

Studien zur  
Außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte  
(Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika) –

38

Studies in the History of Christianity  
in the Non-Western World

It was by no means only Western missionaries who brought Christianity to the countries of the Global South. In various places they encountered old Christian churches which had been already existing such as in India and Ethiopia. In other places, voluntary or forced migration and indigenous Christian initiatives also led to an independent expansion and the formation of transregional networks at an early stage. This resulted in various exchange relationships between different areas of the expanding Christian world, which were carried out by local representatives.

The volume contains the contributions of an international conference held in 2023, which discussed early examples of such South-South connections between the 16th and early 19th century. It not only provides important insights for a polycentric approach to the history of World Christianity, it also offers new perspectives on diverse discourses regarding the history of globalization and transcontinental religious entanglements.

Es waren keineswegs nur westliche Missionare, die das Christentum in die Länder des globalen Südens brachten. An verschiedenen Orten trafen sie auf bereits bestehende uralte christliche Kirchen (so in Indien oder Äthiopien). An anderen Orten führten freiwillige oder erzwungene Migration sowie indigen-christliche Initiativen ebenfalls früh zu einer eigenständigen Ausbreitung und überregionalen Netzwerkbildung. Es kam zu vielfältigen Austauschbeziehungen zwischen verschiedenen Gebieten der sich ausweitenden christlichen Welt, die von lokalen Akteuren getragen wurden.

Der vorliegende Band enthält die Beiträge einer internationalen Konferenz aus dem Jahr 2023, die frühe Beispiele solcher Süd-Süd-Verbindungen zwischen dem 16. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert erörterte. Er liefert nicht nur wichtige Elemente für einen polyzentrischen Zugang zur Geschichte des Weltchristentums. Zugleich öffnet er neue Perspektiven auf vielfältige Diskurse zur Geschichte der Globalisierung und transkontinentaler religiöser Verflechtungen.

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Early South-South Links in the History of World Christianity

Harrassowitz

## Early South-South Links in the History of World Christianity (16th – Early 19th Century)

Edited by  
Klaus Koschorke, Ciprian Burlăcioiu  
and Philipp Kuster



Harrassowitz Verlag



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in the Non-Western World

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Klaus Koschorke & Johannes Meier

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Cover illustration: Anonymous, San Juan Goto, late 17th century, azulejo, Lima, Iglesia de San Pedro, Sacristy; photo: Raphaële Preisinger. - The tile painting shows San Juan Goto, one of the Japanese martyrs of Nagasaki in 1597, in the church of San Pedro in Lima (Peru) - an early example of transcontinental veneration of native Christian saints (from regions beyond Europe) in the Christian world of the 17th century.



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## Table of Contents

Preface.....	9
<b>Introduction into the Conference</b>	
KLAUS KOSCHORKE .....	11
<b>I. The “Christian” Black Atlantic</b>	
1. Early Kongo Christianity in its Transatlantic Connections JOHN THORNTON .....	19
2. Kongolese Christianity in the Americas and the Formation of Transatlantic Networks of Black Brotherhoods in the 17 <sup>th</sup> and 18 <sup>th</sup> Centuries DAVID DANIELS .....	31
3. West African Christianity and its Transatlantic Trails. Sierra Leone in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries CIPRIAN BURLĂCIOIU .....	45
4. Race, Religion, and Repatriation: Ideological Origins of the Back-to-Africa Movement, 1770-1820 JAMES CAMPBELL .....	57
<b>II. Ethiopia in its Transregional Connections</b>	
5. Rediscovering African Agency in the History of the Reformation: Ethiopian Monks, European Reformers, and the Global Circulation of Religious Knowledge STANISLAU PAULAU .....	73
6. The Aksumite Kingdom and the Wider Christian World: A Transtemporal Perspective on Early South-South Links in the History of World Christianity STANISLAU PAULAU .....	85
7. Transatlantic Ethiopianism: Ethiopia as Symbol of Redemption and Independency among Black Christians on Both Sides of the Atlantic KLAUS KOSCHORKE .....	97

