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Introduction

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At the beginning of the twentieth century it is estimated that about a third of the people in the world were Christians – which meant that Christianity was by far the largest of the world's religions. During the century the numbers of Christians increased rapidly, but so of course did the world's population, with the result that the proportion who were Christians may have fallen slightly. By the end of the century Christians still outnumbered the followers of any other religion, but Muslims were a strong second.[1] Meanwhile, there had been a dramatic shift in the distribution of Christians between the different regions of the world. It has been estimated that at the beginning of the twentieth century about 80 per cent of the world's Christians lived in Europe, the Russian empire and North America, and a mere 5 per cent in Asia and Africa. By 2000, according to the same authors, the proportion living in Europe, the former Soviet Union and North America had dropped to around 40 per cent, while the proportion living in Asia and Africa had jumped to 32 per cent.

These figures neatly summarise two of the central themes of this volume: in the twentieth century Christianity became a worldwide religion; yet at the same time it suffered a series of major crises in what had been for many centuries its heartlands. Nonetheless, these familiar points may conceal two others, which are equally important. First, power within international Christianity was still at the end of the twentieth century mainly concentrated in Europe and North America. Second, in spite of the crises brought about in the West both by attacks from totalitarian governments and by broader and more gradual processes of secularisation, Christianity and the Christian churches continued to play a major political, social and cultural role in their former heartlands, at least up to the 1960s. This role remained important

1 All the figures in this paragraph are based on the estimates (admittedly in many cases speculative) in David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson (eds.), *World Christian encyclopaedia*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), vol. I, pp. 4, 12.

in the last three decades of the century, though varying between countries, and being more significant in some areas of life than others.

Catholics, Protestants, Independents

Christianity has historically been divided between East and West, and the modern history of Eastern Christianity is the subject of another volume in this series. The present volume is devoted entirely to Western Christianity, and to newer movements that grew out of Western Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the sixteenth century, Western Christianity has been divided between Catholics, who recognise the primacy of the bishop of Rome, and Protestants who do not. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, new forms of Christianity emerged in the United States and, more especially, in Africa and Asia, sometimes led by prophets claiming to have received new revelations, sometimes driven simply by the motive to be free of any kind of Western control. In Africa and Asia they are generally referred to collectively as 'Independent churches'. Part I of this volume provides an overview of five institutions or movements that have been of international significance in the twentieth century, namely: the papacy; the Ecumenical movement, in which the driving forces have been the older Protestant churches; the missionary movement; Pentecostalism, the most expansive branch of twentieth-century Protestantism; and Independency.

Roman Catholicism has remained throughout the twentieth century by far the largest branch of Christianity, about half the Christians in the world being members of that church. At the beginning of the century, it dominated southern, and much of central and eastern, Europe. Baptised Catholics formed the overwhelming majority of the population in France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Italy. They were a substantial majority in Ireland and in the Austro-Hungarian empire. There were large Catholic minorities in Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, and a significant minority in Great Britain. Catholics were also an overwhelming majority in nearly all parts of South and Central America, in several Caribbean islands and in the Philippines. They were nearly half the population in Canada and there were substantial Catholic minorities in the United States and Australia. There were also long-established Catholic enclaves in various parts of Asia and Africa, and recent missionary efforts had led to significant numbers of conversions, notably in Uganda and in Indo-China.

The Vatican Council (1869–70), culminating in the definition of the dogma of papal infallibility, had set the dominant tone for Catholic life in the later

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The church was increasingly centralised, strongly conservative in theology and often in politics, and bound together by Ultramontane piety and intense loyalty to the pope. There had, however, been a significant dissenting minority of liberal Catholics, Gallicans, and others at the time of the Vatican Council. Some had left the church; most had suppressed their doubts. But dissenting currents continued beneath the surface. At the beginning of our period the church had just passed through the so-called 'modernist crisis', in which Pope Pius X had clamped down on Catholic biblical scholars who used 'modernist' methods of biblical criticism pioneered by Protestants, and had required the clergy to take an 'anti-modernist' oath. Apart from these internal divisions, the church had also faced serious external challenges from anti-clerical governments and broader trends towards 'dechristianisation' – the alienation of significant sectors of the population – in some European countries, notably France.

