

Today, the majority of the world's Christian population lives in the Global South. Knowledge of their history is therefore indispensable. This textbook offers a compact and vivid overview of the history of Christianity in Asia, Africa and Latin America since 1450, focussing on diversity and interdependence, local actors and global effects. Maps, illustrations and numerous photos as well as continuous references to easily accessible source texts support the reader's own reading and its use in various forms of academic teaching.

KLAUS KOSCHORKE is professor emeritus at Munich University LMU (Chair, Early and Global History of Christianity). He had multiple guest professorships in Asia (India, China, Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka), Africa (South Africa, Ethiopia) and UK. He has published widely on the history of Christianity in the Global South and developed the concept of polycentricity in the history of World Christianity.

*"wonderful work that is eye-opening in many ways"*  
— Volker Leppin, Yale Divinity School

*"This one-volume introductory book uniquely contributes to understanding global South Christianity from the 1500s to the present day, interweaving unparalleled details and connections."*  
— Raimundo Barreto, Princeton Theological Seminary

*"This is a magnificent synthesis and belongs in the bookcase of every teacher and student of church history."*  
— Thomas Kaufmann, University of Göttingen

*"pioneering book"*  
— Kevin Ward, University of Leeds

*"fills a gap and is urgently needed"*  
— Martin Wallraff, University of Munich

*"indispensable"*  
— Andreas Müller, University of Kiel

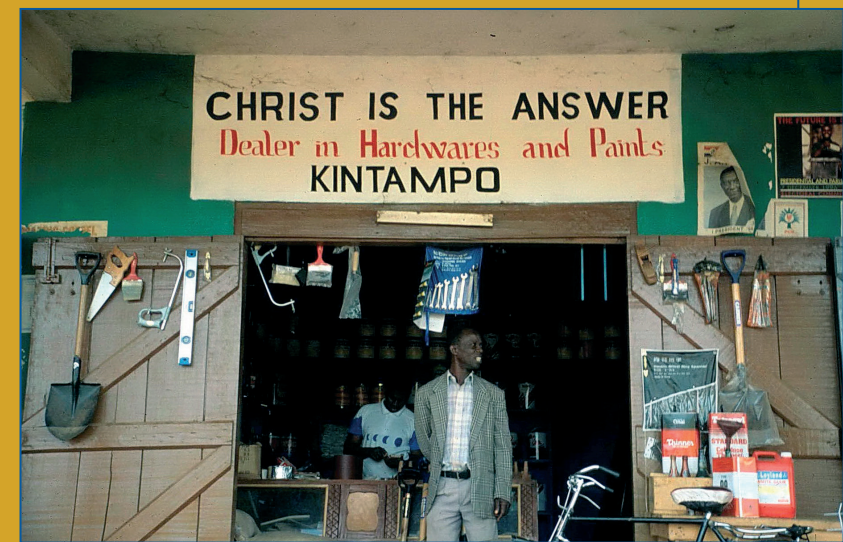
*"impressive and strongly recommended"*  
— Fabian Fechner, Global History, University of Hagen

*"This book breathes life and animates the readers to imagine the vitality and challenges of World Christianity in their contexts"*  
— Daniel Jeyaraj, Liverpool Hope University

A SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY BEYOND THE WEST  
Klaus Koschorke

## A SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY BEYOND THE WEST

*Asia, Africa, and Latin America 1450-2000*



Klaus Koschorke



THEOLOGY AND MISSION  
IN WORLD CHRISTIANITY, 31

ISSN: 2452-2953  
brill.com/tmwc

BRILL

THEOLOGY AND MISSION IN  
WORLD CHRISTIANITY

BRILL

## A Short History of Christianity beyond the West

# Theology and Mission in World Christianity

## *Editors-in-Chief*

Kirsteen Kim (*Fuller Theological Seminary, USA*)

Stephen B. Bevans (*Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA*)

Miikka Ruokanen (*University of Helsinki, Finland/Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, China*)

## *Editorial Board*

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (*Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana*)

Martha T. Frederiks (*Utrecht University, The Netherlands*)

Dana L. Robert (*Boston University, USA*)

Elsa Tamez (*Latin American Biblical University, Costa Rica*)

Rachel Zhu Xiaohong (*Fudan University, Shanghai, China*)

VOLUME 31

The titles published in this series are listed at [brill.com/tmwc](http://brill.com/tmwc)

# A Short History of Christianity beyond the West

*Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1450–2000*

*By*

Klaus Koschorke



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON



This is an open access title distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license, which permits any non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided no alterations are made and the original author(s) and source are credited. Further information and the complete license text can be found at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

The terms of the CC license apply only to the original material. The use of material from other sources (indicated by a reference) such as diagrams, illustrations, photos and text samples may require further permission from the respective copyright holder.

