Praise for *The Church from Age to Age*

*The Church from Age to Age* is a marvelous survey text. Replete with a lengthy, detailed timeline, fifteen different maps, lists of popes, eastern patriarchs, church councils and assemblies, peppered with primary source readings and, most importantly, founded on a meaty, spiritually edifying, and global historical narrative, it offers students of all kinds a wealth of information in a reader-friendly format. Though produced by confessional Lutherans from a Protestant point of view, it is accurate, reliable, and much broader in scope than most traditional Protestant histories. Its global frame of reference will be especially helpful to many. I strongly recommend this text for use in Christian colleges, seminaries, churches, and Protestant homes around the world. I will certainly be using it in my own teaching ministry.

—Douglas A. Sweeney, PhD
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

In a very readable and lively fashion, *The Church from Age to Age* offers a global survey of Church history and historical theology since the time of the apostles to the present. Combining exceptional research with often insightful looks into the past, this protestant, comprehensive, one-volume work reminds the Church of its confessional heritage.

—Chris Chun, PhD (University of St. Andrews)
Associate Professor of Church History
Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

*The Church from Age to Age* is both erudite and accessible. It charts the growth of the Church from its origins in Palestine, but does not succumb to a Eurocentric focus: all the arrows begin in Jerusalem, but do not all follow a westerly trajectory. Especially notable in this regard is the treatment of Christianity in western Asia and Africa from apostolic times to the present. In a word, this comprehensive volume encourages a truly global vision of the Church.

—Joseph P. Amar, PhD
Aramaic and Arabic Christianity
The University of Notre Dame

*The Church from Age to Age* is both timely and timeless. It is timely as a comprehensive history of the Church that takes cognizance not only of the history of the Western and Eastern churches but also of the history of the churches in the global south where the majority of Christianity currently resides. It is timeless in its exploration of the patterns of theology that have perennially occupied the Church as these are lived among the people. But this magnum opus is not a history of dogma; it is a history of the Church’s faith and life through the ages that allows readers to live alongside the Christians of every age in their various expressions of the Christian faith. Ambitious in scope, comprehensive in content, this single volume work will serve as a helpful resource for students of history (both lay and academic) who want to step inside the shoes of Christians from other times and places to see where Christianity has been and where it is going.

—Rev. Joel C. Elowsky, PhD
Associate Professor of Theology, Concordia University Wisconsin
Research Director, Center for Early African Christianity, Eastern University
Former Research Director and Operations Manager of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Drew University

A clear, thorough and balanced coverage of world Christianity in its Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox expressions. This book takes us East to India, China, Korea and Japan; North to Russia; South to Egypt and Ethiopia, and West to Europe and America. It is sensitive to gender issues and covers the most important matters in global Christianity. Highly recommended for personal enrichment or for introductory courses in Christian history.

—Bradley Nassif, PhD
Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies, North Park University (Chicago)
Consultant for *Time* and *Christianity Today* magazines
With its unique combination of well-chosen primary documents, clearly written narrative and global awareness, *The Church from Age to Age* should enjoy a welcome reception in libraries and classrooms around the world. Specialists and non-specialists alike will find this one-volume introduction to Church History filled with a rich array of fresh resources for their study and teaching.

—Garth M. Rosell, PhD  
Professor of Church History  
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

An outstanding book! *The Church from Age to Age* combines all the elements that make for a great text in the history of Christianity: ecclesiastical history, political history, social history, historical theology, and biographies, topped off with primary source readings. The authors take notice of lesser known movements like the churches of the east, and they bring order to events of the last two centuries which are often hard to categorize. I highly recommend it.

—Robert Caldwell, PhD  
Assistant Professor of Church History  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

There are many fine church history surveys available, but I’m delighted to commend *The Church from Age to Age* as one of the very best. This one-volume update to the highly acclaimed Church in History series is comprehensive enough for use in graduate courses, but the narrative style makes it a good choice for undergraduates and laypersons as well. The inclusion of primary source readings offer a “microscopic” complement to the generally “telescopic” approach of the book. The attempt to tell the story of church history from a global perspective represents the best of recent scholarship and accurately reflects the dispersion and diversity of the Christian movement. I hope The Church from Age to Age gains a wide reading in seminaries, among clergy, and even in congregational reading circles.

—Nathan A. Finn, PhD  
Associate Professor of Historical Theology and Baptist Studies  
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Covering two thousand years of Christian history, from the birth of Christ to the twenty-first century, *The Church from Age to Age* is well-researched, highly informative, and definitely not boring. Readers will be edified seeing the “hand” of God in how He preserved His Church through the ages in spite of numerous attacks from outside and from within her midst. It’s a must have book for every congregation’s church library.

—Alvin J. Schmidt, PhD  
Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Illinois College  

In this updated and wide-ranging tour of the history of Christianity, the authors leave virtually no stone unturned. Like restoring ancient ruins, they bring to life the rich and varied textures that comprise the Christian family tree. Even more, I found their even-handed treatment of other Christian traditions a refreshing turn in publications from presses located in a distinct branch of Christianity. While a text of this size requires much of the reader, the authors have done their best to make the difficult journey worthwhile, sweetening each step with little gems from “lost” Christianities without sacrificing the larger narrative they weave for each age. The accompanying readings from primary sources merely provide the final touches on this expansive narrative portrait. For these reasons, I warmly recommend this text.

—Dale M. Coulter, DPhil  
Associate Professor of Historical Theology, Regent University  

The editors are grateful for the many kind endorsements from professors and church leaders from the following denominational families: Baptist, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Evangelical, Lutheran, Pentecostal, and Presbyterian.
The Church from Age to Age
Other History and Religion Titles from CPH

Andrew E. Steinmann. *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*

Thomas A. Von Hagel. *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism: Christians through the Centuries*

Bengt Hagghlund. *History of Theology—4th Revised Edition*

Franz Posset. *The Real Luther: A Friar at Erfurt and Wittenberg*

Philip Melanchthon. *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*


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FOREWORD

Christianity is the greatest success story in the history of the world. No other religion or institution or government comes even close to the number of its adherents, with some two and a quarter billion in the present generation alone. It has exerted a greater influence, changed more lives, educated more people, fostered more progress in the arts and sciences, inspired loftier achievements in culture, and had a more powerful role in helping the helpless than any other institution on earth. In the past two thousand years, it has indeed proven to be the greatest movement ever.

The organized expression of Christianity is the Church—that wondrous collective of Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants of every variety, and groups that defy any category—a mighty miscellany of those who confess Christ as Savior. That the Church should have sprouted from the seedbed of Judaism through the life and teachings of one man and be transmitted by His twelve followers and their followers seems inconceivable. That this movement even survived beggars belief, since the most powerful empire in the world tried every means available to eradicate it. Judaism, its parent, largely disowned its own offspring. A welter of competing pagan religions all hated the Christian movement and tried to suppress it.

Nay, more. Not only did the Church have to struggle for survival against external foes, but internal enemies as well: heretics, who, like opportunistic bacteria, preyed upon the wounded body of the Church before its own defenses—the New Testament canon and the Creed—had been fully developed to separate truth from error. By all rules of historical precedent, then, Christianity should have shared the fate of countless extinct sects in the ancient world, the butt of jokes about a peculiar breed of people who believed that their founder was the Son of God when in fact He was a crucified criminal.

