

UGI Briefing 137

Understanding Global Issues



Christianity

in the New Millennium

Introduction

For many people in the West, religion barely registers in their daily lives. Traditional churches are empty, the clerical professions are dwindling and belief in an afterlife is commonly derided as wishful thinking. At the same time, Christianity in the developing world is enjoying strong growth, partly thanks to well-funded programmes of evangelism. Evangelicals claim that in China 10,000 people a day are being converted to Jesus.

In the United States, the world's biggest and most powerful Christian nation, Christian lobby groups have huge political influence, megachurches have vast congregations and the majority of people have strong religious convictions. When the pastor Rick Warren published his book *The Purpose-Driven Life in 2002*, it quickly became the best-selling hardback in publishing history, selling 30m copies by mid-2005. Some 40,000 churches worldwide have since conducted '40 days-of-purpose events'. Such enthusiasm for religion is hard for most Europeans to understand.

In Europe people have tended to think that religion was something we grew out of when the Enlightenment brought rationality to overcome the superstitions of the Dark Ages. The move from religious fervour to cool reason appeared both logical and desirable in view of the wars that religion had caused in so many countries in so many ages. It also seemed to be a natural progression from a society where disease and hardship were part of daily experience to a society where long life and daily comfort were the normal expectation. People no longer needed God, because the welfare state would provide. Meanwhile, science had shown that chemistry lay behind the workings of the human brain, undermining notions of a separate 'soul'.

And yet the fastest-growing branch of Christianity, even in prosperous societies, is Pentecostalism,¹ the most 'irrational' of the many paths that this most adaptable of religions can offer. Clearly there is great hunger for the spiritual even in our technological, consumerist society.

Could it be that a turning point is approaching when humanity will reject the industrial society with its waste and its dehumanising biotech advances? Many Christians believe that the 'end times' are near when Jesus Christ will return and the world will be engulfed in war and destruction. Only true believers will be carried up to heaven. Websites such as *readyrapture.com* keep the faithful up to date with the latest news of apocalyptic events. Age of reason? Think again.

For some 1,500 years the Roman Church had almost complete control over the Christian religion in the West. There was a single framework, a single form of worship. The Church provided clear definitions of what was right and wrong and the forms of penance that had to be undertaken in order to secure forgiveness of sins. Over the last 500 years and especially in the last century, the Christian religion has fragmented to the point where there are now 39,000 different denominations worldwide. By comparison, Islam has a much simpler framework of belief. Indeed, some argue that Christianity can no longer be spoken of as one religion. Even the basic teachings of Jesus Christ have many interpretations, most obviously in the US where war-making is a habit and poverty is not seen as a worthy lifestyle despite the examples of peacemaking and poverty set by Jesus. Writing in *Harper's Magazine* in August 2005, Bill McKibben, the Methodist author of *The End of Nature*, argued that "America is simultaneously the most professedly Christian of the developed nations and the least Christian in its behaviour".

As the US continues its crusade against Muslim terrorism, most people pray for reconciliation between nations and steps to prevent disastrous climate change and irreversible damage to nature. Christianity will have a profound impact on these issues, but whether for good or ill remains to be seen.

See notes on page 16

UGI Briefings

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Cover Members of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, celebrate the opening in July 2005 of their new 'megachurch' – seating capacity 16,000 people. Jessica Kourkounis, Associated Press.

In the Beginning – God the Father

Christianity, like Islam later, sprang from the monotheistic religion of the Jews. All three ‘religions of the Book’ recognise the Old Testament as the foundation of their official scriptures.

There is no doubt that Jesus was a genuine historical figure, though scholars dispute the date and place of his birth, the year of his death and many of the details of his life. It is known that he was crucified on the orders of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea during the period 26-36 CE – 26-36 Anno Domini (AD) in Christian literature.

Jesus was of course a Jew, and there are many examples in the gospels of his familiarity with the traditional stories of the great kings and prophets of Israel – Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Solomon and David and, not least, the prediction that a Messiah would one day come to save the Jews from their oppressors. As his fame spread, more and more people came to believe that he was this Messiah, and that the Day of Judgement was near at hand.

While avoiding any direct challenge to the Roman occupiers, Jesus made powerful enemies among the Jewish authorities with his scorn for material wealth, his criticism of the established priesthood and, above all, his apparent claim to be ‘King of the Jews’. He

God of Love and Salvation

The concept of a single all-powerful God was a key feature of Judaism, setting it apart from the polytheism of the ancient world. The Jehovah of the Old Testament is the god of his ‘chosen people’, implacable, often angry, punishing and rewarding the actions of a nation and its leaders. Jesus, in contrast, described a personal god, who watched over and loved everyone, whatever their faults. This god sent his only son, Jesus, to live and die as a human being – and thereby save the souls of all who repented of their sins. More dramatically, Jesus taught that repentance was urgent; that the end of the world was so near that, according to Matthew’s gospel, there was scarcely enough time for the apostles to take his message to all the cities of Israel.

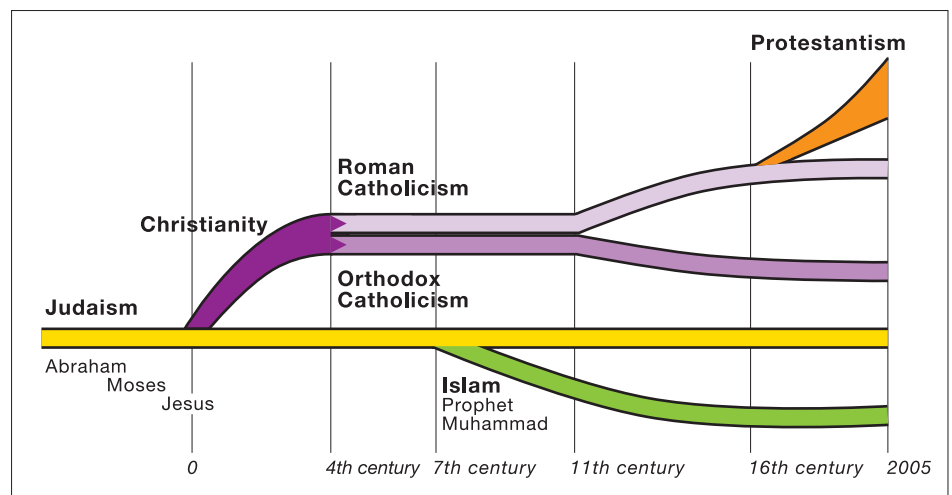
preached a popular message radically different from traditional Jewish doctrine, making him a dangerous trouble-maker in a notoriously rebellious province of the Roman Empire.

Jesus’s life and sayings were recorded in numerous gospels (“good news” stories), the first of which was only compiled 30-50 years after his death. Though Jesus probably spoke Aramaic, surviving manuscripts of the gospels, derived from oral traditions, were largely written in Greek. By the 4th century, those of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John had become official scripture and most of the others had disappeared. The real authorship of all four ‘canonical gospels’ is disputed but scholars think they are related: that Mark’s Gospel is the earliest, and that the other two drew on Mark, and on another common but unknown source ‘Q’ (German *Quelle* = source).

St John’s Gospel stands apart from the other three for its poetic language and theological difficulties, but also for its emphasis on the part played by the Jewish elders in the death of Jesus. It has been accused, perversely, of anti-semitism and – along with the reference in Matthew 27:22 (“His blood be on us, and on our children.”) – as the source for the depiction of the Jews as Christ-murderers that has fuelled pogroms down to the modern age.

Monotheism and the ‘people of the Book’

The three most important monotheistic religions are closely linked by history and scripture. All three regard Abraham as the prophet who marked the change from polytheism to belief in a single all-powerful God. Neither Judaism nor Islam accepts the Christian notion that Jesus was divine, seeing him instead as an important prophet. According to traditional Islam, Jews and Christians are respected as ‘people of the Book’, because they have received divine revelations as recorded in the Bible. Relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims have varied in different societies and at different times, with treatment ranging from mutual tolerance to hatred, persecution and war.



Foundations of the Christian Church

Peter and Paul were key figures in the early church, but it was the Roman Emperor Constantine who gave real momentum to the new religion – and Charlemagne who reinforced it in Europe.

From the moment of Jesus' death his life and teachings were subject to many different, often contradictory interpretations. Argument focused on two issues in particular: the nature of the 'godhead' – The Holy Trinity – and the mission to the Gentiles.

Jesus made the Apostle Peter head of his new 'church'. For Catholics, when coupled with the Christian tradition that Peter had been Bishop of Rome, this was the founding act of the papacy. Over the next three centuries disputes over doctrinal matters led the Christian community repeatedly to question central authority and to split into numerous sects. There are signs that some passages in the New Testament were added during this period, to support one view or another.

Paul, the most influential of the early Christians, was both a Jew and a

Rome and religion

The Romans worshipped numerous gods, including their own emperors, and were generally tolerant of local religions in conquered provinces. Judaism, with its fierce nationalism, was always a problem. Christianity proved more adaptable, suiting the powerful for its emphasis on law and obedience, the poor for its message of hope and heavenly reward. When Constantine made it the de facto official religion of the empire, it was probably for political as much as personal reasons.

