

# The End of Christendom

*This is the first chapter of Stuart Murray's book, Post-Christendom.*

## Snapshots of post-Christendom

In a London school a teenager with no church connections hears the Christmas story for the first time. His teacher tells it well and he is fascinated by this amazing story. Risking his friends' mockery, after the lesson he thanks her for the story. One thing had disturbed him, so he asks: 'Why did they give the baby a swear-word for his name?'

One Sunday in Oxford a man visits a church building to collect something for his partner who works during the week in a creative-arts project the church runs. He arrives as the morning congregation is leaving and recognises the minister, whom he knows. Surprised, he asks: 'What are all these people doing here? I didn't know churches were open on Sundays!'

Two snapshots of 'post-Christendom' – a culture in which central features of the Christian story are unknown and churches are alien institutions whose rhythms do not normally impinge on most members of society. Only a few years ago, neither would have been credible, but today there are numerous signs that the 'Christendom' era in western culture is fading.

In these snapshots, an unknown story and alien institution provoke surprise not hostility, curiosity not indifference. The story fascinates; the institution is intriguing. Total ignorance of church and Christianity may not yet be widespread, but it is becoming more common, especially in our inner cities. Over the coming decades, as the last generation who are familiar with the Christian story and for whom churches still have cultural significance dies, the change of epoch from Christendom to post-Christendom will be complete.

Then, for the first time in many centuries, Christians in western culture will be able to tell the Christian story to people for whom it is entirely unknown – a challenging scenario but full of opportunities we have not had for generations. This was the early Christians' experience as they carried the story across the Mediterranean basin and Central Asia. It has been the task of pioneer missionaries throughout the centuries as they have translated the story into diverse cultures. But it is new to us.

In western culture, until recently, the story was known and church was a familiar institution. Evangelism meant encouraging those who already knew the story to live by it and inviting those already familiar with church to participate actively. Many were 'dechurched', but hardly anyone was 'unchurched' (neither term is appropriate in a post-Christendom culture where church is marginal and abnormal, but they help us understand the transitional phase we are experiencing). But our culture is changing. Adult churchgoing continues to decline and only 4 per cent of children are involved in churches. Ignorance of Christianity is increasing and church buildings are becoming as alien as mosques or gurudwaras. Some residual knowledge and belief will persist, though this will become attenuated and syncretistic, and church buildings will still provide vital community space. But we will no longer be able to assume we are in a 'Christian society' where most are latent Christians and lapsed churchgoers.

The end of Christendom will require radical changes in our understanding of mission and church. We have already discovered through the disappointments of the Decade of Evangelism in Britain in the 1990s that 'exhortation and invitation' evangelism is becoming obsolete. This has stimulated a widespread search for more authentic and contextual ways of being church and engaging in

mission. But important attempts to reconfigure church and mission, rooted in theological reflection on contemporary cultural shifts, are often hampered by limited understanding of the significance of the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom. It is *this* shift that is the subject of this book.

We are not quite there yet. We are in a lengthy transitional phase. Christendom took centuries to develop and will not collapse overnight. In this interim period, some still know the story and memories of faith may still draw some into the churches, but this era is fading. We must prepare for change. New expressions of church and mission will be needed, new ways of thinking on ethics, politics and evangelism. Anything proposed at this stage must be experimental, tentative and modest, since we cannot yet see more than the outlines of the emerging culture. But post-Christendom is coming and we cannot continue as if Christendom will endure for ever.

### **What post-Christendom is not**

Understanding and engaging with post-Christendom will occupy us throughout this book, but we need a working definition of post-Christendom. It may be helpful to clarify what post-Christendom is not.

*Post-Christendom does not comprehensively describe the culture that will replace Christendom.* It is one of many ‘post-’ words in contemporary society signalling a time of cultural turbulence, of transition from the known to the unknown. The prefix means ‘after’ and indicates something familiar is passing. It says nothing about what is replacing it. We know things are not how they used to be and sense change in the air, but we are unsure what is approaching. ‘Post-’ words are backward-facing, indicating something is disappearing. If we could describe the new reality taking shape, we would not use ‘post’ language but would name it. Used appropriately, this terminology displays humility: we do not have a full and accurate understanding of what is happening, but we know previous assumptions, structures and responses are now inadequate. Christendom is dying: we are entering a new culture that is ‘after Christendom’ and we realise we will need time to find our bearings in this new landscape.