That Christianity not only survived but thrived is miraculous and itself a proof of God’s existence. The incredible saga of how this happened, and how the Church grew and spread, is the substance of this book. It will not, however, be a prolonged glory story. Alas, “the Holy Christian Church” has always been composed of saints who are sinners as well. There will be disappointing chapters as sad counterpoints to the successes and triumphs, since scrupulous honesty has been the absolute mandate in these pages.

Clearly, this is a large book because it has a huge story to tell. It may be helpful to offer, at the outset, a menu for the literary feast to follow. This is not
to “give away the plot,” as it were, but to offer something of an appetizer that may help the reader more easily digest two thousand years of Christian history. In *The Church from Age to Age*, seven distinct eras appear—seven, not because of any biblical significance, but because it accords well with the way historians often divide the past two millennia.

The Early Church (to AD 250) deals with the all-important beginnings of Christianity: Jesus; Paul; the apostles and their mission journeys; the testimony of the Church Fathers; the early defenders and defamers of the faith; how the New Testament canon, the Creed, and church government were established; and especially the horror of the Roman persecutions.

The Church in a Changing World (250 to 600) tells how the persecutions were finally halted after the extraordinary conversion of Constantine, the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, and how the faith went on to conquer Rome itself. Although the empire declined and fell to Germanic invaders, they, in turn, were conquered by Christ through Christian missionaries. As dark ages blanketed Europe, the Church and its priests and monks, as the only educated class, saved civilization in the West, while Christians of Asia and Africa continued to thrive until suppressed by *dhimma* status under Islam.

The Church of the Middle Ages (600 to 1400) deals with Medieval Europe when the Church and its papacy were challenged by their own successes as the dominant forces in Western civilization, much as the patriarchs of Constantinople were in Eastern Orthodoxy. This was the era of powerful popes and soaring cathedrals, yet also a time when too close a link between Church and state led to doctrinal error and moral corruption. And in 632, with the death of the Muslim prophet Muhammad, Christianity had to face—and still faces—its greatest confrontation ever in Islam. Christendom was also weakened by the Great Schism—the huge split between the Eastern and Western Churches, as well as the failure of the Crusades and the fall of Constantinople to the Muslim Turks in 1453.

The Church of the Renaissance and Reformation (1300 to 1600) was impacted by these two very diverse movements. The Renaissance (“rebirth”) emerged in Italy already in the fourteenth century. It did not bring on more culture but a change in culture from a totally religious worldview to a secular alternative. A great constellation of scholars, artists, sculptors, and authors pioneered the new learning, and popes patronized them in hopes of saving the Renais-
sance for the Church. What happened instead was the secularization of the papacy, as well as moral and theological crises in the Church that demanded reform.

Reforms had indeed been attempted by Peter Waldo in France, John Wycliffe in England, Jan Hus in Bohemia, and Savanarola in Italy. All had failed, with the reformers themselves often burned at the stake. It was left to Martin Luther—the providential person at the perfect time—to inaugurate the Protestant Reformation, which transformed much of northern Europe and the future itself.

**The Church in the Age of Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment (1600 to 1800)** followed the religious wars of the seventeenth century. This bloodshed showed Christendom at its worst. Although the Thirty Years’ War finally ended in 1648 for a battered Germany, religious hatred and persecution continued in Europe for many years. Positions became entrenched and a stolid form of orthodoxy grew dominant, provoking a reaction to this faith of the head with a faith of the heart called Pietism in Germany and Methodism in England. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, however, became a powerful secularist challenge to all branches of Christianity. While some leaders of the Enlightenment such as Isaac Newton remained Christian, others such as François Voltaire ridiculed the faith.

**Christian Churches in Modern Times (1800 to World War I)** presents three revolutions that rocked the world: American, French, and Latin American. Napoleon tried to redraw the map of Europe but failed. All branches of Christendom were impacted by these events and also by the many political and social uprisings that punctuated the nineteenth century. Even more so than previously, the Church now had to meet a fourfold ideological challenge from rationalism, the theory of organic evolution, materialist philosophy, and biblical higher criticism. Christian reaction to these ranged from militant denial to accommodation, and the debate continues to this day. But this was also the time of intense missionary activity across the world and a response to Matthew 28 not seen since the earliest missionaries from Rome and Constantinople Christianized the rest of Europe.

**The Spread of Global Christianity (The World Wars to the Present)** describes the mission outreach of Christendom, restarted so strongly in the nineteenth century. This outreach has continued and even accelerated to the present day because the Church has capital-
ized on the communications revolution. Much as the printing press made the Reformation possible, so, too, radio, television, the Internet, and other technological gifts have transformed the way Christians spread the Gospel. The worldwide response has been phenomenal, especially in Africa and the southern hemisphere. A strong ecumenical movement is also contributing toward at least a partial fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer “that they might all be one.”

These, then, are some of the headlines in the story of Christianity. On the pages that follow come the delicious details. Gifted scholars have served up the facts in a way that will negate any claims that history is boring. While this extraordinary survey is “must” reading for clergy, church professionals, and seminarians, it will surely benefit anyone who is interested in learning more about the greatest movement in the history of the world. Beyond the usual timelines and maps, the book includes lists of popes, patriarchs, ecumenical councils, and bibliographic resources that distinguish this volume for thoroughness. And what other worldwide organization has a list of its principal officers and assemblies going back twenty centuries?

These pages, then, will easily engage readers while offering them totally trustworthy information that avoids the usual denominational and parochial approach in favor of a truly global perspective. Our Founder did not limit His missionary mandate to Europe and America. “All nations” were His target, and that prophetic instruction—which must have seemed totally impossible at the time—is actually being fulfilled before our eyes. How could this miracle ever have happened in fact?

Read on . . .

—Paul L. Maier, PhD
The Russell H. Seibert Professor of Ancient History
Western Michigan University
The history of God’s people covers thousands of years. Through Moses and the prophets, God recorded the events and people important to the “Church” of Israel. And through the pens of those who walked and talked with our Savior, we have the history of Jesus’ time on earth and the founding of the Christian Church. Within the first centuries of the missionary activity of Paul and Peter and the other apostles, numerous writers had recorded the activities of local churches and leaders as well as the doctrinal deliberations of church councils and the mergers and schisms that human beings have experienced as Christians.

Exploring the Church in history provides us the opportunity to learn from past events and discover ways to further the spread of the Gospel worldwide. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Concordia Publishing House offered its Church in History series as a popular presentation of the nearly two thousand years of people and events that have formed our definition of “Church.” Many of the original authors served as university professors, and their expertise of historical events brings these past eras to life, similar to listening to captivating oral presentations.

Now Concordia has completely revised the series, uniting all the content of the six volumes into one book and updating the presentation to bring readers into the twenty-first century. The comprehensive index aids readers in locating topics. The readings from primary sources offer historical and personal context to the topics. We have not included primary source readings for the modern era, as the majority of those texts are readily available online or in print. Dr. Robert G. Clouse, senior research scholar in liberal arts and professor emeritus of history at Indiana State University, and Dr. Richard V. Pierard, professor emeritus of history at Indiana State University, have revised and expanded the bibliography to list sources that will take the reader beyond the basics on topics and people discussed. Additional maps, indices, and a broad timeline provide additional contextual information.

