



Protestants: The Faith That Made the Modern World

Alec Ryrie

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Protestant Christianity began with one stubborn monk in 1517. Now it covers the globe and includes almost a billion people. On the 500th anniversary of Luther's theses, a global history of the revolutionary faith that shaped the modern world

Five hundred years ago an obscure monk challenged the authority of the pope with a radical vision of what Christianity could be. The revolution he set in motion inspired one of the most creative and destructive movements in human history. It has toppled governments, upended social norms, and transformed millions of people's understanding of their relationship with God. In this dazzling global history that charts five centuries of innovation and change, Alec Ryrie makes the case that Protestants made the modern world.

Protestants introduces us to the men and women who defined and redefined this quarrelsome faith. Some turned to their newly accessible bibles to justify bold acts of political opposition, others to support a new understanding of who they were and what they could and should do. Above all, they were willing to fight for their beliefs. If you look at any of the great confrontations of the last five centuries, you will find Protestants defining the debate on both sides: for and against colonialism, slavery, fascism, communism, women's rights, and more. Protestants have also fought among themselves. What unites them all is a passion for God and a vital belief in the principle of self-determination. Protestants are people who love God and take on the world.

Protestants have set out for all four corners of the globe, embarking on courageous journeys into the unknown to set up new communities and experiment with new systems of government—like the Puritans, Quakers, and Methodists who made their way to our shores. They are resourceful innovators and are making new converts every day in China, Africa, and Latin America. Protestants created America and defined its special brand of entrepreneurial diligence. Whether you are yourself a Protestant, or even a Christian, you live in a world, and are guided by principles and ideas, shaped by Protestants.

Protestants: The Faith That Made the Modern World Details

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From Reader Review Protestants: The Faith That Made the Modern World for online ebook

Josef says

Great overview of Protestantism. Great focus on the major role players. Also very funny in places. This is a textbook I will keep on my shelf and refer back to often. I loved the fact that Protestantism is seen as a love affair with God and His power as a lived experience, a memory or a hope. That it is also a family of squabbling identities that people fight for and identify with is indeed true

Dmitry says

An incredibly well-researched and thoughtful overview of the historical interaction of the Protestant Christianity with the surrounding society on many levels - politics, other religions, ethical dilemmas, poverty, slavery, Nazism and Communism, etc. Special chapters are dedicated to Protestant Christianity in South Africa, Korea, and China, which have a fascinating and controversial history. Reading the book helps one think deeper about the importance of various doctrines in the life of the church and in the life of a person. It is not a quick read - almost 500 pages of dense text, but the time that it takes to go through a work of this size is conducive for additional contemplation and analysis. I highly recommend this work to any serious thinker.

Jason Weeber says

I was excited to find this book, finally able to merge my love of history with my faith. This is a comprehensive volume, and certain sections will appeal to different people depending what points of history fascinate you the most. For myself, I loved reading about Luther, Calvin and the other early Protestants. I found each of their personalities fascinating and how they all tackled a new intellectual view of the Bible differently. Luther was especially fascinating to me as you can see a lot of the modern world in his work, and not just the church. He was a thinker ahead of his time whose movement shaped our world for the better. Not all Protestants were as positively influential. This book does a good job of highlighting the good and the bad. Ryrie likes to label the two sides of every point in history as a religious right and a religious left. It was particularly interesting to read the biblical arguments on both sides of slavery, see just how terribly the Bible was warped to justify it, and also how early on a lot of Protestants fought against it. I also really enjoyed learning about the church in the Nazi Empire. How the idea of separation of church and state made most Christians stay apolitical warping Luther's idea of "Two Kingdoms." Hitler did not stay as separate though and even created a Bible that removed all Jews (It was a very short book). I was surprised to see that the Jehovah's Witnesses were the only German church to stand up against the Nazis and were jailed heavily for it. I won't be making jokes about them again anytime soon! This book is a fair look at the Protestant movement and will be interesting to believers and nonbelievers alike.

