H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Religion in an Age of Imperial Humanitarianism, 1850-1950. Harald Fischer-Tiné, Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich; Johannes Paulmann, Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte Mainz; Alexandra Przyrembel, Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen, 05.09.2012-07.09.2012.

Reviewed by Esther Möller
Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (April, 2013)

Religion in an Age of Imperial Humanitarianism, 1850-1950

The goal of the international and interdisciplinary conference was to discuss the globalisation of religious humanitarianism in the context of its entanglement with European colonial powers on the one hand and the colonies on the other. With its main focus on missionary societies, missionary orders and philanthropic organisations that pursued religious and more broadly humanitarian aims, the task was to analyse the longevity, ambiguity and malleability of religious arguments for state and non-state humanitarian assistance well into the twentieth century.

The first panel on "Global Players and Humanitarian Networks" took a close look at different Protestant organisations which were among the first to deliver humanitarian aid in a global sense. IAN TYRRELL (Sydney) noted a surge in humanitarianism in the United States in the 1890s which he described as a new form in his paper "American Missionaries and Moral Reform in the Conception and Mobilisation of Humanitarian Transnational Movements in the Age of Formal Empire, 1898-1934". Quoting "For God, home and humanity" as the motif of American Protestant Missionaries, he characterised their activities, such as medical aid or educational programmes, as national, personal and consciously an "-ism" leading to a transnational humanitarian engagement. Moreover, he emphasised the global expansion of the activities with only very few links to the United States government, economic interests or geopolitics.

DANIEL MAUL (Gießen) remained within the American and British Protestant context of the late nineteenth century with his paper on "'Lay upon us the burden of the world's suffering' - the Quakers transatlantic network of relief 1890s-1920s". He explicated how the Quakers from the United States were part of a larger global humanitarianism and, at the same time, of American expansionism. Religion worked as a driving force within a specific political and social context. He stressed the modernist Quaker theology as a reaction to evangelicalism and the ambivalent relation to missionaries whose idea of salvation contradicted the Quakers' emphasis on the fellowship of social service. He also described the devise debates over military service, which only in the post-war period was bridged through the firm establishment of relief and rehabilitation work.

JEFFREY COX (Iowa) gave his presentation on "The Invisibility of Liberal Protestantism: From Mission Society to NGO in Twentieth Century Britain". Cox not only emphasized missionary organisations as the first and for a long time dominant actors of humanitarian engagement in early twentieth century Britain, but also differentiated their representation, by highlighting women as central actors and nominal Christians as an active group of humanitarians, who are often neglected in research. He concluded that Christian piety later in the century increasingly took a secular form but did not lose its religious core which only became invisible in a "religion of ethical practice" or the "religion of everyday life".

The second panel entitled "Media and Humanitarian Mobilisation" was opened by ALEXANDRA PRZYREMBEL (Essen/Duisburg) with her paper on "Media, Money, and Empathy - Missionary Organisations and Fundraising Strategies in the 19th century". She analysed how German Protestant missionaries, through their journals, tried to mobilise their readers for giving money to their activities in- and outside Europe. She detected two different strategies used by the missionaries: one which strengthened the concept of "impartiality" and focused particularly on children as both 'objects' and 'subjects' of help, and another which appealed to the readers' feelings, both of anger and compassion. Pzyrembel was thus able to highlight the very ambivalent emotional regimes employed by missionaries.

MICHAEL BERKOWITZ (London), with his paper on "From Nationalisation to Refugee Relief: Photography,

Zionist Publicity and Fundraising", shifted focus from Christian to Jewish actors of humanitarian engagement, and in particular to Jewish photographers who, through their work, contributed to the public concern for Jewish humanitarian needs, but also to the extension of Jewish relief efforts beyond confessional boundaries. Berkowitz underpinned his hypotheses with central examples of war pictures and biographical data of significant Jewish war photographers.

