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SPECIAL ISSUE: The “Munich School of World Christianity”

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Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures: A Special Issue on the “Munich School of World Christianity”
Adrian Hermann, Ciprian Burlacioiu, and Peter C. Phan, eds.

A Note on the “Munich School of World Christianity” and the Special Issue
DAVID D. DANIELS III
1

ARTICLES

Introduction: Klaus Koschorke and the “Munich School” Perspective on the History of World Christianity
ADRIAN HERMANN AND CIPIRAN BURLACIOIU
4

Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity
KLAUS KOSCHORKE
28

A Response to Klaus Koschorke’s “Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity”
DAVID D. DANIELS III
57
Current Debates About the Approach of the “Munich School” and Further Perspectives on the Interdisciplinary Study of the History of World Christianity
ADRIAN HERMANN AND CIPRIAN BURLACIOIU
63

Expansion Without Western Missionary Agency and Constructing Confessional Identities: The African Orthodox Church Between the United States, South Africa, and East Africa (1921–1940)
CIPRIAN BURLACIOIU
82

Publicizing Independence: The Filipino Ilustrado Isabelo de los Reyes and the “Iglesia Filipina Independiente” in a Colonial Public Sphere
ADRIAN HERMANN
99

Mona Hensman: An Indian Woman at the World Missionary Conference in Tambaram (1938)
FRIEDER LUDWIG
123

Protestant German Immigrants in Brazil and the Importance of Historical Anthropology for the Study of World Christianity
ROLAND SPLIESGART
148

Discrimination and Integration of the Dalits in Early Modern South Indian Missions: The Historical Origins of a Major Challenge for Today’s Christians
PAOLO ARANHA
168

World Christianities: Transcontinental Connections
PETER C. PHAN
205
A Note on the “Munich School of World Christianity” and the Special Issue

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Writing the history of global Christianity implies a future where historical enterprise wrestles with the reality of world Christianity critically and imaginatively. Some scholars crunch the numbers connected with the demographics of world Christianity. Others plot out the emergence and reinvention of Christianity on the various continents, especially of the global South. Still others situate major Christian traditions such as global Pentecostalism within the context of the world Christianity movement.

This issue of the *Journal of World Christianity* introduces our readership to the scholarly approach of Klaus Koschorke, professor emeritus of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany, and others associated with this approach. These scholars linked to the project of the Munich School of World Christianity have opted to go in another direction than the ones noted above. They interrelate the mini-narratives and the grand narratives in a new way. They excavate the linkages between Christian communities of different continents rather than across the same continent. They are intrigued by the translocal networks that crisscross the Indian Ocean rim of Asia and Africa, the Pacific rim of Asia and South America, and the South Atlantic rim of Africa and South America. These translocal networks are constituted by linkages where people, theological ideas, and Christian practices are exchanged. These links uncover a fascinating world of Christian interaction outside of the missionary gaze. Christians connect through networks across the global South, promoting “indigenous” agency.
The Munich School under the leadership of Klaus Koschorke has for nearly twenty years attracted scholars from around the world to its academic conferences in Freising, near Munich, where these linkages have been explored. They have participated in the redrawing of the map of world Christianity, which is dotted with multiple centers of Christian vitality and growth.

In this issue of the Journal of World Christianity, edited by Adrian Hermann, Ciprian Burlacioiu, and Peter C. Phan, the reader will find articles that present the scholarly work of the Munich School in various forms. Hermann and Burlacioiu characterize and analyze the scholarship of the Munich School in two co-authored articles. The reader will have the opportunity to read a retrospective article by Koschorke where he frames his historical project, to which I have written a response.

In an article on the African Orthodox Church, Burlacioiu drafts a mini-narrative on this denomination that was founded in New York City during the year 1921 by an Afro-Caribbean immigrant from Antigua: Alexander McGuire. McGuire would be consecrated to the bishopric by a French immigrant, Joseph René Vilatte, who himself had been consecrated in Asia by a Syriac Church bishop, Antonio Francisco Xavier Alvares, who resided in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Through personnel, the African Orthodox Church would emerge in other parts of the United States as well as the Caribbean and Canada. Through newspapers it would reach Africa, resulting in congregations being opened in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, and Ghana.

In an article on the Philippine Independent Church, a Catholic denomination, Hermann narrates the story of the struggle of this church to find a public voice through its periodicals and a place within the neocolonialism of the United States and the international network of independent Catholic movements in Europe, North America, and Asia.

Frieder Ludwig writes about Mona Hensman, a delegate to the famous World Missionary Conference of Tambaram (India) in 1938. The conference included delegates from other countries in Asia besides India as well as from Africa and Europe. Educated in India and England, Hensman became a leader in the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), including service as the first World YWCA vice president of Asian Indian descent. Ludwig lodges Hensman’s story within the context of the local YWCA in Madras, India, which had an international membership of Asian Indians, Ceylonese (Sri Lankans), British, Americans, Swedes, and Australians along with one Dane, one Persian, one German, and one Canadian.

Roland Spliesgart introduces to the reader the German Protestant diaspora in Brazil in the nineteenth century. This mini-narrative reflects a North-South exchange between Germany and Brazil along with an exchange between France
and Brazil. Crucial to his thesis is the role of the newly invented local culture in the “Brazilianization” of German Protestants.

Paolo Aranha, in his article, debates the conceptual validity of employing the term *Dalit* to any pre-twentieth-century peoples in India. He unravels the various population groups within the Dalits after the independence of colonial India: “Backward Castes,” “Scheduled Castes,” “Scheduled Tribes.” Aranha sneaks into the article a mini-narrative on Africans in India: Siddi communities, military African “slaves.” He notes that these Christians respectively embrace other distinct features.

Peter Phan’s reflections on this special issue and the importance of trans-continental connections for a history of world Christianity conclude this issue presenting the historical project of the Munich School of World Christianity.