### III. The Pacific World

8. From India to Brazil:  
The Pacific Journeys of the Martyr Saint Gonçalo Garcia  
ERIN KATHLEEN ROWE ..... 113
9. “More of a Mission Outpost than a Colony”?  
The Philippines as an Intercultural and Geostrategic Contact Zone  
CHRISTOPH NEBGEN..... 131
10. The Martyrs of Japan in the Andean Highlands: “The Indies”  
as a Cornerstone of Identity Construction in the Viceroyalty of Peru  
RAPHAËLE PREISINGER..... 141

### IV. Across the Indian Ocean

11. St. Thomas Christians and the Indian Ocean Trade, 800-1800  
PIUS MALEKANDATHIL..... 165
12. Goa, the Afro-Asian Church in the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*, and  
the Rise of a Catholic Underground Movement in Dutch Colonial Sri Lanka  
KLAUS KOSCHORKE ..... 189

### Results/ Comments/ Perspectives

13. A Thousand Little Stories? World Christianity in a Polycentric Perspective  
BIRGIT EMICH..... 205
14. Results and Perspectives: Some Remarks  
on Circulation Processes in Early Modern Missionary Provinces  
FABIAN FECHNER ..... 211
15. Common Themes and Future Possibilities in the Global History  
of Early Modern Christianity  
MIRA SONNTAG..... 217
16. Global History of Christianity: Potentials and Chances of a South-South  
Perspective  
CHRISTOPH MARX ..... 225
17. History of World Christianity (16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries) from the Perspective  
of Religious Studies and Global Religious History  
ADRIAN HERMANN..... 229

18.	Reflections on South-South Links and the Polycentric Nature of World Christianity	
	KEVIN WARD.....	233

## **Appendix**

19.	Polycentricity and Plurality of Premodern Christianities (Keynote Speech at the Inauguration of the KFG Frankfurt October 27, 2020)	
	KLAUS KOSCHORKE .....	243

Authors / Editors .....	267
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## Preface

This volume contains the papers presented at an international and interdisciplinary conference held in Bad Homburg near Frankfurt (Germany) from 5th to 7th January 2023. The theme of the meeting was early South-South connections in the history of World Christianity from the 16th century to the early 19th century. While the global expansion of Christianity since 1500 is still primarily attributed to the activities of Western missionaries — first the Catholic missionary movement (especially in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) and later (and particularly in the 19th century) the Protestant one —, indigenous actors played an increasingly important role both in its regional and trans-regional spread. This was the case not only in the last two centuries, but already in the early modern period, since the beginnings of the Iberian colonial and missionary overseas expansion around 1500.

These multiple connections are often known only to insiders. But they are indispensable for a differentiated understanding of the religious dynamics within in the Christian world beyond Europe since 1500. Some prominent paradigms were explored at the conference, which was attended by scholars from three continents and varied professional expertise. At the same time, the conference was launched to encourage further research in this emerging field of World Christianity studies. The relevance of the new South-South paradigm for other disciplines and areas of historical research was intensively discussed at the meeting.

The conference was organized by Klaus Koschorke in his capacity as Senior Fellow of the Frankfurt Research Group “Polycentricity and Plurality of Premodern Christianities (POLY)” (2020-2023), in cooperation with two younger colleagues (Ciprian Burlăcioiu and Philipp Kuster). At the same time, this meeting was a continuation of the series of seven Munich-Freising Conferences (1997-2015), where the concept of polycentricity had been developed, together with other projects based at the Munich Chair for Early and Global History of Christianity. This concept of polycentricity focuses on multidirectional links in the history of World Christianity. This includes not only (as in traditional mission history) North-South or (as discussed now in Bad Homburg) South-South links, or early instances of South-North connections and entanglements at different regional and transcontinental levels. It also discusses, for example, the interconnectedness of Christian Ethiopia with the wider Orthodox World and its impact on the multifaceted and widespread movement of emancipation among black Christians on both sides of the Atlantic in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries known as “Ethiopianism”. As such, it seeks to analyze the globality of Christianity in its varying forms and successive stages of historical development.