Roman citizen who began his public life as a zealous persecutor of Christians. Following his famous conversion 'on the road to Damascus', he trav-

elled widely, expounding and expanding Jesus's teachings with missionary fervour, adapting them to a new, Gentile audience. An important factor in the spread of early Christianity and its split from Judaism was the attitude taken by both Peter and Paul to circumcision: while essential for entry to Judaism, to become a Christian it was enough to be baptised and to affirm belief in the Holy Trinity.

The Dead Sea Scrolls² do not mention Jesus or his disciples, and there is almost no mention of him or his movement in Roman literature. But Judaism was clearly in turmoil. Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and others argued bitterly over doctrine and their response to the Roman occupation.

The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE drove many Jews out of Palestine and contributed to the growth of Rome as the centre of Christianity. Latin eventually replaced Greek as the main language of the Western Church and became a key element binding together Christian Europe. The Mass was conducted everywhere in Latin; vernacular languages were only introduced after the reforms of Pope John in the 1960s.

By the 4th century CE Christianity had become widespread despite bouts of repression by Rome. After a victorious battle to end a civil war between the eastern and western empires, Constantine gave the new religion a massive boost, building churches in Byzantium, which he renamed 'New Rome', and intervening in the doctrinal disputes that risked fragmenting the growing Church. He convened the first Christian summit (Council of Nicaea) in 325 CE, chiefly to settle the theological dispute over the Trinity.

Millions of Brazilians participate in the annual Good Friday festivals which mark the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Apart from the USA, Brazil is the world's largest Christian nation. Most Brazilians are Catholic but about 25% are now affiliated to various types of Protestantism and Pentecostalism.



Erardo Peres, Associated Press

The key outcome was the set of basic beliefs known as the Nicene Creed – still accepted by most Christians of all persuasions to this day. Whether he was a true believer (tradition says he was baptised before he died) or just an astute ruler of a fractious empire, Constantine’s espousal of Christianity transformed it from a message of personal salvation into an arm of the state, with momentous consequences.

On Constantine’s death in 337 CE, his empire split again, into an eastern empire based in New Rome, renamed ‘Constantinople’, and a western empire based in Rome. The Christian church also diverged, the Western Church adopting Roman centralism, the Eastern Church giving more power to local churches. Both Churches see themselves as the true continuation of the church founded by St Peter.

The sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 CE signalled the fall of the western Roman Empire. Subsequent invasions by other ‘barbarian’ hordes wrecked much of the Christian infrastructure that had been developed across

Europe and was closely associated with the ruling authorities. It was left to Irish and Italian monks to keep the traditions alive.

Monasteries³ were a key factor more generally in the success of Christianity. The network established across Europe in the Middle Ages provided centres of learning (usually conducted in Latin) and agricultural innovation, vital qualities for the development of civilisation. Initially founded by devout Christians, the monasteries, like other parts of the Roman Church, eventually became corrupted by material success.

Christianity revived in Europe when Charlemagne adopted it – and ordered that anyone refusing baptism should be put to death. He conquered most of Europe, wiping out the traditional pagan religions and using Christian clerics and monks as a kind of ‘civil service’ bureaucracy. In 800 CE he was crowned emperor in Rome by Pope Leo III. Thus Constantine’s notion of a Christian empire was reborn as an entity later known as the Holy Roman Empire.

The Holy Roman Empire

For almost a thousand years, the Holy Roman Empire played a key role in European politics and religion, with the House of Hapsburg dominating its leadership for half that time. Though it sometimes provided a rival to the papacy in terms of secular power, the Holy Roman Empire helped to maintain Roman Catholicism as the preferred faith of central Europe. It was fatally weakened by the religious wars which followed the Reformation.

The Eastern Roman Empire survived until 1453 when Constantinople finally fell to the Turks and Islam replaced Christianity as the official religion. In the meantime, Eastern Orthodoxy had spread northwards, thanks to the work of missionaries such as Cyril and Methodius – and more exercise of imperial diktat. In the 9th century, for example, Boris, King of the Bulgars, and Vladimir, the ruler of Kievan Rus, imposed Christian baptism on all their subjects.

The teachings of Jesus

In the course of his ministry, Jesus covered a wide range of topics concerned with daily life and spiritual salvation, often using parables to make his point. According to the Gospels, he performed numerous miracles along the way, thereby convincing followers that he had divine powers. Some have seen his most important message as heralding the advent of God’s kingdom on earth – though there is much controversy over what this actually means. Numerous sects have developed around this concept. For the majority of people, however, his main influence has probably been in setting moral standards for behaviour.

Many regard the Sermon on the Mount as containing the essence of his teaching. Blessing the gentle, the merciful, the peacemakers, Jesus told his followers to obey the law but to abandon the Old Testament idea of justice (“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”) and instead to ‘turn the other cheek’. He said you should treat others as you would like them to treat you; never insult or get angry with other people; be faithful to your spouse in both thought and deed; love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; do good deeds in secret; do not store up treasure on earth (for you cannot serve both God and money). In short, “there must be no limit to your goodness”.

The Sermon on the Mount also included the Lord’s Prayer, a simple request for God’s will to be done, for food, forgiveness and delivery from evil. It has been the most widely-used prayer among Christians over the last 2,000 years.

The crucifixion and reported resurrection of Jesus was the starting point for Christian belief, though Eastern Orthodoxy puts more emphasis on Christ’s incarnation and birth than on his death. For Christians, Jesus Christ is the personification of goodness. Jesus means “God saves” while Christ means “the anointed one”, i.e., the Messiah.



Associated Press

Tradition, Reformation, Proliferation

By the mid-14th century discontent was spreading throughout Europe at the extravagance and corruption of the Western Church, and the perceived neglect of Jesus's message.

The architectural heritage of Christianity is both widespread and impressive. Medieval communities competed with each other to build bigger and better churches. The wealthy sponsored the construction of magnificent cathedrals that became centres of communal life as well as expressions of the power and majesty of the Christian church. At a time when death and disease were commonplace, they could also be seen as attempts to gain God's mercy.

The very opulence of the Roman Church, and its arrogant assertion of rights transcending those of Europe's crowned rulers, provoked strong dissent among clerics and scholars. It was also much weakened by the 'Papal Schism' of 1378-1417 when, for a brief period, the Church had three popes. In England John Wyclif, often called the 'morning star' of the Reformation, used his deep knowledge of both the law and the Bible to refute papal claims on both legal and theological

The Bible and dissent

The Bible was translated into Latin, the official language of the Empire, soon after Christianity became its official religion, for the use of clerics who could not read Greek or Hebrew. In the following centuries parts were glossed or translated into regional languages. But the first complete translations into the vernacular were undertaken in the 14th century, to support a theological debate about authority that had begun in protest at the inept power-broking and corrupt practices of the Church.

grounds, and later produced the first complete translation of the Bible into English. Wyclif's ideas reached Bohemia, where Jan Hus took them up, was excommunicated and burned at the stake. But their protest gained new momentum when the invention of the printing press in the 15th century

made the sacred texts more widely available.

The Reformation is usually said to have begun when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg castle church in October 1517. But Luther was not at that stage challenging the right of the Catholic Church to grant forgiveness of sins (indulgences), just protesting at the corrupt way it was done. His more general quarrel with the authority of the established Church developed only later. However the 95 articles were rapidly printed and circulated throughout Europe and 'protestant' movements sprang up everywhere. Popular discontent was directed in particular at the trade in fake relics and the sale of indulgences (with money being paid to the Church).

The most important new movements were based on the teachings of Luther himself and those of John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. By and large, all Protestants emphasised the literal truth of the Bible, scorned the Catholic reverence for holy relics, and focused on personal piety and each person's right of direct access to God unmediated by priests. In Geneva, the centre of Calvinism, religious police paid random visits to homes to ensure that moral standards were being upheld. With strict rules on virtuous behaviour, a ban on alcohol and dancing, and the death penalty for adultery, the early Calvinists had much in common with the Taliban of modern Afghanistan.

A consequence of the diminished role of priests in the Protestant faiths was that the Roman Catholic requirement for celibacy among the priesthood was dropped. This had always been

The Holy Trinity and the Apostles' Creed – passwords to baptism

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."

The Apostles' Creed affirms belief in a triune God – Father, Son and Holy Ghost, i.e., the Trinity. This version of monotheism caused much controversy in the early Church – and has continued to provoke theological debate ever since. Does the Creed describe three distinct entities, or three aspects of one? In what sense was Jesus the Son of God, or 'conceived' by the Holy Ghost? For some non-Christians, the Holy Trinity is an echo of a polytheistic past.

Though scholars have discarded the idea that the Twelve Apostles (the main disciples of Jesus) wrote the creed themselves, it is thought to summarise their basic beliefs. A longer version of the creed, known as the Nicene Creed, was put together at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. With minor variations, this creed has been used ever since by all Christians – Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant. The creed is used in a 'question and answer' format at Christian baptismal ceremonies.

unrealistic in practice and no doubt contributed to the moral collapse of the Roman Church, because so many priests and monks ignored the rules and took mistresses. Even so, the Vatican continues to this day to insist on celibate (and male) priests.

