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"THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS"

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN MISSION SCHOOLS FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE AFRICAN ELITE, USING THE EXAMPLE OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN THE CONGO BASIN

Tinko Weibezahl

Around 1960, a time when many African countries were trying to gain independence, the world for the first time took notice of a generation of African politicians who stepped out of the shadow of colonialism to conceive and set up post-colonial societies. Men like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba, Leopold Senghor and Robert Mugabe were at first viewed by the colonial powers as troublemakers and as a threat to the carefully-maintained status quo. Later on they became heroes in the eyes of many Africans – and also of many Europeans and Americans – precisely because some of them, like Lumumba, gave their lives to the fight. Others, like Mugabe, in later years gave up their initial idealism in order to espouse inhumane and repressive policies. But despite all their differences in terms of nationalities and ideologies, they all had one thing in common: all of them without exception were educated in Christian mission schools.[1]

For European missionaries in Africa, schools were right from the start their best opportunity of gaining and maintaining access to the people. The missionaries' motives were as varied as their denominational backgrounds. It is the nature of missions to use schools as a means of evangelizing, and by spreading their education and religion they succeeded –

1 | Cf. Stefan Mair, "Ausbreitung des Kolonialismus," *Informationen zur politischen Bildung*, vol. 264, http://bpb.de/0457447087406224317164555950156 2 (accessed May 17, 2011).

whether intentionally or not – in alienating Africans from their traditional way of life. Andreas Eckert, Professor of African History at Humboldt University in Berlin, points to the phenomenon which resulted from mission education when describing this generation of African politicians: "It is remarkable how strictly the new African elite adhered to modern European values and colonial structures", and even after gaining their countries' independence they established "close political, economic, cultural and even military ties to the former colonial powers".[2] By giving them a European-style education and the ensuing ability to negotiate on equal terms with colonial representatives, the Christian missions ended up setting the pace for African emancipation, something which was certainly not the intention of their founders.

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Today more than ever, the enormous effect that Christian missionary activity has had on the whole African continent, but particularly on Sub-Saharan Africa, is clear for all to see. The present-day ratio of Christians is particularly high in those areas where the missionaries came upon largely traditional populations who had had little contact with the outside world. Around 90 per cent of people in the Democratic Republic of Congo are Christians, with one in two of them Catholics.[3] As a result of this fact and the government's total failure to provide basic social services, the Catholic Church in Congo is of central importance.

Along with their religious work, Christian missions also play an important role in the areas of education and, above all, healthcare. And they have been very successful – while churches in Europe are seeing their members leaving in droves, in the Democratic Republic of Congo alone there are around 2,900 diocesan priests, 1,600 priests belonging to religious orders, 7,900 nuns, 100 lay missionaries and almost 64,000 catechists, who mainly look after the Christian communities in rural areas.[4]

2 | Cf. Andreas Eckert, "Eine bescheidene Bilanz," in: *Afrika. Spiegel Special Geschichte*. 02-2007 (Hamburg 2007), 26.
3 | Cf. Marco Mörschbacher, "Zur Situation der katholischen Kirche in der Gesellschaft," in: Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, *Wegweiser zur Geschichte: Demokratische Republik Kongo* (Potsdam 2008), 148.
4 | Cf. ibid.

FIRST CONTACTS

Christianity was and remains a missionary religion: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (*Matthew*, 28:19) – a key theological sentence which the churches were always happy to invoke.[5]

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The fact that the missions as a result formed close alliances with the country's imperial powers was in line with long-standing traditions. The activities of the Christians helped the ruling powers to expand their dominions, while the Churches needed a secular arm to help them spread their faith. Even in Late Antiquity, Christianity had joined forces with the Roman Empire throughout the whole Mediterranean region. Later on, missionaries circled the globe aboard the ships of explorers and conquistadors. In return the Pope guaranteed them possessions and trade monopolies in the New World. By the end of the 15th century it seemed that the spread of Christianity into all parts of the known world was ensured.