Laura L. Lane, MA
Associate Editor, Concordia Publishing House
“My eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared
in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the
Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel.”
—The Song of Simeon (Luke 2:30–32)

Surveying Church history comes with challenge. Pentecostal tongue-speaking in Southeast Asia, the official promulgation of Lumen Gentium during the Second Vatican Council, and a quotation of the American television personality Gracie Allen may seem like utterly distant and unrelated things. Missionary leaps from people to people, mergers, divisions, and movements combine to make the story of the Church in our age seem bewilderingly complex. Understanding thousands of years of these changes is challenging for those who are beginning to explore them. Yet, careful study can draw out common themes, noteworthy persons, and landmark events that help readers today make sense of it all in a compelling way.

For example, the Ecumenical Movement, which sought to draw Christian churches together in a grand unity, dominated the story of the twentieth century. However, ecumenical efforts highlighted how differently Christians think about their message and its revelation from God. The Roman Catholic dogmatic constitution called Lumen Gentium affirmed the infallibility of the pope and outlined the official boundaries for his inspired revelation of God’s will. The fervor of Pentecostals rapidly circled the globe in the twentieth century, urging Christians to believe that unless they were in direct contact with God’s revelation personally, their Christianity was weak and ineffective. Likewise, liberal American Protestant churches adopted a promotional campaign based on Gracie Allen’s statement that one should not use a period where God has placed a comma since God has more to say. These American churches emphasized an ongoing revelation of God’s will that changes and is centered in the personal experience of the individual. In contrast, more conservative Protestants emphasized the central authority of the Bible as the only reliable revelation from God by which Christians can determine doctrine and practice. Together, these late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century events show that, while Christians think and express themselves quite differently, they may also share common concerns that illustrate their united interest and how they influence one another from age to age.
Mission and Confession

Discovering common themes, differences, and their consequences is one of the joys of studying Church history. Understanding them helps Christians understand one another and relate to one another in more positive ways while also serving to warn Christians against past mistakes.

The Church’s history stems from the revelation of the message of salvation for all people: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet it is a message that divides people depending on whether or not they believe the message. The tug and pull of inclusiveness and exclusiveness appear throughout the story of the Church. Mission and confession commend themselves again and again as the prevailing concerns of Christians who long to follow Jesus in word and deed. God’s revealed Word, the Holy Scripture, is the constant, common standard for all Christians. As a result, interpretation and application of Scripture are central to Church history.

About the Book and its Writers

The contributors for The Church from Age to Age are Protestant historians who have written for a general readership. Most served as university and seminary professors. Some have served as editors for a variety of publications. The book presents a history of leaders, leading events, and movements in Church history from the time of Jesus to the present. Portions of the book are drawn from the previously published Church in History series developed by Concordia Publishing House. A number of academic and professional journals published scholarly reviews for the books in that series, including Church History, Communio Viatorum, Duke Divinity Seminary Review, Journal of Religious History, Restoration Quarterly, Review & Expositor, and The Springfielder. As general editor for this new volume, I read and sought to learn from earlier reviews.

The chief criticism I found in the reviews for the original series was the brevity of the books. Because they were written for a general readership, some reviewers regarded them as too short and general to serve as textbooks for courses on specific periods of history. I agree that this was a valid criticism for the books. However, as I considered them and the reviews, I also concluded that the brevity of the original books could actually become a strength if the works were brought together and supplemented to create a general, historical survey. Endorsers for The Church from Age to Age kindly agree and call this new, updated publication a “comprehensive history” and “marvelous survey” for persons new to the study of Church history. Below, I provide the following biographical sketches for the writers.
• Dr. Robert G. Clouse is professor emeritus of history at Indiana State University. He was a founding member of the Conference on Faith and History, served on the editorial board of the Brethren Encyclopedia, and was a contributing editor of the New Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge.

• Dr. Karl H. Dannenfeldt † served as professor of history at Arizona State University, the American editor of Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, a committee member for the American Society of Church History, and president and officer for the American Society of Reformation Research.

• Edward A. Engelbrecht (STM) is senior editor for professional and academic books at Concordia Publishing House and general editor for The Lutheran Study Bible (2009), which is currently being translated into Spanish, Portuguese, and Telugu (a widely spoken language in India).

• Dr. Marianka S. Fousek is an independent historian who served as a professor at Miami University and other schools. She also served as a council member for the American Society of Church History.

• Walter Oetting † (MA) served as professor of Church history at Concordia Seminary. He died young, just after completing his book for the Church in History series, which was reissued in 1992 due to its continuing interest as an introductory text.

• Dr. K. Detlev Schulz is associate professor and chairman for the department of pastoral ministry and mission at Concordia Theological Seminary, serves as the PhD supervisor of the missiology program, and is dean of the graduate school. He grew up in Africa, studied in Europe and the United States, and served as a missionary in Botswana.

• Dr. Roy A. Suelflow † served as a missionary in China, Japan, and Taiwan. He also served as a seminary professor and mission director in East Asia. He later taught church history at Concordia Seminary and served as associate editor for the Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly.

• Dr. Carl A. Volz † served as professor of church history at Luther Seminary and as an editor for Dialog: A Journal of Theology. In 1997, the American Academy of Parish Clergy selected his book, The Medieval Church, as one of the ten best books of that year.
This general history of the Church presents themes, persons, and events in historical and chronological order. The content is arranged by the different eras that historians commonly use as well as by geography as needed. Maps, resources, and citations of Christian writers are also included. The writers commended themselves to the work through their ability to present matters in a readable, fair, and straightforward way.

Edward A. Engelbrecht, STM
Senior Editor for Professional and Academic Books
Concordia Publishing House
Timeline

Below are two samples of the twenty-eight page timeline, which provides easy access to many of the persons, events, and dates you will read about in *The Church from Age to Age* as well as further historical context. The timeline encompasses the time of Jesus through present day.

**THE CHURCH IN A CHANGING WORLD**
**EVENTS AND TRENDS FROM AD 250 TO AD 600**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Event / Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c. 251–c. 356</td>
<td>Anthony, Egyptian hermit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>257–60</td>
<td>Valerian Persecution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. c. 258</td>
<td>Novatian, rival bishop of Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. 258</td>
<td>Cyprian, bishop of Carthage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 260–c. 340</td>
<td>Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea and father of Church history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. c. 276</td>
<td>Mani, founder of Manichaeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>284–305</td>
<td>Diocletian, Roman emperor, died in 313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 290–346</td>
<td>Pachomius, founder of coenobitic monasticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>293</td>
<td>Diocletian establishes tetrarchy of Roman rulers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 296–373</td>
<td>Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Event / Person</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c. 300–c. 380</td>
<td>Frumentius, missionary and bishop of Ethiopians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>303–311</td>
<td>Diocletian Persecution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. 304</td>
<td>Eulalia, martyr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>306</td>
<td>Constantine declared emperor at York, Britain</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 306</td>
<td>Council of Elvira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 306–373</td>
<td>Ephrem of Syria, theologian and poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>311</td>
<td>Donatist Schism begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 311–83</td>
<td>Wulfila, apostle to the Goths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>312–37</td>
<td>Constantine I, Roman emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>313</td>
<td>Edict of Milan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 315–87</td>
<td>Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
–1950–