Thanks are due to various contributors and sponsors who enabled the organization of the conference and the publication of its results. Most of the costs of the conference itself were covered by the POLY Research group (Frankfurt University) resp. the German Research Foundation (DFG). In addition, significant contributions came from private funds. Editing and printing of the proceedings has been financed from different other sources. The publication of this volume in an Open Access format has been made possible by the Open

Access Fund of the University of Munich (LMU). Ciprian Burlăcioiu and Philipp Kuster (both Munich) contributed significantly to the conceptual preparation, realization and publication of the conference and its results. Thanks are also due to the members of the Munich Chair for Early and Global History of Christianity, for manifold assistance, and to Stephen Hayes (Pretoria, South Africa) who as “Native speaker” reduced the “Germanisms” of various papers. Excellent, as usually, has been the cooperation with the team of the Harrassowitz Publisher (Wiesbaden).

Munich, May 22, 2024

The Editors

# Introduction into the Conference\*

KLAUS KOSCHORKE

The core issues addressed by this conference are the global spread and polycentricity and the multidirectional processes of exchange and interaction in the history of World Christianity. That's the reason why we are talking about early *South-South connections* in the worldwide diffusion of Christianity since the early modern period. Thus the focus is not on North–South links — as in traditional mission historiography where the genesis and rise of Christian communities in Asia, Africa and Latin America since the early modern period has usually been presented primarily as being the result of Western missionary activities.

Important as the Western missionary movement has been — first the Catholic and later the Protestant one, particularly at certain places and specific periods of initial contacts — it was just *one* factor, *among several others*, in the worldwide spread of Christianity.

- In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese encountered ancient Christian Churches that already existed in Asia and Africa (as, for example, the St. Thomas Christians in India or Orthodox Christianity in Ethiopia);
- In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the explosive growth of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa took place exactly in the postcolonial period, after many European missionaries had left the continent, together with the former colonial masters;
- In some regions Christian communities were established without any western missionary agency. So, for example, in Korea, where the beginnings of Catholicism in this isolated country go back to the underground activities of former Confucian scholars in 1784, sending an envoy to Beijing and accepting Christianity after his return. This happened 50 years *before* the first European priest entered the “hermit nation”. Also the beginnings of Korean Protestantism 100 years later have been described as the result of a process of “Self-Christianisation”, which soon turned the country into a center of global missions itself;
- Migration – forced or voluntary – has been an important factor in a non-missionary diffusion of Christianity, not only in the most recent times (after WW2), but in earlier periods as well;
- Anonymous spread along transregional or transcontinental trade routes has been another important aspect. Transregional networks or missionary initiatives by indigenous Christian elites are another important factor often overlooked;
- Even in regions with (usually limited) missionary presence, it was the local people who in the end decided about the acceptance or refusal or selective appropriation or

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\* Extended and updated version of the introduction given at the opening of the conference on January 5, 2023.

transformation of the message and cultural package introduced by Western missionaries.

Admittedly, considerable research has been done in recent years on these multiple localized forms of Christianity which developed in different regional and cultural contexts. Thus important elements for a polycentric approach to the global history of Christianity have been provided<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, however, they are *often known only to insiders* and regional specialists. Even some classical paradigms are still totally unknown in other branches of historical research. What we need, therefore, is a survey of relevant developments in different areas and colonial, missionary and cultural contexts – and to integrate them into a broader picture, with a new, *enlarged map of the history* of World Christianity.

To take one example: *Kongo Christianity* – a highly significant paradigm of an indigenous African Catholicism which originated since late 15<sup>th</sup> century in a largely pre-colonial context, as a result of African initiatives. To quote the German Africa and colonial historian Horst Gründer:

“In (the historical kingdom of) Kongo, the phenomenon of a Christianisation carried out by the locals without pressure from outside can be observed which, moreover, was driven forward by the Africans more strongly than by the Europeans, sometimes even against their resistance”<sup>2</sup>.

