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Charity of Religions with Special reference to Hinduism, Islam and Christianity An Inter-religious Perspective

1. Charity in Hinduism

Narayana Seva is Nara Seva - Service to Humanity is Service to God

In Hindu India the traditional system of individual, kinship, caste and community charity is still working; it is small charity. I don't know if there has been a systematic analysis of its value calculated in economic terms. It must be a gigantic amount which people give in different forms to the needy ones: as service, as money, as protection, as consolation.

It is indeed a horrible falsification of history what happened to the Hindu traditional charity. The propaganda of the colonial missionaries and churches didn't want to admit the vast charitable activities, customs and institutions of Hindu *seva*. They wanted to show that only their Christianity is able to do charitable work, following the rule of *nara seva* while the Hindus had in mind only *nara-*

yana seva, serving God. This propaganda was very successful so that even Hindus educated in Christian schools and coming from less poor background believed that prejudice.

They didn't realise that the missionaries were coming from a rich country, rich because it exploited the crown jewel of the empire, Hindustan. The Western research has shown that the wealth of the British was coming from the subcontinent. That exploitation was not only humiliating but disastrous: Hindustan was not only robbed of her wealth but also of her historical chance to develop a modern welfare system. Therefore, it is indeed very cynical to impoverish a country and to keep down a people by force and then complaining poor conditions of the Hindu society and its alleged lack of interest to help the needy ones. Although the traditional system of charity was under permanent pressure of the system of colonial exploitation it still worked.

However, the missionaries using indo-colonial surplus to organize their Western charity in Hindustan, could implant the prejudice in the heads of English-Christian educated Hindus that there was no indigenous charity in Hindustan and that the Hindu religion was responsible for that lack of solidarity with the needy ones.

Nevertheless, the modernization of the Hindu society is demanding reorganization and an adaptation which the Western societies could start with the help of the Indian wealth one century ago.

The modern Hindu communities are indeed feeling the need of modernization and intensification of such charity activities and the strong need for building up a general social conscience free from group barriers and to motivate people for social engagement. We see that not only the cult of Ganesha, the God of Success, is increasing but that of Hanuman too; Hanuman is the epitome of a selfless social *sevakar*, service man.

The religious motivation for engaging in charitable activities or in helping by material goods is surprisingly similar to the moral ideology in the Western tradition. *Narayana seva* is understood as *nara seva*¹ or the same principle is called 'Serving Humanity is Serving God'.² Religion becomes now the motivation to do secular good deeds including charity. *Raghu Nandan Prasad Sharma* explains the Sewa Sutra as follows: "<Sewa> is the most essential virtue to make one's life meaningful i.e. the success of one's life lies in the service to others."³ Service to the others is according to the Hindu Modernists "the essence of devotion and that too with full dedication."⁴ The aim of all religious activities is the production of inner energy for an ecstatic engagement in very secular social welfare work.

¹ Cf., A.L. Sharma: *Nara Seva Narayana Seva*. Souvenir, 5th European Hindu Conference. Frankfurt am Main 1992, p.149; Raghu N.P. Sharma: *Nar Sewa Narayan Sewa*. New Delhi: VHP Sankat Morcham Ashram, December 1995.

² Heading of a leaflet of the RSS run Sewa International, 515, New Rajindra Nagar, New Delhi-110060.

³ Raghu N.P. Sharma: *Sewa Sutra*. www.vhp.org/...SewaSutra_7.htm

⁴ Raghu N.P. Sharma: *Sewa Sutra*. www.vhp.org/...SewaSutra_7.htm

The religious motivation is counterbalancing the materialistic vision in making surplus unlimitedly. In the logics of that secular motivation there isn't any argument to share with needy people. It is very irrational in this perspective to do charity. However, the *Vernunft*, the reason full of wisdom, is ironically irrational enough, not to follow the logics of unlimited profit making.

The new Hindu middle class is becoming more and more religious in a modern shape and in the time more and more charity concerned. The increasing self-consciousness of the Indian people looses more and more their inferiority complex and gives them a feeling for their co-nationals.

Religion is the social function to cultivate the inner richness, the simple awareness of the absolute, non-questionable value of one's own existence.

Of course, the logics of profit are denying that fantastic idea; however, the logics of profit have no ultimate reason.

