CHRISTIAN HISTORY

1901 C.E. to Present

September 16, 2026

SUMMARY OF THIS CENTURY

General Development: World War I broke Protestant churches' perspective (in Europe and North America, at least) that Western culture was destined to bring progress and prosperity to the world. World War II shifted the political landscape globally, and the church responded with growth and mission work in every direction. Older, mainline churches declined; evangelical/conservative churches flourished, Orthodox churches opened to new connections with the broader Christian world, and the Roman Catholic Church made major reforms. Christianity declined in Europe and began to decline in North America, but has grown rapidly in the southern hemisphere.

Key Questions: Should the church support war? What is the church's role in setting government policy in free nations? Can the church survive under Communist or totalitarian rule? Will the church adapt to meet new needs as society changes? Can the church ever be one again?

Key Places: Europe (World Wars I and II); the United States (launching pad for many mission efforts globally); Russia/the Soviet Union (center of Communism for decades); South Korea (major center of Asian Christianity)

Key People: Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Billy Graham, Jürgen Moltmann

Key Dates:

1906 — The U.S. government officially recognizes the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ as two separate groups
1914-1918 — World War I
1917 — Russian Revolution (start of the Soviet Union, first major Communist state)
1919-1933 — Prohibition in the U.S.
1939-1945 — World War II
1950 — The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association is founded
1962-1965 — Second Vatican Council

1) EASTERN CHRISTIANITY

The Coptic Orthodox Church dates its origins to the first century. "Coptic" comes from a Greek word meaning "Egyptian". The Coptic Church continues to exist in Egypt, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Turkey, and Russia. It has its own pope (currently Tawadros II), who lives in Cairo.

Eastern Orthodox Church — Churches under the Patriarch of Constantinople were generally ruled by the emperors of the Byzantine Empire. When the Byzantines were conquered by the Turks in 1453, the Ottoman Empire gave the Orthodox patriarchs authority over the Christians in their territories. When the Ottoman Empire fell apart in the 1800s and early 1900s, national Orthodox churches (Serbian Orthodox, Bulgarian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, etc.) were formed. Between World Wars I and II, the Patriarchs of Constantinople recognized the independence of the national churches. Many eastern European nations fell under Soviet control after World War II, and their national Orthodox churches fell under Soviet restrictions. In most other nations, the state and the church separated, and the Orthodox churches survived in spite of no longer enjoying the support of the government. Greece was an exception—it retained the old union of church and state.

Russian Orthodox Church — From the 1600s to the early 1900s, Russians debated how much Western influence to accept in their culture. Roman Catholicism and Protestant perspectives both influenced the Russian church. But when Marxist Communists took over Russia in the revolution of 1917, the church

was officially separated from the state, seminaries were closed, and all religious teaching in schools was forbidden. Christianity fell into official disfavor. The Soviet Union began to allow the Russian church more freedom during World War II. In the 1980s, the Russian Orthodox Church still numbered about 60 million people, in spite of the influence and relative opposition of Communism. Today Russia has no official religion, but the Russian Orthodox Church is the largest religious group in Russia and enjoys close ties with the Russian government.

Other Eastern Christian Groups — Today there are native Orthodox churches in Japan, China, and Korea; these are the results of Russian Orthodox mission work. Many Orthodox believers have moved from their homelands to Western Europe and the Americas. According to Orthodox practice, there can be only one Orthodox church in an area, and this has become a problem where, for example, Greek Orthodox believers and Russian Orthodox believers prefer not to join together but to worship only with their own group. There are other Eastern churches that broke off from the Orthodox Church at some point: Nestorians in the area of Iraq/Iran/Syria and in the U.S., who reject the title "Mother of God" for Mary; Monophysites, including the Coptic Church of Egypt, the Church of Ethiopia, and some churches in Syria and India, all of which reject the traditional Orthodox explanation of the humanity and divinity of Jesus; and the Armenian Church, which also rejected the Orthodox explanation of Jesus' humanity and divinity and has been scattered all over the Middle East, parts of Europe, and the Americas.

Strength of the Orthodox Churches — Their powerful attachment to tradition and liturgy have helped them survive even under Muslim, Soviet, and other such unfriendly governments and associated persecution throughout the last few centuries.

Effort toward Christian Unity — The mutual excommunication between the Eastern (Orthodox) church and the Western (Roman Catholic) church was removed by mutual agreement on December 7, 1965. Orthodox Church representatives have sometimes joined in ecumenical gatherings intended to build bridges between various Christian groups.

