congregational Archives in Dublin for pointing me to these materials.

<sup>38</sup> Basic ecclesial communities grew rapidly in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s. They were small non-hierarchical church communities. Some were connected to a local Catholic parish, others were stridently anti-institutional. They developed also in Italy, France and Spain where Catholics unhappy with the Church hierarchy found a space to discuss and question Church teachings and actively develop social justice and political initiatives not all of which would have been congruent with church teaching.

they instructed catechists, barrio residents, who in turn taught Catholic doctrine and catechism and prepared their co-religionists for the sacraments of communion and confirmation. Barrio catechists became the primary agents of evangelization in their communities. They were connected to their local parish, involved in community activities including weekly formation meetings and prayer and youth groups who prepared the liturgy.<sup>39</sup>

Many initiatives were women-centred. They included organising kitchens (*comedores*) throughout the barrio where local women cooked and provided meals at a nominal charge to the 70% of the barrio inhabitants who were un- or under-employed. Tupac Amaru women created income-generating native crafts that were later sold by Mercy communities throughout England. This income gave women independent access to funds to help run their home and educate their children. One sister wrote describing her daily work:

We help the sick; we help in the *comedors* or communal kitchens; we help with crafts; in fact we try to help the women move out of the isolation of their homes, often little more than a shack, so that they can learn to organise, share their concerns & find the support of friendship. For the women it is the food, medicines or money earned, that matter most. That is what makes the difference between life & death for them & their families. But we hope they see us as people who represent the God of life, interested in helping them & their families to live [...].<sup>40</sup>

Written in the 1980s, this excerpt demonstrates the Sisters of Mercy embrace of traditional 'caring' work of the corporal works of mercy. Yet the language suggests an approach that differs from the nineteenth century: sisters were 'work[ing] with the Senoras' rather than managing. Barrio women were expected to take the lead in these enterprises and to 'learn to organise'. The traditional work of the Sisters of Mercy 'visiting the sick' was soon managed by members of a local women's group. Another group organised the *comedors*. One sister recorded their progress: 'Having already acquired the cooking utensils they must now provide a secure roof to safeguard this equipment.' The priority of the barrio women was the practical work of survival: 'food, medicines or money earned'. But it seems important too that these women 'share their concerns & find the support of friendship'<sup>41</sup> suggesting consciousness-raising (or perhaps the conscientization of the Puebla CELAM conference), of the larger social structures that were complicit in the poverty that oppressed them. Their aims were to encourage barrio residents 'to be actively involved in every effort being made to improve their lot – spiritually, physically and materially'.<sup>42</sup>

Clinics and special schools were initiated by the Sisters of Mercy, but they were intended to be run and managed by local constituents. The Sisters in Tupac Amaru in 1969 immediately opened up a clinic in their residence with (at least initially) one sister-nurse as the sole medical practitioner. By 1984 this had grown into a stand-alone brick structure, a Posta

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<sup>39</sup> IOLM/PERU/1/3, Circular Letter from Sister M. Mildred McNamara to Sisters dated 1985.

<sup>40</sup> IOLM/PERU/1/3, Circular Letter from Sister M. Mildred McNamara to Sisters dated 1985.

<sup>41</sup> IOLM/PERU/1/3, Circular Letter from Sister M. Mildred McNamara to Sisters dated 1985.

<sup>42</sup> IOLM/PERU/3/1: 'Mercy Response to the Cry of the Poor', p. 4.

