The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe,
1750–2000

Christendom lasted for over a thousand years in western Europe, and we are still living in its shadow. For over two centuries this social and religious order has been in decline. Enforced religious unity has given way to increasing pluralism, and since 1960 this process has spectacularly accelerated. In this book, historians, sociologists and theologians from six countries answer two central questions: what is the religious condition of western Europe at the start of the twenty-first century? And how and why did Christendom decline? Beginning by overviewing the present situation, the authors then go back into the past, tracing the course of events in England, Ireland, France, Germany and the Netherlands, and showing how the fate of Christendom is reflected in changing attitudes to death and to technology, and in the evolution of religious language. They reveal a pattern more complex and ambiguous than any of the conventional narratives will admit.

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The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000

directed by Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf
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Preface

This volume has grown out of a conference held in Paris in April 1997. It was the last of a series of three on the theme of ‘The Rise and Decline of Christendom in Western Europe’, organised by the History Group of the Missiology of Western Culture Project. The Group comprised Dr Neal Blough (Paris), Dr Alan Kreider (then Oxford), Prof. Hugh McLeod, and Prof. Werner Ustorf (both Birmingham). A. Kreider (ed.), *The Origins of Christendom in the West* (Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark, 2001) was the result of the first of these conferences. The second focused on the period of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

The Missiology of Western Culture Project (1992–1997) was an ecumenical attempt by western missiologists to mobilise the thinking of specialists in a variety of disciplines about the interplay of the Christian message and churches with the culture of the contemporary west. Subsidised by substantial grants, notably from the Pew Charitable Trust (Philadelphia), the project sponsored study groups in seven areas (the arts, ecclesiology, epistemology, social structures and systems, history, the individual, and health and healing), and each group organised its own study processes and colloquia. The Project ended with the groups sharing their findings with each other in September 1997 in a major international consultation at the Bon Secours Center, Marriottsville, Maryland, USA. Their learnings are gradually appearing in print. The first direct fruits came from the Epistemology Group: J. A. Kirk and K. J. Vanhoozer (eds.), *To Stake a Claim: Mission and the Western Crisis of Knowledge* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999).

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