

The missionary impulse in Norwegian history

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Abstract

The paper discusses the influence of church and mission in Norwegian politics during the nineteenth century. Norway, a rather small country by European standards, was a major missionary provider in Zululand. The influence of mission in Norway is demonstrated by the fact that the missionary school in Stavanger was the second national educational institution to have its own building after the Napoleonic wars, the University of Oslo being the first one. The “missionary impulse” was also important in Parliament as many of the leading politicians were active believers – though split between liberals and conservatives. The power of religion in Norwegian history – both locally and at the national level as well as politically and socially - was so overwhelming that it has become imperative to recognise the “missionary impulse” as a key area of research for an understanding of 19th century Norwegian history.

History and historical events are not stochastic incidents. There are reasons behind the fact that Norway, a seemingly insignificant and distant small power on the edge of the polar seas, was one of the leading missionary countries in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These reasons account for the development of the transnational research project Norwegian Mission and Cultural Interaction in Madagascar and South Africa (NMCI) in the city of Stavanger on the west coast of Norway. The reasons for this project pertain to the history of Norway.

In the nineteenth century Norway was a deeply religious society. The church and the “call” had an influence in the daily life of society that can hardly be understood in the secularised North Europe of the twenty-first century. The nucleus of the religious impulse in Norwegian nineteenth century politics and society was situated in the western peripheries of the Norwegian kingdom. The coastal strip between the episcopal residences of Kristiansand and Bergen was the birth place of several waves of lay conversion. Stavanger, the smallest of all and yet a cathedral city on the icy periphery of Europe, was the heartland of the lay Christian movement with its concern for the conversion of the heathens for the Lord.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the influence of lay-led missions on Norwegian politics during the nineteenth century and to shed some light on the apparent rebirth of Nordic mission research in the last decade. A multi-disciplinary research project on missionary history, sponsored by the Norwegian Research Council, was carried out in 2008 at the University of Bergen. In 2009 a research project on Christian masculinity was completed at the University of Lund in Sweden. The Stavanger NMCI project was launched for a period of four years in 2008, later extended to 2013. Does the development of missionary research as an area of scholarly commitment in Stavanger reflect the continued importance of lay driven missionary commitment in Norway?

This paper does not aim to answer this question. Its main purpose is to stress the importance of religion and mission in Norwegian history from the nineteenth century to the present day in contrast to the long held practice of ignoring religion altogether in social research. Continued disregard towards non material influences in history implies that history and other forms of social studies gradually lose their relevance in the analysis of world politics. The fresh focus on missionary research of which the NMCI project is a part may contribute to the correction of major biases in modern Western development research. This kind of research was characterised by blindness to non-European perspectives in the collective perception of the self and the “Other”. Historical evidence indicates that a central feature of the myth of the “Other” in the age of colonialism was the dominance of the Western perception that the non-European “Other” held a non-rational belief system, a belief which justified the call for the conversion of the heathens to a form of north-western rational Christianity in which politics and religion are separate entities. A closer look at the religious and missionary impulse¹ in Norwegian history may destabilise the dichotomies between the so-called civilised Christian, and the non-rational black who did not separate religion and politics.

Officially recognised missionary archives

Mission occupies a central place in Norwegian history. An indication of the validity of this statement is that only two private archives receive funding from the state: one is the archive for the labour movement and the other one

¹ The concept of “missionary impulse” was originally introduced to grasp central parts of the history of Norwegian foreign politics. See Olav Riste, “Ideal og eigeninteresser: Utviklinga av den norske utanrikspolitiske tradisjonen” [The development of the Norwegian foreign political tradition], in Sven G. Holtmark et al. (eds.), *Motstrøms. Olav Riste og norsk internasjonal historieskrivning [Festschrift to Professor Riste]*, (Oslo: Cappelen, 2003), 60f. See also Olav Riste, *Norway's foreign relations: a history*, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2005).

the archive for The Norwegian Mission Society in Stavanger.² These two state recognised archives have in common the fact of being collections of documents from members of idealistic and volunteer movements that were based on robust faith – both literally and symbolically. To begin with, they were convinced they had been given the task of saving themselves and their brothers and sisters for a better life on this earth or in the hereafter, either collectively or individually.