*Post-Christendom does not mean post-Christian.* Some use these concepts inter-changeably, arguing that post-Christendom will result inevitably in a post-Christian culture. But conflating these terms causes confusion and prejudges debatable issues.

The demise of Christendom does mean the Christian story is becoming unfamiliar. The proportion of the British population with any church connection (measured by usage of rites of passage, occasional attendance, regular participation or membership) has declined steadily over the past half-century. The influence of Christianity on public debate and personal belief and behaviour has diminished. As Callum Brown concludes in *The Death of Christian Britain*, ‘what emerges is a story not merely of church decline, but of the end of Christianity as a means by which men and women, as individuals, construct their identities and their sense of “self.”’ He catalogues the changes in the late twentieth century:

In unprecedented numbers, the British people since the 1960s have stopped going to church, have allowed their church membership to lapse, have stopped marrying in church and have neglected to baptise their children. Meanwhile, their children, the two generations who grew to maturity in the last thirty years of the twentieth century, stopped going to Sunday school, stopped entering confirmation or communicant classes, and rarely, if ever, stepped inside a church to worship in their entire lives. The cycle of inter-generational renewal of Christian affiliation, a cycle which had for so many centuries tied the people however closely or loosely to the churches, and to Christian moral benchmarks, was permanently disrupted in the ‘swinging sixties.’

Some dispute Brown's explanation of the causes of this collapse, but this sustained decline in almost all aspects of 'Christian affiliation' since 1960 is unprecedented. The demise of Christendom might mean the virtual extinction of the church in Britain. Some trends and statistical projections point in this direction. Some denominations are facing not just the continuing attrition of declining numbers but the possibility of meltdown:

- If the current rate of decline is not arrested, the Methodist Church will have zero membership by 2037.
- If it continues to shrink at the present rate, the Church of Scotland will close its last congregation in 2033.
- Unless something happens to reverse the decline it is experiencing, the Church in Wales will be unsustainable by 2020.
- The Salvation Army and United Reformed Church face similar prospects.

Though we should treat such projections with caution, recognising that wipe-out is unlikely, denominational non-viability is looking increasingly probable for these groups of churches.

Larger denominations are suffering drastic decline that will make it difficult for them to continue as normal. Attendance at Mass in Catholic churches fell from nearly two million to just over one million between 1965 and 1996. Almost all indicators in the period 1980-2000 show accelerating decline in the Church of England, with Sunday attendance figures below one million for the first time. However, few churches are closing, suggesting increasingly desperate efforts to maintain the national coverage Anglicans regard as crucial to their self-identity. Chronic shortages of Catholic and Anglican ordinands exacerbate the problem; it unlikely the present parish system and ubiquity of a national church can be sustained for much longer.

There are signs of hope and growing congregations in most denominations (one in five churches reports growth), and some denominations are holding their own or even growing slowly, but John and Olive Drane summarise the seriousness of the situation:

For the last forty years, the statistics have reflected an accelerating crisis in church life, and we are now faced with the serious possibility – likelihood, even – that the Christian faith might disappear entirely from our culture within the first half of this century...Our churches are in incredibly bad shape. Moreover, the decline is affecting all Christian traditions. Every denomination faces the same issues, and they extend right across the theological spectrum.

Our inability to recruit new members and our failure to retain existing members or their children mean that church attendance could be down to 4 per cent within the next twenty years. Currently about 1500 people each week are leaving the churches (excluding deaths and transfers). Christian values and perspectives will no longer have the limited influence they currently have when Christians are one among many marginal communities. This prospect is unthinkable to many Christians. They note surveys indicating greater interest in Christianity and greater resilience in church attendance than headline figures suggest, enthuse about 'emerging forms of church', suggest others emulate growing churches, hope and pray for revival, or assume God will intervene. But Christianity has been eradicated before in places (the Middle East and North Africa) that were once Christian heartlands. It could happen in Western Europe.

