Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity (Inaugural Lecture)

KLAUS KOSCHORKE

1. Christian India around 1550

The theme of this conference is: "Polycentric structures in the history of World Christianity;" and the main challenge will be to relate in a new way the global dimensions of the history of Christianity – which have existed from its beginnings – to its polycentric structures – which likewise are found from its start (and not only in recent times).

I'd like to begin with an episode, which is well-known to many of my students from Munich. When Vasco da Gama arrived in India by sea in 1498, which his rival Columbus missed a few years earlier taking the alternative Atlantic route, he met two Arabic merchants on the beach of Calicut in the current state of Kerala, who greeted him in Genoese and Castilian with the friendly words, "What the devil are you looking for?" – to which he gave the famous answer, "Christians and spices." Spices – and ending the Arabic monopoly on trade – were actually the economic motive of the Portuguese overseas expedition, and the search for "Christians," the ideological one. Also in the European Middle Ages, they had vague knowledge about the Oriental Churches in far-away Asia, and Vasco da Gama had landed by chance exactly in that part of India where native Christians indeed had been living for centuries in the form of the St. Thomas Christians. The story that followed was marked by a series of partly bizarre misunderstandings. So, for example, the first worship of the Portuguese new-comers on Indian ground took place in a Hindu temple. They were amazed – according to an eyewitness of the events – by the unique depictions of Mary and the Saints in statues with six arms and teeth jutting far out of the mouth. It was only after some time that they realized that they had landed in a Hindu temple rather than in a Christian church. The – quite ambivalent and repeatedly shifting – encounter with the real St. Thomas Christians took place later.

This nice story of an intercultural misunderstanding was also the starting point of the first Munich-Freising-Conference in 1997. Its proceedings were published under the title, "Christians and Spices."[1] Later my wife found this book title advertised online under the category "Cookbooks" which, however, did not significantly increase sales. This episode may also now be used as a starting point for this Sixth International Munich-Freising-Conference. It illustrates a crucial aspect of our conference's theme: namely, that the western mission movement was certainly a significant factor in the process of the global spread of Christianity and the making of overseas churches, but nevertheless only *one* factor among

---

1   K. KOSCHORKE (Ed.), *"Christen und Gewürze".* Konfrontation und Interaktion kolonialer und indigener Christentumsvarianten (StAECG 1; Göttingen 1998).

others. Christianity existed in India long before the arrival of the Portuguese, in the form of the previously mentioned St. Thomas Christians, who had been living in the region continually since the 3rd century. And they would continue to play an enormously important role in the subsequent history of Indian Christianity until today.

In addition, a *third* version of Christianity – apart from the ancient church of the St. Thomas Christians and the colonial Catholicism of the newly arrived Portuguese – emerged in India in the 16th century, resulting from the self-Christianization of the *Paravas*. The Paravas were a fishing caste in South India who were socially marginalized within the Hindu-society and oppressed by Muslim merchants. As soon as they heard of the arrival of the Portuguese, the Paravas took initiative to make contact with them, asked them to send priests and converted to Christianity in a mass movement starting in 1535. When Francis Xavier – later to be celebrated as the "Apostle of Asia" in Catholic historiography – came to their region in 1542, he encountered already existing Christian communities. In addition, the Paravas became agents of a regional expansion. As fisher people dependent on the monsoon winds, they used to change their location according to season and circulated regularly between the southern coast of India and the northern coast of Sri Lanka (in the region around Mannar), where they spread their new faith. This happened long before the Portuguese entered that region. Persecutions swiftly carried out by local Hindu rulers (in 1544 by the princes of Jaffna) could not stop the growth of the emerging Christian community. Still today, the region around Mannar counts as one of the strongholds of Sri Lankan Catholicism; and in South India, Christian Paravas became firmly established as a separate group within the regional caste system.[2]

2. Christianity as World Religion and Church History as an Academic Discipline

As never before in its history, Christianity has become a World Religion, and Church History – as an academic discipline – has largely been asleep during this development. This is especially true in the German speaking academia, where Church History, as undertaken in protestant theological faculties, still works with antiquated geographies of religion. Whereas in 1900, ca. 82% of the Christian world population still lived in the Northern Hemisphere, since the 1980s a growing majority is to be found in the so-called "Global South," i.e. in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In 2007, the figure was about 65%, and it is