The archive for the hereafter is the oldest one. The first Norwegian missionary, Hans Schreuder, departed for Zululand in the 1840s. The missionary archive in Stavanger has artefacts and written documents from distant parts of the then non-European world in unbroken series, covering a period of more than hundred and fifty years. These sources shed light on the portrayal of the so-called “Noble Savage”, the “civilised”, converted non-European, his European “saviour” and the European settlers and other colonisers during the long nineteenth century, in which the earth was conquered for God, Glory and Capitalism.

This is known in mission circles but not outside them. The average Norwegian historian is hardly aware of the existence of the Stavanger missionary archive and of documents detailing and describing European colonialism in this archive. By contrast, most historians, including those from Norway, are familiar with the libraries and archive repositories around the globe which document the history of the socialist movement.

The reason for the neglect of the missionary archive in Stavanger, in contrast to the interest in the archives documenting secular utopian movements, appears to be, as far as Norway is concerned, the fact that the missionary factor in nineteenth century Norwegian politics no longer makes sense in modern time. The labour movement and its records attract research because of the hegemonic role of the labour movement in modern political life. In the nineteenth century the relationship between the two movements, which were in the same business of spreading hope for a better future, was different: mission and religion ruled the state as well as its people, while the labour movement was a movement for the few and powerless.

The power of the clergy

Stefan Zweig gives a short and pithy glimpse into the meaning of religion in his description of the mass movement of volunteers to the front in 1914: “In

² St.meld. [Parliamentary Report], No. 24 (2008–2009) Nasjonal strategi for digital bevaring og formidling av kulturarv. I am indebted for information on this point to Professor Knut Einar Eriksen at the Archive for the Labour Movement and Chief Archivist Gustav Stensland at the Missionary Archive. A longer version of this paper has been published under the title of “Misjonshistorie og samfunnsforskning” in *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* 3-4 (2009), 322-336.

those days the people blindly believed in their authorities.³ In 1914 the highest authority was God and the clergy spoke on his behalf – as was the case for Hans Schreuder and his contemporaries. The church and clergy had a central place in political, judicial and architectural Norway. The church and its theological experts ruled the country. This may sound as a truism but it reflects the reality.

Norway was established as a kingdom in 1814 by way of a ritual in which all adult males took an oath to their country and declared their willingness to give their lives for its continued existence. This oath was given in the churches under the supervision of priests. The church's central role in the founding rituals of modern Norway was reiterated ninety-one years later when the country's leading politicians broke the union with neighbouring Sweden – a union which the great powers of the day had imposed after the freedom oath of 1814. The dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905 was ratified by a referendum carried out, as in 1814, in churches after the vicar had explained to the congregation "the seriousness of the political situation and the importance of voting yes to the dissolution and the grave consequences of saying no" (*den politiske situation, og [...] betydningen af at stemme ja, og det alvorlige ved at stemme nei*).⁴

In the nineteenth century vicars routinely exercised solemn and public authority and they supervised parliamentary ballots. To be declared valid, a law had to be notified on church ground after the Sunday sermon. The ministers controlled the municipal budget. They also supervised morality. Since the seventeenth century the ecclesiastical law banned work on Sundays. Church discipline remained in force, legally and practically, long after 1800, though there were some reforms during the 19th century that seemingly weakened the ecclesiastical power. In the early 1840s, lay persons gained access to the pulpit and autonomous local government was introduced with significant consequences for the distribution of power between the rulers and the ruled. Religious control, however, still was a key factor to prevent the masses from revolting against social and economic injustice. As long as the masses believed in salvation and eternal damnation, they accepted their destiny however unfair it may have seemed. In addition the church was the sole institution authorised to perform services such as baptisms, confirma-

³ Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers* (Stockholm: Fischer, 1992), 260. My translation. The first edition of the book was published in 1942.