Peter McLoughlin says

This is a fairly good history of Protestantism written by a sympathetic insider. It spends most of its time on the history and development of various strands of Protestantism since Luther. It has a somewhat positive spin on it but it doesn't hide for the most part the downsides of the religion. It definitely is a very important modern force that shaped and is shaping our world. Covers a big span from Luther and Calvin to the English civil war, the Plymouth colony, the Great Awakenings in the US, Slavery debates, Protestantism during the second world war including the sore point of its role in Hitler's Germany. It also talks of the Christian left and the Christian right in response to modernity. The later chapters are about Protestantism in Latin America, Korea, China and South Africa. Decent history and I learned a thing or two.

Peter Kyhn says

Excellent non-technical historical study of the birth and spread of the Protestant Christian faith, with a global perspective. The only reason I gave it 4 out of 5 stars is that Ryrie did not address a protestant offspring - the so-called prosperity gospel. I purchased a digital copy of the volume to use as the basis of a church history class I'm considering putting together.

Russell Threet says

It is my belief that in the very near future this book is going to be the go to text for the topic of Protestantism at the collegiate and even seminary level. All I can say is thank goodness. This book is great because even though it has the breadth of a textbook it reads very well. I might even describe it as compelling. Ryrie does a good job of delving into the many different streams of Protestantism while acknowledging and expounding upon their common roots. This book will not only be a vital tool for the student of religion, but is also a great text for the student of general history because it highlights the ever present influence of Protestantism on the world as we have come to know it.

Steve says

This was a book that I was led to by op-eds on the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's 93 Theses. Although I am not myself religious, I do find the history and social study of religion to be absolutely fascinating, and heightened by taking a graduate seminar on religion and American politics that was taught by a past president for the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, who happens also to be on my dissertation committee. Further, although as said before, I was not religious or raised in an observant household, but I spent most of my primary school years and all of my secondary school years in Catholic schools. We seemed to learn about every religion *but* Protestantism, which is why I have in adulthood tried to read as much about this branch of Christianity as possible.

There is much to admire in this book. Ryrie takes an unusual tack in that he wishes to discuss "Protestants" the people versus Protestantism the religion and Protestantism the doctrine. I think this is an interesting idea, however, the execution - at least to me - disappoints. He also tries to look at Protestantism outside of Europe and America, a laudable goal. I was actually very interested in what he had to say, and much of the material *is* very interesting. Unfortunately again, the execution, that is to say, the prose itself, again comes up short. I do not think this is because Ryrie is a bad writer, indeed, his chapters on the history of the Protestant Reformation and the struggle between the religious right and the religious left in Europe and America after

WWII are both compelling.

I suspect what makes the latter examples more compelling and the international chapters less is not the material itself - which is all interesting, and again, I *loved* that he wanted to move beyond Europe and America - but is probably instead because this material was newer for the author. Ryrie has published books on the early history of the Reformation, rather than more modern history. Hence, he has more polish and verve with material he knows well. It is a shame, because more accessible international history is needed. But I found the chapters to be a real slog and I think it's because unlike the other chapters he doesn't offer a thread that holds the whole together - and again, I think that is primarily the result of familiarity with the material.

But in the end, there is a bigger problem with this book, and to be fair it is one that Ryrie acknowledges at the outset. He recognizes that he has bitten off a huge chunk and at the start he asks leniency for this, proposing that what is more important than giving answers is to raise the right questions or something like that. As an academic writing his dissertation, I raised my eyebrows at this, but was willing to at least give a little benefit of the doubt. However, Ryrie's execution, in my view, does not justify that much forbearance, particularly to an established author.

What Ryrie is trying to do is admirable. Rather than go back over what is already known about Protestantism for the entire book, he wants to follow Protestants as they moved out and encountered the world. The problem is that this aim has classically been met by one of three strategies: a multivolume massive history, or a set of interconnected stand-alone books, or a high-altitude survey. None of these - based on what he does, not what he says in the matter - seems to appeal and I can see why. Of the three, I am most in favor of the second option, interconnected stand-alone books, but that would be a lot of work.