Medica that was managed by local administrators and medical personnel.<sup>43</sup> Sisters initially provided their technical expertise sharing standards of hygiene and biomedical practices, and in the training of barrio residents created employment opportunities; one sister wrote of 'getting some of our girls into the local hospital to be trained'.<sup>44</sup> Letters home to sisters in England recount them 'teaching the mothers the basics of nutrition and hygiene, with special concern for expectant mothers and new-born babies. The mothers are very anxious to co-operate, and Sister is training them, so that they in turn can help others.'<sup>45</sup> Another sister teamed with English priests and the Columban sisters to open a centre for children impaired with mental or physical ailments which also operated as an advice and advocacy centre. One sister explained how staff members became advocates for local people: 'So this centre became quite a centre, you know, where people gravitated towards, and we were able to help them go to the hospital if they needed callipers on their legs, or whatever it might have been [...].'<sup>46</sup> The teachers in the centre were Peruvian, and as teaching qualifications changed, were funded by the mission to attend courses or obtain university training in order to meet national requirements. This enabling of expertise respected the quality of local training. The sharing of expertise, whether it be biomedical, pedagogical or organisational, was a feature of these smaller, community-run groups. This emphasis on self-help was also constituent in the ministries of religious institutes who chose to establish schools and hospitals where medical and educational infrastructures were non-existent. Influenced by social justice and liberation theology, these institutional ways of doing internationalism also shared technical expertise often intending that institutions would transfer to local control.<sup>47</sup>

Sisters did not shy away from politicisation of poverty. They arranged for speakers to discuss with barrio residents 'more fully their position in a fast declining economy, as well as the various ways in which they may try to overcome exploitation'.<sup>48</sup> They organised Human Rights Groups and the 'building, furnishing & organising [of] a workshop for the Craft Group which will also provide an overnight refuge for battered women to be named "Casa de Misericordia."<sup>49</sup> They promoted native culture by organising Peruvian Folk Groups that were 'essential' according to one sister 'because many of the children born in the barrio have lost their 'roots', be it religious/musical/dance, etc.'<sup>50</sup> Barrio women were encouraged

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<sup>43</sup> IOLM/PERU/3/1: 'Mercy Response to the Cry of the Poor', Letter from Mother Imelda Keena to Sisters re: Feb to March 1985, pp. 51-2.

<sup>44</sup> Sister Mildred McNamara, 'Our Sisters write from Peru', *Leeds Diocesan Gazette* (August 1971).

<sup>45</sup> RSM Union: Miss/1: 'Peru 1978', Letter from Sister Mary Fitzsimons to dear Sisters undated.

<sup>46</sup> Interview RSM 011. The stories I heard were intensely personal and sometimes emotive, and some participants wished to remain anonymous so all the oral narratives have been anonymised for consistency.

<sup>47</sup> Wall, *Into Africa*, pp. 152-3.

<sup>48</sup> IOLM/PERU/3/1, 'Mercy Response to the Cry of the Poor', Letter from Mother Imelda Keena to Sisters re: Feb to March 1985, p. 54.

<sup>49</sup> IOLM/PERU/1/3, Circular Letter from Sister M. Mildred McNamara to Sisters dated 1985.

<sup>50</sup> IOLM/PERU/3/1, 'Mercy Response to the Cry of the Poor', Letter from Mother Imelda Keena to Sisters re: Feb to March 1985, p. 53.

to organise, facilitate groups, raise funds; ultimately taking responsibility of their own communities and organising in collaborative, non-hierarchical ways. The Sisters of Mercy acknowledged the political ramifications of what they did. One sister admitted: 'In such a complex scene, it is not easy to steer a middle course, in giving witness to Christian values of social justice and human rights, with sufficient sensitivity not to provide an excuse to someone in a power-position to retaliate against the very people our Sisters are trying to serve.'<sup>51</sup> One historian of Peru has called these forms of community organizing 'fraught with social and political implications'.<sup>52</sup> In a position paper dated 1987, the Sisters of Mercy reported on 'signs of life'. These included barrio residents organising to put in basic services of water, sewerage and electricity. Disappointments could be intuited in this paper also, including the struggles to maintain democratic processes within the barrio structures. The position paper acknowledged that their aims, to create an active, Catholic populace with networks, confidence, skills and knowledge to address their own oppression, was far from complete.