But in the “Global history” of Christianity by another prominent German historian (Heinz Schilling) – which offers a survey of the Christian world in Europe, Asia and America in the early years of the reformation movement — the Christian Kongo is not mentioned at all, without any reference even in the index<sup>3</sup>. This in spite of the fact that its King Afonso (Mevemba Nzinmga, 1465?–1543) — whose extensive correspondance both with the Portuguese crown and the curia in Rome is easily accessible and whose son Henrique was to become the first (and only) black bishop in sub-Saharan Africa for more than 300 years — is a well-studied person. In addition, the historical Kingdom of Kongo provides not only an early example of an “African Catholic Church” as result of African initiatives in a precolonial context. It also had a significant impact on the process of Christianisation among the African American slaves abducted to the New World. “The conversion of Africans”, says *John Thornton*, the leading authority in this field of research, in his classical study on ‘Africa and Africans in The Making of the Atlantic World’, “actually began in Africa, and 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”<sup>4</sup>.

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1 See e.g. LINDENFELD, D.F. (2021), *World Christianity and Indigenous Experience*. A Global History, 1500–2000 (Cambridge/ New York); TAVÁREZ, D. (2017) (Ed.), *Words and Worlds Turned Around*. Indigenous Christianities in Colonial Latin America (Boulder); BAAGO, K. (1969), *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity* (Madras); cf. also: MCGRATH, A./ RUSSELL, L. (2022) (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Global Indigenous History* (Routledge).

2 GRÜNDER, H. (1992), *Welteroberung und Christentum* (Gütersloh), 50–65, here: 58 (translated).

3 SCHILLING, H. (2017), *1517. Weltgeschichte eines Jahres* (München).

4 THORNTON, J. (1998), *Africa and Africans in The Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge), 254. 262.

So I am very glad that John Thornton has been with us as the first speaker at this conference. “Early Kongo Christianity in its Transatlantic connections” is the theme of his presentation. He discusses Kongolese Christianity as the result of a remarkable process of “self-evangelisation” and analyses the role played by enslaved Kongolese Christians — who “carried their home Christianity with them into the New World” — in “evangelizing non-Christian slaves in their new environment, both in Brazil and in St Domingue. They also did evangelization in Protestant countries”.

The idea behind this conference now is a double one:

- To discuss well-established (and in the meantime partly already classical) cases of early South-South links and to introduce them into the wider academic mainstream discourse — thus also making them relevant to more traditional (and Eurocentric) disciplines such as Church History (my own field) as they are being taught in the German-speaking academic context.
- At the same time, to take these case studies as a starting point and try to apply them as a model for a connected history of Christianity in other world regions and maritime spaces as well. This naturally can be only a first step — in order to identify rewarding paradigms for future research.

### *The “Christian” Black Atlantic*

One well studied paradigm has been, for example, the concept of what Andrew Barnes (2014) has labelled as the “‘Christian’ Black Atlantic” — as a space of transcontinental communication and interactions between black Christians on *both* sides of the Atlantic<sup>5</sup>.

This concept is relevant not only to more recent developments (in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> c.), but also for connections and processes of transregional interactions since the 16<sup>th</sup> c. And it includes not only black Catholicism – such as Kongo Christianity in the Americas or the role of black brotherhoods in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in connecting African-American Catholics in Brazil, Lisbon, Madrid or West Africa — but also the emergence of black Protestant communities in the Atlantic world (which can be observed since the 1750s).

One classical case has been the famous *Sierra Leone experiment* in 1792 which led to the establishment of a Christian settlement in Freetown (Sierra Leone). This was the result of an African-American initiative: by remigrants from the other side of the Atlantic, freed slaves, who — with the Bible as “charter of freedom” in their hand — wanted to return to the country of their ancestors. They founded what mission historian Andrew Walls has described as “the first Protestant church in [West] Africa”: “It was a ready made *African* Church, with its own structures and leadership”<sup>6</sup>. In addition, with its polyglot African elite, Sierra Leone also served as a hub and bridge in the subsequent process of Christianization of West Africa. Later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was black missionaries from the Carribean –

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5 BARNES, A. (2018), “The Christian Black Atlantic. African American, Ethiopianism and Christian Newspapers in Africa”, in: Koschorke, K./ Hermann, A./ Ludwig, F./ Burlaciou (Eds.), “*To give publicity to our thoughts*”. Journale asiatischer und afrikanischer Christen um 1900 .. (StAECG 31; Wiesbaden), 345–362.