Ryrie tries an interesting experiment, a fourth option that is sometimes used but not common, of using particular cases to illuminate broader themes. Hence he can bring in South African churches and apartheid, Korean Protestantism, the spread of Protestant Christianity in China, and Pentecostalism, all near the end of the book. The problem, again from my perspective, is that in order to do this, he needs to set each case within broader themes, and he does not do this to my satisfaction. I think it's in large part (but not entirely) related to his decision *not* to go into the minutia of Protestant doctrine. After my other reading on the history of both Protestant and Catholic doctrine (including MacCulloch's magisterial volume on the Reformation), I can see why. One can very quickly get bogged down in issues of Calvin vs. Arminius, premillennialism vs. postmillennialism, and so on.

However, I disagree with the extent to which doctrine can be entirely left to one side. The millennialism split is *particularly* important because pre-millennials tend to withdraw from the world and focus on individual salvation whereas the post-millennials tend to work to bring about Christ's temple on earth. Ryrie discusses the huge importance of the Protestant religion on the North American colonies but fails to set that out clearly earlier than he does (the question does come up, but is addressed in passing rather than being made central). Further, as Ryrie and many others point out, Protestantism is the endlessly fissioning religion, and that tends to occur both for sociological reasons but also because of doctrine. While I agree that the book should not be a dry account of doctrine, nor can it be emptied of doctrine either.

Finally, Ryrie seems at pains to sidestep Catholicism as much as possible, and I find this problematic, not the least because of my long steeping in Catholic schools. While the story of the Counter-Reformation has been told elsewhere, what of the Protestant sweep in that once most Catholic of regions, Latin America? Ryrie's apology at the outset and his plea that raising questions may be positive does not, I think, justify what looks like vast omissions to an overall story. I don't think the book should get much longer, at almost 500 pages it

is in the outer bound of what I find reasonable for more books. What I think he should have done was to make the book more thematic and used those themes to justify particular cases and choices. If he had had some prefacing material about the spread of Christianity and in particular Protestant Christianity outside Europe and America while mentioning things like Protestantism in China and the conversions in Latin America and then focused in on Korea, China, and so on, that would be fine. But he doesn't do so, and so each chapter after the historical material feels more adrift.

The devil of it is, pardon the expression, is that Ryrie points out so many areas of interest. Of the later chapters in the book, I found his discussion of the religious right vs the religious left to be the most interesting, as is his conclusion that the real mystery is not the rise of the religious right as much as it is the demise of the religious left. But this is itself an entire book! Likewise, the growth of Christianity in the rest of the world is several books. I suspect that had Ryrie written those books before this one, he would have had better mastery of the material and could have summarized those arguments in a more cohesive way in this book.

For a student of the role of religion in modern society (like me) the book has great value precisely because of the questions it raises, but I also know enough of this material also to be irritated by particular decisions the author made. By contrast, however, to someone less versed in this material, the book may actually read more easily, and there really is a lot here to learn from and to ponder. I have been rather tough in this review, but I am in that phase of my own career where I am extremely tough on my own work, let alone others. It is, for all my reservations, nevertheless a recommended book.

David Dunlap says

Splendid book -- exceptionally well-written, with clarity, wit, and an admirable mastery of the source materials. The book traces the beginnings and development of Protestant thought, with prominent explorations of the major threads and figures in the movement. Very informative! (One fact I learned: Ulrich Zwingli is more properly the founder of what has been called 'Calvinism,' although Calvin gave Reformed ideas greater and fuller expression than Zwingli was able to do. The chapters on the antebellum United States and the rise of liberal Protestant thought were also thought-provoking!) I appreciate the author's description of the Reformation in terms of a renewed love affair -- with God and the Bible. -- The book concludes with a number of very helpful chapters tracing the development of Protestantism in South Africa, Korea, and China -- along with a history of the rise of Pentecostalism. A book that merits MORE than five stars, IMHO...