Cover illustration: Ghana (Kintampo): Christianity in everyday life (Photo by Klaus Koschorke, with kind permission by the author).

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Koschorke, Klaus, author.

Title: A short history of Christianity beyond the West : Asia, Africa, and Latin America 1450-2000 / Klaus Koschorke.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2025] | Series: Theology and mission in world Christianity, 2452-2953 ; volume 31 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024029214 (print) | LCCN 2024029215 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004699823 (paperback) | ISBN 9789004699830 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Christianity--Asia--History. | Christianity and culture--Asia--History. | Christianity--Africa--History. | Christianity and culture--Africa--History. | Christianity--Latin America--History. | Christianity and culture--Latin America--History.

Classification: LCC BR1065 .K67 2025 (print) | LCC BR1065 (ebook) | DDC 270--dc23/eng/20240731

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024029214>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024029215>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: [brill.com/brill-typeface](http://brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 2452-2953

ISBN 978-90-04-69982-3 (paperback)

ISBN 978-90-04-69983-0 (e-book)

DOI 10.1163/9789004699830

Copyright 2025 by Klaus Koschorke. Published by Koninklijke Brill BV, Leiden, The Netherlands. Koninklijke Brill BV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Schöningh, Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Brill Wageningen Academic, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau and V&R unipress. Koninklijke Brill BV reserves the right to protect this publication against unauthorized use.

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

# Contents

Preface XI

List of Figures and Maps XIII

Technical Notes for Use XVIII

**In Place of an Introduction: “Christians and Spices” – or:  
the Multiplicity of Regional Centers in the History of World  
Christianity XX**

## **PART 1**

*1450–1600*

- 1 The Christian World around 1500 3**
  - 1.1 Christian Europe around 1500 3
  - 1.2 The Islamic World 4
  - 1.3 Knowledge of Non-European Cultures, Perceptions of Europe from Outside 5
  - 1.4 Christians and Churches in Africa and Asia 7
  
- 2 The Iberian Expansion of 15th/16th Centuries 11**
  - 2.1 The Portuguese on Their Way around Africa (1415ff) 11
  - 2.2 Spain, Columbus and the “Discovery” of the “New World” (1492) 12
  - 2.3 Divided Spheres of Interest (‘Inter Cetera’ 1493, Tordesillas 1494) 14
  - 2.4 Encounters: Vasco da Gama and the Indian St. Thomas Christians (1498ff) 17
  
- 3 Iberoamerica I: Colonization and Christianization 20**
  - 3.1 American-Indian Cultures on the Eve of the Iberian Invasion 20
  - 3.2 Stages of the Conquest 21
  - 3.3 Legal Titles: Patronage and ‘Requerimiento’ 22
  - 3.4 Mission Personnel, Duality of Mission and Colonial Church 24
  
- 4 Iberoamerica II: Debates and Controversies 28**
  - 4.1 Religious Debates: Franciscans and Aztecs in Mexico 1524 28
  - 4.2 Controversies over Ethics of Colonialism: Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolomé de las Casas 29

