African Identities
and World Christianity
in the Twentieth Century
Proceedings of the Third International
Munich-Freising Conference
on the History of Christianity
in the Non-Western World (September 15–17, 2004)

Edited by Klaus Koschorke
in cooperation with Jens Holger Schjørring

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This volume comprises the proceedings of the Third International Interdisciplinary Conference on the History of Christianity in Asia, Africa and Latin America, which took place at Freising, near Munich, from September 15–17, 2004. The theme this time was “African Identities and World Christianity in the 20th Century”. This conference came about through two initiatives. The first is the series of Munich-Freising Conferences, organised by the Chair of Church History I at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Munich, which aim at an integrated perception of the history of Christianity in the Non-Western World. The second is the project initiated by Jens Holger Schjørring on “Changing Relationships between Churches in Africa and Europe in the 20th Century”. A preparatory meeting was held in Århus (September 18–20, 2003), a concluding conference took place from October 9–12, 2005 at Tumanini University Makumira (Tanzania) entitled “Church Identity in Times of Political Crisis”. Its proceedings will be published in this series as well. Each of the projects aims to increase cooperation between historians, theologians and ecumenical scholars in Africa and Europe, and to develop global perspectives on the history of Christianity. Responsibility for the planning and editing of this volume lies with Klaus Koschorke.

Munich and Århus,
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KLAUS KOSCHORKE
JENS HOLGER SCHJØRRING
I.

In August 2003 the Kenyan Methodist Samuel Kobia was elected General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. The Lutheran World Federation is led by Ishmail Noko from Zimbabwe and the General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Setri Nyomi, comes from Ghana. So at the beginning of the 21st century the three major Protestant ecumenical institutions are headed by Africans. Today most Anglicans live in Africa, thus turning the former “Church of England” by numerical majority into an African Church. Great was the disappointment among many Roman Catholics in Nigeria and South Africa that after the death of John Paul II in April 2005 no African was elected his successor – despite the importance of Catholic Christianity on the continent. The current General Secretary of the United Nations Organisation, Kofi Annan from Ghana, is a Christian, as is his African predecessor, Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992-1997), who as a member of the Coptic Church of Egypt belongs to one of the oldest Churches of the world.

These are but a few examples of the growing importance of Africa in the context of World Christianity. The map of global Christianity continues to undergo dramatic changes, and on this map Africa comes to the fore. Yet the examples cited above are in one sense unrepresentative for the explosive growth of Christianity in Africa during the 20th century took place mainly outside the “historic” churches that originated from Western missions and European mother Churches. In many areas the former “mainline Churches” are stagnating or continuously shrinking while independent Christian groups are spreading like wildfire. The growing weight of African Christianity can therefore be observed not only within the various global confessional families such as Anglicans, Lutherans or Roman Catholics. Many exciting developments are taking place outside the traditional ecumenical networks. Perhaps this is why so little notice is taken of them even by professional ecumenical observers in the Christian world beyond Africa. A much broader approach is required, therefore, and one which is more in tune with the lived African experience, in order to do justice to the multifaceted reality of historical and contemporary African Christianity.