Nile says

Very well done. This is sort of a world history book of the last 500 years (starting with the reformation) that is told through the perspective of Protestant religion. It starts by going in detail through the reformation (major events and people) and hits on major and difficult topics like slavery, WWI, Nazis, and apartheid, showing how the Protestant religion was used and abused to justify actions. He does an excellent job showing how people reasoned their way into atrocities we often write off wholesale. This in no way justifies, but reminds you that we are all human, even slave owners and Hitler.

I gained a new understanding of Christianity in Korea and China as well as the beginnings of denominations and occult groups that I previously only knew by name.

I listened to the audiobook for this one and it was fantastically done.

Justin Evans says

This is a very solid, broad overview. Ryrie writes very clearly, and somehow manages to be reasonably objective, but also sympathetic, but also takes his stands when he wishes to. As others have pointed out, this book is *very* light on theology and doctrine, which is fine--this is a history of people, not of doctrines. The book is also very light on anything about the Baptist churches, which is very strange, given how much space Ryrie gives to sects that even he doesn't believe to be Protestant. There's a slight tendency towards writing a history of what-Protestants-did-at-important-moments-of-history, rather than a history of Protestants (did we need quite so much on the Nazi churches? Quite so much on abolitionism?), but again, that goes with the size of the project. This has certainly piqued my interest in Protestantism in America, in particular; the chapters on China, Korea, South Africa and so on are decent first stabs at a more inclusive history, and certainly taught me a lot.

Palmyrah says

‘I also,’ states the author in the introduction to his book, ‘have my own corner to defend, and it is only fair to be plain about it. I am myself a believing Protestant Christian and a licensed lay preacher in the Church of England.’

In fact, as we learn from the acknowledgements (which have been placed after the text, very near the end of the book), Alec Ryrie is Professor of Theology & Religion at Durham University in the United Kingdom.

Perhaps it was simple modesty that discouraged Prof. Ryrie from being more truthful about the size and shape of his ‘corner’; yet his evasion is symptomatic of the slippery nature of theology itself. It is the study of something that is acknowledged to be rationally incomprehensible, so we cannot expect either logical rigour or fidelity to empirical evidence from its arguments. Not that this book is a theological treatise; there is, for my money, a great deal less theology in it than there should be. Ryrie shows little interest in the philosophical and doctrinal differences that distinguish one variety of Protestantism from another.

My argument throughout this book has been that Protestants are best treated as a family... [whose common] characteristics are hard to pin down, but you know them when you see them. Protestants are divided from one another by their beliefs but tied together by a deeper unity of mood and emotion. Their tradition began from Martin Luther’s ravishing love affair with the God he met in the Bible... Since his day, Protestants have pursued that love in radically different ways... Often that old flame has been reduced to a simmer or doused altogether, sometimes it has blazed beyond any control, but it is the same fire...

Clearly nervous about being held to any strict account, the author insists repeatedly that his book isn’t about Protestantism, but about Protestants. Rubbish. There are a few more or less rudimentary character-sketches of famous individual Protestants – the founding fathers of the Reformation and a few pivotal figures from later in the history of the movement – but nothing remotely resembling biography in the tradition of Plutarch or Suetonius. Nor is it in any sense a book about the ‘Protestant character’; Ryrie is far from convinced that any such thing exists, and I agree with him. No, *Protestants* is a history of Protestantism, pure and simple,

though the range of wildly differing sects and cults that Ryrie is willing to subsume under the heading of ‘Protestant’ is far wider than many people, religious or not, will accept.

Yet despite his reluctance, typical of academic theologians, to own up to a definite statement about anything, Ryrie must surely have used some working definition to decide what to write about in his book and what not to; and so indeed it proves.

As a historian, I prefer a genealogical definition: Protestants are Christians whose religion derives ultimately from Martin Luther’s rebellion against the Catholic Church.

Well then, that’s that sorted. Now all we need to decide is who qualifies as ‘Christian’. Do Jehovah’s Witnesses? the author says yes, even though JWs deny the divinity of Christ. How about Mormons? No, although the full name of their religious organization invokes that of Jesus. The Taiping rebels of nineteenth-century China? No again – despite the fact that they fit Ryrie’s genealogical definition pretty well.