In the sixteenth century, Protestantism had become the religion of the state in large parts of northern Europe. There were already three main branches of Protestantism: Lutheranism became the official religion of many of the German states and throughout Scandinavia; the Reformed faith (also known as Calvinism or, in the English-speaking world, Presbyterianism) was victorious in many of the Swiss cantons, in some German states, in Scotland, and, after many years of warfare, in the Dutch Republic; Anglicanism became the established religion of England and Wales, as well as of Ireland (where most of the people nonetheless remained Catholics). In the early twentieth century the religious establishments set up in the sixteenth century were still intact (except in the Netherlands and in Ireland) and generally commanded at least the nominal allegiance of the majority of the population.

But the religious situation in the Protestant world had been greatly complicated by the emergence of many new forms of Protestantism from the seventeenth century onwards. Already in the sixteenth century the Anabaptists had tried to initiate a Reformation from below without any support from the state, but they had been largely wiped out by persecution. However, seventeenth-century England gave birth to the Baptists, Congregationalists and Quakers; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England to the Methodists, the Unitarians and the Salvation Army; nineteenth- and twentieth-century America saw the emergence of the Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostalists. The most important new development in the twentieth century was Pentecostalism, a collective term for a plethora of denominations, some large, some very small, which have sprung up since the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906.

As Protestantism moved beyond Europe it took a great variety of forms. In the United States the largest branches of Protestantism in the twentieth century were the Baptists and Methodists; in Australia, the Anglicans and the Uniting church (a union of Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians); Nigeria and Uganda were Anglican strongholds; while Presbyterianism was strong in Malawi, and Methodism in Ghana and South Africa – reflecting the continuing relevance of earlier missionary geographies – though, as almost everywhere in Africa, these long-established churches were competing with many newer forms of Protestantism. Pentecostalism is now by far the largest branch of Protestantism in Latin America and, as is shown in chapter 6, it has grown impressively in various parts of Africa and Asia and to a lesser extent in most other parts of the Christian world.

The nineteenth century brought new theological differences to Protestantism. Very often these divided denominations and brought together those of similar theological tendencies in different churches. The biggest driving forces in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had been Evangelicalism (the term used in the English-speaking world) and Pietism (the name given to related movements in Germany and Scandinavia). Evangelicals believed in the inherent sinfulness of all human beings, and their absolute need to repent, to seek God's forgiveness, and to undergo an experience of conversion. They emphasised the authority of the Bible, usually interpreted literally.[2] But the nineteenth century also saw the development of a powerful liberal movement within Protestantism. While still regarding the scriptures as their supreme authority, liberal Protestants believed that the sacred text should be subject to critical scrutiny; and, rather than seeing the Bible as a cohesive whole, they recognised tensions within it, and treated some parts, notably the gospels and the Old Testament prophets, as more authoritative than others. They emphasised the ethical more than the doctrinal teachings of Christianity, and they had a very positive view of science and education. A third major division arose from the high-church movements in Anglicanism and Lutheranism. 'High-church' indicated an emphasis on the sacraments, especially the eucharist, on the priestly office, on ritual and ceremony, on church tradition. It often led to more sympathetic attitudes to Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy: indeed, high-church Anglicans often

2 David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 2–3, offers an influential definition of Evangelicalism.

called themselves 'Catholics' or 'Anglo-Catholics', and denied that the Church of England was a Protestant church.

