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0521814936 - The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000

Edited by Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf

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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.

HUGH McLEOD is Professor of Church History at the University of Birmingham. His previous publications include *Piety and Poverty* (1996) and *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789–1989* (1997). He is president of the British branch of the International Church History Organisation.

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2003
Reprinted 2004

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Times 10/13 pt *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

ISBN 0 521 81493 6 hardback

Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	page vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
1 Introduction	1
HUGH McLEOD	
Part I	
2 The secularisation decade: what the 1960s have done to the study of religious history	29
CALLUM G. BROWN	
3 Christendom in decline: the Swedish case	47
EVA M. HAMBERG	
4 New Christianity, indifference and diffused spirituality	63
YVES LAMBERT	
Part II	
5 Established churches and the growth of religious pluralism: a case study of christianisation and secularisation in England since 1700	81
DAVID HEMPTON	
6 Catholicism in Ireland	99
SHERIDAN GILLEY	
7 Long-term religious developments in the Netherlands, c. 1750–2000	113
PETER VAN ROODEN	

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi	Contents	
8	The potency of 'Christendom': the example of the <i>Darmstädter Wort</i> (1947)	130
	MARTIN GRESCHAT	
Part III		
9	The dechristianisation of death in modern France	145
	THOMAS KSELMAN	
10	The impact of technology on Catholicism in France (1850–1950)	163
	MICHEL LAGRÉE	
11	Semantic structures of religious change in modern Germany	184
	LUCIAN HÖLSCHER	
Part IV		
12	Master narratives of long-term religious change	201
	JEFFREY COX	
13	A missiological postscript	218
	WERNER USTORF	
	<i>Index of people and places</i>	226
	<i>Subject index</i>	231

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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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).

The editors of the present volume would like to thank Grace Davie and Loek Halman for their generous help.