### Collaborations

Collaboration with other religious communities was also a new feature of the twentieth-century Catholic International. In the nineteenth century, successful missions to foreign lands would have been staffed by religious sisters from one religious institute. Declining numbers entering religious life limited the pool of missionaries so co-operation between members of different religious congregations became more commonplace. One Sister of Mercy, alongside members from the Missionary Sisters of St Columban (Columban sisters) and Sisters of Mary Reparatrix, implemented religious programmes in ten centres for the physically impaired creating teaching materials for teachers and parents.<sup>53</sup> They shared pedagogical expertise as they travelled throughout Peru giving one-day courses to local staff on preparatory programmes for first communion and confirmation, and tutoring Peruvian catechists.<sup>54</sup> Relationships between religious were more than simply collegiate.<sup>55</sup> One sister remarked: 'And you became very, the missionaries together, you became very close, you were like one family. You never thought of them as different orders. Yeah, worked with the Franciscans were lovely as well, and the priests were lovely, you know.'<sup>56</sup>

The Columbans were central to coordinating the Leeds Peru Mission; they provided the intellectual, spiritual and physical hub of these Peruvian endeavours.<sup>57</sup> They arrived in Peru in 1951 and by the end of the century, they, alongside priests, religious sisters and Catholic laity, were managing twelve parishes. They were vital to this experimenting though this was

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<sup>51</sup> IOLM/PERU/3/1: 'Mercy Response to the Cry of the Poor', Report on visit to Lima, 19 March-11 April 1987 by Mother Imelda Keena p. 68.

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey L. Klaiber, 'Prophets and Populists: Liberation Theology, 1968-1988', *The Americas*, 46 (1989), 1-15, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> RSM Union: Miss/1: 'Peru 1978', Letter from Sister Joan Healy to Sisters dated Sep 1981.

<sup>54</sup> RSM Union: Miss/1: 'Peru 1978', Letter from Sister Joan Healy to Mother Augustine Cahill dated August 1982.

<sup>55</sup> Mangion, *Catholic nuns and sisters in a secular age*, Chapter 5.

<sup>56</sup> Interview RSM 012.

<sup>57</sup> The Columbans were members of the Missionary Society of St Columba, a religious institute inaugurated in Dublin in 1916.

not without tensions.<sup>58</sup> Mission praxis emanating from liberation theology was political, and some were insistent the Columbans should stick to their pastoral role. Others, like Tiago G. Cloin Redemptorist and Bishop of Barra Bahia in Brazil speaking to the Columbans at a week-long study week urged a more radical thinking:

[...] I would like to add only one thing about sending missionaries to Latin America. The missionary needs many qualities, but one is absolutely essential – a great feeling for social justice [...].<sup>59</sup>

One sister acknowledged the significance of the Columbans to the mission: it was ‘to them that all other priests and Sisters there converge for organisation of mission projects, for organisation of finances for collection of their mail, for advice, for the proverbial cuppa, and above all for the experience of real caring friendship.’<sup>60</sup> Other occasions for collegiality and mutual support included the monthly meal shared by the Mercy sisters of Villa Maria and Villa Sol with nearby sisters of other religious institutes.<sup>61</sup>

Sisters of Mercy, like other congregations, continued to imbibe spiritual and political sustenance through their association with the Columbans who organised regular retreats and meetings. One sister recalled at one of these meetings the influence of the foremost liberation theologian of their generation, Gustavo Gutiérrez with: ‘I remember hearing him, yeah. And some of the foreign priests would too, yeah. And every day there was different topics.’<sup>62</sup> Liberation theology became controversial in Catholic circles. Some were concerned it enabled the spread of Marxism whilst others believed it strengthened the democratisation process and ‘awaken[s] the poor to the dangers of any form of political manipulation, whether from the right or the left’.<sup>63</sup> The mission to Peru, while adhering to some of the nineteenth-century ideals about ‘care’ for the poor incorporated new thinking on liberation theology and its language of the margins politicised the missionary aims of the Sisters of Mercy. This terminology was used frequently in the recollections of individual sisters. One sister recalled:

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<sup>58</sup> Michael Fitzgerald, ‘Changing Course’, *The Far East* (November 1969), pp. 4-6; Angelyn Dries, *Be Centered in Christ and Not in Self: The Missionary Society of Saint Columban: The North American Story (1918–2018)* (Xlibris Corporation, 2017), pp. 202-205.

<sup>59</sup> Tiago G. Cloin, ‘Latin America – Brazil’ in Enda Mc Donagh, ed., *The Church is Mission* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), pp. 164-170, p. 170.

<sup>60</sup> RSM Union: Miss/1: Peru 1978, Letter from Sister Margaret Mary to dear Sisters dated March 1985.