6 WALLS, A. (2002), “Sierra Leone, Afroamerican Remigration and the Beginnings of Protestantism in West Africa (18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.)”, in: Koschorke, K. (Ed.), *Transkontinentale Beziehungen in der Geschichte des Außereuropäischen Christentums/ Transkontinental Links in the History of Non-Western Christianity* (StAECG 6; Wiesbaden) 45–56, here: 55.

sent first by white Protestant societies and later also by black missionary bodies – who became active, for example, in West Africa. Transatlantic black Churches — such as the ‘African Methodist Episcopal Church’ (AME) or the ‘African Orthodox Church’ (AOC) — originated respectively in the early 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Black journals crossing the Atlantic created a feeling of a shared Christian identity among people of African descent and established a transregional indigenous “black” public sphere. They also fueled multiple pan-African initiatives, both religious and political.

The Sierra Leone experiment in 1792 is also the subject of two papers at this conference. *Ciprian Burlăcioiu* focuses on the role of black pastors who led the passage of black diaspora congregations from Nova Scotia to the West African coast. “Exodus, from the slavery of Egypt into the promised land of one’s ancestors, was being renewed”. *Jim Campbell* discusses the “Ideological Origins of the Back-to-African Movement 1770 – 1820”. He places “the birth of Sierra Leone” in a wider spectrum of black emigration movements and white colonisation ventures in early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although both did not achieve their original goals, they had a significant impact, inter alia, on the later genesis and survival of independent nations in West Africa. — *David Daniels* looks at an earlier period (16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.) and explores the relevance of black brotherhoods “in constructing the Black Christian Atlantic during the early modern period”. Kongolese Catholic confraternities in Brazil, for example, played an important role both on the local level as well as within transatlantic networks. They “operated a Black Christian Atlantic world of other confraternities and Christian communities led by Christians of African descent”.

The case of the “Christian” Black Atlantic — as a space of intra-Christian transregional communication and interactions, not only by colonial or missionary actors, but also by indigenous people and marginalized groups — has been intensively explored in recent years. In the meantime it has become a “classical” paradigm in itself. This certainly is partly due to the enormous interest shown by (and sociopolitical relevance of) the African-American community in the US.

To which extent could this model of the “Christian” Black Atlantic be applied also to other world regions and maritime spaces - such as the Pacific or the Indian Ocean? What forms of trans-oceanic communication, religious exchange, or cultural impact of trade or diaspora formation - as factors relevant to a polycentric history of Christianity - can be observed here?

### *The Pacific World*

The Philippines, for example, functioned technically as a subcolony of Mexico. To what extent did the galeone trade serve not only for the exchange of commercial goods, but also for the transmission of ideas, cultural traditions or religious items (such as the famous ivory carvings by Chinese Christian artisans that found their way from Manila to Mexico and Spanish Colonial America)? It was through “merchants, migrants, missionaries” that direct transmaritime connections between these two territories were established, as Luke Clossey has observed in an article in 2006<sup>7</sup>. “More a missionary outpost than a colony” is a

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7 CLOSSEY, L. (2006), “Merchants, Migrants, Missionaries, and Globalization in the Early-Modern Pacific”, in: *Journal of Global History* 1, 51–68; cf. also MEHL, E.M. (2016), *Forced Migration in the Spanish Pacific World. From Mexico to the Philippines, 1765–1811* (Cambridge).

quotation used by *Christoph Nebgen* in his paper to describe the geopolitical relevance of the Philippines as a springboard for missionaries on their (intended) way to China.