The Catholic reaction to such widespread protest in the West was the Counter Reformation. The Church attempted to put its own house in order by eliminating corruption and defining 'best practice'. The Council of Trent (1545-63) defined Catholic doctrine and set rules for Catholic church services that have largely remained in place ever since.

The Reformation made little impact on Eastern Orthodox Catholicism, which was organised as numerous 'autocephalous' churches in Alexandria, Antioch and other provinces. Each had its own bishop who answered to no higher authority. These episcopal sees were self-governing but in full communion with the 'one church' centred on Constantinople, and were

The Crusades

The first Christian crusade in 1095-99 was called by Pope Urban II to defend the Byzantine Empire from the Seljuk Turks. It ended with the capture of Jerusalem, the looting of its treasures and the massacre of its inhabitants. Some crusaders also took the opportunity to kill Jews they ran into on the way through Europe.

Later crusades became even more like looting expeditions, the most notorious being the Venice-led sacking of Constantinople in 1204. Participants in a papal crusade were promised absolution from any sins they might commit en route.

Not surprisingly, Jews, Muslims and Eastern Orthodox Catholics look back on the crusades with revulsion and anger. Western culture has tended to see them as noble adventures in defence of Christendom. The crusades had an important economic and social impact on medieval Europe, creating new trading and cultural links, and 'internationalising' outlook.

subject to the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. These meetings of all the bishops to discuss and decide questions of administration and doctrine included Rome until the Great Schism of 1054, when the two churches went their separate ways.

In western Europe, conflict between Catholics and Protestants frequently erupted into war. Christian armies embarking on the crusades had been told, more or less, that they could do what they liked to heathens. Various popes had indicated that the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" did not apply to Catholics who murdered 'heretics' in the name of Christ. When the Vatican encouraged Catholics to root out the evil of Protestantism in France, the result, in 1572, was the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris. Thousands of Huguenots were dragged from their beds and murdered in an orgy of hatred and bloodletting which spread across France and ended with as many as 70,000 dead. What made the Huguenots especially dangerous to the authorities, apart from their trenchant criticism of Catholic ritual, was the fact that they practised the anti-clerical Calvinism already dominant in Switzerland, and they believed that salvation was God-given and could not be granted by priests or pope.

To prevent further fragmentation of the Church, the Vatican sometimes resorted to trial by formal Inquisition.⁴ At the same time it supported the Society of Jesus, a new order of devout Catholics founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1534 to defend the faith as "footsoldiers of the Pope". Known for their 'spiritual exercises' and unshakeable faith, the Jesuits worked in Europe and in many other parts of the world to implant Roman Catholicism. Education was an important aspect of their activities. As a Jesuit maxim put it, "Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man".

Despite the best efforts of the Roman Church, Protestantism continued to

spread. In England this took the form of an Anglican Church⁵ with a strong central authority, headed by the monarch as 'defender of the faith', but most other Protestant groups avoided hierarchical structures in favour of a 'priesthood of all believers'.

This 'presbyterian' approach to church government contrasted with the episcopal system common to traditional Christianity. In Scotland, John Knox led the movement to establish a Calvinistic form of Protestantism and the Church of Scotland adopted presbyterianism. The Puritans tried to establish a similarly democratic system for the Church of England, seeking to purge Anglicanism of the remnants of 'popery'. This struggle over the 'divine right of kings' led to the English civil war and a brief period of rule by the 'puritan' Oliver Cromwell.

The clash between Protestants and Catholics led to much bloodshed and persecution all over Europe. The general climate of intolerance drove many Protestants to emigrate to other countries where they could practise their faith in peace. America in particular benefited from the influx of independent-minded but God-fearing migrants. The puritanical zeal of those who sailed aboard the *Mayflower* in 1620 enabled them to withstand many hardships and eventually to build successful communities.

Hard-working and convinced of their own righteousness, they had an uncompromising attitude to the indigenous population. When the Indians died of diseases brought from Europe, the Pilgrims saw this as a sign that God had cleared the land for them. Despite their unabashed racism (typical of that time), the immigrants had a profound impact on the nature of the free society established in North America. Its revolutionary new constitution was signed in Philadelphia – the city of brotherly love. Thus presbyterianism helped to engender democracy in the USA.

Christianity, Empire and Secular Power

Constantine, Charlemagne, and the Czars of Russia were among those who used Christianity to build their empires. Many leaders have used it to bolster their authority.

By the time of the Reformation, the Vatican had become as much a secular as a religious power, with the pope commanding large military forces. Its links with the commercial world were strengthened with the development of banking in 15th century Florence. The popes became patrons of the arts, commissioning the best sculptors, architects and painters of the Renaissance period. The distinction between popes and princes disappeared when the Borgia family took over the papacy. Alexander VI, who became pope in 1492, ruled with ruthless efficiency and total disregard for moral conduct. The spiritual prestige of the papacy fell to its lowest level at the height of its secular power.

When the Ottomans recaptured Constantinople in 1453, closing the overland trade route to the East, Spain and Portugal embarked on their great voyages in search of new routes by sea. In 1493 the Pope drew a north-south line on a map of the western hemisphere 100 leagues west of the most westerly Azores, and granted all the territory 'known or to be discovered' south and west of that line to Catholic Spain, all that to the south and east to Catholic Portugal. In 1494 the line was redrawn 370 leagues west of the Azores, which eventually gave the 'bulge' of Brazil to Portugal.

No such allocations were made to the Protestant English or Dutch. However, these Christian nations soon joined in the profits of the colonial plunder initiated by Cortes and Pizarro in the former Aztec and Inca empires. And when the Muslim threat to Europe ended in 1571, with the sinking of the Turkish fleet at Lepanto, other Christian powers, too, set about

Slaves and Christians

Early colonial settlers in the Americas first tried to use the indigenous people for forced labour but later, as the native population shrank under the impact of new diseases, began to import African slaves. Christian merchants dominated the slave trade, one of the pillars of western economic success in the period 1550-1850 when some 11 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic. This shocking trade was long defended by both Catholic and Protestant churches which saw slavery as a normal part of human society. The Bible makes frequent references to slavery, which was central to life in the ancient world, and even Jesus does not condemn it.

Although the Catholic priest Bartolomé de las Casas was a strong proponent of the rights of native Indians in 16th century Latin America, it wasn't until the late-18th century that moral doubts about slavery became widespread in the Christian world, notably among Methodists such as John Wesley and the evangelical William Wilberforce.

acquiring their share of the newly-discovered lands – and converting the heathen. Catholic missions, often led by the Jesuits, spread the Roman faith throughout Latin America. In North America protestantism dominated, except in the French colonies of Louisiana and Quebec. But everywhere indigenous populations were wiped out (along with most of the forests) and plantations of tobacco,

sugar and cotton were soon providing 'employment' for millions of slaves.

Ever since Constantine, there had been a close connection between church and state in western Europe. Non-Christians had no chance of public office. Yet the Christian values professed by European leaders did not prevent them from waging wars, persecuting fellow Christians or supporting the slave trade. Conflicts between Christians in the post-Reformation period produced more than a century of war, ruining Spain and Portugal and long holding back unification of the religiously divided German states. Meanwhile, the British and the Dutch enriched themselves from trade and colonial gains in Asia and the Caribbean. Christianity made few inroads into Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist Asia but did well in the West Indies – and among black slaves in general, presumably because of Jesus's message of hope and personal salvation.

By the mid-18th century northern Europe had mostly achieved freedom of religious practice. Church control over land and commerce had been broken, allowing free enterprise and capitalism to flow across Europe, feeding the Industrial Revolution. The Enlightenment introduced a new spirit of scientific rationalism, sweeping away superstitions and demanding empirical proofs instead of beliefs.

The French Revolution brought about the disestablishment of the Church in France, breaking a thousand-year link between church and state. Though Napoleon invited the Pope to his coronation as emperor in 1804, he placed the crown on his own head,

symbolising both the connection with Charlemagne and his own superior authority. The Holy Roman Empire evaporated soon afterwards. In 1815, however, concerned at the possible impact of revolutionary thinking on his own empire, Czar Alexander I of Russia persuaded Austria and Prussia to sign up to a 'Christian Union of Charity, Peace, and Love' (the so-called Holy Alliance). Ostensibly intended to reinforce the proper application of Christianity in European affairs of state, the alliance was widely seen as an attempt to secure the thrones of autocratic monarchs, many of them related to each other. The alliance was later widened to include first Britain, then France.

The extension of the British Empire under Queen Victoria gave rise to a new wave of missionary zeal, as reform-minded Christians sought to abolish slavery and save the souls of the coloured peoples. It was a convenient marriage between morality and commerce. Missionaries, willing to tolerate bad living conditions, helped to educate the natives and prepare them for the European empire-builders. Africa bore the brunt of the colonisers' zeal as Britain, France, Belgium and Germany carved up the continent and baptised its inhabitants. In Australia and New Zealand, the aborigines – with their complex spiritual cultures – were largely killed off and replaced by Christian settlers who saw them as mere savages.