With the start of the ocean-going era, European powers – above all the Portuguese – began to systematically look to Africa for expansion. In 1418, with the "Bulla Rex Regnum", Pope Martin V gave the Portuguese king the "right of crusade and conquest" in Africa. But until the middle of the 15th century the Christian world ended at Cape Bojador in West Africa. A chronicler of the time wrote: "Sailors say that there are no humans living beyond that point. The currents are terrible, no ship would ever return. No-one would ever sail there unless he were guaranteed a sure profit."[6]

In 1482 the Portuguese captain Diogo Cao was the first European to reach the mouth of the Congo overland and he erected a stone pillar with a cross on top and bearing the king's coat of arms. Cao found himself at the northern end of a flourishing African kingdom of around three million

5 | Cf. Ute Planert, "Unverhoffte Früchte," in: *Afrika. Spiegel Special Geschichte*. 02-2007 (Hamburg 2007), 50.

6 | Cf. Peter Milger, *Die Kreuzzüge. Krieg im Namen Gottes*, (Munich 2000), 33.

inhabitants which covered an area of 650 square kilometres.[7] Its capital was M'banza Kongo, ten days on foot from the coast and today located south of the DR Congo's border on Angolan territory. In 1491, nine years after the first landing, a group of priests and envoys of the Portuguese king arrived to establish permanent representation for their country at the court of the king. The new arrivals immediately began to build churches and mission schools, ushering in the first conflicts with African customs and traditions. The Portuguese missionaries were not only horrified by the practice of polygamy but also by the revealing clothing worn by the natives which did not fit in with Christian morality. In turn, the Africans were suspicious of the Portuguese, who hid their bodies under robes, never showed their feet and whose white skin colour was associated in the Congo with dead ancestors. The word "Mundele", which means "White" in the local Kikongo and Lingala languages, originally meant "clothed person" and has persisted until today as the word to describe pale-skinned foreigners.

However, these initial conflicts were overlaid by the enthusiasm displayed by the ManiKongo, the king, for these strange Europeans. Nzinga Mbemba Affonso was in his early thirties when the Portuguese arrived in the Congo. He converted to Christianity and spent ten years studying under the priests in Mbanza Kongo. One of these wrote to the King of Portugal: "Affonso knows the prophets better than we do, along with the Gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the lives of all the saints and everything relating to our holy mother Church."[8]

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Along with his enthusiasm for the Church, the ManiKongo was also a fan of the written word, European medicine and the manual skills which the Portuguese brought with them to Africa. But a few years later he began to realise the danger which was threatening his people. The emergence

7 | For more on the first encounters between Portuguese explorers and missionaries and the Kingdom of Congo from 1491 to around 1600 cf. Adam Hochschild, *Schatten über dem Kongo* (Stuttgart 2000), 15 et sqq.

8 | Cf. Louis Jadin und Mireille Decorato (eds.), *Affonso I., Correspondance de Don Affonso, roi du Congo 1506-1543*, (Brussels 1974), 117.

of the slave trade and European greed for precious metals were a threat to his community. The Portuguese priests were also not immune from the desire for profit. Many of them deserted their priestly duties, took their own slaves and sold their pupils and converts into slavery. Just forty years after the arrival of the first missionaries, 5,000 slaves a year were being sold on the Congolese coast. After Affonso's death, the kingdom's power declined rapidly. Slavery quickly made provincial heads and village elders into rich men, thus ensuring that they no longer recognised the authority of the court. By the middle of the 16th century Christianity had once again disappeared from the Congolese territories.

Nevertheless, Portugal continued trying to set up mission stations on Africa's west coast. Most of these failed. What usually happened was that one or two local rulers took an interest in the Gospels and perhaps got baptised, but their successors were followers of natural religions and so prevented the further spread of Christianity. Missionary involvement in local conflicts also gave Africans the impression that baptism was just a way of recognising Portuguese sovereignty. This resulted in tribal wars and religious conversions of ruling figures which were purely for show. By the beginning of the 19th century there were barely any traces left of these early missions.

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AMBIGUOUS MISSIONS

Despite the explorations of the Portuguese and other ocean-going European nations, until well into the 19th century most of central Africa remained nothing more than a blank space on the map, a "terra incognita". But with the dawn of the industrial age in the mid-19th century and a self-confident Europe which was looking for new challenges, a new kind of hero emerged – the African explorer.[9] Just as with the conquerors of the American West, an fascinated public turned these explorers and adventurers into hero figures who overcame the trials and tribulations of wild animals, dangerous diseases and hostile "natives" and who were showered with honours and fame. There were many

9 | Cf. Hochschild, *Schatten über dem Kongo*, n. 7, 41.

