

Chapter 3.04 Christian Variations 1: Classical to Protestant

This chapter and the next describe some stances within Christianity. For the chapters on Jesus later, you can get by without these chapters, but, if you meet terms there that you do not know, you might have to return here. This chapter goes from the classical statement of standard orthodox Christianity through Protestantism. The United States has 30,000 Christian divisions. I am not interested in some differences that people find important, such as whether or not to baptize children. I am interested in how the magic of Jesus-as-God-coming-dying-resurrecting-returning took over from the moral teachings of Jesus as the basis for a Christian life. The next part of the book looks at the Bible and at early Christian history. The term “teachings” includes teachings, sayings, parables, the implications of Jesus’ actions, and his program for the Kingdom of God.

From Jesus to Nicea. Christian beliefs were standardized at a council in 325 CE (AD) (see below). A lot happened between Jesus’ death and the Council. For now, I skip over what happened in between to jump directly to orthodoxy. I cover Jesus’ life and the events after his death in the next part of the book.

Classical Orthodoxy: the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed declares what orthodox Christians believe. It grew in a process starting in 325 CE (AD). It was pretty much completed by 381 CE (AD) in a Council at Nicea in what is now Turkey. The original was in Greek. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America translated it into English as below. When I went to church as a boy, every week the entire congregation recited the Nicene Creed in both Greek and English.

I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father through Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And He rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; And he will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets. In one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen.

The Creed was shaped by theological disputes that are not as intense now so it might not be apparent why all the clauses are there. In the phrase “Who for us men and for our salvation”, I think the Greek term translated “us men” (“tous anthropos”) is really gender neutral and includes both men and women. I translate it “we people” to yield “Who for we people and for our salvation”. “Catholic” does

not mean “Roman Catholic” but means “entire” or “whole” or “complete” and applies to all Christian churches that accept the Nicene Creed. Originally all Christian churches were catholic in this sense but not Roman Catholic. The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church use different versions of the Creed that emphasize different relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Different versions played a role in the separation between the Eastern and Western Churches. The details are not important here. I think most Protestant churches use the Roman Catholic version, or a modification, because the Roman Catholic version shows the influence of Augustine, and Protestant churches generally follow Augustine; but I did not check each church. Specific churches modified the Creed for their particular needs. For other versions in several languages, see Wikipedia. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 clarified the ideas from Nicea, in particular the divinity, humanity, and dual nature of Jesus. Those two councils defined orthodoxy for Christians from then up to the present. Chalcedon is now part of Istanbul, Turkey, but was then an outlier of Constantinople.

Key Ideas.

Notice some ideas the Creed asserts, sometimes through only a word or phrase:

Rather than Jesus’ teachings, the church stresses the special status of Jesus as God and stresses his special life events. The expected return of Jesus, the “Second Coming” is added to the special events of his history.

The Trinity

The preexistence of Jesus as God

The existence of Jesus as both divine and human

The fact that Jesus preexisted as God and then became human suggests the magic of his birth, especially suggests the virgin birth.

The crucifixion has magical efficacy. It is not clear what all the crucifixion does but it is generally taken that our sins are forgiven and we are saved.

The resurrection

The necessary return of Jesus

Jesus had some kind of physical body during his life and at resurrection

The importance of rituals such as baptism

The importance of a single verified Church (apostolic succession)

The distinction of the prophets from God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit so that Jesus was not merely a prophet but fully God

The main results of Jesus' activities are to produce a world divided between salvation and non-salvation, and to allow for salvation. The chief relevance to this world of Jesus' actions is to create the possibility of salvation. There is only salvation and non-salvation.

Salvation has to do only with Jesus coming, dying, being resurrected, and returning.

The Kingdom begins after Jesus returns and it is an entire world order like a state. It is a real kingdom in whatever kind of reality prevails after Jesus returns.

No intrinsic role for Mary or the saints

Implications of the Nicene Creed.