1950–53 Korean War
1954 World Council of Churches Assembly; Evanston, Illinois
b. 1958 David (Paul) Yonggi Cho, Korean pastor
b. 1959 R. Albert Mohler Jr., theologian
1960 John XXIII establishes Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity
1961 World Council of Churches Assembly; New Delhi, India
1962–65 Vatican II Council
1964 Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras reconciled
1966 Chinese Cultural Revolution
1967 Voice of the Martyrs founded by Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand
1968 Medellin Conference
1968 World Council of Churches Assembly; Uppsala, Sweden
1975 World Council of Churches Assembly; Nairobi, Kenya
1981 AIDS first diagnosed
1983 World Council of Churches Assembly; Vancouver, British Columbia
1989 The Singing Revolution and fall of the Berlin Wall
1990–91 Gulf War in Iraq
1991 World Council of Churches Assembly; Canberra, Australia
1998 World Council of Churches Assembly; Harare, Zimbabwe

–2000–

2001 September 11 attacks by Al Qaida terrorists; Irish Republican Army announces disarmament
2003 War on Terror begins in Iraq and Afghanistan
2004 840 megachurches identified in the United States
2005 Cardinal Ratzinger elected as Pope Benedict XVI
2006 World Council of Churches Assembly; Porto Alegre, Brazil
2007 Russian Orthodox Canonical Communion and Reunification
2010 Haitian earthquake strains efforts of Christian relief organizations
2011 Arab Spring
Church and Society in a Changing World

“Imperial edicts were published everywhere ordering that the churches be razed to the ground, that the Scriptures be destroyed by fire, that those holding office be deposed and they of the household be deprived of freedom, if they persisted in the profession of Christianity.”
—Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

Introduction

Our own era is marked by revolutions and dramatic changes among the nations in the areas of culture, social mores, worldviews, philosophy, technology, and our whole way of life. The Church is caught up in the midst of the swirl.

When we consider the period of this section, the years between AD 250 and 600, we see that the society and the Church of those days underwent similar earthshaking changes. That era of tremendous upheavals necessitated adjustments as great as ours. Around 250, the Church saw the first systematic persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire, which had begun to feel threatened by the spiritual challenge of the growing Christian movement. In the early fourth century, almost overnight, came a period of imperial favor for the Church and a wide acceptance of Christianity by society. Within less than a century came the collapse of the Roman world in the West under the impact of barbarian invasions. The Church then entered an entirely new and unfamiliar world, which it undertook to win for its faith. The years around 600 saw chaos-driven Western Christendom obtain the history-making leadership of Gregory the Great, who is considered the last great “Father” of the Ancient Church and a founder of the medieval papacy.

How did the Church fare in these periods of persecution or seductive favor? Did its devotion, thought, and leadership grow, or did these become stale and irrelevant with the advance of time? How much real influence did Christianity exercise on society? How did the Church adjust to the disappearance of the familiar Roman world and to the chaos and new societies that succeeded the Roman
order? Did this era of changes produce any significant developments that endure to this day?

Our aim is to probe the life and thought of the Church in the changing world of this era.

**Ordeal by Fire**

The first period of the great changes started in the mid-third century and lasted for almost seventy-five years. It brought fierce, intermittent, empirewide persecutions of Christians. It was for the Christian community, grown large and soft by the security it had enjoyed for most of the preceding half century, a trial by fire.

The first great persecution began in 250, when the new emperor Decius launched a new policy requiring all citizens to sacrifice to the pagan gods and to have a certified statement (a *libellus*) of their compliance with the edict. The Roman Empire had suffered serious setbacks in the preceding years. It was generally believed that the ancient gods were revenging themselves on the empire for its lax policy toward the Christians, who refused to worship the gods and who influenced others to neglect their civic duty toward them as the divine patrons of the empire. Many Christians could not bring themselves to face the fierce penalties and so either performed the required ritual or at least secured the *libellus* from friendly or bribed officials. The leaders of the Church naturally considered such acts a repudiation of the baptismal vow, by which the baptized had foresworn all pagan gods and bound themselves only to the one God. The fallen, or *lapsed*, Christians were barred from the Church’s Communion until they showed sufficient penitence and received reconciliation from the Christian community, the household of God.

The number of the “lapsed” was alarming. As many as 80 percent of some congregations’ members were classed among the public “penitents” once the rugged—but-brief first wave of the great persecutions was over. Other waves followed. The last universal and greatest persecution took place under Emperor Diocletian in 303–4. He ordered all Christian churches to be destroyed, Christian sacred books and vessels confiscated, and all Christian clergy imprisoned. Finally, all citizens were required to sacrifice to the gods or face death. The persecutions tested the Church’s mettle, restored it to its unique calling within society, and renewed its spiritual vigor. The Church was being prepared for a role of leadership in Roman society, a role that fell to it with the final victory of Constantine when he became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire in the autumn of 324.
**Surprising Victory**

The definitive end of the persecutions and Christianity’s sudden rise to imperial favor and prominence in Roman life came as a surprise to the Church. From its beginning, the Church had been a small and often suspect minority.

Constantine was a military leader. He turned to the Christians’ God for aid in battle, and when he won, he became devoted to the Christian Church. There is the famous story of his vision of the cross and the words “By this sign conquer”\(^1\) inscribed on the midday sun. Another story tells of a dream in which Constantine was told to put the XP (Chi-Rho)\(^2\) monogram on the shields of his soldiers to secure victory.

We may have doubts about the depth of Constantine’s understanding of the Christian faith and of his conversion, but the emperor was after all a military man, for whom victory in battle was crucial. Although he never became a man of peace, his legislation as emperor testifies to his Christianity.

He forbade the branding of prisoners on the face “because man is made in the image of God.” He directed all prisons to let the inmates out into the open air each day, so that a day may not pass without their having seen the salutary sun. Constantine also assigned a large portion of the government’s revenues to the support of the philanthropic work maintained by the Church (a work which was not being undertaken by any other organization or agency; the Church was a pioneer in the works of mercy). He built magnificent, large churches, exempted the clergy from taxes, and made Christian clergymen paid civil servants of the empire.

His support of the Church was a mixed blessing. It radically altered the status of the Christian in society and the life and makeup of the Christian community. It became easy to become a Christian and advantageous to enter the clergy. However, the meaning and cost of discipleship became all too often obscured, and many people entered the ranks and offices of the Church without conviction.

**The Marriage of Faith and Culture**

Constantine must have hoped that the empirewide Christian Church would become the cement that would unite the badly cracking empire and give

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1. The Latin, *In hoc signo vinces* is usually rendered in the abbreviated form of *Hoc signo,* or as *Nika* in Greek, and is used as a Christian symbol.

