

Unit One

Who Am I? Who Are We?

Lesson 3

Many Out of One: The Protestant Churches

heart to Heart

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer



A Backward Glance

- The disciple of Jesus most associated with the Catholic Church is*
 - a. St. James
 - b. St. Thomas
 - c. St. Peter
 - d. St. John
- The Roman Catholic Church, centered in Rome, began as*
 - a. A sub-group of the early church
 - b. A break-away protest group in the 12th century
 - c. Part of the one universal church
 - d. Oriental Orthodox
- The Catholic "rites of initiation" differ from those in the Armenian Church because*
 - a. The Catholics do not believe in infant baptism
 - b. They have separated them into three distinct events
 - c. They can all be done at home
 - d. A priest is not necessary for their realization
- A fundamental difference between the Armenian priesthood and the Roman Catholic priesthood is that*
 - a. All priests in the Catholic church must know Latin
 - b. The vocation of the Catholic priest is unmarried (celibate)
 - c. Catholic priests cannot be ordained before the age of 30
 - d. Armenian priests wear ornate vestments and Catholics do not
- Check the two differences between the Catholic Mass and our Divine Liturgy:*
 - a. The Catholic Mass can be in a variety of languages
 - b. The Mass can take place without a priest
 - c. Holy Communion is not necessary for Catholic believers
 - d. The Catholic priest generally faces the congregation during the Mass

Verse Master

"Do not merely listen to the word of God, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

James 1:22



As Concise a Guide as Possible to the Protestant Church

It would be very hard to summarize the variety of denominations that have come to be called “Protestant” in one short chapter of one short book! But here goes....



It began simply enough – as things are always thought to have begun when you look back and reflect – as a protest by the Catholic priest Martin Luther against some of the corrupt and questionable practices of the church of his time (there *had* been earlier protest movements). He

eventually nailed his famous “95 Theses” on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1521.

Above all, he was protesting the idea that a person could “earn” his or her salvation by certain good works and prayers (“indulgences”) which dispensed forgiveness. Seeing that these were being sold for profit, Luther vehemently objected, proclaiming that salvation is a gift of God’s freely given (“grace”) and that the church can in no way provide, let alone sell, God’s grace. It was God’s gift of faith alone (*sola fide*) that would save us.

Luther also believed that the canon of Scripture should reflect the earliest collection of books, so he removed what the church had begun to call the “Second Canon” or “Deuterocanonical” books (some refer to these books as the “apocrypha” meaning “hidden”). These were books such as I and II Maccabees, or Psalm 151 (found in the Orthodox Bible) that the Church thought were important but not as important as the original canon.

So Protestant Bibles do not include these; Orthodox and Roman Catholics do.

An interesting footnote: The Armenian historian Yeghishe, who wrote about St. Vartan and the Battle of Avarayr, was profoundly inspired by the beautiful imagery of the holy war depicted in I and II Maccabees.



This and other protests and reforms launched what came to be known as the *Protestant Reformation*. Luther was ultimately excommunicated by the Pope of Rome for his questioning. But he had won many followers in northern Europe where princes were eager to be free of the political influence of the Pope and people were attracted to a more “democratic” church.

Lutherans accept only two sacraments: baptism (not immersion but by a symbolic sprinkling of water) of infants and adults and Holy Communion (offered in adolescence). Other rites of the Roman Catholic Church – from which Martin Luther broke away – were retained as services of blessings but not necessarily sacraments, including confession, confirmation, ordination of ministers, and marriage.

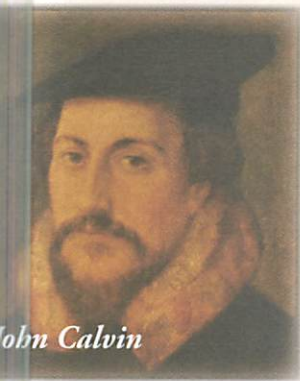


Like Lutherans, *The Church of England (Episcopal or Anglican)* once recognized the Pope as their spiritual leader. The Reformation was well under way at the time of Henry VIII of England and when the Pope refused to undo the king’s first marriage so that he could marry Anne Boleyn, he ordered the Archbishop of Canterbury to reject papal authority. King Henry himself became the head of the Church of England. While Catholic sacraments, creeds, and orders were kept for a time, once the Reformation was in full swing, changes continued. The Bible was translated from Latin into English, a *very* daring move since in those early centuries, the western church had considered it inappropriate for people to read and understand on their own.

