

*A SHORT HISTORY
OF CHRISTIANITY*

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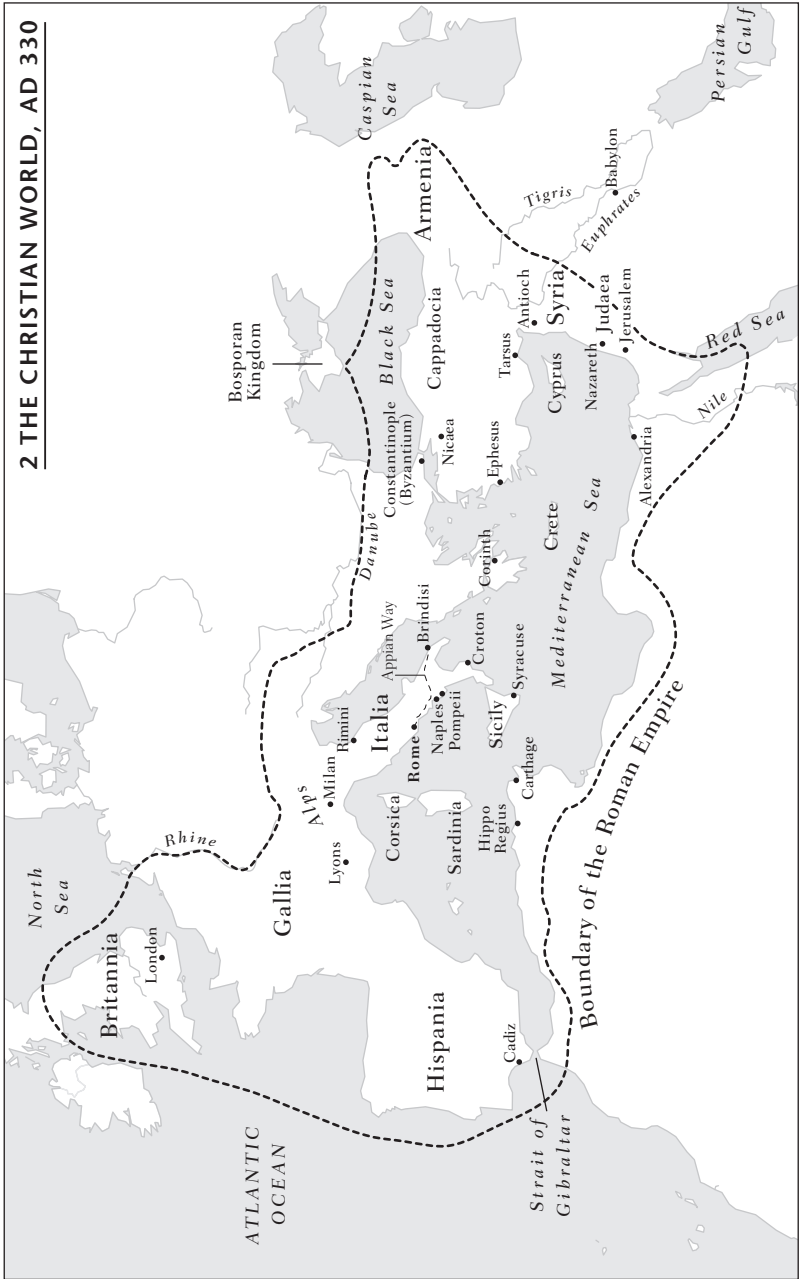
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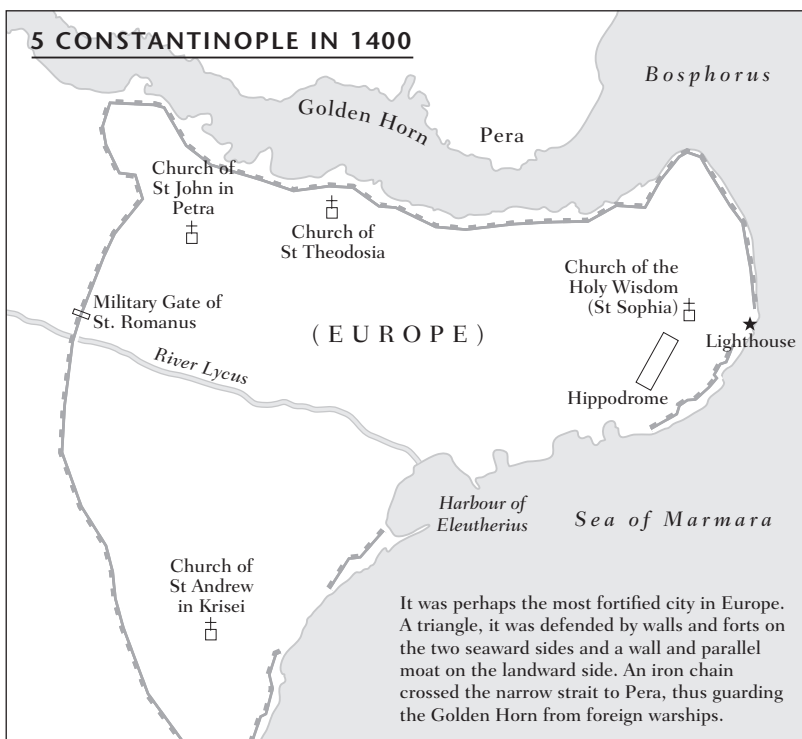
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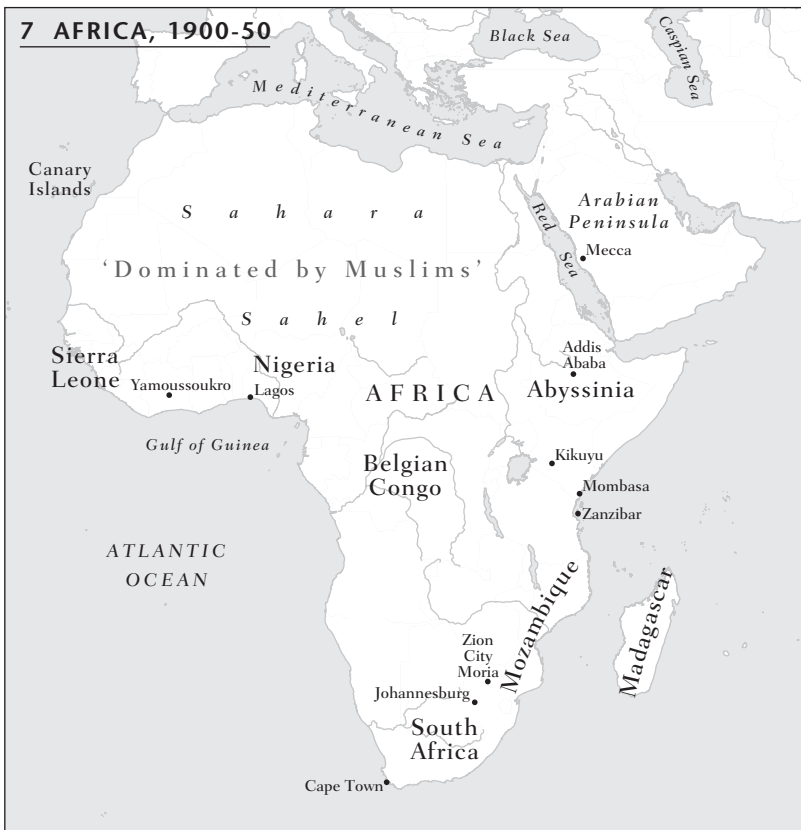






