H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Hilary M. Carey. *God' s Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c.1801–1908.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 446 S. $99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-19410-5.

Reviewed by Helge Wendt
Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (July, 2013)

H. Carey: God's Empire

In her study, Hilary M. Carey focuses on the contribution of British Protestant and Catholic colonial missions to the idea of a British Empire. This book is thus situated in the flourishing fields of historical investigation of mission history, best represented by Andrew N. Porter Andrew N. Porter, Religion Versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914, Manchester 2004. and Carla Gardina Carla Gardina Pestana, Protestant Empire. Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World, Philadelphia, Pa. 2009. and the fast growing new Empire history. In contrast to both of these studies, Hilary M. Carey understands "mission" not as the missions to the "native" populations of colonized regions, but rather the spiritual work carried out by European/British priests among the white settler communities in different parts of the British Empire during the nineteenth century.

In the first chapter, which should be read as a long introduction, Carey defines her understanding of the colonial mission, referring exclusively to settler communities. In the second chapter, she presents the mission activities among the settler communities in different parts of the world which were carried out by a wide range of Protestant and Catholic mission societies. She underlines the importance of these societies which were not only sources of spiritual aid for the migrants but also deeply involved in what she calls "nation-building activities" within the British Empire. Carey offers an impressive overview of contributions to a debate that flourished in the imperial metropolis and, it should be mentioned, also in the colonies. She also gives a very instructive description of the different mission societies at large and the particular problems they faced, as well as the politico-theological solutions they invented. At the end of the book, two rather short chapters focus on the colonial clergy and on the settlers who migrated to different regions of the British Empire.

In the first chapter Carey discusses extensively the ideological foundation of the British Empire in a nationalistic spirit. This debate had important implications in politics, but was also introduced into the ecclesiastic sphere by its representatives from the late eighteenth century on. The different churches in the British metropolis were in charge of the education and "uplifting" of the population, both in the center and in the colonial domains. Thus, the work of these churches among the British settlers became an important argument to claim government funding.

One important issue that remains undervalued in many others studies on colonial missions is the parallel evolution of Protestant and Catholic mission activities during the nineteenth century. Carey convincingly shows the role that Irish and even French catholic propaganda played amongst Irish and Scottish catholic settlers in the colonies. Lamentably, she does not mention the internal political quarrels between French/Irish and Portuguese catholic clergy in former Portuguese India, which seriously undermined the legitimating role of Catholicism in the newly united imperial territory.

Some other examples will explain why it is misleading to focus only on white settlers, without considering the missions to "indigenous" communities as well as any contacts that existed between the "white" and the "native" colonial spheres. When Carey mentions the chaplain Samuel Marsden in his role as chaplain sent out to Australia, it would have been worthwhile to add the information that the same Marsden did not work exclusively for the white population of Sydney and its environs, but that he induced imperialistic missionary activities in New Zealand as well. Colonial history is full of examples of how it is highly misleading to present an a priori pure white imperial church with no relations to a presumed native social space or any form of dynamic entanglement. Marsden is only one example of a chaplain who "converted" to a missionary. The first British churchmen sent to Sierra Leone were meant to take care of the white

settlers. Confined to the Church Mission Society, this enterprise, by founding new villages and importing mostly German missionaries, especially from Basel and Berlin, quickly developed into one of the most costly and intensive missionary enterprises in the history of the British Empire. Another example of how little the two spheres of whites and natives were really separable in the nineteenth century can be found in British India where the consecration of natives in order to form a native clergy and obtain native bishops in a white dominated hierarchy was widely debated. Carey herself gives an example that reveals the misleading construction of an approach which focuses exclusively on the missions to settler communities. In her description of St Augustine College in Canterbury, she emphasizes that the ideologically well-established racial frontiers were in practice highly permeable. The institution, intended to educate children and young men to become priests, was from its very inception open to both white and native Christians.

Carey's decision to limit the perspective of her study, for whatever reason, by detaching the missions to the colonizers from the missions to the colonized, obscures its richness and partly innovative approach. In the chapter on the colonial clergy, Carey gives a fine introduction to the situation and to the distribution of the clergy who were destined to work in the colonies. She also gives a useful insight into the subject of the education of white churchmen in the home country and the newly founded institutions in the colonies, in view of the increasing numbers of clergy men required to work amongst the ever growing numbers of settlers in the colonies. Carey offers an overview of institutions founded in different parts of the British Empire and does not omit to mention, even though this issue is not taken further, that some of them received both European as well as indigenous pupils. She underlines that the foundation of new missionary schools in the colonies was due to the establishment of bishoprics in the colonies; these new dioceses and schools helped the church hierarchy to become more emancipated from the mission societies and to attain the status of a world church. Due to her focus on the contribution of colonial missions to the national British debates on the Empire, however, Carey fails to note the real significance of this development. The visible separation between state, church and mission institutions as well as between overseas and metropolis church institutions marks the beginning of decolonization processes and must therefore be seen in a wider context.

The most innovative aspect of Carrey's study is the inclusion of the Catholic, mostly Irish, engagement in the colonial enterprise. All four of her chapters take a closer look at the ideological adaption process of British Catholicism in the first half of the nineteenth century. Carey describes in detail the Catholic mission enterprises, the educational engagement and the difficulties the Catholic enterprises met in the overseas territories.

The reader has to bear in mind the limited perspective of this study due to its exclusive focus on the white British Empire. Its silence on the "entangled" spheres, inspired by post-colonialism and featured in most contemporary studies of colonial and global histories, is its greatest weakness. This omission overshadows the advantages that God's Empire does have, such as the joint analysis of Protestant and Catholic mission enterprises.

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: Helge Wendt. Review of Carey, Hilary M., *God' s Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c.1801–1908.* H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. July, 2013.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=39610

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.