

Veränderte Landkarten

Auf dem Weg zu einer polyzentrischen Geschichte
des Weltchristentums

Festschrift für Klaus Koschorke zum 65. Geburtstag

Herausgegeben von
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Umschlagsbild: Eine Reproduktion des Behaim'schen Globus, entnommen aus einer französischen Enzyklopädie des 19. Jahrhunderts
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Im Jahr 1492 stellte der Nürnberger Kartograf und Entdeckungsreisende Martin Behaim den ältesten heute noch erhaltenen Globus fertig. Er repräsentiert das geografische Wissen seiner Zeit und zeigt Europa, die Umrisse Afrikas sowie die damals bekannten Regionen Asiens. Unglücklicherweise fehlt auf seinem ‚Erdapfel‘ das in demselben Jahr von Christoph Kolumbus ‚entdeckte‘ Amerika. Es dauerte Dekaden, bis sich die Landkarte im Kopf den veränderten Realitäten angepasst hatte.

Klaus Koschorke nimmt dies in seinem Aufsatz „Veränderte Landkarten der globalen Christentumsgeschichte“ (2009) zum Ausgangspunkt, um auf die Notwendigkeit neuer Karten der Geschichte des Weltchristentums hinzuweisen.

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Inhalt

Vorwort	IX
Einleitung: Veränderte Landkarten und polyzentrische Strukturen der Christentumsgeschichte – Zum akademischen Wirken Klaus Koschorkes und dem Programm der Festschrift CIPRIAN BURLACIOIU / ADRIAN HERMANN	XI
Wurzeln und Wegmarken MARTIN KOSCHORKE	XLIX
Verzeichnis der Schriften von Klaus Koschorke	LII

I. Antike / Frühmittelalter

1. Frühjüdische und frühchristliche Mystik? Kritische Anmerkungen zu einer populären Strömung in der gegenwärtigen Gnosis-Forschung ENNO EDZARD POPKES	1
2. Polyzentrismus als Merkmal der frühen Christentumsgeschichte ADOLF MARTIN RITTER	15
3. Teilung der Erde. Hippolyt und die Entdeckung des Raumes in der Christentumsgeschichte MARTIN WALLRAFF	27
4. „..., damit so der Frieden der Kirche bewahrt und der Name Gottes gepriesen werden.“ Visitation als Instrument kirchlicher Reorganisation. Die Reise des Mar Aba CLAUDIA RAMMELT	39

II. Neuzeit / Moderne

5. Das afrikanische Vermächtnis des Christentums in Brasilien JOHANNES MEIER	55
6. Einige Merkmale der spanischen Evangelisation der Philippinen MARIANO DELGADO	71

7.	Konstruktion des Anderen. Zum Bild der rumänischen Orthodoxie in Siebenbürgen bei Johannes Honterus (1542/1547) und Johannes Tröster (1666) ANDREAS MÜLLER	85
8.	Mar Thoma: eine indische Stimme der syrischen Thomaschristenheit in der Interaktion mit deutschen und niederländischen Protestanten MARTIN TAMCKE	95
9.	“How small a part of the world”: An 18th-Century Literary Topography of World Christianity in Daniel Defoe’s <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> Trilogy RICHARD FOX YOUNG	111
10.	Historismus, Vorsehungsglaube und Ethnozentriismuskritik. Herders frühe Geschichtsphilosophie JAN ROHLS	125
11.	Transregional Contacts Between Independent Catholic Churches in Asia Around 1900: The Case of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and the Independent Catholics of Ceylon ADRIAN HERMANN	139
12.	Women in Mission and Media in English-Speaking West Africa, c. 1890–1930. A Tentative Outline of Developments and Trajectories EMILY PHUTI MOGASE / FRIEDER LUDWIG	151
13.	„Japanese women and the problems of the present day“ – ein Blick von Umeko Tsuda auf das „Ideal of womenhood“ von vor 100 Jahren CHRISTOPH BURGER	161
14.	The Role of the Religious and Secular Black Press in the Forging of the Transatlantic Black Community at the Turn of the 20th Century CIPRIAN BURLACIOIU	169
15.	The Southern Shift of Christianity PAUL GIFFORD	189
16.	Wandlung und Polyzentrismus im Lutherischen Weltbund um 1970 JENS H. SCHJØRRING	207
17.	Political Celibacy. 1983 as a Turning Point in the Roman Catholic Church for Priests-Politicians ARMANDO LAMPE	223