Under the everlasting condition of shortage of goods the religion has to motivate the new rich middle class to support the needy people particularly in the new urban areas and to motivate the new poverty to fight against useless oppression which is blocking their socially necessary upcoming. Charity as help for the helpless and charity as help for self-help.

However, the religious communities should not forget that their particular duty is not charity itself; it is the motivation for charity. The work of charity should be done by professional and engaged lay people. The religious gurus have to concentrate on the task of convincing the people to balance their own economic success and their duty of charity for the needy ones.

It is very easy to convince the masses particularly of the new lower middle class to qualify themselves for money making; but it is extremely difficult to convince the same people to support the needy ones by voluntary work, that means loss of economic time, money, and deficit of personal reinvestment.

No doubt, the Hindus are able to do their social duty. The masses of voluntary *seva* workers and the increase of private activities in the educational sector and the development area are symptoms of the new charity. Now, modern charity is becoming more and more a function of all Hindu communities.⁵

2. Charity in Islam: *rahim, amanat, zakat, sadaqa, waqf*

The fundamental relevance of Islamic charity, *zakat*⁶ and *sadaqa*⁷, roots in the Muslim understanding of God. According to the proper message of Mohammed

⁵ Cf., Moestl, Roswitha: *NarasevÁ – Moderne Hindudiakonie [NarasevÁ – Modern Hindu Charity]*, Frankfurt on Main etc. 2006.

⁶ *zakat*, arab.: purity, alms. *Zakat* is one of the five fundamental principles of Islam: A true Muslim has to give a certain portion of his income to the poor people.

⁷ *sadaqa*, arab.: what s.o. is entitled to get; in this case: what poor people are entitled to get. Later Islamic tradition interpreted *sadaqa* exclusively as voluntary alms and *zakat* exclusively as obligatory charity. However, that is questionable (see below).

the first and primary name and quality of God is *rahman* and *rahim*⁸. Allah is - so to speak – *rahman*, the life giving uterus, *rahim*. Like the uterus he gives life to the men without any pre-condition. Life is a gift free of charge not a reward for something. And if men have become sinners during their life-time God will forgive them all their sins without any condition; they have only like children to beg his pardon! Allah enjoys forgiving sins. His nature is *rahim* and his realization *rahman* will say his essence is to give and to maintain life. Like a mother he will do everything to preserve the life of her children even if they destroy it. If men are getting God's grace, i.e. life and forgiveness free of charge, then generosity and mercy to the fellow-men is the only ethical consequence.

Property and wealth of human beings is not a reward of their deeds but a free grace of God, delivered as a trust charge, *amanat*.⁹ Therefore human beings are only fiduciaries of their property and wealth. This applies particularly to that portion of their wealth which belongs to the needy: "And in their (the rich people's) wealth the beggar and the outcast had due share" (Surah 51, 19).¹⁰ What rich people give to the poor is in reality not their own property but the God given right of the poor people; and therefore the rich people are only their trustees. The Koran says: "... the (righteous) worshippers (are those) who are steadfast in prayer and *in whose wealth there is a right acknowledged for the beggar and the destitute*" (Surah 70, 22-25). Or: "O you who believe! Spend a part of what We have given you before that day arrives when there shall be neither trading, friendship nor intercessions. Truly, it is the disbelievers who are the wrongdoers" (Surah 2, 254). Here is said that the actual disbelievers are those people including Muslims who keep back the property of the needy. This means that the rich man devours foreign property, he is a robber and therefore nothing and nobody will him on the day of the Last Judgement.

This God given property of the needy which the rich are only holding in trust, is absolutely taboo for everybody not being needy: Therefore, when the Prophet "was presented with food, he asked about it. If he was told that it was a gift, he ate out of that, and if was told that it was a sadaqa he did not eat of that."¹¹ This taboo is so strict that even the Prophet did not dare to eat a particular date because he was not sure if it was a question of *sadaqa* will say a portion belonging to the poor people.¹² When his grand-sons Al-Hasan and Al-Husain, were trying to eat a *sadaqa*-date they was set right by the Prophet: "Narrated Abu Huraira:

⁸ *rahim*, arab.: womb, med. uterus; (producing) kinship; *rahman*, arab.: realizing *rahim*, producing life and kinship.

⁹ *amanat*, pl., arab.: trust, trust charge.

