

### Kai Funkschmidt: Review "Mission und Gewalt"

*Mission und Gewalt. Der Umgang christlicher Mission mit Gewalt und die Ausbreitung des Christentums in Afrika und Asien in der Zeit von 1792 bis 1918/19*, ed. Ulrich v. d. Heyden/Jürgen Becher, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2000 (*Missionsgeschichtliches Archiv. Studien der Berliner Gesellschaft für Missionsgeschichte vol.6*), 557 pages, € 81,- (19 articles in English, 20 in German)

"Es ist die ganze Kirchengeschichte Mischmasch von Irrtum und Gewalt" (The entire Church history is but a mishmash of error and violence". Goethe's well-known *bonmot* (Zahme Xenien, 9) probably characterises well the common prejudice against mission. In the popular mind and to some academics, the missionary enterprise is often reduced to the interdependence of mission and colonial violence from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Latin America, prime example for mission *by* violence, is, however, not part of the book's remit). Most contributions in this volume (emerging from a 1999 international conference, co-organised by the Berlin Society for Mission History, the Department of Missiology, Religious Studies and Ecumenics and the Department of African Studies at Humboldt University, Berlin) avoid ideological historical simplifications. The authors offer very different perspectives, looking at the topic from anthropological, linguistic, historical, legal angles.

The theme is widely defined. Both the time scale and the theme are much wider than the title suggests. The German word *Gewalt* (violence, force, power, coercion) is itself more than any English equivalent and in addition it is etymologically related and alludes to many other phenomena (administration, mastering (e.g. a language), rape, lawyer etc.). Several authors use such vague resemblances to bridge the gap between their article and the book's title, sometimes a bit arbitrarily or to the point of absurdity (p.357 „Gewalt der Liebe“, violence of love). Rather late comes a systematic distinction between the meanings of *vis*, *potestas* and *violentia* (526), an approach which seems to me more helpful than the method of free poetic association around *Gewalt*.

All contributions focus on Protestant mission history, most of them relying on the exploration of historical material lying in the world's mission archives. Making academic disciplines other than just Theology and Religious Studies aware of the treasures hidden in these archives was an explicit aim of the conference organisers. Most contributions testify to the success of this endeavour.

Dominating the book are historical case studies (Pugach 509ff: on missionary attitudes to and impact on African languages; Bergunder 371ff: the complex history of movement between denominations ('proselytism') in Indian church history; Sippel 525ff: conflict between colonial administration and missions over the right to exercise violence; Schultze 327ff: missionary protest against violence) but it also includes reflections on historical concepts of mission, the role of violence therein and the origin of such violent strands (Ustorf 139ff) or critical reflection on research methodology (Hexham 193ff). It is undoubtedly the wealth of thoroughly researched historical papers that constitutes the book's value.

Violencesuffered *by* missionaries rather than inflicted by them plays only a minor role, as does some cultures' violent heritage *before* the Europeans' arrival (but see Nzacahayo 461ff) and the mission's contribution to overcome structures of violence. Yet what one misses maybe most is a reflection on the *theological* role of 'violence', both the violence emerging from God (just read the Bible!), the power (*Gewalt*) of the Word of God and the violence/power that the testimony to this Word inherently implies. If one accepts the inclusion of structural and other non-physical aspects in one's understanding of *Gewalt* (as the book does) it seems imperative to reflect upon the relation between non-violence propagated in parts of the Christian Bible with violent aspects of God and the Spirit and finally the structural *Gewalt* that any religion with universal truth claims

will incorporate, as spelled out in Steven Finamore's 2001 Whitley Lecture (Oxford) on Violence, the Bible and the End of the World). How did these influence mission practice?

Particularly interesting is the first part on 'Christian and Islamic Expansion' dealing with Christian and Islamic expansion from a historical perspective. Apart from looking at missionary enterprises in Islamic contexts (Eisler 43ff) and Christian-Muslim mission competition in Africa (e.g. Pawlkiková-Vilhanová 79ff) it offers a study of surprising similarities in method between Christian and Muslim expansion since the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Feldtkeller 19ff). Islamic attitudes to violence in self-expansion and the question of slavery in Africa are subjected to a differentiated analysis (Hock 67ff).

The British reader will find it slightly annoying that almost all German articles which mention the British colonial or missionary enterprises speak of 'England' and 'English' where in fact they mean 'Britain' and 'British'. Scotland in particular for centuries provided a disproportionately large share of British overseas missionaries and colonial officers. This error is probably explained by the fact that many primary sources (in English and German) adopt this usage, but this does not excuse it. After all one does not today speak of 'negroes' or 'natives' simply because the sources do.

This is a very good collection of detailed historical articles and broader approaches to the topic, although sometimes one would have wished for a stronger editorial hand, not just because some contributions seem hardly to have been proofread for orthography. The book also contains no index, no list of acronyms and only very scanty information on the authors (often we do not even know which discipline they come from: Theology?, African Studies?, Linguistics? etc). Also, in view of the explicitly unchecked compilation of papers presented at the conference a longer foreword or postscript, offering a reflective summary for the book would have further improved the volume.