- 4.3 Experiments on the Formation of an American-Indigenous Church 33
- 4.4 Beginnings of Black Slavery in America 35
- 5 **Mission under the Padroado: Encounters and Conflicts in Africa and Asia** 38
  - 5.1 Ethiopia: Portuguese as Guests and Allies in the Christian Empire 38
  - 5.2 Beginnings of Catholic Presence in Sub-Saharan Africa 40
  - 5.3 Goa as an Ecclesiastical and Political Center 42
  - 5.4 Francis Xavier: India, Malacca, Moluccas, Japan, Plans for China (1542–1552) 44
- 6 **Forms of Indigenous Christianity** 48
  - 6.1 Asia: the South Indian Paravars and the Martyrs of Mannar (Sri Lanka) 48
  - 6.2 Africa: the Christian Kongo Kingdom in Its Transatlantic Connections 50
  - 6.3 Iberoamerica: Voices of American-Indian and Mestizo Christians 52
- 7 **Reception of the Council of Trent Overseas and the End of Local Experiments** 56
  - 7.1 State of Expansion at the End of the 16th Century 56
  - 7.2 Trent and Its Impact on Spanish America 57
  - 7.3 India: the Synod of Diamper 1599 and the Forced Union of the St. Thomas Christians 60
  - 7.4 Ethiopia: Expulsion of the Jesuits under Emperor Fasilidas (since 1632/33) 61
- Illustrations for Part 1** 65

## PART 2

### *17th/18th Centuries*

- 8 **Changing Framework** 71
  - 8.1 Aspects of European Expansion 71
  - 8.2 Stages in Mission History 72

- 8.3 Enlightenment and Other Debates 73
- 8.4 Regional Centers, Transcontinental Entanglements 74
- 9 Latin America 77**
  - 9.1 The Church in the Colonial City 77
  - 9.2 Native American and Mestizo Voices 80
  - 9.3 Jesuit Reductions (1609–1768) 82
  - 9.4 On the Eve of Independence 84
- 10 Africa 89**
  - 10.1 Ethiopia: Period of Self-Imposed Isolation 89
  - 10.2 Regional Developments 90
  - 10.3 Protestant Beginnings 92
  - 10.4 Transatlantic Slave Trade, Vision of a Return to Africa 93
- 11 Asia 97**
  - 11.1 Japan: the End of the “Christian Century” 97
  - 11.2 China: Accommodation Strategies and Rite Controversy 98
  - 11.3 Sri Lanka and the Philippines: Resistance in a Colonial Context 100
  - 11.4 Korea: Self-Founded Martyrs’ Church (1784ff) 102
  - 11.5 Tranquebar 1706 and the Beginnings of Protestant Mission in Asia 104
- Illustrations for Part 2 108**

### PART 3

#### 1800–1890

- 12 The End of the First Colonial Age and the Beginning of the “Protestant Century” 119**
  - 12.1 Collapse of the Old Colonial Systems (Ibero-America, Africa, Asia) 119
  - 12.2 Hitting Rock Bottom of the Catholic Missions (Asia, Africa, America) 120
  - 12.3 Developments in the Protestant World 122
  - 12.4 Transcontinental Migration Flows, Beginnings of African-American Missions 124



- 13 Asia** 129
- 13.1 South Asia: Missions as a Factor of Modernization 129
  - 13.2 Northeast Asia (China, Japan, Korea): Opium Trade and Bible Smuggling 135
  - 13.3 Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia 141
  - 13.4 Indigenous Versions of Christianity 142
- 14 Africa** 147
- 14.1 West Africa: Slave Emancipation and Transatlantic Resettlement Projects 147
  - 14.2 South Africa: Black Christians and White Settlers 150
  - 14.3 East and Central Africa: David Livingstone and Other European “Discoverers” 153
  - 14.4 African Christian Rulers: Madagascar, Uganda, Ethiopia 156
  - 14.5 S. A. J. Crowther, First Black African Bishop, and Controversies about the “Three Selves” 159
- 15 Latin America** 163
- 15.1 Independence Struggle and the Church (1804–1830) 163
  - 15.2 The Catholic Church and the New States (1830–1890) 164
  - 15.3 Romanization of Latin American Catholicism 166
  - 15.4 Forms of Protestant Presence in Latin America 168
- Illustrations for Part 3** 172

#### PART 4

#### *1890–1945*

- 16 Churches and Missions in the Age of High Imperialism** 181
- 16.1 Growing Colonial Rivalries 181
  - 16.2 New Missionary Actors 183
  - 16.3 Indigenous Counter-Movements 185
  - 16.4 Multiplicity of Transregional and Transcontinental Networks 187
  - 16.5 The First World War as a Caesura and the End of the ‘Christianity-Civilization’ Model 190
- 17 Asia** 195
- 17.1 Religious Nationalisms and Indigenization Experiments 195
  - 17.2 Ecumenism as a Protest Movement, National Church Aspirations 197

