

## BOOK REVIEW

**Michael Barnett and Janice Gross Stein (eds.), *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism*, Oxford University Press, 2012, 258 pages, ISBN:978-19-991609-2.**

**Larysa KOVRYK-TOKAR\***

The modern world is extremely complex and intricate web of connections, relationships, processes in which a person can not always find its meaning. Extensive financial, technological and information capabilities provide comfort to many people, who lost for the understanding of certain values, faith in goodness, altruism, help to people in need. As a result - we become stale, corrupt, or lose faith in God or in humanity that, in fact, can lead to the destruction of human as a top of evolution. What fate awaits humanity in such circumstances? This question has no single answer, but at least one way the researchers Michael Barnett and Janice Gross Stein offer in the collective work *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism*. This work reveals a Humanitarianism phenomenon in the modern world, its correlation with a faith, secular and sacred, the place and role of religious organisations in carrying out humanitarian activities and etc. The book consists of nine chapters, each of which illustrates the study of several prominent scholars from certain aspects of Humanitarianism that is implicit theoretical value and practical significance of this kind of research papers.

Barnett and Gross Stein emphasise in the introduction that in modern humanitarianism much like in a globalised world, two trends, two differences - secular and religious aspects - are a *barricade bridges* opposed to each other. In this respect, this work examines such differences and trends through additional research of *secularisation and sanctification of humanitarianism*. *Secularisation and sanctification* can be understood as *process, strategy and outcome*, because these are structural forces in motion, propelled and arrested by broader political, cultural, economic and sociological trends. We can agree that there is nothing natural about the religious and the secular because of their social constructing and creating by the human imagination and activity. Therefore, these social structures can be formed, reshaped, improve and resolve differences that arise between them. Actually the authors note that they are less interested in *secularisation and sanctification as outcomes in large part because they tend to*

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\* Larysa Kovryk-Tokar is Assistant professor at the Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University.

*invite scorekeeping – who is up, who is down? – and more interested in their processes of mutual creation.*

In the International Committee of the Red Cross's terminology the humanitarianism is a fair, independent, impartial and neutral provision of life-saving relief in emergency settings. However, according to Barnett and Gross Stein, *this definition bypasses other ways in which people want to relieve the suffering of others.* From this perspective humanitarianism is explicit in religious, philosophical and spiritual commitments that inspire acts of compassion. In addition, humanitarianism includes not only medical care, but also human rights, development, public health care and other social interventions. All these become the basis of humanitarian activities as religious-based organisations and non-governmental organisations, whose role in improving the humanitarian situation in the world can not be overemphasised.

Therefore, Barnett and Gross Stein summarise, that *one moral to this volume is that a humanitarianism that loses its sense of the sacred will be a humanitarianism that ceases to exist.*

The second section of the book is devoted to the development of so-called humanitarian market, which has various actors, including religious-based organisations. Particular attention Hophood Stephen and Leslie Vinjamuri paid to the research of the Evangelical Christian Church - World Vision International's - activities (a religious non-profit organisation). Its activities are closely linked to the secular humanitarian norms/ but it increases much of its cash and motivates its work and stuff on a religious background. According to the authors of this chapter, such mix of secular practice and religious principle is highly effective because of its competitiveness, that's why they suggest that WVI may be *the business model of the future in the humanitarian marketplace.*

It also pointed out that the main problem for religious humanitarian organisations is *survival and prosperity*, which is concerned not so much with internal as external identity requirements. In an effort of seeking public funds from secular donors, religious-based organisations face the risk of losing their own religious identity. This creates the problem of correlation between the private and public donors to fund FBOs humanitarian projects and their funds. Public donors such as the UN, EU agencies, states, largely control NGOs, FBOs therefore they prefer private contributions that reduce dependence, give financial autonomy to preserve and avoid *costly overheads.*

Overall, the authors stress that since the 1970s, humanitarianism has been *both globalised and marketised* to produce a humanitarian world characterised by professionalisation, bureaucratisation and commercialisation.