<sup>61</sup> Interview RSM 011.

<sup>62</sup> Interview RSM 012. Peña in pointing out that ‘protest language in liberation theology echoed that of an already mobilized popular sector’ acknowledges already existing ‘poor people’s movements’. Milagros Peña, ‘Liberation Theology in Peru: An Analysis of the Role of Intellectuals in Social Movements’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 33 (1994), 34-45 (p. 43).

<sup>63</sup> Jeffrey L. Klaiber, ‘Prophets and Populists: Liberation Theology, 1968-1988’, *The Americas*, 46.01 (1989), 1–15, p. 14. Liberation theology also has a place in black and feminist movements.

liberation theology was beginning to come in and the call of the Church as well, yeah, was saying to reach out to the poor. And we seemed to have everything, really. And it was, for me, I know you can't solve everything, but we can share.<sup>64</sup>

In acknowledging the 'we' in England who had 'everything', this sister was moved to 'share' though acknowledging the limitations of any permanent solution to the inequities of life for the poor in Peru. Sharing faith and evangelisation was intrinsic to the Peru mission, but by harnessing the discourse of social justice the Sisters of Mercy were engaged with a political intent that was more than simply 'care'. They took the opportunity to respond to the 'preferential option for the poor' by redistributing resources and personnel to the mission field where support was needed. What underpinned these practical ministries was the desire to be 'present' to the poor; and to urge barrio residents to develop structures and skills they would use in their own journey of much hoped for liberation.

The mission to Peru brought together sisters from several communities in England and also introduced them to other groups of Sisters of Mercy missioned to Peru from Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>65</sup> These autonomous groups became more interconnected from the late 1970s. North American groups of Mercies in Latin America united under the umbrella 'Mercy Union General of the United States'.<sup>66</sup> The Sisters of Mercy then expanded this grouping internationally, deciding it would be fruitful to connect as one body in Latin America though links to home countries remained in place. They were united in a Mercy identity that became stronger as they became 'more conscious of being part of Mercy – on all levels: local, Latin America, International'.<sup>67</sup> They held regular conferences, nationally, regionally and internationally. The Latin American and Caribbean conference of 1989 had as one of its aims to 'grow towards greater unity'. Together they drew up the 'Common Criteria for Formation Programs in L.A. [Latin America]'. Many were also wedded to an understanding of mission which incorporated social justice language such as the desire to 'insert oneself among the poor (house, work, Heart)'; 'allow the poor to evangelize us'; and 'accompany the people in their struggles to defend life (justice initiative, co-ops, workshops, etc.)'.<sup>68</sup>

The educational remit of the Sisters of Mercy extended beyond the *barriada*. Their regular letters home were shared and discussed in Mercy communities. There were continued efforts to maintain links between the Sisters of Mercy in Peru and in England at a time of tumultuous change in religious life.<sup>69</sup> Regular visitors included congregation leaders and sometimes ordinary sisters. Mother General Augustine Cahill and Mother Imelda Keena of

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<sup>64</sup> Interview RSM 012.

<sup>65</sup> Mary Beth Fraser Connolly briefly discusses the Chicago Sisters of Mercy Sicuani mission to Peru which established schools and health care facilities. Connolly, *Women of Faith*, pp. 162-3. For more on the United States missions see Angelyn Dries, *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), pp. 179-246.

<sup>66</sup> RSM Union: MISS/1, 'Policy regarding the Peru Mission', p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> RSM Union: MISS/1, 'Common Criteria for Formation Programs in L.A. [Latin America]'.  
<sup>68</sup> RSM Union: MISS/1, 'Common Criteria for Formation Programs in L.A. [Latin America]'

<sup>69</sup> Mangion, *Catholic nuns and sisters in a secular age*, Chapter 1.

