

PREFACE

Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus of Nazareth was put to death on a cross in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire. Today, worldwide faith in the risen Christ has grown as never before, not just in the so-called Christian West but in the new centres of Christianity in Africa, South-East Asia, and South America.

How has the belief of a handful of persecuted and frightened people in Jerusalem expanded so extensively? How did it outlive the mighty Roman Empire and outlast the more recent empires? How did the Christian churches, denominations, movements, doctrines, and beliefs we know today come into being? How has the faith passed from generation to generation, and from country to country? These are a few of the questions we attempt to answer in this book.

To write the full story of the rise of the Christian faith in one volume is an almost impossible task. In trying to tackle it, we have called upon the expertise of many contributors. We have involved writers from many countries throughout the world, and drawn on wide resources for photographs, illustrations, and maps. The aim has been to draw a rounded picture of the worldwide development of Christianity, focussing on key movements, outstanding Christian leaders, crucial turning-points, and revolutionary breakthroughs. This cannot claim to be a comprehensive history of the church; however, the compression necessary to a book of this length offers the prospect of exciting new perspectives across the centuries, a bird's-eye view of 2000 years of Christianity.

Is it objective history? Yes – if we mean that it is written by experts, well informed on their subjects, and abreast of modern views. Yes – if we mean that it claims to be accurate, scholarly, and balanced. But no history can be detached. It is written largely by scholars who are Christians, and who write with a sympathetic understanding that breathes life into their accounts. They are committed both to Christianity and to the unhindered pursuit of truth; they haven't disguised or avoided the darker, depressing, or disgraceful aspects of the varied story of Christianity.

The story is an exciting one, yet also complex; we have tried not to over-simplify difficult questions. Wherever possible, we have presented material visually and graphically, to give a 'feel' for the period concerned, to see the wood as well as the trees. We have principally in mind those who come new to the subject, excited by the discoveries, gripped by the unfolding story, and wanting an account which is not so superficial as to be unsatisfying but which wears its learning lightly. We have tried to let the facts speak for themselves.

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

This new revised edition adheres to the aims of the original book. However, we have redesigned and re-arranged material to make things clearer and easier to follow, and also taken the opportunity to update, and to bring the story down to the twenty-first century.

In summary, for this edition we have:

- Removed some introductory material on historiography to allow more space for the narrative history
- Completely revised, re-styled, checked, and re-edited the text throughout
- Added important new text – for example on Jesus, the Thought World of Early Christianity, and the Future
- Added dates for all significant named persons
- Added scripture references and texts
- Added a useful glossary of ecclesiastical and theological terms
- Created around 40 new full-colour maps
- Revised and re-designed all Timelines
- Created a single, comprehensive index
- Completely re-illustrated the book in full colour throughout
- Added section summaries, study questions, and suggested further reading for students
- Completely re-designed the entire book, with a larger format, more readable typeface, and clearer layout

It is the hope of editors and contributors alike that this book in its new form will open up the story of the Christian faith to a new generation of readers and students.

Tim Dowley
Dulwich, London 2013

THE CHRISTIAN CENTURIES



