

Book Reviews

***Reverse Mission: Transnational Religious Communities and the Making of US Foreign Policy.* By Timothy A. Byrnes. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011. ix + 187 pp**

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This book examines the transnational structures and the spiritual commitments of the Jesuit, Maryknoll, and Benedictine orders, as well as the roles that each plays in efforts to influence American foreign policy. The author articulates the loyalties and the ethos of each religious community in order to show how those factors advanced its intersecting spiritual and political interests. For example, Byrnes shows how the tightly-knit global order of the Jesuits resulted from their unified religious life based on the Spiritual Exercises of their founder, St. Ignatius Loyola. All members are linked by calls to prayer, action, faith and justice reflected in their social mission to seek and teach the truth. Jesuits can act individually as priest-scholars, but they can also act communally as members of their order and their universities. The Maryknolls, on the other hand, are missionaries, which gives them a spiritual and social justice purpose, the ability to experience and articulate United States policy, and the knowledge to critique the American government's effects on the people they serve. The Benedictines are contemplatives and act on the principles of the Rule of St. Benedict, part of which calls for hospitality for those who come to their monasteries. This has been translated by them into providing sanctuary to those seeking comfort and asylum when they have been marginalized by their governments.

The political mobilization of Jesuits, Maryknolls, and the Benedictines is impelled by both religious and political principles. Their religious personnel in the United States act as American citizens, but they also often express solidarity with their religious brothers and sisters outside the United States. They mobilize for social, economic and political change and

speak for their fellow religious abroad who cannot do so, or who have no outlet to work for the needs of the poor or other marginalized populations.

Byrnes explains the connections between religious missions and political actions from the perspective of identity politics. He argues that the Jesuits, Maryknolls, and Benedictines have had an impact on American foreign policy, influence that is a result of the formation and structure of their organizations. He uses three cases to prove his point. The first is an examination of the role of the Jesuits and their efforts, after the 1989 murder of six Jesuit priests who were professors at the Universidad Centroamericana, to attempt to get the United States government to take aggressive action to curb human rights abuses in El Salvador. Jesuit college presidents provided solidarity with the University at once and volunteered to restore and rebuild the University almost immediately. They persuaded the United States government to provide a financial grant to keep the University open and functioning; and lobbied for justice for the victims of the murders. Other Jesuit college presidents used their considerable contacts within the United States government and worked transnationally to focus on their educational mission and justice in El Salvador.

The second case Byrnes analyzes is the role of the Maryknoll sisters and their opposition to United States support for the contras in Nicaragua, which occurred after the murder and rape of two nuns and four women missionaries in 1980. The sisters had always seen their religious mission as being with the people, and their role as reversing those policies that had marginalized the poor for centuries, particularly by raising awareness of these social justice abuses in the United States. After the murders, the nuns played a major role in testifying before Congress and using the media to advocate for political change in Nicaragua.

The third case of religious influence on American foreign policy that Byrnes discusses emerged from the affiliation of the Benedictine brothers in Vermont with Benedictine nuns in Mexico; a collaboration that began to evolve during the latter 1970's, and aimed to challenge the nuns' perceived inequities of United States policy toward Mexico. This case study shows how the two groups came together to work through prayer and missionary activities bound by a unique common ethos. The finances and spiritual support of the American monks supplemented the Mexican nuns' work with the poor in their everyday struggles; the alliance of the two refocused the mission of the monks on the reality of the poor in Latin America and recommitted them to the Benedictine principle of hospitality. As a result, the monks in Vermont played a role in the sanctuary movement in their state, and gave impetus to a lay organization for the same purposes.

Byrnes credits these three cross-border interactions to the transnational nature and spiritual commitments of the Jesuits, Maryknolls, and Benedictines even though some of their political activities were indirect and part of larger, ethnic lobbying efforts. It is the religious identity of these orders, he says, that made the difference in the issues and responses that they pursued.

From an historical/political perspective, Byrnes has provided a new way to interpret how and why transnational religious organizations act as they do in the international arena, and he has chronicled the high points of three specific religious orders and their political involvement in the United States. No one can forget that they, and others, also led demonstrations against the war in Viet Nam. They challenged autocratic regimes in Latin America. They supported the Church's letters on the economy and nuclear war. They supported the development of American human rights foreign policy under Jimmy Carter.

What has happened to the activist role of the religious orders since those times? Political challenges still persist around the world. United States foreign policy has been mired in two wars in the last decade. Islam is challenging Christianity and the religious rights of its believers in the Middle East. Immigration and migration remain problematic around the world. Economic inequalities have worsened. Why are the transnational structures and spiritual communities that played such vital roles in fostering Jesuit, Maryknoll, and Benedictine political involvement in the past no longer able or willing to cope with the problems of current times? Perhaps a second volume by Byrnes could answer this critical question.

***More Desired Than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism.* By Robert O. Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xvi + 304 pp. \$29.95 Cloth**

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Over the past decade, American Christian fascination with, and support of, the modern State of Israel has gained the attention of journalists, religious