reasons for this publicity: the Europeans had high hopes of profiting from the wealth of raw materials they believed would be found in Africa, hopes which were fuelled by the discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa. But along with this there was a desire to be "cultural missionaries" by fighting against slavery and exporting "civilisation" and Christianity.[10] One British doctor, missionary and explorer particularly embodied the European fascination with African explorers: David Livingstone. He had been travelling in Africa since the 1840s, campaigning against slavery and preaching the Gospel – and along the way he discovered the Victoria Falls. He had long been a national hero in England because he had been the first white man to cross the continent from coast to coast. When Livingstone set off on another expedition into the heart of Africa in 1866 and had not returned five years later, another adventurer was contracted by an American newspaper to go looking for him. This was the Welshman Henry Morton Stanley, who had previously distinguished himself as a war correspondent, and who was now seeking to increase his fame and fortune. After eight months of searching Stanley finally found Livingstone, and he went on to turn his expedition into a professional marketing operation. His books, articles and lecture tours attracted an enthusiastic audience, spurring him on to undertake more expeditions. Between 1874 and 1877 Stanley made a spectacular journey, crossing the continent from Bagamoyo in the east to Boma in the Congo delta. In his reports he described in detail the suffering caused by slavery and denounced the crimes of "Arab slave traders".

These caught the attention of the Belgian king, Leopold II, who had long been on the hunt for colonial possessions. Stanley's reports provided him with a humanitarian alibi for his African adventure: fighting the slave trade and liberating and civilising the "natives".[11] So King Leopold called an international conference on the Congo in 1876 to pave the way for the establishment of trading posts and mission stations in the upper Congo which were given the task of both exploring the area and combating slavery. While in reality planning to

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10 | Cf. ibid., 43.
11 | Cf. ibid., 63.

take colonial possession of these territories, King Leopold did everything he could to hide his true intentions behind a veil of honourable motives. So in 1876 the first European missionaries, Protestants from the British Livingstone Inland Mission, arrived in the Congo.[12] The first Catholic missionaries, French members of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, set up a mission station in Boma in 1880. The Belgian expedition managed to set up large numbers of trading posts along the Congo River, along the way making 400 agreements with local tribal chiefs in order to safeguard their trading rights. Heading up this land grab on behalf of the Belgian king was none other than Henry Morton Stanley, who now invited missionaries from the Livingstone Mission and Baptist Mission to come and work in his station, later to become Leopoldville[13], from where they could take steamships into the interior to propagate their message.

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A legal basis for this was provided by a conference held in Berlin in 1884/5 at which Leopold's representatives managed to convince the other European powers of their good intentions towards the Congo. His "Association Internationale Congolaise" took over the "État Indépendant du Congo", making it the private property of the king and gaining the diplomatic recognition of the major European powers and the United States.

MISSIONS IN THE "CONGO FREE STATE"

The governmental structures of the new "Congo Free State" are unique in European history. The country was the private property of Leopold, however the Belgian regime took on the task of expanding its administration and infrastructure, which was of course done with a view to the economic exploitation of this huge country. At the end of the 19th century the main sources of income were ivory and

12 | For more on the missionaries in the Congo under Leopold II. cf. Marco Mörschbacher, "Das katholische Missionswesen im Kongo und sein Beitrag zur Entwicklung," in: Manfred Schulz (ed.), *Entwicklungsträger in der DR Kongo – Entwicklungen in Politik, Wirtschaft, Religion, Zivilgesellschaft und Kultur* (Berlin 2008), 92 et sqq.

13 | Leopoldville: present-day Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

rubber. Harvesting rubber was particularly labour-intensive as the rubber grew wild in the jungle. The trees had to be found, incised and the rubber transported across pathless terrain to collection points. King Leopold's administrators installed a cruel regime in order to make maximum profits – a period which has gone down in history as the "Congo Horror". Nevertheless the king never lost sight of the need to maintain the public legitimacy of his actions. To this end he naturally made use of institutions and people who were under his influence. This meant that foreign missions which realised his real intentions and represented foreign interests were no longer welcome. Belgian Catholic missionaries were supposed to support the king, but at first showed little interest. Various requests made by Leopold were refused with the excuse that they were short-staffed. Finally in 1886 the Vatican created the "Apostolic Vicariate of the Belgian Congo" which was to be missionized by the "Scheutists", so-named after Scheutveld where the Catholic order was founded. In 1888 the Scheutists established mission stations in Kwamouth and Leopoldville. From there they and missionaries from other Belgian orders set about missionizing the whole area.[14]

