

Changing Relations between Churches in Europe and Africa

The Internationalization of Christianity and Politics in the 20th Century

Bearbeitet von
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The Internationalization of Christianity
and Politics in the 20th Century

Edited by Katharina Kunter
and Jens Holger Schjørring

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Foreword

This is the volume of the conference “Changing Relationships between Churches in Africa and Europe in the 20th Century: Christian Identity in the Times of Political Crises”, which took place from 8th to 12th October 2005 at Makumira University College of Tumaini University in Tanzania. It was prepared in cooperation with the department of Church History at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Aarhus, Denmark. Most of the papers presented at Makumira appear here in a revised form, plus a few new articles whose authors were not able to give them there personally. As editors we are very thankful to all who participated in the conference and contributed to this book.

A special word of thanks is due to all the persons and institutions that made the project possible and supported it generously financially: Lutherisches Kirchenamt, Hannover; Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, Stockholm; Missionhögskolen, Stavanger; Faculty of Theology, Aarhus. We are also very thankful to all members of Makumira University who contributed to the success of our conference. Last but not least we thank Kevin Ward who carefully read, commented and corrected all papers.

The conference in Makumira was the end of a longer project, in which an international group of theologians, church historians and historians from Northern Europe abandon the usual limits of their own specialist horizon. An initial goal of the project was to go beyond the national or regional scope of conventional perspectives to an international level which went beyond one's own continent. At the same time, however, the project also fostered an international network of researchers, all of whom are concerned with the role of the Christian churches in politics and history in Europe or in Africa. This network should not only serve as a forum for debates but also help to evaluate concrete potentials and options for an individual academic exchange, for instance through grants and fellowships. The importance of such a personal international nexus of researchers is indicated by the fact that in the field of churches and religion of the so-called “non-European world” is mostly seen in Northern Europe and Germany as an exotic topic for scientific outsiders. But at the beginning of the 21st century and in the face of the growing internationalisation of religion and politics such an approach is no longer appropriate and urgently needs a historiographical revision. This was the shared conviction of all participants and provided the intellectual context for this publication. However, the conference and this volume can only be a small contribution to the much more extensive project of interpreting the history of Christianity in the 20th century.

Aware that such a project can only realized through a longterm, and sometimes exacting effort of international cooperation, we would encourage all readers to seek such collaboration. Studying and analyzing the history of Christianity in the 20th century as well as understanding its diversity and variety in different continents remains for us one of the most exciting academic challenges in the future.

June 2007

Katharina Kunter
Jens Holger Schjørring

Introduction

KATHARINA KUNTER

The 20th century has been often interpreted in retrospect as an ‘age of extremes’ (Eric Hobsbawm), characterised by wars, dictatorships and ideologies. However, although it is correct to highlight the historic experiences of division, separation and exclusion as essential signatures of the recent past, this description neglects the growth in transcontinental communication, which impressed its seal on the second half of the 20th century especially. This worldwide process of transnationality and globalisation, found in international historiography under the key word “Global History” or “Transnational History”, has attracted increasingly attention over the past years. Nonetheless, it is surprisingly that the many publications of recent years¹ have largely neglected the religious factor – although Christianity and its institutions, the churches, form one of the fundamental transnational networks in modern history.

Correspondingly, newer global perspectives of contemporary history are picked up very hesitantly in the still nationally orientated field of church history. Recent exceptions to this include some general histories of Christianity published in English, for example, David L. Edwards „Christianity. The First Two Thousand Years“, which subsumes the period from the 1960s under the headline „Global Christianity“, or Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter’s edited work „The Changing Face of Christianity. Africa, the West, and the World”², which also has a transnational scope. The publications in German of the church historian Klaus Koschorke should also be mentioned. Koschorke has not only compiled a sourcebook about the „Non-European” history of christianity³, but has also edited other books in this series, providing conference reports with varied themes about the transcontinental relations of non-European Christianity.⁴ What this brief summary suggests is that it is predominantly published conference proceedings which have represented and guided the academic discussion. This indicates an area of academic research which is at its beginning and therefore still fluid: First insights and

1 For further reading Gunilla Budde/Sebastian Conrad/Oliver Janz, *Transnationale Geschichte*, (Göttingen 2006); see also; Anthony G. Hopkins, *Globalization in World History* (Cambridge 2002); Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History* (New York 2003); Bruce Mazlish/Akira Iriye, *Global History Reader* (London 2005), Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914. Global Connection and Comparisons* (Oxford 2004).

2 Lamin Sanneh/Joel A. Carpentier, *The Changing Face of Christianity. Africa, the West, and the World* (Oxford 2005).

3 Klaus Koschorke/Frieder Ludwig/Mariano Delgado (ed.), *Außereuropäische Christentums-geschichte (Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika) 1450-1990* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 2004).