The resurrected Jesus was not a disembodied spirit or a re-animated corpse. He had a physical body that normal humans would recognize as a physical body, though his body was better than a regular body. Jesus' resurrection was the first in a mass resurrection and renewal of the world. Christians expect to be resurrected in quasi-physical bodies sometime after they die. If Jesus returns when they are still alive, then their bodies will be changed into the better physical bodies of the saved.

This idea was not as strange at the time of Jesus as it is to us now but it was not a common idea even then and it was not easily accepted. Non-Christians then did not think of being resurrected. If they did think of life after death, they would become a spirit without a physical body at all. The Christian idea of a real physical resurrection was part of what made Christianity unique and so hard for some people to accept. People that did accept Christianity had to leap from their old religious base; they had a "conversion experience". Not everybody then understood the physical resurrection in the same way as do modern theologians but it was still an odd idea.

Salvation is not a question of getting Jesus' teaching. You do not have to understand anything or to do anything other than accept Jesus of the Creed and accept the Church. No items of Jesus' teaching are in the Nicene Creed.

None of the teachings of Jesus, his program, or any behavior expected of a Christian in accord with the teachings or program, are mentioned in the Creed. Critics of orthodoxy sometimes say the Church is interested only in Jesus' death and resurrection while it is not interested in his life. The Creed allows the Church to select from Jesus' teaching what it wants to stress and to overlook what it wishes to ignore. Other statements of dogma recall Jesus' teachings but they might not have the status of the Nicene Creed.

Jesus' coming, dying, resurrection, and expected return were not intended to change this world but to allow for salvation out of this world. The new world of the Kingdom might be a new world entirely or it might be a transformation of this world but it is not just this world.

The Church controls the rituals and the content of faith. The Church controls access to salvation.

Salvation comes in two steps and only two steps: by Jesus' action as God and by accepting the Church. Salvation comes automatically to some people as a result of Jesus coming, dying, being resurrected, returning and by their accepting the Church.

Salvation is a magic result of Jesus' coming, dying, resurrection, and expected return. Theologians have spent much effort on explaining the magic, in particular how Jesus' death automatically caused original sins to be forgiven, other sins to be forgiven, and caused people to be saved. I do not think they have succeeded.

Part of the explanation for the magic of salvation through Jesus includes just exactly who Jesus was as messiah, his status, especially as messiah. If we can figure out how Jesus was special, then we can figure out why the magic works. Theologians have not figured this out either.

It is unclear if there is room for a relation with God or Jesus or the Holy Ghost apart from accepting the magic of Jesus' coming, dying, being resurrected, and expected return. If there is room, it is not clear what role a relation with Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit might play in salvation, and what the character of the relation might be.

Because the Kingdom is not of this world, it is not a state of mind in this world, and it is not made out of a subgroup of people that follow Jesus' teachings about this world. It is apart from this world even if it comes from this world and even if the inhabitants are people with physical bodies. Of course, the Church is a subgroup of people in this world. It is in this world for now, although some theologians describe it as in both worlds. The situation with it is as if a branch of the Kingdom opened here first. The members of the Church Kingdom here are defined in that they believe in Jesus as God (coming, dying, resurrection, and return) and they believe in the authority of the Church.

But the Church is not necessarily any group that follows a particular teaching apart from this core. The Church is not intrinsically an agency to promote "do unto others", social club, socio-economic class, soup kitchen, victims' compensation agency, state agency, private agency, immigrants' legal agent, family values promoter, anti-abortion activist group, business booster, or rich person's club.

More Orthodoxy.

Within the above points there is room for interpretation and variation. Here are some additional points decided by the Church.

Like Jesus after his resurrection, the residents of the Kingdom are not just disembodied spirits although they are more spiritual than we are. The residents have real physical bodies. Their bodies are not subject to all the physical limitations of current bodies, and are somehow "improved", but they are still physical. (The West has wonderful ideas about body-ness and sensation that figure into ideas about what it means to be human rather than a computer or an angel; but I cannot go into it here. See "City of Angels" with Nicholas Cage and Meg Ryan, and the Star Trek TNG movie "First Contact" where Data kills the Borg Queen.)