The US, whose own Indians had also been annihilated, was supposedly opposed to colonialism but in 1898 conquered the Philippines, where centuries of Spanish rule had imposed a Roman Catholic tradition. The US was also active in opening up the markets of Japan and China, and, like the European powers, did not hesitate to use force. European and American missionaries were busy proselytising throughout the world. The combination of arrogant commerce and

Christianity and capitalism

Before the Reformation the Church dominated economic life in Europe, while the financial system remained undeveloped because 'usury' (the charging of interest on loans) was frowned upon. Yet some monasteries, such as those run by Cistercians, had a strong entrepreneurial flair. The Reformation loosened the Church's grip on the economy, enabling a freer flow of business ideas to circulate. The thrifty Calvinists showed how businesses could be built through hard work, careful financial management and reinvestment. As the banking system developed and trading links spread, attitudes to loan interest softened and usury came to mean only the charging of excessive interest. In the US, pioneering Christians saw material success as God's reward for hard work, virtue and prayer.

insensitive preaching led to a violent backlash in China, the Boxer Rebellion,⁶ which was suppressed by international forces in 1900. In the meantime, the secular power of the Pope had vanished as Italy achieved nationhood and took over the papal states, leaving only a small area around St Peter's under Vatican control. The Holy See became the world's smallest independent state.

Writers such as Karl Marx tapped into the revolutionary mood with new theories about egalitarian societies in which religion – "the opium of the people" – played no part. In Russia Czar Nicholas II was closely associated with the Orthodox Church and calls for his overthrow meant calls for an end to Church power too. Though the Communist regime closed down some churches, most of the buildings were left intact. Many Russians continued to practise their religion in secret, though Lenin had declared that "every idea of God is unutterable vileness...of the most dangerous kind". Only in Albania, where Enver Hoxha ruled with an obsessively heavy hand, was the practice of Christianity (and Islam) made illegal. In 1967 Hoxha announced that Albania was the first atheist state in history. This period did not last long and the death of Hoxha in 1985 was followed by a resurfacing of religious enthusiasm. The wearing of crosses and headscarves became a fashionable trend amongst the young in the 1990s: Christianity as a symbol of freedom in post-Soviet Europe and Islam as a symbol of resistance to the Christian West.

The Catholic Church in Poland survived Communist rule and played an important part in the political processes leading to the restoration of democracy. Pope John Paul II,⁷ born in Poland in 1920 and elected to the papacy in 1978, was widely seen as an influential figure in the collapse of communism in eastern Europe. In other parts of the world, however, the Polish Pope actively discouraged revolutionary fervour, clamping down on the 'liberation theology' which some felt would help Latin America towards fairer societies.

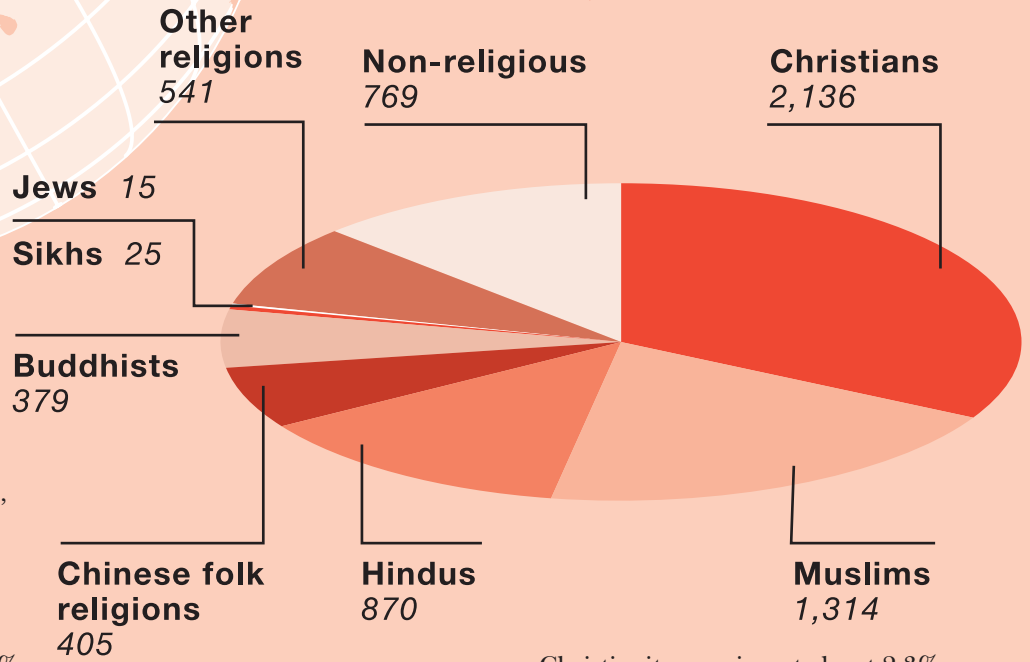
Evangelicals have always been excited by the prospect of converting the Chinese to Christianity. In 2005 estimates of the number of Christians in China varied from 40 to 100 million. If Christianity can penetrate China to the same extent as in neighbouring Korea and Vietnam, it could have a profound impact on international politics.



Associated Press

The Christian world

World population (mid-2005 in millions)
6,454



World religions

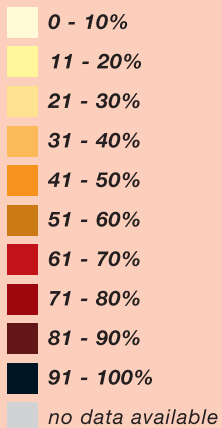
In global terms, Christians easily outnumber all other religious groups, a situation that seems unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. While adherence to Christianity may be declining in Europe, it remains almost universal in the US (where 85% of people profess Christian beliefs) and Latin America, and has a strong hold in many African countries where population is growing rapidly. Some Asian countries, such as South Korea,

China, India and Vietnam, also have substantial Christian minorities. According to *New Internationalist* ("In the Name of God", August 2004), Islam is growing at 2.9% a year, with

Christianity growing at about 2.3%. Within Christianity, Pentecostal churches are growing at 8.1% a year, evangelicals at 5.4% and Roman Catholics at 1.3%. Annual growth in world population is about 1.4%.

Christian affiliation by country

Christian share of population



Sources: globalchristianity.org; Britannica Book of the Year 2005

Orthodox Catholic

Few Christians now live in Turkey, but the Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul) is still the titular head of the Orthodox Catholic Church (sometimes known as Eastern or Greek Orthodox). Church regions are autocephalous under the ancient patriarchies of Alexandria (covering Egypt, Ethiopia, etc.), Antioch (Syria, Lebanon) and Jerusalem, the medieval patriarchies of Russia, Georgia, Serbia, etc. and the more recent churches established in Poland, Slovakia, America, etc. Ancient offshoots include Armenian, Coptic, Monophysite and Nestorian Christians.

Roman Catholic

Led by the Pope as Bishop of Rome, the worldwide Roman Catholic church is divided into almost 3,000 dioceses each headed by a Bishop and over 200,000 parishes each with its own priest. About 180 Bishops have been designated by the Pope as Cardinals. Cardinals have no authority over other Bishops but act as advisers to the Pope. Cardinals under 80 can vote in the conclave which selects a new pope. Links between Roman and Orthodox Catholicism are shown by central European Uniates who recognise the Pope but use Slavonic liturgy.

Protestant groups

After the Reformation, the Protestant faith fragmented into numerous 'churches'. There are now 39,000 separate Christian denominations worldwide. They include:

Lutheran

Named after Martin Luther (1483-1546), the first reformist group began in Germany, spread to Scandinavia and eventually worldwide. The Lutheran World Federation covers 140 churches with 66m members in 78 countries.

Reformed/Presbyterian/Calvinist

Various reformed churches (Church of Scotland, Church of Sweden, etc.) were set up by followers of John Calvin. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches covers 218 churches with 75m members in 107 countries.

Anglican

The Church of England, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury (currently Rowan Williams), is the largest member of the worldwide Anglican Communion, a loose alliance of Anglican churches in about 160 countries.

Baptist

A diverse, often evangelical, group which believes that baptism must be undertaken by a committed adult and must involve total immersion. The Baptist World Alliance, founded in 1905, claims to represent a community of 110m Baptists in over 200 countries.

Methodist

Methodists believe, with John Wesley, that Christian faith is "revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason". The World Methodist Council, founded in 1881, has 78 Methodist, Wesleyan and Uniting member churches in 130 countries.

Pentecostalist

Named after the Disciples' inspiration with the Holy Spirit, Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing strand of Christianity, especially in Africa, where belief in the spirit world is deeply rooted.

Other

The thousands of other groups include Quakers (The Society of Friends), Congregationalists, Pietists, Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, and numerous independent churches in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Americas.