2) BEFORE WORLD WAR I (1901-1914)

Europe — In France, separation of the Catholic Church and the state was established in 1905. France no longer paid Catholic clergy, and all church property became state property that clergy had to petition to be allowed to use. The French state no longer recognized any preferred faith.

- A revival movement in Wales in 1904-1905 brought some 100,000 people to faith in Christ.

United States — After the Civil War, the Church of the Nazarene grew out of Methodists concerned that the Methodist Church had moved too far away from John Wesley's teachings on holiness. It was organized in 1908. The Assembly of God churches also grew out of the same movement, but with the practice of "gifts of the Spirit" (speaking in tongues, healings, and prophecies). They began after 1914.

- Goodwill Industries was started by a church in Boston shortly after 1900 and was incorporated in 1905. It provided employment for the poor and the aged and provided cheap items for the poor to buy.

Asia — In 1907, a revival movement in Korea began through the work of Presbyterian missionary John L. Nevius, who taught missionaries there to take Korean workers with them on their evangelistic tours, discipling those workers along the way. Revival resulted, and thousands came to faith. In the 1970s, another Christian revival took place in Korea. Today South Korea is about 25 percent Christian.

- By the early 1900s, there were tens of thousands of Protestant missionaries in China, and there were healthy churches in every province.

North Africa and Muslim Lands — When the Ottoman Empire fell in the early 1900s, Muslim territories were reopened to Westerners, including missionaries. Missionaries found that there were still churches there from earlier centuries, when the church had been young. Catholics invited the churches there to reunite with the Roman Catholic Church, and some did. Protestant churches worked to cooperate with

the ancient churches there, but because they brought in new ideas from Europe, the ancient churches divided, some sticking with their traditional ways and others becoming Protestant.

3) WORLD WAR I (1914-1918)

Efforts to Work Together — "…[I]nternational tensions were increasing, and Christians felt called to gather, not only to discuss ecclesiastical matters, but also to seek ways to preserve international peace. On August 2, 1914, in the city of Constance [in Germany], a world organization for promoting peace through the churches was founded. That very day World War I exploded." *Justo L. González, The Story of Christianity, page 322*

Churches in the United States at first agreed with the nation's official position that it was neutral. But gradually the war came to be seen as a spiritual struggle to save Christian civilization from the "Huns" [the Germans] who were trying to destroy it. As the U.S. joined in the war in 1917, churches began to support the war effort. By the start of 1917, some churches were putting the U.S. flag inside the church building alongside the Christian flag, and in the place of honor on the right. World War I became almost a modern crusade. Many preachers preached support for the war effort. Some even sold war bonds in church services. Conscientious objectors and those who critiqued the war were denounced.

4) IN THE U.S. BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS (1918-1939)

The Push for Prohibition stemmed from Christian movements launched in the 1800s to decrease or end the use of alcoholic beverages. Drunkenness was seen more and more as something beyond an individual issue, a societal problem. (Indeed, it is known now for having been much worse in the 1800s U.S. than it is today.) Churches organized, women's movements pushed for the end of saloons and alcoholic drinks, and by 1916 no less than 23 of the 48 states had banned saloons or alcohol. World War I helped the cause of Prohibition. Most breweries in the U.S. were owned by German-Americans; advocates of Prohibition framed it as a way to thwart the enemy Germans and protect our troops. Prohibition—the banning of the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcohol in the United States—was enacted in the 18th Amendment in 1919. It did not last long, though. The black market for alcohol exploded in growth, and the Amendment became impossible to enforce. The 18th Amendment was repealed in the 21st Amendment in 1933.

Jehovah's Witnesses began among people who read the Bible as a book with hidden clues about the future and the end of the world. The group was begun by Charles T. Russell, who rejected the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus and predicted the end of the world in 1914. World War I began that year, but the world did not end. When Russell died in 1916, Joseph F. "Judge" Rutherford took over the movement and, in 1931, gave the group the name "Jehovah's Witnesses".

Mindset of Protestants in the U.S. — After World War I, the U.S., including its churches, was marked by contrasting impulses:

- On one hand, the atmosphere was one of optimism, rapid economic development, and high expectations. The U.S. had been largely insulated from the horrors of World War I that had utterly devastated Europe. The "Roaring Twenties" brought tremendous wealth into the U.S. economy, and most people's quality of life improved noticeably. (That optimism and rising quality of life changed dramatically, of course, in the Great Depression of 1929-1939.)