⁴ Ståle Dyrvik, *Året 1814* [The Year 1814] (Oslo: Samlaget, 2005), 49f; Roald Berg, *Profesjon – union – nasjon 1814–1905*, Vol. 2 in *Norsk forsvarshistorie* [The history of the Norwegian defence forces] (Bergen: Eide, 2001), 301. See also Berge Furre, "Sundagen var annleis. Preikeseundagen som ritual og institusjon" [The pulpit as ritual and institution in nineteenth century Norway], in Svein Aage Christoffersen (ed.), *Moralsk og moderne? Trekk av den kristne moraltradisjon i Norge fra 1814 til i dag*. Oslo: Ad Notam, 1999), 48.

tions, marriages and funerals. Confirmation was obligatory until 1912. Refusing confirmation entailed a penalty.⁵

Numerically, the mission was a small part of the religious power system in Norway in the 19th century. In 1901 the *Norsk Missionstidende* listed fourteen Norwegian missionaries in South Africa and several assistants.⁶ By then the Norwegian Zululand mission was split between the Stavanger Mission, which commanded the majority of the missionaries, and the so-called Schreuder Mission. A few years later in 1904, the total number of Norwegian missionaries in South Africa reached about fifty, spread over seventeen mission stations.⁷ The well-known assertion that Norway was the leading missionary country in the last half of the nineteenth century⁸ is derived from these numbers, as compared to the entire population of Norway which was of less than two million at that time. But the influence of Christianity on Norway's political life far exceeded that of the fifty souls who left their country to live as missionaries in response to a call from heaven.

The missionary impulse in Norway

As junior and weaker partner in the union with Sweden, Norway did not have its own foreign services – diplomacy and consular services – in the nineteenth century. By default the mission was the primary mediator between Norwegians and the non-European world. It had a decisive influence on the formative process of Norwegian attitudes towards Africa and Africans, at a time when the idea of modern press coverage was lacking.⁹ Missionaries created the Norwegian picture of “the Other”. They contributed to the Norwegian feeling of being called upon, which translated into the modern Norwegian international aid policy and the allegedly distinctly Norwegian peace tradition in foreign politics.¹⁰ Such is the general background of the

⁵ Furre, “Sundagen”; Alf Kaartvedt, *Drømmen om borgerlig samling 1884–1918*, bd. 1 i *Høyres historie [The history of the Conservative party]* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1984), 62.

⁶ *Norsk Missionstidende* 7 (1901), last page (not paginated).

⁷ James R. Cochrane, *Servants of power. The role of English-speaking churches in South Africa: 1903–1930* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 255f.

⁸ Hilde Nielsen, “From Norway to the ends of the world: Missionary contributions of Norwegian images of ‘self’ and ‘other,’” in Christina Folke Ax et al. (eds.), *Encountering foreign worlds. Experiences at home and abroad*. Proceedings from the 26th Nordic Congress of Historians. Reykjavik 8-12 August 2007. (Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press, 2007), 49.

⁹ Jarle Simensen, “The image of Africa in Norwegian missionary opinion, 1850-1900”, in Øystein Rian et al. (ed.), *Revolusjon og resonnement. Festskrift til Kåre Tønnesson på 70-årsdagen [Festschrift to Professor Tønnesson]* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), 137ff.

¹⁰ Terje Tvedt, *Bilder av "de andre". Om utviklingslandene i bistandsepoken*, [On the developing countries in the age of aid] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1990), 24 and *passim*. The peace tradition in Norwegian foreign policy is in the process of being scrutinised in

influence of missions in Norway in the nineteenth century. Yet even at a more concrete level the mission movement had a central position.