III. Systematische und theoretische Perspektiven

18.	„Polyzentrik des Christentums“ und das Projekt einer Ethnologie des Christentums. Ein Dialogangebot PETER J. BRÄUNLEIN	243
19.	Rethinking Polycentric Structures in the Postcolonial Church: Dangers of “Drone Missiology” or Afghanization of Christianity TEOTONIO R. DE SOUZA	267
20.	„Darkness has hit Africa at noon“ – eine Würdigung von Ogbu Kalus Choreographie afrikanischer Christentumsgeschichte ANDREAS HEUSER	275
21.	Transkulturelle Perspektiven auf polyzentrische Strukturen KLAUS HOCK	295
22.	World Christianity on the Scales ELIZABETH KOEPPING	315
23.	Pietismus in China? Anmerkungen zum typologischen Pietismusbegriff HARTMUT LEHMANN	331
24.	Interkulturelle Theologie – Systematische Theologie – Theologische Ethik. Überlegungen zu ihrem spannungsreichen Verhältnis WOLFGANG LIENEMANN	339
25.	Theologische Ausbildung im Horizont der Weltchristenheit illustriert am Beispiel von Letty Mandeville Russell (1929–2007) CHRISTINE LIENEMANN-PERRIN	369
26.	40 Jahre CEHILA: Von der Befreiung der Armen zum Phänomen der Religion. Anmerkungen aus Lateinamerika zur Außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte ROLAND SPLIESGART	385
27.	Mission Studies and Historical Research: Past Trends and Future Trajectories BRIAN STANLEY	403
	Autorenverzeichnis	415

Rethinking Polycentric Structures in the Postcolonial Church: Dangers of “Drone Missiology” or Afghanization of Christianity

TEOTONIO R. DE SOUZA

1. Some introductory remarks

In his English version of “Veränderte Landkarten der globalen Christentumsgeschichte” (2009), Klaus Koschorke rightly pointed to the persistent trend in the western Church historiography (referring in particular to German Protestant academic institutions) to treat Church History as History of Christianity in Europe.¹ He avoids the designation of euro-centric, but admits that this tendency, shared in different proportion by the Protestant and the Catholic authors, is not entirely an unintentional or unconscious exercise. Koschorke concludes that we urgently need “an ecumenically oriented Church History, which reflects both the confessional and the geographic-cultural plurality of world Christianity”.²

Klaus Koschorke is well aware of many recent, and not so recent attempts, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, to promote a changed perception of the history of Christianity in Asia and in Africa. He points to efforts of the Church History Association of India (CHAI), particularly since 1968, with its focus upon the pioneers of indigenous Christianity, rather than on the missionary protagonists, and seeking to integrate the history of Christianity as an integral part of India’s national and social history.

Koschorke also points to similar efforts of the Comisión de Estudios de Historia de la Iglesia Latinoamericana (CEHILA) since the early 1980s, and to the founding of the History Group of EATWOT, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. I was personally privileged to collaborate actively in these three aforementioned groups, participating in their activities on the three continents, covering Mexico, Nairobi, Mumbai, Changmai/Bangkok, Mumbai and Manila, resulting in my modest contribution to a new historiographical orientation.³

1 Cf. K. KOSCHORKE, “Changing maps of the history of global Christianity”, in: K. KUNTER/J.H. SCHJØRRING (Eds.), *Europäisches und Globales Christentum / European and Global Christianity: Herausforderungen und Transformationen im 20. Jahrhundert / Challenges and Transformations in the 20th Century* (Göttingen, 2011, p. 276–293). Published in German as K. KOSCHORKE, “Veränderte Landkarten der globalen Christentumsgeschichte” (*Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 22/1, 2009, p. 187–210).

2 Ibid., p. 276.

3 T.R. DE SOUZA, “Spiritual Conquest of the East: A Critique of the Church Historiography of Portuguese Asia” (*Indian Church History Review* 19/1, 1985, p. 10–24); ID., “A conquista espiritual do Oriente: Nota crítica sobre a historiografia da Igreja na Ásia Portuguesa”, in: J. BEOZZO (Ed.), *Para uma história da Igreja na América Latina* (Petrópolis 1986, p. 123–135); ID., “The Afro-Asian Church in the Portuguese Estado da Índia”, in: O.U. KALU (Ed.), *African Church Historiography: An Ecumenical*

In this brief essay I shall obviously draw from my reflections, which I shared over the past three decades and to which I have provided some bibliographical references. It is clear from them that I had several opportunities to share my views beyond the Anglo-Saxon world, and some of them in events organized by Klaus Koschorke himself as Munich-Freising Conferences.