Contrary to popular ideas, neither the Creed nor the Bible says Christians go to heaven when they die so as to “be with Jesus” forever as spirits. The Creed and Bible do not say what happens to people when they die. We only know we too will be resurrected at last. For the people that die before Jesus returns, neither the Creed nor the Bible says what happens to them after they die but before they are resurrected. There is a heaven but neither the Creed nor the Bible says what role it plays. The people that die before Jesus returns might reside in heaven temporarily or they might not.

To the extent that there is a Kingdom on this earth before the Second Coming of Jesus transforms this earth, that Kingdom is the Church.

The Church acts as representative of Jesus.

The Church has the right to decide who will go to the Kingdom and who will not, that is who will be saved and who will not. As representative of Jesus, the Church judges the living and the dead. There is no salvation outside the Church.

Bishops are the backbone of the Church. Other offices that have grown out of bishop, especially that are higher than bishop, such as Pope or Patriarch, are the major bones in the backbone.

The Church mediates any possible relation between people and God or Jesus. People cannot have a direct relation with God or Jesus apart from the Church.

Different churches have defined and explained relations with God and Jesus differently, and the experiences of their members have differed.

In theory, Jesus died for our sins and so we should be saved automatically unless we persist in bad sin. In practice, and by special delegation from Jesus through Peter, the Church actually decides whose sins are forgiven and what sins are forgiven. If salvation depends on having sins forgiven, then the Church decides on who is saved or damned.

It is not clear if Jesus died for everybody’s sins and saved everybody, or died only for believers, correct believers, members of the Church, or members of the Church who are also correct believers. Early Christians interpreted it various ways. The Church decided that people could only be saved through the Church, so it seems as if Jesus died only for Church members. I do not know if members also have to believe correctly or not, and how far they may deviate.

The Church developed many kinds of institutions for many kinds of temperaments and abilities, including lay monks and nuns, confirmed monks and nuns, ascetic monks and nuns, lay helpers of all kinds, married priests and celibate priests, bishops, higher level officers with various duties, and a powerful hierarchy. This complex of institutions was able to keep nearly all people within the Church for about 1500 years, and is still able to keep in nearly all people who are born in. The closest approximation outside of the Christian Church would be if Hinduism were formally institutionalized.

From the beginning, at least some Christians have been concerned with helping people beyond the usual social norms of helping. The Church usually provided institutional means for expressing this

desire, such as the means to help during widespread illness, to give to the poor, and to found orphanages, hospitals, and schools.

Officially the Church remained neutral in politics, and remained neutral between the rich and the poor.

The sources of authority for the Church are: the Bible, the traditions of the Church, and apostolic succession including the authority of the bishops and higher officers. It is not clear which of these three contributors has highest authority in all cases. In practice, the bishops and higher officers decide. The bishops and higher officers really do put a lot of emphasis on the Bible and on traditions, and the actual weight varies in particular cases. The Church tends to well-document and well think-out decisions.

My Bias.

I offer a warning before I talk about Roman Catholics and Protestants. I do not think any church properly represented Jesus or his teachings, even at the start of Christianity; so what I say here does not reflect any allegiance to any Church. I have not considered myself Greek Orthodox since I was about 13 years old although my early training still colors my view now. The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church split before Protestant churches split from Rome or each other. The Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church split mostly due to cultural differences between East and West, and for political reasons. To me, the Roman Catholic Church separated from the original Church in the first of a series of schisms of which the West seems to be prone. Later Protestant separations from Rome seem only a continuation of the Western tendency to schism begun by Rome. The first Protestant schism came about 150 years after the official separation of Rome and the East. Whether the line of schisms is for good or bad depends on your analysis.

Augustine.