The Norwegian Mission Society was established as part of a wave of associations founded in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹¹ The School of Mission and Theology, which was created in 1843, occupies a unique position in Norway's education system. It is the third oldest academy in Norway.

The first was the Academy of War, established in 1750. The second national institution for higher education was the University of Oslo, established in 1811. The missionary school in Stavanger was the third – and the second after the establishment of a sovereign Norwegian state in 1814.¹² The University of Oslo got its own premises in 1852, the first official building for the purpose of higher education after 1814. The next physical education structure was the main building at the mission school in Stavanger, erected in 1864.¹³

The mission school of Stavanger was not as pompous as the Greek-inspired university building situated on the main street of Oslo. The two buildings even differed in the manner in which they were financed. The university building was financed by state funds, while the mission school was built with private money. In this it resembled the so-called Folk Colleges, national colleges providing informal education, which played a major role in the opposition to the old regime and to the union with Sweden. The first one of these peculiar institutions was established in 1864 and obtained a building a year after the mission school.¹⁴

The university and the military academy educated the agents of modernisation: the men of the law, the men of the Word and the men of arms.¹⁵ But the Norwegian historiography has hardly paid attention to the fact that the military, ecclesiastical and judicial civil servants in the nineteenth century also played the role of social, moral and physical guardians in

historical research at the University of Oslo. See Helge Ø. Pharo, "Den norske fredstradisjonen – et forskningsprosjekt", *Historisk tidsskrift* 84 (2005), 239–255.

¹¹ Bjørg Seland & Olaf Aagedal, *Vekkelsesvind. Den norske vekkingkristendomen* [The Norwegian conversion Christianity] (Oslo: Samlaget, 2008), 33.

¹² See http://www.mhs.no/category_54.shtml (accessed on 29.5.09). The teacher schools that were established from the 1820s were regional high schools.

¹³ Emil Birkeli & C. Tidemann Strand, *Kallet og veien. Det Norske Misjonsselskaps Misjonsskole 1859-1959* (Stavanger: Det norske misjonsselskap, 1959), 32f. On the university, see John Petter Collett, *Historien om Universitetet i Oslo* [History of the university of Oslo] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999), 44.

¹⁴ Oddvar Vormeland, "Herman Anker", in *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon* [Norwegian biographical dictionary], vol. 1 (Oslo: Kunnskapsforlaget, 1999), 105.

¹⁵ On the university in the nineteenth century, see Rune Slagstad, *Kunnskapens hus. Fra Hansteen til Hanseid* [House of knowledge] (Oslo: Pax, 2000), 17 and *passim*. On the military academy, see Berg, *Profesjon*, 87-99. See also Rune Slagstad, *(Sporten): En idéhistorisk studie* [History of Norwegian Sport] (Oslo: Pax, 2008), 19-25, 62-71.

society. When, occasionally, the masses rebelled against the privileged upper class and the economic and political injustices, the clerics did their best to silence them by the Word. The lawyers enforced order by their law books. If necessary, the military commanders displayed their weaponry to coerce the plebs to submission. The nineteenth century is full of examples of civilian, clerical and military officials who carried out control and repression of the people.¹⁶ Both the university and the military academy equipped and qualified sons of the upper classes for the exercise of power. The missionary school differed from the others as its aim was not the control of the social order.

The Folk Colleges and the mission school shared the same passion for education. Both aimed at exercising a “spiritual influence” and both favoured the emancipation of their students.¹⁷ Education at the Folk College was meant to supply ballast to social advancement and development. The mission school was a theologically based vehicle of personal salvation in the hereafter. At the same time, it furthered social mobility and advancement in young men and single women.¹⁸ In this way, Stavanger served a dual purpose. It allowed one to fulfil a spiritual vocation, a goal which differed from the Folk College. But it also provided to the non-privileged, the underclass and the ordinary farmers access to higher learning.