But post-Christendom need not mean post-Christian. The near future will be difficult for Christians in a society that has rejected institutional Christianity and is familiar enough with the Christian story not to want to hear it again. Inherited assumptions and Christendom models will not help us respond creatively to the challenges ahead. But perhaps – if we have the courage to face into this future rather than hankering after a fading past, if we resist short-term strategies and pre-packaged

answers, if we learn to be cross-cultural missionaries in our own society, and if we can negotiate the next forty years – whatever culture emerges from the ruins of Christendom might offer tremendous opportunities for telling and living out the Christian story in a society where this is largely unknown. Post-Christendom is coming. Whether this is post-Christian will depend on whether we can re-imagine Christianity in a world we no longer control. Christendom is dying, but a new and dynamic Christianity could arise from its ashes.

There is another reason for avoiding ‘post-Christian’: it assumes Christendom was Christian, Europe was a Christian civilisation and Britain was a Christian nation. But persistent voices throughout previous centuries queried whether Christendom was as Christian as was generally believed and suggested its Christianity was little more than a veneer. If this is so, calling the emerging culture ‘post-Christian’ and proclaiming the ‘death of Christian Britain’ is unhelpful. Using the term ‘post-Christendom’ does not prejudge these issues, which will be investigated in the following chapters.

*Post-Christendom is not the same as pre-Christendom.* Although telling the Christian story to those who have never heard it has similarities to the pre-Christendom context of early Christians and pioneer missionaries, we should distinguish carefully between pre-Christendom and post-Christendom. Vestiges of Christendom will be scattered across post-Christendom. Even when obvious anachronisms are removed (with or without the churches’ approval) its Christendom past will haunt post-Christendom. Mediated through literature, historical studies, architecture, coinage, art, music and other aspects of culture will be powerful memories of the all-pervasive Christendom culture that shaped western society. Even movements that are antagonistic towards Christianity are shaped by it: the ideology of neo-paganism, for example, owes as much to the Christendom era it dismisses as an extended deviation from indigenous European pagan religion as to the ancient paganism it claims to be recovering.

In the twilight zone between the demise of Christendom and the development of full-orbed post-Christendom, these memories will in the churches often be tinged with nostalgia. This may discourage the reappraisal of Christendom attitudes, priorities, structures and practices that we must undertake to thrive, or even survive, in post-Christendom. Elsewhere, such memories may dissuade those who associate the Christian story with what they dismiss as an oppressive and failed culture from listening afresh to this story. Renewal within the church and evangelisation beyond it are both problematic in this interim period. We have neither of two advantages: the freshness of the story in pre-Christendom nor its familiarity in Christendom.

Forty years on, both renewal and evangelisation may be easier. As memories of Christendom fade, as the generation of church members dies for whom the final years of Christendom were disappointing, and as the snapshots with which this chapter opened become commonplace, resistance to change may be less, post-Christendom forms of church and mission may be emerging and there may be greater openness to a story that is quite unknown. But, even then, we will be in post-Christendom, not pre-Christendom. As heirs of Christendom we must decide what to discard as baggage weighing us down and what to carry with us as precious resources for the ongoing journey into post-Christendom.

*Post-Christendom does not mean secular.* During the second half of the twentieth century the demise of Christendom in western culture was generally assumed to be a cause or consequence of secularisation. Decline in Christian belief and abandonment of a Christian worldview were linked with the mid-eighteenth century Enlightenment. Transition from the medieval world to the modern world, growing reliance on reason rather than revelation, the disenchantment of nature and the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation were all cited as factors in the marginalising of Christianity and development of a secular society.

Religious warfare between supposedly Christian nations in Europe preceded and provoked the emergence of a secular worldview that undermined Christendom. This involved a philosophical shift towards a society based on reason and science rather than dogma and religious intolerance. The political disintegration of Christendom can thus be perceived as a *cause* of secularisation. As this secular approach gained sway, the societal, psychological and institutional disintegration of Christendom can be interpreted as a *consequence* of secularisation. Some versions of the 'secularisation thesis' describe a slow process over two or three centuries marginalising Christianity and resulting in the gradual demise of Christendom. Brown proposes a catastrophic collapse of Christendom in the past fifty years, as pent-up pressures were released in the single generation that experienced the revolutions of the 1960s.

