



PART 8

CHRISTIANITY

SUMMARY

With around one third of the world's population as adherents, Christianity is easily its largest religion. This fact, though, belies Christianity's humble origins, as what was essentially a small Jewish sect. For his early followers, Jesus was a Jewish teacher commanding strong loyalty, who provided direction through his preaching and a code for life, but was also more than a mere prophet. Christianity's divorce from Judaism was the result of its acceptance of Jesus himself as the Messiah of Jewish teaching, as the Son of God, and as a sacrifice made by God to redeem his followers from sin. Jesus' message not only supersedes that of the Old Testament in Christianity, but his life also furnishes it with its distinct rituals and festivals: baptism, communion, and, above all, Easter, are all taken from the Gospels, rather than from Jewish tradition.

While the earliest history of Christianity is one of anti-establishment insurgency, a threat to both Jewish and Roman authority, much of its subsequent history is closely bound up with European high politics. Christianity rapidly advanced into Asia and North Africa, and after 324 was officially recognized in the Roman Empire, a development that eventually saw much of the church's life centred on Rome itself. This ancient church subsequently broke up during three schisms that resulted from conflicts over doctrine and authority.

If Christianity today is the world's largest religion, it is also its most diverse. This is in part due to the division of the ancient church, producing distinct Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant branches, but also due to more recent developments, such as the adaptation of churches in the global South to the needs and cultures of their local communities. In the West, too, older churches have been shaped by their different reactions to social and scientific developments, as well as by the emergence of new trends, such as the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. The strength of Christianity increasingly lies outside the West, however, and in much of the world it faces competition from other faiths, especially Islam.

A Historical Overview



Christianity rapidly spread beyond its original geographical region of Roman-occupied Palestine into the entire Mediterranean area. Something of this process of expansion is described in the Acts of the Apostles, in the New Testament. For example, it is clear that a Christian presence was already established in Rome itself within fifteen years of the resurrection of Christ. The imperial trade routes made possible the rapid traffic of ideas, as much as merchandise.

THE EARLY CHURCH

Three centres of the Christian church rapidly emerged in the eastern Mediterranean region. The church became a significant presence in its own original heartlands, with Jerusalem emerging as a leading centre of thought and activity. Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, was already an important area of Christian expansion, as can be seen from the destinations of some of Paul's letters, and the references to the 'seven churches of Asia' in the book of Revelation. This process of expansion in this region continued, with the great imperial city of Constantinople, modern-day Istanbul, becoming a particularly influential centre of mission and political consolidation.

Yet further growth took place to the south, with the important Egyptian city of Alexandria emerging as a stronghold of Christian faith. With this expansion, new debates opened up. While the New Testament deals with the issue of the relationship of Christianity and Judaism, the expansion of Christianity into Greek-speaking regions led to the exploration of the way in which Christianity related to Greek philosophy. Many Christian writers sought to demonstrate, for example, that Christianity brought to fulfilment the great themes of the philosophy of Plato.

Yet this expansion was far from unproblematic. The 'imperial cult', which regarded worship of the Roman emperor as determinative of loyalty to the empire, was prominent in the eastern Mediterranean. Many Christians found themselves penalized for their insistence on worshipping only Christ. The expansion of Christianity regularly triggered off persecutions. These were often local – for example, the Decian persecution of 249–51, which was particularly vicious in North Africa. Christianity was not given official recognition as a 'legitimate religion' by the Roman state until 313, when Constantine

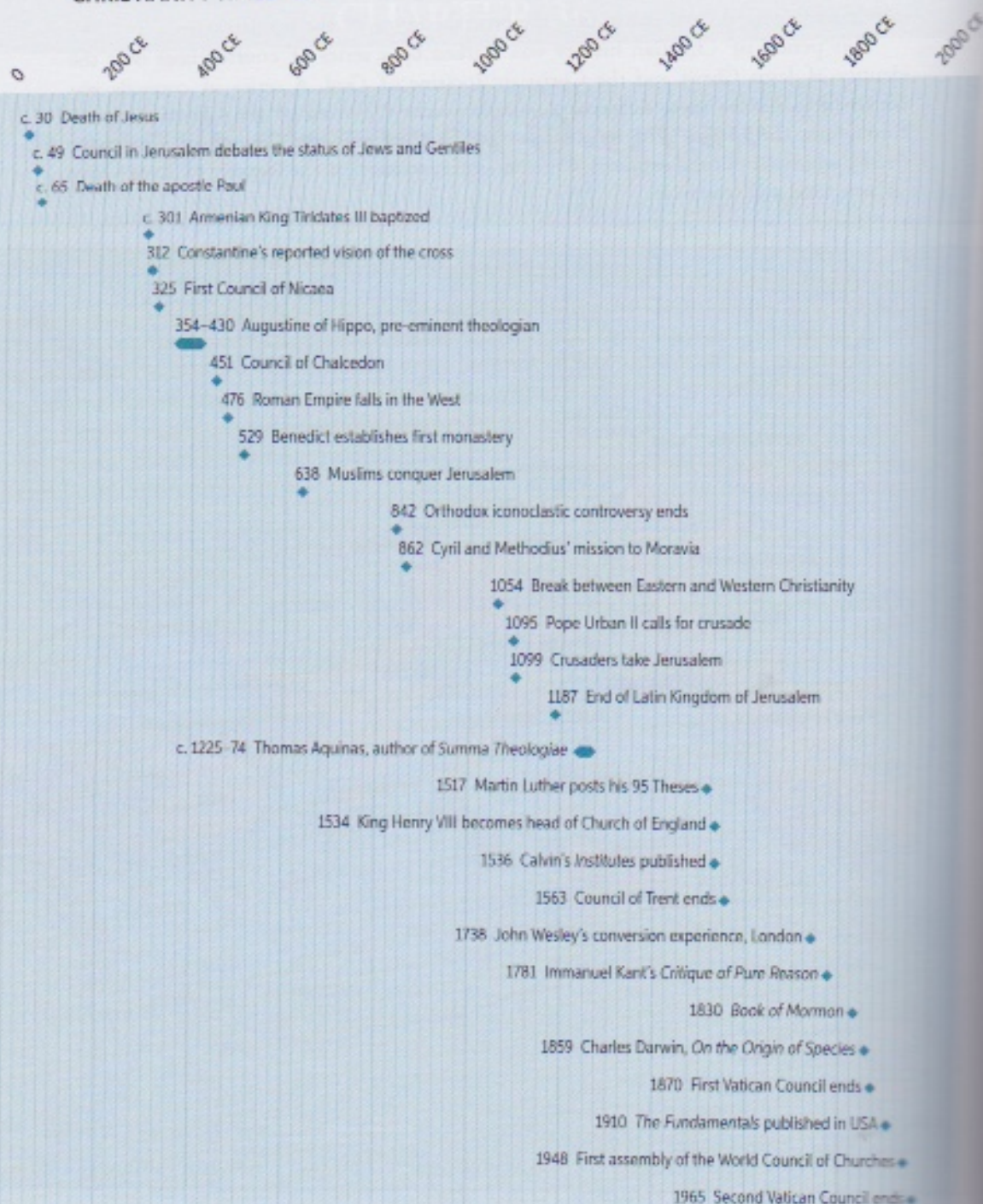
a recent convert, was joint emperor. From that point onwards, Christianity became not merely a recognized faith, but in time the official religion of the Roman state.

This period of Christian history was marked by a series of controversies over the identity of Jesus Christ and the Christian doctrine of God. A series of councils was convened to resolve these differences, and to ensure the unity of the Christian church throughout the empire. The most important of these was the Council of Chalcedon (451), which set out the definitive Christian interpretation of the identity of Jesus Christ as 'true God and true man'.



Spread of Christianity about 300 CE

CHRISTIANITY TIMELINE



2000 CE

The fall of the Roman Empire – traditionally dated to 476 – led to widespread insecurity within the Western church. In the East, the church continued to flourish, as the Eastern Empire, based at Constantinople, was largely unaffected by the attacks from northern European invaders which eventually ended Roman power in the West. The removal of Rome as a stabilizing influence, however, gave a new role to the church in the West, and particularly to its monasteries. The founding of the first Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino around 525 is seen as a landmark in this process. The increasingly important role of the pope as a political force also began to emerge during this period.

The major disruptions within the Roman Empire in the fifth century led to a growing rift between the Western and Eastern churches. Increasing tension over political as much as theological issues led to the 'Great Schism' of 1054. By this stage, the influence of the Eastern Church had extended as far north as Moscow. While the story of Christianity in Eastern Europe at this time is important, most attention focuses on developments in the Western church.

THE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

Christianity underwent a major renaissance in Western Europe during the period 1000–1500. This era – often referred to as the 'Middle Ages' – saw the renewal of church life at every level. It was a period of consolidation of the political and social influence of the church, with the personal authority of the pope to intervene in political disputes of the region reaching unprecedented levels. The form of theology known as 'scholasticism' began to develop around this time, with thirteenth-century writers such as Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus achieving new levels of theological sophistication.