At Stavanger one obtained the level of education necessary to be a missionary pastor. This clerical education was the only path towards vicarship which escaped state control.¹⁹ A consequence of such bypass of state control was that the mission priests were denied access to the pulpits of the Lutheran state churches. When the missionaries returned back home after serving in Africa, they were not allowed to serve as servants of God in their own country. However, the title of missionary was valuable for a person without social or financial position in a society dominated by church rule and deep class and vocational cleavages.

The function of mission as a lever for social upliftment was obvious. This does not imply that the missionaries could expect a kind of upper-class life. Life on the mission field was far from luxurious. The living quarters at the mission station were basic. More often than not the missionaries lived far away from other Europeans for periods of up to fifteen years. They suffered

¹⁶ See Berg, *Profesjon*, 128-138, 151-153, 300f; Roald Berg, “Embetsmannsstat, rettsstat eller generalguvernement 1814-1829” [Central administration history 1814-1829], *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* 1 (2003), 73-84.

¹⁷ Rune Slagstad, *De nasjonale strateger [The national strategists]*, (Oslo: Pax, 1998), 94 (on the Folk College).

¹⁸ Inger Marie Okkenhaug (ed.), *Gender, race and religion. Nordic Mission 1860-1940* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 2003).

¹⁹ Vidar L. Haanes, “Pastors for the Congregations: Transatlantic Impulses”, in Todd W. Nichol, *Crossings. Norwegian-American Lutheranism as a transatlantic tradition* (Northfield, Minn.: Norwegian Historical Association, 2003), 93-118.

from disease and malnourishment. One such missionary, Ommund Oftebro, complained in 1859 that his life was so difficult that he doubted having the ability to continue it (*Det var mangen Gang saa mørkt for mig, at jeg virkelig frygtede, jeg ei længre kunde holde ud*).²⁰

The missionaries and, later, the members of political liberal movements and labour unions had in common a mix of altruism and vocational capacity to help both themselves and their brothers to break away from the old and deadlocked hereditary society. All these movements, therefore, were liberation movements. The mission and the Folk College movements shared the goal of widening the consciousness of their adherents beyond the national borders. They differed, however, in their approach to education. While the Folk College strove to foster intellectual and cultural life around Norwegian values and culture – by showing that the culture of the North was a part, sometimes of great significance, of the European culture, and that Norway belonged to the circle of so-called civilised states, – Stavanger was the first and, for generations to come, the only institution looking beyond “civilised” Europe. It was the first Norwegian education institution, in the 1860s, that recruited African students.²¹ The mission movement influenced the formation process of Norwegian politics in general. The missionary impulse was strong in Parliament and government.

The number of subscribers to the Norwegian missionary journal *Norsk Missionstidende* increased from 2,000 in the 1850s to 6,500 in the 1870s and 10,000 in 1885. By comparison, in the 1870s the leading secular newspaper in Norway, *Morgenbladet*, had 2000 subscribers.²² Among the members of the Norwegian Parliament in the nineteenth century many were Christian believers. This does not suggest that they always agreed on political matters. As the religious sociologist Andreas Ropeid has shown, the Christian influence on the Norwegian political process in the nineteenth century often resulted in a dichotomy between “sacramental” and “conversional” policies. The former were based on a conservative interpretation of society as governed by a hierarchy in which God held the highest position and all authority derived from Him. The latter assumed that all men were created equal by God and enjoyed equal rights. The “conversional” movement developed into a liberal ideology which led to the introduction of parlia-

²⁰ Øystein Rakkenes, *Himmelfolket. En norsk høvding i Zululand* [Biography on Bishop Schreuder], (Oslo: Cappelen, 2003), 185-187.

²¹ Birkeli & Tidemann Strand, *Kallet og veien*, 36.

