

Europe as the Other: External Perspectives on European Christianity

Veranstalter: Judith Becker, Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz; Brian Stanley, University of Edinburgh

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An outside view can help to see issues differently and more clearly. The conference 'Europe as the Other: External Perspectives on European Christianity', held at the Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz, adopted this approach – by adding the underrepresented external perspective to the contemporary debate on the relationship between Europe and European Christianity. The conveners Judith Becker (Mainz) and Brian Stanley (Edinburgh) brought together a group of international scholars who presented and contrasted various arenas of cultural contacts and the conflicting visions of European Christianity which have emerged there. The conference papers investigated this question from multiple perspectives – dealing with cultural encounters which occurred in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the South Sea; and investigating notions of diverse external observers, including visitors to Europe and people visiting the mission fields, non-Christians and Christians, non-Europeans and Europeans.

In the first presentation, JUDITH BECKER (Mainz) provided an insight into missionaries' perceptions of European Christianity during their long-term stay outside of Europe. By focusing on periodicals of the Basel Mission and the Church Missionary Society in the early 19th century, Becker illustrated that in this evangelical context, Christianity had an unmistakably European face. This was not only the case because the missionaries themselves were formed by their European background – in the mission field 'Europe' became the most important point of reference for them –, but also because they considered only the European way of life to be adequate to Christian life. In these conceptions, conversion of indigenous people involved a process of assimilation to what was thought to be European culture. Though the missionaries' aim

was to convey Christian values and not European culture, the in-depth look at the reports showed how general 'Christian values' were modified into 'European Christian values' and how Christianity was perceived more and more as 'European'.

Five different statements in the debate on the European Christianity from the 1890s to the 1930s were the focus of WERNER USTORF's (Birmingham) paper, which, due to his absence, was read out by Felicity Jensz (Münster). It brought together both external and internal voices from three continents representing various cultural and educational backgrounds (Hermann Yoyo, Simon Kimbangu, Moses Tjalkabota, Jakob Hauer, Joseph Oldham). Despite this diversity, Ustorf was able to outline common notions amongst these voices, such as the criticism of the close connection between European culture and Christianity or the rejection of mediatory positions claimed by churches or missionaries. The overview demonstrated how established dividing lines in discourses about European Christianity – especially a South-North-dichotomy – were crossed and blurred in a manifold manner.

REBECCA CATTO (Lancaster) supplemented the historical dimension of the conference by adding a sociological perspective on more recent occurrences. She analysed interviews with missionaries from countries like India, Kenya, or Peru, who work in Britain today and hence partake in 'reverse mission'. The narrative of a 'Christian Europe' still shapes conceptions of Europe worldwide and arouses high expectations among external visitors, as one can see in the fact that the respondents are similarly astonished and bemused about the state of European society – contrary to their initial expectations of Europe as a region inspired by Christianity, they soon were convinced that they had to come up against faithlessness and looseness all around. In their opinion, the decline of Christianity has its roots in the European tradition of Enlightenment as well as in the consumer culture.

The first day was completed by a public discussion with FIDON MWOMBeki (Wuppertal), the Secretary General of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM). He emphasized that the UEM's primary concern today is to avoid

unidirectional mission and rather to connect churches in Africa, Asia, and Europe in order to coordinate resources and to support one another. Besides this, he pled for a more balanced culture of remembrance towards mission work: indigenous voices, which do not think of mission as a solely imperialistic endeavour, but also express gratitude, should also be heard in mission historiography.

In contrast, sceptical indigenous perceptions of European missionaries were important for EMILY MANKTELOW's (Exeter) presentation. Discussing the case of London Missionary Society South Sea Reverend Alexander Simpson, who had been accused of sexually assaulting missionaries' girls under his care, Manktelow argued two things: first, that in mission discourse, missionaries' children were generally 'othered' because of former singular cases of deviant behaviour and that this image could be used by Simpson to defend himself; second, that missionaries were objects of an „inverted imperial eye“ – as missionaries' practices and their failings were intensively scrutinized by the indigenous people. Lapses of single missionaries in moral matters undermined the self-understanding of ethical superiority of European Christians and thus the mission endeavour in general. Hence, as missionaries tried to prevent this through preemptive actions, their interactions in the mission field were indirectly shaped by the power of the indigenous eye.