Cultural proximity and activity of Islamic religion-based organisations in modern humanitarianism are covered in the third chapter. Jonathan Benthall believes that the *religion is coming to be "mainstreamed"* in relief and development. In addition, due to the existence of umma or transnational

community of Muslims, “cultural proximity” appears more in Islamic world than Christian. However, the researcher speaking of cultural proximity within the Ummah declares several caveats that are caused by the following reasons. First, religion is just one sign of similarities or differences should be taken into account as ethnicity, language, class, generation, gender, political ideology and more. Secondly, according to the doctrine, religious practice, relations with secular states, *Muslim Umma* is not homogeneous and *sharply divided in itself*. Third, a political factor and inflated expectations of Islamic donors play an important role in the activities of Islamic religious-based organisations. Fourth, there is no clear reason to assume that Muslim beneficiaries is less able to respect the principles of humanitarianism than non-Muslim NGOs, as data as required in practice. In addition, the threats to the safety of the aid workers among the causes are real to Islamic or not-Islamic employees. For example the militants in Iraq or Afghanistan, attacking humanitarian missions, not hesitate on killing Muslims.

In summary, Benthall notes that *cultural proximity within humanitarianism is controversial*. This is evident in the West in the stereotype that charity is the Judeo-Christian monopoly because the Islamic charitable activities are biased. However, Christianity and Islam as the two main religions are doomed to study and try to understand each other, even with competitive relations. In the opinion of the author the non-discrimination in the humanitarian field must remain the main principle: it does not matter who assists a result is important.

Quite interesting and compelling is Ajaz Ahmed Khan’s position on the motives of donors in humanitarian activities. In particular, he notes that especially religious obligation is important for Muslims, but more significant motives for donors are altruistic motives, they want to overcome poverty and suffering of others. For example, the British Muslim donors committed to *Islamic Relief* because of its reputation as a reliable, well-known charitable organisation, in addition, they believe that it will make *a positive image of Muslims and their contribution to British society*.

Revealing the reasons of Muslim donations Ajaz Khan speaks about their religious and secular origin. One of Britain’s Muslim public polls showed that 78% of donors as a reason for donations indicated a desire to alleviate the suffering of poor people in developing countries. Another reason (approximately 76%) called the performance of their religious duty (zakat) - the third pillar of Islam. Apart from zakat, Muslims are encouraged to make voluntary contributions or sadaqab, to help the poor and needy in their social needs. Both zakat and sadakab play a key role in the religious beliefs of Muslims without them faith is incomplete. The author also points out that in the United Kingdom, Muslims second and third generation, having no close ties with the historical homeland, to perform zakat and sadakabu turn to religious NGOs such as

Islamic Relief. The reason is surely that this assistance will focus on those countries with which they have family ties. Within its annual budget Islamic Relief is the largest Muslim humanitarian religious-based organisation in Britain and one of the most famous in the world.

Instead, five part of the monograph examines the role of spirituality in humanitarianism. The authors of this chapter start with a rather provocative question: does a person's degree of *spirituality make a difference* to their ability to survive and recover in times of crisis, and if it does, *can and should humanitarian aid agencies seek to support spirituality?*

For the authors, the *humanitarian enterprise* is a deeply moral and ethically driven endeavour. It works to provide lifesaving aid and protection for people caught up in extreme crisis, regardless of their race, religion or nationality. This is a direct expression of faith that *humanity is one family*.

The authors sought understanding of spirituality, not religion, because they are often mutually combined in modern terminology. They summarise that the discrepancy between the religious and spiritual evolved in response to widespread dissatisfaction with institutional religion and religious practice in Europe and America. The researchers suggest that in this context the reason of described changes may be that spiritual people do not always have to be a believer. Thus, people can refer themselves to the sacred, but without decoration, ideology, history, that is associated with religious institutions.

The issue of religious donations, its regulation in modern India disclosed in six chapter of this paper. Erica Bornstein notes that in India *religious charity* and *secular humanitarianism* were legally separated into two different areas. This distribution was vested in the introduction to the British Trust Law in colonial India; in the formation of the secular constitution of early post independence India and Personal Law; and the regulation of modern NGOs through Tax Law.

Special attention is given to research of *Hindu donation* (Dan). Dan in Hinduism is a special form of donations, which does not require a "return", at least in this lifetime. Giving a donation, many people expect happiness. This differs from the classical concept of charity that is relevant to the obligation. In Bornstein's opinion, it contrasts with an equivalent donation because one who gives the Dan in Hinduism strives to release itself from any future contact with the recipient of their gift. Dan is *pure* and *free* gift. However, the researcher indicates that in urban New Delhi Indians prefer to give Dan to organisations such as orphanages. Here they can see the result at any time and make a spontaneous visit, instead of sacrificing Brahmin or priests in the temple. People often consider donations to schools for education of impoverished girls or humanitarian organisations, which also serve as a form of dan. Thus we agree with Bornstein's statement that Dan became such a measure through which Indians understand humanitarian aid in the wider sense.