²² Jarle Simensen & Vidar Gynnild 1984, “Norske misjonærer på 1800-tallet: Mentalitet, sosial profil og foreningsbakgrunn”, in Jarle Simensen (ed.), *Norsk misjon og afrikanske samfunn. Sør-Afrika ca. 1850–1900* [Norwegian mission in South Africa] (Trondheim: Tapir, 1984), 21; Marianne Gullestad, “Nær Afrika – langt borte fra Paris og Brussel”, in Fredrik Engelstad et al. (ed.), *Demokratisk konservatisme. Frihet, fremskritt, fred. Festschrift til Francis Sejersted på 70-årsdagen* [Festschrift to Professor Sejersted], (Oslo: Pax, 2006), 93.

mentary democracy in 1884 in Norway.²³ Two representatives of the “conversional” Christian ideology, Lars Oftedal and Jakob Sverdrup, saw parish councils as a central locus of popular power. On the opposing side, conservative politicians such as Johan Christian Heuch, bishop from 1889 to 1904, argued that democracy as the acceptance of “individual will” would result in the worshipping of man and the destruction of authority in society (*Hævdelse af den individuelle Villies Selvherlighed [som] med Nødvendighed slaar over i Menneskedyrkelse [...] for at tilintetgjøre Autoritetens Magt i Samfundet*” and “*Vantroens Væsen*”).²⁴

The struggle between orthodox (sacramental Christian ideology) and lay Christianity (conversional Christian ideology) spread to the mission field. It led to Bishop Schreuder’s expulsion from the Norwegian Mission Society in 1873 after he had refused a call from his missionary colleagues in South Africa and Madagascar for a missionary constitution which would in effect have undermined the bishop’s authority. According to Schreuder, a bishop should have unlimited power in the performance of his vocation. A bishop should not be subject to any other authority other than the Almighty. Schreuder refused to surrender to “the ruling desirous spirit of democracy” (*regjeringslystne Demokratiaand*) and the “unchristian tendencies” (*ukirkelige Tendenser*) of the day, and rather insisted on his rights to rule unrestricted on the basis of “canon law” (*Kirkeretten*).²⁵

As Jarle Simensen, the leading Norwegian mission historian, emphasised, Schreuder’s lost struggle illustrates why one should not take for granted, as some secular scholarly circles do, the opposition of the missionary movement in Norway to modernity, democracy and industrialisation and its attachment to the values of rural society. Most Norwegian missionaries were raised from the rank and file of the underprivileged small holders and as a result tended to view political and theological modernisation in a positive light.²⁶ They dissociated themselves from the Augsburg Confession because of its insistence that lay people should not teach without the approval of secular princes.²⁷

²³ Andreas Ropeid, “Misjon og bedehus”, in Ingrid Semmingsen et al. (ed.), *Det gjenfødte Norge*, vol. 4 in *Norges kulturhistorie* [Norwegian History of Culture], Oslo: Aschehoug, 1994), 218.

²⁴ See <http://virksommeord.uib.no/taler?id=441> (accessed on 29.5.09); Kaartvedt 1984, 64.

²⁵ Olav Uglem, *Norsk misjonshistorie* [History of the Norwegian mission], (Oslo: Lunde, 1979), 98f.

²⁶ Jarle Simensen, “The image of Africa in Norwegian missionary opinion, 1850-1900”, in Øystein Rian et al. (ed.), *Revolusjon og resonnement. Festskrift til Kåre Tønnesson på 70-årsdagen* [Festschrift to Professor Tønnesson], (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), 143; Jarle Simensen (ed.), *Norwegian Missions in African history*, vol. 1, *South Africa 1845-1906* (Oslo & Oxford, 1986).

²⁷ Godvin Ousland, *Vekkelsesretninger i norsk kirkeliv 1840-75* [Conversion variants in Norwegian Christianity], (Oslo: Luther, 1978), 119, 12.

