Religion and Masculinities en Las Américas

Veranstalter: Heiko Kiser, Felix Krämer, Antje Schnoor, Exzellenzcluster, „Religion und Politik", Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster; Olaf Stieglitz, Universität Erfurt
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On 29th and 30th of September the international conference „Religion and Masculinities en Las Américas" was held in Münster. The conference was coordinated by Heiko Kiser, Felix Krämer, Antje Schnoor (Cluster of Excellence „Religion and Politics", University of Münster) and Olaf Stieglitz (Erfurt University). Within the wider context of ongoing research concerning gender relations in religious practices and discourses, this conference set the goal of exploring the different intersections of masculinity and religion. Taking „the Americas" as a geographical frame, the focus of the conference was transregional. The importance of religion in the construction of masculinities and the impact of masculinity concepts on religion and religious institutions were subject to indebt analysis.

In his opening talk OLAF STIEGLITZ (Erfurt) introduced the historical figure of Bruce Barton, who in the 1920s was the author of a book that developed an interpretation of the New Testament based on the word „success" and argued against a perceived feminization of religion. Taking Barton as a starting point he raised a number of questions regarding the construction of hegemony in the 20th century. Leaning on two milestones of gender history by Simone de Beauvoir and Joan W. Scott he outlined the central aims of the conference: to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, to regard religion and gender as intertwined systems of power and knowledge and to focus on the interaction and transfer of norms and ideas between the Americas.

In giving the first keynote address of the day ERHARD GERSTENBERGER (Marburg) took the description of Adam and Eve as a starting point to compare these biblical archetypes with actual gender performances in the Americas. He argued that convictions of male superiority, betrayal by women and women's inherent evilness were stamped into the cultural history of the Christian West and are still virulent today. He differentiated between a more individualistic variant of maleness in North America in contrast to a more clan and community focused concept of maleness in South America.

The following section on normative order started with a case from North America. Speaking about urban Catholic bachelors in the U.S. between 1890 and 1920 AMY KOEHLINGER (Tallahassee) made an effort to „recover Catholic men as historical subjects". While according to Koehlinger historians of American Protestantism already began to do research on the relationship between men, masculinity and religion in the last decade, there was still much to do regarding Catholic men. She showed that for a huge number of Catholic men devotional Catholicism was marginal in their everyday lives, and that therefore the Church tried to make it relevant for urban men. By taking the case of urban bachelors, young pugilists as a point of reference she cautioned against focusing on the institutions of parish and family, when writing the history of American Catholicism.

With ANTJE SCHNOOR (Münster) the audience was directed back to a much more institutionalized setting within the Catholic Church: the Jesuit order in Chile. Starting out with a conflict between the Pope and the order about the vow of obedience in the 1960s, Schnoor examined the construction of masculinity within the Chilean order, arguing that virility was a crucial element in its masculinity construction. She maintained that, when the Pope in 1966 criticized the diminishing obedience of the order's members appealing to their virility, he deplored a crisis of masculinity, when it was authority, what was in crisis.

SILKE HENSEL (Münster) commented on the two papers. With reference to the case study on the boxers she asked if their Catholicism might have occurred as an effective part of their own identity perception. More gener-

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ally it would appear as a challenge to historical analysis to work out different lines among religious and gender identifications, according to the comment. With regard to the Jesuits Hensel placed a question concerning the ontogenesis of the historical identity production as men. She remarked that it would remain an interesting challenge to investigate in how far the education Jesuits provided for their male members actually influenced the educational context of society as a whole – and vice versa.

In her evening lecture DAGMAR HERZOG (New York) focused on the recent history of the 21th century. She linked masculinity constructions with politics, analyzing the success of the Religious Right in the U.S. since the late 1990s. She portrayed it as an answer to heterosexual men's insecurities, provoked by the „ambivalences left behind by the sexual revolution." According to Herzog it was the media hype surrounding Viagra and problems regarding marital sex and desire in the 1990s, which provoked anxieties about post marital sex and insecurities among US-Americans. As Herzog argued, those insecurities were exploited by religious conservatives. Firstly the religious movement succeeded because it was „wildly pro-sex" regarding marital sex while promoting sexual abstinence until marriage. Secondly it secularized its message by using arguments about physical and most notably mental health. And thirdly it inserted itself into „the current pandemic of angst about the death of post marital desire."

The second section focused on concepts of masculinity and religion in the media. FELIX KRÄMER (Münster) analyzed the reemergence of the preacher figure on TV by the end of the 1970s. Against the backdrop of a perceived crisis of masculinity, he traced the media performance from Jimmy Carter's confession to be a „born again" Christian to prominent TV preachers like Jerry Falwell to show how concepts of masculinity were applied to establish a distinct Moral Masculinity within the discourse of Moral Leadership and how these concepts were translated into politics gaining cultural influence.