2. In Greek, the letters *Χ* (Chi) and *Ρ* (Rho), form the beginning of the name “Christ.” The letters, one superimposed on the other, became yet another Christian symbol.
it a sense of common purpose and dedication. The Roman Empire had become too huge and heterogeneous to have such a unity of itself. It contained many annexed and conquered provinces, and its population and army included more and more immigrants from the nomadic Gothic (that is, Germanic) tribes, who were pressing in on the empire from several directions. To stem the inflow of immigrants, the imperial officials sometimes refused them permission to settle on Roman land, an action that evoked successive Gothic invasions of the empire. To guard the security of its frontiers, the state needed inner unity in its population and army. There was nothing corresponding to the American school system, with its Americanizing effect on immigrants, to unite the empire. The cult of the emperor, designed to develop a common loyalty in the empire, had failed in its purpose.

The Christian Church was the only institution that might perhaps weld the people into one. Thus, the emperors initiated the marriage of Church and society. We use the image of marriage purposefully, for marriage means union and not identity, and it involves give-and-take, adjustments, crises, and storms.

Society was not immediately Christianized, of course, nor was Christianity the state religion under Constantine. Christians were then only a substantial minority. It was not until the end of the fourth century, under Emperor Theodosius, that the Church became the state church and that laws were issued against public pagan worship. Pagans still continued to hold high positions in the empire until the mid-sixth century, when Emperor Justinian outlawed paganism. Jews were protected by imperial law, even if they were not always free from molestation. Yet Christianity was obviously the imperially favored religion, and a harmony and cooperation between Church and state was the envisioned ideal.

More and more, people poured into the Church. The Church had an opportunity to influence the society; it became wide open to the existing culture, with its riches and its problems.

The fourth century was the “Golden Age” of Christian antiquity. The accumulated learning, arts, and skills of the Greco-Roman and Near Eastern civilizations were now absorbed by the Church without fear of heathen contamination. The pagan culture ceased to appear dangerous. Most of the best minds embraced the faith that had been considered vulgar and low-class by the educated classes only a short while before. The result was a flourishing of Christian literature and theology, of skillful preaching, and of the arts connected with Christian worship and devotion.

The Christianization of a whole society and its culture was a difficult and long-term task. Many of the existing cultural and social forms and customs had to be adapted, and they transformed only very gradually. The Church engaged
in a vigorous teaching activity, not only in preaching but also in the preparation of candidates for their Baptism. But the former rigorous screening of these catechumens fell into disuse. The Church now rejoiced at having the opportunity to reach the multitude.

There was a parallel growth of Christian ranks outside the Roman circles. However, while Christianity within the empire spread by and large simply by “contagion,” it was often brought by specific individuals to the nations outside the Roman confines. There were, however, no “missionary societies.” Since, in contrast to the population of the Roman Empire, most of these peoples had a strong sense of their corporate unity, whole tribes and kingdoms accepted Christian Baptism. The majority of the Gothic peoples (in and outside the empire), several Arab tribes, the kingdoms of Armenia, Georgia, and Ethiopia, as well as the Franks, the Irish, the Scots, and finally the English had become or were to become Christian between the end of the third and the end of the sixth centuries. (Christianity also penetrated from Christianized Syria into Mesopotamia and Persia even though it was not favored by the Sassanite rulers, the great rivals of the Roman emperors.) The traditions and folklore of the baptized peoples were also “baptized” in the process. A most striking example of this is the introduction of Christmas into the Church’s calendar. It was typical of the fusion of formerly pagan customs with Christian celebrations. The early Christians considered the celebration of Jesus’ birthday unnecessary or even inappropriate. No one knew when Jesus was born. It was not customary to celebrate people’s birthdays. The emperors’ birthdays may be feted, but Jesus was not an emperor, Origen (third century) curtly said.

December 25 (in the West) and January 6 (in the East) were popular holidays in honor of the birth (return) of the sun. Eastertime roughly coincided with spring fertility rites. When the Church wanted to win the masses in the fourth century, it was good psychology to transform the pagan feast days into Christian festivities. The Christian acceptance of the ancient pagan lore of the new converts explains the many otherwise illogical customs associated with the Christian holy days, such as Easter eggs and bunnies.

Not only harmless pagan traditions found their way into the Church. Some pagan ideas were irreconcilable with Christian teaching and values, giving the Church a hard struggle or actually a new face.

The fourth to the sixth centuries were marked by violent theological debates and by conflicts between bishops and emperor. The great theological question of the time dealt with the relationship of the transcendent God to the world and to human existence. Much of Greek and Oriental philosophical thought made an absolute separation between the infinite and the finite, between the spiritual
and the earthly. If there was such an infinite chasm between these spheres, how could God create the world or have any relationship with it? How could men know God? How could the infinite God enter history or human existence and redeem it? Who, then, was Jesus Christ and what did He accomplish? These questions affected the heart of the Christian faith; they were fought over bitterly, with a Greek philosophical thoroughness that sometimes seems pointless to the practical Western mind.

Although these controversies often appear to have been only wrangles over words, ultimate questions were at stake. They also often involved open conflict between the Church’s leaders and government officials who wanted to achieve peace and unity in Church and empire by means of compromise. The emperor considered himself responsible for his entire realm, and, in his mind, theological matters were not separable from it. Recalcitrant bishops were usually deposed and exiled, but the emperors were only temporarily successful in imposing their will on the Church’s creeds. At other times, emperor and bishop faced each other over questions of imperial policy and practice in the social realm. The Church was by no means separate from the state, and, although the Church did not wish a separation, the truly great bishops, whether in the East or West, were no puppets of the imperial court. The fourth to the sixth centuries provide a rather fascinating history of church-state relations.

Among the most dangerous results of the marriage of Church and society in the fourth century was the transmission of the easygoing ways and values of society into the Church. Power, ease, and comfort changed the Church from an elite minority into a comfortable, all-inclusive Church that could no longer be distinguished from the rest of society. Discipline and self-sacrifice were not its marks. Its life had ceased to be an inspiration and challenge to men.

It is against this background that we must understand the rise and attraction of Christian monasticism. The fourth century ascetic movement arose as a protest against the loss of the heroic nature of the Church. The early hermits and monks wanted to obey Jesus’ demand to “sell all” and “follow” Him on His hard and lonely way. They wished to bear His cross and follow in the footsteps of the martyrs who bore witness to their Master by their rejection and agony. Wonderful as it was that society no longer wanted to suppress the Christian faith and even wished to embrace it, the change in social status robbed the Church of its heroic character and blunted the sharp edge of the Gospel for the multitude and the highborn who were now entering it. The men and women who were enthralled by the monastic ideal in this period knew the cost of Christian discipleship and wanted to pay it. Since the age of the martyrs was in the past,
the hermits and monks became the new heroes of Christendom. They were a constant challenge to the superficially Christian society.

How great was the actual Christian influence on Roman society and government? Although it is difficult to assess such a complex matter, the influence seems disappointing. It was impossible to really convert a whole ancient culture and a totalitarian system of government within a few generations. By the turn of the fourth century, the imperial government had indeed become totalitarian out of the fear of collapse before the onslaught of continued invasions and mutinies. Nevertheless, the Church did have an important role and considerable influence within the given limits.