However, whether the process was gradual or sudden and whether secularisation was a cause or consequence of the demise of Christendom, confident assertions in the 1960s and 1970s about the emergence of a secular culture now seem strangely dated. Secularisation has continued apace: secular assumptions rule contemporary society and guide political, economic and social decision-making. But the expectation that religious beliefs would wither has proved false. Spirituality and religious beliefs, in remarkably diverse forms, have flourished and we can now identify a counter-process of desecularisation challenging secular assumptions. Neo-paganism, westernised oriental religions, 'new age' ideas, Islam, new religious movements, interest in the occult and other expressions of spirituality and religion are undermining any claim that post-Christendom is secular. Some may be 'designer spirituality', resistant to institutional expression and eschewing truth claims. Much of it is privatised and unconnected with public life or daily work, where economism and consumerism maintain the dominance of the secular worldview. But it suggests human beings are incurably religious and that secularism is an inadequate basis for any society.

In post-Christendom, however, renewed interest in spirituality is generally not related to Christianity, which is associated with oppressive dogmatism and seen as spiritually inhibiting. The fervent hopes many Christians express that resurgent spirituality might represent new opportunities for the churches have not yet been realised. Most people interested in spirituality in post-Christendom are looking elsewhere for insights and resources. Post-Christendom is not secular, but neither is it Christian.

*Post-Christendom is not the same as postmodernity.* The most familiar 'post-' words in descriptions of contemporary culture are 'postmodernism' (a philosophical stance) and 'postmodernity' (a cultural shift). But post-Christendom should not be confused with postmodernism or postmodernity. There are significant connections between these concepts, but they are different. Many Christians are investigating this aspect of culture, examining postmodern challenges to theology, developing postmodern ways to communicate the gospel and designing postmodern churches. This is valuable (though we must beware becoming locked into what may be a passing phase), but the transition from Christendom to post-Christendom should neither be marginalised nor subsumed within discussions about postmodernity.

Postmodernism represents a critique of modernism and is variously hailed as the most significant philosophical shift since the Enlightenment or a minor adjustment within a worldview that will continue to be dominant for centuries. Postmodernism enhances the process of desecularisation: it endorses the resurgence of spirituality, reflects loss of confidence in rationalism and science and urges pursuit of authentic humanity. It regards all 'meta-narratives' (overarching explanations and truth claims) as inherently oppressive. Uninterested in coherent systems or consistency, it is relativistic, playful, pessimistic and sceptical.

Some use the term to catalogue criticisms of modernism, some to signal a vacuum as modernity collapses, and some to greet an emerging worldview shaping our culture. Many are weary of the

term and whatever it signifies – mid-course correction in the onward march of modernity, cultural dead-end, or a philosophy replacing modernism as the dominant western worldview. Its critique of modernity is often apt (though it is also governed by unacknowledged meta-narratives) and its recovery of marginalised dimensions of human and social life is welcome. Some hail its liberating potential. Others find it too fragmentary, self-indulgent and incoherent to offer a sustainable foundation for society or human flourishing: debunking is temporarily exciting, but a more integrative and inspiring philosophical basis is needed for personal and societal values. But, even if postmodernism is merely a short-lived burst of deconstructive pessimism, reconstructing modernity will require substantial redesigning and greater humility. Whatever we think of postmodernism, we inhabit postmodernity.

As with secularisation, both causes and consequences are involved in the relationship between the demise of Christendom and the development of postmodernism. One of the meta-narratives postmodernists reject is the Christian story, especially in the way this was told during Christendom. The demise of Christendom and widespread loss of confidence in the Christian story led first to the new meta-narrative of modernity and then to the ambivalent plurality of postmodernity. Postmodern values – suspicion of dogma, distaste for institutions and acceptance of multiple and contradictory stories and expressions of spirituality – have so far frustrated Christians' attempts to seize the opportunities presented by its critique of modernity and accelerated the demise of Christendom. Postmodernity represents a challenging component of the new mission frontier in western culture.

Our concern, however, is with post-Christendom. Although this term also represents a transitional phase, the prospect of Christendom recovering its former influence is less likely than modernity absorbing postmodernity and recovering the centre ground. The demise of Christendom will surely continue. And the opportunities and challenges associated with this deserve as much attention from Christians concerned about God's mission in contemporary culture as those associated with postmodernity. Indeed, the shift from modernity to postmodernity may be quite minor in missiological terms by comparison with the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom. But this latter shift has received far less attention.