Before we continue, I suppose I should do as the author has done, and declare my own bias. I am culturally an Anglican, baptized and confirmed in the Church of Ceylon: a formerly religious man whose own individualism and fondness for ethical inquiry, combined with a scientific education, slowly eroded his faith in God without destroying his acceptance of the moral philosophy of Christianity or his fondness for the rituals and liturgy of the Church in which he was raised. I am no longer a Christian but you may call me a sympathetic fellow-traveller; and what I think the world needs is a history of Protestantism written, not by a believer like Alec Ryrie, but by someone like myself – someone who despises religious double-talk and is willing to take a firm empirical and moral attitude towards his material. Sadly, it is hard to imagine any unbeliever taking the trouble.

You’ll have guessed by now that I don’t think much of this book, though I slogged through it almost to the end. I skimmed through the penultimate chapter (about Pentecostalism, of which the author seems strangely fond), and let the last chapter go unfinished because I thought Ryrie’s predictions concerning the future of Protestantism were based on a poor and ill-informed understanding of trends and developments in the secular world. For all that, I found much to interest me within these pages, and quite a bit to praise. Concerning the former, the moral and theological support given to apartheid by the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa shocked and revolted me. It also put me in mind of the devil’s bargain between institutional Buddhism and majority-community racialism in my own country, especially when I read how “Christian” was a tribal identity, “race-and-religion” a single word’ among Boer revivalists. In Sri Lanka, ‘Sinhalese Buddism’ is a tribal identity of exactly the same kind, race and religion proclaimed as one – but I digress.

Returning to Ryrie’s book, I must say it was news to me, though perhaps it should not have been, to read that Jehovah’s Witnesses suffered serious persecution in Germany under the Nazis (over a thousand died in concentration camps). I also found Ryrie’s account of the growth of Protestantism in Korea absorbing and enlightening; I had had no idea that, until the division of the country, there had been more Christians in the north of Korea than the south. By contrast, the chapter on China was plodding and rather confusing in terms of timelines, and much of the material concerning the Mao era seems to have been assembled from hearsay evidence.

I was equally disappointed by what the book leaves out. The theology professor seems largely inclined to paper over theological controversies; the Reformation and Counter-Reformation period are reasonably well covered, but there is almost nothing about, for example, the quarrels over ritual and doctrine among English Christians in the nineteenth century. Hardly anything about political Evangelicalism, no more than two sentences about Anglo-Catholicism, nothing at all about Muscular Christianity or the Oxford Movement.

There are other yawning gaps of this kind: there's not nearly enough about colonial missionary efforts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or about the establishment and growth of Protestantism in the colonized world (China, Korea and South Africa are the only exceptions); nothing at all about huge missionary societies like the CMS and the rivalries between missionary groups that so agitated Protestants in that era. The public controversy over evolution and the age of the Earth, which was inflamed by the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and continues to this day, is handled with asbestos gloves and the author's eyes nervously averted; apart from this, the effects of the scientific challenge to Christianity (and especially to Biblical literalism) are largely ignored.

Concerning the interaction of Protestantism with the secular world, many obviously evil actors receive the benefit of Christian charity and tolerance not only for themselves, which is perhaps acceptable, but for their ideas. The section in which Ryrie recounts the pro arguments concerning the theological justifications for apartheid (which, he willingly admits, was 'a form not of fascism but of Calvinism') is positively nauseous.

So what are we to make of this deceitful book, which claims to be about Protestants but is really about Protestantism, which pretends to make no judgements while being constantly selective in the material it chooses to treat of, and says almost nothing about the 'corner' its author claims to defend?

Reading it wasn't exactly a waste of time. Although history is a principal interest of mine, Protestantism isn't my field, and there were many things I didn't know until I read this book. For example, I was quite ignorant about the details of the Reformation and the developments that followed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I wish this section of the book had been bigger. I also wish the author had spent more time on events in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, instead of saving the lion's share of his attention for the twentieth.