---

[2] Cf. G. SCHURHAMMER, "Die Bekehrung der Paraver (1535–1537)", in: ID., *Gesammelte Studien.* Vol. II (Rome 1963, 215–254); S. NEILL, *The History of Christianity in India*. Vol. I (Cambridge etc. 1984), 140ff; S. BAYLY, "A Christian Caste in Hindu Society: Religious Leadership and Social Conflict among the Paravas of Southern Tamilnadu" (*Modern Asian Studies* 15/2, 1981, 203–234); P.A. ROCHE, *Fishermen of the Coromandel.* A Social Study of the Paravas of the Coromandel (New Delhi 1984); M.P.M. VINK, "Church and State in Seventeenth-Century Colonial Asia: Dutch-Parava Relations in Southeast India in a Comparative Perspective" (*Journal of Early Modern History* 4/1, 2000, 1–43). – The Paravas in the 16th century are just one example of Indian initiatives in the history of Sri Lankan Christianity. Further examples are the Goanese Oratorians of 17th/18th centuries who – since the days of Joseph Vaz (1651–1711) – revitalized Ceylonese underground Catholicism under Dutch colonial rule; or, in 19th century, South Indian indentured labourers resp. "coolies" who worked in the tea estates in Sri Lankan highlands and established a Christian presence in regions that were not yet reached by the missionaries. Cf. K. KOSCHORKE, "Dutch Colonial Church and Catholic Underground Church in Ceylon in the 17th and 18th Centuries", in: ID., *Christen und Gewürze* 95–105.

growing. Thus, in a global perspective, Christianity is not at all shrinking in size, as we widely experience it in secularized Europe. However, the demographic centers and growth zones have moved to the south – in a "shift of centers," as it has been labeled in ecumenical discourse. These are some of the dramatic changes, to which the academic Church History in these parts has, at the most, selectively responded until now. As Church Historians we run the risk of only working on a shrinking sub-segment of "World Christianity" – which, on the whole, is growing in size. In traditional Church History curricula the world outside of Europe usually has been neglected – or is still shoved into the discipline of "History of Missions," which, however, corresponds less and less to historical realities.

In other regions, however, the new discipline "History of World Christianity" is booming, and from the beginning it has been one of the goals of the Munich-Freising-Conferences to make a specific contribution from the German-speaking academic context to this international, dynamically developing debate. But also in other historical disciplines, a growing interest in the global dimensions of the History of Christianity can be observed. In the archives of the Protestant and Catholic mission orders and societies – for example in Halle, Basel, Rome, London or Yale – historians, linguists, ethnologists and representatives of various regional and cultural studies crowd together; and it is above all the historians of globalization, who are discovering in brand new ways the relevance of the transcontinental missionary networks as communication channels for the exchange of culture and knowledge between Europe and other regions.[3] Especially when looking at the early formation of far-reaching networks, historians have been paying new attention to the "*religiösen Ökumenen*" ("global religious communities," Jürgen Osterhammel) and the transregional communication structures of the Christian mission organizations.[4] These have, in addition, repeatedly inspired important internationalization processes in other areas as well – such as in the field of modern history of diplomacy, science, and religion of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The *globalization of Christianity*, however, is *not* identical with the process of *Europeanization*. Certainly, in the various stages of the world-wide spread of Christianity, the contribution made by the western missionary movement was very important for specific times and regions. But – as we increasingly realize – it was just one factor among many others. Christian Churches also existed, or were established, before, outside and after western missionary activities. Already in the time of the European Middle Ages, a third center of world-wide Christianity (apart from the Latin and Greek Church) existed in the form of

---

3 Cf. R. HABERMAS/R. HÖLZ (Eds.), *Mission Global.* Eine Verflechtungsgeschichte seit dem 19. Jahrhundert (Köln et al. 2014); R. HABERMAS, "Mission im 19. Jahrhundert – Globale Netze des Religiösen" (*Historische Zeitschrift* 56, 2008, 629–679); CH. A. BAYLY, *Die Geburt der modernen Welt. Eine Globalgeschichte 1780–1914* (Frankfurt/New York 2008, 400–450, "Weltreiche der Religion"); W. REINHARD, *Globalisierung des Christentums?* (Heidelberg 2007); R. WENDT, *Vom Kolonialismus zur Globalisierung*. Europa und die Welt seit 1500 (Paderborn u.a. 2007); P.E. FÄßLER, *Globalisierung* (Köln/Wien 2007) ; A. BOGNER/B. HOLTWICK/H. TYRELL (Hg.), *Weltmission und religiöse Organisationen*. Protestantische Missionsgesellschaften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert (Würzburg 2004). Cf. K. KOSCHORKE, "Christliche Missionen und religiöse Globalisierung im 19. Jahrhundert", in: W. DEMEL/H.-U. THAMER (Eds.), *Die Entstehung der Moderne*. 1700 bis 1914 (WBG Weltgeschichte Bd 5; Darmstadt 2010, 197–208).