Schreuder's fall in 1873 was one of several indications of an emerging parliamentary regime in Norway that would be instituted in 1884. A similar indicator was the fall, in 1869, of a naval minister who stood in the way of young and ambitious naval officers with modern ideas of democracy and costly war machines, willing to cooperate with the opposition in the Parliament.²⁸ Even Schreuder's opponents were modern young men who demanded the right to participate in decision making and who opposed the absolute rule of the episcopal order. Schreuder's fall was a part of the erosion of the old and autocratic regime. These selected incidents remind us of the power of religion in Norwegian history both before and after 1884. In 1904, a year before the demise of the union between Norway and Sweden, in the middle of a constitutional crisis which nearly caused a war between the two nations, the dissension between orthodox and liberal theologians overshadowed, according to a minister, the union question in government circles (*den helt overskygger unionssaken*).²⁹

The intimate relationship between mission and politics has an old history in Norway – and is still relevant in understanding politics in the country. Researchers in social science seem to have overlooked this factor. Prospects of new beginnings in missionary research – such as the NMCI project – augur well for the future of research in Norway.

Mission and the modernisation of research in social science

Norway participated in the development of a missionary enterprise aptly described by Desmond Tutu and other African scholars in the following terms:

When the white man first came here, he had the Bible and we had the land. Then the white man said to us, "Come let us kneel and pray together." So we knelt and closed our eyes and prayed, and when we opened our eyes again, lo! – we had the Bible and he had the land.³⁰

Although Norway did not directly participate in the late nineteenth century "Scramble for Africa", recent research suggests that Norwegians took more

²⁸ Anne-Lise Seip, *Forspill til parlamentarisme. Haffner-saken 1869* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1968).

²⁹ Jakob Schønning, *Jakob Schønning's dagbøker fra Stortinget 1895–97 og fra Regjeringen 1903–05* [Diaries from one minister in the government] (Oslo: Tanum, 1950), 236.

³⁰ Allister Sparks, *The mind of South Africa. The story of the rise and fall of Apartheid* (Johannesburg & Cape Town, Jonathan Ball Publishers 1990), 65; Martin Ballard, *White men's God. The extraordinary story of missionaries in Africa*, (Oxford/Westport, Conn.: Greenwood World Publishing, 2008), 85.

part in the colonial process than previously thought.³¹ A probable reason for the Norwegian historians' "oversight" of their country's more or less indirect participation in the imperial venture resides in the fact that Norway was connected to Sweden and that the political union prohibited it from pursuing its own active foreign policy during most of the colonial period. The Norwegian variant of European nationalism in that period was a democratic movement aiming at getting rid of the union bonds that limited its independence. In this variant of nationalism, jurisprudence and especially international law were substitutes for military power, a luxury Norway could not afford demographically and economically. This is the background of the construction and branding of modern Norway as a moral great power and of the creation of what some historians called "Norwegian regime of kind-heartedness" (*det norske godhetsregimet*) in the field of international aid policy.³²

In its latest report on current foreign policy, the Norwegian foreign office suggests that the Norwegians' high profile altruism in aid policy might be a variant of selfish pursuit and self-interest.³³ When the Norwegian Mission Society sent its mission exhibition around Norway in the 1950s, a newspaper commented that many Norwegian mission stations must be regarded as colonies, though they were all conquered by love and not by bloodshed:

Norway has no colonies that give us economic advantages. But our missionaries have brought many spiritual colonies to us, and from these we have much more pleasure. Therefore we do not want to achieve any colonies of the traditional kind, but we do want to amplify our spiritual colonies.³⁴

³¹ Kirsten Alsaker Kjerland & Knut M. Rio (ed.), *Kolonitid. Nordmenn på eventyr og big business i Afrika og Stillehavet* [Norwegian adventures and big business in Africa and the Pacific during the colonialism] (Oslo: Spartacus, 2009), *passim*.