Christians by professed faith (mid-2005)

	<i>million</i>
Roman Catholics	1,119
Protestants	376
Orthodox	219
Anglicans	80
Independents (post-denominational and neo-apostolic)	427
Marginal Christians (Mormons, Unitarians, etc.)	34
Unaffiliated Christians (not linked to a church)	110
<i>Less Christians doubly-affiliated or disaffiliated</i>	<i>229</i>
Total	2,136

Christians by geography (mid-2005)

	<i>million</i>
Africa	410
Asia	351
Europe	555
Latin America	518
North America	275
Oceania	27
Total	2,136

Source: globalchristianity.org

Rationalism and the Decline of Faith

The advance of science has weakened the hold of religion in many countries. But while secularism dominates in Western Europe, religion remains profoundly important to many Americans.

The discovery by Copernicus that the earth revolves around the sun gave a profound shock to established religion. When Galileo endorsed this theory in 1612 he was called before the Inquisition and recanted. This had no effect on the path of the sun but demonstrated the gulf between science and faith. Darwin's theory of evolution was an even bigger surprise, apparently relating men to monkeys.

For most people the response to new scientific knowledge and scholarly questioning of the Bible was a weakening of faith and a resort to 'relativism'. But some dug in their heels, insisted on the literal truth of the Bible and stressed the unchangeable nature of Christian truths. This division between 'liberal' and 'conservative' views of Christianity has persisted ever since. The Vatican was normally a guardian of the status quo and tended to see change as dangerous or even heretical.

Responding to the 19th century decline in religious belief, which Matthew Arnold likened to a receding

tide in the 'sea of faith', Pope Pius IX convened the First Vatican Council (1869-70) in order to reaffirm the primacy of (Roman) Catholic dogma as defined in the Council of Trent, and to counter all forms of rationalism, liberalism and materialism. The Council's most controversial decision, affirming the infallibility of the Pope, caused 60 members to walk out before the vote. In contrast, Pope John XXIII used the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) to throw open the doors to discussion. Among the results of this new debate was a change in the form of worship. The traditional Tridentine mass in Latin had ensured that Catholics all over the world shared the same form of worship – though few understood what all the words meant. The Second Vatican Council decided that parts of the service could henceforth be held in the language of the congregation. Conservatives saw this as a dangerous 'thin end of the wedge' which would open up Catholic worship to different and divisive forms of interpretation. Intellectuals such as

Cardinal Ratzinger stressed the danger to the universal church if local differences were allowed to proliferate. Similar arguments were used to defend Vatican opposition to contraception, women priests and liberation theology.

For many years the liberal tide seemed unstoppable. People had ceased looking to the past and had come to believe in progress. Following in the footsteps of Francis Bacon, Descartes, John Locke and other rationalists, people demanded to see the evidence before they would accept any 'truth'. Authoritarianism gave way to democracy, toleration and the notion of universal human rights.

Meanwhile, power had shifted from Europe to the United States, where a new Christian nation was creating the richest economy the world had ever seen, built partly on the Calvinist notion that hard work was a sacred duty, not a punishment for sin. Though most early Americans were Calvinist in outlook, the Founding Fathers – Washington, Jefferson,

According to a national opinion survey, almost two-thirds of US adults believe that human beings were created directly by God, the basic tenet of 'creationism'. Ten percent think that human beings are so complex that they required a powerful force or intelligent being to help create them. Only 22% believe humans evolved from earlier species.

What Americans believe

(based on Harris Poll, July 2005)

Creationism	64%
Evolution	22%
Intelligent design	10%
Not sure/declined to answer	4%
	100%

Source: Harris Interactive

Evolution, creationism and intelligent design

The Scopes trial (1925), when a young teacher defied Tennessee state law by teaching Darwin's evolutionary theories in school, became a *cause célèbre* for both liberal and conservative Americans. Though convicted, Scopes did not go to jail and his fine was paid by the American Civil Liberties Union. The ridicule heaped upon the 'fundamentalists' by the media merely served to entrench their thinking, which was quite consciously based on deep faith rather than scientific reasoning. They redoubled their efforts to spread the faith, setting up colleges such as Bob Jones University (founded by the evangelist Bob Jones Senior in 1927).

Most US schools now teach Darwin's theory of evolution as science. Creationists argue, however, that it is only a theory, and that many features of the world are too complex to have come about by natural selection. They claim that the theory of intelligent design (and, therefore, a 'designer god') also has scientific validity, and should be taught alongside Darwinism. In 2005, when the 'creationist' school board of Dover, Pennsylvania, tried to amend the curriculum in this way, a group of parents took it to court. Meanwhile, Pope Benedict XVI appears ready to embrace Darwin, on the understanding that evolution itself is part of God's plan.

Franklin and others – formed an intellectual elite driven by rationalist ideas. They realised that the new republic had to take a tolerant view of religious belief or risk the kind of strife that had torn Europe apart for nearly 200 years. Separation of church and state was made an integral part of the US constitution. Yet periodic ‘Great Awakenings’ with fiery preachers and frenzied congregations showed that many Americans were far from rational when it came to religion. As Karen Armstrong put it in *The Battle for God*, they moved Americans “away from the classical republicanism of the Founders to the more vulgar democracy and rugged individualism that characterise much American culture today”. This led to the distinctive style of American political life with the mass rallies, unabashed sentiment and showy charisma so bewildering to Europeans.

Americans came to believe that they lived in God’s chosen country, echoing the experience of the Israelites. Evangelical Christians provided the core of what was to become the Republican Party, seeking to develop a ‘righteous empire’ based on God’s law. The ruling class in the US is still White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) but its Ivy League liberalism has given way since the 1970s to a more conservative type of Protestantism heavily influenced by the southern Baptists.

The Unitarians exemplified a very different strand of Christian belief. Denying both the Trinity and the divine nature of Jesus, the Unitarians stressed the use of reason in religion, harking back to Platonic philosophy. The ideas of such freethinkers, denounced as heresy in the Post Reformation period, gradually took hold in more and more people as science progressed and ‘higher criticism’ of the Bible revealed discrepancies in the Scriptures. Catastrophes from the Lisbon earthquake (1755) to the Holocaust shook Christian belief in a ‘loving God’. Yet Christian ethics still had universal appeal.

The ultimate rational approach is secular humanism, which accepts many of the ethical tenets of Christianity but without its dependence on God. In 2003 a group of prominent intellectuals, including Richard Dawkins, Edward O. Wilson and 21 Nobel laureates signed a statement from the American Humanism Association rejecting religious beliefs and declaring that “the responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone”. The Sea of Faith movement, founded in the 1980s, is an example of a Christian form of humanism.

While Eastern Orthodoxy continued to stress the mystical aspects of religion, western Christianity veered towards rationality. Loss of belief in miracles led inevitably to loss of belief in God. But the loss left many people disoriented and uneasy. Something was missing. What is the meaning of life if there is no God? Many felt that faith, like poetry, could provide a clarity that reasoned logic could never achieve. Though mainstream Christianity is in decline, there is much interest in alternative ‘religions’ based on ‘New Age’ thinking, mysticism, and even paganism. Christianity itself has developed a vast array of different belief systems, some re-imported from Africa and the West Indies, and ranging from the narrow exclusionism of some millenarian sects to the all-embracing religion advocated by, for

The Da Vinci Code

According to Dan Brown’s best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, Jesus married Mary Magdalene, had a child with her, the bloodline survives in France – and the Church has conspired for millennia to hide the truth. A key character declares, among other things, that the Roman Emperor Constantine had the idea of ascribing divinity to Jesus in order to bolster his own political power and unite the Roman Empire through a common religion. The book made an enormous impact, though its research was quickly debunked by scholars of Christian history.

Public thirst for books with a religious theme appears vast. Among the biggest sellers in recent years are the *Christ Clone Trilogy* and the *Left Behind* series, both contemporary thrillers with apocalyptic themes, i.e., the ‘rapture’ of believers to heaven amid a struggle between the forces of Christ and Antichrist on Earth.

example, Brian McLaren in his book “*A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a missional, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, fundamentalist/calvinist, anabaptist/anglican, methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, depressed-yet-hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian*”.

Another Great Awakening in the 21st century?

Upwellings of religious belief have been a recurring feature of US social history. Evangelical education over the last century has increased belief in the “absolute truth of the Holy Bible”, including its prophecies about the second coming and the apocalypse. Events such as two world wars, the explosion of the atom bomb, the rebirth of Israel after 2,000 years of Jewish exile and, more recently, a wave of natural catastrophes – tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, disease pandemics, etc. – have combined to convince a quarter of American Christians that the ‘end of the world is nigh’. The influential evangelist Jerry Falwell said the creation of the state of Israel was a particularly important sign of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. The attitude of the Christian Right, coupled with the so-called ‘Jewish lobby’, has helped to make the US highly protective of Israel since 1948. Though Jesus said “blessed are the peacemakers”, some Christian groups are deeply inimical to the United Nations, whose peacemaking efforts are seen as Antichrist heresy because they conflict with biblical predictions of war in the ‘end times’.

