

Preface

Protestantism, alongside the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, has been one of the three major manifestations of the Christian religion ever since the sixteenth century. Its total number of adherents is estimated to be roughly 391,000,000, to which should probably be added another 345,000,000 who are members of so-called “independent” traditions, most of which are distinctly Protestant. While statistics of this sort are notoriously unreliable and need to be taken with the proverbial grain of salt, one may well conclude that Protestants at present comprise some 40% of world Christianity, with Roman Catholicism and Orthodox churches comprising the rest. Protestantism is not confined to Europe and North America but has been, since the nineteenth century, a truly global phenomenon.

Unlike Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, however, Protestant Christianity is divided not only geographically and culturally, but also theologically and ecclesiastically. There is no single Protestant Church as such the way there is, despite various diversities, a single Roman Catholic Church. Quite the contrary, there are dozens upon dozens of Protestant churches. Some of these, such as the Anglican Communion, are worldwide in scope and distribution of membership; others such as the Church of the Prussian Union are confined to a single country or such as the independent snake-handling churches of the Appalachians in the United States are solitary church bodies or congregations. Despite such diversity, which Catholics in the past used to buttress their own truth claims (since truth, as Bishop Bossuet noted in the seventeenth century, must be one, not many), all of these traditions, however, have staked out the same truth claims as have the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Until the modern era, all Protestant churches insisted on the exclusive prominence of Christian truth and, each in its own way, echoed the ancient Catholic notion that “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*”—outside the church there is no salvation.

This diversity of Protestant traditions raises the question of their essential identity. The name “Protestant” itself comes, of course, from the “protest” which the supporters of the Reformation lodged in 1529 at Speyer against the decision of the Catholic estates and rulers to carry out the stipulations of the Edict of Worms against Martin Luther and his followers. The term is, therefore, a negative one, even though some interpreters of the action in 1529 have pointed to the root meaning of the Latin “*protestari*” as denoting “to stand for something.” Still, while Protestantism may

well be defined with a number of positives, it is also correct to call Protestant all those individuals and churches that repudiate the authority and office of the Roman pontiff of the Catholic Church.

This Protestant diversity finds its obvious explanation in the absence of a central authoritative entity—either person or structure—in Protestantism that would constitute normative authority (and power). The Protestant recourse to the Bible, or the Word of God, as ultimate authority has produced multiple divergent interpretations of the Bible. And ever new and different theological or biblical interpretations have frequently assumed structural concreteness. Yet, it is neither fair nor theologically accurate to contrast the relatively homogeneous Catholic and Orthodox churches with the bewildering diversity of Protestant denominations—and to find in this diversity proof positive for the non-viability of Protestant truth claims. The Roman Catholic tradition can sustain its theological homogeneity through the process of excommunication or inciting the voluntary separation of dissenting members. Thereby, the Roman Catholic Church is at once able to retain its relative homogeneity but also to become the source of the larger diversity within Christendom. The very existence of Orthodox and Protestant traditions suggests that the Roman Catholic Church has not been able to sustain its truth claims universally but has sloughed off dissent within its ranks. In Protestant churches, excommunication and dissent likewise have led to separation, but with a difference—the frequent result of the establishment of new groups and churches. The phenomenon of new ecclesial structures has been particularly prominent in places where the legal freedom to do so existed. The absence of “established” churches in North America and the non-European world has allowed dissent to express itself publicly and organizationally, sociologically in the form of new churches, each of which advances its own truth claims.

The diversity of Protestant groupings and churches, especially pronounced in the United States, has entailed two consequences. One is the difficulty of speaking of “the” Protestant understanding or view of almost any topic—be it worship, doctrine, ethics, etc. Even in regard to the traditional and hallowed and fundamental hallmark of Protestantism, namely, the priority of grace in salvation, there are diverse Protestant notions as to how exactly divine grace and human will and effort are to be related. Accordingly, while one might assume that a reference work on Protestantism would have definitive entries on the

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Protestant understanding of basic theological topics, grace, to cite one example, the reality is different and more complicated.

Second, there is the increasingly popular (at least among scholars) tendency to use the plural and speak of “Reformations” of the sixteenth century, which is to denote the empirical reality of Protestant diversity in the sixteenth century. Analogously, the term suggests the use of the plural for “Protestantism” as well.

This *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* seeks to offer a comprehensive reference work for this diverse Protestant tradition, both historically and theologically. In so doing, we face the seemingly simple, yet truly complex question as to what is, and what is not Protestant, and, therefore, what is to be included in this reference work? To cite one example: Is the Unification Church a Protestant church? The answer is simple, if all non-Catholic traditions are considered Protestant. The Unification Church then is definably Protestant, and the definition of Protestantism is simply that Protestant is whatever is not Catholic (or Orthodox).

Historically, the question can be answered with relative ease. Protestant Christianity may be defined as those theologies, church structures, and politics that consciously separated themselves from the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, Protestantism may indeed be defined negatively, that is, Protestantism is not Catholicism. This separation from Rome took place at first painfully and reluctantly. It is a truism that Martin Luther and the other early reformers did not want to separate themselves from the church. They were forced out of the Roman Church by excommunication rather than by their own decisions to leave it.

But it is an equal truism that, once the break had occurred, theological reflection made it clear to the Protestant reformers that their understanding of text and message differed categorically from that of the Catholic Church. There surely should be no doubt—the only exceptions seem to be systematic theologians who tend to view the past from the perspective of their understanding of the present. From a certain point onward, the reformers and their successors would not have returned to the Catholic Church even if they had been welcomed with open arms.