4 See also Klaus Koschorke/Jens Holger Schjørring (ed.), *African Identities and World Christianity in the Twentieth Century*, Wiesbaden 2006; Klaus Koschorke (ed.), *Transkontinentale Beziehungen in der Geschichte des außereuropäischen Christentums*, Wiesbaden 2002; Klaus Koschorke (ed.), „Christen und Gewürze“. Konfrontation und Interaktion kolonialer und indigener Christentumsvarianten (Göttingen 1998).

problems may have formulated, but syntheses and empirically founded monographs and overviews are still missing.

Focussing on the development of Christianity and churches in Europe and Africa in the 20th century, it became much more obvious how deeply the awareness of a „North-South conflict“ changed confessional perceptions in European as well as in African catholic, protestant and charismatic circles. The changed perception contributed to the emergence of a global and transnational view about modern Christianity. For further academic research this implies that, in the future, the history of Christianity in the 20th century can no longer be written from a purely European or Western perspective. Instead the mutual relations, the reciprocal linkages, but also the ambivalences and conflicts of European-African relations will have been closely considered and embedded into a comprehensive transnational perspective.

The influence of European Christianity in Africa in the first half of the 20th century was of course considerable in the context of mission and colonialism. It also brought the internationalization of ecclesiastical relations and, on one hand, new inspirations but, on the other hand, problems which arose in the traditional understanding of the relationship between church and state. This volume contributes to the expanded body of scholarship on mission and its consequences. Holger Bernd Hansen introduces us to this complex field with the example of Uganda. Drawing on the *extensive* and diverse academic literature, which has grown far from the classical history of mission over the past years, the reciprocity of mutual interests and influences of the Christian mission is detailed and analysed.⁵ Aspects of mission are also discussed by Simo Heininen and Odd Magne Bakke who describe, from a North European view, transnational aspects of the Finnish and the Norwegian history of mission in Namibia and North Cameroon. Both authors make clear that the role of the European Mission in changing of African Christianity should not only be seen simply in negative moral or political terms or as a cultural one-way street.

The sufferings of the First and Second World War marked for European Christians important political, social and religious breaks. But as global wars they also had – which the European perspective sometimes overlooks or does not fully understand – fundamental effects on Africa. Not only was the geopolitical map of Africa changed, but the mandate system of the League of Nations (and later its successor, the United Nations) added a new dimension to its political constitution. Africa was an active participant in these wars initiated in Europe – and conflict affected directly African Christians and churches. In this regard, Wilson Niwagila looks at how the church struggle of the anti-Nazi Confessional Church (“Bekennende Kirche”) in Germany was seen from an African perspective, while Joseph Parsalaw traces the effects of the First and Second World War on the German mission in what is now Tanzania.

Despite the national separations and violent conflicts of this period, the ecumenical movement provided various means for Christians of the whole world to meet in an alternative, peaceful arena. In the first half of the century the hegemony of Western

5 See for example Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 1996); Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London 1986), Ulrich van der Heyden/Heike Liebau, *Missionsgeschichte, Kirchengeschichte, Weltgeschichte* (Stuttgart 1998), Karl Müller/Werner Ustorf, *Einführung in die Missionsgeschichte* (Stuttgart 1997)

Christianity within this global mission was self-evident. However, since 1945 the self-conception and character of ecumenical gatherings has changed fundamentally. In place of paternalism, the principle of partnership sought to accept the equality and autonomy of brothers and sisters in Africa and to look for new spiritual things which the “old European Christianity” could learn from Africa. One notably significant forum for this new relationship in regional and super-regional ecumenical meetings was, for instance, the All Africa Lutheran Conferences. These gatherings are at the centre of the study of Jens Holger Schjørring, in which he investigates how the self-image of African Christians changed against the background of European-African church relationships between 1955 and 1965. It is evident that, since the 1950s, the ongoing process of decolonisation in Africa – and also in Asia – was historically decisive. Decolonization led, on the one hand, to political independence and a growing self-awareness of the “young churches”, as how Europeans – obscuring the long history of African Christianity – often called the African churches. But, on the other hand, they caused numerous European church circles to shift from traditional confessional and mostly national orientated perspectives. How churches could support decolonization actively, how they could oppose apartheid and racism, developed into an important question, which were intensely discussed from the 1960s onwards by European Christians.

However, the church based and theological search for solutions turned out to be difficult because both European and African Christianity had to face the political realities of the cold war: they were caught in the middle of the superpower rivalry of the United States of America and the Soviet Union, as well as the systemic antagonisms of communism contra capitalism. Theologians like Karl Barth and the World Council of Churches and its first general secretary, Willem Visser’t Hooft, therefore pleaded for a third way, in which the protestant Christianity could play a role in political conflicts. But the realization of the vision of a Protestant third way turned out to be difficult within global politics, which were determined by multidimensional political interests and complex ambivalences. The second part of this book clarifies some of these areas and asks about the path European and African churches took between cold war, communism and human rights.