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An important argument in favour of the rapid spread of missionary work was made by concessions granted by the king to church representatives. Leopold generously offered them free land ownership in the Congo, thus helping the missions to become financially self-sufficient. This tipped the mood in Belgium in favour of supporting the Congo adventure and many more Belgian orders sent missionaries. The missions quickly began building schools on their newly-acquired land, spurred on by two main factors. Firstly, Leopold wanted to use education – and hence propaganda – to make Congolese children willing instruments of his regime. In 1890 he wrote: "I think we should try to set up three children's colonies. […] The main purpose of these colonies is to provide us with soldiers."[15] Secondly, the king was coming under increasing pressure to justify his actions, as foreign missionaries had been telling the world about the atrocities which were taking place in the Congo. Finally in

14 | Cf. Mörschbacher, "Das katholische Missionswesen im Kongo und sein Beitrag zur Entwicklung," n. 12, 94.
15 | Hochschild, *Schatten über dem Kongo*, n. 7, 192.

1905 an international investigating commission which had been set up under the leadership of the British and U.S. governments confirmed the reports of the atrocities which were being committed on the people. As a result Leopold agreed, within the terms of a convention between the Holy See and the Congo Free State, to provide national missions with 100 to 200 hectares of land on condition that every mission station had to set up a school under state supervision to train the Congolese people in agricultural and manual skills.[16]

The Belgian Catholics generally remained loyal to the king, in contrast to the foreign missions which were viewed with distrust by Brussels. The atmosphere at the mission schools is described by a mother superior of one of the Catholic missions in a letter to a state official: "A lot of girls were so ill when they arrived that our good sisters could do nothing to help them, but they all experienced the joy of holy baptism; now they are little angels in heaven, praying for our great King."[17]

In the Congo, as in all colonies, for the Christian missions it was not so much a question of possession – despite the king's gifts of land – as of winning the souls of the colonized populace. Joseph Schmidlin, the founding father of missionary history, expressed this desire very clearly: "The state can force physical obedience through punishment and laws, but it is the missions which bring about mental submission".[18] German colonial officials praised the important role that mission stations played in "turning blacks, wogs and Chinese into useful people". In line with the Christian work ethic which considered idleness to be a sin, the focus was on "training blacks to work" – a principle which, after the abolition of slavery, fitted perfectly with the hunger of white settlers and plantation owners for native workers.[19]

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17 | Hochschild, *Schatten über dem Kongo*, n. 7, 194.
18 | Cf. Planert, "Unverhoffte Früchte," n. 5, 55.
19 | Ibid.

Despite these negative examples of missionary activities it should also be noted that there were also many missionaries who, regardless of their religious alignment and intentions, felt that they should represent the interests of the native people and who actively denounced the abuses of colonial rule. These critical voices played a significant part in drawing the world's attention to the Congo atrocities which eventually led to the Belgian king having to give up control of his private colony in 1908 and hand the Congo over to the Belgian state.

CHRISTIANISATION AS A NATIONAL PROJECT

When the Belgian state took over the Congo as a colony, the "civilising" of the country became a national project, not least in order to free itself from the stigma of the previous brutal exploitation. After World War I, 22 Belgian missionary associations were working in the new "Belgian Congo", and school education became the main focus. In 1926 all state schools in the Congo were handed over to the Catholic missions. This meant that around 90 per cent of all schoolchildren were in Catholic hands, with only ten per cent of private schools being Protestant-run. In contrast to these, the Catholic missions received generous state subsidies to keep their schools running.[20]

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Despite the public mandate, for many missionaries the schools' main focus was religion and the Church. The schools were also a very effective means of missionizing the local population, as the teaching of Christian values was not just limited to schoolchildren. Many African families just agreed to be baptised so that they could send their children to school. The missionaries generally did not speak the local language and had no understanding of the customs and mentality of the native people. There were many colonial officers who were of the opinion that "an educated black" was no use as a worker, and many missionaries shared this view.[21] Of course there were also some

20 | Cf. Mörschbacher, "Das katholische Missionswesen im Kongo und sein Beitrag zur Entwicklung," n. 12, 96.