The most striking example of the Christian influence was the introduction of the seven-day week into Roman society and from there eventually into other parts of the world. The system of dividing time into weeks, with one day as a holiday, was completely unknown outside Jewish and Christian circles. When Constantine and his successors made Sunday an official day of rest, it was a tremendous boon to the working man, and it provided a new rhythm of life in society. Under Christian influence, concubinage for a married man was forbidden, adultery and rape became more severely punished, divorce was made less easy, and infanticide became illegal (but not the abandonment of infants; a Roman father had the right to dispose of his newborn children). The immensely popular and bloody spectacle of gladiatorial contests in the circus shows was discontinued but not until well over one hundred years after Constantine’s conversion. The lot of slaves and prisoners became somewhat humanized during the first one hundred years of the rule of Christian emperors. In the sale of slaves, it was forbidden to separate the members of a family (a regular practice in modern Christian America until the middle of the nineteenth century), and the freeing of slaves was made easier. Jailers were forbidden to starve prisoners and were commanded to bring them to the baths once a week. But the torture of prisoners suspected of any antisocial activities was a regular feature of the system. It should be noted that even prior to the Christian impact, reforms in the status of slaves had been effected as a result of Stoic philosophical influence on emperors. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between Stoic and Christian influence in the framing of more humanitarian laws.

Landed aristocrats were quite free to do as they pleased with the farmers on their estates. While the slaves there received better status, the peasants became bound to the soil and were almost slaves in their standing. The institution of serfdom was beginning to emerge, and neither the government nor the Church was particularly effective in checking the oppression by the wealthy.
On the whole, the Church was not an effective agent of social reform. Originally a small voluntary brotherhood awaiting the end of this world with its injustices, it was not prepared to reform an empire. The Church was not a group of plotting social revolutionaries. It probably would have taken a revolution to shake up the structures of the entrenched society. It took the barbarians to do that. Except in time of war, barbarian customs and laws were less savage than those of the late Roman Empire, corrupted as it was by wealth, power, and fear. Still, the bishops were able to be a saving or chastening influence in many individual instances. Bishops could intercede with the authorities on behalf of accused or threatened individuals or cities, and in the ancient world, the intercession of respected persons counted heavily. So Bishop Flavian averted a major disaster from the city of Antioch, whose population expected fearful reprisals for their rioting and smashing of the emperor’s statues when an increase in the already oppressive taxation had been announced. Bishop Ambrose of Milan for a while persuaded Emperor Theodosius not to wreak bloody revenge on the population of Thessalonica for its riots against the imperial troops stationed there. When the emperor in hot temper changed his mind and had seven thousand unsuspecting Thessalonians massacred in the circus, to which they had been invited by subterfuge, Ambrose announced he would not give the emperor Communion until he had submitted himself to public penance—and the emperor complied.

Perhaps what the Church lacked was more men like Ambrose, though unfortunately he did not use his skill and power always for the benefit of justice. A better balance of power in the empire was what the welfare of the society needed. If all power had not been concentrated in the hands of the emperor and of the extremely rich, Christian social teaching could have made the Church more effective. Or, would a greater emphasis on a biblical understanding of social justice in the Christian training of the emperors’ and aristocrats’ children have done the job? Would the parents have kept such disconcerting tutors?

In the sphere of philanthropy, the Church did make a genuinely pioneering impact on its society. The Church was able to introduce the principle of compassion for the weak (pity for the weak was scorned by pagan philosophy) and a sense of the dignity of the less fortunate members of society. In the Christian understanding, the rich bestowing gifts on the underprivileged were not considered to be generous benefactors but to be following simple justice (this, by the way, was a part of the Christian’s Jewish heritage) and to be doing themselves actually a favor, for the poor were considered specially close to Christ. The intercessions by the poor for their donors were respected as having special weight with God. Thus the commonly accepted practice and notion of intercession was reversed; here, the poor were the powerful intercessors and therefore benefactors of the
disadvantaged rich. The wealthy may have their money, but the poor have their prayers. This tipped the balance.

In addition to the Church’s care for needy individuals and its encouraging generosity and interest on the part of the wealthy Christians in this work, the Church (richly endowed by imperial and private monies and wills, the latter especially bequeathing large tracts of fertile land to the Church) pioneered in the development of institutions and professional staff for the care of the sick, especially the lepers, the insane, the homeless, the poverty-stricken, and the travelers. These works of the Church provide the foundation of all modern institutions of this nature. The Church’s influence of instilling a compassionate attitude in the minds of the people toward the less fortunate may have been the most revolutionary principle introduced into civilization, even if its full effect has been felt only in modern times and often in secular guise.

The Church exhorted slave owners and other men with legal powers over people to be humane. In the case of slavery, the Church encouraged the freeing of slaves and accepted slaves as important officeholders in the Church. Slaves were certainly not segregated from freemen in church. Nevertheless, the Church did not seriously try to reform the structure of society and its laws. Instead of trying to change the system, earnest Christians simply tended to shrink from being in a position that would involve them in unchristian actions, at least during the earlier part of the era under our survey. During the third and fourth centuries, it was not at all clear to Christians whether they could be soldiers or magistrates (which involved judicial responsibilities) with good conscience. Although Christians were usually allowed to remain or become soldiers during peacetime, they were not allowed to shed blood or torture anyone, even when under orders. The same held true for Christians in the position of judges. Given the harsh laws of the era and the common practice of judicial torture, it is easy to see why Christians would initially avoid the office. If a Christian as a magistrate or soldier became responsible for the torture or death of a man, he was to abstain from Communion and undergo the prolonged penance customary for grave sins. In the fifth and sixth centuries, when society became almost wholly Christianized on the surface, it became inevitable and acceptable that Christians should assume all the burdens of law-and-order enforcement, including the use of violence on behalf of the safety of the empire, as long as the war could be considered morally justified and was conducted without barbarism.

It is hard for us to see why Christians in influential positions did not try to change the laws more radically, though of course the ability to reform the rules of war has eluded us to this day.
CHRISTIANITY AFTER WORLD WAR II

"Religious pluralism is the belief that the differences between the religions are not a matter of truth and falsehood, but of different perceptions of the one truth; that to speak of religious beliefs as true or false is inadmissible. . . . But it is vital for clear thinking to recognize the severe limits of pluralism”
—Lesslie Newbigin

This section is an update on the global status of Christianity after World War II. However, because of the sheer amount of material—much of it not yet recorded in printed literature but accessible only via online material—it is not an exhaustive historic presentation. Rather, it is a selection of a few events and people deemed important by the author for an understanding of Christianity today.

The reader should bear in mind the important concern underscoring this report, namely, that the spread of Christianity worldwide is severely challenged by other religions and volatile political powers and structures. That is the case even if the immediate context of the reader reflects little of these challenges. There is also the concern that Christianity—though a universal faith—has not reached many parts of the world. There are still many people without the message of their salvation through Jesus Christ.

A significant focus of Christianity after World War II has become the discussion of its proper relationship to other religions, particularly to Islam. The September 11, 2001, attack on the Twin Towers in New York City carried out by radical Muslims who belonged to the terrorist group Al-Qaeda further strained the relationship. The attack has led to military action in Iraq and Afghanistan. And threats by a Christian pastor in Florida to burn the Qur’an on the ninth anniversary of September 11 sparked unrest in the remote area of Indian-ruled Kashmir, resulting in the death of sixteen Christians.
Note: the following selections are from Chapter 47.