SEBASTIAN KIM (York) investigated more aggressive reactions to the spread of Christianity by presenting the case of *Pyŏngin pak-hae*, the persecution of Catholic Christianity in Korea 1866–1873. Internal power struggles played a major role in initiating these persecutions. However, it was the fear of an increasing Western penetration that made these actions become more extensive, claiming about 10,000 victims. Especially French missionaries' repeated requests for military intervention and forcible re-establishment of religious freedom made Korean leaders think of Catholicism as an „ally of imperialism“ and thus as a not only culturally, but also politically subversive ideology. In the long run, these developments led to an intensified isolationist policy and an enduring impairment of Catholicism's reputation in Korea.

In China, negative perceptions of the West and Christianity were widespread, too, as R.G. TIEDEMANN (Croydon) demonstrated in his paper. However, in the course of the period investigated (1860-1930) the patterns of judgement were modified significantly. Until the early 20th century, anti-Christian sentiments were shaped in the 'culturalistic' manner prevalent since the 18th century: whilst Western science was admired, Christianity was seen as an „absurd and subversive philosophy“ posing a threat to the moral, societal, and political system of China. In contrast, subsequent to the protests of May 4th 1911, anti-Christian polemics were connoted in a more nationalistic way, considering the overcoming of Christianity as a central part in modernizing China. Chinese Christians also had to take a stance on nationalistic claims; in the case of liberal Protestant clergy this led to a louder call for an indigenization of Christianity and for stronger emphasis on Social Gospel.

THORALF KLEIN (Leicestershire) added a linguistic and iconographic dimension to Tiedemann's presentation by investigating Chinese polemic pamphlets of that period. Since about 1860, Western foreigners in general and missionaries in particular were labelled and depicted as *guizi* (demons). However, patterns changed here, too: in the first decades missionaries were illustrated as humans behaving like demons, whereas in the 1920s publications tended to show them as demons with just a human mask, reflecting the notion of mission as soft imperialism. Moreover, whereas missionaries had initially been seen as belonging to the one group of 'Western demons', after 1900 they were presented as a distinguishable sub-group.

Opposing the West to the East is not limited to anti-Christian pamphlets, but is also a recurrent pattern in mission historiography, i.e. in postcolonial studies or in the question of whether Christianity within a cultural contact zone is shaped *either* by foreign *or* by indigenous influences. In contrast, JEFFREY COX (Iowa) argued that the powerful but problematical master narratives in mission research need to be overcome. His case study of Punjabi Dalit Hymnody provided an example of the complex dialectical process in which different influences – the tradition of psalm sin-

ging moulded by 16th century Protestant reformer John Calvin and Punjabi metric – were joined. In collaboration between United Presbyterian missionaries and Punjabi Christians, something new and unique was generated. In order to understand the complexity of phenomena like this, one must rethink binary categories and develop more flexible tools of analysis.

Returning to the area of external voices inside Europe, MARTHA FREDERIKS (Utrecht) pointed out how former slaves in the late 18th century added African aspects to the abolitionism discourse in Britain. By focusing on Ottobah Cugoano's 'Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species', she showed how this self-educated first-generation Christian made his voice heard in Europe. In his radical polemic, Cugoano outspokenly rejected both slave trade and slavery itself and assaulted European Christianity for partaking in these general failings, either actively by supporting or passively by condoning. His view on Christianity, however, was not entirely negative, as he differentiated between good and apostate Christians, just as between the Christian religion itself and Christian practice.

The workshop continued with papers on non-European converts coming to Europe motivated by mission institutions. KOKOU AZAMEDE (Lomé) discussed North German Mission's assistants from West Africa who went to Württemberg for academic and missionary training in the late 19th century and came into contact with European society. During this period they gained experiences which enabled them to compare the way in which Christianity was practiced and taught both in Europe and in Africa. In private letters – but not in their official reports – they started to dissociate themselves from the way Christianity was shaped in Europe. Experiences of discrimination by other Christians and theological disagreements resulted in a progressively deeper insight into the European style of Christianity and partly to the rejection of certain aspects (e.g. monogamy). In claiming that it was not necessary to deny their own African cultural identity to become a Christian, the assistants made a contribution to develop a hybrid form of African Christianity after their return back home.