*Post-Christendom is not the experience of all Christians.* It is the experience of Christians in Western Europe and other societies with roots in this culture. The term 'post-Christendom' is less familiar in some places than others, but once understood is widely accepted as a framework for explaining changes many have perceived but not analysed and interpreting strong but confusing feelings. Using this language on recent visits to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and several European nations has provoked vigorous nods of confirmation from those already aware of the issues and excited or tearful responses from others who can suddenly understand their context. Historical, socio-political and cultural differences have produced different forms of Christendom in different nations and have resulted in variations in the pace of its demise and the shape of the emerging post-Christendom. But transition to post-Christendom is the shared experience of most Christians in western culture.

It is not, however, the experience of Christians in many other societies. Some belong to ancient churches in regions where there was no Christendom era. Early Christian missionaries went east as well as west, planting churches across central Asia and reaching India and China. In the medieval period there were probably more Christians in Asia than in Europe. But, because church history is usually told from a Eurocentric perspective, only recently has the story of Asian Christianity become better known. Asian Christianity spread, flourished and struggled in a different environment, facing not ageing European paganism but major religious alternatives – Zoroastrianism in Persia, Hinduism in India, Buddhism in China and Islam in the Middle East and Central Asia. It never experienced Christendom (although on occasions this suddenly seemed

possible). The history of Asian Christianity may offer insights to Christians in post-Christendom faced with a plural religious context for which Christendom has not prepared us.

Nor is post-Christendom the experience of Christians in nations, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where Christianity is growing exponentially in cultures that can be described as pre-Christendom or still-Christendom. The decline of Christianity in western societies is more than matched by its expansion in these areas. Christians in post-Christendom are abnormal: our wealth, whiteness, declining numbers, experience of secularisation and postmodernity, weariness and struggle to adjust to marginality are exceptional within the global church. During the twentieth century Christianity's centre of gravity moved south, even if our denominational and institutional structures have not yet acknowledged this. If post-Christendom does spell the virtual extinction of Christianity in Europe, this will not be terminal for God's global mission – any more than God's mission was thwarted by similar geographical shifts in previous generations. Indeed, missionaries from the former 'mission fields' of Asia, Africa and Latin America are arriving in Europe in increasing numbers to evangelise the former 'sending nations': their impact on post-Christendom culture may be as significant as any response western churches make.

But, as we celebrate the extraordinary growth of the global church and redefine mission as 'from everywhere to everywhere', we should heed some notes of caution. Missionaries from Christendom exported their culture, assumptions and structures as they preached the gospel in Africa, Latin America and Asia. New Christendoms may be established in these continents, with consequences that are scarcely imaginable but may be profoundly disturbing. Can painful stories from European Christendom be shared, humbly but urgently, with these emerging 'Christian societies' before they are repeated with devastating consequences? Furthermore, adopting southern hemisphere patterns of church or mission for post-Christendom, hoping missionaries from these regions will re-evangelise Europe and tailoring our expectations to growth rates in other cultures will exacerbate the crisis we face. Partnership and mutual learning across different cultures offers more than dependence or plagiarism.

Missing from the list of western societies experiencing the shift to post-Christendom was the United States of America. Some places in America and aspects of American society have all the hallmarks of post-Christendom, so the language and issues are recognisable. But the form, status and experience of American Christendom has been significantly different from other western societies. How this will affect the transition to post-Christendom is unclear. In some parts of America, despite constitutional separation between church and state, an unofficial but deeply entrenched form of Christendom continues to thrive. This kind of Christendom may persist far longer in America than in other western nations, or a renegotiated form of Christendom might even succeed in capturing the heart of American society. Some predict America will buck the trend of declining church attendance and the marginalising of Christianity (though in the northwest attendance is already at European levels). But the shift to post-Christendom, already evident in many urban areas across America, may occur a generation or two after Europe but with similar consequences. Either way, uncritical reliance on American models of church, techniques of evangelism and approaches to mission will be of little help to Christians in post-Christendom. Recent experience of imported American programmes and strategies suggest these often raise illegitimate expectations and distract us from what needs to be done.

This section has flagged up important (and contentious) issues which later chapters will revisit. But, just as the meaning and implications of postmodernity cannot be understood without reference to modernity, so the significance of post-Christendom cannot be understood without Christendom. For, as well as being *post*-Christendom, our context is also *post-Christendom*. Christendom is passing, but it is Christendom that has shaped our culture and from which post-Christendom is a

development. As Robert Jensen writes, ‘Western civilization is still defined by Christianity, but as the civilization that *used* to be Christian.’