4 J. OSTERHAMMEL/N.P. PETERSSON, *Geschichte der Globalisierung*. Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen (München [5]2012), 27ff (English edition: ID., *Globalization*. A Short History, Princeton 2009, 31ff: "Long-distance Trade, Empires, [Religious] Ecumenes").

the East-Syrian/Nestorian "Church of the East."[5] At the climax of its expansion in the 13th and 14th centuries, it stretched from Syria to East China and from Siberia to South India, and thereby encompassed an area that, simply in geographical terms, surpassed the Latin Christianity of the West by far. And the explosive church growth in Sub-Saharan Africa accelerated exactly in the period of political independence since 1960 – when most of the Euro-American missionaries had left the continent, along with the former colonial masters. Quite analogous is the situation in China, where today there are many more Christians compared to the time before the "Cultural revolution" of the 1960s and 1970s which had aimed at the extermination of all "religious superstitions" (and especially of Western-"imperialistic" Christianity). So, the history of World Christianity in its various epochs has to be described at the same time as that of a polycentric movement. In a new way, proper attention has to be paid to the plurality of its regional centers, cultural expressions, indigenous initiatives, and confessional varieties.

3. Polycentric Structures – Early Paradigms

3.1. Ethiopia

Back to the 16th century and the era of incipient Iberian overseas expansion. Not only in India, but also in Ethiopia, the Portuguese – who the pope had commissioned in 1493, along with the Spaniards, with the Christianization of the world outside Europe – encountered a very ancient Christian church with independent traditions. Historians date the beginnings of Ethiopian Christianity to the 4th century. The Ethiopian Church itself, however, claims biblical origins and follows its roots back to the time of King Solomon. In any case, the Ethiopian Christians met the Portuguese with considerable self-confidence. The Ethiopians had (and have) their own biblical Canon (which deviates significantly in parts from the Western tradition). They use a unique liturgical language called Ge'ez, and differ from the Church of the West in numerous customs (like the observance of the Sabbath and practice of circumcision) and organizational structures. As in India, the Portuguese attempted to latinize this ancient oriental church in the course of 16th century and to subjugate it to papal jurisdiction – an undertaking that failed grandly. The Jesuits were driven out in 1632, and Ethiopia entered a period of more than 200-years of self-isolation over against Christian Europe. Catholic and, later, Protestant missionaries were denied access to the country (or forcibly removed); and still in 1881, the Ethiopian monarch refused the advances by European missionaries on the grounds that the Ethiopians were already Christians (Blyden 1882, etc.). [6]

---

5   R. MALEK (Ed.), *Jingjiao. The Church of the East in China and Central Asia* (Sankt Augustin 2006); D.W. WINKLER / LI TANG (Eds), *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters*. Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia (Wien/Münster 2009); W. BAUM/D.W. WINKLER, *The Church of the East*. A Concise History (London/New York 2003); K. KOSCHORKE, "'Ob er nun unter den Indern weilt oder unter den Chinesen…'. Die ostsyrisch-nestorianische 'Kirche des Ostens' als kontinentales Netzwerk im Asien der Vormoderne" (*Jahrbuch für Europäische Überseegeschichte* 9, 2009, 9–35); cf. the contributions on the Church of the East as a continental network by S.N.C. LIEU, W. HAGE and F. REICHERT, in: K. KOSCHORKE (Ed.), *Phases of Globalization in the History of Christianity* (StAECG Vol. 19; Wiesbaden 2012, 39–82).

6   For Ethiopia see A. HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa 1450–1950* (Oxford 1994), 3–45. 130–172. 478ff; V. BÖLL, "Von der Freundschaft zur Feindschaft. Die äthiopisch-orthodoxe Kirche und die