That there is a “shift of centres” of World Christianity from North to South is repeated in current ecumenical debates like a mantra, evoking a picture of the growing polycentric structure of World Christianity. Such a perspective is quite correct. However, it must not be restricted to the most recent – often labelled postcolonial or postmissionary – period after World War II, in which African churches were emancipated from European control, and increasingly presented themselves as independent actors on the Christian world stage. Christianity has been polycentric from its very beginnings, and Africa early emerged as one hub. This is the case not only for the ancient churches of Ethiopia and Egypt, which also played a prominent role in the more recent development of African Christianity. It also ap-
plies to the varied forms of African Christianity which resulted from the encounter between the successive waves of missionary movements and African culture in modern times. As early as the 16th and 17th centuries, Christian Congolese who had been transported to the New World as slaves acted as agents of Christianisation among their compatriots there. On the other hand, the establishing of African Protestantism in West African Sierra Leone at the turn of the 19th century was not initiated by or related primarily to the missionary activity of British evangelicals and German Pietists. It was rather the outcome of African-American returnees, determined to establish a Christian colony in Freetown, with “the Bible as the charter of liberty in their hand” (A. Hastings). – Ethiopia is not only the one African country which was never (apart from a brief intermezzo in the 1930s) under colonial rule. It is also a land with a very particular and deeply-rooted Christian tradition. This enabled it to serve as a symbol both of ecclesiastical and political independence in the 19th and 20th centuries, with an almost magical attraction for freedom-seeking Christians not only in West and South Africa but also in much of the Caribbean. In Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, there is even today scarcely a lamppost which is not decorated with the green, yellow and red colours of Ethiopia. – Nigeria-born A.J. Crowther (c. 1806-1891), a former slave who in 1864 became the first black Bishop of the Anglican church, did not just give hope for ecclesial and social advancement to the western-educated elites of West Africa. He also fuelled debates among Asian Christians in India and Sri Lanka at the end of 19th century who pointed to his example: “When is India to have her own bishops?” – And the mushrooming African Initiated Churches, which in the 20th century have become an integral aspect of the face of African Christianity, have long spread beyond the shores of Africa. They are currently well-represented in Britain, the European mainland and America, not only among the members of the African diaspora but also among white people, and no longer simply representing African migrant churches in Europe and other parts of the Western world but also starting African initiatives in global Christianity.

II.

“African Identities and World Christianity in the 20th century” was the theme of the Third International and Interdisciplinary Conference on central issues of the History of Christianity in the Non-Western World, which took place in Freising near Munich from 15th-17th September, 2004. The main focus was on the manifold manifestations of African Christianity in the 20th century, the conditions of their formation and dissemination, and on the various ways in which ‘African’ and ‘Christian’ identities were formulated and interacted with each other. The negotiation of the local and the global in the process of forming African churches was discussed, as was the question of the impact of internal African debates and developments on global ecumenical discourses. The participants – speakers and discussants – came from Africa, Scandinavia, Great Britain and Germany. Additional papers were written by some participants after the conference (E. Chitando, A. Hermann, E. Kamphausen and R. Spliesgart), with extended contributions on important issues of the

1 The first Munich-Freising Conference took place in 1997 and the second in 2001. The proceedings have been published by K. Koschorke (Ed.), “Christen und Gewürze”. Konfrontation und Interaktion kolonialer und indigener Christentumsvarianten (StAECG Vol. 1; Göttingen 1998); K. Koschorke (Ed.), Transcontinental Links in the History of Non-Western Christianity (StAECG Vol. 6; Wiesbaden 2002).
Introduction

The conference aimed to present African Christian history as an integral and increasingly important part of the history of World Christianity, while also serving as a platform for dialogue between African and European historians, theologians and ecumenical scholars.

The discussions revolved around various themes: the dynamic of the various African movements and churches (1-3); genesis and development of African theologies (4-6); the Bible and its impact on the making of African Christianity (7-9); African Christians and European missionaries (10-12); interaction with other regions and the perception of Christian Africa outside the continent (13-16).

(1) The opening lecture, given by Oghu Kalu, Chicago/ Nigeria (“A Trail of Ferment in African Christianity”), deals with Ethiopianism, Prophetism and Pentecostalism and thus with the movements which experienced the strongest growth in 20th century Africa. In contrast to earlier approaches, which stressed the differences between these movements and rank-ordered them by historical epoch, Kalu underlines their continuity: “There is a line of continuity through the various phases of revivalism in Africa.” He also emphasises the overall charismatic nature of African Christianity, the result of the successive “cycles of charismatic revivals, which have stamped an increasingly charismatic character on the various groups and Churches”, ultimately dependent on the translation of the Bible into so many languages, enabling African Christians to uncover its “spiritual resources” in a very particular way. A charismatic “trail of ferment” is thereby drawn through the Christian history of the entire continent, weaving itself into the former mission churches as well as newer Pentecostal groups and thereby giving African Christianity an unmistakable identity. “The core argument is that the prophetic movements, revivals and other forms of charismatic religiosity were appropriated by Africans to establish a charismatic spirituality that would define African response to the bible. At once conservative, evangelical, with emphasis on the centrality of the Bible, interpreted without Western intellectual gymnastics but with simplicity and immediacy ... negative about indigenous religions yet emphasizing miracles, visions, dreams and healings”.