21 | Cf. Andreas Peters, "Missionierung in Afrika," http://weltbilder.de/derautor/seinearbeit/missionierung (accessed May 17, 2011).

positive examples: many mission schools organised their teaching so that there was a focus on learning practical skills alongside bible instruction. In this way the missionaries hoped Africans would move closer to the Gospel by learning manual skills. The system of state-subsidised mission schools proved to be very successful in terms of converting the local population of the Belgian Congo to Christianity. In 1930 there were 640,000 Catholics in the Congo, about ten per cent of the total population. By 1959 this number had increased to 5.5 million. At the time of independence in 1960, 40 per cent of Congolese professed to be Catholics.[22]

Along with schools, many missions also built hospitals. Helped by state funding, this combination of church, school and hospital resulted in the Catholic missions building a strong infrastructure and network across the country.[23] This infrastructure formed the basis of a rapidly-growing church, which today still plays a central role in the life of the Democratic Republic of Congo, because in comparison to the failed state institutions it is in fact the only functioning institution in the whole country.

The basic attitude of the missionaries to native culture and religion was characterised by two opinions. Firstly, it was generally accepted as a given that they were representatives of a "higher-value culture" and at the same time were bearers of the only true religion, making their role an important one. Material progress was also seen as an indication of more advanced human development. It was not assumed that the native people would be able to reach the same level of civilisation as the whites in a forseeable future. The Africans were seen as "children" who needed the leadership of Europeans because they were so primitive and uncivilised. In line with these ideas, the Africans should change their lives which were so defined by ancient traditions in order to fit in with the Europeans' desire for "civilization". The more strongly this principle was applied, the more the Africans must have felt their self-esteem being eroded. All this led to a tense

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22 | Cf. Mörschbacher, "Das katholische Missionswesen im Kongo und sein Beitrag zur Entwicklung," n. 12, 96.
23 | Cf. ibid.

and at times hostile relationship.[24] On the other hand, better education and Christian assimilation led to hopes of social and political participation, which were in sharp contrast to the defensive, racist attitudes of the colonial rulers. Native pastors and catechists were for a long time barred from higher religious office, as Church boards were also dominated by feelings of ethnocentric superiority. This is why many of these thwarted churchmen became the founding fathers of the 12,000 free churches which are so characteristic of Christianity in Africa today, alongside the major churches.[25]

The figures show how the belief that elementary education was useful but should not go beyond the rudimentary level was anchored in the colonial school system. When the Congo gained independence in 1960, the number of children attending school was higher than in all other countries in Africa, at 65 per cent, but at that time in the Congo there were only 15 native university graduates.[26] These rare academics had all attended Christian mission schools and were members of an elite known as the *Évolués*, the "developed ones", who the Belgian colonial rulers considered to be on the right track when it came to the long-term assimilation of European values and norms. In the mid-1950s the Catholic Leuven University in Leopoldville founded the Lovanium University because the colonial ministry had come up with a plan to provide university education for sections of the population by the end of the 20th century (!). The *Évolués* of course felt unhappy and resentful about such slow progress, and this soon culminated in unrest and fighting in the streets. When confronted with the protesters' desire for independence, announced by people who themselves had been through the Belgian mission school system, the colonial powers fell over themselves to get out of the Congo. This country, which had no native elite to speak of, gained independence on June 30, 1960.

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24 | Cf. Peters, "Missionierung in Afrika," n. 21.
25 | Cf. Planert, "Unverhoffte Früchte," n. 5, 56.
26 | Cf. Mörschbacher, "Das katholische Missionswesen im Kongo und sein Beitrag zur Entwicklung," n. 12, 97.

CHURCH AND STATE DURING INDEPENDENCE

The hurried withdrawal of the colonial rulers and the ensuing power vacuum meant the new Republic quickly slid into chaos. The few, mainly very young, protagonists in the fight for independence were not able to hold this huge country together. Civil war broke out and mission stations suffered repeated attacks. During the "Simba Rebellion" of 1964 more than 200 missionaries and a further 10,000 Christians were killed in the north-east of the country.[27] Those European advisers and business-people that had stayed in the country now fled, and only the mission stations remained. The situation only began to calm down after 1965 under the dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. He continued with the, initially unchanged, policy of cooperation between state and church in the school system. It was only his later disastrous "authenticity" campaign in the early 1970s which led to the state taking over the running of the Catholic schools and Lovanium University. The country, which was now called Zaire, was however never in a position to fund the school system, and there was a total lack of professional administration. As a result the schools were quietly given back to the Church within ten years. While Mobutu spent three decades ruining the country through his corrupt, self-serving practices, the churches took over large swathes of the education and healthcare systems, thus asserting their central role in Congolese society.