Yet scholasticism was not universally acclaimed. The European Renaissance, which began to become a major cultural force in Western Europe during the fourteenth century, emphasized the importance of returning to the roots of Christendom through the simple language and imagery of the New Testament. The humanist movement, linked with the Renaissance, believed it was essential to study the Bible in its original languages, rather than in unreliable Latin translations, such as the Vulgate, thus creating irresistible pressure for new Bible translations. Yet it became clear that some medieval

'Prayer of St Francis'

*Lord, make me an instrument of
your peace.*

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

*grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled, as to console;*

to be understood, as to understand;

to be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive.

*It is in pardoning that we are
pardoned,*

*and it is in dying that we are born
to Eternal Life.*

Attributed to Francis of Assisi (1181–1226)

theological ideas were ultimately based on translation mistakes in the Vulgate. Some form of review of teachings was seen to be necessary, in the light of the new biblical scholarship.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century had a significant impact on Christianity in North Africa and Palestine. However, its influence seemed poised to reach new levels in 1453, when Islamic armies finally managed to take Constantinople, the city widely seen as the gate to Europe. By the early sixteenth century, Islam had become a significant presence in the Balkans, and was poised to enter Austria. Martin Luther (1483–1546) believed it was only a matter of time before Europe became an Islamic sphere of influence. In the event, a series of decisive military defeats limited this influence to the Balkans. By this stage, however, Western Europe was convulsed by new controversies, as the movement we know as the Reformation gained momentum.

REFORMATIONS

The sixteenth century gave rise to a major upheaval within Western Christianity, usually referred to as the Reformation. This movement had its origins in the Renaissance, especially its demand for a return to the original sources of Christianity in the New Testament. Alarmed at what they perceived to be a growing disparity between apostolic and medieval visions of Christianity, individuals such as Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) pressed for reform. For Zwingli, it was the morals and institutions of the church that required reform. Luther, however, judged that a deeper level of reform was required. The teachings of the church had been either distorted or inflated during the Middle Ages, and needed to be brought back into line with Scripture. For Luther, the whole question of how we enter into a right relationship with God – technically referred to as the ‘doctrine of justification’ – needed radical revision in the light of the biblical witness.

Although the need for reform was widely conceded within the church, such reforming agendas proved intensely controversial. In the end, both Luther and Zwingli found themselves creating reforming communities outside the mainline church, instead of reforming that church from within, as they had hoped. By the time of John Calvin (1509–64) and his reformation of the city of Geneva, Protestantism had emerged as a distinct type of Christianity in its own right, posing a very significant threat to the Catholic Church.

In the late 1540s, the Catholic Church itself began a major process of reformation and renewal, referred to as the Catholic Reformation – previously as the Counter-Reformation. The religious orders were reformed, and many of the beliefs and practices which reformers such as Luther found objectionable were eliminated. Nevertheless, significant differences remained between Protestantism and Catholicism. In many ways, the Reformation debates defined the contours of modern Christianity, and many remain live to this day.

THE MODERN PERIOD

A period of political uncertainty developed during the eighteenth century, with major implications for the future of Christianity in the West. Growing hostility towards the church in France was one of the contributing causes to the French Revolution of 1789, which saw Christianity publicly displaced from French society. Although the French Revolution did not achieve the permanent removal of Christianity from the nation, it created an atmosphere of instability. Revolutionary movements throughout Europe sought to repeat the successes of their French counterparts, creating serious difficulties for the Catholic Church in many parts of Europe, especially Italy.

Christianity also faced new challenges in the West. During the 1840s, the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72) argued that the idea of God was simply a projection of the human mind. Karl Marx (1818–83) declared that God was invented by people to console themselves in the face of social and economic hardship: all that was necessary for the elimination of religious belief was the radical alteration of the social conditions which brought it into being in the first place. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) argued that religion was simply an illusion, a 'wish-fulfilment'. By about 1920, many had concluded that Christianity was intellectually untenable.

By then, other difficulties had arisen. Perhaps the most important of these was the Russian Revolution of 1917, which led to the establishment of the world's first explicitly atheist state. The Soviet Union actively sought to eliminate religion from public and private life, especially during the 1930s. The Allied defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II led to large areas of Eastern Europe coming under Soviet influence, and the state adoption of explicitly anti-religious policies. With the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, a new openness towards religion developed throughout the former Soviet sphere of influence, with Christianity – especially in its Orthodox forms – and Islam experiencing a major renaissance. Yet by this stage the epicentre of Christianity had moved away from this region altogether.

WORLDWIDE EXPANSION

The sixteenth century saw the beginnings of a process which would have a decisive impact on the shaping of Christianity. During the Middle Ages, Christianity was primarily a European religion. Although it was present in parts of India and the Middle East, its numerical strength was heavily concentrated in Europe. The discovery of the Americas opened up new mission fields, and led to a new interest in spreading the gospel abroad. The Society of Jesus, the 'Jesuits', founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1540, took the lead within the Catholic Church, and sent missionaries to the Americas, India, China, and Japan.

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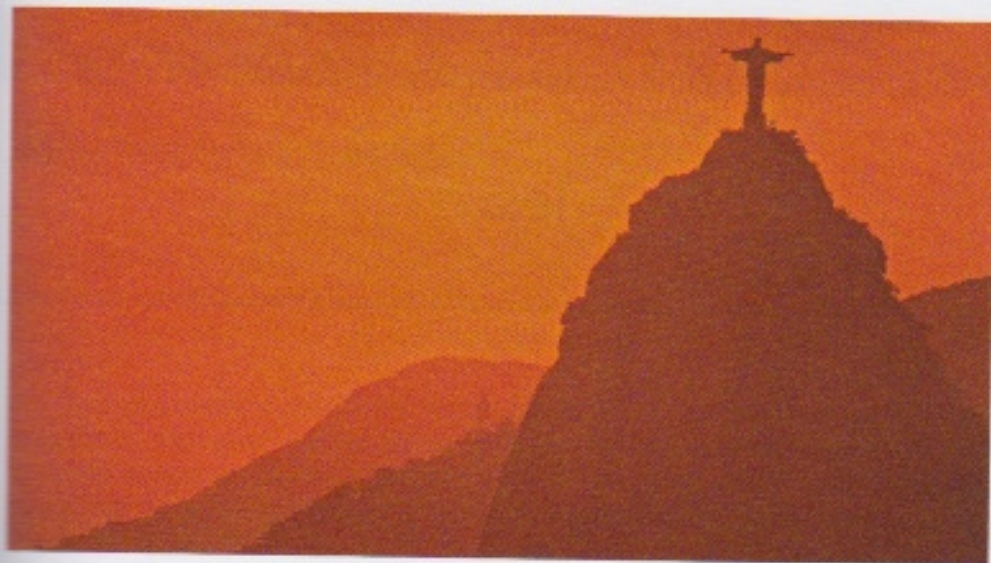
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Statue of Cristo Redentor – Christ the Redeemer, at the peak of Corcovado mountain, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Society for the Propagation of the Gospel; the London Missionary Society, founded in 1795, and initially known as 'The Missionary Society'; and the Church Missionary Society, founded in 1799, and originally known as 'The Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East', all played a major role in planting Christianity in Africa, India, and Oceania. American missionary societies also played important roles in establishing Christianity in various regions of the world, especially Korea.

Yet Christianity expanded by other means too. One of the most important was large-scale emigration from Europe to North America, beginning in the late sixteenth century. Initially, the immigrants were primarily Protestant refugees from England; however, these were later joined by Lutherans from Scandinavia, Anabaptists from Germany, Calvinists from Holland, and Catholics from Ireland and Italy.

Today, Christianity is primarily a faith of the developing, rather than developed, world. Although European and American missionaries played a significant role in planting Christianity in regions such as Asia and Africa, these are now largely self-sufficient. The implications of this massive shift from the West to the developing world have yet to be fully explored. It is nevertheless clear that a new phase in the history of the Christian church has begun, with momentous implications for the future.

ALISTER MCGRATH

CHAPTER 37

Jesus



Christianity is founded on the worship of Jesus Christ – ‘Jesus the messiah’ – as Son of God, the unique self-revelation of God to the human race. At the same time, it remembers Jesus as a real historical figure, a man of insignificant social standing, during his life unknown outside the obscure corner of the Roman Empire where he lived and died.

Almost all we know about Jesus comes from the four accounts of his life, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in the New Testament. This account is based on those Gospels. Although scholars disagree at some points about the historical value of the Gospel records, the following general picture is widely agreed.

MESSIAH

Born just before the death of Herod the Great, King of Judea, around 4 bce, Jesus lived for a little more than thirty years, scarcely travelling outside Palestine throughout his life. At this time, the Jews were a subject people, who lived either under local princes appointed by the Roman Emperor, or under the direct rule of Rome itself. They had long hoped for ‘the day of the Lord’, when God would act to save his people. There were several different hopes of a ‘messiah’, a saviour, whom God would send, and these hopes ran high at the time of Jesus.

Jesus was born at Bethlehem, in Judea, but was brought up in Galilee, and most of his public activity was in that region. Luke’s account of the baby, cradled in a manger in a stable, visited by shepherds, has become one of the best-known stories in the world. But the Gospels record it was far from ordinary. Angels proclaimed him the promised saviour, and it was maintained he was not conceived by human intercourse, but by the power of God. This bringing together of earthly poverty and obscurity with a miraculous birth is typical of the Gospels’ portrait of Jesus, as truly human but also uniquely the Son of God.