(2) Kevin Ward (Leeds/ UK) discusses the issue of “African identities in the historic ‘Mainline Churches’”. One of his central points is that “equally with the African-initiated Churches, in many cases to a much greater degree, the mission Churches are vehicles by which ethnicity is articulated and negotiated”, based on the paradigm of African Anglicanism which proved to be “surprisingly responsive to local culture”. Examples are drawn from the Anglican Church in Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Congo, South Africa and the Sudan. The last two are of particular interest. The Anglican Church in the Sudan only reached an appreciable size during the civil war which began in the 1960s, and evidences the vitality of post-independence African Anglicanism in a context relatively free of English influence. In the rather different context of South Africa, where the ideology and praxis of apartheid was given legitimacy by Christian church leaders, members of the Anglican church such as Trevor Huddleston, Theophilus Hamutumpangelo or Desmond Tutu, were at the forefront of the fight against apartheid. Thus the Anglican Communion in the continent represents manifold variations of the ‘synthesis of local and global’ and varied links between ‘Christian’ and ‘African’ identity.

(3) The relationship between African churches and global Pentecostalism is the subject of Allan Anderson's (Birmingham/ UK) paper (“African Independent Churches and Global Pentecostalism. Historical Connections and Common Identities”). He distinguishes three
different kinds of “African Pentecostalism”: (1) long-established African-initiated and charismatic-influenced churches such as those linked to William Wade Harris or Garrick Braide in the first quarter of the 20th century; (2) “classical Pentecostals” of Western origin which have been operating in Africa since 1907 when the first Afroamerican Pentecostal missionaries arrived in West Africa from the USA; and (3) new Pentecostal and charismatic Churches which have become a widespread phenomenon since the 1970s. Traditional AICs and classical Pentecostals are clearly differentiated and as a rule have no organisational links. At the same time “North American Pentecostalism’s root in African American religion made the transplanting of its central tenets easier to graft in South Africa. Yet the new pentecostal churches of the 70s, despite numerous links to the USA, are in no way replicas of American patterns due to the “many innovations made by these movements” to adapt to the African context. AIC’s make up the majority of Christians in several African countries and, moreover, are “an extremely important component of World Christianity”. Anderson too notes the changes the charismatic churches have engendered in the mission churches. He describes African Pentecostalism as a “polycentric phenomenon that had different beginnings in Africa, just as in other continents”.

(4) Erhard Kamphausen (Hamburg/ Germany) in his paper “African Cry”. Remarks on the genesis of a contextual theology of liberation in Africa”, describes the history of African theologies as a step by step emancipation from the “shackles of occidental theology”. He discusses the ‘Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians’ in Accra/ Ghana 1977, which set out an African liberation theology which it sought to make part of the international theological discourse, and enquires into the origins of this program thus producing a history of African theology in nuce. Kamphausen commences with the transatlantic slave-trade in the 15th and 16th century and the African experience of and reaction to that “Black holocaust”, describing the emergence of the AICs since the end of the 19th century as a form of “religious resistance” against the mission churches controlled by Europeans. He analyses the debates of the 1950s and the 1960s on ‘negritude’ and ‘African Personality’, and on adaptation and inculturation theology, considering their at times tense relationship to the varied sketches of Afroamerican and South African ‘Black Theology’. By the mid 1970s, African Christianity experienced what can be called a ‘shift of paradigm’, after which the concern was less to relate Christian belief to traditional African culture than to confront the challenge posed by the political and economic realities of the continent.