Finally, the author concludes that in India it is difficult to regulate religious donation sector, the efforts in this regard may be unrealistic. This is due to the sacred nature of “gupt dan” and spontaneity with which most religious giving in India takes place, whether to individuals or to religious institutions.

The seventh chapter reveals the humanitarian work of French Catholic missionaries and the challenges of the modern world they face. Bertrand Taithe notes that in genealogy of humanitarianism the missionaries were playing an important role for a long time. The missionaries exceeded their non-religious rivals and in their work with local missionaries often won in the battle *for hearts and minds*. However, despite their convincing experience in this area, their *spiritual DNA* often presents unique challenges when confronts with the need to be competent.

According to the author, it focuses on the intervention of the French Catholic Church in colonial and post-colonial era, a time when humanitarian work that was done by missionaries, had to be separated from the work done by the colonists - a deep transformation of the Catholic Church itself. At that time there was rivalry between the French Catholic and Protestant missionaries and external presence of American missionaries in Africa.

The eight part of the paper deals with a problem of humanitarianism's place in post-industrial era, its correlation of bureaucracy. For most of its history, emergency relief was staffed by persons either immune or opposed to planning, coordination and centralisation, unlike modern aid workers. Reflecting the stereotype that aid workers are divided into three types - *missionaries, misfits and mercenaries* - humanitarians, in Barnett's opinion, seemingly savoured a lifestyle that relied more on instinct than on institutions. However, over the past two decades the humanitarian sector has bureaucratized, rationalised and professionalised with incredible enthusiasm.

According to the researcher, emergency workers may similarly divided into three types, but they have developed the ability to attend coordination meetings, keep records, make budgets, manage accounts and graduate from training programs. As a consequence the modern volunteering transformed into opportunity to get an alternative career and professional growth. We can also agree that the humanitarian activities is a sphere with a growing number of regulations, standards, codes of production, accounting system and other components that fit the new professional area.

In addition, to Barnett's mind, *modern philosophy of humanitarianism* is influenced by American pragmatism, which provides sceptical understanding of knowledge, the importance of experience and practice to gain knowledge and tools. The author asks the question: how has the spirit of rationalisation and pragmatism influenced sacred in humanitarianism? The answer is adequate: rationalisation nourished by faith in what the world is, in principle, be reduced to calculation, clear and reasonable, cost analysis, integrating secular and spiritual

world of humanitarianism. As for pragmatism, the researcher suggests its possible practical philosophy of humanitarianism with its emphasis on the use of scientific methods and practices to find effective solutions to the most urgent problems. After all, be pragmatic - so first solve the problem, then think about ideology.

In summary, Barnett puts quite a rhetorical question: can a more pragmatic and institutionalised *humanitarianism* preserve *faith and sense of the sacred*? The answer is: If humanitarian does not believe that it is possible to improve the humanitarian sphere, if he drops the possibility of moral progress, then nothing will happen. Perhaps little profanity is just what the sacred needs.

The last part is devoted to the role of secular and spiritual in humanitarian life. Andrea Paras and Janice Gross Stein offered to consider two arguments. The first suggests that the boundaries between the secular and the sacred are not sharp, but rather flexible. Humanitarian sphere and human rights embody the sacred for both secular and religious humanitarians and are sanctified by both. The interpretation of sacred influences how organisations understand the nature of humanitarian action and its own essence as humanitarian actors. The second argument shows that religious humanitarians better prepared to direct the boundaries between spiritual and secular than the mundane. That is the religion-based organisations, feeling the sacred of humanitarian space, understand its multilateral cooperation with the political space. Instead secular humanitarian organisations perceive sacred humanitarian sphere more literary.

Special attention is paid to the study of the role of the “sacred” in the life of modern humanitarian organisations. In particular, it is noted that the concept of humanitarian space together with the concept of human rights is one of the most important concepts in the history and life experiences of humanitarian organisations, as it represents the central value of humanitarianism - both significant and immovable sphere of moral action. This area creates the fundamental principles of neutrality, non-interference, independence and universality.

To summarise, it should be emphasised that humanitarianism is obvious phenomenon of modern global processes. It provides the opportunity to realise our sacred need to help those who need it in any way, or supply water thirsty, or donate a million African children, or to work as volunteer in religious-based or humanitarian NGOs. The main thing is to believe in the human propensity for empathy, compassion and desire to do good things.