It is important that we do not get misled by words. We also need clarity of the concepts involved. Koschorke's emphasis on "polycentric structures" requires to be discussed and analysed critically to sort out its geographic components and its political-cultural implications, in order to be clear where the priorities lie. Without such exercise we will run the risk of hiding behind the ambiguity of words and concepts. My gut feelings make me believe that "polycentric structures" is just what the West needs in the postcolonial era to replace the control it has lost with decolonization.

2. *Edinburgh Conference, Vatican II and Dictates of Financial Capitalism*

Koschorke makes a very important point by laying emphasis upon the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910 as birth hour and starting point of the modern ecumenical movement in the Western world. He draws a parallel with the Second Vatican Council 50 years later. What he does not say and what needs to be said loud and clear is that the Edinburgh Conference is to be viewed as a prelude of the birth of a new phase of world capitalism, namely the financial capitalism. A deeper study of the participation of the American churches in the Conference could confirm this reading.

The First World War was part of the strategy of the financial capitalism to dismantle the colonial empires. It was not fully successful, but it laid the principle of self-determination of nations by giving to the League of Nations the mandate of preparing most colonies of England and France for political autonomy. There may have been little love lost for those colonies, as the secret Sykes-Picot agreement would confirm, but the main idea was to break open the world markets to the financial capital. The ecumenical dialogue initiated by the Edinburgh Conference was a religious anticipation of the new political trend, which would be completed following World War II.

Perspective (Bern: 1988, p. 56–76); ID., "Algumas faces de Cristo na Ásia" (*Concilium* 246, 1993, p. 173–180); ID., "The Indian Christians of St. Thomas and the Portuguese Padroado: Rape after a century-long courtship (1498–1599)", in: K. KOSCHORKE (Ed.), *Christen und Gewürze: Konfrontation und Interaktion kolonialer und indigener Christentumsvarianten* (München 1997, p. 31–42); ID., "The Council of Trent (1545–1563): Its reception in Portuguese India", in: K. KOSCHORKE (Ed.), *Transkontinentale Beziehungen in der Geschichte des Außereuropäischen Christentums/ Transcontinental Links in the History of Non-Western Christianity* (Wiesbaden 2002, p. 189–201); ID., "D. José da Costa Nunes – A Patriarch who cared for more than souls: A case of caesaro-papism in Portuguese India, 1942–1953", in: U. VAN DER HEYDEN/H. STOECKER (Eds.), *Mission und Macht im Wandel politischer Orientierungen: Europäische Missionsgesellschaften in politischen Spannungsfeldern in Afrika und Asien zwischen 1800 und 1945* (München 2005, p. 243–256); ID., "O Padroado português do Oriente visto da Índia" (*Revista de Ciência das Religiões* 13/14, 2008, p. 413–430); ID., "The Economic and Racial Implications of the Globalization of Knowledge by the Catholic Missionaries in Portuguese India, 16th–18th Centuries", in: U. VAN DER HEYDEN/A. FELDTKELLER, (Eds.), *Missionsgeschichte als Geschichte der Globalisierung von Wissen* (Stuttgart 2012, p. 381–388); ID., "From Christianization of Karma to Luso-Tropicalism and Lusosphere" (*SEMINAR*, Delhi, 2012, p. 23–27).

The Second Vatican Council is a Catholic variant of the Edinburgh Conference, but it does not anticipate. It follows the process of decolonization, reflecting the worry of the Western Catholic Church about the consequences of this decolonization and seeking ways to dissociate in the minds of the Asian and African political leaders the close linkage of the Church with the colonial exploiters. The Second Vatican Council does this very cleverly by recovering the concept of Local Churches to replace the concept of Mission Churches as a return to the pre-colonial origins of the Church.

We certainly do not need polycentric structures for extending Church support to new versions of slavery in the globalized world in which polycentric structures might work as multipolar command centres, without any corresponding respect for polycentric cultural and mental structures of the decolonized peoples.

Contrarily, we may be near to witnessing postcolonial global missionary structures in which the white mission commands in the former third world are replaced by what could be termed “drone missiology” bases of the 21st century, equipped with advanced forms of management and economic control, based in the geographically distant centres of power.