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At the start of the 1990s, after the final collapse of the Mobutu regime, the Church took on a leading role in the efforts to turn the country into a democracy. After Laurent Kabila seized power by force in 1997 and the country once again sank into chaos and years of war, the churches were the only institutions to maintain their infrastructure and actively work for democracy and peace. In the run-up to the free elections in 2006, the Catholic Church in particular played an active part in the process of raising the consciousness of the country's citizens.[28] And almost five years after the first elected government took power, the

27 | Cf. ibid., 98.
28 | Cf. ibid., 101.

church institutions are still the most important agencies for education and healthcare. The constant corruption and mismanagement within state institutions means that they have still not managed to create a practical alternative to the missions in these areas.

MISSIONS – HELPERS OR HENCHMEN?

When we look at the figures it is clear that Christian missionary work in Africa has been a huge success. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, in 2002 around 380 million Africans were avowed Christians. Along with the main denominations, the Christian scene in Africa is now characterised by around 12,000 free churches which have broken away from the major churches. The Africa historian Christoph Marx therefore turns it around and talks about the "enrichment of African religion with Christian elements".[29] These figures are astounding when one thinks that even at the zenith of missionary euphoria around 1910, there were less than 10,000 Europeans working in the whole of Africa.

Throughout Africa, the arrival of Christianity set in motion a process of social change, resulting in the disintegration of tribal organisation and the framework of social norms and values which governed people's lives and relationships. Christian teachings and the creation of Christian communities opened up new ways of looking at the world, but the missionization and conversion of Africans also meant impregnating them with Western values and norms and a rejection of African customs. This led to a process of transformation in traditional African society which left the African legacy in a kind of taboo grey zone. The colonial missionaries' view that Christianity was the only way to create true civilisation is thought-provoking, as the new Christian identity was only partially able to compensate for the loss of social and religious identity which was so fraught with conflict because espousing Christianity inevitably required a break with African religious traditions.[30]

Christian teachings and the creation of Christian communities opened up new ways of looking at the world, but the missionization of Africans also meant impregnating them with Western values and norms.

29 | Cf. Planert, "Unverhoffte Früchte," n. 5, 52.
30 | Cf. Peters, "Missionierung in Afrika," n. 21.

The process of missionization and conversion to Christianity was different in each African country. This was due to the different levels of involvement and dependency of the mission associations with the colonial powers, and also the different approaches taken by the various denominations. The geographical, social and historical characteristics of the individual countries also played a decisive role.[31] So it would be a mistake to imply that the missions were just in cahoots with the colonial regimes, aiming to oppress the local population by providing them with elementary education and work training for the benefit of the colony. Even at the end of the 19th century, so at the beginning of colonisation, there were plenty of critical voices warning that Africa's traditional cultures should be respected. An example of this is Albert Schweitzer, who worked as a mission doctor in present-day Gabon. In January 1907 at a St Nikolai Church mission camp in Strasbourg he warned: "Christianity will be a lie and a shame if what has been done is not atoned for, if for every act of violence committed in the name of Jesus a helper does not come, if for everyone who has stolen there is not someone who brings, if for everyone who has cursed there is not someone who blesses."[32]

There were plenty of critical voices warning that Africa's traditional cultures should be respected. An example of this is Albert Schweitzer.

However, it is also not correct to think of the missions as the drivers of the independence movements in African countries which led the battle against the colonial regimes. As was discussed earlier, the ties which bound many missionaries to the colonial powers were simply too tight.