¹⁰ The quotations of the Koran are mostly taken from: The Holy Qur'an with Translation and Commentaries. Islamic Publications for The Holy Qur'an Association. Istanbul 1998. There are some explanations added by the author or the translators.

¹¹ Sahih Muslim, www.searchtruth.com/: Abu Hureira reported: When the Apostle of Allah ...

¹² Sahih Bukhari, www.searchtruth.com/: Narrated Ana: The Prophet passed a date fallen on the way and said, "Were I not afraid that it may be from a sadaqa (charitable gifts), I would have eaten it." Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "Sometimes when I return home and find a date fallen on my bed, I pick it up in order to eat it, but I fear that it might be from a sadaqa, so I throw it." (Book 42, Hadith 612)

dates used to be brought to Allah's Apostle immediately after being plucked. Different persons would bring their dates till a big heap collected (in front of the Prophet). Once Al-Hasan and Al-Husain were playing with these dates. One of them took a date and put it in his mouth. Allah's Apostle looked at him and took it out from his mouth and said, 'Don't you know that Muhammad's offspring do not eat what is given in charity?'"¹³

The Prophet was afraid of the Day of Judgement. Then Allah's wrath will punish the rich people who out of avarice and exceeding love for wealth misused the share or inheritance of the needy for their own interests. The Koran says: "Who hoard their wealth and enjoin avarice on others, and hide that which Allah *has bestowed upon them* of His bounty. For (such) disbelievers We prepare a shameful doom" (Surah 4, 37). And: "But whenever He (Allah) tests him (the rich man) by restricting his (the rich man's) subsistence; he says: 'May Lord has humiliated me.' (This answer is not correct. The Lord says:) No! But you do not honour the *orphan*. Nor do you urge another *to feed the needy*. Rather, you devour *the inheritance* (of the orphan) unsparingly. And you love wealth with exceeding love." (Surah 90, 16-20). And: "Have you observed him who denies the Religion? Such is he who repulses the *orphan*, and who does not urge others to *feed the poor*" (Surah 107, 1-3). Here we see that the misuse of *amanat* which belong to the poor does not only break faith with the needy; it is even an act of faithless and disloyalty to Allah.

A rich man as a trustee is not even allowed to use that *sadaqa* property for getting public applause as a generous supporter of the needy ones. He would infringe a trust misusing foreign property for self-interest. The judgment about that misuse is very strict: "Who gives alms in order to be seen by the people has associated an idol with Allah."¹⁴ And this would be the most horrible blaming of God.

On the other side, true and beloved Muslim are those people who feed the needy without any self-interest, only for the love of Allah, and without any self-righteousness and arrogance because they are afraid of his wrath on the Day of Judgement: "And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive. Saying, 'We feed you for the love of Allah. No reward do we desire

¹³ Sahih Bukhari,

www.searchtruth.com/searchHadith.php?keyword=sadaqa&translator=1&search=1&book=&start=0: Book 24, Hadith 562. Narrated Abu Huraira: Al-Hasan bin 'Ali took a date from the dates of the sadaqa and put it in his mouth. The Prophet said (to him) in Persian, "Kakh, kakh! (i.e. Don't you know that we do not eat the sadaqa (i.e. what is given in charity) (charity is the dirt of the people))." (Book 52, Hadith 306).

Narrated Abu Huraira : Al-Hasan bin 'Ali took a date from the dates given in charity and put it in his mouth. The Prophet said, "Expel it from your mouth. Don't you know that we do not eat a thing which is given in charity?" (Book 24, Hadith 568).

¹⁴ [Sa'd, Allahs Wohlgefallen auf ihm, berichtete: "Ich hörte den Gesandten Allahs, Allahs Segen und Friede auf ihm, folgendes sagen: »Wer betet, um dabei von den Leuten gesehen zu werden, hat Allah beigesellt; und wer fastet, um dabei von den Leuten gesehen zu werden, hat Allah beigesellt;] *und wer Almosen gibt, um dabei von den Leuten gesehen zu werden, hat Allah beigesellt.*«" (Ha) In: Von der Sunna des Propheten [From the Sunna of the Prophet], ed. by Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rassoul, Köln 1994, p. 62. Quotation in italics. English translation by the author.

from you, nor thanks. We only fear a day of distressful wrath from our Lord.' Therefore, Allah has warded off from them the evil of that day, and has made them find brightness and joy" (Surah 76, 7-11).