In her commentary MARIA FRITSCHE (Trondheim) placed the rise of the TV preachers in the wider context of the 1970s and 1980s. She underscored the weakened position of the white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity after the social and political upheavals of the 1960s as an important factor in the revival of religions in the later decades. In highlighting the changes the concept of morality had undergone since the 1960s to a point where moral and religious leadership had become almost interchangeable, she traced religions way into presidential politics.

The final section addressed the question of reform movements starting with ANJA-MARIA BASSIMIR (Münster), who analyzed the ways US-American evangelicals dealt with the societal changes of the 1960s. She examined the portrayal of the ideal family and the role of men therein in evangelical magazines in the 1970s and 1980s and argued that while evangelicals recur on the Bible to establish normative gender roles, the allegedly „biblical" family structures can more accurately be described as a romanticized version of the mythical 1950s nuclear family. Nonetheless, as Bassimir showed, even Bible-based masculinity concepts were open to some interpretation: Responding to societal changes, evangelicals could acknowledge the equality of genders in the spiritual sphere or develop a concept of „mutual submission" between man and woman, while at the same time adhering to hierarchical family structures as the prescription for every-day life.

HEIKO KISER (Münster) turned the focus to another kind of reform movement: liberation theology in Mexico. He took a comparative look at two Catholic ceremonies on diocesan level in the Mexican State of Oaxaca in 1959 and 1984, analyzing gender roles in the ceremonial orders and related texts. He argued that gendered rule was subverted by liberation theology, which promoted a new ideal of masculinity for society and church. This ideal included poverty, indigenous customs and supposedly feminine qualities, like empathy and self-sacrifice, and therefore was opposed to the upper class self-image. The Vatican's move to close down Oaxaca's liberationist Church was motivated among other things by the wish to restore gendered rule within the Church.

MARIE-THERES WACKER (Münster) commented on the two papers. In her response to Bassimir's paper, she wondered whether the

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holy family – Joseph, Mary, and Baby Jesus – could be considered as a Biblical role model for evangelical family ideals. She also encouraged the presenter to consider age in her studies and to include an analysis of the portrayal of grandfathers. Regarding Kiser's paper, she felt convinced by the concept of emphasized femininity, as it deals with and exposes a kind of female behaviour in compliance with female subordination to patriarchy. She called into question that the success of liberation theology subverting gendered rule was enduring, claiming that post colonial liberation theologians still were rare and a shift back to indigenous religiosity was also tricky.

In the final discussion of the conference the focus was directed at the repeated postulation of a crisis of masculinity throughout the history of the 20th century. It was reemphasized that further research had to pay attention to the construction of hegemonic masculinity as well as manifestations of alternative masculinities, taking the categories of race and class into account. It was furthermore pointed out that the historical research tended to marginalize religion as an analytical context and that this conference had shown that taking into account the construction and reception of God proved an important and fruitful category for historical analysis.

Konferenzübersicht:

Opening Speech

Chair – Antje Schnoor

Olaf Stieglitz (Erfurt): Add Religion and Stir!? Gender History and the Question of (Male) Religiosity

Keynote Address

Erhard Gerstenberger (Marburg): Maleness between Deification and Condemnation. Musings over Gender Relations in the Americas

Panel: Normative Order

Chair – Barbara Rupflin (Münster)

Amy Koehlinger (Tallahassee) 'Up, Catholic Men!': Bachelor Culture and American Catholic Manhood, 1890-1920

Antje Schnoor (Münster) Religious Obedience since the 1960s; or, What Kind of Man is a Chilean Jesuit?

Comment – Silke Hensel (Münster)

Evening Lecture

Chair – Heiko Kiser

Dagmar Herzog (New York): The Therapeutization of Heterosexual Masculinity: Evangelical Sexual Politics at the Turn of the Millennium

Panel: Media

Chair – Ulrike Bock (Münster)

Felix Krämer (Münster): 'God's Man for The Hour': Reincarnating Moral Masculinity on TV in the US around 1980

Comment – Maria Fritsche (Trondheim)

Panel: Reform Movements

Chair – Debora Gerstenberger (Münster)

Anja-Maria Bassimir (Münster): Conservative Counterrevolution: US-American Evangelicals and Family Values

Heiko Kiser (Münster): Did Liberation Theology Subvert Gendered Rule? Masculinities, Race and Class as Performed in Public Church Celebrations in Oaxaca, Mexico

Comment – Marie-Theres Wacker (Münster)

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