6 EUROPE AND THE REFORMATION, 1550







8 THE WORLD'S CHRISTIANS IN 2015

In 1900, of the nations with large Christian populations, at least eight of the top ten were in Europe. In the first half of the twenty-first century, Europe probably will hold none of the top ten. If the European Union, however, was counted as one nation, it would rank first.



TOP 10 CHRISTIAN NATIONS

1. USA: 247 million
2. Brazil: 176 million
3. Mexico: 107 million
4. Russia: 106 million
5. Philippines: 91 million
6. Nigeria: 80 million
7. Democratic Republic of Congo: 68 million
8. China: 67 million
9. Ethiopia: 55 million
10. Italy: 54 million

PREFACE

To write a history of Christianity is fascinating, frustrating and even perilous. It is fascinating because of the way it shaped western civilisation, and the long periods in which it affected people's way of life. It is frustrating because some parts of the history are wrapped in mystery. In its opening years the miraculous is rarely far away, and some of the Christian precepts come down to us in the form of parables, allegories and even riddles. To write its history is also perilous because it is punctuated with controversy, and on each opposing side those who argued – and even fought – were backed by what they believed were invincible arguments. I have tried to see both sides with some sympathy.

A few scholars argue that Jesus Christ, the founder of the religion, did not even exist. They rightly point out that contemporary references to him were extremely rare. My own conclusion is that, by the standard of the times, his life is astonishingly documented. He did not become well known until the last few years of his life, and then only in one small outpost of the Roman Empire. And yet, of all the