The early twentieth century brought further theological divisions within Protestantism. Two developments need special mention. Fundamentalism, which by the later twentieth century had become largely a term of abuse, originated with the publication in the United States between 1910 and 1915 of a series of volumes called *The Fundamentals*, and the subsequent formation of a World's Christian Fundamentals Association. The authors were conservative Evangelical Protestants, hostile to the growth of liberalism. Many of their tenets were common to conservative Christians generally, but they had certain distinctive beliefs and concerns. Their central principle was commitment to what they called the 'inerrancy' of scripture. This led to two other points: rejection of Darwin's theory of evolution became a favoured shibboleth; and their interest in biblical prophecies led to a distinctive interpretation of history known as 'premillennial dispensationalism' and an expectation of Christ's imminent Second Coming.[3] Fundamentalism had a big influence on popular religion in the United States and, via American missionaries, in other parts of the world. A second important new development around the same time was Neo-Orthodoxy, which had minimal influence on Christians at large, but a huge influence on academics and church leaders. Its leading exponent was the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, and its first major statement was his commentary on Paul's epistle to the Romans (1919). It was 'orthodox' in that it reaffirmed many of the classical Reformation doctrines and emphasised the radical gulf between God and sinful humanity, bridgeable only through God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. It was 'neo' in the fact that it took for granted some of the major theological innovations of the previous century, such as the critical approach to the Bible.[4]

Five major themes

Five themes run right through parts I and II of this volume: the development of Christianity from a mainly European and American religion to a worldwide

3 See George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American culture: the shaping of twentieth century Evangelicalism 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

4 For a comprehensive guide to Christian theology in the twentieth century, including sections on the various regions of the world, on individual theologians, on feminist and postmodern theologies, on relations between theology and science, and much else, see David F. Ford (ed.), *The modern theologians: an introduction to Christian theology in the twentieth century*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

religion; the major challenges faced by Christianity in its European and North American heartlands; the diminishing importance of denominational boundaries within Christianity, together with the growth in contacts between Christians and adherents of other faiths; the huge role of war in twentieth-century history; and the relationship between Christianity and movements for the emancipation of oppressed groups. A sixth theme is seldom mentioned explicitly, but is part of the essential background to most of the chapters, namely the revolution in communications. I will comment briefly on each of these points.

Christianity becomes a worldwide religion

The great growth of Christianity in Africa and Asia has to be seen in ambivalent relationship to European and American power. In the 1920s nearly all of Africa, nearly all of south and south-east Asia, and much of the middle east was under European rule. This offered Christian missions two major advantages: physical protection both for missionaries and for native converts, and funding for mission schools. On the other hand, none of these things guaranteed a response to Christian missionary efforts. In most of south Asia and in some parts of Africa the response was small, and, in many parts of Africa, Islam was also growing during the colonial era. On the other hand, Korea, the Asian country where Christianity progressed fastest, was under Japanese rule. And, of course, as David Maxwell points out in chapter 22, Christianity has grown faster since the end of colonial rule than it did during that era. It seems likely that continuing processes of social change set in motion by colonialism have done more to create the conditions in which Christianity might flourish than anything inherent in colonial rule as such.

In the late twentieth century, with the end of the European empires, American power continued to have an important influence on the growth or non-growth of Christianity. Perceptions of the United States, as well as the efforts of American missionaries and such resources as books, tapes, videos and so on, provided by American denominational headquarters, have influenced the spread of Pentecostalism and other forms of conservative Protestantism across the world. The prestige of American culture makes many people more open to other American products, such as American religion. On the other hand, American economic and cultural power, like European colonialism, is two-edged: anti-Americanism can take the form of hostility to Christianity, or at least to Protestantism, as happened, for instance, in China in the 1950s and 1960s, and was happening in various parts of the Muslim world at the end of the century. From 1945 until

perestroika in the later 1980s there was also an anti-Christian super-power, with considerable influence in other parts of the world, especially Africa. In the 1960s and 1970s numerous Marxist governments were set up, sustained ideologically, and to some extent financially, by the Soviet Union, and in some cases, as in Ethiopia, pursuing violent anti-Christian policies.