It would be a scenario of “Afghanization” of global Christianity, in which any discordant discourse, or any challenging praxis, including obviously the non-European cultural “aberrations”, could come under the screening radars of the American Home Security and be shot out of existence from the Korschorkian global map with collaboration of the European NATO allies, to ensure the protection of Christian values as integrated in the western culture, and presented as universal.

Samuel Huntington’s vision of the clash of civilizations is the more likely outcome of the globalization process initiated by the Iberian Discoveries and the colonialism that fed the world market that sustained the western Industrial Revolution.⁴ If the past is to serve as any guide, including the past five centuries of the missionary expansion, only a strong faith in God that is not a mentor or co-planner of the western missionary strategies, may permit the non-western world to believe in a new Church dispensation with recognition of their cultural traditions and values, including their rights to safeguard their God-given material resources.

3. *The Indian Observatory of Missionary Politics*

An international conference, gathering thirty scholars from various Christian denominations, nationalities and continents, debated “Christianity in History: Encounters, Engagements and Experiences” during three days (2nd–4th February 2011).⁵ It was organized at the Centre of Historical Studies of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi. It may be regarded as a positive expression of the secular approach that is loudly touted in India, but not always so successfully practiced.

One main objective of this conference was to help developing a historiography that could be liberated from the near-monopolistic domain of a few ‘religious’ and western experts who focused largely on the origin and nature of mission societies from their metro-

4 S.P. HUNTINGTON, “The clash of civilizations?” (*Foreign Affairs* 72/3, 1993, p. 22–49).

5 <http://apostarnahistoria.blogspot.pt/2011/01/christianity-in-history-encounters.html> (archived at: <http://www.webcitation.org/6FsSZLIkK>, 14.04.2013).

politan countries, the personnel that were involved, the numbers that were converted, and how much charity was exercised or hunger relieved.

My keynote address to this Conference was entitled “Christianity in Asia and its Historiography in the Postcolonial Context: A Review and Challenges”. It took into account the expressed objectives of the conference and focused on the postcolonial context, risking obviously the displeasure of some western participants and their accusations of simplifying the issues.

I saw no need to be led by the agendas aimed at completing an “unfinished business”, an expression that opens the Introduction to *Missions and Empire* by Norman Etherington,⁶ edited as Companion Series for the *Oxford History of the British Empire*. It seeks to impress upon the international community (aimed particularly at the ex-colonies) and remind us how the missionary sons and daughters of the western colonial powers promoted the spiritual and material welfare of the colonized and converted Asians, helping to break away from the injustices of the local cultures. The general tendency in such historiography is to eschew handling the complexity of the process that bred new forms of injustices that the colonial West exported to Asia under the guise of modernity and civilizing mission.

I chose to remind the audience that empires had not disappeared altogether, and that colonial hangovers persist on both sides of the divide. There is no reason otherwise why the European scholars should find fault with “postcolonial studies” as vague and undefined, but still seek to appropriate them to their advantage. Is it an acquired habit of the orientalist and their purportedly superior models of scientificism, which fail to recognize other forms of knowledge and perception? The washing of guilt feelings often takes the form of resorting to contra-factual history, which affects the ongoing re-evaluations of the Mission History as constructed in the West.

It is curious to note how the above mentioned *Missions and Empire* denounces the aphorisms that popularized the relationship between evangelization and imperial expansion. The frequent use of such aphorisms is attributed to spokesmen of anti-colonial nationalisms. We are told that it hardly corresponded to reality, where the missionaries were more often seen as a nuisance and even barred from interfering with imperial schemes. Then it goes on to uphold *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* by Timothy Yates as a good model of postcolonial historiography of Christian missions, because it studies the Christian Missions in our times as predominantly non-Western, and more importantly, the book contains only five references to imperialism, two references to British, and none to colonialism.⁷

Since the Conference was hosted by Jawaharlal Nehru University, I thought it opportune to recall the advice of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in his *Glimpses of World History*: “Our study of history has shown us that life is often very cruel and callous. To get excited over it, or merely to blame people, is foolish and does not help. It is much more sensible to try to understand the causes of poverty and misery and exploitation, and then try to remove them.”⁸

Referring to Jesus and Christianity in Chapter 31 of the same work, Nehru lamented that despite much similarity in all religions, they are often distorted by intolerant bigots, and served as handmaidens to politics. He expressed his surprise at how the poor and non-

6 N. ETHERINGTON (Ed.), *Missions and Empire* (Companion Series of the *Oxford History of the British Empire*; Oxford 2005), p.1.