17.3	Developments in Catholic Asia	199
17.4	Between World War I and World War II	201
<b>18</b>	<b>Africa</b>	<b>205</b>
18.1	The Christian Missions and the “Scramble for Africa”	205
18.2	The Emergence of African Independent Churches	207
18.3	Themes of the Twenties and Thirties	211
18.4	Christian Elites and the Political Independence Movements	213
<b>19</b>	<b>Latin America</b>	<b>217</b>
19.1	The Situation around 1900	217
19.2	Regional Profiles: Brazil, Mexico, Cuba	218
19.3	World Economic Crisis and Social Question	220
19.4	Denominational Pluralization, New Religions	221
	<b>Illustrations for Part 4</b>	<b>225</b>

## PART 5

### *1945–1990*

<b>20</b>	<b>Postcolonial Order and Ecclesial Emancipation Movements</b>	<b>231</b>
20.1	End of the Second World War, Waves of Decolonization	231
20.2	New Alliances, Movement of “Third World”-Countries	232
20.3	Forms of Ecclesiastical and Theological Emancipation	233
20.4	Growing Importance of the Southern Churches in the Global Ecumenical Movement	236
20.5	New Actors and Movements	239
<b>21</b>	<b>Asia: the 1950s</b>	<b>242</b>
21.1	Christians as a Minority in the Process of Nation Building	242
21.2	Loss of Status and Persecutions under Communist Rule	244
21.3	Search for Christian Identity in the “New Asia”	246
21.4	Approaches to New Theological Orientation	248
<b>22</b>	<b>Africa in the 1960s</b>	<b>251</b>
22.1	Church and State in New Africa	251
22.2	‘Historical’ and Independent Churches	253
22.3	Approaches to African Theology, Interreligious Initiatives	256
22.4	South Africa: Christians and Churches in the Apartheid State	258

- 23 Latin America: the 1970s 263**
- 23.1 Between Social Revolution and State Repression 263
  - 23.2 The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and the Bishops’ Conference of Medellín (1968) 264
  - 23.3 Liberation Theologies: Characteristics, Controversies, Developments 265
  - 23.4 Protestant and (Neo)Pentecostal Groups, Revitalization of African American Religions 268
- 24 “Shift of Centers”: Developments in the 1980s 273**
- 24.1 From a North to a South Majority 273
  - 24.2 “Return of the Religions”, Religious Fundamentalisms 277
  - 24.3 “Reverse Missions”, Impacts on the West 278
  - 24.4 Regional Developments and Profiles 280
- Illustrations for Part 5 286**

## PART 6

### *On the Threshold of the 21st Century*

- 25 1989/90 as an Epoch Year in the History of World Christianity 295**
- 25.1 End of the Cold War, Collapse of Apartheid, Crisis of Liberation Theologies 295
  - 25.2 Internet, Digital Globalization, Liberalized Travel 298
  - 25.3 Changing Geographies of Religion, Transcontinental Churches, New Dynamics of Polycentrism 301
  - 25.4 “The Next Christendom” – Discussions and Expectations around the Turn of the Millennium 304

**Outlook, Perspectives 311**

**Maps 314**

**Bibliography 332**

Bibliography I: Standard Works, General Surveys 332

Bibliography II: Complete List of References 335

**Illustration Credits 365**

**Survey of the Digital Appendix: Photos of Selected Regions 366**

**Index 367**

# Preface

Since the 1980s, a growing majority of the Christian world population is living in the global South. Any attempt to understand Christianity as a world religion has to pay proper attention to these dramatic changes. Until quite recently, the history of the Christian communities in Asia, Africa and Latin America has often been described more or less as a mere appendix to Western church and mission history. But churches existed in Asia and Africa long before the first European “discoverers” and missionaries entered the scene. Even later, the western missionary movement was just *one* factor, among others, in the worldwide spread of Christianity. Describing world Christianity as a polycentric movement, we have to take into account a multitude of regional centers of expansion, indigenous initiatives, cultural expressions, local forms, global entanglements and multidirectional forms of exchange.