Virtually nothing is known of Jesus’ life from his infancy until about the age of thirty. The event that launched Jesus’ public ministry was the mission of his relative, John ‘the Baptist’, in Judea. John called the Jews to return to God, and baptized those who responded in the River Jordan. He attracted a large following, and Jesus joined him, was

baptized, and himself began preaching. When John was put in prison, Jesus moved back to Galilee, and continued to preach in public.

HEALING AND PREACHING

The Gospels summarize Jesus' activity as preaching, teaching, and healing. He and his closest followers deliberately adopted a wandering and dependent style of life.

As a preacher, Jesus drew large crowds, who followed him constantly. He taught with a vivid simplicity, and with an authority that contrasted sharply with other Jewish religious teachers.

From the beginning of his public activity, Jesus was well known as a healer. The Gospels record his curing many different types of illness and deformity, usually by a simple word and a touch, sometimes by a word alone. He is also recorded as an exorcist, driving out demons by a word of command. It was apparently as much for his healing power as for his teaching that Jesus was sought out by the Galilean crowds.

Most of Jesus' recorded miracles are healings, but there were also a number of incidents where he displayed a supernatural control over nature. The Gospels present him as one whose personal authority extended beyond his words to a control over nature, which inevitably made a deep impression on those around him.

Like many other Jewish teachers, Jesus quickly gathered a group of committed followers, known as his 'disciples'. An inner group of twelve were his constant companions. Much time was spent in teaching his disciples privately, preparing them to continue his mission. Jesus told them he would soon be killed, and expected them to be the focus of the new community created by his work.

OPPOSITION

Jesus quickly aroused the opposition of the Jewish leaders. His attitude was in many ways unconventional, and he posed a threat to the Jewish religious establishment. He refused to recognize the barriers that divided people in society. His habit of mixing with ostracized classes earned him the name 'friend of tax-collectors and sinners'. Women held an unconventionally high place in his following, and not all of them were 'respectable'.

Jesus did not share the general Jewish disdain for Samaritans – a despised minority of mixed blood. Although he seldom travelled outside Jewish territory, Jesus welcomed the faith of a non-Jewish soldier and a Syrian woman. As for economic barriers, Jesus deliberately gave up a secure livelihood, and made no secret of his contempt for affluence.

On religious questions he was equally radical. Jesus clashed with the religious authorities because of his liberal attitude to the observance of the Sabbath, the day of rest, and his declaration that ritual purification mattered less than purity of heart. His bold reinterpretation of the Jewish law moved away from an external observance of rules to a deeper, more demanding, ethic.

Nor did he please the Sadducees, the priestly rulers. Jesus taught that the Jewish nation was ripe for God's judgment, and even predicted the destruction of the Temple, upon which their national religion was centred. In a symbolic gesture, he 'purified' the Temple, by violently expelling the traders whose presence the priests encouraged. His popular following threatened to upset the delicate balance of the Sadducees' cooperation with Rome.

Jesus made it clear his idea of salvation was not a political one, so gradually his popular following dwindled, as those who wanted a military messiah became disillusioned. Even one of his twelve closest disciples betrayed him in the end, and none of them understood his true purpose till after his death.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The opposition to Jesus came to its climax at the annual Passover festival in Jerusalem. Jesus rode into the city in a deliberately messianic gesture on a peaceable donkey, and was enthusiastically welcomed by the crowds.

Eventually Jesus was arrested by the Jewish leaders, with the help of Judas – his disillusioned disciple – and tried under Jewish law on a charge of blasphemy, because he claimed to be the messiah and Son of God. A death sentence was passed, but a Roman conviction was required to make it effective. This was secured by a charge of sedition, pressed upon the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, by the religious leaders.

Jesus was executed by crucifixion, the barbaric method reserved by Rome for slaves and rebels, and buried in a nearby tomb. The cross has become the symbol of Christianity: in Jesus' death, with all its cruelty and injustice, is the focus of salvation.

The Beatitudes

Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor;

the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

Happy are those who mourn;

God will comfort them!

Happy are those who are humble;

they will receive what God has promised!

Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires;

God will satisfy them fully!

Happy are those who are merciful to others;

God will be merciful to them!

Happy are the pure in heart;

they will see God!

Happy are those who work for peace;

God will call them his children!

Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires;

the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers.

Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted.

From Jesus' Sermon on the Mount,
Matthew 5:3–12, Good News Bible, 1976.

BRANCHES OF THE CHURCH

The New Testament is witness to the vision that the church should be one – and to the reality that it is not. The history of Christianity since then is, for the most part, a history of fragmentation. Only in the twentieth century were serious attempts made to seek reconciliation between churches separated by centuries of misunderstanding and mistrust. The various branches of the Christian church owe their existence to three historic crises. The first was the splintering of Eastern Catholic Christendom in the fifth century. The second was the so-called 'Great Schism' between East and West, usually dated at 1054, that resulted in the division between 'Catholic' and 'Orthodox' Christianity. The third was the Reformation in the sixteenth century, which, together with its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aftermath, left as its legacy Protestantism in its various forms. This article deals only with the principal branches of the church as they have emerged in the history of Christianity.

The Eastern Churches

These include the Orthodox Churches, together with those that share with them in a spiritual and cultural ethos that derives from the Byzantine Empire. The church in the East suffered its most serious divisions following the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), called to determine the orthodox Christian teaching on the relationship between the deity and the humanity of Christ. The Nestorian Church, centred historically on Persia, and the Monophysite Churches, such as those of Syria, Egypt, and Ethiopia, date from this period.

The final separation of the Eastern Churches from Western Christendom lay in their conflict with Rome over the papal claim to supreme authority, and in their rejection of the Filioque clause, added by the Western church to the original text of the Nicene Creed, in which the Holy Spirit is said to proceed 'from the Son' as well as the Father. The Orthodox Churches extend across Eastern Europe, the Slav nations, and eastern Mediterranean. The patriarchates of Constantinople,

Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem are given special honour, but authority belongs to the whole church, whose rich liturgical life and icon-based spirituality is seen as the living embodiment of divine love on earth. It is estimated that there are over 322 million Orthodox Christians today.

The Roman Catholic Church

Numbering around 1,200 million members, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest single Christian grouping. Roman Catholics, or simply 'Catholics', trace their lineal descent from the Western Catholic Church of the Middle Ages. They acknowledge the primacy

Ave Maria

Ave Maria, gratia plena,

Dominus tecum.

Benedicta tu in mulieribus,

et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus.

Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,

ora pro nobis peccatoribus,

nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace,

the Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou amongst women

and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

pray for us sinners,

now, and in the hour of our death.

One of the most popular Roman Catholic prayers. Of unknown origin, it was incorporated into the liturgy in the 15th century.

and authority of the Supreme Pontiff, the bishop of Rome, who is traditionally regarded as Christ's representative, or 'Vicar', on earth, and the successor of St Peter. When speaking with full authority – *ex cathedra* – and defining matters of faith or morals, the pope's utterances are regarded as infallible and binding on Catholics.

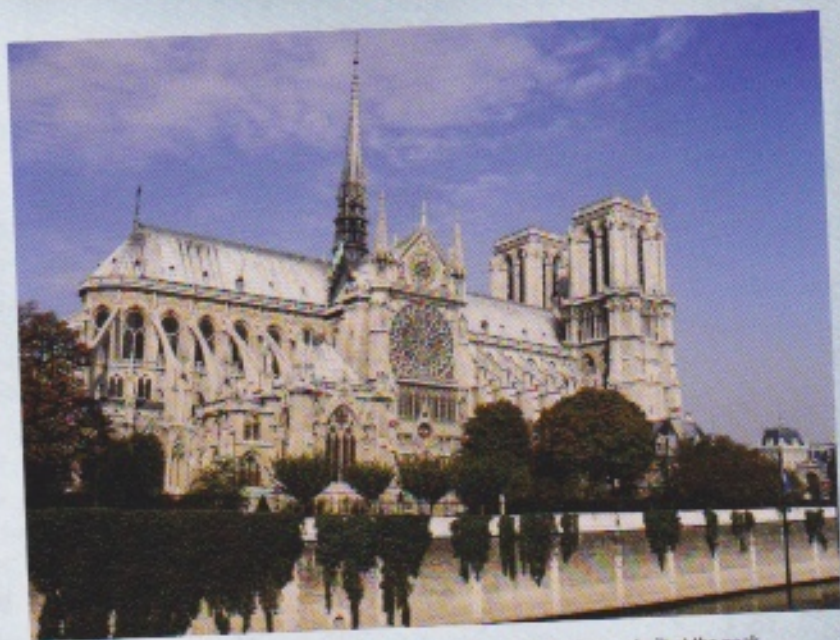
The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) resulted in far-reaching reforms, including greater emphasis on the role of bishops acting as an episcopal college, more open relationships with non-Catholic churches, and the simplifying of the liturgy.

