

Protestantism

A Very Short Introduction

By Mark A. Noll

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- Why is it so hard to write a comprehensive history/survey of Protestantism?
- In what ways were Luther's charges against the Catholic Church of his day like modern protest movements like Occupy Wall Street?
- Review the four distinctives of Protestantism that the author identifies in his introduction with special attention the place of Scripture. How do these beliefs and practices set Protestantism apart from other Christian traditions and from other religions, especially Islam? Are there ways in which Protestantism is closer to Judaism and Islam than Catholicism as the author claims (from conclusion)?
- Trace the appeal to individual conscience in the spread and diversification of Protestantism after Luther. How has the right of individual conscience been both the blessing and bane of Protestantism?
- What did pietists like Philip Spener, evangelicals like John Wesley, and spokesmen for the Enlightenment have in common and what did they contribute to Protestantism?
- Hugh McLeod defines Christendom as "a society where there are close ties between the leaders of the church and secular elites; where the laws purport to be based on Christian principles; where, apart from certain clearly defined outsider communities, everyone is assumed to be Christian; and where Christianity provides a common language, shared alike by the devout and the religiously lukewarm." (p. 29) Why did Christendom fail to take root in most parts of North America?
- Of the factors that the author identifies in chapter 4, which do you feel did the most damage to Christendom in the 19th century?
- In what ways did Protestant missionaries in the 19th century act as pawns of the colonial powers? In what ways did they contribute to the development of indigenous Protestant-like Christianity?
- What roles have minorities, especially women and blacks, played in the expansion of Protestantism?

- What has been the impact of Pentecostalism and how do you explain its rise in the early 20th century, especially in the non-western world? What does it share with the traditional beliefs and practices of Protestantism?
- Which world events in the 20th century led to the loss of credibility of Protestantism in Europe? In particular, what do you think of Collum Brown's thesis (p. 121) that "when large number of women began to view themselves as autonomous actors in modern society, de-Christianization became even more pronounced"?
- Why didn't North American Protestants suffer the same recent diminishing as European Protestants?
- What accounts for the more recent success of Protestantism in the non-western world as measured by its scope and influence? Consider the impact of North American style voluntarism.
- If it's true that Protestantism is primarily a non-western religion in the 21st century, how will this affect churches in the West? What do African Anglican bishops have to say to their counterparts in the West? Might the imposition of western standards, especially liberalizing attitudes towards homosexuality, be a new form of imperialism?
- Do you think the author has made sufficient room for the supernatural in his accounting of the history of Protestantism, or has he simply reduced the spread of Protestantism to an accommodation of prevailing social changes?
- What do you think the future holds for Protestantism in Europe? In North America? In Latin America? In Africa? In Asia? Of the commonalities that the author identifies (Scripture, continuing western leadership in theological education, globalizing Protestant music, the ubiquity of the internet, more attention to the power and work of the Holy Spirit), which will have the most momentous impact on the health of Protestantism around the world?

Other Books by the Author

Co-author with Carolyn Nystrom, *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

God and Race in American Politics: A Short History (Princeton University Press, 2008).

Co-author with Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Catholicism* (Baker, 2005).

The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys (InterVarsity Press, 2004).

The Work We Have To Do: A History of Protestants in America (Oxford University Press, 2002).

The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity (Eerdmans, 2002).

Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997)

Further Reading:

Dictionary of African Christian Biography (online).

Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

Martin E. Marty, *Protestantism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).