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Missionary

The concept and figure of the missionary, a qualified agent authorized to recruit adherents in areas outside the de facto spiritual jurisdiction of a church, arose in the context of Western Christianity. The history and practices of humanitarianism and Christian missions are closely intertwined. While expansion and recruitment are a hallmark of many religious traditions, the humanitarian dimension of expansion practices in religions outside Western Christianity is less well understood, partly because of Christian ideological and technological dominance in the organizational field of systematic recruitment across space. As a consequence, there is no comparable body of research examining the connection between humanitarianism and missionaries of other religions, such as Islam and Buddhism.

Christianity has been actively recruiting since its early stages, and the conversion of “pagans” was an important factor in the religious homogenization of Europe in the Middle Ages (Wood 2001). Yet a more specialized mission sector only emerged with the geographical mobility of the mendicant orders in the 15th century and the formation of Vatican’s specialized Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in the context of competition with strengthening Protestant churches in the 17th century. Initially weak, the Protestant challenge

found a solid missionary footing in the late 18th century with the founding of the first effective missionary voluntary organizations (Neill 1986). This new Protestant missionary movement created the organizationally powerful modern form of missions.

Modern Christian missions were historically intertwined with confessional hostilities playing out in the enlarging theater of European overseas expansions. Their humanitarian dimensions inscribe themselves in the complex religious and political tensions of the last six centuries and the dynamics of European expansionism. The goal of conversion of other populations to Christianity almost naturally aligned the missions with imperial political authorities (Abernethy 2000). However, the relationship between missionaries and political agents empirically occupies a spectrum from full collaboration to highly contentious opposition (Stanley 1990; Porter 2004).

Missionary initiated and implemented humanitarian projects emerged within this spectrum as religious representatives identified issues and conditions that they sought to alleviate. Substantively, missionaries contributed to the emerging humanitarian field by identifying and mobilizing support for a series of social problems and policies: they were active in promoting education (Savage 1997), health care (Williams 1982), and disaster relief (Bohr 1972), and in combating economic exploitation and body-harming practices such as enslavement, female genital mutilation, foot-binding, or widows' ritual self-immolation in India (Oddie 1979).

Missionaries' typical role as initiators of humanitarian projects thus comes from the combination of several factors: their geographical proximity to observed social problems and cases of social injustice (Nepstad 2004); religious ideologies of compassion and the perceived value of humanitarian practices as technologies of salvation (Chaves 1998); and the ability of missionary organizations to enlist the support of distant "metropolitan" congregations (Maughan 1996).

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Mitigation

Broadly put, there are three meanings of the notion of mitigation in the humanitarian context. The first meaning refers to the prevention or avoidance of humanitarian crises often caused by armed conflict (Lane 2016). Here, mitigation takes the form of anticipatory responses aimed at tackling three aspects: the societal preconditions of violent politics, the potential of violent conflict itself, and the potential effects of the conflict (Albala-Bertrand 2000). The second meaning of mitigation refers to the alleviation of suffering caused by humanitarian emergencies through the provision of relief aid that creates temporary administrative, personnel, and financial compromises (Hoffman, Weiss, and Egeland 2017). The third meaning is that mitigation is a specific phase of the so-called “disaster management cycle,” which is typically divided into different stages (Coetzee and Van Niekerk 2012) such as mitigation, preparedness,