Along with the Orthodox Churches, Roman Catholicism recognizes seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, marriage, ordination, penance – the sacrament of reconciliation, extreme unction – anointing of the sick, and, at the centre of the sacramental system, the Mass. Especially in developing countries, Roman Catholics are often prominent in supporting the struggles of the oppressed, and in the pursuit of justice and peace generally. In the early twenty-first century the church was shaken by revelations of sexual abuses committed by a number of priests.

Churches of the Protestant Reformation

The Anglican Church

The Anglican communion is a worldwide family of autonomous churches in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, who has presidential status amongst the heads of other Anglican Churches. Largely anglophone, its members number around 85 million. The parent Church of England has its roots both in the Celtic Christianity of the earliest Britons, and in the



The Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, France, built at the peak of medieval European Christendom.

Roman form of the faith brought to England by Augustine of Canterbury (r. 597–604).

The Anglican Church claims to be both Catholic and Reformed, and has adhered to the Catholic threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons, but with a conservatively reformed liturgy. The *Book of Common Prayer* of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) retained many of the texts of the medieval church, while recasting them in a clearly Protestant direction. Nowadays, Anglicanism is an inclusive church embracing members of at least three persuasions: Anglo-Catholic, Liberal, and Evangelical, and for this reason is often seen as a 'bridge' church between Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Orthodoxy.

The Lutheran Churches

These represent the chief Protestant presence in Germany and Scandinavia, as well as being a significant worldwide Christian denomination, which speaks through the Lutheran World Federation. Following the

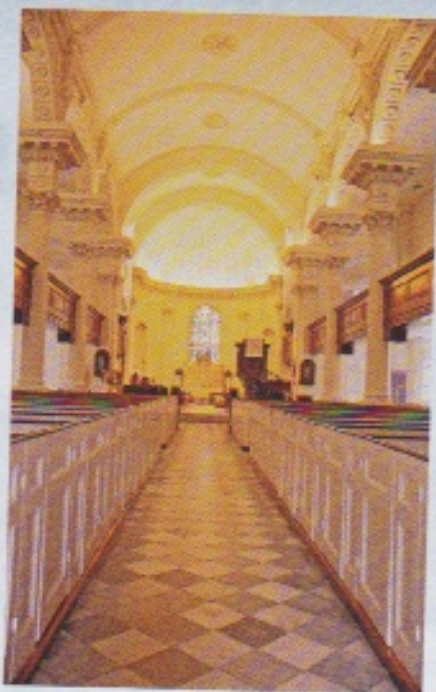
teaching of the German reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546), the doctrine of justification by faith is its central tenet, embodied in the Augsburg Confession (1530). Some Lutheran Churches have retained the Catholic threefold ministry, while others are more presbyterian or congregational in government. Like Anglicanism, Lutheranism adopted a conservative attitude to liturgy, although the preaching of the sermon has always been central, and music has always played an important part. Lutherans worldwide number around 75 million.

The Reformed Churches

Protestantism in France, Switzerland, the Low Countries, and Scotland at the time of the Reformation shared many of the central tenets of Lutheranism, but following the principles of John Calvin (1509–64), applied them in a more thoroughgoing way. The authority of the Bible is paramount, and the preaching of the Word is central to its liturgy. There are two principal forms of church organization: presbyterian – local churches grouped together under the government of a regional synod of ordained presbyters and lay elders – and congregational – local churches as independent congregations, responsible for their own life and order. Reformed churches have around 75 million members worldwide.

The Free Churches

These all derive from the various churches of the Reformation as a result of movements in subsequent centuries.



Interior of a traditional American Episcopal church. It shares many characteristic features with other Protestant churches, with a prominent pulpit and simple altar.

The Baptist Churches are a worldwide family of independent congregations that reject the baptism of infants, claiming baptism is a sign of an adult profession of faith. Worship tends not to follow set liturgical forms. The Southern Baptists of the USA are a particularly influential conservative evangelical grouping. There are around 100 million Baptists across the world.

The Methodist Churches originate in the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century, and in the preaching of John Wesley (1703–91). Historically indebted to Anglicanism, which Wesley never renounced, congregational hymn-singing is one of its distinctive contributions to the church at large. Social action is emphasized. Their worldwide number is around 75 million.

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, was founded by George Fox (1624–91). It rejects all liturgical forms – including sacraments – ecclesiastical structures, and definitions of faith. Members meet for silent worship to attend to the 'inner light'. Quakers have a strong commitment to radical involvement in justice and peace issues. They number 400,000 in all.

The Salvation Army was founded by William Booth (1829–1912) as a mission to the poor of London. Now a worldwide movement, it gives equal place to the preaching of the gospel and to social action amongst the needy. Worship is informal and Bible-centred: the sacraments are not observed. Organization is along the lines of the armed forces. There are around 1.1 million Salvationists.

The Pentecostal Churches, numbering around 130 million, amongst them the Assemblies of God, date from the early twentieth century. Charismatic renewal is

particularly strong in Latin America and Africa. The gifts of the Spirit, ecstatic experience, healing, and speaking in tongues, are central to church life and worship.

The Charismatic movement

This has profoundly influenced churches in most denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church.

The African Independent, or Initiated, Churches are vigorous and fast growing communities of black Christians for whom the black experience is crucial to their self-understanding. In various degrees, they are influenced by liberation theology, as a people who have known oppression, charismatic renewal, and the indigenous religion of their ancestors. They number around 40 million.

House Churches, or New Churches, are a growing phenomenon within the conservative evangelical movement. 'Restorationists' reject the institutional church with its ordained ministry, returning to what is seen as a New Testament pattern of worship in members' homes. Worship is informal, and often charismatic in style.

The Ecumenical Movement

The Ecumenical Movement, from the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning 'the inhabited world', is the product of the twentieth century. It was increasingly realized that Christian witness in the world is severely compromised by the deep historic divisions between the churches. While organic unity, or even inter-communion, between the churches remains a long way off, the churches now recognize the validity of one another's baptism. The mutual recognition of ministries, especially by Roman Catholics of non-Catholic ministries, remains problematic. All the mainline denominations are publicly committed to the task of reconciliation between Christians.

Statue of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546), Dresden, Germany.



The World Council of Churches was constituted in 1948 as a fellowship of churches united in their loyalty to Jesus Christ 'as God and Saviour'. The Council exists to enable the churches to debate matters of common concern, and where possible, to speak and act as one. It has been particularly vigorous – sometimes controversially so – in development work, in education, and in taking up the cause of oppressed minorities. Assemblies of the Council meet every seven years. Councils of churches exist in many places, enabling local congregations to worship, work, and study alongside one another. More formal ecumenical agreements enable sharing of buildings and ministries to take place on a regular basis.

Michael Sadgrove

*'I am the bread of life.
He who comes to me will
never be hungry.'*

*'I am the light of the
world. Whoever follows
me will have the light of
life and will never walk
in darkness.'*

*'I am the gate for the
sheep ... whoever comes
in by me will be saved.'*

*'I am the good shepherd,
who is willing to die for
the sheep.'*

*'I am the resurrection
and the life. Whoever
believes in me will live,
even though he dies;
and whoever lives and
believes in me will
never die.'*

*'I am the way, the truth
and the life; no one goes
to the Father except
by me.'*

*'I am the vine, and
you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me,
and I in him, will bear
much fruit; for you can
do nothing without me.'*

*Jesus' great statements about
himself, from John's Gospel,
Good News Bible.*

Two days later, Jesus' disciples found the tomb empty. The meaning of this was brought home to them by a series of encounters with Jesus himself, alive and real. He explained to them again the meaning of his life and death, and the mission that he had entrusted to them. Then he left them, and they began to preach to the world that Jesus – triumphant even over death – was Lord and Saviour. The resurrection of Jesus formed the focus of the earliest Christian preaching; it was the risen Lord whom they worshipped.

WHO WAS JESUS?

Jesus was hailed as a prophet, a man sent by God. In his preaching, teaching, and healing he matched up to that role. But Christians believe, and his own life and teaching suggest, he was much more than that.

Jesus called for faith in, and loyalty to, himself, and presented himself as the final arbiter of people's destiny. He not only proclaimed forgiveness and salvation: by his own life, suffering, and death he achieved it. He is the messenger – but he is also the heart of the message. He calls people to God, but he is also himself the way to God.

During Jesus' earthly life, his disciples only dimly understood this. But after his resurrection, they quickly came to speak of him as more than just a man, and to worship him as they worshipped his Father. During his earthly teaching, Jesus had prepared the way for this, by speaking of himself as the Son of God in a unique sense, and of God as his Father in an exclusive relationship quite different from the sense in which his disciples could use the term.

The worship of Jesus the man as the Son of God did not have its origin in some fanciful piety, long after his death, but in the impression he made on his disciples during the three years of his ministry. His resurrection deepened that impression and confirmed it. Without in the least doubting his real humanity, they believed they had been walking with God.

The Father and I are one.

John 10:30, Good News Bible.

RICHARD FRANCE

CHAPTER 38

Sacred Writings

The word 'Bible' comes from the Greek *Biblia*, meaning simply 'the Books'. The plural is significant: the Bible is a collection of books written over a period of more than 1000 years, in widely differing cultural and historical situations, and in a rich variety of styles and language. This collection has come to be regarded by Christians as a single unit, 'The Bible', as its books have been recognized as standing apart from other books.