So colonialism itself was the main reason why native people were prepared to accept Christianity. African willingness to allow Christian missionaries into their countries was often done with the political motive of turning the colonial powers into allies who would protect them against their enemies. The mission stations became bridgeheads of European influence and thus became an essential element of colonial settlement and economics.[33] In organisational terms, the whole of economic, social, cultural and political

31 | Cf ibid.
32 | Cf. James Bentley, *Albert Schweitzer. Eine Biographie* (Düsseldorf 1993) 73.
33 | Cf. Peters, "Missionierung in Afrika," n. 21.

life was played out within the stable framework of the mission stations. Another problem is the fact that the populations of certain African countries were not allowed to benefit equally from the Christian education on offer. Certain ethnic groups were favoured in order to safeguard the colony's administration and economy. This was the case in Rwanda, where after 1926 almost all candidates for priesthood were recruited from the ranks of the Tutsi. The Belgian colonial government also set them up as "Chiefs" after they had put down the Hutu uprisings. This one-sided favouritism which turned a minority into a Christian educational elite helped to create different classes and levels in society and intensified the hatred between ethnic groups in many African countries. In Rwanda, this "home-made" conflict led to several bloody civil wars and eventually to genocide. The inconceivable massacre which took place in 1994 was certainly not the Church's fault, but without the history of colonial missionary involvement the enmity between the two ethnic groups would certainly have been less intense.

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The teaching provided by the Christian missions laid the foundations for an understanding of the political and economic systems in Western nations. Language training, the Christian faith imbued by the schools, military service and university education created a new generation of more disciplined, more determined politicians who were in a position to articulate the concerns of their people to the colonial rulers. This new generation were fast learners and at first played the parliamentary democracy game perfectly. They also understood how to use the new structures to gradually expand their own power base. The fact that these new protagonists had no knowledge of how to create functioning state systems once the Europeans had left or that they fell victim to ideologies which were typical of the time had more to do with the way the new African nations were used and manipulated during the Cold War period.

Once the African countries had gained independence, the generation of political leaders of that time believed they were in a position to select all that was good about Europe and Africa. But the politicians were victims of their own

rapid success. They set up their young nations as socialist states with a great deal of scope for interventionism, but found themselves confronted with the legacy of a weak and authoritarian state. They also had to recognise that the colonial economic structure that they had inherited gave them very little room for manoeuvre. Faced with the huge disparity between dreams and reality, and because of their weakness, the rulers of most countries sought remedy in authoritarian solutions which later led to the collapse of many African states.[34] The dark side of Africa's path since independence is characterised by limited freedom of speech, political prisoners, the growing power of state bureaucracy, an agricultural policy linked to a high degree of forced resettlements and repeated economic collapses.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Education will be central to the future development of all African nations and it will require a high level of cooperation between church and state. The fact that – as in the Democratic Republic of Congo – the churches are the biggest providers of education and health services is largely due to the failure of state structures, incompetence, lack of political will and corruption. Without the missions there would probably no longer be an educational system in the Congo. It is of course primarily the responsibility of governments to build functioning state structures. But the churches can offer help based on their many years of experience as education providers, something which is also in their own interest.

For the sake of its own credibility, the Church has to recognise past mistakes and align, or if necessary adjust its Christian value system to suit African traditions and customs.

If Christianity is to survive in Africa, and for the sake of its own credibility, the Church has to recognise past mistakes and align, or if necessary adjust its Christian value system to suit African traditions and customs. In the Democratic Republic of Congo the churches have been aware of this responsibility for some years now and are trying to find a balance in society. At the beginning of the 1990s Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo took over the leadership of the "Conférence Nationale Souveraine" as part of efforts to promote democracy.

34 | Cf. Eckert, "Eine bescheidene Bilanz," n. 2, 30.

In the future too, the Church will play an important role in society due to the large numbers of Christians in the Congo. It will be a question of acting as "the people's advocate"[35] when faced with difficult political circumstances. Last year Laurent Monsengwo became a cardinal, making him the

Catholic Church's highest dignitary in the Congo and hence the country's most important Christian leader. In Kinshasa in December 2010 he gave a notable speech to 80,000 believers in which he warned: "Power is to be used in the service of the common good. Power which does not first and foremost look after the common good and the people but which instead looks after its own interests is power without meaning."[36] We can only hope that the country's rulers take this to heart.

35 | Cf. Mörschbacher, "Das katholische Missionswesen im Kongo und sein Beitrag zur Entwicklung," n. 12, 101.

36 | Cf. Dominic Johnson, "'Kinshasa, erhebe Dich und leuchte': Kardinal Monsengwos Bombe," *taz.de*, December 7, 2010, http://blogs.taz.de/kongo-echo/page/4 (accessed June 29, 2011).