³² Terje Tvedt, *Utviklingshjelp, utenrikspolitikk og makt. Den norske modellen* [Aid, foreign policy and power. The Norwegian model], 2. ed., (Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, 2009), 26f, 316.

³³ St.meld. [Parliamentary report], No 15 (2008–2009), *Interesser, ansvar og muligheter. Hovedlinjer i norsk utenrikspolitikk* Oslo: Utenriksdepartementet; <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2008-2009/stmeld-nr-15-2008-2009-.html?id=548673> (accessed on 29.5.09).

³⁴ *Opland Arbeiderblad*, 13 October 1950, the archives of the Norwegian Mission Society, hjemmeskr., X0002/01, Stavanger: "Norge har ingen kolonier som vi har økonomiske fordeler av, men ved hjelp av våre misjonærer har vi skaffet oss mange åndelige kolonier, og disse har vi uendelig mye mer glede av. Vi ønsker heller ikke å skaffe oss noen kolonier i vanlig forstand, men vi ønsker å utvide de åndelige kolonier vi har"; Nielsen, "From Norway to the Ends of the World", 66.

According to an idealist interpretation of this type of colonialism, missions was characterised as a work of charity (*barmhjertighetsarbeid*), as missionaries did not only built churches, but also hospitals.

Mission historian Inger Marie Okkenhaug emphasised that, like any missionary activity, the educational work of the mission had unintended implications:

The missionary work epitomizes the great paradox of the project of modernization, which functioned as a tool for Western governmentality but also provided tools for threatening and subverting colonial hegemony. Literacy, for instance, and Western political ideas became important sources of self-control and resistance.³⁵

Andrew Porter, another distinguished mission historian, admitted that European governments supported missions and missionaries in the belief that they would contribute to the consolidation of European political control and ensure social stability and peace. “Nevertheless, religious dynamics proved unpredictable and often counter to imperial needs”. In many cases missions and missionaries “provided powerful stimuli to command unity and opposition to colonial rule”.³⁶ Missions and missionaries were collaborators with imperialism, true enough, yet the Christian mission also became a tool for liberation.

The dimensions of missionary history were multifarious. Researchers in social science will greatly benefit from integrating missionary history in their work. The rediscovery of the missionary impulse in Norwegian history will lead to a new interest in faith and emotions, which will in turn help to understand social, political and cultural change, nationally as well as internationally, in a new way.³⁷ This rediscovery will reveal that development and peace movements had a greater impact on Norway’s political processes than has been realised in social research.³⁸ I will add that the faith must be

³⁵ Inger Marie Okkenhaug, “Project proposal: Norwegian missionaries. Practice and representation in the formation of “self” and “other”, 1870–2005”, unpublished manuscript.

³⁶ Andrew Porter, “An Overview, 1700–1914”, in Norman Etherington (ed.) *Missions and Empire*, (Oxford University Press, 2007 (2005)), 40f.

³⁷ Some work has already been done, see Inger Furseth, *People, faith, and transition. A comparative study of social and religious movements in Norway, 1780s–1905*, ([Oslo]: Unipub, 1999); Jan Eivind Myhre, *Feeling One’s Way. Emotions in History and Historiography*, in Jan Eivind Myhre, *Mange veier til historien. Om historiefagets og historikernes historie*, (Oslo: Unipub 2009), pp. 119–138; Jon Elster, *Strong Feelings. Emotions, Addiction and Human Behavior*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Roald Berg, “Norge og England på 1800-tallet. Litt om følelser og interesser i storpolitikken”, in Sven G. Holtmark et al. (eds.), *Motstrøm*, 89–109.

³⁸ Tvedt *Utviklingshjelp*, p. 294; on the other hand, see Pharo “Den norske fredstradisjonen”.

included in the research agenda as an empirical entity and not merely as a cover for power struggles and imperialism. The subjective views of the missionaries, their emotions and empathies and their belief in God must be taken seriously in the writing of Norwegian and African history.