THE OLD TESTAMENT

There are two unequal parts to the Bible. The first, and by far the larger, called by Christians 'the Old Testament', is simply the Hebrew and Aramaic scriptures of Judaism, which present the history and religious thought of the people of God up to the time when Jesus came. Christians have always regarded themselves as the legitimate heirs to the religion of ancient Israel, and so accept the books of the Hebrew Bible as fully 'canonical', or part of scripture. Without them, the specifically Christian scriptures could hardly be understood.

A number of later Jewish works in Greek are also included in Roman Catholic editions of the Old Testament, sometimes distinguished as 'deutero-canonical', of lesser importance than the Hebrew scriptures. Protestant Bibles do not include these works in the Old Testament; but they are sometimes printed after the Old Testament, as a separate section, known as 'the Apocrypha'. Protestant Christians do not accept them as Scripture.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The specifically Christian books of the Bible, known as 'the New Testament', comprise twenty-seven writings by Christians of the first century CE, mostly quite short. While most of the writers were of Jewish origin, the books are in Greek, which was the common language of the Roman Empire.

They consist firstly of four 'Gospels', setting out from different points of view the life and teaching of Jesus, together with the 'Acts of the Apostles', which is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke telling the story of the first thirty years of Christianity. There are

then thirteen letters by Paul, the great missionary leader, to churches and individuals; eight other letters by early Christian leaders; and the 'Revelation of John', a visionary work cast in the mould of Jewish apocalyptic literature.

The New Testament writings, although produced within a relatively short period compared with the many centuries of the writing of the Old Testament, are mixed in style and content; even the literary quality of the Greek varies widely. The different interests and personalities of the writers are clear on even a superficial reading.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

Christians have regarded these varied writings of both the Old and New Testaments as a unity, often called the 'Word of God'. They have spoken of the Bible as 'inspired', meaning not merely that it is great literature, or that it brings spiritual enlightenment, but that it comes from God. But the classic Christian belief is that what they wrote in their own language, and in their own historical setting, was directed by God, so that the result was no less his word than theirs.

So, while the biblical books must be interpreted with proper attention to their background and literary form, what they declare is, Christians believe, God's word to his people. This is why the Bible, for all its variety, is treated by Christians as a unity, progressively revealing not only God's acts, but his mind and will.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

In theory, therefore, all Christians accept the Bible as authoritative, both in guiding their actions and in forming their beliefs. In practice, Christians have differed on this. The Protestant Reformation aimed to restore the Bible to a place of authority above the pronouncements of the leaders of the church and the traditions that had grown up. Within Protestant Christianity, the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century led to a new confidence in human reason as the ultimate guide to truth, and the Bible began to be treated only as a record of human religious development, not as a divine revelation.

Today, while evangelical Christianity accepts the Bible as its supreme authority, more liberal Protestantism questions its importance. In Roman Catholicism, since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a resurgence of interest in the Bible.

RICHARD FRANCE

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16,
New International Version.

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

Second Westminster
Confession (1677)

CHAPTER 39

Beliefs

The Christian faith is directly descended from the religion of the Jews. At the time of Jesus this had the following characteristics, as taught in the sacred book of the Jews, the Old Testament:

- Belief in the existence of one God (monotheism), the Creator and Lord of the universe, who is sovereign over all.
- Belief in the fact that human beings are made in the image of God, but have rebelled against their Creator, and stand in danger of judgment.
- Belief that God, who is the righteous judge, is also gracious and merciful. He has provided a way for people to be set free from judgment, by the penitent offering of sacrifices.
- Belief that God revealed himself to the nation of Israel and called them to be his people.
- Belief that God would some day establish his rule in a sinful world, setting his people free from their enemies, and appointing his chosen agent, the messiah, to rule over them for ever.
- The practice of a moral life, under the guidance of the Law given in the Old Testament; the maintenance of a religious ritual based on the Temple and involving the offering of sacrifice.



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS

These beliefs were decisively affected by the coming of Jesus, his followers' confident reports of his resurrection from the dead, and their receiving of the gift of the Spirit of God at Pentecost. There remained a basic similarity with the Jewish religion, but there were some fundamental changes.

The most important of these changes was due to the Christian understanding of Jesus. From a very early date, the Christians began to realize that the Jewish hope of God's chosen agent coming to set up his rule had been fulfilled in Jesus. He was the messiah whom the Jews awaited. It is the rejection of this identification by Jews that constitutes

I believe Christ's teaching; and this is what I believe. I believe that my welfare in the world will only be possible when all men fulfil Christ's teaching.

Leo Tolstoy, *What I Believe* (1884).

the decisive difference between them and Christians. For Christians, the coming of Jesus means that God's future plan, announced in the Old Testament, has already begun to happen. God's rule is being established in a new way.

But the way in which it has happened is different from what the Jews had come to expect. They thought that God's rule would be achieved by the military overthrow of their enemies, and would lead to their own establishment as the dominant nation. But Jesus did not speak out against the external enemies of the Jews; rather, he proclaimed the need of everybody for a change of heart. The rule of God advances by the conversion of individuals to a new way of life, and the way of violent revolution is firmly rejected.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

God's action in Jesus was also seen as including sacrifice. The death of Jesus was understood as a means of cancelling sin, provided by God himself, and displaying his love for sinners. Sinfulness must inevitably bring separation from God, or death. But Jesus died this death himself. A variety of pictures – drawn from the slave market, the law court, the Temple, and personal relationships – are used to express the fundamental belief that the death of Jesus is the means of reconciling God and human beings, and freeing them from the fear of judgment.

The effect of this understanding was to bring to an end the system of animal sacrifices, which were understood as pictures pointing forward to the spiritual sacrifice of Jesus, and now made obsolete by the offering of the perfect sacrifice. Christian worship was no longer a matter of offerings in a temple; rather it was the expression of gratitude to God for his provision of a sacrifice.

At the same time, the coming of Jesus was seen as bringing to an end the ritual Law of the Jews which regulated the Temple worship and a host of other matters. The ethical principles which lay behind the Law, seen especially in the Ten Commandments, were not abolished, but the detailed ritual and other observances were no longer needed.

In practice, the Jews had come to regard the observance of the Law in minute detail as the means of gaining and maintaining a good relationship with God and obtaining his favour. It was Paul who insisted that God's favour could not be gained by keeping the Law: all have sinned and come short of God's glory. So the proper relationship of human beings with God can only be that of faith, the grateful and obedient trust which comes to God on the basis of what he has done, in contrast to the approach of works, which insists that the individual must do something to merit God's favour.

Though Christian worship abandoned the Temple, it was deeply influenced by the synagogue, the Jewish meeting-house in which the teaching of the Law was central. But the rejection of the Law as the means of salvation led to a shift in the understanding of the Old Testament. Interest turned more to its prophetic character, as a book which looked forward to the coming of Jesus, and it was increasingly studied for what it taught about him. At the same time, other writings were increasingly placed alongside it as equally inspired and authoritative scriptures. The writings of the infant church, the letters written by its leaders, and the accounts of the actions and preaching of Jesus in the Gospels, were

seen as a corpus of scriptures alongside the Old Testament. The whole collection became the Bible of the Christian church.

The recognition that observance of the Jewish Law was no longer binding on Christians, together with the simple fact that almost from the beginning non-Jews – the Gentiles – were attracted by the message, led quickly to the development of a community composed of both Jews and non-Jews. Despite initial uncertainties, it was recognized that non-Jews did not need to adopt the practices of the Jewish Law, especially circumcision and the observance of Jewish holy days, in order to become Christians. Christianity, which might have remained a Jewish sect, was thus poised to become a world faith, open to everyone on the basis of belief in Jesus.

The characteristic rites of the new faith, which roughly parallel the Jewish rite of circumcision and the festival of the Passover – which celebrated the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt – were baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism was a ritual washing with water which signified cleansing from sin, the reception of God's Spirit, the dedication of the baptized persons to God, and their entry into the new people of God. The Lord's Supper, or Eucharist – 'thanksgiving' – was a token meal of bread and wine: elements used by Jesus at his Last Supper before his death to point to his self-sacrifice and the shedding of his blood to open up a new covenant or agreement between God and his people.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Alongside the death of Jesus, belief in his resurrection was the crucial thing for the development of Christianity. Christians saw it as God's vindication of Jesus, after he had been rejected by the Jewish leaders and put to death. It was the confirmation of his claims to be God's agent, and above all it demonstrated that he was triumphant over the power of sin and death. The resurrection was seen as the decisive stage in the ascent of Jesus to share the throne of God in heaven – to use the picture-language of the New Testament. This belief had several important consequences.

- First, it confirmed the Christian belief that God would act again in history through the return of Jesus at the end of the world. The exaltation of Jesus meant that he was the agent appointed by God to carry out final judgment and to bring in God's eternal reign in peace and justice.
- Second, it led to the conviction that Jesus was to be seen as divine. Already in his lifetime, he had displayed a unique consciousness that he was God's Son, and that God was his Father. After the resurrection, Christians recognized increasingly that all the functions of God were exercised through Jesus, and that he shared in the rule of God. He was to be regarded as the Son of God, who had 'come down' into the world in human form and then 'ascended' to be with God. The consequences of this belief were shattering: Jews and others who believed that there was one God could not accept the

All things are possible to him that believes, more to him that hopes, even more to him that loves, and more still to him that practises and perseveres in these three virtues.