Kevin Ward deals with the effects of confessional politics in Uganda between 1952-1962, which took place in the context of the competing forces of African Nationalism, Christian democracy and communism. Ezra Gebremedhin, who outlines in his study the repressive consequences of a Marxist dictatorship for the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991, sets another focus. Little of this history has been included in European reflections on the fall of the communist regimes since 1989/90, which are normally restricted to Middle- and Eastern Europe. But the end of the Cold War 1989 and the demise of Soviet bloc regimes in Europe also meant an epochal break for the African churches and Christians. Katharina Kunter pleads against this background for a global historical approach to the investigation of the role of the European and African Christianity in the Cold War and takes, among other themes, the issue of how human rights were instrumentalized in the churches as an ideological football between East and West.

This was also the case after 1969 when the World Council of Churches announced the five-year Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). With this programme for the first

time the “Third World” appeared as an independent and self-contained subject in the perception of European church representatives. Although often controversial discussions in churches of the “North” on the question of financial support of for armed liberation movements took place, this was not the totality of European ecumenical involvement in ecclesiastic concerns about Africa. They may have helped political independence to come a step closer, as Tapiwa P. Mapuranga and Ezra Chitando suggest with their historical overview about the engagement of the ecumenical Programme to Combat Racism in Zimbabwe between 1969-2005. Parallel to the protestant ecumenical engagement, Sophia Chirongoma surveys the role of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe, especially the role of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, and explores which impact they had for the independence of Zimbabwe. Mindful of the present distancing of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe from their dictatorial state president Robert Mugabe – who was once supported by the Catholic Church in his fight in what was then Rhodesia against its prime minister Ian Smith – gives this contribution a special significance. While the political future of Zimbabwe is still in the balance, an epochal moment for South Africa was the release of Nelson Mandela in 1989 and the end of apartheid through its own process of democratic and social transformation. Björn Ryman looks back on more than 40 years of racial segregation which preceded this transformation and gives an account of the continuous solidarity of the Nordic churches with the black majority in South Africa.

Turning from the contemporary history which provides the context of current political debate to the present day, the Christian churches are still looking for their public role. This is the main theme of the third section. Veikko Munyika describes the role of the churches in Namibia before and after its independence from South Africa in 1990 and he introduces recent ecumenical initiatives for reconciliation. The challenging and still politically divisive topic of the ‘land reform’ programme begun in 2000 in Zimbabwe and how the bible was instrumentalized in this process is addressed by Lovemore Togarasei. This example dealing with the Church of Christ shows not only the complexity of the historical heritage of the white minority and black majority there, but also the necessity for an authentic Christian reference for human rights in Zimbabwe. Christians of the former socialist countries in Central- and Eastern Europe had the kindred experiences in the past and they are still looking for their place in the democratic public sphere today. Particularly at the beginning of the 1990s the concept of Civil Society was widely discussed in intellectual circles in Central Europe. The concept of civil society is also the starting point for Benjamin Simon when he asks if the Christian communities and churches of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania could be interpreted as an integral part of an African civil society.

The next two contributions also pick up an important aspect of the civic society. They thematize the changing role of the African women at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st from a theological point of view. Fulata Lusungu Moyo discussed from a feminist-theological view the biography of Vera Chirwa, a female politician from the Presbyterian Church of Central Africa, and a leading human rights activist in Malawi. Musimbi Kanyoro brings out the essential role of women in the political independence movements and during current social transformations in Africa.

After this concentration on Africa, the last two articles go back to Europe but this time from the other direction. Afe Adogame characterizes firstly the civic role of the

Christian Church Outreach Mission International in Ghana, before then going into the expanded spiritual activities of this church in what, from an African Christian viewpoint, is the ‘unbelieving’ continent of Europe. It is from this point that Gerrie ter Haar proceeds with her study about African Christians in Europe and the large churches and communities they have founded. She designates that process as “Mission in Reverse”. Worldwide globalisation and international migration contributed, so her thesis concludes, to a fundamental challenge of the Christian religious history of the 20th century.

With these pointers into the future the circle is closed. If we are looking back to the beginning of the 20th century we should consider that in Europe’s aggressive and expansive nationalism and colonialism the Christian religion contributed to empire building on Africa and was generally strongly connected with the political power of the rulers. Exceptions could be named – for instance European Christian missionaries who stood on the other side, by the African indigenous peoples, and tried to support them in their struggle for independence. But, on the whole, the early relationship between Europe and Africa was characterized by an unbalanced and inequitable situation, until decolonization modified this onesided powerplay. Different examples in this volume make visible how, in face of the growing internationalization since the 1950s some of the political, socio-cultural and religious developments on the European, but also on the African map have changed the character and the role of the Christian churches in the history of the 20th century. Churches in Europe came to identify themselves less and less with the former colonial power. Instead they argued for the poor and supported activities against racism and colonialism in Africa. At the same time European churches were affected by secularisation and their numbers of members started to decline. But in Africa, the period of decolonisation of the 1950s and 1960s saw the largest growth of Christianity in modern history. The understanding and identity of the Christian churches in Africa also underwent change, becoming more critical of established power and advocating a pluralistic and equalitarian society. The future will show if this will be an integral and indispensable part of a global new understanding of the political role of the Christian churches.