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DAVID KILLINGRAY's (London) paper connected to Azamede's by presenting Africans who came to Great Britain in order to be trained in Mission seminaries. Giving a broad overview, Killingray showed that the procedure of bringing Africans to Europe was fairly common throughout the 19th century – both in mission societies affiliated with the church and in dissenting ones. This measure reflected a general notion in missionary discourse that the mission fields demanded native agency and that the future indigenous leaders should receive the 'better' education in Britain, secluded from dangerous 'heathen' influences. However, after their return to Africa, these missionary workers had to deal with different difficulties: with the reconciliation of Christianity and their culture, as well as with the missing acceptance by local people who did not want to recognise those 'Black White-men' as real missionaries.

In the last presentation of the conference, ANDREW WALLS (Liverpool) also investigated non-Europeans visiting Britain in the 19th century: Tiyo Soga, a Xhosa, who lived and studied in Scotland from 1846 to 1857, and Lal Behari Dey, a well-educated Indian, who took part in the 1860 Liverpool mission conference as the only indigenous participant and engaged vigorously in discussions there. Both contemplated the European Other and European Christianity: whilst Dey demanded forcefully that „the voice of the indigenous church should be Indian“ and that educational programs should be seen as an essential part of mission work, Soga criticised the „unblushing infidelity“ of a current European Christianity and of a degenerate European civilization, which just thought of „development“, without any Christian content.

Overall, the papers dealt with various aspects important for the conference's main theme, ranging from self-representations of European Christians to anti-Christian invectives and indigenous appropriations and rejections of characteristics of European Christianity. In doing this, they showed that a homogeneous outside perspective on 'Europe' and 'Christianity' did not exist. A close connection between these two concepts could either be pro-

claimed or denied – depending on the particular situation and the specific intentions of the agents involved. Hence, the external perspective has once again demonstrated the complex and ambiguous relationship between Europe and Christianity that necessitates a cautious and differentiated approach.

Conference Overview:

Irene Dingel (Mainz) – Welcome

Judith Becker (Mainz)/Brian Stanley (Edinburgh) – Introduction

Judith Becker (Mainz) – What was European about Christianity? Early 19th-century missionaries’

Perceptions

Werner Ustorf (Birmingham) – Affinities and Differences: Ecumenical Perspectives on European Christianity from the 1890s to the 1930s

Rebecca Catto (Lancaster) – Missionary evaluations of European Christianity and secularism

Public Lecture

Fidon Mwombeki (Wuppertal) – Mission in Postcolonial Times: Views of an African Christian Missionary in Germany

Emily Manktelow (Exeter) – Mission Deviance and Indigenous Scrutiny in the South Seas Mission:

Inverting the Imperial Eye

Sebastian Kim (York) – ‘Pyŏngin pakhae’ (persecution of Catholic Christianity; 1866–1873) and western imperial advancement in Korea

R.G. Tiedemann (Croydon) – Changing Chinese Perspectives on Western Christianity during the Transition from Culturalism to Nationalism

Thoralf Klein (Leicestershire) – The Missionary as Devil. Anti-missionary Demonology in China, 1860–1930

Jeffrey Cox (Iowa) – Transcending the Western/Indigenous Binary: Punjabi Dalit Hymnody

Martha Frederiks (Utrecht) – Eighteenth century African abolitionist voices in Britain: Ot-

tobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano’s assessments of ‘European’ Christianity

Kokou Azamede (Lomé) – What were the reactions of African converts to Christianity, particularly of those who visited Europe? The case of North German Mission’s assistants in West Africa

David Killingray (London) – Godly examples and agents: training African missionary workers in British institutions in the 19th century

Andrew Walls (Liverpool) – Distinguished Visitors: Tiyo Soga and Lal Behari Dey in Britain and at home

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