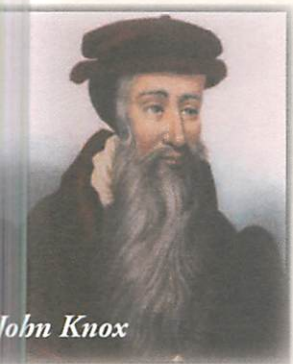


Of all the Protestant denominations, the Episcopalians have outwardly maintained many similarities to both the Catholic and Orthodox churches in form and community living, retaining seven sacraments, a similar ranking of ministry (deacon, priest, bishop), the importance of the Eucharist or Holy Communion – consecrated and distributed at every Divine Liturgy.

Another Protestant denomination, the *Presbyterian Church*, was founded by John Calvin (1509-1564). His teachings were inspired by Martin Luther and the Reformation. Calvin fled France for Switzerland and established his own religious community in Geneva. His devoted student, John Knox, a former Roman Catholic priest, returned to his native Scotland to evangelize this new form of the “protestant” faith. The Scottish Parliament abolished Roman Catholicism and declared Presbyterianism the state religion. Baptism (of infants and adults) and Holy Communion are considered sacraments, although the Eucharist is more a meal of remembrance and fellowship.



John Calvin



John Knox

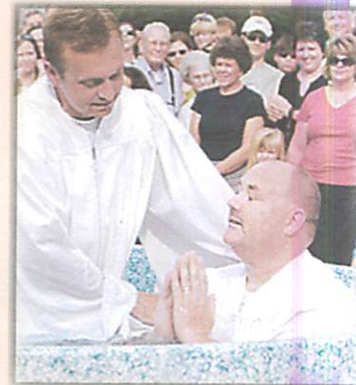
The *Methodist* church originated in the teachings of John Wesley (1703-1791), an Anglican minister. A student at Oxford University, he and his prayer group were called “Methodists” because of their methodical study and prayer habits. Shocking the

more aristocratic Anglican Church (Church of England) with his work of preaching to and praying with the poor, the growing number of his followers eventually formed an independent church. Baptism and Holy Communion are sacraments, with Christ symbolically – not actually – present in the Eucharist. This denomination is strong in North America, with three large groups: the United Methodist Church, and two black churches: the African Episcopal Church, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.



John Wesley

The *Baptists*, trace their roots to the Anabaptists (who practiced re-baptism of already baptized Christians) of the early 16th century Europe. Founded on the belief that only adults should be baptized, the church was established in Amsterdam in 1609 by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, both English preachers living in Holland to avoid persecution. Helwys returned to England and there founded the first Baptist church in England.



Persecuted in England, many Baptists fled to the new American colonies. One of the most famous of these was Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island in 1639.

The Southern Baptists are the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. and together with the worldwide Baptists form the largest Protestant denomination in the world.

There are no sacraments; only adults are baptized, and the Lord’s Supper is offered only as a remembrance. Like the Methodists, grape juice and not wine is used for this service. The Bible is the most important, almost exclusive guiding document and there are, therefore, no creeds. Individual interpretation of Scripture is encouraged. Local congregations are independent and self-governing.



Scenic Overlook

The Armenian Church, in a very inspired and visionary move, had translated the Bible into vernacular Armenian in the 5th century! This was the first translation in the new Armenian alphabet that started a "Golden Age" of translations and other writings.



Remember

The Protestant Church was born in the 16th century as a protest against perceived corruptions in the established church. It has diversified into a number of communions including Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists and Baptists among many others.

In Summary...

As you review the information in the history and general approach to these churches, do you see some basic principles you can define as "Protestant"? Name three:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

There are *many* other denominations you could look up and learn more about: i.e., the United Church of Christ, the Quakers, the Amish, etc. But there is a clear pattern to the development of all the communions we can label as Protestant. Leaders arose who developed a significantly different understanding – sometimes in defiance of authority and sometimes in opposition to legitimate corruptions. What may have seemed as minor differences slowly evolved into unbridgeable ones – all leading to the formation of distinctively new and different understandings and, therefore, new communities.

Do you think it's a healthy development or a regrettable one that so many Christian groups – often bitterly opposed to each other's understanding of Jesus Christ and the Church – developed?