A more secular and sceptical approach to the material would have freed Alec Ryrie from the parson's bind of never being able to call a spade a spade. This is what the book most lacks, and what is most likely to irritate those of us whose moral compasses do not need constant recalibration by Divine Authority. *Protestants* is a milk-and-water treatment of a religious movement that trades largely in fire and brimstone; a lukewarm posset, richly deserving of the treatment prescribed for such potions in Revelation 3:16.

What did stay with me from my reading was a sense of the apparently unbreakable association between Protestantism (however loosely defined) and intolerance. This intolerance appears in many forms: doctrinal, ritual, textual, racial, sexual, social. Some Protestants even refuse to tolerate facts, as in the widespread refusal to 'believe in' evolution. Sometimes this intolerance is personal and results in a turning away from secular society, as with the Quakers or the Amish; more often it explodes into violence of one kind or another: witch-burnings, the drawing and quartering of heretics, religious wars and uprisings, pogroms and lynchings. It is hard, reading this book, not to think of Protestantism as a religion of hate. This is the real case the movement has to answer. Ryrie barely touches it.

Callie Stockman says

3.5 stars, rounded up.

It's a sweeping narrative, from Martin Luther to the rise of Pentecostalism. It helped me overcome my sometimes spotty knowledge of my own religion and Ryrie came across as unobjective.

My only issue, which is a big one, is that Ryrie is NOT great at defining his terms. I could read a whole

chapter on a movement and by the end of that chapter still not have a basic definition of the movement he was talking about it.

Jimmy says

This book was published in the timely year that is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation which began when Martin Luther started raising concern with the corruption of the Catholic Church that eventually led to Luther's recovery of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, among other things. Here the author Alec Ryrie examines Protestantism historically as a movement. Ryrie also evaluated the impact that Protestantism has had for good or for bad in history. Given how much Protestantism has shaped world history and has contributed to what society and civilization looks like today, this is indeed a fascinating book for both Protestants and non-Protestants alike.

The book is divided into three parts. Part one is on the Reformation Age. Early in the book the author tells us that this section is on the development of Protestantism from the moment of its birth, its struggle for survival and eventually the spread of the Protestant faith around the world. Part two explores new crisis for Protestantism in the modern world. Finally part three explores Protestantism in a global age. Here in part three the author is to be commended for the global perspective that he has in writing something as complicated as the history of Protestantism over the span of five centuries which in of itself is already a difficult task, but now he covers Protestantism in different parts of the world outside of the West such as Protestant Christianity in China, South Africa, etc.

As a whole the theme of Protestants as lovers of God and also fighters for the sake of the God they love is an ongoing topic that Ryrie points out again and again. This has great explanatory power of Protestantism's rather interesting history. I think the author in the book did a good job of explaining Protestants' stance as motivated by their love for God even if it seems strange and questionable to those outside of it. Of course the history of Protestantism and also every Protestants are from perfect because of our sin nature but the tension of Protestants' love for God and yet Protestants' sinfulness explains historically why some Protestants and their movements seek for more worldly things such as money, power and possession while at times there's higher principles at war with more worldly concerns. The book rightfully argued how Protestantism were important in the development of our contemporary age and certain sensibilities, values and ideas we take for granted; things such as free inquiry, democratic ways, apoliticism (that is, the desire to be left alone) and free of conscience can be seen in the forging process during the Reformation. The book's argument about these matters was not a simplistic or crude argument that the Reformation was exactly like our age in these values and ideals for as the book pointed out sometimes early Protestants can be inconsistent or haven't fully worked out the implications of what they believed in ways that future generations learned from. There were also at times points of tension with certain values such as the point of tension historically on the point of limited government. If you read this far in the review I want to make it clear that this book isn't primarily about attacking Protestantism historically for while shortcomings of Protestants in history are pointed out the author also turned it around by saying it is because of Protestants commitment to Sola Scriptura (that is, Scripture alone) that makes Protestants willing to reconsider their most cherished and treasured values and beliefs and see if it is biblical and true. This has allowed for much change for the better in history. The book's discussion of the abolition of the slave trade, abolition of slavery itself and also the Apartheid were really good examples of this.