The high mobility — both physically and in terms of religious exchange — in the Pacific world already in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries also becomes evident from the case of the *Japanese martyrs* discussed in three contributions for this conference. *Raphaèle Preisinger* focuses on the Japanese martyrs of Nagasaki in 1597 who were beatified in 1627 and canonized in 1862. As the first group of predominantly non-European martyr-saints in modern times – the majority of them were of Asian descent, not only from Japan, but also from India – they quickly enjoyed global veneration in Catholic Europe and Asia as well as in Spanish Colonial America. Preisinger analyses pictorial representations from the vice-royalty of Peru where the Japanese martyrs of 1597 were locally appropriated and portrayed as “members of the local Andean population”. - “From India to Brazil: The Pacific Journeys of the Martyr Saint Gonçalo Garcia” is the title of the presentation by *Erin Rowe*. Gonçalo Garcia (1556/7–1597) — born from a Portuguese father and an Indian mother — was one of the Nagasaki victims of 1597. As a merchant and Franciscan lay missionary he travelled frequently between India, the Philippines, Macao and Japan. He was venerated as a martyr not only in India, but also — due to his brown complexion — in Brazil. Here he turned into a patron saint and “advocate for free, mixed race communities seeking to carve out a communal identity distinct from enslaved and Black people”. One of the last non-Japanese martyrs in Japan was San Lorenzo Ruis (1594–1637) from the Philippines, who is discussed in the paper of *Christoph Nebgen*. In Ruis’ biography and ancestry Chinese, Filipino and Spanish elements are mixed. Later he turned into a national hero in the Philippine archipelago (and the Philippine diaspora worldwide). At the same time, the worldwide veneration of the Japanese martyrs contributed significantly to the making of a global Christian consciousness in the Catholic world of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This applies not only to the literate elites (with access to printed reports or journals or hagiographies) but also to illiterate peasants e.g. in colonial Peru or Mexico who - watching in their local chapel the representation of the faith heroes in far-away Japan - felt as members of a worldwide community.

### *Across the Indian Ocean*

Similarly, the Indian Ocean has attracted considerable attention through the “oceanic turn” in historical research in recent times. What role, however, did it play in the history of global Christianity? To what extent did it facilitate exchange between Christian communities along its shores, for example between India and East Africa? Already in precolonial times there had existed a remarkable Indian presence along the East African coast. And when Vasco da Gama reached Malindi (in current Kenya) in 1498 he encountered there St. Thomas Christian sailors who had come from India with four vessels.

*Pius Malenkandathi’s* essay explores the role played by Indian St. Thomas Christians in the Indian Ocean trade between 800 and 1800. In medieval times, they enjoyed certain privileges and concessions (especially in the pepper trade), granted to them by local rulers, due to their ability to mobilize the Indian Ocean trade of the port of Quilon (Kerala) and to care for the supply of spices and other cargo from the hinterland. Even under Portuguese (and later under British) rule, they continued to be active in the maritime trade and were partially able to dispatch cargo to the most profitable destinations in the Indian Ocean.

With the arrival of the Portuguese and the establishment of Goa in 1534 as the political and ecclesiastical center of their empire in Asia and Africa, the Afro-Asian Church of the Portuguese *Estado da India* was created, as discussed in the paper of *Klaus Koschorke*. Goa became a cosmopolitan city and meeting point also for local Christians from Asia and Africa. In spite of the strong Portuguese presence, Indian Christians at Goa developed a distinct identity. This led to manifold conflicts and far-reaching activities by local clergy like Mateo de Castro Mahale (1594–1677). He travelled widely between India, the Near East and Rome (and tried, however unsuccessfully, to get to Japan and Ethiopia as well). In other colonial contexts (such as Dutch Ceylon), Goanese volunteers supported the underground activities of local Catholics. British rule in the 19th century resulted in new forms of interaction between communities and Christians on both sides of the Indian Ocean. A significant instance of this is the so-called “Bombay Africans” - former African slaves, abducted from East Africa to India, who were liberated and educated there in mission schools and later provided African leadership in the nascent Church in Kenya.