This textbook and study guide has been the result of many years of teaching at various institutions, both in Germany (Munich University LMU) and during multiple guest professorships in Asia, Africa and UK (Liverpool Hope). It is intended for a variety of audiences: students and teachers of church history, religious studies, mission history and World Christianity, contextual theology and ecumenical studies, various area and cultural studies, global history and history of globalization, anthropology of Christianity etc. The volume is designed to be used for different forms of academic instruction: for survey courses, as an extension (or supplement) to traditional period lectures, for courses on the Christian history of individual continents or regions, and for treatment of selected topics. At the same time, this one volume single-authored survey is directed also to a wider public interested in the global dimensions of Christianity and its history.

A special feature of the book is its close connection with a similarly structured documentary source book on the history of Christianity beyond the West from 1450 to 1990 which has been published in English, German and Spanish.<sup>1</sup> This facilitates academic teaching and enables parallel reading of relevant source materials for the individual chapters of his book. Another characteristic of the volume is its rich visual material. In addition to the maps and historical

---

<sup>1</sup> Koschorke, K./ Ludwig, F./ Delgado, M. (2007 ff) (eds.), *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1450–1990. A Documentary Sourcebook* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K.); for the German and Spanish editions see details on p. XVIII, FN. 3. – This textbook is a revised and updated translation of: Koschorke, K. (2022), *Grundzüge der Außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte. Asien, Afrika und Lateinamerika 1450–2000* (utb 5934; MohrSiebeck: Tübingen).

illustrations, there is a digital appendix with about 250 photos from various regions and places relevant for the history of Christianity in the global South. They were taken by the author during repeated overseas travels and research stays since the 1980s.

The textbook and study book was developed in various test runs. Thanks are due for critical comments and suggestions to many persons. First of all to my students and collaborators at the Munich Chair of 'Early and World Church History' (which I held from 1993 to 2013) and other places of varied guest professorships in different regions. Special thanks also go to the co-editors of the above-mentioned source volume, my colleagues Mariano Delgado (Fribourg/Switzerland), Frieder Ludwig (now Stavanger) and Roland Spliesgart (Munich). Various colleagues at home and abroad have proofread individual sections or commented on specific aspects. I mention with thanks (in alphabetical order): Afe Adogame (Princeton); Raimundo Barreto (Princeton); Verena Boell (Leipzig); Ciprian Burlacioiu (Munich); Christian Büschges (Bern); David Daniels (Chicago); Adrian Hermann (Bonn); Michael Hochgeschwender (Munich); Klaus Hock (Rostock); Daniel Jeyaraj (Liverpool/Chennai); Thomas Kaufmann (Göttingen); Sebastian Kim (Pasadena); Hartmut Lehmann (Kiel); Johannes Meier (Mainz); Elizabeth Marteiijn (Groningen); Andreas Müller (Kiel); Christoph Nebgen (Frankfurt); Peter Tze Ming Ng (Hong Kong); Stanislaw Paulau (Halle); Rudolph von Sinner (São Leopoldo); Wolbert Smidt (Mekele); Mira Sonntag (Tokyo); Veit Strassner (Maikammer); Martin Wallraff (Munich); Andrew Walls<sup>†</sup> (Edinburgh/Liverpool); Kevin Ward (Leeds). Library research and technical support was provided by Philipp Kuster (Munich). Special thanks are also due to the editors of the 'Theology and Mission in World Christianity' series and the production team of Brill Publisher. The lively exchange with many colleagues from the worldwide ecumenical community should not go unmentioned. They have opened my eyes – since a first formative guest lectureship in Sri Lanka in 1982/83 – to the richness of Christian history in other cultures and world regions.