(5) While Kamphausen pursues the development of African theologies to the 1980s, Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué (Hamburg/ Togo) concentrates on theological debate since 1990 (“Troubled but not destroyed. The development of African Theologies and the paradigm of the ‘Theology of reconstruction’”). She discusses the paradigm of the ‘theology of reconstruction’, which reflects the changed situation at the end of the century. Whereas in the initial era of independence, external factors such as slavery, (neo-)colonialism or Western missions could be made responsible for the problems of the continent, it has become increasingely vital to look at internal factors (and the domestic implications of sinful situations such as interethic wars or the legitimisation of oppressive regimes). The Biblical Exodus story – the release of Israel from alien debt slavery in Egypt – could no longer explain away the situation. On the agenda now appeared the theme of ‘Christianity and the reconstruction of Africa’ and the ensuing demands on the Churches and the Christians of the continent. Attention is also paid to the relevant voting in the ‘All African Conference of Churches’ (AACC) in 1997 as well as, by way of example, the work of the central African theologian KaMana.
(6) The presentation of Klaus Hock, Rostock/ Germany – “Appropriated Vibrancy. ‘Immediacy’ as Formative Element in African Theologies” – offers a theological analysis with historical implications. In his description of African theological developments in the last thirty years, he highlights “immediacy”, which Kalu has already cited as a crucial marker of African Christianity: “African theologians try to mediate between the Bible and Africa by synthesizing biblical and African worlds, independently of ‘mediating’ (European) theologies”. They are convinced of a deep-seated “analog between biblical and African world views” – a perspective grounded and expressed both in the belief in spiritual forces as a central element in both traditions and in the “radical continuity” between the Biblical concept and the traditional African understanding of God. God was not only known in Africa before the missionaries came, as the Tanzanian theologian Charles Nyamiti (among others) puts it. African notions of God, according to the Methodist Gabriel Setiloane, also seem much more appropriate than Christian categories – or at least the categories of the missionaries and Western theologians who reduced God to a mere intellectual concept without any relevance to the African context. Various ways of relating the Christian and traditional African concepts of God are discussed, and different approaches to an African understanding of Christ presented.

(7) The centrality of the Bible in African Christianity has been pointed out in many contributions. That it also played a crucial role in establishing new churches is the theme of Adrian Hermann’s (Munich/ Germany) presentation on three independent churches of the 1920s and 1930s in Southern Africa: “The Old Testament and the Formation of African Independent Churches in 1920s’ Malawi”. Clearly the customary practice of polygamy was one of the main factors standing in the way of the missionary message in Africa, which insisted polygamy was not biblically founded. African Christians, however, pointed out that Kings, prophets and other prominent Old Testament figures had more than one wife, indeed that according to Old Testament witness, this marriage form was acceptable to God, an argument which could equally be applied to various other “natives customs, laws and traditions”, scorned by missionaries. It was on such grounds that the Last Church of God and His Christ or the African National Church in Malawi separated from the Presbyterian mission. The dividing line in the conflict between Mission and independent church lay not only in the acceptance of certain traditional African ways of life but also in the normative relevance attributed to the Old Testament. Thus the Bible, translated into many languages and widely distributed by the missionaries, became for African Christians an instrument of emancipation from missionary control.

(8) That the Bible was treasured not only by African Christians, but also by followers of traditional cults, is the theme of the contribution of Georges Razafindrakoto/ Knut Holter (Stavanger, Norway/ Madagascar). It investigates the culture of the Merina from Madagascar where the Bible, the first printed book in the country, had a deep impact on society at large. The authors speak of a process of “gradual democratisation”, which increasingly questioned the church monopoly of interpreting the Bible, local “traditio-practitioners” using the book in rather different ways. The Holy scriptures can be treated as sacred object ("closed" Bible) or they can be understood as a book which is interpreted as a text ("open" Bible). In the first case the Bible is being used more or less as a magical item, for purification, healing or protection, in the second it becomes important for its moral teachings. Whatever the usage, these paradigms show that the Christian Bible deeply influenced Madagascan African Traditional Religions which, on the other hand, showed themselves to be flexible and open to interaction with Christianity, the religion of the majority in Mada-
gascar. This is one more example of the influence of the Bible reaching far beyond the confines of the mission church.

(9) “The 20th century has made the Old Testament an African Book”, asserts Knut Holter, Stavanger/Norway in his contribution: “The first generation of African Old Testament scholars. African concerns and Western influence”. The implications of this thesis in the field of academic research led him to analyze 87 Old Testament dissertations of African authors from 1967 – 2000. They represent a small but important cohort for the reception of the Old Testament in Africa, given their future function as theologians and church leaders. Holter is especially interested in those dissertations using a comparative approach, either taking African experiences to interpret the OT or, vice versa, using the OT as a key to contemporary African concerns and experiences. Both approaches depend on the underlying assumption of cultural and religious analogies between ancient Israel and traditional or even modern Africa. Examples are drawn from cultic events such as sacrifice or the concepts of theophany and cosmology in biblical and African thought. Though most of the dissertations analysed were written in Western institutions, they represent an independent approach to the Old Testament which reflects African social and cultural concerns in the reading of the Bible.