Probably the greatest influence on all Church doctrine has been various interpretations of Paul. Interpretations of Paul have been more important even than the teachings of Jesus. I think Paul has been misinterpreted since shortly after he wrote in about 40-60 CE (AD). Probably the greatest single influence on Western church dogma has been Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 CE (AD)), especially as he used Paul. He was one of the smartest people in the history of the world, but I still reject his ideas. Before he was a Christian, he was Manichean dualist and in training to be a lawyer. I think he remained a dualist of good and evil, and a lawyer, after he became a Christian, and he strongly increased those tendencies in Western Christianity. His ideas:

Original Sin.

Christianity is about being saved or being damned. To explain why we are likely to be damned but can be saved, Augustine remade the idea of Original Sin. Due to Adam and Eve accepting the Forbidden Fruit from Satan, all people are now evil and the world is irretrievably fallen. We all inherit the taint of Original Sin, and the taint affects our personalities. All of us are born damned, and we naturally seek to do only evil. We are not just a mixture of good and bad, we are all evil. We cannot look for good within ourselves. We can only be saved by a power apart from ourselves. The evil of Adam and Eve spread from them to the entire world. The world might have started out good, but is good no longer. Even

animals and plants are more selfish, cunning, ruthless, poisonous, less useful, harder to tend, and more evil than when God originally made them.

As far as I can tell, the idea of original sin, especially the idea that original sin is passed on from Adam and Eve to all of us, is not in the Tanakh. The idea that the world is irretrievably fallen and overall evil also is not in the Tanakh. The Hebrews had ideas of an inherent human tendency to do bad and to resist good but that tendency was not the same as original sin or as the idea that we are all evil. I mentioned this topic before and I will say more on it later in the book.

Justification and Legalism.

Augustine had a typically Western legalistic interpretation of relations among God, Jesus, people, church, sin, and salvation. To be saved, we have to be justified. Jesus saves by justifying first. It is not entirely clear what "justification" is. Paul used the term "justification" but Augustine took over and modified the term far from Paul's original use. To me, it is as if each person is on trial both for original sin and for all the sins that he-she committed in life. God is both judge and sometimes prosecutor; Jesus is both defense lawyer and prosecutor; and the church is sometimes jury, defense lawyer, and prosecutor. To be saved means to be cleared of our crimes, including the crime of Original Sin, even if we did not personally commit the crime of Original Sin. We really do have crimes and we really have to be cleared of our crimes. We have to be justified to God. Jesus' coming, dying, resurrection, and expected return are a kind of legalistic courtroom dramatic ploy (rather like Matlock) to somehow counteract our guilt and to win us a "not guilty" verdict, or to win us a good plea bargain, even in the face of clear evidence against us. A legalistic view of life and religion does NOT come from the Jewish idea of the Law. As far as I can tell, it comes directly from European culture, and is thoroughly a part of American culture. America does not have the most lawyers per person in the world (by far) because of some inheritance from Judaism but because Americans and Europeans are litigious by culture.

Nobody can justify him-herself.

No actions can make up for original sin and the ongoing depravity of human nature. Nobody can change his character enough to make up for original sin, or even to make good preponderate over bad apart from original sin. On the basis of strict judgment alone, we are doomed.

Only Jesus or the church can justify us to save us.

Jesus already did it magically by coming, dying, being resurrected, and promising to return. The Church continues to have the power to bestow or withhold Jesus' gift.

Grace.

Nobody can even choose by his-her own free will to accept the justification and salvation offered by Jesus and the church. People can be justified and saved only if God softens their hearts through Grace. Salvation comes through God's grace. The Church can play a role in helping us achieve God's grace but it is not entirely clear what the role is. If the Church is necessary for God's grace, then, in effect, acceptance by the Church takes the place of God's grace.

Predestination.

People are predestined to be saved or damned even before they are born. People can freely choose to accept or reject God's grace but God already knows beforehand what choice they will make. The people that God chooses to be saved are called "the Elect". This idea is not very important in this book but it is so commonly known that I could not leave it out.