Crisis in the West

In Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century the truth of Christian doctrines had been fiercely debated. Equally fierce was the political debate about the position of the church in relation to the state. These political debates became particularly intense during the first four decades of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the century, most European countries had an established church and Christianity was deeply implicated in the exercise of political and economic power. Paternalist businessmen and landowners often practised Christian charity, but also used Christian preachers to legitimate their authority. Schoolteachers often mixed religion with patriotism, and soldiers were required to attend church parades.

Most of this was under attack from liberals and socialists. France separated church and state in 1905, Portugal followed in 1911, Russia did so in 1918, Germany in 1919, Spain in 1931. The establishment of totalitarian, or at least highly authoritarian, governments in large parts of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, and the prestige that some of these regimes enjoyed even in democratic countries, posed serious problems for the churches. These governments differed widely in their attitude to religion and the churches. Only the Soviet Union was completely and openly opposed to any kind of religion. At the other extreme, some dictators such as Salazar in Portugal or Dolfuss and Schuschnigg in Austria were very friendly to the Catholic church – though, of course, the high-handed methods of even the friendliest dictators could be a source of tension. The Nazis were in principle anti-Christian, and at the local level often openly so, but their official policies were mainly determined by tactical considerations.[5] Pope Pius XI, as John Pollard points

5 The classic text is John S. Conway, *The Nazi persecution of the churches* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968). This has now been challenged by Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi conceptions of Christianity 1919–45* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), who argues that militantly anti-Christian Nazis, such as Heydrich, were untypical, and that the mainstream position, though anti-Catholic and anti-clerical, was not anti-Christian. Their attitude to Protestantism was relatively favourable. His study is well documented and provides a more nuanced picture than was previously available, but his central argument is, in my view, considerably overstated.

out in chapter 3, was no democrat, and had indeed helped Mussolini into power; but his relations with the Italian dictator were often tense, he never had any sympathy for the Soviet Union, and he soon lost all sympathy for Nazi Germany. International Protestant leaders were mostly convinced democrats, but they asked themselves whether Christianity was losing the battle against new 'political religions', which seemed to offer a more exciting faith and practical solutions to economic and social problems.

After 1945, communist governments were established through most of the eastern half of Europe, and all pursued anti-religious policies. In western Europe, on the other hand, church–state relations entered an exceptionally harmonious phase – one reason being that so many of the key political figures in the period c.1945–65 were practising Catholics. In the United States, which in 1791 had become the first Christian nation to separate church and state, questions of church–state relations gained a new prominence in the last quarter of the century. The so-called 'religious right', emerging in the later 1970s, consisted mainly of conservative Protestants, who believed that Christianity was under threat from recent Supreme Court decisions and from more general changes in the moral climate. They in turn had a galvanising effect on liberals and secularists, who claimed that this 'religious right' endangered the constitutional separation of church and state.

The changing moral climate, deplored by American conservatives, had in fact affected the whole Western world in the 1960s. Religious controversy now focused not so much on politics as on Christian teachings concerning sexual ethics and gender, and on criticism of Christian exclusiveness. There was a growing demand for greater individual freedom in questions of religion and ethics, with each person claiming the right to choose their own 'path', to draw inspiration from a variety of sources, and to decide which parts of their church's teaching they would accept and which they would reject or ignore. The religious and moral ferment of these years is fully described in chapters 17, 18 and 29. There is no doubt that the 1960s and 1970s mark a turning point in the religious history of Europe and North America – though historians, sociologists and theologians are divided as to how the changes in this period should be interpreted. Some see this as a time of definitive secularisation; some see it as the beginning of a era that is 'post-Christian', but not 'post-religious'; and others see it as a period of 'spiritual awakening' from which Christianity has emerged transformed and also in some ways strengthened.[6]

6 For a variety of perspectives, see Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Predicting religion: Christian, secular and alternative futures* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003);

Relations with other Christians and other faiths

In the nineteenth century, conflict between Catholics and Protestants intensified and Protestant churches were bedevilled by schism, leading to the formation of many new denominations. Religious divisions were partly caused by social and political factors, but they were justified by exclusivist theologies that insisted that salvation depended on orthodoxy. Overseas missions gained their urgency from the belief that the 'heathen' were destined to hell. This latter expectation was modifed as liberal theologians in the later nineteenth century questioned traditional teachings concerning eternal punishment. Yet, while doing so, they often placed even greater emphasis on the humanitarian motives for mission: Christianity would bring an end to a multitude of cruel practices that wrecked lives in the present world.