The Koran, always emphasising charity as God's will, names the people who are entitled to get alms: "What ever you spend for good must go to parents, to your near relatives, *orphans and to the poor and the wayfarer*" (Surah 2, 215).

"Righteousness is not whether you turn your face to the East or to the West; but righteous is he who ... gives his wealth for the love of Allah to the relatives, *orphans and the needy, and the wayfarer, and those who ask, and for (the liberation of) the slaves.*" (Surah 2, 177) An other list is given in Surah 9, 60: "Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and those who collect them and for those whose hearts are to be reconciled (the non-Muslims), and for the ransom of captives (slaves) and debtors (who have to pay a big fine or blood money) and for the way of Allah and for (the hospitality of) the wayfarers. This is an obligatory duty from Allah, and Allah is Knowing, Wise."

Here we see: Allah strictly controls the rich people if they do their duty, and that there is not made any distinction between *zakat* and *sadaqa*. There is nothing said about *sadaqa* as a voluntary alms. If *sadaqa* would be a voluntary gift then it could not be a share or right of the needy. Otherwise a rich man could hold back the share *sadaqa* without any fear to incur Allah's wrath. But we have seen the undistinguished wrath of Allah against all who misuse the *amanat* of the needy; it may be *zakat* or *sadaqa*.¹⁵ There can be no doubt about it. The Prophet told his followers in no uncertain terms: "Giving of *sadaqa* is essential for every Muslim."¹⁶ It's not surprising that Mohammed "did not leave anything (after his death) except his arms, a white mule, and a piece of land which he had given as *sadaqa*."¹⁷

The most practical effects of this strong charity-centred message of Mohammed are the unnumbered charitable trusts, *waqf*¹⁸, in the Islamic world.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cf., Sahih Bukhari, www.searchtruth.com/: Narrated Ibn 'Umar: Allah's Apostle has made *sadaqat-ul-Fitr* obligatory, (and it was), either one Sa' of barley or one Sa' of dates (and its payment was obligatory) on young and old people, and on free men as well as on slaves. (Book 25, Hadith 588)

¹⁶ Sahih Muslim, www.searchtruth.com/: Sa'id b. Abu Burda reported on the authority of his grandfather that the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: "Giving of *sadaqa* is essential for every Muslim." Narrated Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari: The Prophet said, "On every Muslim there is enjoined (a compulsory) *sadaqa* (alms)." They (the people) said, "If one has nothing?" He said, "He should work with his hands so that he may benefit himself and give in charity." They said, "If he cannot work or does not work?" He said, "Then he should help the oppressed unhappy person (by word or action or both)." They said, "If he does not do it?" He said, "Then he should enjoy what is good (or said what is reasonable)." They said, "If he does not do that." He said, "Then he should refrain from doing evil, for that will be considered for Him as a *sadaqa* (charity)." (Book 73, Hadith 51)

¹⁷ Sahih Bukhari, www.searchtruth.com/: Narrated 'Amr bin Al-Harith: The Prophet did not leave anything (after his death) except his arms, a white mule, and a (piece of) land which he had given as *sadaqa*. (Book 53, Hadith 330)

¹⁸ *waqf*, arab.: religious foundation

¹⁹ Cf., <http://www.islamic-relief.com/Prjsec/1.asp>.

3. Christian Charity

with Special Reference to West Europe and Germany

Charity has a long tradition in the Christian religion. From the early beginning there was some organized charity. In the Acts of the Apostles we read about so-called *diakonoi*, servants, who had to take care of the needy Christians.

During the whole church history there was the rule that 1/3 of the tithe or religious tax had to be spend for the poor people of a parish. Of course, there was much misuse of that church tax; the tithe become property of private people, and the new owners of the tax mostly living far away were not interested in supporting the poor people. Yet, the Christian people collected additional voluntary charity.

The Christian theology supported the voluntary charity by developing the doctrine of merit and alms. Giving alms was interpreted not only as an act of Christian love that enjoyed the love for the needy brethren and sisters; alms giving was seen as a meritorious act which means: every Christian who gives something of his own property without any necessity or income to another one particularly to the poor people will get an appropriate transcendent reward. With the help of those good deeds the Christian could balance his personal transcendent account. Every sin producing a deficit could be compensated by *satisfactio operis*, satisfactory acts, the so-called good works. A rich man having beaten a servant too much had to compensate that irregular and unjust behaviour; dying before he had been given the commensurate satisfaction he had to suffer after his death in the purgatory for some time. The Christians of the West were convinced for centuries that alms giving was an appropriate *remedium animae*, a remedy for the soul, balancing the negative transcendent account even during life time.

