

Scott Libson, "Tainted Money, Sanctified Wealth: The Business of Mission Movement Fundraising, 1865-1929."

Columbia University Libraries Research Award Report

My dissertation examines the critical role of foreign missionary societies in the formation of global philanthropies in the early twentieth century. Bringing together the histories of missions, capitalism, and imperialism, my project investigates mission movement fundraising, an omnipresent yet understudied topic in missions history. Missionary societies shaped American religious values to include gifts for foreign societies and asked American Protestants to consider the role of American wealth in the world. The ways Americans responded helped define the global philanthropic and economic reach of the United States in the early twentieth century.

The Columbia University Libraries Research Award allowed me to examine numerous collections that have become central to this project. For many years, Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary has housed the Missionary Research Library, which John Mott established in 1914 in association with the Foreign Missionary Conference of North America. Mott was a leader in efforts to coordinate and systematize missions work across denominations. The Missionary Research Library aggregated as much data as possible in order to make missions more efficient and fact-driven. With the help of a 2011 Henry Luce Foundation grant, Burke Library's Brigitte Kamsler has processed many collections in the Missionary Research Library for the first time. For my research, therefore, the Missionary Research Library was a repository for highly relevant documents that had just been made far more accessible as well as, in its founding, a product of the developments that my dissertation describes.

I applied for the Libraries Research Award with the intention of seeking documentation regarding how missionary societies coordinated fundraising efforts across denominations and in particular, how they framed their appeals. The library holds records of the Foreign Missions

Conference of North America, the Laymen's Missionary Movement, and the World Missionary Conference of 1910. I also planned to look at two collections of personal papers and two more American organizations. I hoped to find correspondence and reports pointing to fundraising strategies advocated by these various groups and individuals. Together, these collections would inform the third chapter of my dissertation, which connects missionary fundraising with progressivism.

In large measure, the collections served the purpose I had hoped they would. One section of the World Missionary Conference records has proven highly beneficial. Anglo-American Protestant leaders organized the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910 following the success of the Ecumenical Missionary Conference in New York in 1900. The organizers created eight commissions, each to investigate a particular facet of missions work. Commission VI focused on the "home base," which included a wide range of topics relating to how missionaries and mission boards promoted their work. Many of the records that I initially looked at presented draft reports that were published soon after the conference. What proved far more beneficial was the correspondence among commission members and the various surveys that the commission circulated. These records presented the variation and conflict that preceded the published report. For example, significant conflict arose regarding the relationship between women's societies and denominational boards. Of the twenty-one members of Commission VI, women held only two spots. Perhaps as a consequence of this male-dominated process, the question of women's societies fell under the category of "problems of administration." When the commission asked for feedback on an early draft of that portion of the report, several leaders of the women's societies wrote back with scathing criticism. They especially disparaged how the report framed the relationship as contentious rather than mutually beneficial. The

commission accepted the criticism and the final report placed less emphasis on conflict between the women's societies and denominational boards.

The Commission VI records reflect a broad transformation that my dissertation documents. It can be summarized as follows: Due to longstanding fundraising challenges, male-dominated denominational boards sought to centralize their control over missionary finances in the first decades of the twentieth century. These efforts at centralization facilitated an expansion of the missionary enterprise and led some leaders of the mission movement to see more promise outside of the limitations of church-based philanthropy. While women's societies proved exceptionally strong at raising money and promoting the missionary cause, they also stood in the way of growing centralization. As a result, the denominational boards felt deeply ambivalent about women's societies and the documents point to those conflicted sentiments.

The records of the World Missionary Conference therefore satisfied one of the primary purposes for which I sought a Libraries Research Award. Other collections pointed to similar developments. The records of the Foreign Missionary Conference of North America (FMCNA), for example, include numerous reports and statistics about charitable giving. Both the statistics and the ways that mission movement leaders interpreted those statistics will help me understand how fundraising changed in the early twentieth century. The Robert E. Speer papers consist of Speer's collection of publications, many of which similarly document fundraising efforts.

While these materials helped me fulfill the goals I had set out to accomplish through the Libraries Research Award, the archivists at Burke (particularly Brigitte Kamsler, Matthew Baker, and Ruth Tonkiss Cameron) also steered me toward collections that have helped reshape my project. I had no intention, for example, of looking at the records of the Near East Relief Committee (NER), which will now form the basis of my final chapter. The organization that

became NER was founded in 1915 in response to the Armenian genocide. It had no religious affiliation, but most of its leadership and benefactors participated in missions in some way. This fact made me wonder how we might understand the relationship between secular and religious philanthropies, which are usually seen as quite distinct. NER suggested a very different history. Consequently, I unexpectedly spent much of time at Burke using the NER records.

What I found in the Near East Relief Committee records was an organization with far more resources than any missionary society, but which in other ways was practically indistinguishable from missions. Much of NER's work centered on the care and education of Armenian orphans. Missionaries and former missionaries assisted in this work. Some promotional material that I found in the NER records emphasized religion and the religious inculcation of the orphans almost as much as missionary material. They hoped "the real spirit of Christ pervading its organization" would attract donors. NER faced the same criticism as missionaries, especially with regard to the mismanagement of money. In facing this criticism, they were often lumped together with missions work, reflecting the popular perception that they differed little. At the same time, NER did differ substantially from missionary societies. They held a government charter, raised \$41 million between 1915 and 1920 (more than twice what the wealthiest missionary society raised), and framed their appeals as a national, rather than a denominational, obligation. While most of the leaders were involved in missions somehow, Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, who was Jewish, initially proposed the organization and numerous politicians served on the Board of Trustees. When NER promoted Christianity, it was a generic version. Unlike Protestant missionaries who attempted to convert Armenians from the Orthodox Church to Protestantism, NER made a special effort to gain the support of Orthodox

Church leaders and promoted “practical rather than doctrinal” religious education. Also, some promotional material was entirely devoid of religion.

One of the clearest examples of vaguely Christian nature of the Near East Relief Committee, well documented in the records, was a fundraiser called Golden Rule Sunday. Though the title obviously referenced Christianity, religion was not an essential aspect of the fundraiser. Participants ate a meal made up of the same food the orphans ate and then calculate how much money they saved by eating so sparingly and send those savings to NER. NER designed the fundraiser to appeal to either Christian or secular motivations and publicized the event in both the religious and non-religious press. The event was hugely successful and continued throughout the 1920s. In 1923, receipts within the first two weeks following Golden Rule Sunday totaled nearly \$400,000, mostly from people who had never before donated and in amounts of five dollars or less. For my purposes, therefore, NER reflects a transitional moment in the formation of global philanthropy, when foreign missions had proven both its limits to serve certain communities and its importance for organizations that could serve those communities.

These are just a few of the ways that the Columbia University Libraries Research Award has shaped my dissertation. As I continue to sort through my notes and photographs, I am sure to discover many other connections between missions and modern philanthropy.