Evangelism, Television and Politics

In the US, the world's largest and most powerful Christian country, evangelists have developed broadcasting networks with enormous political and financial clout.

The National Religious Broadcasters (NRB), formed by evangelicals in 1944, now represents some 1,600 broadcasters reaching over 100m people in the US alone. With assets worth billions of dollars, they carry enormous economic and political clout. As Mariah Blake reported in the *Columbia Journalism Review* (May 2005), "In 2000...the Federal Communications Commission issued guidelines that would have barred religious broadcasters from taking over frequencies designated for educational programming. The NRB lobbied Congress to intervene, at one point delivering a petition signed by nearly half a million people. Legislators, in turn, bore down on the FCC, and the agency relented".

The NRB's head is Frank Wright, former director of the Center for Christian Statesmanship, a Washington-based body that trains politicians how to "think biblically about their role in government". After 9/11, the leading Christian TV networks stepped up their news reporting, giving a faith-based slant to issues such as the war on

Liberalism and evangelism

The generally liberal social climate of the 1960s in the US was countered by an upsurge in evangelism. The spread of radio and television enabled both traditional and new forms of Christian preaching to reach very large audiences.

terrorism. They also lobbied hard for prayer in schools (banned by federal law), changes in the judiciary, and tax cuts for the wealthy. They fiercely opposed gay rights, abortion, pornography, stem cell research and any relaxation of the 'war on drugs'.

Christianity recovered its influence in the late 1970s via grassroots movements such as the US 'Moral Majority' led by Jerry Falwell, which helped to get Ronald Reagan elected in 1980. The Christian Coalition of America, founded by Pat Robertson (whose own bid for the Presidency failed in 1986), has strongly influenced the policies of the George W. Bush administration. Prior to the 2004 US election, the

Christian Coalition distributed 70m voter guides throughout all 50 states. Supposedly "non-partisan", the guides showed where candidates stood on issues important to 'people of faith'. Local Christian activists also helped bring about the election of Kim Dae Jung in Korea, Lula da Silva in Brazil and Gloria Arroyo in the Philippines.

In the US the confidence of Christian groups arises partly from their success in the field of education. In the 1960s, many parents, especially in the conservative South – 'the Bible belt' where the Baptist churches are particularly strong – were worried about the declining moral standards of the younger generation, with their experiments in drugs and sex, and began to teach their children at home or in privately-run Christian schools. Enrolment in such schools grew sixfold between 1965 and 1983. By 2005 the American Association of Christian Schools had about 1,050 member schools with 175,000 students.

Evangelists such as Bob Jones, Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson (Regent Univer-



Pentecostalism is the world's fastest-growing branch of Christianity. Shown here is a 2005 convocation of the Light of the World Church, founded in Mexico in 1926. Its members are known for hard work and honesty, but some modern evangelists have adopted commercial techniques of high-pressure selling. Using programmes that mix entertainment with prayer, watchers are urged to sign up to courses or buy books, tapes, DVDs, etc. which will change their lives or make them rich. In a world where 2 billion people live on less than \$2 a day, the notion that "Jesus will redeem you from poverty" has obvious appeal. Yet the requests for donations "to prove your faith" has echoes of the sale of indulgences that corrupted the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. There is a growing list of evangelical leaders who have used their TV missions to make huge personal fortunes.

Billy Graham

Billy Graham, born in 1918, committed himself to Jesus at the age of 16. He first came into the public eye with his Los Angeles 'crusade' in 1949, when he likened the Cold War to a battle between Christian good and Communist evil. Ordained in the Southern Baptist Convention, he has preached to over 210m people in live audiences in over 185 countries. TV appearances and books have added to his international fame. His three-day crusade in New York in June 2005 was attended by 230,000 people. Untouched by scandal, a strong supporter of civil rights and an adviser to several US Presidents, Billy Graham has arguably been the most influential Christian of his generation.

sity) and Jerry Falwell (Liberty University) set up universities to further the Christian cause. By 2005 the US Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) had 105 member institutions ranging from the Abilene Christian University to Williams Baptist College. In the period 1990-2004 enrolment at CCCU campuses grew by 70% to about 230,000 students. In 2001 President Bush gave the go-ahead to Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (FBCI) in the belief that religious organisations could be more effective

than government in managing social programmes. Hurricane Katrina provided an early test for the FBCI.

By late 2005, it seemed possible that the influence of the Christian Right in the US may have peaked. Many evangelicals had become embarrassed by the excesses of the fundamentalists and were turning to more tolerant and 'greener' forms of Christianity. Public support for President Bush was falling and a succession of scandals involving well-known preachers (including Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Paul Crouch and Benny Hinn) was eroding the credibility of Christian groups. Meanwhile, televangelism continues to spread worldwide thanks to satellite links. Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* became a box office hit largely thanks to support from Christian media.

In Europe, religion plays a smaller part in politics. Though Christian Democracy had been an important aspect of the political landscape in post-war Germany and Italy, it was largely secular in nature. Elsewhere religion can still get you killed. In 2004 14 Roman Catholics were killed worldwide while engaged in missionary work. In Africa and Asia, political arguments over religion still boil over into violence. Examples range from full civil war in Sudan to sporadic conflict in Nigeria, Indonesia and many other places.

Liberty University's Doctrinal Statement

"...We affirm that all things were created by God. Angels were created as ministering agents, though some, under the leadership of Satan, fell from their sinless state to become agents of evil. The universe was created in six historical days and is continuously sustained by God; thus it both reflects His glory and reveals His truth. Human beings were directly created, not evolved, in the very image of God. As reasoning moral agents, they are responsible under God for understanding and governing themselves and the world.

We affirm that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, though written by men, was supernaturally inspired by God so that all its words are the written true revelation of God; it is therefore inerrant in the originals and authoritative in all matters.

...We affirm that the return of Christ for all believers is imminent. It will be followed by seven years of great tribulation, and then the coming of Christ to establish His earthly kingdom for a thousand years. The unsaved will then be raised and judged according to their works and separated forever from God in hell. The saved, having been raised, will live forever in heaven in fellowship with God."

Quoted from the 2005 doctrinal statement of Liberty University, founded by the Southern Baptist evangelist Jerry Falwell.

Bush, Blair and God

Some 40% of support for George W. Bush in his two presidential campaigns came from evangelical Christians. Leaders of the Christian Right are regular visitors to the White House, where they have reported approvingly the presence of many bibles and "people of faith" (such as Attorney General John Ashcroft). Bush has even claimed he is doing God's work in leading a crusade in Iraq. Such claims do not damage his political standing in most of the United States.

In the very different context of UK politics, Tony Blair's Christian convictions are deliberately underplayed. As his media adviser put it, "We don't do God". Prime Minister Blair refused to confirm whether or not he and Bush had prayed together before launching the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

Christian broadcasting

Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), claims to be the world's largest religious network. Founded by Paul and Jan Crouch in 1973, TBN is now featured on over 5,000 TV stations, 33 satellites, the internet and thousands of cable systems.

Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) was founded by Pat Robertson in 1960. Its 700 Club is one of the longest-running programmes in broadcasting history. In 1995, CBN launched WorldReach "with a mission of converting 500m people to Christianity using Gospel programming to targeted international audiences".

Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), a global Catholic network, transmits in Spanish and English to 110 countries.

Other networks include Vatican Radio, broadcasting in 37 languages worldwide; Salem Communications (1,100 radio stations); USA Radio; Daystar; SkyAngel; Inspiration; God.tv, etc.

Adapting to the Modern World

Christianity is an enormously flexible religion, reinventing itself many times in many places. In the 21st century, both conservatives and liberals are struggling to adapt to a fast-changing world.

In 1851 at least half the British population were regular church-goers. Now the figure is less than 7%. The collapse of Christian worship has been accompanied by a massive improvement in living standards – a sign perhaps that comfort undermines religious belief. The appointment in autumn 2005 of the first black Archbishop of York, the second most senior position in the Church of England, symbolises the changes that are taking place in the Anglican church. As a Ugandan, Dr John Sentamu comes from a country with a very different Christian context. As Philip Jenkins points out in his book *The Next Christendom*, Anglicanism is considerably healthier in Uganda than it is in England. While the established churches of Europe face apathy, falling memberships and ageing congregations, Christianity in Africa is vibrant and fast-growing. It is a similar story in Latin America where evangelism has helped to create a potent new religious force in a continent which has long mixed the liturgy of Rome with traditional ethnic forms of belief and worship. Christianity is taking hold in parts of Asia too, notably in South Korea, where a quarter of people have adopted Christian beliefs, and China, which has more practising Christians than the UK and France combined.

Protestant authorities have shown indications of change in recent years – adopting ‘people friendly’ church services, pop music and peppier sermons and making the first appointments of women clergy. More recently, there was the first election of an openly gay bishop in the United States.