For centuries the societies in the West faced diseases which they couldn't cure: e.g. the leprosy. All over Old Europe we can find leprosaria, hospitals for lepers. Those hospitals were well organized and well equipped. We can read from the documents how many donations were given to these institutions and how strictly the local governments controlled and supervised them.

However, according to the official ethics everybody lost the right to get alms when he became able to take care of himself and or got his own livelihood from private income.

Through internalization the feudal merit religion safeguarded a vast and effective charitable system lasting for more than thousand years.

There was a very powerful reason why the Christian societies systematically, extensively and intensively developed charity.²⁰ This reason had nothing to do

²⁰ St Francis (1182-1226), the servant of Lady Poverty, radicalized the doctrine of charity by declaring the alms as property of the poor people, property which Jesus Christ had earned once and then bequeathed to the needy ones. Therefore, by giving alms, the so-called donators give only back to the poor people what they had got as testamentary trustees from Jesus Christ. The alms are given to the rich people for safekeeping only. More than that: The religious devaluation of charity had its reason in St. Francis' favouring the poverty. If poverty is the

with alms as religious merits or property of the poor people but only with the functional fundamentals of the feudal societies.

The mediaeval society depended on charity in a broader sense. The steady development of material productivity was always threatening the basic structures and functions of the feudal society. The agrarian feudal economy was extremely jeopardized when the urban system of production (i. e. specialization and division of labour, trade, market, communal politics) became an integral and irreversible part of the social system. The new urban classes directly organized the production by themselves. To get a chance of economic survival they were forced to get technical qualification and economical competence. They started something like an intra-feudal competition.

However, the traditional feudal lords didn't want any change of their anti-competitive system; particularly the agrarian lords, including the ecclesiastical hierarchy, were afraid of reinvesting profits into the productive economic activities. Therefore the urban craft guilds and merchants were not allowed to plough back their profits. They had to spend their surplus for unproductive consumption, for the construction of all the great urban cathedrals, churches, chapels, palaces, the development of schools, universities, the promotion of arts, and all the other foundations and non-productive investments, particularly for an extensive system of charity, including leprosaria, hospitals, etc. The absorption of the surplus had become the main question of the urbanized feudal system.

The urbanized society was indeed depending on charity. Therefore, they had not only to prevent the market explosion but also to prevent the majority of the people to get a productive job. Better a friar and a beggar than a surplus making manager and labourer. The religion supported that system calling the jobless people with the honorific name *pauperes Christi*, the poor people of Jesus Christ.

Poverty became a basic religious ideal because it protected the urbanized feudal system. Therefore, supporting the poor people will say the non-productive ones was a necessity for the maintenance of society. The Catholic law indirectly promoted that sacralised poverty by prohibiting those people who couldn't get one of the few full jobs to marry and produce children. The celibacy was not only a method of population control in general but primarily a socio-economic strategy to avoid the emergence of a labour market.

When the anti-productive society declined because the productive forces had undermined the socio-economic restrictions the questions of a new system of charity arose in the new productivity-centred economy.

best form of life, uplifting of poor people by giving them alms and other support doesn't make any sense. Charity only means to give the needy ones what they need as necessary food for one day; nothing more. Therefore, St. Francis' charity isn't religiously useful for the rich and materially not attractive for the poor. However, the moral consequence of that position was very dangerous for the religious basis of the feudal charity system. If the alms weren't given voluntarily and weren't part of the property of the donator, how could he be entitled to religious merits? He had only fulfilled his duty. By discharging one's duty no merit or reward could be acquired. Therefore, St. Francis' concept of alms never came into vogue.

The radical change of the old charity system we can observe on the religious symptoms first.