*Klaus Koschorke*

Munich, December 2023

## **In Place of an Introduction: “Christians and Spices” – or: the Multiplicity of Regional Centers in the History of World Christianity**

In 1498, when Vasco da Gama, with the help of a Muslim pilot, “discovered” the direct sea route to India that Columbus had missed on the alternative Atlantic route six years earlier, he met two Arab merchants on the beach at Calicut (now Kozhikode). They greeted him in Genoese and Castilian with the friendly words, “What the hell are you looking for here?”. To which he gave the famous reply, “Christians and spices”. Access to the spice-producing regions of Asia was indeed the economic motive of Portuguese overseas expeditions, and connection to the fabled realm of the Christian priest-king John in the Far East the ideological one. And it was more by chance that Vasco da Gama had landed in that region of India (today’s Kerala), where in fact there existed an ancient and centuries-old indigenous Christian community in the form of the St. Thomas Christians. The subsequent encounter between the Portuguese newcomers and the Indian St. Thomas Christians was, however, marked by a multitude of intercultural misunderstandings. For example, the first service of the Portuguese on Indian soil took place in a Hindu temple, which they mistook for a Christian church. They did wonder, according to an eyewitness, about the priests’ peculiar costume (with cords and white ash painting) and the unfamiliar images of the saints – provided with “four or five arms” and large teeth that “stuck out an inch from their mouths” [Text 5a]. It was only in retrospect that the Iberians realized they had stumbled into a “pagan” temple. Later then (since 1500) they met the “real” St. Thomas Christians. The relationship between the Indians and the Portuguese turned out to be very changeable in the following time. St. Thomas Christians exist in modern India until today, although as a frequently divided community.

I have told this episode repeatedly to my Munich students. I think it is also suitable as an introduction to this textbook and study book. For it vividly demonstrates that there already existed Christian communities in Asia or Africa long before the first European missionaries or Western colonists appeared in these regions. Today, as never before in its history, Christianity has become a worldwide phenomenon, present in all six continents and in a multitude of different cultures. However, there is still a widespread belief that this global expansion has been primarily the result of earlier Western missionary activities in the countries of the Southern Hemisphere. Indisputably, the Western missionary movement since the 16th century has been an important factor in the process of this global expansion, both temporally and regionally. However,

it has been only *one factor among others* – besides, for example, its spread through (voluntary or involuntary) migration, along trans-regional diaspora networks, in the context of different trade and cultural contacts, or as a result of the activities of local multipliers and indigenous Christian initiatives of different scope.

Elsewhere, Western missionaries encountered ancient Christianities already in existence – as in 16th-century India, where the St. Thomas Christians could look back on an uninterrupted history since the 4th (if not 3rd) century. Such encounters, however, were quickly overshadowed by conflicts. This was the case again in *India*, where the Catholic Portuguese – after initial friendship and mutual support – soon identified deficiencies in the traditional Christianity of their Indian co-religionists. Since the 1550s, they therefore intensified their efforts to Latinize the St. Thomas Christians. In 1598, these were then more or less forcibly integrated into the Portuguese colonial church, from which individual groups have only been able to free themselves again since 1653. Subsequently, the history of Christianity in the country remained characterized by the opposition of a St. Thomas Christian branch and successive Western missionary church undertakings.

A constellation comparable to that in India – indigenous Christians in conflict with the Portuguese newcomers – also developed in the 16th century in the Christian empire of *Ethiopia*. Here, too, in 1540, in the face of Muslim threats, the Iberians were initially welcomed as allies and helpers in need. Their priests were greeted as pastors to the small Portuguese community in the country. When, however, the Jesuit missionaries sought to subjugate the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to the control of Rome from 1555 onwards and rejected its time-honored traditions as “heretical”, a rupture occurred. As a result, the Portuguese were finally expelled first from the imperial court and then from the country in 1632. In the period that followed, the country entered a prolonged phase of self-isolation from Christian Europe. At the same time, this self-isolation led to an increased emphasis on specifically ancient Ethiopian traditions, in distinction from Western traditions. From then on, the East African country was almost completely closed to European missionaries, both Catholics and later Protestants.

Ethiopia became important in a global perspective not only as a representative of a seemingly particularly ‘archaic’ type of African Christianity, which somehow has survived to the present day. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Ethiopia became the reference point of the so-called Ethiopian movement. This was a widespread and ‘modern’ emancipation movement of black Christians on *both* sides of the Atlantic, in the slaveholding societies of the Caribbean and USA as well as in the British colonies of West and South Africa. Ethiopia – which had successfully expelled an Italian invading army in 1896 at

the height of European imperialism – was now increasingly seen as a symbol both of ecclesiastical and political independence. It inspired diverse pan-African movements as well as transatlantic networks (both religious and political) of African and African-American Christians.