(10) The marginalisation of Africa in the debates of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910 is the theme of Brian Stanley, Cambridge/UK (“Africa through European Christian Eyes. The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910”). In contrast to the “awakening nations” of Asia, with their rich and respected cultural inheritance and great missionary potential, Edinburgh treated Africa as a step-child. No African representatives were invited (whereas 17 Asian delegates took part) and even Western missionaries to Africa were under-represented both as respondents in the preparatory correspondence and as members of the various commissions. The reasons for this cold-shouldering are not obvious, given that Africa had long been the central focus of missionary interest. But African leadership had fallen into grave disrepute in the aftermath of the Niger controversy, and the growth of Ethiopianism – resp. of African-Christian communities outside the missionary network – had not exactly bettered the mood in missionary circles. The marginalisation of Africa is evident not merely in the meagre contribution accorded to it before and at Edinburgh, but also in the varied respect given to non-Christian religions of Asia and Africa. With respect to Asia, strenuous efforts were made to identify positive “points of contact” in order to draw adherents of other faiths towards the full revelation of truth in Christ. In Africa, however, points of contact between traditional beliefs and Christianity were regarded by some as “very few and all perverted”. Hinduism – despite its “moral deficits” – could be recognised as a “religion” (allowing Christianity to be presented as the “Crown of Hinduism”), whereas many missionaries denied that Africans knew religion at all, despite African belief in a “Supreme Being” being acknowledged by missionary observers.

(11) The different respect accorded to Hinduism and African Traditional Religions affected not only the debates at Edinburgh 1910 but is also evident in the then emerging discipline of comparative religion, which still depend on missionary sources and categories. This is the core of the paper of Ezra Chitando (Harare/Zimbabwe): “Missionary Attitudes towards African Traditional Religions and Hinduism. A comparative survey”. Hinduism was accepted into the category of World Religions whereas the traditional religions of Africa were not, a classification which still has its impacts on the discipline and on Christianity. The main Christian churches accept Hinduism as a partner in inter-religious dialogue, but scarcely ever dialogue with African Traditional Religions – at least outside Africa.
Chitando asserts that this differential rating of non-Christian religions in missionary discourse and the academic study of religion is related to the religious categories of the protestant missionary movement, based on the possession of “written texts or sacred writings”. Indian Hinduism passed this test, but the orally transmitted religions of Africa did not. However, both Hinduism and African Traditional Religions experienced a revival through their interaction with the protestant missionary movement, Hinduism since the late 19th century and the Traditional religions of Africa in the post-colonial period. Both movements – which had originally abstained from missionary activities – now send messengers to other places “devoted to the vitality of Hinduism and ATRs in the contemporary period”.

(12) The long-term effects of missionary work in Eritrea are the concern of Ezra Gebremedhin, Uppsala/ Eritrea (“(‘Let there be Light!’. Aspects of the Swedish missionary venture in Eritrea and their implications for political awareness [1866–1962]”). When the first missionaries of the Swedish Evangelical Mission 1866 landed in what is now Eritrea, they regarded it as merely a transit station on the way to the Oromo in the Ethiopian Highlands. Yet they stayed in the area, and from a century of missionary involvement resulted major impulses establishing a consciousness of identity and political awareness in this emerging nation, independent since 1962 – despite missionary efforts to remain apolitical and focused primarily on evangelisation. Yet their activities in the field of education and health care, their linguistic studies and contribution to the establishment of Tigre as a literary language and, in spite of all shortcomings, their sensitivity towards traditional culture were important factors in the formation of an Eritrean ‘grassroot patriotism’. This was biblically rooted in hymns and other symbols of Eritrean national consciousness among Christians. The model of a ‘dialectic of Christianisation’ developed (though not cited here) by the historian Horst Gründer with respect to the struggle for freedom by the black African elite can equally be usefully applied to Eritrea. In all innocence, European missionaries, by encouraging cultural awareness and an egalitarian spirit, affected, or effected, the foundation of a national independence movement.