3.2. Ethiopianism

Ethiopia, however, is relevant in our context not only as a relic of ancient African Christianity having survived in modern times. It became even more important as a most *dynamic symbol inspiring the first wave of African Independent Churches in the 19th and 20th centuries*, not only in Africa itself, but also on both sides of the Atlantic. One of the reasons: Ethiopia was the only country in Africa that could escape the clutches of European colonial power at the climax of western imperialism. In 1896, an Italian invasion army was devastated in the battle of Adwa. On the map of colonial Africa in 1900, there were only two white spaces left: Liberia – the "Land of Freedom" and goal of African-American Christian remigration from the USA – and Ethiopia. In the ears of the 19th century African elite – who wanted to be religiously-modern (that means, Christian), without at the same time becoming dependent on western missionaries – the word "Ethiopia" had gained nothing less than a magical ring – *as a symbol of political and ecclesial independency*. Ethiopia was black, it was free, and it was Christian. It inspired the mind of many African Christians even when many had no clear idea of where exactly this country could be found and what the church in Ethiopia was like. And there was another important aspect: Ethiopia was already prominently mentioned in the Bible in many places. This refers not only to stories like that of the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8), but, above all, to the oft-cited word Psalm 68:31 (in the translation of the King James Bible): "Ethiopia stretches forth her hands unto God" – which was generally understood as a promise of deliverance to all people of African origin. (That is the so-called "Ethiopian discourse", to be found in 19th century in the hymns and sermons of black congregations in the Caribbean and USA as well as in political documents such as the "Ethiopian Manifesto" of the African-American New Yorker Robert Alexander Young from 1829.) Later, the symbol "Ethiopia" played a decisive role in the formation of black mission-independent churches in late 19th and early 20th centuries. These independent churches sprouted like mushrooms quite simultaneously in Western and Southern Africa (since about 1890), and later also in other regions of the continent. They spread rapidly in the face of the growing paternalism (and often racism) of the European missionaries. They called themselves "Ethiopian" – as in the case of the "Ethiopian Church," which was founded in Pretoria in 1892 by the former Methodist preacher Mangena Maake Makone, and served as an example to others. But already in 1783, black Baptists on the other side of the Atlantic had established a "First Ethiopian Baptist Church" in Jamaica; and Afroamerican Churches from the USA (such as the "African Methodist Episcopal Church", AME) became inscreasingly active also in Africa. Without this first wave of African Independent churches, the explosive church growth in Sub-Saharan Africa in the late 20th C is not to be understood[7]

---

portugiesischen Jesuiten in Äthiopien, 16. und 17. Jh.", in: KOSCHORKE, *Christen und Gewürze* (43–58); E. BLYDEN, "Philipp and the Eunuch", in: E. BLYDEN, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Edinburgh 1887 / [R]1967, 152–172), 160ff.

7   For Ethiopianism see E. KAMPHAUSEN, "Äthiopien als Symbol kirchlicher und politischer Unabhängigkeit", in: K. KOSCHORKE (Ed.), *Transcontinental Links in the History of Non-Western Christianity* (StAECG 5; Wiesbaden 2002, 293–314); J.T. CAMPBELL, *Songs of Zion*. The African Episcopal Church in the US and South Africa (Oxford 1995); G.M. FREDRICKSON, *Black liberation.* A comparative history of Black ideologies in the United States and South Africa (New York 1996); MOITSADI MOETI, *Ethiopianism.* Creation of a nationalist order for African and the Africans in South Africa (Boaba 1997); K. BENESCH, *African diasporas in the New and Old Worlds.* Consciousness and imagina-

3.3. Korea

Change of location: Korea. Today one finds Korean missionaries everywhere – on the Red Square in Moscow, in the subway of Budapest, or in remote villages in the Andes of Peru. In many Asian countries they have taken up the position previously held by European missionaries. According to a recently published survey, currently ca. 14,000 Korean missionaries are active in about 180 countries all over the world[8].

The churches of the country themselves are the result of a *self-christianization*, to an extent which is quite unique even in the Asian context. This applies especially *the beginnings of Catholicism* in year *1784*. They go back to an initiative of Confucian scholars at the end of the 18th C, who in hermetic closed-off Korea first came in contact with Christian teaching "western knowledge" through Chinese-language Jesuit tracts. They wanted to know more about this, and sent one from their group – named Seung-Hoon Lee – in 1783 as a member of the yearly Tribute Commission to Peking, where he obtained more texts and information from the Catholic fathers who were active there and eventually was baptized in the "North Church." After his return to Korea in 1784, he himself then converted and baptized his colleagues, who at once spread the new teachings in the land. They began producing theological literature, first in Chinese, then in the Korean language. Despite rapidly enacted bloody persecution, the count of Catholics had already reached 4000 in 1794. This occurred approximately 50 years before the first European missionary, the Frenchman Pierre Maubant, set foot in the country in 1836. As a church of martyrs, the Catholic Koreans survived underground until the edict against Christians was lifted in the 1880s.

The beginnings of Korean Protestantism 100 years later have also been described as the result of self-evangelization[9]. Before the arrival of American missionaries in 1884, there were already Protestant communities in the country, which had come into existence, above all, through the distribution of the New Testament. Korean Christians in the diaspora (Manchuria, Japan) played an important role in this development. Furthermore, the principle of congregational autonomy and native leadership was applied from the beginning on. The newly established congregations had to be "self-extending, self-supporting and self-governing" – the famous three-self formula. Another jimportant factor for the rapid spread was the leading participation of Korean Christians in the anti-Japanese national movement. In contrast to other Asian countries, Korea did not have to deal with western colonialism, but rather with the Japanese, who gradually occupied the country. So of the 33 signers of the – unsuccessful –independence declaration of 1919, 16 were leaders in the Korean church, although the Korean Christians made up no more than 1% of the population at that time.