The history of Christianity in *Korea* is also particularly significant. It represents the example of a self-Christianization that is singular even in the Asian context. Its *Catholic* beginnings date back to 1784, when a group of Confucian scholars – who had come into contact with Jesuit tracts in Chinese in the completely isolated country – sent one of their own to Beijing to learn more about the “Western knowledge” respectively Christian teaching. The latter was baptized there, returned to Korea, convinced and baptized there his colleagues. Thus he became the founder of an underground church that subsequently grew steadily despite the rapid onset of persecution. All this happened fifty years before the first European priest (from France) entered the country.

The beginnings of *Protestant* presence on the peninsula a hundred years later (1884) also took place initially from the margins. Even before the arrival of the first U.S. missionaries, it was set in motion by Koreans who had encountered Christianity in the diaspora outside the country. As a result, the newly founded Protestant congregations experienced rapid expansion. Early on, they became the bearers of a national consciousness in times of Japanese oppression. In the catastrophic year of 1910 – when Korea was formally annexed by Japan – Korean evangelists were already active among their compatriots in the diaspora in Siberia, Manchuria, Japan, Hawaii, California, Mexico, and Cuba. The loss of their national sovereignty – as Korean historians interpret this process – was compensated for by Korean Christians, among other things, through extensive evangelistic enterprises. Korea thus developed early into an independent “center of world mission” – a development that continued at an accelerated pace after 1945. Korean activists became active in Northeast Asia as well as in Turkey or Peru and – after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990/91 – in numerous areas of the former Soviet empire.

These are all paradigms of a “*polycentric*” approach to the history of *World Christianity*. In this context, the term “World Christianity”, which has been used frequently recently, refers to the diversity of denominational, cultural and contextual forms of the Christian movement in the different stages of its history. It is important to remember here that this polycentricity is not just a phenomenon of the recent past (since the end of the Second World War). Rather, it characterizes the history of Christianity from its very beginnings, and as early as in New Testament times. For example, the Christian community in Rome was not founded by Paul. Rather, it already existed when the “Apostle to the Gentiles” wrote his Epistle to the Christians of the capital city (in which he first felt compelled to introduce himself to them [Rom 1:1–7]). Its beginnings lie in the dark.



It probably arose as a result of the high fluctuation and transregional networks of the Jewish diaspora in the Roman Empire. – In India, as mentioned above, the first Christian communities can be traced back to the fourth, if not already the third century. They had formed in the context of the intensive trade between the Mediterranean region and the Indian subcontinent. Later, Indian Christians placed their beginnings under the authority of the apostles Thomas and Bartholomew. In times of the European Middle Ages, there existed in Asia (along with Rome and Byzantium) a third center of contemporary Christianity which far surpassed the Latin Christianity of Europe just in its geographical extension: the East Syrian (formerly often called "Nestorian") 'Church of the East', which at the height of its expansion in the 13th century stretched from Syria to eastern China and from Siberia to southern India and southern Asia. They had spread along the late antique trade routes through merchants and monks.

The 16th century was not only the era when Catholic pioneer missionaries (like Francis Xavier) set out for the far regions of Asia or (like Antonio de Montesinos) for the new worlds of the Americas. It was also the time when a growing number of already baptized Kongo Christians were taken by the Portuguese as slaves across the Atlantic to their (and others') American possessions. Some of them worked there as evangelists among their compatriots and fellow sufferers. Clear traces of this *transatlantic Kongo Christianity* can be traced in the Caribbean or Brazil until the early 19th century. And the beginnings of Protestant presence in West Africa at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries are not only linked to the names of Anglican missionaries (from England) or Swabian Pietists (from the Basel Mission). They were preceded by an initiative of African-American returnees from Nova Scotia (on the other side of the Atlantic). Former slaves set out – with the Bible in hand as their charter of liberty – to what is now Sierra Leone to found there a "place of freedom". As a hub in the Christianization process of West Africa, the resulting "Freetown" (with its both English and African speaking indigenous elite) was to play a central role in the subsequent period.<sup>2</sup>

