McLeod, Hugh: *Piety and Poverty. Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York 1870-1914*. New York: Holmes & Meier 1996. ISBN: 0841913560; 264 S.

Rezensiert von: Andrew August

Hugh McLeod challenges the widespread assumption that members of the industrial working class are likely to be alienated from religious life. McLeod's three case studies offer abundant evidence of varied religious practices and attitudes among sections of the working classes in Berlin, London, and New York from 1870 to 1914. Yet the author is not content to criticize theoretical approaches that cannot account for this diversity. Instead, he offers useful models for the analysis of working-class religion beyond the three cities he has studied.

To explain complex patterns of religious belief and practice, McLeod examines the social, ethnic, and intellectual environments in which working-class religion developed. In Berlin, close links between conservative elites and the dominant Lutheran church inspired liberal and bourgeois hostility to religion, and this influenced working-class estrangement from the church. An „extensive and deep alienation, not only from the church, but from Christianity in general" (107) developed further as socialists created an alternative working-class culture in the city. In contrast, religious pluralism in London encouraged strong religious commitment among middle-class liberals and provided politically attractive religious environments for some workers. While most others spurned regular church attendance, London's working-class culture was usually not hostile to Christianity. In New York, churches became the focus of identity for many members of the ethnically fragmented working class, particularly the Irish.

The most exciting sections of the book for students of popular culture are the last two chapters, investigating the fabric of working-class religious life beyond church attendance. McLeod rejects the view that working-class religion was an exclusively female phenomenon. Relying mainly on evidence from London, he argues that working-class men participated in some religious activities, including debates, church-affiliated sports activities, and services led by particularly notable speakers. Women embraced different religious practices, such as mothers' meetings and life-cycle observances. Though in Berlin conflict between secular men and their more religious wives was relatively common, in London–and to some extent in New York–„male and female forms of religiosity" coexisted, though women's religious activity was often more „intense" (173).

In all three cities, religion played a role in working-class peoples' lives. Observances with religious content often marked rites of passage, including baptisms, confirmations or bar-mitzvahs, and in some places weddings and funerals. Working-class celebrations of holy days also reveal a vital religious sense, and in London and New York, McLeod suggests, private prayer was common among the working-class, even if regular church attendance was not.

Many of the strengths of this book come from its comparative approach. This methodology is ideally suited to testing existing conceptual approaches and developing more viable ones with broad applicability, which McLeod does impressively. But, as he notes, the availability of different kinds of sources for each case complicates his task. The richest material comes from London, and oral histories are used to particularly good effect. The sources on Berlin are more institutional, which makes it difficult to study less formal religious practice in that city. While religion appears less important in the Berlin working class, perhaps the kinds of sources McLeod exploited so profitably in London would have revealed a more complex picture in the German capital as well.

Overall, *Piety and Poverty* is a useful and interesting book. It challenges simplistic approaches and offers a range of compelling factors to consider in thin exploited so profitably in London would have revealed a more complex picture in the German capital as well.

Andrew August
Pennsylvania State University

Andrew August über McLeod, Hugh: *Piety and Poverty. Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York 1870-1914*. New York

1996, in: H-Soz-Kult 14.04.1997.