### *Ethiopia in its Transregional Connections*

Another prominent paradigm discussed at this conference has been *Christian Ethiopia*. It is highly relevant not only as a remarkable representative of an “Ancient Oriental Church” but also as a symbol of both religious and political emancipation which fueled “modern” movements among African and African American Christians in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In addition, it entertained multidirectional links not only with the churches of the Orthodox world but also with Latin Christianity.

Early direct contacts between Orthodox Ethiopia and the reformation movement in Western Europe (16<sup>th</sup> c.) is the subject of a first essay by *Stanislaw Paulau*<sup>8</sup>. Ethiopian representatives such as the monk and deacon Abba Mika'el who visited Wittenberg in 1534 were not only acknowledged and welcomed by Luther and Melachton as brethren in faith and members of the same Church of Christ. Orthodox Ethiopia also played an important role in the confessional controversies in Western Europe in 16<sup>th</sup> century — as example of an ancient Christian Church outside the jurisdiction of the Roman pope. – In a second paper, *Stanislaw Paulau* discusses Ethiopia's transregional entanglements both in the premodern and modern period. Whereas a first section focusses on medieval Aksum's extensive trade networks across the Red Sea and Mediterranean regions that became instrumental in disseminating Christianity and integrating the kingdom into the then-known Christian world a second part deals with king Kaleb (of 6<sup>th</sup> century) under whom Ethiopia became a major Christian power. Since 16<sup>th</sup> century, he turned into a notable figure also in the Eastern Christian world (including Russia under Ivan the Terrible). This “adaptation of Kaleb's story in the Russian context underscores the transcultural appeal and adaptability of his narrative within various Christian traditions”. As Saint Elesbaan he was finally integrated into the liturgical life of the Catholic Church. His cult dissiminated in regions extending from Brazil to Goa.

Far reaching impacts of Ethiopia as a symbol of redemption and independency are discussed in *Klaus Koschorke*'s essay on “Transatlantic Ethiopianism”. Due to its repeated mentions in the bible, its venerable past and its survival as an independent nation in

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8 This session was originally organized jointly by Stanislaw Paulau and David Daniels; but due to health reasons, the latter was prevented to submit his presentation in a print version.

colonial Africa at the peak of Western imperialism, Christian Ethiopia became a point of reference and symbol of hope for black Christians on *both* sides of the Atlantic in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ethiopia inspired manifold movements of emancipation, both religious and political, pan-African sentiments and fueled various Back-to-Africa endeavours and African-American missionary activities in Africa in 19<sup>th</sup> century. For many colored people, the term “Ethiopian” became synonym with African Christian identity.

### *Global and Polycentric*

These are some of the examples of early South-South connections that have been explored at the conference. Naturally, there exist many more relevant instances (especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries). Quite generally the main purpose of this meeting was not so much the production of print-ready papers but to enter into a collective brainstorming and to identify rewarding case studies and areas for future research. Many incentives for further investigations can be found in the detailed comments of colleagues with varied expertise and disciplinary backgrounds (printed in the last section of this volume). Birgit Emich (Early Modern History), Christoph Marx (African Studies), Mira Sonntag (History of Christianity in Japan and North East Asia), Fabian Fechner (Latin America and Jesuit Missions), Adrian Hermann (Religious Studies and Global Religious History) and Kevin Ward (Anglican Missions and Christianity in the Global South) contributed significantly to the discussions and opened a wide panopticon of perspectives and challenges for future research.

This conference continues the work of the former seven *Munich-Freising conferences* (held since 1997) where the concept of a polycentric history of world Christianity was developed. Especially relevant in this respect have been the first, second, fifth, sixth and seventh of these international and interdisciplinary meetings, which sought to design “new maps” and to describe changed contours in the historiography of worldwide Christianity<sup>9</sup>. The concept of polycentricity has since been widely received and discussed, with different emphases in varied areas of research. This applies also to the Frankfurt POLY Research Group, in the context of which this meeting has been taking place. What distinguishes the Munich concept from other approaches is, among other aspects, its primary focus on developments in the Christian world *beyond* Europe, the importance attached to “native agency”, the corresponding search for indigenous Christian sources, and the different ways in which local characteristics and global perspectives are being related to each other. In many current studies attention is being paid somehow one-sidedly to isolated localized versions of Christianity and processes of decentralization. What has frequently been overlooked in this context, is that the emphasis on local or regional identities — as expressed by “native” Christian voices in different places and periods — was repeatedly