- On the other hand, partly because of World War I, there was a movement toward isolationism and fear of everything foreign. The Ku Klux Klan grew more than ever, focusing its accusations of evil in American society on blacks, as before, and now also on Catholics and Jews. Many religious leaders and churches agreed. With the rise of Communism in Russia, many also went on witch hunts for Communists subverting society. "Adding fuel to the fire and benefiting from it, many churches

presented themselves and the Christian faith as the main line of defense against the red [Communist] threat. Famous evangelist Billy Sunday [1862-1935] declared that the deportation of 'radicals' was too easy a punishment, and one that would be costly to the nation. Instead, he suggested, they should all be lined up and shot." *González 373*

5) WORLD WAR II (1939-1945)

Attitude toward War — The church overall and globally learned its lesson from World War I and did not support the war effort enthusiastically. Churches supported nations' efforts to defend themselves, but did not give full support to the war effort. After the war they raised huge amounts of money to rebuild church buildings destroyed in the war.

- In the U.S., responding to the nation's entry into World War II, "In general, perhaps chastised by the by their wholesale support of the previous war, the churches spoke with moderation during the conflict. They did support the war effort, provided chaplains for the armed forces, and declared their abhorrence for the crimes of Nazism. But most leaders took care not to confuse Christianity with national pride. It is significant that at the same time there were in Germany those who insisted on a similar distinction, even at much higher cost. While the world was torn apart by war, Christians living on both sides of the conflict were seeking to build bridges." *González 377*

Churches in Germany — Some churches in Germany (Catholic, Lutheran, etc.) had aligned themselves with the Nazi government in order to avoid persecution, joining the officially sanctioned German Evangelical Church. Many others in Germany refused to do so, joined together as the German Confessional Church (led by Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer), and opposed the totalitarian state. Niemöller was imprisoned and Bonhoeffer was executed for standing up against the government's crimes (more on Bonhoeffer below). Before World War II broke out, the Roman Catholic Church signed a concordat with the Nazi government in which it agreed not to interfere in government affairs. Then it did not protest German mistreatment of Jews, even as the Nazis slaughtered about six million Jews, almost a third of all the Jews in the entire world.

Jews — Zionism had begun with Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), from Hungary, who longed for land in Palestine to belong to Jews as their homeland. Many Jews moved to Palestine. In 1917, the British promised Jews a national home in Palestine. Six million Jews were killed by the Nazis in the Holocaust. After the war, Jews continued to migrate to Palestine, and Israel declared itself an independent nation in 1948.

6) SINCE WORLD WAR II (1945-Present)

In Democratic Nations like the U.S., the church and the state are officially separated. Article VI of the U.S. Constitution even says, "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." In Germany, England, and the Scandinavian nations, there is still a state church, and leader appointments and any changes in faith and practice must be approved by the government. Other denominations are officially tolerated. Though Christians have not endured severe persecution in democratic nations, there is still a constant tension between the governments and the church.

- Totalitarian governments tend to persecute the church harshly because Christianity demands that the believer's first allegiance go not to the state, but to God. When Russia became Communist in 1917, the government tried by several means to wipe out Christianity, including shutting down the Russian Orthodox Church (which was seen by revolutionaries as being tied to the oppression enacted by the czars). But Christianity survived in spite of churches being closed, clergy unemployed, and atheistic propaganda being spread for years. Eventually the Soviet government gave up and let churches reopen,

though with limitations. Christianity has had a similar history in China and other Communist nations. The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally opposed Communism, but has also been willing to work with any government that will allow it to continue to have authority over the lives of its members in their land.

> *Many have suffered martyrdom, cruel imprisonment, and horrible tortures for their faith. Communism was as great a threat to organized Christianity as war or the modern blight of secularism and materialism that blasts so much of Western civilization. The opposition of the Roman state to the early church and the spread of Islam at the expense of Christianity in the Mediterranean area during the seventh and eighth centuries are the only comparable threats that the church has faced.* Earle E. Cairns, Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church, page 453

Ethnic-Religious Issues — In the U.S., churches supported the freeing of slaves in 1863, but did little to combat segregation until after World War II. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist minister, led the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s. Even with public desegregation, though, white churches were often slow to accept blacks.