During the Middle Ages when the feudal system was flourishing Catholic religion successfully taught the people to take care of their post-mortal existence: what will happen to the soul when the body is vanishing away. The church taught that a Catholic soul normally has to suffer in the purgatory, the temporal hell, for a long time in order to atone for their bad deeds on earth, to pay the debt. The Catholic believers were so deeply convinced of the reality of the purgatory which could last 20 000 years and more that they were ready to pay everything to shorten that gruel time. The remedy for the salvation of the soul was besides prayers mostly alms and foundations. Rich widows having no descendants made huge donations to the church for establishing hospitals or houses for fallen girls etc. All the beneficiaries of such donations had to do one thing: to pray i.e. to make religious merits in favour of the donator. The beneficiaries had to produce remedies for the salvation of the widow, i.e. to shorten her misery in the purgatory. The normal argument for charity was the donor's own post-secular wellness.

The Protestant Reformation introduced a radical change in the motivation of making charity. The idea of shortening the purgatory became unimportant because the purgatory or better suffering was no more in contradiction to salvation. "*Leid, Leid ist des Christen Teil: Suffering, suffering is particularly essential for being a Christian.*" A Christian shouldn't avoid suffering. Therefore, there was no need for shortening suffering anymore.

Did charity vanish with the Protestant Reformation? Not at all. Only the reason for charity changed: Now the Christians offered alms and donations to realize their Christianhood. Having got salvation by the grace of God free of charge the Christian couldn't use his energy and wealth for his salvation anymore; that would be absolutely useless. He should give his surplus to the needy ones in order to enjoy God in this way. These are the so-called free works, free from ego-centred salvation, done only to please God by loving the needy fellowmen in a practical and material form.

The new religion completely changed the sponsored deeds: Protestant charity became secularized: no prayers or masses were asked for; only secular and rational help for the needy people was demanded by the secular authorities from the rich people. All the monasteries and private religious foundations became secularized and their buildings and goods were – under the control of the secular authorities - used to educate and uplift the Christian people (schools, universities) or to support economically, physically or psychically helpless fellow-men in a more centralized and rationalized manner. Later on rich Protestants completed the new charity system establishing by themselves charitable trusts for needy people.²¹

²¹ In Frankfurt, there is till today the *Cronstett- and Hynspergian Protestant Foundation*. In her whole lifetime, a rich and noble lady, named *Justina Catharina Steffan von Cronstetten*, took care of poor orphans and women

The old Protestant religion of charity had its religious root in the experience of a God who gave his grace without any condition and let suffering be a godlike experience.

Being pleased about such a God the Protestant was greedy to please him with good secular deeds without any ego-centred heavenly interest, with so-called free love for the fellow-men.

That Protestant motivation underwent change in the 19th century during the rise and triumph of the *Bourgeois society*.

The new system of productive mass labour reinforced by the national and international markets and the development of transport and trade created a new poverty. The new poverty of the proletarian labourers in the new industrial areas and the underemployed people in the traditional villages couldn't be supported by the traditional charity system. The uncontrolled explosion of population and the increasing demands for jobs for maintaining the multiplied number of low standard families made the traditional charity system ineffective. On the other hand the readiness of giving alms was reduced by the new economic possibility to reinvest the surplus.

When the poverty crisis intensified in the 19th century and the politization of the proletarian masses threatened the old and new ruling classes they started a double strategy to counter the crisis which was called the *Soziale Frage*, the basic social conflict.

The first one: the new or Bourgeois Christians started a vast private charity movement organizing thousands of charity associations e.g. for fallen girls in the new urban areas, public kitchens, old people houses, hospitals for mentally and physically ill people²², they helped the wandering workers²³, hundreds of girls' schools were established, and so on. All the models and organizations of Christian Bourgeois charity were created in the 19th century.

The religious motivation of that surprising Protestant and Catholic lay movement of helpers was very clear: the idea of heavenly merit had lost its motivating power.

The new charity ideology taught that a real Christian has to be *eine sittliche Persönlichkeit*, a moral personality. A good Christian was someone who did good works. Good works meant worldly deeds useful for the society. The good deeds should culminate in material success. A rich man was not - as the traditional ideology taught - far from the kingdom of God; just the opposite, he was very close to it. He was able to fulfil the basic commandment of the Bible: lov-

who couldn't look after themselves. With the help of her immense property she established that foundation which should give noble widows a home. Today that foundation is engaged in mobile support of old people and mobile child nursing, it is running an Old Peoples' home, etc. Today, the foundation is getting its money mostly from rents of houses in the city of Frankfurt, an amount of € 2, 3 Mio. In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 30. 1. 2001, p. 59

²² The biggest institutions are the Betheler Anstalten [Hospitals in Bielefeld] which were founded by the aristocrat and Protestant revivalist pastor Friedrich von Bodelschwingh (1831-1910).