Early on, the Korean Christians concerned themselves with the spread of the Christian faith among their compatriots living abroad. Already in 1901 (just 15 years after their own formation), the Presbyterian congregations in the north of the peninsula began to send out their own evangelists to migrants in Manchuria. In Hawaii, the majority of the first Korean groups of immigrants in 1903 was already Christian and immediately after their arrival

---

tion (Amsterdam/New York 2004); O.U. KALU, "Ethiopianism in African Christianity", in: ID. (Ed.), *African Christianity*: An African Story (Pretoria 2005, 258–277), 337ff.

8   For Korea, see the contributions by SEBASTIAN KIM, KYO SEONG AHN and KIRSTEEN KIM in this volume.

9   "It is striking that Korean Christianity began virtually as a self-evangelized church": JOON-SIK PARK, "Korean Protestant Christianity: A Missiological Reflection" (*IBMR* 36, 2012, 59–64), 59.

founded a Methodist-Korean church there. In 1906, 36 such churches already existed on the island. A document from 1910 named the Korean colonies in Siberia, China, Manchuria, Hawaii, California and Mexico as the goal of the foreign activities of Korean evangelists. But also outside of their own community, the Koreans were active early on, as in the Shandong Region of northern China, where the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) sent missionaries since 1913 with the goal of founding a native Chinese church. This occurred just shortly after the catastrophic year of 1910, in which Korea was formally annexed by Japan. This occurrence was not at all random. If Korea had already lost its national sovereignty, it should – according to the convictions of many Korean Christians – at least make itself known as a member and sending center of the Christian world community.

3.4. Sierra Leone

Another change of location – now to Sierra Leone (West Africa). This region plays a central role in the history of West African Protestantism. Traditionally, the beginnings of Protestant presence there have been traced back to the activities of British missionaries (from the Anglican 'Church Missionary Society') and Swabian Pietists (from the Basel Mission) at the beginning of the 19th Century. In significant measure, however, these beginnings were the result of an African-American initiative: the remigration efforts by members of the African-Protestant diaspora on the other side of the Atlantic, as Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh and most recently Jehu Hanciles have impressively demonstrated.

"African Protestant Christianity was then, by the 1780s, very much a reality" – so begins A. Hastings the section on "West African Protestant Beginnings and the Foundation of Freetown" in his *Church History of Africa*. He continues: "The one place it did not exist was in Africa" – apart from some trading stations of the Dutch, English and Danes along the West African Coast. On the other side of the Atlantic, however, and especially in Nova Scotia (in modern-day Canada), there were countless freed blacks, many of whom were previously in British service, who – with the Bible as their Freedom Charter in hand – wanted to return back to Africa. And despite all setbacks and unfulfilled expectations, this initiative led in 1792 to the founding of a Christian settlement in Sierra Leone[10]. The newly established port city Freetown was, from the beginning on, a Christian city; and the emerging polyglot black elite of Sierra Leone would serve as a bridge in the further course of the Christianization of West Africa. To quote Andrew Walls: "In this way, in November 1792 the first Protestant church in tropical Africa was established" – as the result of an African American initiative from the other side of the Atlantic. "It was a ready made African church, with its own structures and leadership."[11]

---

10   A. HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa 1450–1950* (Oxford 1994), 177; "Thus in 1792 the already existing African, English-speaking, Protestant society which had come into existence in diaspora over the preceding half-century established a foothold in Africa" (ibid. 181); A. WALLS, "Sierra Leone, Afroamerican Remigration and the Beginnings of Protestantism in West Africa", in: KOSCHORKE, *Transcontinental links* 45–56; L. SANNEH, *Abolitionists abroad*. American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa (Cambridge/London 1999); J. HANCILES, *Beyond Christendom*. Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West (Maryknoll 2008); cf. his contribution in this volume (p. 29–50): "The Black Atlantic and the Shaping of African Christianity, 1820–1920".

11   WALLS, *Sierra Leone* 55.

These characteristics persevered later to a great extent, when Sierra Leone became a British Crown colony in 1808 and turned into a center of European mission activity. Simultaneously, also the demographic composition of the black population in Sierra Leone changed. Instead of the African American returned settlers from the USA, it was then increasingly the so-called "recaptives" – freed slaves – from various regions of West Africa, who reached land in Freetown. The most famous of these "recaptives" was Samuel Ayaji Crowther (ca. 1808–1891) from current-day Nigeria. Through a British squadron he was freed from a Portuguese slave ship in 1822, was entrusted to the care of English missionaries in Freetown, where he was baptized and later ordained and contributed to the translation of the Bible into Yoruba. In 1864 he was the first African in the modern age to be installed as Anglican bishop in British Equatorial West Africa. As "the slave boy who became bishop," he had already in his lifetime become a legend and symbol of the hopes of advancement of African Christians.