- In South Africa, the churches initially opposed an end to apartheid.
- In Cyprus, Orthodox Greeks opposed Muslim Turks.
- In Egypt, Muslims oppressed Coptic Christians.
- In Sudan, hundreds of thousands of Christians were killed by the Muslim dictatorship. There is still heavy persecution of Christians in Sudan today, where Muslims are the majority. In South Sudan, where most of the population is Christian, there is greater religious freedom for all and relations between Christians and Muslims, though sometimes strained, are more peaceful.
- Even with ethnic problems in various places, missionaries have gone, or have attempted to go, everywhere to bring the gospel to every ethnic group.

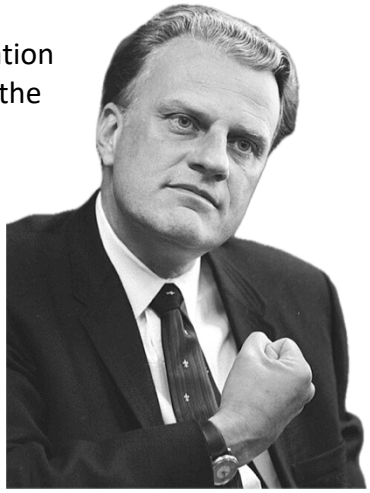
Transformation in the Roman Catholic Church — In the 1800s and early 1900s, the Roman Catholic "reaction to the modern world was mostly one of fear and condemnation. Among the reasons for such reaction were the loss of the Papal States to the new nation of Italy, the fear that the new lay states would hinder the work of the Catholic Church, and the concern that minds would be led astray by modern ideas." Much of twentieth century Catholic history consists of conflict between those wanting to resist outside influences and change and those wanting the Catholic Church to open up more to new ideas and influences. *González, page 345*

- From the end of World War I to about 1958, the Catholic Church emphasized mission work globally and invested strongly in the Catholic Church outside Europe, recognizing the increasing globalization of human culture. It strongly opposed Communism, which took over Russia, China, and most of eastern Europe during this period. In fact, Catholic opposition to Communism was so strong that when fascism arose in Italy, Germany, and Spain, the popes generally supported it so that those nations would not turn to Communism. This became a problem for the papacy when the pope eventually had to break ties with Mussolini in Italy and when the pope failed to denounce the horrific Nazi treatment of Jews.
- The SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL (1962-1965) marked a major turning point for the Catholic Church. Most of the bishops present supported making major changes; conservative bishops pushed back against them, mostly in vain. The council generally shifted the attitude of the Catholic Church toward the modern world from one of constant opposition and declarations of the modern world's evils to one of understanding, empathy, and greater outreach. Major changes were made in Catholic liturgy, most noticeably that the church now encouraged primary use of the local language rather than of Latin. The council officially encouraged religious freedom in all nations (which would have been unthinkable for the Catholic Church in earlier centuries) and reemphasized the centrality of Christ in the Christian faith (though the pope, in contrast, responded by reaffirming devotion to Mary as the "Mother of the Church").

- In 1968, Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) prohibited Catholics from using any forms of birth control, despite urging from many Catholic leaders that the church take a more nuanced position on the issue.
- American Catholic bishops published a declaration opposing nuclear war and the nuclear arms race.

> *In general, what has taken place in Roman Catholicism during the twentieth century is that, after centuries of refusing to deal with the challenges of the modern world by any other means than confrontation and condemnation, it has opened itself to a dialogue with that world. As a result of that dialogue, Catholics as well as Protestants and even non-Christians have been surprised to find in the Catholic Church an energy that few suspected it had.* González, page 359

Protestants in the United States — After World War II, as Soviet Russia became a threat to the free world and the Cold War commenced, "In the United States, there was a renewed witch hunt for Communists and socialists of every stripe. During the heyday of the 'McCarthy era,' lack of church membership was viewed as a possible indication of anti-American inclinations." *González 380*



- BILLY GRAHAM's ministry became well-known in the 1950s. It was a continuation of the old American tradition of revival meetings, but with a lot of money and the ability to use modern electronic communications (radio, TV, etc.) to spread its message. It became a worldwide phenomenon.
- Post-war economic prosperity led masses of people to leave the cities and move to the suburbs, and the churches moved with them, leaving a church vacuum in the inner cities, which were populated mostly by the poor, immigrants, and racial minorities. Not until the 1980s did churches begin to find ways to reinvest in the inner cities, which had become desperately unchurched in the meantime.
- Prosperity Gospel preaching/churches rose up in the post-World War II years. It promoted faith as a means to mental health and happiness.
- The Civil Rights movement was led primarily by black churches.
- American theology began to take on perspectives from other cultures (Third World, other racial groups, etc.) in order to understand Scripture better.

