

FRIEDRICH FABRI UND DER IMPERIALISMUS IN DER BISMARCKZEIT (Friedrich Fabri and Imperialism in the Bismarck Era): REVOLUTION — DEPRESSION — EXPANSION by Klaus J. Bade, *Studies in Colonial and Overseas History, Vol. 13, Freiburg im Br., Atlantis-Verlag, 1975, 580 pp.*

Friedrich Fabri, nineteenth century German theologian and home mission leader, was rightly known by his contemporaries as "the father of the German Colonial Movement". The question which springs spontaneously to mind after reading this book is what sort of "movement" this actually was. It certainly was not a popular one. Part 3, entitled "Organisation der kolonialen Interessen" (Organization of Colonial Interests), and Part 5, "Vom Deutschen Kolonialverein zur Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft" (From the German Colonial Association to the German Colonial Society), show all too clearly that the Colonial Associations had only a very small number of members, by far the majority being figures from West German industry and finance. It was not the existence of a "Colonial Movement", constantly invoked by Fabri, which convinced Bismarck of the need for a German colonial policy, but the massive interests of certain economic groups in particular concrete projects. This book shows how the initial naively idealistic commitment of a church "all-rounder" was taken up, developed and utilized by expansionist economic interest groups when German colonial policy was being established. One would be inclined to say that the colonial policy would also have been possible without the colonial movement.

Fabri's historical and political significance in the colonial, imperialistic expansion of the German Reich is more that of giver of an impulse. This makes the question of his motivation all the more important. The author demonstrates very convincingly that the crucial experience for Fabri, his constant preoccupation, was the 1848 revolution in Germany and the ever-increasing poverty of the industrial proletariat accompanied by their organization into a social democracy.

Fear of revolution was, in fact, the determining factor in his defensive Christian-conservative social outlook and his efforts to bring about the integration of the fourth estate. His work in the *Innere Mission* (home mission) soon led Fabri to realize that the church's efforts to integrate the workers must inevitably fail because of the latter's intransigence. The beginnings of over-production, over-population, emigration and the economic crisis which reached a peak in 1878-79 aggravated the situation and called for a comprehensive solution to the social question.

While Fabri's initial concern was for local solutions to the problems of "needy workers", the issue became instead the expansionist alternative to revolution, geared to the national interest and possible because of the growth in national strength after 1871. In new colonies providing work and trade, organized emigration, and new markets, in short, in the colonial solution was found the answer to the social question. With territorial expansion it would be possible to neutralize and manipulate the growing fourth estate which, under the influence of Materialism, was becoming increasingly well-organized. For Fabri, expansion was a means of defending the Christian social order, with its middle class character.

Bade has assembled an extensive body of material and established some interesting connections. All in all, he has produced an important contribution to a better understanding of this hitherto relatively unknown, but important churchman, and for this deserves unreserved praise. The fact that the author shows little understanding for Fabri the theologian is excusable. What has escaped Bade, however, is the fact that in the nineteenth century, Fabri was one of the few theologians who, in the forefront of the church, took up the challenge of Materialism — with — except in a few important cases — no verbal support or objection from the church.

According to Bade, Fabri's lasting importance lies in his having recognized the real challenge facing the church in the nineteenth century and, beyond that, of having seen the inadequacy of the church's efforts to solve social problems through a levelling process. His importance on the negative side, however, has a very topical ring to it — his defence of a monolithic Christian social order, all too uncritically allied with the expansionist designs of German financial interests still calling themselves Christian.

A reading of this book therefore compels self-critical reflection on the premises and frame of reference of the church's commitment in the present world-wide social and economic context and the search for a global solution to the social question in our times. Who can deny that the experience of the revolutionary movements in the late Sixties and early Seventies of this century has given many people in Christian circles an almost pathological fear of revolution, making it one of the main-springs of the church's thinking and action? Who would maintain that the church is working for a social order in which the overwhelming majority of humanity is able to lead a more human life? Who would be willing to take oath that the church today is no longer ploughing the furrow of quite different interests, used and misused by still more powerful interest groups, as was the case in the 19th century? And, to look at another question, does it not give pause for thought that precisely during his twenty-seven years as director of the largest German missionary society (1857-1884) Fabri, with his uniform answer to the challenge of Materialism (proclamation and service), cleared the way for German imperialism.

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