The insight into the polycentric character of the history of Christianity also has consequences for the concrete imparting of knowledge. In the following, the aim of this book is to convey basic information on the history of Christianity in Asia, Africa and Latin America since the end of the 15th century. This history is to be described in its different regional manifestations and global interdependencies. For reasons of space, a pragmatic selection of regions had to be made. North America, as indicated in the title, is not the subject of the

---

2 Individual references to the examples given here can be found in: Koschorke (2010), *Polycentric Structures*; Koschorke (2012), *Phasaes of Globalization*; Koschorke/Hermann (2014), *Polycentric Structures*.

presentation, apart from a few cross-references. This is despite the fact that its missionary history in the colonial phase until the end of the 18th century was in many respects parallel to that of Central and South America (as well as the Caribbean). Oceania, too, can be mentioned only occasionally in the present account, despite the immensely exciting (and partly autochthonous) history of its Christianization. In the Africa chapters, the focus is on sub-Saharan Africa, with repeated reference to West and South Africa in particular, as well as individual regions of East Africa. In the Asia sections, it is specific countries – India, China, Japan, and Korea – whose developments are addressed in each of the successive epochs. Other regions are mentioned rather selectively. The ancient Near Eastern churches are treated paradigmatically with a focus on India's St. Thomas Christianity (for Asia) and Orthodox Ethiopia (representing ancient African Christianity). Other ancient churches in the Near East – such as those of the Copts (Egypt), Maronites (Syria), Armenians or Georgians – are only occasionally discussed.

The division into five epochs (with caesurae around 1450/1500, 1600, 1800, 1890, 1945 and 1989/90) is guided by the endeavor to get a view of analogous and different developments as well as simultaneities and dissimilarities in the Christian history of different regions. The starting point of this book at the turn of the 15th to the 16th century results from the simple circumstance that only since this date one can speak of a developing Christian presence in all three continents mentioned in the title. The earlier – "pre-colonial" – history of the Christianities of Asia and Africa is repeatedly referred to. The volume ends with the 1990s, which in various respects also mark a caesura in the global history of Christianity. For the collapse of the Soviet empire and the end of the Cold War had profound effects not only on the situation of Christians and churches in Eastern Europe and in the former communist sphere of power. They also led to dramatic changes and system changes in Africa and Latin America, by which many churches in the region were directly affected – partly very actively and partly rather passively.

As mentioned in the preface, this structure of the textbook and study book is connected with the possibility of its use in different formats of academic teaching. This is especially true with regard to possible uses in various disciplinary contexts (such as church history, ecumenical and intercultural theology, history of religions, various regional and cultural studies, global history, etc.). Moreover, the volume seeks to contribute to a more integrated view of the history of Christianity in the non-Western world. Despite the upswing in historical 'World Christianity Studies' in recent years, especially in Anglophone academia, there are still too few comparative studies that relate the Christianity history of individual regions to each other. The question of both analogous and specifically different developments in comparable contexts continues to

be asked too little. Studies on the history of individual regions or continental developments often follow heterogeneous research traditions or are conducted in mutual isolation.

To give a concrete example: At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, mission-independent black churches under African leadership were formed simultaneously, but initially quite independently of each other, in different regions of Africa. These so-called 'African Independent [or: Initiated] Churches' (AIC's) are now – in contrast to fifty years ago – firmly established in the historiography of Christianity on the continent. The research situation is different with regard to Asia, where at the same time around 1900 analogous constellations and conflicts developed between the emancipation efforts of indigenous Christian elites and the growing paternalism (and racism) of Western missionaries. The only difference is that these conflicts – so far only selectively analyzed – led to (mostly evolutionary) national church aspirations rather than to an immediate break with the mission churches (as in Africa). In both continents, however, in Christian Africa as in Christian Asia, the situation at the beginning of the 20th century cannot be described without proper consideration of these protest movements of native Christians. From these, in turn, especially in Asia, came considerable impulses for the early ecumenical movement in the churches of the West as well.

A further challenge will then be the task of integrating the multitude of regional developments into a new overarching perspective. This should also include the Christian history of the West (without, however, being dominated by it, as in traditional mission history). At the same time, it should be able to provide elements of a Christian culture of memory that can increasingly be experienced as a common heritage.