The Vatican, led by Pope Benedict XVI, appears less ready to accept

A shifting centre of gravity

For most of its history, Christianity has been a predominantly European religion. Of the conclave of Bishops who elected Pope Benedict XVI in April 2005, 55 were from Europe (including 19 from Italy alone), 21 from Latin America and 10 from Africa. Yet Africa and Latin America have 600 million Catholics – more than twice as many as Europe. Similarly, there are far more Protestants in the developing world than in the industrialised countries that have so far dominated church authorities. Demographic trends show declining populations in Europe and major increases in Africa, Latin America and Asia. It seems certain that the 21st century will see a shift in church leadership from Europe to the developing world. This will have profound implications for Christians everywhere.

change. The synod of bishops called to Rome in autumn 2005 took a generally conservative line, retaining the ban on communion for divorcees and strongly reaffirming priestly celibacy, despite the shortage of Catholic priests.

The Vatican is often berated by Western intellectuals for failing to respond to changes in society. But Catholic conservatism has to be seen in the light of the shift that is taking place in membership of the Catholic church, which now has three times as many members in the developing world as in Europe. In 1900 over 80% of Christians were white. By 2005 the proportion had almost halved. Non-white Christians usually take a much tougher line on issues such as homo-

sexuality and abortion than do those in the liberal West. Meanwhile, liberal Catholics want the Vatican to recognise the need for contraception in an overpopulated world and, bearing in mind the paedophile scandals of recent years, to allow priests to marry so that frustrated men don't molest the young people in their care.

According to the Bible, God told Abraham that, through him, “all nations would be blessed”. Evangelicals believe it is their duty to carry the Christian message to every corner of the globe. The biggest group of ‘unreached’ lies in the region between 10 and 40 degrees latitude. According to Window International Network, this area has 4bn people, including 90% of the world's poor. An estimated 1.6bn of these people have “never had the

Protean Christianity

Christianity began by building on Jewish traditions and then took advantage of Graeco-Roman cultures to spread its message. Its move into northern Europe was facilitated by the adoption of some traditional pagan practices. The dates chosen for Christmas Day, Easter, etc. coincided neatly with traditional feast days. Priests who felled sacred trees in Saxon villages or ordered the massacre of Indians who desecrated the Holy Bible were in a minority compared with Christian missionaries who brought messages of hope and mercy. Most of the social reforms of the 19th century emanated from Christian philosophy. As the 21st century begins, more and more Christians have become aware of the need for loving stewardship of ‘God's green earth’. If this view takes hold in Christian America, it could begin to change US environmental policy.

Competing with Islam

The rise of militant Islam has been one of the most notable features of international politics in the last 50 years, partly fuelled by Western support for Israel in its struggle with the Palestinians. The creation of a Jewish state in a region holy to all three monotheistic religions has been seen by most Arabs as deeply provocative. In theory, the common roots of Judaism, Christianity and Islam could bring about a happy convergence of cultures. In practice, the opposite seems to be happening.

chance to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ...Truly, the 10/40 Window remains the darkest and most inhospitable territory to the cause of Christ and represents the greatest remaining stronghold of Satan". The fact that the region has most of the world's Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists is an indication of the mindset of such evangelical extremists. The clash of Christian and Islamic civilisations is welcomed by the Christian Right, though it makes others tremble.

Christian liberals agonise over other issues too. Should human embryos be used in research? Should lesbian priests be allowed? Should same-sex marriages be blessed in church? Arguing that Christianity is too closely associated with consumerism, some call for a more sustainable economy based on stewardship rather than ownership. Others point out that the teachings of Jesus are much closer to communism than capitalism. The Sea of Faith movement argues that "since faith systems were man-made, created to fill certain needs at particular times in specific places, we know we can remake them for our needs, our times, our place". Christianity is no longer a single coherent faith, despite Catholic efforts to hold the line. It seems that people can find in Christianity whatever they are looking for.

The sexual issues which divide Christians

The main controversies which divide Christian churches are not about war, injustice or poverty but rather concern issues of gender and sex.

Contraception and abortion

Secular societies have taken a pragmatic view of contraception and abortion, seeing both as preferable to the bearing of unwanted or damaged children. However, contraception was regarded as sinful by both Catholic and Protestant authorities until the 1930s when the Anglican church relaxed its condemnation. Most other Protestant groups soon followed suit. The official Catholic doctrine, repeated in *Humanae Vitae* (1968), is still to condemn contraception, though most couples in Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain ignore this part of the Church's ruling, seeing it as absurd and outdated.

In Catholic teaching, a human life begins at the moment of conception and any form of abortion is prohibited. Traditionally, most Christian societies outlawed abortion if the foetus was beyond the 'quickening' stage, i.e., had begun to move in the womb. At the other extreme is the policy adopted under communist regimes, where even late-stage abortion was made available on demand. In the US, abortion has been legal since the *Roe v Wade* decision of the Supreme Court in 1973. The 'pro-life' movement, supported by the Christian Right, has been trying to get the ruling overturned.

Homosexuality

Jesus had nothing to say about homosexuality and the few biblical references to it are much disputed by scholars. Jewish law as described in the Old Testament banned all kinds of sexual activity outside marriage. Since Jesus endorsed Mosaic law in the Sermon on the Mount, conservative theologians have argued that he must have accepted its proscriptions on homosexuality. Others have argued that the church has to adapt to different perceptions of morality in the modern world. Thus divorce, equally condemned in the Bible, is now widely accepted – though not by the Vatican – as a way of ending unsatisfactory marriages. Equal rights for women is almost universally seen as preferable to the kind of harsh patriarchy of earlier human history.

The election of the openly gay Rt. Rev. Gene Robinson as the Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 caused much controversy and provoked a serious rift in the worldwide Anglican Communion, especially in its African ranks. Bishop Robinson is the father of two children from a conventional marriage which ended in amicable divorce in 1986. He has lived with the same gay partner for over 15 years. Those who know Bishop Robinson regard him as a 'good man' who cannot escape his God-given sexuality and is trying to do the right thing. Fundamentalist critics see him as an agent of Satan.

Ecumenism and the World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC), founded in 1948, is an ecumenical council of representatives from about 350 Protestant and Orthodox churches in over 120 countries worldwide. It represents some 400 million Christians, covering most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of denominations derived from the Protestant Reformation (Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, etc.), as well as many united and independent churches. The Vatican has a regular working relationship with the WCC but is not a full participant in its work. Pope John Paul II did much to improve relations between Eastern Orthodoxy and the Roman Church and to foster good relations with Islam. The Russian Orthodox Church, however, has so far resisted the Vatican's attempts at reconciliation.

Some denominations reject the ecumenical movement, seeing it as reducing Christianity to the lowest common denominator. This tends to be the attitude of exclusionist fundamentalist groups who strongly believe that they are right and everyone else is wrong. In recent years, issues such as homosexuality, same-sex marriages and abortion have threatened the momentum of the ecumenical movement, though leaders such as the Archbishop of Canterbury have continued to press for Christian unity as a way to prevent division and conflict.

Additional Notes

1 Pentecostalism

Particularly prevalent in the US and among the poorest communities in the developing world, Pentecostalism revives the spiritual experiences of early Christians who, according to the Gospels, 'spoke in tongues' when touched by the fires of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection of Christ. There are thought to be more than 20m Pentecostals in the US, some 14m in Brazil and over 12m in Nigeria. Pentecostalism has spread quickly in Africa, Latin America and southeast Asia.

2 Dead Sea scrolls

Between 1947 and 1956 hundreds of ancient scrolls were discovered in Qumran on the north-west shores of the Dead Sea, an area that was part of Jordan until 1967. Most were written in Hebrew, with a few in Aramaic or Greek. They were probably copied from other holy manuscripts by members of a Jewish sect called the Essenes. The scrolls do not refer directly to any New Testament figures, though some were probably written during the lifetime of Jesus. The scrolls confirmed the accuracy of many Old Testament works and shed much light on the nature of society and religious life in Palestine at the time of Jesus.

3 monasticism

St Anthony, an Egyptian Christian who withdrew to the desert to live a life of asceticism in the 4th century, is traditionally regarded as the founder of monasticism. Solitary hermits later gave way to communities set up by Christians who wanted to live humbly and piously in the company of the like-minded. The most influential monastic orders were the Benedictines, the Cistercians, the Franciscans and the Dominicans. The monasteries developed into self-sufficient institutions with strict rules for good management and agricultural practice. The tending of vineyards was an important preoccupation, partly because of the ecclesiastical need for communal wine and partly for pleasure. The endorsement of wine drinking no doubt contributed to the public acceptance of Christianity across Europe.

4 Inquisition

The Catholic Church attempted to root out heresies with the help of special bodies popularly known as 'inquisitions'. The

most notorious of these was established in Spain in 1478 under Ferdinand and Isabella. At this time, over 700 years of Islamic domination was coming to an end and the Muslim and Jewish communities were being forced to choose either emigration or conversion to Christianity. In charge of the 'cleansing' process was the Dominican monk Torquemada. The Inquisition sometimes used torture to get confessions. Vatican efforts to keep the faith pure included the compilation of an Index of Prohibited Books. The Index was maintained until 1966 when it was abolished by Pope Paul VI.