Doncaster spent eight weeks in 1980 with Mercy sisters in Tupac Amaru promoting community renewal. Upon her return, Mother Imelda Keena was anxious to share her experiences indicating: 'This is an opportunity for us to show our solidarity with our sisters working in the Third World, as well as giving us the chance of coming together for a few hours to renew our friendships and deepen our relationships.'<sup>70</sup>

In 'bearing witness', Sisters of Mercy also conveyed eyewitness accounts of political and economic injustices and structural inequities faced by barrio occupants to a larger English audience. 'Bearing witness' according to theorist Fuyuki Kurasawa encompasses a 'web of cosmopolitan testimonial practices structured around five dialectically related tasks and perils': voice against silence; interpretation against incomprehension; empathy against indifference; remembrance against forgetting and prevention against repetition.<sup>71</sup> Media coverage of Peru in the Catholic parish, diocesan and national press included vivid accounts of Lima's poverty by the Bishop of Leeds, George Dwyer, alongside fundraising efforts of parish Justice and Peace groups, Friends of Peru and a folk-singing girl-group from Notre Dame High School.<sup>72</sup> Epistolary exchanges in the 1970s and 1980s were important means of communication in the early days of the transnational 'era of the witness' when media coverage was less instantaneous and relentless.<sup>73</sup> Bearing witness did not 'cure' or eliminate injustice, but it was, as Kurasawa highlighted, an 'act of resistance' that potentially enabled participation, empathy and knowledge to cross national borders.<sup>74</sup> 'Bearing witness' had a remarkable similarity to one of the 1979 Puebla commitments: to give public witness for the Church's solidarity with the poor. Sisters of Mercy shared and criticised the injustices lived daily by barrio occupants and expressed solidarity with the poor whilst conscientizing Catholics in England.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The Sisters of Mercy in their missions to Peru sought to empower those marginalised by poverty by creating local institutions and processes that would be managed and supported by barrio residents, but were integrated into international missionary networks that were part of the Catholic International. They supplied resources in the form of technical expertise, personal labour, access to funding and knowledge of information, creating networks both in Peru and in England. This form of religious internationalism was born from a desire of women religious from England, and elsewhere, to engage with the assumed spiritual and known material needs of Peruvians. As Catholic missionaries, they shared an understanding of marginalisation, seen through the lens of social justice and liberation

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<sup>70</sup> RSM Union: Miss/1, Letter from Sister Mary Malachy Slavin to sisters dated 7 February 1980.

<sup>71</sup> Fuyuki Kurasawa, 'A Message in a Bottle: Bearing Witness as a Mode of Transnational Practice', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26 (2009), 92–111, p. 92.

<sup>72</sup> 'Parish visit in Peru', *Catholic Herald*, 21 August 1964, p. 4; 'Mr Kieron Moore', *Catholic Herald*, 3 August 1977, p. 3; 'People and Places', *Catholic Herald*, 17 March 1978, p. 7; 'People and Places', *Catholic Herald*, 19 March 1978, p. 9; 'Christopher Howse reports on the differences in a working childhood', *Catholic Herald*, 29 February 1980, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* translated by Jared Stark (London: Cornell University Press, 1998/2006), p. 96.

<sup>74</sup> Kurasawa, 'A Message in a Bottle', p. 106.



theology. Scholars Emily Baughan and Juliano Fiori have stressed this form of humanitarian action, the empowerment of local actors, could be 'part of a politics of transnational solidarity':

This is not a solidarity based on shared experience or characteristics, nor is it one that privileges the role of the outsider as an 'impartial spectator'. Instead, it is a solidarity between different agents with distinctive roles in pursuit of a common goal: a more just politics that challenges marginalisation, oppression, and subordination in their various forms.<sup>75</sup>

The mission of the Sisters of Mercy reflected a shift in the strategies of tackling of injustices through an interdependent relationship where giving and receiving was experienced by all parties.