Global Christianity — The population of the church shifted in the 1900s from being highest in the global north to being most populous in the global south:

- In 1900, 49.9% of all Christians lived in Europe. By 1985, that number was estimated at 27.2%.
- In 1900, 81.1% of all Christians were white. Around 1982, it was estimated that by 2000 white Christians would make up 39.8% of all believers.
- Already, in some cases, missionaries are being sent from South America and Africa to the northern hemisphere.

More Statistics — In 1990, Christians globally numbered about 1.7 billion, a little over 30 percent of the world population of 5.3 billion. Muslims were almost 20 percent, over 1 billion. Of Christians, Catholics numbered about 960 million, Protestants 550 million, and Evangelicals 150 million.
- Mainline churches declined tremendously in the U.S. 1965-1995, by 30-40% in some cases. But conservative Christian groups increased over that same period, some by 40-50%, some by over 100%. Evangelical groups grew most quickly.

From Google AI: **Theological & Cultural Factor**	**Evangelical Protestants**	**Mainline / Liberal Protestants**
Approach to the Bible	**Literalism & Inerrancy:** The Bible is viewed as the literal, error-free Word of God and the ultimate authority.	**Contextual & Historical:** The text is taken seriously but not literally; it is interpreted through historical and cultural contexts.
The Path to Salvation	**Exclusive Personal Conversion:** Focuses heavily on a distinct "born-again" moment and a personal relationship with Jesus as the sole path to heaven.	**Inclusive & Grace-Centered:** Emphasizes God's universal love and grace, often viewing spiritual growth as a gradual, lifelong journey.
Primary Mission	**Evangelism & Saving Souls:** Prioritizes sharing the gospel, proselytizing, and gaining individual converts.	**Social Justice & Community:** Focuses heavily on reforming social issues, advocating for the marginalized, and public service.
Worship & Cultural Style	**Informal & Modern:** Often features casual dress, contemporary music (worship bands), and spontaneous, emotion-driven prayer.	**Liturgical & Traditional:** Usually follows traditional, rehearsed structures with formal creeds, organs, choir hymns, and responsive readings.
Church Structure	**Independent / Local Control:** Tends toward autonomous or non-denominational setups led by local boards of elders.	**Hierarchical Denominations:** Governed by established national systems, synods, or historic regional dioceses.
Theological Boundaries	**Narrow & Conservative:** Strictly bound to defined conservative creeds and traditional moral stances.	**Broad & Modernist:** Permits a wide theological spectrum, from moderate to progressive, and adapts quickly to modern cultural developments.

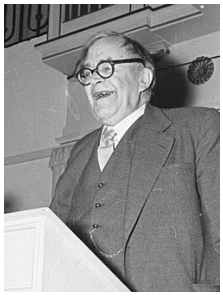
- As of 2023-2024, 62% of U.S. adults identified as Christians. 7% identified with other religions, and 29% categorized themselves as religiously unaffiliated. www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/
- As of 1996, the Bible—whole or in part—had been translated into almost 2,100 of the world's 6,000 languages (many of which are spoken but not yet written).

Church Growth — The number of evangelical Christians in Communist China grew from 1 million in 1949 to 50+ million in the 1990s.

- The largest single Christian congregation in the world today is the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, with between 800,000 and 870,000 members. It is a Pentecostal church connected to the Assemblies of God. It holds several Sunday services of tens of thousands and also offers satellite locations and livestreaming.
- Megachurches in American suburbs and in some places internationally appeared in the second half of the 1900s. Often they share their evangelistic and discipling strategies with loose associations of churches, frequently from across the denominational spectrum. Interestingly, as denominational loyalty has weakened, these megachurch associations have replaced a measure of the ministry training and mutual church support traditionally supplied by denominational organizations. The Willow Creek Church outside Chicago is a well-known megachurch, with some 12,000+ members in the mid-90s; it leads an association of 1,400 churches connected with it.
- The largest single congregation in the U.S. at present is Life.Church, an evangelical multi-site church in Edmond, Oklahoma, with about 85,000 attendees each week. The largest non-multi-site congregation is Lakewood Church in Houston, seating 16,000-17,000 people at a time, with about 44,000 attending weekly.
- As the church grew in the 1900s, so did persecution, mostly in Communist, Islamic, and Hindu nations. In the 1990s, Christian martyrdoms were averaging about 150,000 per year globally.