(13) The varied views of Christian Africa in the academic discourse of 20th century Protestant Germany is the subject for Hartmut Lehmann, Göttingen/ Germany (“Twentieth-Century German Protestant Views of African Christianity”), accomplished by analysing entries on Africa in successive editions of the leading protestant encyclopaedias. The representation of African Christianity varies widely, leading Lehmann to the conclusion that “there is hardly any continuity. It seems, as if the relevant information about Christianity in Africa had to be invented, or reinvented, for every new edition”. As evidence he takes criteria such as the description of non-Christian religious and social contexts, the presenting of African leaders and initiatives and prognoses on the future of Christianity in Africa: “Not until the 1970s, however, the attempt is made to give due recognition to the autonomy of the independent Christian Churches in Africa and their leaders”. Such variability indicates not only the limited interest of the German academic body in matters ecumenical and African, but also the immense changes in 20th century Christian Africa itself.

(14) African Churches are now firmly anchored in the religious scene of Europa. As Afe Adogame, Edinburgh,UK/ Nigeria, makes clear (“African Instituted Churches in Europe. Continuity and Transformation”), they have long ceased to be restricted to the first generation of African immigrants, spreading across the continent and establishing new branches not only in the UK, but also in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Spain, Ukraine and other European countries. They are moving beyond specific ethnic boundaries in their membership structure and are increasingly attracting local people. At the same time, how-
ever, their function and public role has changed. As far as their relationship with European Christianity is concerned, they often feel obliged to undertake a reverse mission and to engage in “the re-missionization of Christianity to a dead Europe”. For their African constituency they generate new forms of community and solidarity amidst a Europe that is “shaken by failing welfare systems and dwindling economies”. Maintaining traditional forms of belief and former local identity, the AIC’s have nevertheless managed to assimilate notions of the global within the new context of their European host societies.

(15) Interaction between Africa and Latin America is the theme of Roland Spiesgart, Munich/Germany (“Africans on both sides of the Atlantic. Alterity as identity”). The transatlantic slave trade was an important factor in the relationship between the two areas until the 19th century. Millions of Africans were transported to the New World in the colonial era, and at least in Brazil they had to adopt the Catholicism of their new owners. Underground, however, African cults lived on and merged into Candomblé which – with the end of slavery and the 1891 proclamation of religious freedom in the Brazilian republic – eventually attained a remarkable public presence. On the other hand, among the returning waves of former slaves into West Africa from the 1830s were Afro-Brazilians remigrants who now stressed their Catholic identity. Different from Protestant returnees to Sierra Leone, they were not moved by any sense of religious calling. Yet even without ordained leaders, the Afro-Brazilians maintained an intense religious life with splendid processions and services, describing themselves, in intentional contrast to local traditionalists and European missionaries, as “Brazilian Catholics”, a mode which the author describes as “double religiosity”.

(16) Klaus Koschorke, Munich/Germany (“History of Christianity in Africa and Asia in comparative perspective”), stresses the need for comparative research in order to develop an integrated understanding of the history of Christianity in the non-Western world. While for many years African Christian history used to be regarded just as an appendix to Western mission history, and currently sometimes is in danger of losing overall perspective amid a multitude of regional and local topics, it is essential to identify central themes which through comparative analysis can present a clearer picture of related developments in different contexts. Focussing on the relationship between African and Asian Christian history, the paper discusses three paradigms: (a) Pre-colonial Christianity: African Ethiopia and the Indian St. Thomas Christians in the debates of indigenous Christian elites in 19th and 20th century Africa and Asia; (b) Early Church independency: The Rise of indigenous Christian movements in Africa and Asia at the turn of 19th and 20th century; (c) The beginnings of the ecumenical movement in Asia and Africa. Christian patriotism and the protest against Western “sectarianism”.

III.

In 1492 the Nuremberg cartographer and explorer Martin Behaim constructed the oldest extant globe. It represented the geographical knowledge of his time and showed Europe, the outline of Africa and the then known parts of Asia. Unfortunately, America – “discovered” in the same year 1492 by Christoph Colombus – was totally absent. Responsible was not only the lack of distance in time to the Genoan’s journey. Columbus himself, looking for an alternative – Western – route to Asia as it had been described by Marco Polo, did not realise the significance of his discovery during his lifetime. He would still have seen the world