4. Themes of the Conference

Ethiopia, as a representative of ancient African Christianity and modern symbol of political and ecclesial independence; Ethiopianism, a pan-African emancipatory movement on both sides of the Atlantic in the 19th and 20th centuries; Korea, example of a grandiose self-Christianization in the 18th (and 19th) centuries and an early missionary center in Asia in 20th century; as well as Sierra Leone and the trans-Atlantic beginnings of the West African Protestantism around 1800 – these are all notable examples of a non-western missionary expansion and regional dynamics in different contexts. At the same time they provide important insights and elements for a polycentric approach to the history of global Christianity since the early modern era.

Some of these examples – like Sierra Leone and Korea – meanwhile have been intensively studied and have become classical paradigms of a polycentric (pluralistic) perspective. And I am very pleased that we could have international leading authorities here – Jehu Hanciles (for Sierra Leone) and Sebastian and Kersteen Kim (for Korea) – who will present these case studies in more detail in the course of the conference.

Other examples of early regional self-expansion and transcontinental interactions are less well-known and often familiar only to insiders or the respective regional historians.

The task of this conference will be to identify related examples, to compile and to analyze them, and above all, to place them into a wider historical perspective which pays proper attention to both aspects: the global dimensions of the history of Christianity – which existed from its very beginnings – and, at the same time, to the plurality of its regional centers, confessional expressions and cultural versions.

We will discuss:
– Chinese, Indian, Filipino, and other ethnic diasporas in Asia and Oceania of the 19th century (as agents of regional self-expansion)
– the concept of the 'Black Atlantic', in its relevance for the transcontinental spread of Christianity;
– African retromission in Europe;
– transregional networks of indigenous Christian elites around 1910;

– and the example of the Chinese Rites Controversy in the 17th and 18th centuries, which is also highly significant from the point of view of a history of transcontinental interactions. What began in the 1620s as a controversy among the Catholic missionaries active in China increasingly influenced the debates first in ecclesial and later also philosophical Europe. Here it was not Europe that set the agenda; rather the themes resulted much more from the encounter with an advanced Asian civilization[12].

Other examples of transcontinental interactions and earlier South-South relationships have been discussed intensively at earlier Munich-Freising-Conferences.

The goal of all of these case studies is to contribute to a new map of the global history of Christianity that offers space for manifold experiences and that does justice not only to the confessional, but also to the geographical-cultural plurality of World Christianity. And this widened perspective cannot simply be generated through a mere juxtaposition of unconnected regional histories – which would result in what has been labeled as a mere "book binder synthesis". Rather, the challenge will be to integrate the particular histories and historical experiences of very different branches of World Christianity and make them comprehensible as part of a greater whole. Such an agenda of a future history of World Christianity would in no way devalue traditional forms of historical scholarship as, for example, in the field of German Church History. On the contrary, the challenge will be to create an enlarged map of the history of Global Christianity, upon which various – national, regional, confessional – particular histories can be plotted and perceived in their mutual relationship. Still, we are far away from realizing such a new overview map – one that is not simply pieced together from map materials of diverse origin and quality, but enables reliable orientation in a changed historical and ecumenical landscape.

Alone the mere perception of synchronicity can lead to new insights. Emperor *Charles V.* for example, who is dealt with extensively in every course on the history of the Reformation, was not only the deciding opponent of the Lutheran movement, but at the same time also the overlord of the Spanish Conquista, in whose wake the Catholic overseas-mission of the early modern age took place. Cajetan was not only the cardinal who interrogated Luther in Augsburg in 1518, but at the same time the superior – and notably also supporter – of Bartolomé de las Casas, the most important critic of colonialism in this era; and the reception of the anti-Protestant resolutions of the Council of Trent coincided in the New World (for example, in Mexico) with the end of quite remarkable indigenization efforts such as the production of Christian literature in various native American languages. Pope Leo X was not only the head of the church, to whom Luther addressed his "Treatise on Christian Liberty" and who excommunicated the reformer. He also received letters – which is little known – from an African monarch, King Afonso I, the ruler of the Christian Congo-Empire, who initiated the Christianization of his land partly even against the resistance of the Portuguese (who were primarily interested in slave trade) and whose successor were awarded with the honorary title, "Defensor fidei". It is even less known that many Christianized Congolese – who were carried to the Americas as slaves – became active there in evangelizing among their compatriots, e.g. in South Carolina, Haiti, and Brazil. To cite John Thornton: "The conversion of (American) Africans actually began in Africa, and