The book is over 600 pages; certainly there are a lot of things that readers will discover from reading this book. I really enjoyed learning from this book details about the Reformers that I did not know before or facts I previously knew but were put in a better perspective as a result of reading this work. For example in talking about Martin Luther I had previously understood that Luther's literary output was incredible; but the book goes on to argue that "Luther's literary achievement was unparalleled in human history." The author himself

goes on to admit that this might seem rather extravagant but Ryrie goes on to share the statistics of Luther's output: Luther produced over five hundred forty four books, pamphlets and separate articles over a period of thirty years; that is about one every three weeks. Luther's work account for a fifth of what the German Press printed in the 1520s and his work outnumbered his critics. I also enjoyed the book's discussion about Luther's two kingdom theology and also problems with it. Ryrie's look at Protestantism and pointing out flaws was not immune to the Reformers or Bible believing Protestants; he also pointed out serious issues of liberals in Protestantism; I was surprised to learn about the Episcopal church in 1972 were giving donations to violent groups who supported revolution and how donations from their laity who disagreed with their liberal leaders dramatically decreased. But the book isn't only about problems with Protestantism; the author's discussion about China was a treat. Ryrie argues rather persuasively that the Communist persecution of the church in China was what allowed it to be as indigenous church movement when ties to the West and her missionaries were eventually cut during the era of Red China. This allows Christianity to be eventually viewed not as merely "colonialism" since the church now has its own history and identity forged during the persecution era yet at the same time Christianity is also something different and interesting. I also appreciated the author putting the era of the persecuted Chinese Church under Red China in perspective: Sometimes some in the West can idealized or idolized those period but he argues that it was certainly not a good time; churches at times were nonexistent as most Christians were individual believers isolated from others and didn't do church as we think of Church. This was a time of a lot of stunted Christian growth as well. I think the author has a good point in giving us a more balanced look of the Church in Communist China under Mao.

With all the positive aspects of the book that I mentioned above I do believe the book has some serious shortcomings. For starters I wished the author had a better grasp of the Scriptures and it shows itself from time to time that made the book deficient in its evaluation. I think for instance of the book statement that gay marriage is more about culture than theology to be rather misinformed; the issue is about theology no matter where in the spectrum of the debate you land upon, since it is about how one handles and approach the Word of God. I think the author at times made some outrageous claims about Conservative Christians. For instance in chapter twelve Ryrie accused Christian fundamentalists were drinking from the same well as the Ku Klux Klan. That's rather a stretch. I think here the author is rather sloppy in pointing out how both groups do share some similar opponents; but here the author failed to account for the differences in terms of worldviews and motivations with those overlapping common enemies. In chapter thirteen there's a similar outrageous claim that the Apartheid was not so much a form of fascism but of Calvinism and that Calvinism was what led to its creation. To the author's credit he does go on to say that he believes Calvinism is also influential in its dissolution. But his claim that the Apartheid was a form of Calvinism misrepresents Calvinism itself.

If you read this book, read it as a history book which is the clearly stated purpose of the author. Don't read this to develop your theology; that should be primarily the job of the Bible. Although there are secondary source books on theology that helps us understand the Bible in developing a good and sound theology, this is not the function of the book though I would say as a historical insight if one has a biblical worldview this book would be an immense blessing and enrichment.

John Boyne says

This was probably the best book on the history of the Protestant Church that I have ever read. The author writes very clearly and is easy to read. The book also served as a nice reference on some of the distinctions between the different Protestant denominations. Highly recommend!

Franklin Tait says

Well written. Encyclopedic coverage. Honest and fair. He doesn't make truth judgments but covers as a historian. Every insular Protestant should read it to truly come to terms with what the "Reformers" really spawned - not a Church, but movements who could certainly not honestly or reasonably claim to be the "pillar and bulwark of the truth" because that would mean being in agreement with what the truth is before the watching world. Once you jettison the worship and tradition of the early church, you jettison the living context within which ones identity and truth in Christ can be discerned. Once that is gone, one is at the mercy of ones own projections into an 'infallible' text out of which one makes a tradition to replace the one that was rejected. Ironies abound.