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (1691)

Christian claim. Christians, for their part, had to revise their ideas about God, and recognize that, though God is one, alongside the Father there was also the Son; they were each divine in nature, yet in such a way that the Son could be regarded as dependent on the Father. The earthly Jesus was the Son of God made flesh – ‘incarnate’ – become a human being.

- Third, now that Jesus has been exalted to heaven, he remains active and living, in the same way as the Father is the living God. Sharing the status of the Father, Jesus is now the Lord, so that the relation of the Christian to him is not simply one of belief and trust, but also of obedience and commitment. To be a Christian is to make the confession ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’, a confession that he is both the Lord whom the believer obeys, and also the one to whom the whole universe will one day bow the knee.



The ancient Christian monastery of Mar Saba is located in the Judean Hills, near Bethlehem, Israel.

Such faith and obedience is part of a spiritual relationship between Christians and Jesus. Christians can be said to be united with Jesus, a whole variety of metaphors from the language of personal relationships being used to express the reality of this link. The new life which they begin when they believe in Jesus is the reproduction of the life of Jesus in them. They die to their old way of life, and rise again to a new God-centred and divinely inspired life, in the same way as Jesus died and rose again by the power of God. The Christian community is a vast organism, or body, through which the spiritual life of Christ flows.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

After the resurrection came the third decisive event that determined the character of Christianity. The Jews already believed in the communication of God's power and guidance to particular individuals – especially the prophets – by the activity of the divine Spirit. The birthday of the church is reckoned from the day of Pentecost, when all the believers in Jesus became conscious of the gift of the Spirit given to each one personally. So universal is the gift, that a Christian can be defined as a person who has received the gift of the Spirit. The initial experience can be spoken of as a second, spiritual birth, bringing the new life of Jesus to the believer. The Spirit works in the Christian community by giving different abilities to different individuals, to enable them to lead and help the church as a whole. He also acts in the life of each Christian, to foster the qualities of love and freedom from sin which were seen in Jesus himself.

Thus the Spirit can be seen as the personal agent of God in the lives of individuals and the Christian community. This meant a further development in the understanding of God. The Spirit was recognized as being divine in the same way as the Father and the Son, so that the Christian concept of God had to recognize a fundamental 'three-ness' or 'Trinity' in the nature of God as one being who exists in three persons. Thus the understanding of God as Trinity, which in this form is peculiar to Christianity and sharply differentiates it from other religions in the same Judaic tradition — Judaism and Islam — sums up the distinctive and vital elements in Christian faith.

Christian belief takes the holiness and judgment of a righteous God seriously. This is seen in the character of the Christian message, which includes the warning that all people are sinners who have rebelled against God and therefore face judgment. It is only against this background that the Christian message makes sense as 'gospel', good news that the same God is merciful and longs for the salvation of all, and has provided the way of forgiveness and life in Jesus. Thus the gospel presents everyone with the alternatives of judgment or life.

VARIETY AND DIFFICULTY

The Christian message has naturally been subject to fresh thinking and reformulation down the ages, as theologians have tried to express the biblical teaching in ways that are philosophically acceptable and logically coherent. It is not surprising that there have been differences in understanding in different times and places, and that some expressions of Christianity have veered away from the biblical witness.

The doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation have caused particular difficulty. Since the nature of God, who is infinite, lies beyond the scope of our finite understanding, attempts to explain his nature can lead to misunderstandings and one-sided statements. This has led to a variety of attempts to simplify the doctrine of God, by restricting full divinity to the Father, or by regarding the three persons simply as three different aspects of one God. Some theologians have found it hard to believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, and sometimes he has been regarded as a separate, subordinate being. The tendency in modern times has been to deny that God could truly be united with a human being in one person, and to say that Jesus was a good man who possessed the divine Spirit to an unusual degree, or that true humanity is the same thing as divinity. Another tendency has been to regard the Spirit as less than a full person.

The Christian understanding of the work of Jesus has also been the cause of difficulty. Some Christians have denied that any sort of action is necessary to enable God to forgive sins, and have seen in the death of Jesus nothing more than a demonstration of supreme love. Others have carried the idea of sacrifice over into Christian worship, and seen the Lord's Supper as some kind of repetition of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

At times there have been tendencies to legalism: the need to do good works in order to merit salvation has been taught. The church has on occasions claimed an authority almost equal to that of God, and developed a hierarchy, or set of graded authorities, surrounded by pomp and prestige. At other times, the doctrine of God as judge has been

watered down, and replaced by a belief that God will ultimately save everyone, no matter how they have behaved in this life.

Over against such views, mainline Christianity affirms that Christian teaching must be based on the Bible, and any developments in understanding must be consistent with its supremely authoritative position as the written form of God's revelation of himself and his will for his people. It therefore insists that people must recognize that the nature of God is a complex unity in which there are three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, and that the Son became a human being in the person of Jesus. In the life and death of Jesus is seen the activity of the one God entering into the sinful plight of the world and bearing its painful consequences, so that believers might be delivered from its guilt and its power, and share in the life of God himself.

Within this basic framework of belief, as summed up in the historic creeds and confessions of the church, there is room for confession of people's inability to understand God fully, and there can be variety of understanding over matters that are of lesser significance, as the existence of the various denominations of the church shows. At all times Christians need to go back to the Bible and to test their beliefs and their practice by its teaching. Jesus himself – the Christ of the Bible and of experience – is believed to be far greater than any human formulation of dogma or teaching about him.

I. HOWARD MARSHALL

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Worship and Festivals

All institutions live by their rituals, and religious institutions are no exception. The New Testament is, from one standpoint, the history of the religious life – including the ‘cultic’, or worshipping, life – of the people of God: its pages record the beginnings of Christian worship.

It is recorded in the book of Acts that the infant church began a rhythm of church life which, in outline, is what would be called ‘worship’ today – indeed, a modern pattern for a communion service might well have the same elements. ‘The believers gathered for the apostles’ teaching, for prayer, fellowship, and ‘the breaking of bread’.



EUCCHARIST

The Lord’s Supper, Communion, or Eucharist was the distinctive event of Christian worship. Jesus himself commanded it, and there is reason to think that the church observed it as a weekly – sometimes a daily – event from the outset. Originally, the commemoration of Jesus, especially his death and resurrection, which the ‘sacramental’ bread and wine signified, was held within the context of a larger meal, called an *agape*, or love-feast. But for various reasons, this context fell away in the first hundred and fifty years after the resurrection, and a ritual meal of solely bread and wine remained.

BAPTISM

The New Testament also describes what has been called the Christian initiation rite, baptism. This was certainly a means for the new convert to enter the life of the church; but in sharp distinction to contemporary mystery religions, it was open and simple. Baptism was a public ‘washing’, identifying the believer and his household with the death and rising again of Jesus.

Today, churches which are Baptist in conviction hold that this should only take place on confession of personal faith, at an age appropriate for the confession to be credible as the candidate’s own. Others baptize not only adults and others able to confess the faith

personally, but also young children and newborn infants in believing households. The intention is that such infants and children should be brought up as Christians, but they are usually expected to make a personal profession of faith at 'confirmation', or a similar rite, at a mature age.

There is other evidence in the New Testament of early church practice. Psalms and hymns were sung. To express corporate solidarity with missionaries, elders, or deacons serving the church, there was 'laying on of hands' at their commissioning. The sick were anointed and prayer made for their recovery. Money was collected for other, poorer churches. The 'ministry' of the church was divided amongst those who had the 'gifts of God's Spirit' for both practical and spiritual leadership.

There seems to have been no such concept as 'having a service'. The 'business' part of church life, such as organizing for the care of widows or the relief of famine, was all bound up with the 'worship' part, of praying, singing, and teaching.