---

12   A planned contribution on the Chinese Rites Controversy in its relevance for a transcontinental history of World Christianity is not part of these proceedings and will be published separately.

modern scholarship has largely overlooked this aspect of the problem." "Much of the Christianity of the African world was carried across the seas to America. In addition to the Africans who were themselves Christians, there were also the catechists who helped to generate an African form of Christianity among the slaves who were not Christians." The conversion of the Africans is to be described, says Thornton, "as a continuous process, commencing in Africa and carrying over to the New World."[13] At this conference, the important contribution from David Daniels will deal with Congo-Christianity in North America.

5. Debates about the 'Three-Selves' in Asia and Africa around 1900 and the Polycentric Beginnings of the Early Ecumenical Movement

So, at the end, we have come back to the issue of migration which I will take up again, yet from a different perspective. Global streams of migration – in the present and past – are currently a much debated theme. Often they had immediate effects on changed geographies of religion. They are also most relevant for the global spread of Christianity in its manifold denominational and cultural versions and will play a much larger role in future research on the history of World Christianity as compared to current studies.

The 19th century, for example, saw successive waves of European emigration to North and South America. Within the British Empire, it was the system of "indentured labour" (resp. semi-forced contract work) that led to a considerable shift of population between various colonies. Thus, for example, Tamil Coolies made their way to the Caribbean, to Mauritius, to South and East Africa, where there had previously been hardly any Indian presence. This applied to Hindu, but also to Christian contract workers. Thus, Tamil-Christian congregations came into being in the 19th century in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Singapore, South Africa, Mauritius, Fiji, British Guyana, Trinidad and in Uganda[14]. This happened usually through local initiatives and repeatedly in regions where there had been no previous Western missionary presence (like in the tea estates of Sri Lanka). The same applies to the other previously-mentioned diasporas of the Chinese and Koreans.

Such developments may at first be classified simply as side effects of the increased mobility of this time. However, at the turn of the century, this form of self-expansion had increasingly won programmatic significance for many churches of Asia and Africa.

The bygone 19th century – says the "Christian Patriot", the organ of the Protestant intelligentsia of South India in 1901 – had been the century of the Western mission. The 20th century, on the other hand, however, will be the century of the "native Christians" and "native churches" – and will be characterized through "the self-support, the self-govern-

---

13   J.K. THORNTON, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge ²1998), 254. 262. 254; cf. ID., „,I Am the Subject of the King of Congo'. African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution" (*Journal of World History* 4, 1993, 181–214); L.M. HEYWOOD/ J.K. THORNTON, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Cambridge 2007); and especially the contribution by DAVID DANIELS in this volume.

14   Cf. C. SARGANT, *The Dispersion of the Tamil Church* (Delhi 1962); D. JEYARAJ, "Missionary Attepts of Tamil Protestant Christians in East and West during the 19th Century", in: KOSCHORKE, *Transcontinental Links* (131–144).

ment and the self-extension of the native Churches."[15] Those are the "three-selves," which played such a great role in the debates of Asian and African Christians around the turn of the century. And self-expansion also increasingly counted as proof of religious emancipation and as one of the constitutive characteristics of the new era.

Already in 1880, Indian Christians had declared: "The day will come when the Indian Church will send the Gospel to the different countries of Asia" [16]

One consequence was the foundation of indigenous mission societies, for example, the 'National Missionary Society of India' (NMS) which originated in 1905. It followed the principle: *Indian men, Indian money, Indian leadership,* and was active not only in India, but also in various neighboring regions in Southern Asia. The society also maintained relationships to the Indian diaspora in South Africa. One of the founders was V. S. Azariah, whom we will later encounter as first Indian bishop and prominent leader of the Asian ecumenical movement.[17]

Analogous developments can be observed since the turn of the century also in other Asian countries. We have already mentioned Korea and the early activities of Korean Christians in North East Asia and Hawaii. A special dynamic emerged from the churches in Japan, that Asian nation which, after centuries of self-imposed isolation, only quite recently had taken the leap into modernity, and – after their victory over Russia in 1904/5 – became a shining model for the anti-colonial elite of the whole continent. In 1907, a conference organized by the Japanese branch of the WSCF took place in Tokyo, which was described in contemporary publications as the first international conference ever held in Japan. Above all, however, it was the first Christian-ecumenical gathering with a majority of Asian delegates, which made up approximately 500 of the 627 participants. There declared the Japanese delegates: "The recognition of the responsibility of the Christians of Japan for the evangelization of Formosa, Korea, Manchuria and North China […] has been strengthened by the developments of the last year, until now it is generally shared by all intelligent Christians (sc. of Japan)".[18]