**Christianity Compared to Other Religions**

The population information discussed below is gleaned from a combination of census reports, random surveys (in countries where religion data is not collected in a census, for example, the United States or France), and self-reported attendance numbers. The following information is from Barrett’s statistics in 2000, which reflect comparisons of Christianity with a selection of other religions and the regions in which they are located.\(^1\) By 2000, the world’s population was more than six billion people. One should also note that many of these religions embrace numerous subgroups.

Christianity is the world’s largest religion, with a little over two billion followers. Islam follows, with a little over one billion followers. Hinduism comprises less than 15 percent of the world’s religious followers. Smaller groups, such as Ethno religions (folk religions), Buddhism, and Chinese folk religions make up about 5 to 10 percent. The remaining groups are less than 1 percent: Shintoists, Sikhism, Judaism, Baha’i Faith, and Jainism. There are about 150 million people who profess Atheism, mostly in Europe and North America.

As stated above, Christianity represents the largest religious group, encompassing about 33 percent of the world’s population of more than six billion people. As of 2000, the countries with the largest Christian population are as follows:

- **United States**: 235 million
- **Brazil**: 155 million
- **Mexico**: 95 million
- **China**: 89 million
- **Russia**: 84 million
- **Philippines**: 68 million
- **India**: 62 million
- **Germany**: 62 million
- **Nigeria**: 51 million
- **Congo-Zaire**: 49 million

By 2025, Germany will most likely drop out of the top ten and be replaced by Ethiopia, a nation that is experiencing phenomenal growth and that by 2025

is expected to have sixty-eight million Christians. A noticeable feature of these ten countries is that the majority are located in the so-called Third World.\(^2\)

The question that should be asked is whether Christianity is the fastest growing religion. That answer includes, of course, a number of aspects, such as strong regional growth, growth through immigration, growth through conversion, or growth through higher birthrate. Because of few conversions and low birthrates in many European countries, Christianity’s growth is negatively impacted. By contrast, countries in which Islam or Hinduism predominates also seem to be populous and have high birthrates. European countries with significant immigrant populations from North Africa and Turkey see Islam on the rise because of higher birthrates in these communities compared with nonimmigrant groups. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life stated that “Islam is already the fastest-growing religion in Europe. Driven by immigration and high birthrates, the number of Muslims on the continent has tripled in the last 30 years. Most demographers forecast a similar or even higher rate of growth in the coming decades.”\(^3\)

Christianity has played a major role in addressing the rise in birthrates in many parts of the world, not unanimously, however. On June 29, 1968, Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae vitae*, an encyclical that forbids Roman Catholics from the use of artificial means of contraception. This is still considered to be the official Roman Catholic position. However, because of changing views on traditional sexual conventions, the ban on contraception is widely challenged by public figures in Roman Catholicism, including Hans Küng, and in Protestant Christianity.\(^4\)

In certain areas of the world, other religions besides Islam have stepped forward to compete. For example, in Australia, Buddhism is considered to be the fastest-growing religion in terms of percentage gain (from 200,000 to 358,000 adherents between 1996 and 2001, a 79.1 percent growth rate). In 2001, the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) reported a sharp increase in the number of Deists in the United States (717 percent growth since 1990). Is Deism then the fastest-growing religion in the United States, or is this a statistical or classification phenomenon? Only time will tell.

\(^2\) Barrett and Johnson, *World Christian Trends*, 400.
Global Shift

One further interesting observation is the change of Christianity’s configuration worldwide. In 1900, the Christian population of Europe constituted about 68 percent of all Christians in the world; in North America, about 14 percent. In 1900, four out of five Christians lived in Europe or North America. Now, Christians in Europe have dwindled to 28 percent of the worldwide Christian population, and those in North America to 13 percent. By contrast, in 1900, Christians in Africa totaled 2 percent of all Christians worldwide. However, that percentage has risen to 18 percent. Likewise, in Asia, the population in 1900 was approximately 4 percent of the worldwide Christian total, but it has risen to 16 percent of the total today. Moreover, a glance at Latin America similarly presents a positive growth. In the period of 1900–2000, Christianity in Latin America rose from 11 percent to 24 percent of the total population.

We can thus safely say that Christianity’s growth takes place outside the Western world. Christians in the Third World constitute about 58 percent of Christianity, and that growth will increase to about 80 percent by the end of the twenty-first century. Considering these facts, the twentieth century has shown rapid growth in Christianity on the continents of Africa, Asia, and South America. In Africa, the countries with the most Protestant Christians are Nigeria, the Republic of South Africa, and Congo. The fact that China, India, Indonesia, and Korea are the most Christian countries of Asia may be surprising, since India is predominantly Hindu, China is associated with Communism, and Indonesia has a predominantly Muslim population.

A close study of the decline of Christianity in the Western world and the rise of Christianity on the continents of Asia and Africa and in Latin America reveals some startling socioeconomic facts. Some have noticed that countries that post a decline in Christian population are wealthy, relatively peaceful, and emphasize sexual equality, whereas countries with a rapid growth of Christianity are less affluent and have less equality among the classes or between the genders. It seems that Christianity fades where there are better living conditions and increases where living conditions are poor. This phenomenon is evident also for Korea, which saw an increasing Christian population until the 1960s. But sharp economic growth brought economic affluence, social well-being, sexual equality—and a corresponding negative effect on the growth of Christianity in Korea.

Christian theological thinking, too, has been affected by this trend. Given the economic challenges of Third World countries and the struggles experienced by their people, including Christians, Western theologies have typically taken a preferential option for the poor. A significant shift among many Christian
representatives occurred at the ecumenical World Council of Churches and its conferences, especially its 1968 conference in Uppsala and the 1973 gathering in Bangkok, where they reinterpreted the biblical message and the person of Christ to embrace a sociopolitical component. At the Uppsala meeting, Donald McGavran raised the question: “Will Uppsala betray the two billion?” This shift toward a liberation theology and utopian ideal of creating a kingdom of God on earth rather than maintaining a traditional focus on the spiritual state and eternal destiny sent ripples through the Christian Protestant world.

**Renewal Movements within Christianity**

Christianity may attribute its growth in non-Western countries to Pentecostalism, or Renewal Movements. There are three major groups: classical Pentecostalism (“the First Wave”); the Charismatic Movement (“the Second Wave”), which has made inroads into mainline Protestant churches and Roman Catholicism; and the neocharismatics, or neo-Pentecostalism (“the Third Wave”). The latter two waves have taken place after World War II. As of 2002, the Renewal Movement is estimated to embrace about 523 million people, which makes up about 27.7 percent of organized global Christianity. Of the 523 million people, 65 million are Pentecostals, 175 million are charismatics, and 295 million are neocharismatics. Of those belonging to the renewal groups, only about 79 million live in North America, while the vast majority reside in Latin America (141 million), Asia (134 million), and Africa (126 million). The Third Wave, the neocharismatic group, signifies a more recent phenomenon of independent and post-nondenominational groups surfacing throughout the world. According to Barrett, in 2000, there were about 18,810 independent and indigenous churches and groups that, though they do not belong to the classical Pentecostal or charismatic churches, still share with both a “common emphasis on the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, Pentecostal-like experiences, signs and wonders, and power encounters.”