Theologically, the argument leading to the emergence of the Protestant tradition was over authority. The radical newness of the Protestant assertion lay in the insistence that there were two dramatically different sources of authority—the church, in its various representations (council, bishop, pope), or Scripture. The reformers vigorously argued for Scripture and thereby against the Catholic notion that Scripture and tradition were in effective harmony. All Protestant groupings have been heirs to Martin Luther’s insis-

tence that the Word was not only the primary source of religious authority but also that it was self-affirming, clear, and self-evident in its message. The sixteenth century reformers tended to be arrogant in their strident polemic that the Catholic Church did not base its teachings on the Bible, but on what they called “human traditions.” That, of course, was sheer polemic, but it did point to the fact that at issue was not so much the Word but whether or not that Word “alone” was the authority.

There were other pivotal Protestant affirmations. They focused on human salvation and argued that salvation was *sola gratia* and *sola fide*—solely by grace, solely by faith. Protestants also disagreed with Catholics on the number of sacraments. Contrary to the Roman Catholic affirmation of seven sacraments, Protestant churches affirmed only two, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Indeed, if it is the definition of a sacrament that it is a vehicle of divine grace, then many Protestant churches reject such a notion of a sacrament altogether, understanding the act of baptism or receiving bread and wine as symbolic. They speak instead of ordinances or memorial signs. Protestants have also emphasized the notion of the church as a community, rather than hierarchy, of believers, a notion found in Luther’s concept of the priesthood of all believers, which made all Christians equal before God.

In this *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, the historical dimension dominates. This is understandable inasmuch as Protestantism has had a rich and varied history, not the least because of the invigorating emergence of new Protestant groups and groupings ever since the sixteenth century. This rich history, much of which has not been thoroughly studied, deserves adequate and comprehensive treatment.

This *Encyclopedia* seeks to be an accurate and comprehensive reference work reflecting the best in current scholarship. At the same time, it strives to be neutral to the extent to which such is possible, since it is the responsibility of a reference work to present fairly the current understanding of a given topic. The *Encyclopedia* is also intended to be global in scope, thereby acknowledging that the twentieth century has truly turned Protestantism into a worldwide phenomenon that is no longer restricted to Europe and North America. Understandably, however, the *Encyclopedia* favors North American topics, though it is hoped not to the exclusion or marginalization of non-North American entries. One striking aspect of contemporary scholarship on Protestantism is that its European and North American component are far more thoroughly explored than Asian and African Protestantism. Arguably, it has been on the North American Continent that the rich diversity of Protestantism has

come to bear its most meaningful fruit. Accordingly, North American Protestantism deserves special consideration in a reference work such as this.

A number of editorial policies are worth noting. The *Encyclopedia* includes a judicious number of entries that might be considered marginal in their relation to Protestantism. It includes literary and artistic figures as well as figures from public life, whose historical significance, however, does not lie in the realm of Protestant Christianity. The editorial decision was to be restrictive and only include those figures for whom it might be reasonably expected that prospective searchers will turn to a reference work on Protestantism to find the particulars.

A related policy had to do with the inclusion of figures still living. The vicissitudes of life might suggest that, given the longevity of reference works, any policy of this sort will quickly face the realities of life, but the editorial policy was to include living figures if the argument can be made that the individual has played a significant role in shaping and molding twentieth century Protestantism.

In these days of ecumenicity and post-Enlightenment understanding of the Christian faith, the Reformation of the sixteenth century and the ensuing Protestant traditions often seem terribly distant and without dynamic response to the issues and questions of the twenty-first century. Lutherans and Roman Catholics agreed, in the final years of the twentieth century that they possessed a common understanding of the doctrine of justification—over which the reformers of the sixteenth century had separated from the Roman Catholic Church. Other ecumenical agreements could be easily cited. Thus, some Protestants devoutly wish to find ways to be reunited with Rome.

Despite its four volumes, this *Encyclopedia* is by no means able to offer the kind of comprehensive coverage of much larger reference works. This reality allows mention to, two recent reference works published in Germany—the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, with

its 33 volumes to date, and the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, with 11 volumes to date. As regards biographies, the *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Wörterbuch zur Kirchengeschichte*, in over 20 volumes, also available on-line, may be commended.

As is invariably the case in a project that is the work of many hands, the four volumes do not necessarily represent what had been envisioned in the beginning. Thus, if the viewer of this Encyclopedia does not find the “obvious” author connected with a given entry, the reason will be quite complex, since it did not always prove possible to coordinate the schedules of prospective authors with the editorial schedules of a 11,400 entry reference work.

It remains for me to tend a public word of appreciation to all who contributed significantly to this work. Kevin Ohe, now with the Encyclopedia Americana, who proposed this project; Linda Hollick, formerly the publisher at Routledge New York, intervened at a crucial stage to set things right; and Sally Barhydt, who joined the editorial staff at Routledge late but sought to keep things on their right track with indefatigable determination. I also note with appreciation the help I received from the members of the editorial board as well as from Sheila Davaney, Linell Cady, and Mark Toulouse.

The preparation of this Encyclopedia proved to be a more formidable project than I had anticipated. I would be deeply amiss if I were not let the last sentence in this encomium of appreciation be for my family, which once again supported my endeavor. I hope that Bonnie, together with Susanna, Dylan, Johannes, Noah, Annie, Annika, Keenan, Maximilian, Addison, and Madeleine—all of whom sensed that the last few years I was always preoccupied with the “encyclopedia”—will derive insight and meaning from these volumes.

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