The third panel was dedicated to "Gendering Religious Humanitarianism". HARALD FISCHER-TINÉ (Zürich) presented a paper on "Muscling in on Asia: The YMCA in India and Ceylon, c. 1890-1930". He traced the history of adoption and transformation of the Western and Christian inspired organisation YMCA in India which focused on physical culture and philanthropic "rural development" work. YMCA's Americanisation also had its echo in India, for example in the practice by its members of mainly American sports like Basketball and in the stressing of masculinity through sports. Fischer-Tiné explained the YMCA'S success in India by its perception as broker of modernity, but also made clear that the association gradually lost its evangelical purpose and finally served different political, in particular nationalist and social objects. PAMELA WALKER (Ottowa), with her paper on "Gender and British Faith Missions: The South Africa General Mission", analysed different roles Christian women missionaries represented in their efforts to save souls. By choosing three women of the South Africa General Mission (SAGM), working in South Africa in the early 20th century, Walker stressed the fluidity of race and gender boundaries: white, coloured or "mixed" women all experienced racial discrimination and the influence of eugenics, but were also able to transcend these frontiers.

JANA TSCHURENEV (Zürich) spoke about "Science, Religion, Morality: The Women's Christian Temperance Union's Educational Programs". Looking at efforts to introduce Scientific Temperance Instruction first within the US, but then also worldwide, she was particularly interested in the intersection of the languages of science, Protestantism and morality. She explained the increasing importance of science, for example in teaching anti-alcoholism by the apparent credibility scientific arguments conferred. Tchurenev was thus able to underpin not only the crucial role of women as educators in the eyes of this organisation, but also the secularisation of education it promoted.

The fourth panel "Religious Humanitarianism in Transition" focused on non-Western and non-Christian forms of humanitarian aid. MARK R. FROST (Colchester, Essex), in his paper on "Empires of Belief: Other Evangelisms in British Asia, 1860-1920", observed that humanitarian aid was not merely provided from Europe to European colonies but also between colonies within the Empire. He illustrated two different ways of politicisation of assistance, one exemplified by Chinese in Singapore donating for Chinese famine relief, the other by Chinese being encouraged to give for famine relief in India. Frost thus emphasised the crucial role of humanitarianism both as a legitimizing trope for imperial projects, but also as an instrument for nationalist if not anti-colonial activities. GWILYM BECKERLEGGE (Milton Keynes) concentrated on two explicit Hindu humanitarian organisations, addressing "Samnyasins (renouncers), jivanvratis (life-workers) and the Growth of seva (service) as a sadhana ('spiritual discipline'): a Study of Recent Expressions of Hindu Humanitarianism Inspired by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)". He questioned the exclusive influence of Swami Vivekananda on two movements directly inspired by him and pleaded for taking into consideration other elements, like British colonialism and Christianity spread by missionaries, for understanding the transformation of Hindu humanitarian aid.

ESTHER MÖLLER (Mainz) shifted the focus to Islam with her presentation on "Adapting a Christian European Organisation to Islamic Anticolonial Needs: The Egyptian Red Crescent in the First Half of the 20th Century". She argued that religion, in particular Reform Islam, played a central role for the Egyptian Red Crescent's activists (like Christianity for the Red Cross), but that there were other important driving forces like anti-colonialism and nationalism as well. The Red Crescent was also able to transcend religious boundaries by cooperating with Christian aid structures. SOUMEN MUKHERJEE (Berlin) in his talk "A 'Liberal' and Secular Imagination: Islam and Ismaili Imagination in the Twentieth Century" presented another distinct Muslim form of humanitarian aid, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), delivering mainly to its own fellows, but also to a wider circle of recipients. By shedding light on the evolution of the organisation from the early twentieth century until today, Mukherjee traced the increasing impact of liberal and secular elements on the humanitarian activities and highlighted the engagement beyond denominational boundaries.

The fifth panel addressed "Civilising Missions in and outside of Europe". THOMAS WELLER (Mainz) presented a paper on "The Long Road to Abolition: Spanish Discourses on Slavery in the Nineteenth Century".