7) LEADING THEOLOGIANS IN THE 1900s

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), in response to the increasing secularization of European society after World War II, argued that modern people can no longer accept the involvement of the supernatural in our lives and history, and that the New Testament therefore needs to be demythologized so that its message, which is true, may be received and understood without the unnecessary burden of a mythological worldview.

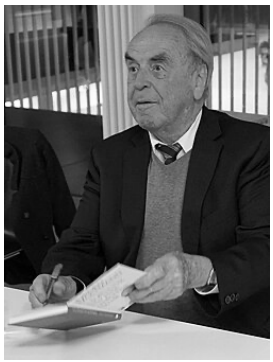


Karl Barth (1886-1968) was probably the greatest theologian of the twentieth century. He called Christians to study Scripture anew, and to base their theology on it rather than on systems of church doctrine. Theological systems commonly in use in Europe emphasized human capability and progress, but World War I had demolished confidence in such perspectives. Barth called the church to renew its understanding that God is entirely Other and taught that human beings will not by their own efforts bring about God's new world.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) — In Germany, many Protestant liberals "believed in the perfectibility of the human race, and this was precisely what Hitler proclaimed. They had also tended to confuse the gospel with German culture, and the Nazi claim that Germany was called to civilize the world found echo in many Protestant pulpits and academic chairs. Hitler's own program included the unification of all Protestant churches in Germany, and their use in order to preach his message of German racial superiority, and of a divinely given mission. Thus arose the party of the 'German Christians,' joining traditional Christian beliefs, usually as they had been reinterpreted by liberalism, with notions of racial superiority and German nationalism." They reinterpreted Christianity in terms of opposition to Judaism, which led to oppression and persecution of Jews. *González 365*

In 1933, the German government ordered the formation of the German Evangelical Church, which was required to obey government dictates. In 1934, many Christian leaders from across Germany responded by forming the Confessing Church, which opposed Hitler's policies. Dr. Martin Niemöller, a minister in Berlin and a government critic, was arrested and imprisoned for 8 years. Nearly all ministers who critiqued the government were drafted into the army and sent into battle. Young minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ministering in London, returned to Germany to teach in a secret seminary. The government eventually closed down his seminary, but he continued to teach in secret. He continued to speak out against the government and was banned from public speaking and publishing. He became involved in an underground movement against Hitler. Whether he was actually involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler is debated. He was arrested in April 1943 and executed on April 9, 1945, just a few days before the American Army captured the prison where he had been killed.

Jürgen Moltmann (1926-2024), author of *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*, argued that "hope is the central category of biblical faith. God is not yet finished with the world. Our God, Moltmann argues, meets us and calls us from the future. Hope for the 'last things' ought not to be the last chapter, but the first, of Christian theology. This is not a private, individualistic hope, but is rather the hope for a new order. Thus, a theology of hope must not lead the faithful to passive waiting for the future, but rather to join those struggles against poverty and oppression that signal the future of God." *González 369*



8) CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Division and Quest for Unity — In 1906, the U.S. Census Director, noting a split between Disciples of Christ churches and Church of Christ churches, wrote to David Lipscomb (1831-1917), editor of the *Gospel Advocate* in Nashville, TN, and asked whether the two groups were still one or needed to be listed separately. Lipscomb, acknowledging the reality he was seeing in the fellowship of these churches, responded that they should be listed separately, because they no longer fellowshipped together. Even so, there were many who worked hard for unity in spite of differences in certain beliefs and practices. Evangelist T. B. Larimore (1843-1929) insisted in 1897 that he would never "renounce and disfellowship" people who followed Christ but "do not understand these things exactly as I understand them… They may refuse to recognize or fellowship or affiliate with ME; but I will NEVER refuse to recognize or fellowship or affiliate with THEM—NEVER."