LITURGY AND LEADERSHIP

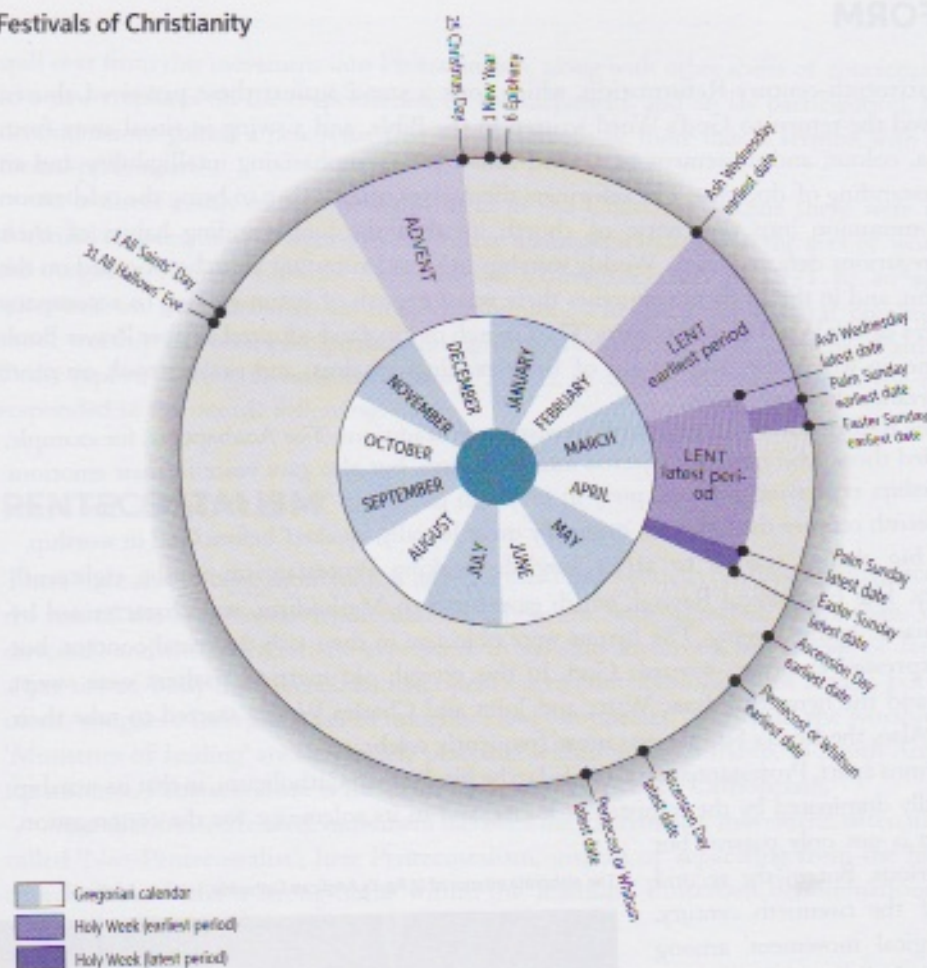
In the post-apostolic years, patterns gradually settled down, and a clear structure of leadership emerged, in which the bishop would normally preside over the worship of the local church. Bishops wrote down for themselves the great thanksgiving prayer which they uttered over the bread and wine of communion, and these 'eucharistic prayers' began to be used regularly, and over wide areas, as others copied them.

As congregations grew, they sometimes overflowed from the homes in which they originally met. Groups started – occasionally even in times of persecution – to put up special buildings for worship. They produced an ever more detailed pattern of the church's year – not only keeping the 'week' of creation, though making the first day of the week holy in place of the seventh, but also keeping annual commemorations: first of all the Passover – when Jesus had died and risen – then – when the Spirit had come – and finally Christmas – celebrating Christ's birth – and the 'death day' of the various martyrs.

The Peace of Constantine, or Peace of the Church (313 CE), gave a new tolerance to Christians to worship freely, and also boosted church building. The assimilation of church and state that followed not only encouraged the use of pagan festivals for Christian commemorations – as happened with Christmas – but also started to shape church organization on the lines of the official civic structures. Whole communities were baptized, and the Western concept of 'Christendom' was born. Later, the natural conservatism of the followers of any institution which observes rituals ensured that Latin remained in use rather than the language of everyday speech, that fourth-century garments remained in use by those who led the worship – even though fashions changed for other uses – and that church building attracted the energies of architects and builders whilst other civic buildings were neglected.

In many ways the Eastern Orthodox Churches have remained closer than any other to the spirit of the fourth and fifth centuries. Generations of a minority position have built

Festivals of Christianity



up a great regard for tradition and its conservation. The East has never had a Reformation or any equivalent of the Roman Catholic Second Vatican Council.

In the Middle Ages in the Western church, the role of the clergy became much more dominant. Celibacy added to the mystique of the clergy, who alone took an active part in worship. The concept of their special – indeed miraculous – power to transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ gave them the functions of a priesthood. The part of ordinary believers was to attend Mass and to adore the presence of Christ. The people could not understand the Latin used for the Bible readings and prayers, nor did they receive communion, except at Easter, and then – from the late thirteenth century onwards – only the bread.

REFORM

The sixteenth-century Reformation, which took a stand against these perceived abuses, involved the return to God's Word written in the Bible, and a swing in ritual away from drama, colour, and movement to a word-centredness, emphasizing intelligibility and an understanding of doctrine. The reformers themselves often strove to bring the celebration of communion into the centre of church life, but the long-standing habits of their congregations defeated them. Weekly worship in most Protestant churches focused on the sermon, and in the Lutheran churches there was a growth of hymn-singing to accompany services of the Word and of prayers. The Church of England adopted a sober Prayer Book routine, in which the daily round of Bible readings, psalms, and prayers took on more importance than preaching.

The Reformation also gave birth to distinctive traditions. The Anabaptists, for example, included those who not only rejected infant baptism, but also gave voice to their emotions in worship, expressing personal piety in prayer in gatherings 'led by the Spirit'. And in the seventeenth century the Quakers, originally quite literally, 'quaked' before God in worship.

A big change started to affect English-speaking Protestantism in the eighteenth century. The Evangelical Revival, which gave birth to Methodism, was characterized by enthusiastic hymn-singing. The hymns were objective in their rich doctrinal content, but also expressed emotions towards God. In this revival, old metrical psalters were swept aside, and the hymns of Isaac Watts and John and Charles Wesley started to take their place. Also, the Lord's Supper was more frequently celebrated.

Hymns apart, Protestantism has tended to be like Roman Catholicism, in that its worship is usually dominated by the minister or leader, and in its solemnity: for the congregation, religion is not only passive, but also serious. But in the second half of the twentieth century, a 'liturgical movement' among both Catholics and Protestants began to strive for just those ends which seem so often to have been missed – active participation by the whole congregation, understandable services, and a genuine building up of the fellowship of the body of Christ.

In the Church of Rome, this led in 1962–65 to the Second Vatican Council's reforms of the liturgy, including the admission of local languages into worship, after 1600 years of Latin. The

The elaborate interior of St Paul's Anglican Cathedral, London, England.



spill over from this movement into Protestantism, along with other shifts of conviction, led to a new emphasis on the corporateness of the sacrament, and on lay participation. Many denominations gained a new sense that worship might be more than a sermon with some formal preliminaries.

As a direct result of this new openness in the Church of Rome there were many doctrinal conversations designed to clear away misunderstandings. In the area of worship, the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission led in 1971 to an agreed statement on the Eucharist, or holy communion. The great multilateral convergence about worship has been precipitated through the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order report, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), to which churches all over the world responded in the decade following.

PENTECOSTALISM

There have always been more radical movements. The twentieth century, for instance, saw the rise of the Pentecostal denominations. These are 'Spirit-directed' rather than 'Word-directed', and the characteristic expression in worship involves a full release of feelings, a free use of body movements, and an openness to contributions – not always, but quite often, 'tongues', 'interpretation of tongues', and 'prophecies' – from all the worshippers. 'Ministries of healing' are also widely practised within public worship. In South America, for instance, Pentecostalism is the main alternative to Roman Catholicism.

A parallel, indeed related, movement has been the 'charismatic' movement, often initially called 'Neo-Pentecostalist'; here Pentecostalism, instead of separating from the historic churches, has found a strong home within the 'mainline' Protestant denominations, and even in the Church of Rome.

TODAY

The religious face of the earth is changing. Eastern Orthodoxy has resurfaced in Russia and other Eastern European nations since the collapse of Communism – whilst Islam and Eastern religions have come, largely by migration, into Western nations.

Christianity is once again in a missionary situation in the West, as Christendom fades into secularism. But the various Western forms of Christianity are not now confined to the West. Young churches flourish in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, varying in their worship from being as traditional as the Western churches from which they sprang, to the use of their genuine freedom to be culturally relevant to their contexts, frequently showing a freshness and liveliness hard to find in Western historic churches.

COLIN BUCHANAN

Contemporary Christianity



The history of the Christian movement across the centuries is full of surprises. From the beginning this faith has displayed an ability to take root and flourish in new areas and different cultural settings. One way of explaining this is to say that Christianity is a faith capable of being translated into new languages and cultural forms.

Today, while the churches of Europe and North America face the challenges of secularization – the process by which a society becomes increasingly secular or non-religious – the faith is growing at a rapid rate in diverse cultural settings in the non-Western world. At the very point in the mid-twentieth century when the colonial empires were receding, indigenous forms of Christianity displayed considerable growth, demonstrating that the faith had put down roots in the soil of local cultures and languages. The outcome has been the emergence of 'World Christianity', which is increasingly recognized as a central feature of our globalized world.

MODERN EXPANSION

The growth of the religion across the southern continents in modern times is unprecedented. While Western missions played a crucial role in the initial act of communicating the Christian gospel across cultural and linguistic barriers, the key players in the spread of the faith have invariably been local believers, able to express their new religion in surprising and dynamic ways, in contexts frequently marked by social and cultural crisis. This is the case whether in the evangelization of West Africa by repatriated slaves, or the contribution of thousands of ordinary Christians who – faced with the challenge of urban living in the burgeoning cities of the south – have proved adept at sharing their faith and planting new churches. In addition, a powerful impetus has come from the ministries of prophetic preachers and evangelists, who applied the faith to local situations, presenting Christ in ways that resonated with the felt needs of their own people, achieving mass movements of converts on a scale that equals, and probably surpasses, previous revival movements in Christian history.