7 T. YATES, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 1994).

8 J. NEHRU, *The Glimpses of World History* (New Delhi¹²1997), p. 435.

violent Jesus was preached by loud-voiced followers, with their imperialism and armaments and wars and worship of wealth: the Sermon on the Mount and modern European and American Christianity – how amazingly dissimilar they were!

The organizers of this seminar were also keen to see a renewal of the historiography, so as to make it multi-disciplinary, not confined to the religious sphere. To respond to this wish, I chose to refer to a similar call of Professor Romila Thapar, the emeritus professor of the Centre of Historical Studies (JNU) in her inaugural address to a conference on *Contemporary India: Transitions* held in Lisbon in June 1998, denouncing historical explanations that are monocausal, merely religious. She elaborated:

This kind of historical writing is opposed to that which examines social and economic history, because the latter shows up the poverty or even the inappropriateness of monocausal explanation. Its prominence in the last ten years is largely the result of the rise of political parties that draw support from religious nationalism, [...]. Such political ideologies constantly reiterate communal interpretations of Indian history. These interpretations are in fact distortions of Indian history. They are ideologically limited and intellectually even somewhat illiterate, because history becomes a kind of catechism, in which the questions are known, the answers are known, and there is adherence to just those questions and those answers. No attempt is made to explore intellectually beyond this catechism.⁹

I sought to adopt and adapt in my keynote address that call of Professor Romila Thapar. The historiography of Christianity cannot only hark back to the teachings of Jesus, but needs to examine how those teachings have been interpreted and manipulated along the centuries to serve the interests of dominant political, social and economic elites or other forces. It is obvious that the modern day beneficiaries and sympathizers of that process are likely to resent and disapprove this call.

I wish to recall also D.D. Kosambi, whose life and work were commemorated a couple of years ago throughout India, cherishing his pioneering approach to Indian historiography that moved beyond the writings and textual readings of sources produced by the dominant social classes, and stressed the need of using archeological and ethnographic sources for recapturing and reconstructing the evolution of the material life of the ordinary people.

In his first chapter of *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Kosambi delved on Scope and Method, warning us that

[c]oncentration upon the study of religion, superstition, ritual can lead us very far from history; to neglect their study altogether throws away valuable features of the superstructure that indicates real changes in the basis. [...] The present approach implies a definite theory of history known as dialectical materialism, also called Marxism after its founder. [...] The adoption of Marx's thesis does not mean blind repetition of all his conclusions (and even less, those of the official, party-line Marxists) at all times [...]. We cannot let pass without challenge Marx's statement: "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging (village) societies."¹⁰

Applying this theoretical grid, he continued: "unfortunately, man cannot exist without bread or the equivalent, which is necessary to keep the soul (if he can afford one) in his body." Seeking to reconstruct the nature of class-structure in the Indus valley culture, he suggests that

9 R. THAPAR, "Interpretations of Indian History: Colonial, Nationalist, Post-colonial", in: P.R. DE SOUZA (Ed.), *Contemporary India: Transitions* (New Delhi 2000, p. 25–36).

10 D.D. KOSAMBI, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Reprint, Mumbai 2008), p. 11–12.

every known class division rests, in the final analysis, upon the use of force whereby the surplus produced by one class of people is expropriated by a ruling minority. The need of violence may be reduced to a minimum if the class of producers can see no other way of making a living except under the direction of the upper class. Often, this means the use of religion in order to convince the working class that they must give up the surplus, lest supernatural forces destroy them by mysterious agencies [...]. The instruments of force, namely weapons cannot be hidden in the archeological record, while superstition reveals itself through images or special buildings for religious use.¹¹

K.M. Panikkar, author of *Asia and Western Dominance* (1953) dedicated the last section VII of his book to Christian Missions. His five conclusions tell us that Christianity under the patronage of imperialism failed to attract the Asian mind. This was the experience of every Asian country, whoever be the specific European power involved in its colonial domination. It is still relevant today to listen to his conclusions, because decolonization only changed the flags, and postcolonialism is a much longer process of cultural and mental decolonization still in progress. Many sections of the former missionary clients in the newly independent Asian countries have not yet been weaned from the Old Mother Hubbard, or perhaps just as much as her proverbial dog.