At the same time, a strong tendency can be observed for increased cooperation between the Christian elites in different parts of the continent, beyond missionary paternalism. Japanese Christians visited India in 1906 and gave there much celebrated presentations about the theme: "What can Indian learn from Japan?" The answer was: 1. Freedom from missionary control; 2. Do away with the Western denominationalism; 3. Women's education. Chinese Christian students penetrated into Tokyo and founded their own YMCA there. So it was not by accident that the first president of modern republican China (since 1911) – Sun Yat-Sen – came from the Chinese diaspora outside the country. In addition, and not surprisingly, he was a Christian.

---

15   *The Christian Patriot* (Madras) 28.9.1901. For a classical study on the concept of the 'Three Selves' as a missionary strategy cf. C.P. WILLIAMS, *The Ideal of the Self-Governing Church*. A Study in Victorian Missionary Strategy (Leiden 1990). Since the 1890s, and over against growing missionary paternalism and racism, the 'Three Selves' became increasingly the watchword of emancipation movements among indigenous Christian elites in Asia and Africa.

16   *The Indian Christian Herald* 5.11.1880.

17   Cf. D.F. EBRIGHT, "The National Missionary Society of India, 1905–1942" (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Chicago 1944); S.B. HARPER, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*. Bishop V.S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India (Grand Rapids 2000), 83ff.

18   *Report of the Conference of the World's Student Christian Federation at Tokyo April 3–7, 1907* (New York n.d. = 1908), 224f.

This all happened shortly before the famous World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910. Edinburgh has been repeatedly described as the "starting point" and "birth hour" of the modern ecumenical movement of the West. However, attention has far too seldom been paid to the extent to which Edinburgh responded to debates and developments in the emerging churches of the South. It was, above all, the perception of the "awakening of great nations" in Asia and Africa, and the emergence of national church movements there, which in the eyes of the conference necessitated the urgency for united action and a brand new quality of ecumenical cooperation between the many fragmented churches and missions of the West. The overcoming of the confessional divisions, respectively the "sectarianism" (as they called it), of the western missionaries had been a central demand for a long time of many Asian Christians, as well as the formation of self-governed ecclesial structures in a national context. Edinburgh in this respect had the function of a *relay station*, so to speak, which received impulses from the 'young' churches of Asia and Africa and returned them there in a reinforced way. But this applies not only to the churches in Asia (and Africa), but also to the churches in the Western world[19].

Global Christian history as a history of transcontinental interactions – this can be studied by analysing the Edinburgh conference 1910 which, already in contemporary publications, had been described as an "ecumenical event" of unique importance. Quite differently from Vatican II in the Catholic world fifty years later, this conference not only had an impressive post-history, but also a precise and describable pre-history in the developments and debates of the churches of what nowadays would be labelled as the "Global South."

Global Christian history as a history of transcontinental interactions and, at the same time, as the description of a process, in which diverse and numerous voices from various regions of World Christianity take the floor, and in which particular historical experiences are integrated into a "greater whole" – that is the challenge, that under the changing circumstances of the 21st century is more urgent than ever.

There is much to do. Let's get started.

Abstract

This inaugural lecture – which, at the same time, was Klaus Koschorke's final academic speech as head of the chair for "Early and Global Church History" at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich (LMU) – identifies the central issues of the Sixth Munich-Freising Conference. Whereas the preceding Conference (Munich-Freising V) had dealt with "Phases of Globalization in the History of Christianity", the focus now has been directed to its polycentric structures in various epochs and the plurality of its regional centers, confessional expressions and cultural versions. The article presents classical and other paradigms of non-western missionary expansion, indigenous Christian initiatives, transregional and transcontinental networks and other forms of exchange in different spaces (such as the 'Black

---

19   For Edinburgh 1910 as a 'relay station' cf. K. KOSCHORKE, "The World Missionary Conference Edinburgh 1910 and the Rise of National Church Movements in Asia and Africa", in: ID., *Transcontinental Links* (189–202); ID., "Edinburgh 1910 als Relaisstation. Das 'Erwachen großer Nationen', die nationalkirchlichen Bewegungen in Asien (und Afrika) und die Weltchristenheit", in: KOSCHORKE, *Phases of Globalization* 273–282.

Atlantic'). Thus, the conference aims at a future history of World Christianity as a history of transcontinental interactions which, at the same time, provides ample space for the different denominational, regional and cultural expressions of Christianity.