²³ Adolf Kolping (1813-65), a Catholic priest; he very successfully organised an association for wandering handicraftsmen.

ing the neighbour. This love was understood as help with material goods. The rich Christian, therefore, could become the best Christian because he was able to spend money for the needy people.

Therefore, the so-called *Liberal Theology* of the Bourgeois Christians was reduced to social ethics. The dogmatic theology, the doctrine of transcendental issues, lost her dominant position within the Bourgeois religion.

Voluntary material support of the needy ones had become the basic definition of a modern Christian.

The ideology of the Bourgeois Christians started in the end of the 18th c. when Protestant theologians and church officers attacked the feudal system criticising the feudal nobility as absolutely useless and unnecessary people. The main argument against that class was that they were only consumers and not productive workers. People who were only consuming couldn't be Christians; a real Christian worked very hard to earn his own livelihood, reinvesting the surplus into the business and giving the needy a certain portion of his profit.

The other side of that anti-feudal ideology of the Bourgeois Christians was very clear: Could the needy people or the proletarians become real and complete Christians? They didn't have any surplus which they could transfer to other needy persons, they were consuming their whole income by themselves neither reinvesting nor spending something.

The liberal Christians thought that those people were lower and incomplete Christians who had to be brought up to the high moral standard of a successful Protestant personality.

The same liberal argument we know from the charity ideology which the missionaries propagated and propagate till now.²⁴

All the private associations of the Bourgeois Christians couldn't solve the social question during the 19. c. Therefore, the imperial German government under the leadership of Chancellor *Otto von Bismarck* (1815-1898) introduced a system of public social security 1883–1889 particularly to withdraw the *Social Democratic Party*.

The *First World War* destroyed the economic basis of the system and therefore the proletarians supported the left parties and the petite Bourgeoisie the right parties. During the Nazi regime the charity organisations got more or less under the control of the Nazi party which murdered thousands of mentally ill people.

Only after the *Second World War* the German society enjoyed a working charity system: in West Germany with the help of the American *Marshall Plan* and in the East with the socialist system.

After the re-unification of Germany the old West German charity system had been introduced into East Germany too. This system, particularly the subsystem for the needy people, is working as follows: private charity organisations and

²⁴ *Albert Schweitzer*, a typical Bourgeois Christian, went to Africa to help and educate what he called the *Primitives of the Jungle*. They were targets of Bourgeois Christian love giving the helper the chance to fulfil his own desire for moral superiority Cf., *Albert Schweitzer: Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen* [Christianity and World Religions]. München 1950, p. 56.

these are mostly religious ones²⁵, deliver charity service, and social assurance companies (premium) and the mostly local authorities (tax) pay for these charity activities. Therefore, financing of the charity doesn't depend so much on alms or similar private donations. The principles of this system are solidarity and subsidiarity, helping one another if someone is really in need or helpless. These principles are common to all Christian communities and serve as the ethical basis for the practice of social politics in Germany.

4. Conclusion

The research of the vast charity culture of the non-Christian communities in East and West has been ignored by ideological reasons. It is a scientific must to study all systems of charitable practice, their specific spiritual motivations and their religious concepts. Then we can smooth the way for the mobilizing of the charity resources of all religions. The increasing new global poverty needs the motivating help of all religions and religious communities: *charity* of the Christians, *nara seva* of the Hindus, *zakah*, *sadaqa* and *waqf* of the Muslim and the social welfare work of all the other religions.²⁶ The abuse of charity for making converts should give way to an inter-religious and inter-cultural co-operation of all charity people.

²⁵ The Protestant 'Diakonisches Werk' [Charity Organization] and the Catholic 'Caritas' [Charity] are the biggest charity organizations which employ hundreds of thousand employees and voluntary workers.

²⁶ Charity in Buddhism is now increasing, cf. Sandhong Rinpoche: Freigebigkeit und Helfen [Generosity and Support (in Buddhism)]. In: Thea Mohr and Edmund Weber (Eds.): Universelle Kultur des Helfens im Hinduismus, Buddhismus, Islam, Judentum und in den Naturwissenschaften [Universal Culture of Charity in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Natural Sciences]. Frankfurt on Main 2006, p. 51-59.; cf., www.dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Buddhism/Engaged_Buddhism/.