In the twentieth century, in spite of important counter-currents, the overall trend, as is shown in chapters 4 and 27, has been towards closer contacts between Christians of different denominations, and between Christians and those of other faiths. Collaboration between Protestant denominations, sometimes extending to proposals for union between them, was developing rapidly from the late nineteenth century. But collaboration between Protestants and Catholics made little progress until the papacy of John XXIII (1958–63) and the Second Vatican Council (1962–5). The 1960s, when 'dialogue' became one of the the most popular slogans of a slogan-loving decade, also mark a key stage in the development of contacts between Christians and members of other faiths.

It is a frequent criticism of such 'dialogues' that they take place at the top and have little impact on 'ordinary people'. In the case of Catholic–Protestant relations the opposite was true. Dialogue between leaders often stalled, but the council opened the way for major changes at the local level. For instance, discussion and prayer meetings, pulpit exchanges, participation in ecumenical social action and, especially important, a more positive approach to intermarriage all brought about a revolution in relationships. A further rapprochement was that between the older Protestant churches and the Pentecostal and African Independent churches, some of which joined the World Council of Churches in the 1970s. An important factor here was the discrediting of European imperialism, and a recognition by Western Christians that they had to take non-Western forms of Christianity more seriously.

Grace Davie, *Religion in modern Europe: a memory mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Amanda Porterfield, *The transformation of American religion: the story of a late-twentieth-century awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The perception that secularisation poses a common threat has encouraged co-operation between churches, and more recently between faiths. Equally significant at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a recognition of the destructive potential of religious hatred, and the dangers it poses to all. As one example, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh leaders in the religiously very mixed English city of Birmingham marked the European elections in 2004 by issuing a joint statement affirming support for 'our multi-ethnic, culturally and religiously diverse community in Birmingham' and concluding: 'We expect all members of our faith communities to practise and promote racial justice and inclusion and reject any political party that attempts to stir up racial and religious hatred, discrimination and fear of asylum-seekers.'[7] The recognition of 'faith communities' as being among the essential components of contemporary British society is a means both of diminishing the danger of conflict between these communities and of combating demands for a more thorough secularisation.

The biggest reason for the erosion of denominational boundaries within Christianity has been the fact that many of the issues that led to the emergence of new Christian denominations in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had lost much of their urgency by the twentieth. Meanwhile, new issues had arisen that caused division within rather than between denominations – for instance, attitudes to the Charismatic movement, to Liberation Theology, to the role of women in church and society, and to sexuality (especially homosexuality). The Roman Catholic church in particular has suffered bitter internal conflicts since the Second Vatican Council. And in the latter years of the century, the Anglican communion was being torn apart by the questions first of women's ordination and then of homosexuality, as is shown in chapter 29. Christians still disagree fundamentally on certain issues, but the grounds for disagreement have changed. Thus a liberal Catholic is likely to have a lot in common with a liberal Methodist, though conservatism is often more denominationally specific.

7 *Birmingham ecumenical news*, June–August 2004. It is notable how many items in this issue of the journal have an inter-faith character or theme: for instance, there are notices of an annual Jewish–Christian study day, meetings organised by the Birmingham Council of Faiths, meetings of the Council of Christians and Jews, a course on 'Understanding Islam', and an inter-faith peace walk. Similarly, a report on the placing of a work of Christian art in a public place in the city, with support from the city council, noted that opposition came 'not from Jews, Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims', who encouraged Christians 'to celebrate the hope Jesus offers', 'in return inviting us all to support their public celebrations when their turn came', but from 'old-fashioned liberal secularists, who pretend that faith is a private affair at best, and irrelevant to our public life'.