> *There have been different groups throughout Christian history that have emphasized one of these ideas [building Christian unity and restoring the church of the New Testament], but emphasizing both at the same time was a distinctive of the Stone-Campbell Movement.* Dockery and Pack, pages 93-94

Growth — After the split with Disciples of Christ churches, Churches of Christ continued to grow, from under 160,000 in 1906 to over a million by the 1990s. They grew fastest after World War II, from about 900,000 members around 1965 to 1.2+ million in 1980. Reasons for rapid growth until 1960 included a simple and effective evangelistic message, a logical approach to faith that appealed culturally at that time (but is less effective now, in a more postmodern cultural atmosphere), and the nationwide post-World War II religious boom. After the 1980s, growth stalled, as in most Christian groups in the U.S. Growth has continued outside the U.S. to the point that today there are more Church of Christ members in Africa and in India than in the U.S. Churches of Christ in Ghana and South Korea have sent out missionaries around the world, including to the U.S. The movement of the bulk of Church of Christ membership from the global north to the global south matches the same trend across Christendom.

Numbers in the U.S…

	Disciples of Christ	Independent Christian Churches	Churches of Christ
1906	983,000	still with Disciples of Christ	160,000
1916			318,000
1926		began to separate from DoC	434,000
1941			600,000+
1980		fully separate from DoC	1,240,000
2000			1,260,000
2025	600,000*	approximately 1,000,000	1,100,000

* *including Canada*

Identity Issues and Divisions — There have also been divisions in Churches of Christ over such issues as premillennial teachings, using multiple cups in the Lord's Supper, hiring full-time ministers, and creating parachurch organizations (children's homes, missions organizations, radio/TV evangelism programs, etc.) that receive support from various congregations.

- During the twentieth century, Churches of Christ became more isolationist and exclusivist. The key issue became restoring the New Testament church, not Christian unity; in the tension between the two, energy was focused more on restoration. This meant they defined themselves by their beliefs and practices over and against other groups (we're not Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, etc.) and that they began, in some places, to believe they were the only Christians.

Response to Racial Issues — Racial division was very prominent in Churches of Christ (who were still strongest in the U.S. South) for most of the twentieth century. Most congregations were either Black or White, but not mixed. While Churches of Christ tended to denounce Communism and use of alcohol, they tended to decry calls for racial equality as a political issue that the church needed to stay out of (though there were voices within Churches of Christ, especially in the black churches, calling for racial unity). Most Church of Christ schools only ended racial discrimination in their admissions in the 1960s, when Civil Rights laws forced them to do so. In the past 30 years, major efforts have been made to make Church of Christ colleges and universities communities where students of all racial/ethnic backgrounds are welcome and valued. Fred Gray (1930-present, now 95 years old), a long-time preacher and elder in Churches of Christ, was a civil rights attorney for Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. He has argued cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

For many in the church in the 1960s (and, unfortunately, this is still true today), Christians "ran their businesses, raised their children, and supported political leaders on the basis of American culture but still felt secure in their salvation because they belonged to the true church and were 'right on the issues." In this period, there were few who could see the inconsistency of their position. Luke Dockery and Jared Pack, Origin Story: Churches of Christ and the Restoration Movement, page 77; quoting Gary Holloway and Douglas Foster, Renewing God's People: A Concise History of Churches of Christ, page 122

Slogans — Five slogans commonly used in the early Restoration Movement and still used sometimes today *(Dockery and Pack, page 84)*:

- Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent. — *originated with Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address, 1809*
- Call Bible things by Bible names.
- No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no law but love, no name but the divine.
- In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, charity. — *This saying comes originated with the German Lutheran theologian Rupertus Meldenius, who coined it around 1827, during the terrible 30 Years' War in Europe, which was caused in part by religious disagreements.*
- We are Christians only, but not the only Christians.

3 Big Controversies in the 1900s

- PREMILLENNIALISM & POSTMILLENNIALISM — World War I broke the assurance of many that the millennium was at hand. From 1915 to 1940, the premillennialists (who believed Jesus would come and inaugurate a glorious 1,000-year reign on earth) were gradually pushed out of mainstream Churches of Christ. Postmillennials, too—who believed humanity would progress until it achieved a golden age that would start the 1,000-year reign, after which Jesus would come again—also fell out of favor in Churches of Christ.
- MISSION WORK AND INTER-CONGREGTIONAL COOPERATION — After World War II, churches seeking to do mission work in the aftermath of the war began forming organizations to carry out that work. Anti-institutional persons and congregations, believing autonomous congregations must not join together to support parachurch organizations, were pushed out of the mainstream, particularly in the 1940s-50s.
- "LIBERALISM" — in the era of the Vietnam War, younger believers, in the spirit of the times, pushed back against what they perceived as shortcomings of the mainstream Churches of Christ in regard to

racial issues, the war, gender issues, generational differences, the Holy Spirit, etc. They were seen as pushing boundaries of conservative/traditional beliefs and ways of interpreting the Bible, and therefore as "liberal".