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9 Published in: KOSCHORKE, K. (1998) (Ed.), “*Christen und Gewürze*”. Konfrontation und Interaktion kolonialer und indigener Christentumsvarianten (StAECG 6; Göttingen); Id. (2002) (Ed.), *Transcontinental Links in the History of Non-Western Christianity* (see FN 6); Id. (2012) (Ed.), *Phases of Globalization in the History of Christianity / Etappen der Globalisierung in christentumsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (StAECG 19; Wiesbaden); Id. / HERMANN, A. (2014) (Eds.), *Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity / Polyzentrische Strukturen in der Geschichte des Weltchristentums* (StAECG Vol. 25; Wiesbaden); Id./ HERMANN/ LUDWIG/ BURLĂCIOIU (2018) (Eds.), “*To give publicity to our thoughts*” (see FN 5). Cf. HERMANN, A./ BURLĂCIOIU, C./ PHAN, P.C. (2016) (Eds.), *The Munich School of World Christianity* (Special Issue of *The Journal of World Christianity* Vol.6/1).

based exactly on the universal promises of Christianity. This was an established topic among, *inter alia*, indigenous Christian elites in 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Asia and Africa.

“Christianity”, said, for example, the African nationalist and Anglican priest James Johnson around 1908 in what is now Nigeria, “is intended to be the religion not of one particular race of people only, but of the *whole world*. But in different countries it will wear *different types*”. Therefore, he claimed, we should have “in Africa an African type” of Christianity, just as there exists “in Europe a European type (and) in Asia an Asiatic type”<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, Indian Christians similarly criticized Western missionaries for representing only a partial segment of the universal Christian tradition. By claiming exclusive rights for their denominational “sectarianisms” — and through their often racist attitudes (reproached as the “most damnable heresy in Christ’s Church”) —, they were accused of excluding themselves from global Christianity<sup>11</sup>. In Ethiopia in 1555, the ruler Gelawdewos insisted, over against Jesuit attacks on certain time-honoured regional practices (such as circumcision or Sabbath observance) on his church’s belonging to universal Christianity. “We stand in unshakeable fidelity”, he said, to the “doctrine of our fathers” and the Twelve Apostles and the early (three) Ecumenical Councils (as recognized by all churches). Thus “we do not deviate neither right nor left” from the common heritage of Christianity worldwide<sup>12</sup>. East Syriac Christians referred to the plurality of the Apostles (and Apostolic traditions) when confronted with the exclusive claims of Portuguese colonial Catholicism. “Just as there are twelve Apostles”, Indian St. Thomas Christians told the Portuguese priest Penteado around 1516, “even so, they founded twelve (sc. different forms of ecclesiastical) customs, each different from the others”<sup>13</sup>. It is within the wider world of global Christianity, they insisted, that both the Indian and the Roman traditions find their legitimate place.

The globality and the polycentricity of Christianity can be described as *two sides of the same coin*. In the study of World Christianity — understood as the totality of Christian churches, movements, and ways of life, in the multiplicity of their denominational, cultural and contextual expressions — both elements are of crucial importance, the local (on various levels) and the global. What makes the “polycentric” approach to its history so exciting is the many forms of transregional interconnectedness we are just about to discover.

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10 Quoted by AYANDELE, E.A. (1970/ <sup>R</sup>2013), *‘Holy’ Johnson. Pioneer of African Nationalism, 1836–1917* (Abingdon), 342.

11 The Christian Patriot (Madras), 23.10.1909, 6.

12 ULLENDORF, E. (1987), “The Confessio Fidei of King Claudius of Ethiopia”, in: *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32/1, 159–176.

13 MUNDADAN, A.M. (1967), *The Arrival of the Portuguese in India and the Thomas Christians under Mar Jacob 1498–1552* (Bangalore), 83.