He explained the late arrival of abolitionism in Spain by numerous changing governments, the importance of the sugar production, the fact that Spanish abolitionism was very paternalistic and that women did not intervene. Whereas in the English-speaking world religious thought and organizations played a pivotal role for the development of antislavery ideology and mass mobilization, religion was seemingly less important in Spain. This is rather surprising since Spanish-speaking religious thinkers numbered among the first critics of Atlantic slavery in the early modern period. Weller discussed the extent to which religious arguments and humanitarian concepts shaped the debate opponents and supporters of slavery. He argued that it encompassed inverted or hidden religious dimension both in the anti-clericalism as well as in secular arguments.

DEAN PAVLAKIS (SUNY, Buffalo) on "Debating the Role of Religion in the Congo Reform Movement, 1896-1913" extended the argument developed by Weller on the parallels between religious and secular arguments against slavery to the Congo Reform Movement. He observed that the differences between the Congo reform movement's religious and secular activists can easily be overstated. For example, its secular proponents referred freely to Christian duty and its religious advocates invoked humanist principles. However, they came together uneasily because of their philosophical standpoints. Although this led to tensions, the combination of the two strands of thought ultimately strengthened the reform movement and gave leverage for internationalising the pressure for reform in the Congo.

FELIX BRAHM (Bielefeld) investigated the relation between slave trade and the trade in fire arms. His presentation "Protecting the Interior: Moral Debates and Politics of Restricting the Arms Trade in Africa, 1880s to 1890s" focused on the attitudes both of the Kabaka in Buganda and British missionaries of the Church Missionary Society towards arms and arms trade. While the Kabaka tried to gain technical knowledge about firearms through the help of missionaries, the latter criticised the increasing arm trade and made it a topic of an international public debate in Europe linking its abolition to the idea of the civilising mission. The topic of conjunction between religious and secular ideas in view of a common cause was also highlighted by FRANCESCO SPÖRING (Zürich) in his talk on "Spirits and Spirituality: The Basle Mission's Temperance Mission between Switzerland and West Africa, 1880-1940". His point of departure was a resolution by anticlerical, scientific oriented members of the International Bureau Against Alcoholism and members of the evangelical Basle Mission which in 1925 asked for prohibition in all League of Nations mandates. Stressing the intersection in the activists' discourses between liquor trade, slave trade and arms trade, Spöring developed a twofold argument: on the one hand, both sides promoted similar concepts of freedom and responsibility, on the other discourses on slavery in Africa and discourses on alcohol in Switzerland were entangled: the Basle Mission's evangelical action in Africa intensified its engagement at home to ameliorate the Swiss' morality through absenteeism.

NIKOLAY KAMENOV (Zürich) in his presentation on "Evangelicals and Tolstoyans: Global connections and Abstinence Activism in Bulgaria" identifed two global sources of this movement with a strong religious impetus: Evangelicals and American missionaries on the one side, adherents of the Tolstoyan movement on the other. Although the Americans gave impetus for the abstinence activism, Kamenov explained, the movement was soon mainly constituted by Bulgarians. The Tolstoyans soon found adherents in other continents, for example in South Africa, where so-called Tolstoy farms were erected. Kamenov showed a country at the margins of Europe, showed that a country at the margins of Europe like Bulgaria was an interesting example of mechanisms of inclusion of exclusion present in European religious and secular discourses on civilisation.

The three conveners of the conference gave an outlook on remaining further research questions on the complex relationship between religion, imperialism and humanitarianism. JOHANNES PAULMANN first made a point on the close relationship between global, imperial and local levels. In this sense, the focus on humanitarianism as a mode of speaking seems an innovative way of showing these intimate linkages. He then raised the issue of racism and its presence in religious thinking. He further argued that conjunctions rather than periods of humanitarianism ought to be looked for in different times. Finally, he stated that more research was needed on how secularised European humanitarianism and relief was perceived by people in Africa, Asia and America that were still to a large extent adhered to religious values and thinking. HARALD FISCHER-TINÉ stressed the dichotomies he had met in the different papers: next to the dichotomy between empirical and theoretical approaches, he emphasised the necessary dialogue between area studies and global history. He finally mentioned that relationship between Europe and the Non-West may be best studied in liminal areas such as the Balkans. ALEXANDRA PRZYREMBEL highlighted the importance of deconstructing the Protestant narrative. She also strengthened the shift of the humanitar-

ian activists' motives from religious causes to the importance of media and technology and asked if one could say that humanitarianism had been invented by the media. She finally underlined the different regimes of aid that had been presented at the conference, the principal being emotions, politics and economics.