Some Protestant authorities proved no less rigorous in attempting to stamp out heresy. Witches were regularly executed in medieval Europe but after the Reformation this practice largely ended – apart from the Salem witch hunts of late 17th century colonial America.

5 Henry VIII and Anglicanism

In 1534, Henry VIII, frustrated by the Pope's reluctance to grant him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, broke with Rome and declared himself head of a reformed Church of England. The new Church steered a middle path between 'high church' Catholicism and 'no-frills' Protestantism as developed by Luther, Calvin, etc. Thus the Anglican Church continued to be ruled by bishops and the eucharist remained at the core of worship (though called 'communion' instead of 'mass'). The King also dissolved England's monasteries and stripped them of their wealth. To raise money, he later sold most of the land to the aristocracy, giving them a vested interest in supporting Anglicanism versus Catholicism.

6 Boxer Rebellion

Nineteenth century China was almost colonised by the European powers. The Opium Wars, other forms of enforced trade, the casual use of military power and the disrespect to Chinese culture shown by many 19th century Christian missionaries caused much resentment. In 1898 a secret society (the Boxers) began to murder Christians and burn down churches. In 1900 they surrounded a large group of foreigners in the Beijing legation quarter and threatened to kill them. Eventually an international force was sent in to rescue them and exact a terrible revenge.

Many thousands of Chinese were slaughtered as the country was cleared of the Boxer threat. These events had a strong influence on Chinese attitudes to Christian missionaries and foreigners in general.

7 Pope John Paul II

The first tributes to John Paul II, who died in April 2005, already referred to him as John Paul the Great, reflecting the impact he had in the 26 years of his papacy, one of the longest in history. An astute user of modern media, John Paul II travelled more widely than any previous pope, carrying the Catholic message to every corner of the globe. He emphasised the dignity of the human person, made in the likeness of God, and the fundamental values of the universal church in a fast-changing world.

8 Opus Dei

Opus Dei ("Work of God," in Latin) is an institution of the Roman Catholic Church which has frequently been accused of undue secrecy, conspiratorial tendencies and the exercise of behind-the-scenes power. Opus Dei was founded in 1928 by the Spanish priest Josemaría Escrivá, who was canonised by Pope John Paul II in 2002, though some thought his conservatism was semi-fascist. The trigger for making Escrivá a saint was the "scientifically inexplicable" cure of a doctor's cancerous radiodermatitis in 1992.

Opus Dei has 85,000 members, around 98% being laypersons; 2% are priests. Most members are married, and their numbers are divided fairly evenly between women and men. The organisation is headed by a "prelate" (currently Javier Echevarria) and defined by persons rather than by geographical area. Local bishops have little control over Opus Dei's membership, activities or practices.

The aim of Opus Dei is to contribute to the evangelising mission of the Church "by promoting among Christians of all social classes a life fully consistent with their faith, in the middle of the ordinary circumstances of their lives and especially through the sanctification of their work". Opus Dei membership is worldwide. Its work in the developing world includes supporting the professional development of women in Brazil and training women in Kenya to start and run their own micro businesses.

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Books

A Brief History of Christianity, Bamber Gascoigne, Constable & Robinson, 2003 (262 pages; ISBN 1-84119-710-6)

A revised version of a book first published by Jonathan Cape in 1977 as *The Christians*, issued as an accompaniment to a BBC documentary series on Christianity.

Introduction to Christianity, Joseph Ratzinger, Communio Books, Ignatius Press, 1969 (380 pages; ISBN 1-58617-029-5)

A commentary on the Apostles' Creed by the Cardinal who was elected Pope Benedict XVI in 2005. Cardinal Ratzinger provided much of the intellectual support for Vatican policies in the last 20 years, serving as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1981-2005.

The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Karen Armstrong, HarperCollins, 2001 (442 pages; ISBN 0-00-638348-3)

The author uses as her starting point the year 1492, when the Muslims were finally defeated in Spain, the Jews were expelled and Christopher Columbus 'discovered' America. Each was a crucial event in the history of Christianity and the beginnings of modern European civilisation. The ancient world had two complementary ways of looking at truth – *mythos* (intuitive, mysterious and concerned with meaning) and *logos* (rational, pragmatic and concerned with function), but the modern world has lost touch with *mythos* and has tried to explain religion using only the *logos* approach. Fundamentalists see rationality as an assault on sacred values.

The Next Christendom: The coming of global Christianity, Philip Jenkins, Oxford University Press, 2002 (270 pages; ISBN 0-19-516891-7)

The author looks at the shifting currents in contemporary Christianity, which "is

flourishing wonderfully among the poor and persecuted, while it atrophies among the rich and secure...When we look at the Pentecostal enthusiasm of present-day Brazil, or the indigenous churches of Africa, then quite possibly, we are getting a foretaste of the Christianity of the next generation" – something closer, perhaps, to the religion of the early Christians.

Christianity on Trial: Arguments against anti-religious bigotry, V. Carroll & D. Shiflett, Encounter Books, 2002 (244 pages; ISBN 1-8935-5415-5)

The authors examine whether the evils sometimes blamed on Christianity – imperialism, racism, misogyny, environmental despoliation, etc. – are justified by historical fact. Comparing the pre-Christian world with the two millennia after Christ, they conclude that, without Christianity, the world would probably have been "crueller, poorer and more provincial, as well as less democratic, creative and informed – in a word, less civilised".

The Gift of Scripture, Catholic Truth Society, 2005 (60 pages; ISBN 1-86082-323-8)

This new guidance from the Catholic Bishops of England, Wales and Scotland has caused much controversy by declaring that "we should not expect to find in Scripture full scientific accuracy or complete historical precision". The teaching guide was published to mark the 40th anniversary of *Dei Verbum* (see below) and builds on that promulgation's attempt to make the Scriptures more accessible to ordinary people.

Dei Verbum: Dogmatic constitution on divine revelation solemnly promulgated by his holiness Pope Paul VI, Vatican, 1965.

Dei Verbum (the word of God) was issued as part of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council initiated by Pope John XXIII. The divine scriptures are seen as "the supreme rule of faith", because God speaks directly to mankind through the Bible and through the Gospel accounts of His Son Jesus (the word made flesh). The link between Judaism and Christianity is clearly marked. "In carefully planning and preparing the salvation of the whole human race the God of infinite love, by a special dispensation, chose for Himself a people to whom He would entrust His promises. First He entered into a covenant with Abraham (see Gen. 15:18) and, through Moses, with the people of Israel (see Ex. 24:8)...The principal purpose to which the plan of the

old covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ, the redeemer of all and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy." *Dei Verbum* encouraged wider distribution and study of the Bible as the bedrock of faith, favouring authorised translations into as many languages as possible and welcoming the contributions of lay scholars, including non-Christians, to improving understanding of the Old and New Testaments.

Other relevant publications include:

A Generous Orthodoxy, Brian McLaren, Zondervan, 2004; *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Really Know about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine*, Bart D. Ehrman, Oxford UP, 2004; *Religion in America Since 1945*, Patrick Allitt, Columbia UP, 2004; *Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible and the Qur'an*, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, Trinity Press International, 2003; *The Purpose-Driven Life*, Rick Warren, Zondervan, 2002; *The Trouble with God*, David Boulton, John Hunt Publishing, 2002; *Changing World, Changing Church*, Michael Moynagh, Monarch Books, 2001; *Fire from Heaven*, Harvey Cox, Da Capo Press, 2001; *The McDonaldization of the Church*, J. Drane, Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000; *Their Kingdom Come: Inside the Secret World of Opus Dei*, R. Hutchison, St Martin's Press, 1999; *From the Holy Mountain*, W. Dalrymple, HarperCollins, 1997.

Some useful websites

bbc.co.uk – BBC
 religioustolerance.org – Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance
 worldchristiandatabase.org – World Christian Encyclopaedia, etc.
 globalchristianity.org – Center for the Study of Global Christianity
 opusdei.org – Opus Dei
 odan.org – Opus Dei Awareness Network
 cafod.org – Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
 christian-aid.org.uk – Christian Aid
 christians.org.uk – Christian Institute
 eauk.org – Evangelical Alliance
 cpalliance.net – Christian People's Alliance
 god.tv – The God Channel
 sofn.org.uk – Sea of Faith
 ekklesia.co.uk – religious 'think tank'
 shc.edu/theolibrary – Theology Library
 vatican.va – The Holy See
 missionfrontiers.org – US Center for World Mission
 newadvent.org – Catholic Encyclopedia
 wcc-coe.org – World Council of Churches

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Christianity in the New Millennium

Different times, different churches

Editor Richard Buckley

Consultant for this issue The Rev. Thomas R. Smith,
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In terms of believers, Christianity is the world's foremost religion. Its established authorities, from Catholic to Methodist, are struggling to adapt to the modern world without weakening the core of Christian faith. Meanwhile, thousands of new churches have erupted across the world, preaching everything from 'lifestyle religion' to belief in the imminence of Christ's second coming and the apocalypse. We look at how Christianity has changed over the centuries.

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