Women religious were guided by a Catholic ethos that provided the religious motivation to engage with liberal, modern ideas of social justice. Jaclyn Granick, in her examination of three faith-based organisations called this 'sacralized humanitarianism' and argued that religious humanitarians drew on their faith 'for motivation, for justification, for empathy and combined it with the liberal ideas of the times [...] They interpreted the world in light of their particular beliefs and adapted their organizations to navigate the balance of an ever-changing world and religious tradition [...]'.<sup>76</sup> Social justice and liberation theology with its 'preferential option for the poor' allied with the idealism and activism of the long 1960s informed the Sisters of Mercy mission in Peru. The sacred was personal, as well as political. The women I interviewed were guided throughout their ministerial work by their relationship with God; many found the new connections and relationships with the 'people of God' transformational. Their decision to move outside of traditional convent ministries was not lightly taken, it was informed by a discourse of social justice that emanated from pontifical letters and encyclicals and their interpretation of the needs of the world. For women religious, these shifts in the 1970s and 1980s were 'radical' responses at a time of transition. Admittedly, such radicalness does not translate well in a secular world that identifies 'radical' with 'radical politics'. Ethnographer Marla F. Frederick suggested from her study of black women and faith that 'women's refashioning of their world may not always coincide with traditional interpretations of radical politics; nevertheless the communities they create and the life changes they inspire speak to the agentive possibilities of their faith.'<sup>77</sup> It is this agentive possibility that is salient to the radical nature of the early

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<sup>75</sup> Emily Baughan and Juliano Fiori, 'Save the Children, the Humanitarian Project, and the Politics of Solidarity: Reviving Dorothy Buxton's Vision', *Disasters*, 39:2 (2015), 129–45.

<sup>76</sup> Jaclyn Granick, 'Sacralized Humanitarianism: A Comparison of Three Faith-Based Private Associations', 2011 <<http://www.swiss-quakers.ch/ge/library/e-documents/7971-Granick2011.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2016/. Granick cites the work of Lisa Moses Leff on sacralised work. Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 169.

<sup>77</sup> Marla F. Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (London: University of California Press, 2003) p. 12.

adopters of experimental religious ministries. For many women, the working for social justice was inherently political as it critiqued the inequities faced by the marginalised.

In the creation of internationalist identities and the 'doing' of internationalism, female Catholic missionaries crossed boundaries in order to strengthen religious identities but also to re-form and support societies through solidarity and collaboration. As part of a larger Catholic International, religious institutes were rethinking their internationalism in response to the spirit of *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council, the development of liberation theology and the influential secular social movements of the long 1960s. Missionary work as a form of internationalism did not occur in a vacuum, it was aligned to the larger social movements of the post-war Catholic and secular world. Women religious were guided by global thinking and influenced by social justice rhetoric. Motivated by faith without an explicitly feminist or political agenda, women religious as internationalists negotiated how their internationalism was defined, lived and experienced. They were significant historical actors within the Catholic International. The Peru mission responded to global religious and secular imperatives; it diverged from the top down structures of nineteenth-century internationalism to stress solidarity and collaboration with both the peoples of Peru and other international groups. These were collaborative ventures, Sisters of Mercy from England worked alongside other Sisters of Mercy, clergy, female and male religious and lay people. New praxis in the foreign missions integrated global thinking revealing both a local mission done globally, as part of an extensive Catholic International and 'bearing witness' to Catholic communities in England; and a global mission done locally with religious sisters living and collaborating with the inhabitants of the *barriadas* of Peru. Internationalism is not simply a secular, liberal product of modernity.

## ABSTRACT

As part of a larger Catholic International, religious orders and congregations around the world were rethinking their internationalism in response to the spirit of *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and post-war social movements. As significant historical actors within the Catholic International, women religious (sisters and nuns) began questioning social structures, gender relations and the dynamics of power and authority from within the convent and in the wider world. Persuaded in the 1970s and 1980s particularly by the global discourse of social justice influenced by liberation theology, some British religious institutes left their institutional work running large schools and hospitals to move into new ministries. This chapter interrogates one of these new ministries: the Sisters of Mercy's missionary work in the barrios of Peru. Motivated by faith and initially without an explicitly feminist or political agenda, women religious as internationalists negotiated how their internationalism was defined, lived and experienced. Missionary work was one of the earliest forms of internationalism but the Peru mission offered a different way of 'doing' internationalism. Missionary praxis diverged from the top down structures of nineteenth-century internationalism to stress solidarity and collaboration with both the peoples of Peru and other international groups. The Peru mission integrated global thinking revealing both a local mission done globally, as part of an extensive Catholic International and 'bearing witness' to Catholic communities in England; and a global mission done locally with religious sisters living and collaborating with Peruvians in the *barriadas*.