Conference Overview

I. Global Players and Humanitarian Networks
Chair: Johannes Paulmann (Mainz)

Ian Tyrrell (Sidney): American Missionaries and Moral Reform in the Conception and Mobilisation of Humanitarian Transnational Movements in the Age of Formal Empire, 1898-1934.

Daniel Maul (Gießen): "Lay upon us the burden of the world's suffering" - the Quakers transatlantic network of relief 1890-1940

Jeffrey Cox (Iowa City): The Invisibility of Liberal Protestantism: From Mission Society to NGO in Twentieth Century Britain

II. Media and Humanitarian Mobilisation
Chair: Harald Fischer-Tiné (Zürich)

Alexandra Przyrembel (Essen/Göttingen): Media, Money, and Empathy - Missionary Organizations and Fundraising Strategies in the 19th Century

Michael Berkowitz (London): From Nationalization to Refugee Relief: Photography, Zionist publicity and Fundraising

III. Gendering Religious Humanitarianism
Chair: Judith Becker (Mainz)

Harald Fischer-Tiné (Zürich): Muscling in on Asia: The YMCA in India and Ceylon, c. 1890-1930

Pamela Walker (Ottawa): Gender and British Faith Missions: The South Africa General Mission

Jana Tschurenev (Zürich): Science, Religion, Morality: The Women's Christian Temperance Union's Educational Programs

IV. Religious Humanitarianism in Transition
Chair: Rebekka Habermas (Göttingen)

Mark R. Frost (Colchester, Essex): Empires of Belief: Other Evangelisms in British Asia, 1860-1920

Gwilym Beckerlegge (Milton Keynes): Samnyasins (renouncers), jivanvratis (life-workers) and the Growth of seva (service) as a sadhana ('spiritual discipline'): a Study of Recent Expressions of Hindu Humanitarianism Inspired by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Esther Möller (Mainz): Adapting a Christian European Organization to Islamic Anticolonial Needs: The Egyptian Red Crescent in the First Half of the 20th Century

Soumen Mukherjee (Berlin): A 'Liberal' and Secular Imagination: Islam and Ismaili Imagination in the Twentieth Century

V. Civilising Missions in and outside of Europe
Chair: Thomas David (Lausanne)

Thomas Weller (Mainz): The Long Road to Abolition: Spanish Discourses on Slavery in the Nineteenth Century

Bronwen Everill (Coventry): Mission Station and Anti-slavery Settlement: The Civilising Mission and Humanitarian Interventions in British Africa

Felix Brahm (Bielefeld): Protecting the Interior: Moral Debates and Politics of Restricting the Arms Trade in Africa, 1880s to 1890s

Dean Pavlakis (SUNY, Buffalo): Debating the Role of Religion in the Congo Reform Movement, 1896-1913

Francesco Spöring (Zürich): Spirits and Spirituality: The Basle Mission's Temperance Mission between Switzerland and West Africa, 1880-1940

Nikolay Kamenov (Zürich): Evangelicals and Tolstoyans: Global connections and Abstinence Activism in Bulgaria

Concluding Discussion and Perspectives (Harald Fischer-Tiné, Johannes Paulmann, Alexandra Przyrembel): How to Write a Global History of Humanitarianism

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Esther Möller. Review of , *Religion in an Age of Imperial Humanitarianism, 1850-1950.* H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. April, 2013.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38978

Copyright © 2013 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.