Focus on Education — Churches of Christ have always been a strongly intellectual group, believing in the value of diligent Bible study and education. Many Christian colleges were established, reflecting the intellectual side of our movement represented best by Alexander Campbell.

Church of Christ-affiliated Colleges/Universities

1891, Nashville Bible School (now David Lipscomb University)
1906, Abilene Christian College (now Abilene Christian University)
1908, West Tennessee Normal College (now Freed-Hardeman University)
1924, Harding College (now University), formed from the merger of Arkansas Christian College & Harper College
1937, Pepperdine College (now University)
1942, Alabama Christian College (now Faulkner University)
1943, Florida College
1950, Oklahoma Christian College (now University)
1956, York College (now University)
~~1956, Columbia Christian College (closed in 1993; reopened as Cascade College in 1994, closed again in 2009)~~
1957, Lubbock Christian College (now University)
~~1958, Ohio Valley College (closed in 2021)~~
1959, Michigan Christian College (now Rochester University)
1964, Crowley's Ridge College

Challenges for the 21st Century

- What should we do to both honor our women and honor Scripture's teachings about how God has equipped men and women to serve?
- How do we honor believers of all races and ethnicities?
- How should we pursue Christian unity? There have been efforts in recent decades to bring renewed unity among Stone-Campbell Movement churches, e.g., between the International Churches of Christ and mainstream Churches of Christ and between Churches of Christ and the conservative Christian Churches.
- Are we the only Christians out there? How should we relate to other Christian groups? To what extent can we work together with them to bring honor to our Lord?
- How do we relate to fundamentalists? How do we relate to evangelicals? "Churches of Christ when viewed in the broad context of American and global Christianity are a conservative body. They hold to or 'conserve' central parts of traditional Christian belief—the sovereignty of God, the divinity of Christ, and the centrality of Scripture." *Douglas A. Foster, The Story of Churches of Christ, pages 36-37* We're not exactly either Fundamentalist or Evangelical. We tend to seek more involvement with the broader Christian community than do Fundamentalists, and to be more open to modern theological scholarship and the consideration of new ideas. We have a higher view of the church than do most Evangelicals. We're less individualistic than most Evangelicals; our commitment to Christ is not merely an individual choice with individual consequences. It unites us with the body of believers in the church, and that connection is emphasized in both our baptism that brings us into the church and our sharing of the Lord's Supper together, our fellowship, our emphasis on congregational worship, etc. We see being part of the Church as intrinsic to being a Christian. We also tend to have a more optimistic view of people's free will ability to turn to God in repentance than do some strains of Protestantism (Calvinism in particular).

9) OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

One of the main reasons Christianity has declined in Europe is because, in the 1800s, Catholics responded with disapproval and resistance to the changes of the modern world, and then in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Protestants largely bought into the idea that Europe was the leader of the world, destined to guide the world into a brilliant new age—hence the justification for colonialism and economic exploitation of other peoples. The two World Wars devastated this view of European supremacy and destiny, and that devastation broke the faith of many people. Catholic France became skeptical and secular first; then Protestant central Europe followed.

Globally, mainline churches declined, evangelical churches grew and expanded through mission work (especially in the Asian Pacific Rim, Africa, and Latin America), parachurch organizations and megachurches emerged, interest in the work of the Holy Spirit was reinvigorated, and Third World missionaries helped Christianity become the world's biggest religion.

Christians have suffered severe persecution in some areas. An estimated 10 million Christians were martyred between roughly 1950 and 2000. "The threat to religion from the powerful secular and, in some cases, hostile state is one of the greatest external problems the church now faces." *Cairns, page 446*

> *One of the main issues confronted by all Christians in the twentieth century is how to live in the 'post-Constantinian era.' What is meant by this phrase is that the church can no longer count on the political [governmental] support that it enjoyed since the times of Constantine. Beginning with the French Revolution, western Christianity has had to face the challenge of secular states that, although not always hostile, tend to ignore it. For Eastern Christianity, on the other hand, that process began when Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453.* González, page 338