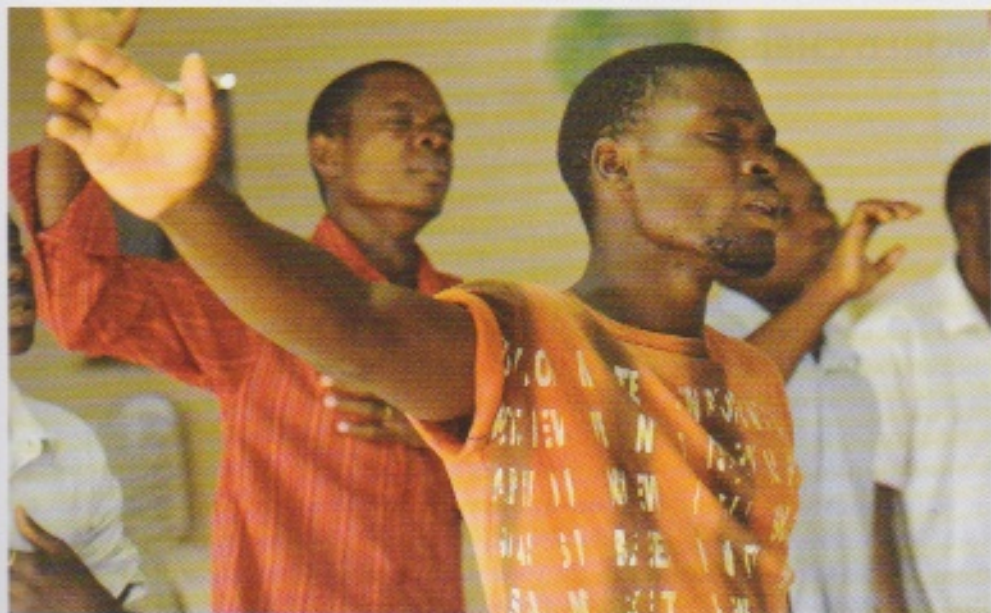
This growth of Christianity across the southern continents has resulted in a shift in the centre of gravity of the religion, which now has its roots firmly planted in the soils

of non-Western cultures. For example, in South America the extraordinary growth of indigenous forms of Pentecostal Christianity, involving the conversion of upwards of 160 million people, has taken both theologians and social scientists by surprise. The secular experience of Europe, far from being the vanguard of a global trend, may actually be unusual and exceptional.

AFRICA

The continent of Africa provided evidence of rapid Christian growth during the twentieth century. Despite the existence of ancient Christian traditions, the faith arrived in most sub-Saharan countries in the course of the nineteenth century. Yet so great has been the Christian growth witnessed across this continent, that Africa is rapidly displacing Europe and North America as the chief Christian heartland. Both the Roman Catholic Church and major Protestant groupings are being transformed by these changes, as the number of their adherents in Africa dwarfs the parent churches in Europe and North America. For example, the Archbishop of Canterbury presides over a worldwide communion of around 85 million Anglicans, of whom the vast majority are in the southern continents, including more than 18 million in Nigeria alone. One estimate suggests that the total Christian population of that country may reach 120 million by the middle of this century, and figures like this can be replicated elsewhere in Africa. Africa also saw a plethora of Independent churches, especially in the Zionist tradition, blossom in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as many other charismatic and Pentecostal churches.

Young African Christians worshipping.



ASIA

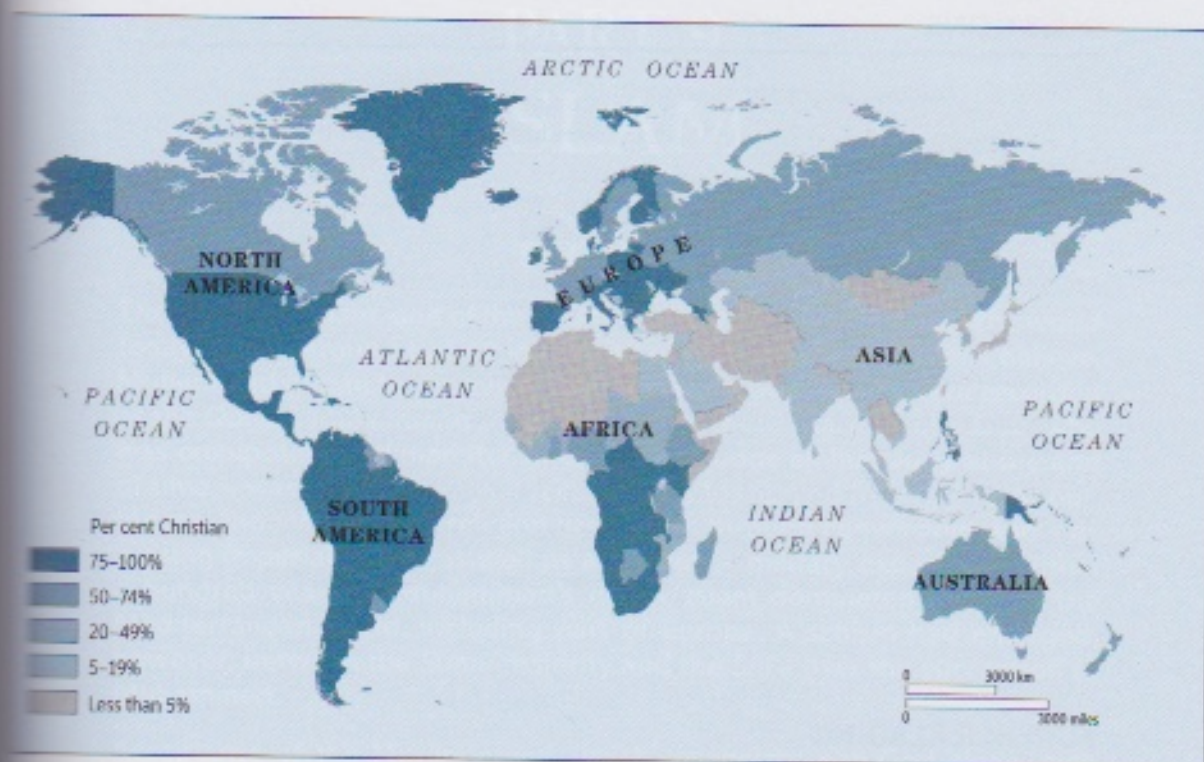
In Asia, the picture appears to be rather different. In many countries across this vast region, Christians remain small minorities, in contexts shaped by ancient non-Christian religious traditions. There are exceptions – notably in South Korea – where growing churches display remarkable missionary passion, as well as Singapore and the Philippines. However, a narrow focus on percentages of Christians can easily conceal the reality of significant Christian movements in the context of Asian religious pluralism. For instance the relatively small Christian community in Japan has given birth to some gifted theologians and writers. Similarly, the church in India has incarnated the Christian gospel in the context of the Hindu culture of the subcontinent, and there are indications it is experiencing growth.

The story of Christianity in modern China is of great significance. Seventy years ago, Western scholars were inclined to dismiss the church in China. Its apparently ineradicable foreignness limited its influence, and seemed to condemn it to being an ephemeral feature of colonial history. However, following the removal of Western missions after the Communist revolution, the unexpected occurred, so that scholars now speak of a flood of manifestations of the revival of religion, and acknowledge that Christianity has shed its image as a foreign import, and is now clearly identified as a Chinese religion. Estimates as to the number of Christian believers vary between 30 and 105 million. While claims at the top end of this range should be treated with scepticism, there is solid evidence of a tenfold increase in the Chinese churches since 1949. This in part reflects the continuing impact of the Home Church Movement in China, where the number of congregations increased from some 50,000 in 1970 to 400,000 twenty-five years later.

WORLD CHRISTIANITY

What are the implications of these changes? Until recently it was possible to assume the churches of Europe and North America could simply be transplanted to other continents, together with their inherited patterns of theology and practice. This assumption rested on the conviction that Western Christianity was a culture-free expression of the faith revealed through Christ and his apostles, and possessed absolute status and importance. In the new context created by the emergence of the non-Western churches, such assumptions have to be abandoned. The church looks very different in societies that stress the importance of the community over the rights of the individual, while theology takes surprising directions in cultures relatively unaffected by Western modernity.

As to Christian mission, the older approaches in which this was a one-way affair – from the West to the rest – have now been replaced by a far more complex pattern, in which mission is 'from everywhere to everywhere'. The massive migrations from the southern continents into Europe and North America is resulting in the appearance of 'Southern' forms of Christianity in the great urban centres of the Western world, where they often become by far the largest and most dynamic of Christian communities.



Christianity Worldwide Today

For the vast majority of Christians in the southern hemisphere, religious pluralism is not a new experience. Faith in Christ is confessed, and the life of discipleship lived out, in continual interaction with one's Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Confucian neighbours. Non-Western churches are overwhelmingly churches of the poor, existing in social and economic conditions largely dictated by forces beyond their control, in a world shaped by the phenomenon of economic globalization. The growth of non-Western churches in contexts inevitably characterized by ongoing dialogue with people of other faiths holds the possibility that fresh insights into the meaning of Christ and salvation will emerge from these new heartlands in the course of the twenty-first century.

DAVID SMITH