The greatest neocharismatic concentrations of strength are in the prophetic African Independent Churches, in Asia—especially the house church movement in China—and in Latin American coun-

6. The designation of First, Second, and Third Waves is attributed to David Barrett in Barrett and Johnson, *World Christian Trends*, 287.
tries, especially Brazil. Barrett and Johnson discovered that the neo-
charismatics actually outnumber all Pentecostals and charismatics
combined. In January 2005, the total in Pentecostal-Charismatic
Renewal was 588,502,000 (up from 523,916,000 in 2000). Approxi-
mately 60 percent were neocharismatics.9

In the United States, Pentecostalism was associated with the poorer regions,
particularly among Southern whites and blacks. For example, the Church of God
in Christ (COGIC)—led by Bishop Charles Mason (1866–1961), who had
received a Spirit baptism at Azusa in 1907—was by 2000 the largest American
and Holiness Pentecostal church, with an estimated 5 million members. However,
Pentecostalism has moved into the middle-class. The Assemblies of God, for
example, joined the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942. By 2000, the
Assemblies of God had 2 million members in the United States. By that time,
Pentecostalism had grown among the Korean and Hispanic population, with the
Hispanic population being the fastest growing Pentecostal group in the United
States. About 20 percent of the Hispanic population in the United States are
Pentecostal, which is about 6 million people.

The Charismatic Movement, or the Second Wave, features the discov-
ergy of spiritual gifts. In April 1960, Dennis Bennett (1917–1991), a priest at
St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, announced to his con-
gregation that he had spoken in tongues. He was asked to resign, but many
point to this event as the beginning of the Charismatic Movement in mainline
Protestant denominations, including the Episcopalians, Methodists, Reformed,
Baptists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians. Lutheran pastor Larry Christenson (b.
1928), from San Pedro, California, claimed to have received a Spirit baptism
while attending a Pentecostal gathering and was instrumental in bringing the
Charismatic Movement to Great Britain and Germany in 1963. Within Roman
Catholicism, the Charismatic Movement surfaced in 1967 when a group of
teachers at Duquesne University spoke in tongues. They were influenced by two
textbooks: David Wilkerson’s *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1963) and John
Sherrill’s *They Speak with Other Tongues* (1964).

The foundation for the Second Wave, or Charismatic Movement, in the
mainline churches had been laid prior to the 1960s by individuals such as Agnes
Stanford, who wrote *The Healing Light* (1947), and by Pat Robertson (1930–). The
latter theologian was a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, who
through his 1959 purchase of a defunct television station launched the Christian
Broadcasting Network in 1966. A third notable figure, Oral Roberts, launched a
healing ministry in 1947 that began public broadcast in 1955. In 1965, Roberts

established Oral Roberts University. Mention must also be made of David du Plessis (1905–87), an Assembly of God member, who had wide ecumenical impact on the Charismatic Movement through his dialogue with Roman Catholicism and through his lectures at theological seminaries such as Princeton, Yale, and Union.

In the 1970s and 1980s, independent Pentecostalism, or Third Wave, took a new approach to material wealth, abandoning the original classical Pentecostal ideals of austerity and denial of wealth. Although Oral Roberts and Jim Bakker already regarded wealth as a blessing from God, independent Pentecostal preachers such as Kenneth Hagin Sr., his student Kenneth Copeland, and the black neo-Pentecostal preacher Fredric K. C. Price embraced the idea of prosperity and the ability for Christians to promote their own financial destiny provided they have faith. This “Word of Faith” movement in the United States—also known as “positive confession,” the “faith message,” the “prosperity gospel,” or the “health and wealth movement”—became popular around the world, finding sympathizers among the younger urban generation. Preachers within this Third Wave are known to lead lavish lifestyles, which has attracted criticism from denominational Pentecostals.10 Many contemporary televangelists hold charismatic or Pentecostal viewpoints, such as belief in spiritual gifts, divine healing, miracles, and a prosperity gospel. Many are outside denominational Pentecostalism and conduct much of their ministries independently and with little accountability. In the twenty-first century, the televised church services of Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas; Robert Schuller’s Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California; and Benny Hinn continue to attract large audiences—though not without public criticism and concerns over style and methods.

In Scandinavia, Pentecostals are the largest church outside the Lutheran state churches. Until the 1960s, Stockholm’s Filadelfia Church, associated with Lewi Pethrus (1884–1974), was the largest Pentecostal congregation. After 1948, many people from the West Indies immigrated to Great Britain, and with them came African Caribbean Spiritism, which showed remarkable growth in the 1960s. As did many other mainline English-speaking churches worldwide, the evangelical Anglicans in England embraced John Wimber’s (1934–97) “power evangelism,” a campaign of renewing established churches, which he started in Anaheim, California. With his first visit to Great Britain in 1982, Wimber taught the role of signs and wonders—especially healing—as an instrument of church growth. In France and Spain, about a quarter of the Roma (Gypsy)

people are known to be Pentecostals, and Italy has the second-largest population of Pentecostals in Western Europe after Great Britain.

In Eastern Europe, the following statistics demonstrate Pentecostalism’s success despite its history of severe persecution (it received religious freedom only in 1991). By 2000, the Ukraine could count 780,000 members; Russia, 400,000 members; and Romania, 300,000 members.

In 1994, the Assemblies of God numbered more than four million members in Africa. South Africa especially boasts many prominent leaders, such as Nicholas Bhengu (1909–85) and the healing evangelist David du Plessis (mentioned earlier). The well-known German itinerant Pentecostal preacher Reinhard Bonnke, who began his ministry in Lesotho, attracts large crowds throughout Africa. From South Africa, especially through migrant workers, Pentecostalism spread to Zimbabwe. It is also strong in the Congo because of the independent Pentecostal missionary William Burton (1886–1971). From Kenya, it spread to Uganda in 1986, though it has been hampered by protracted civil war. Pentecostalism, whether through the Assemblies of God or any of its families, is a significant movement throughout West Africa in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. One particular trait facilitating Pentecostalism’s popularity is divine healing of the sick through the laying on of hands and often accompanied by rituals.11

It is estimated that 11 percent of Africa’s population is charismatic, and the movement has entered many mainline churches, such as the Anglican, Methodist, and Lutheran communities. A noticeable feature of the Lutheran Church—Mekane Jesu in Ethiopia is the infiltration of the Charismatic Movement, particularly in its exuberant worship life. Many African indigenous churches also have embraced Pentecostal traits, though these churches tend to be syncretistic because they also include occult practices, placing value on trances, healing power, spiritual warfare, and polygamy.

Pentecostalism is making great inroads in Asia. In India, the Assemblies of God and the Indian Pentecostal Church for God are the largest Pentecostal denominations with 750,000 adherents in 2000. Indonesia boasts the greatest Pentecostal expansion: between 1965 and 1971, during the “Indonesian Revival,” more than 2 million Javanese became Christian. By 2000, there were between nine and twelve million Pentecostals and Charismatics, which represents about 4 to 5 percent of the total population in a country that is 80 percent Muslim, and thus not always welcoming to Christian activities.