Above mentioned five conclusions by Panikkar spell out that:

The success of the missions need not have been so meager but for certain factors which may be discussed now. In the first place, the missionary brought with him an attitude of moral superiority and a belief in his own exclusive righteousness. The doctrine of the monopoly of truth and revelation is a claim that is alien and unreasonable to the Hindu and Buddhist mind. Secondly, the association of Christian missionary work with aggressive imperialism introduced political complications. National sentiment could not fail to look upon missionary activity as inimical to the country's interests. That diplomatic pressure, extra-territoriality and sometimes support of gunboats had been resorted to in the interests of the foreign missionaries could not be easily forgotten. Thirdly, the sense of European superiority which the missionaries perhaps unconsciously inculcated produced also its reaction. Even during the days of unchallenged European political supremacy no Asian people accepted the cultural superiority of the West. The educational activities of the missionaries stressing the glories of European culture only led to the identification of the work of the missions with Western cultural aggression. Fourthly, the wide variety of Christian sects, each proclaiming the errors of others, handicapped missionary work. Finally, the growth of unbelief in Europe in the nineteenth century and the crisis in European civilization, following the Great War of 1914–18, and the October Revolution, broke whatever spell the different sects of Christianity had among certain classes of Asians. With the disappearance of European dominance Christianity assumed its natural position as one of the religions of Asia and the missionaries ceased to have any special or privileged position.¹²

Once some young American teachers from Ewing College and the Agricultural Institute of Allahabad, worried about the future of the Church in independent India, approached Gandhiji to sound his feelings. They asked: "What is the place of Christian missions in the new India that is being built up today? What can they do to help in this great task?" Gandhiji replied:

Up till now they have come as teachers and preachers with queer notions about India and India's great religions. We have been described as a nation of superstitious heathens, knowing nothing, denying God. [...] My personal view, therefore, is that, if you feel that India has a message to give to the world, that India's religions too are true, though like all religions imperfect for having percolated through

11 Ibid., p. 62.

12 K.M. PANIKKAR, *Asia and Western Dominance*, with a new Preface by Claude Alvares and T.R. de Souza (Reprint, Kualalumpur, 1993), p. 297.

imperfect human agency, and you come as fellow-helpers and fellow-seekers, there is a place for you here. But if you come as preachers of the 'true Gospel' to a people who are wandering in darkness, so far as I am concerned you can have no place. You may impose yourselves upon us.¹³

Very revealing is also the book of the Indian parliamentarian and journalist Arun Shourie, who was invited by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India to share his Hindu perception of Christian missionaries in India on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of CBCI, at a meeting convened in Pune in January 1994. The participants thanked in acknowledgement of the talk, which they declared to be scholarly and challenging. Shourie declined to represent all Hindus, but considered his views personal, though reflecting what he absorbed from Indian leaders, such as Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Ramakrishna Paramanahansa, Ramana Maharishi, Gandhiji and Sardar Panikkar. Shourie admits positive consequences of the right and wrong approaches of the Christian missionaries. Hindu leaders took up social reform, and men like Vinoba Bhave were inspired by the missionary care of the sick and the downtrodden, though often the famines and poverty were used as unfair instruments for conversion.¹⁴

4. *Connected Histories of Christianity in the World*

To conclude, the appeal for a comparative history of Christianity on a global map, needs rather to be taken up as a project of developing "connected" histories that are not dominated by the history of European expansion and to which colonial histories are added as frills, but rather as suggested by the Goa-born doyen of Indian history, D.D. Kosambi, whom we cited earlier.

Advising the Indian historians, Kosambi suggested that they should depart from the European tradition, for whom the history of other countries and their native peoples were just episodes in their national histories. His challenge to the Indian historians was to reconstruct a history of India without episodes, but as a history of successive developments in the means and relations of production.¹⁵

It is the evolution of technologies for the exploration of resources that have connected peoples near and far down the ages since the neolithic revolution in pre-historic times. Religions served as a powerful psychological support in difficult times, as a moderating element in conflict situations, or as a base of confidence for successful commerce and trade.

In Asia, the globalization of trade since late medieval and early modern times was sustained by religious networks of Hindu-Buddhism, Islam and Christianity successively. Instead of the polycentric structures for global Christianity, as suggested by Klaus Koschorke, I would consider more in keeping with the spirit of the Gospels in their original form and reflecting varying perceptions of different communities of early believers, a balanced network of multipolar structures, if we cannot ever do without structures.

13 M.K. GANDHI, *Christian Missions: Their Place in India* (Ahmedabad 1941), p. 287–289.

14 A. SHOURIE, *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* (New Delhi 1994).

15 KOSAMBI, *Introduction*, p. xii.