So the following chapters will begin in the fourth century and examine the birth of the culture that is now dying; trace its territorial and ideological development and identify the main ingredients of Christendom; and chart its gradual demise and the emergence of post-Christendom. This study of Christendom will set the scene for missiological engagement with post-Christendom.

### **The meaning of post-Christendom**

Having explored what post-Christendom does not mean, this may suffice as a working definition:

*Post-Christendom is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.*

Post-Christendom makes no sense without a Christendom past. In societies where churches have flourished and declined, where the Christian story has been told and has influenced individuals and even the culture as a whole, but where other stories have had a definitive or equivalent influence alongside the Christian story, post-Christendom is not an appropriate term to describe the diminished influence of the churches or the story they tell.

The demise of Christendom may be sudden or gradual. It involves both institutional and philosophical changes, for Christendom is both a power structure and a mindset. Sustained persecution may lead to the demise of Christendom (as in some parts of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe), or it may result from the official choice of another story (as in the transition from Christianity to Islam in North Africa). The demise of Christendom in western culture is the first instance of such a cultural shift occurring without the pressure of persecution or the adoption of a different story. Here the Christian story has not been replaced by another story but by scepticism about all explanatory and culture-shaping stories. In this sense, post-Christendom in western culture is different from earlier versions: we really have not been here before.

Post-Christendom includes the following transitions:

- *From the centre to margins*: in Christendom the Christian story and the churches were central, but in post-Christendom these are marginal.
- *From majority to minority*: in Christendom Christians comprised the (often overwhelming) majority, but in post-Christendom we are a minority.
- *From settlers to sojourners*: in Christendom Christians felt at home in a culture shaped by their story, but in post-Christendom we are aliens, exiles and pilgrims in a culture where we no longer feel at home.
- *From privilege to plurality*: in Christendom Christians enjoyed many privileges, but in post-Christendom we are one community among many in a plural society.
- *From control to witness*: in Christendom churches could exert control over society, but in post-Christendom we exercise influence only through witnessing to our story and its implications.
- *From maintenance to mission*: in Christendom the emphasis was on maintaining a supposedly Christian status quo, but in post-Christendom it is on mission within a contested environment.
- *From institution to movement*: in Christendom churches operated mainly in institutional mode, but in post-Christendom we must become again a Christian movement.

Post-Christendom can easily be perceived as a threat and associated with failure and decline. Our response to the challenges it presents may be to burrow ostrich-like into the remaining sand of



familiar church culture, scan the horizon for growing churches that claim we can continue doing what we have always done, or clutch desperately at promises of revival or programmes that promise to restore our fortunes. Indeed, the more we understand post-Christendom, the greater may be the temptation to respond in such ways: post-Christendom is not an easy environment for discipleship, mission or church.

The perspective from which this book is written is different. It celebrates the end of Christendom and the distorting influence of power, wealth and status on the Christian story. It grieves the violence, corruption, folly and arrogance of Christendom. It rejoices that all who choose to become followers of Jesus today do so freely without pressure or inducements. It revels in a context where the Christian story is becoming unknown and can be rediscovered (by Christians and others). It welcomes the freedom to look afresh at many issues seen for so long only through the lens of Christendom. It anticipates new and liberating discoveries as Christians explore what it means to be a church on the margins that operates as a movement rather than an institution. And it trusts that history will turn out how God intends with or without Christians attempting to control it.

Some may find this a very odd perspective, but it is not new. Ever since its birth in the fourth century, not all Christians approved of Christendom. There was a price to pay for Christendom and some considered this too high, protesting that it was corrupt, that excessive wealth and the use of coercion were contrary to the gospel. Others asked if Christendom was real: was Western Europe Christian or was its Christianity a veneer over a culture that remained essentially pagan. Around the edges of Christendom were marginal communities, persecuted as heretics and subversives, who dissented from Christendom and dared to imagine Christianity without it. Their courageous witness is receiving fresh attention, as increasing numbers find their insights inspiring and helpful for marginal churches in post-Christendom.

So you are invited to journey back to the dawn of Christendom, then forward through the centuries during which the Christian story was dominant in Europe, and on to the twilight zone that is our present context as Christendom dies and post-Christendom awaits its proper name. One word of warning: if you are hoping for easy answers to the challenges ahead, you will not find them here. In this transitional period there are more questions than answers and our primary task is to discover which questions are worth asking. Hopefully the journey ahead will at least offer some clues.