Church.

We participate in the justification offered by Jesus and the grace offered by God only through the church.

Filioque.

Augustine accepted the Filioque Clause of the Nicene Creed in which the Holy Spirit comes from Jesus and the Father, and so is subordinate to Jesus rather than co-equal with Jesus and the Father. Perhaps Augustine wished to stress the role of Jesus in justification, salvation, and this world.

The Roman Catholic Church Lightens Up.

Augustine was not nearly as influential in the East as in the West. The Roman Catholic Church accepted Augustine's ideas but also realized how severe they were, and realized they would dismay the average person. It modified his stand to allow people to feel better and to participate in a wide variety of church institutions. It allowed that actions can show intent, and so actions do play a role in justification and salvation. The most important actions are sacraments done under the auspices of the Church such as baptism.

In theory, we cannot know God's will and thus cannot know for sure if any person is justified and saved. In practice, the Roman Catholic Church can certify that a person is justified and saved. Any church member who believes correctly, practices sacraments such as confession, and participates in the institutions of the Church can feel fairly sure that he-she is justified and saved, and so need not fear much. The proprietary role that the Church takes in bestowing Jesus' gift and God's grace becomes not a threat but a way to more widely give the gifts and a way to give people reassurance.

Protestantism.

I think the two main reasons for the rise of Protestantism are:

(1) *The rise of nationalism.* The various folk within Europe no longer wished to be under the control of any power far away, religious or secular.

(2) *The rise of capitalism and of business people.* Business people felt in charge of their own fate, did not feel damned in the way taught by the Roman Catholic Church, wished to keep and use their riches, and did not wish to be under distant authority. The Roman Catholic Church did not keep up with the modern

world of the times and with the needs of its new people. The Roman Catholic Church did not keep up with the new forms of capitalism and the social groups that resulted.

The Roman Catholic Church had created institutions in the past to accommodate most forms of human nature and social life but it “missed the boat” in this case. I do not know if the oversight in this case is because some aspects of human nature and social life cannot be accommodated within Roman Catholicism or because of this particular historical situation. Roman Catholic officials might not have been “swift enough” in this case. In the Counter Reformation, Roman Catholic officials made up for many earlier oversights.

High school textbooks say that the Reformation began when Martin Luther objected to the general corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, and in particular to the sale of the alleviation of punishment for sins (“Indulgences”). That is a vast oversimplification, into which I do not go here. It is better not to think of it in these terms.

Protestantism was a complex movement with many kinds of participants: nobility that wished to maximize their power and to keep the tax revenues from their territories, large-scale town capitalists, small-scale town capitalists, and groups of small-scale artisans and merchants. Not all had the same motives, and not all got the same things by joining the new movement. Not all formed the same kinds of institutions (churches) to accommodate their desires. Instead of diversifying institutions within a single main home church and so keeping unity, Protestants tend to break into different churches each of which has its own kind of parishioner and its own character as a church. The various Protestant churches do have doctrinal differences, but, to me, it seems as if the doctrines are more the means of establishing and keeping boundaries and group identity than are items of theology that parishioners really understand and care about.

Established Protestant churches such as Lutherans and Episcopalians hardly differ from the Roman Catholic Church in rituals or in what the average member believes (regardless of official doctrine), so it is probably better to see those churches as having arisen and become strong because of the desire for regional autonomy. Even many more “extreme” Protestant churches got a lot of their impetus from regional autonomy, including Calvinist Reformed (Swiss and Dutch), Baptist (Eastern Germanic), Methodist (English), and Presbyterian (Scottish) churches.

Small churches, such as the associated “Churches of Christ”, can differ from Roman Catholic worship although they do not necessarily differ that much from some allowed special groups within the Roman Catholic Church. I think these small churches were primarily about similar people giving each other financial, political, medical, social, intellectual, legal, and other help. Having a small church, and using a particular theology in the small church, kept similar people together and excluded dissimilar others so that mutual help could do the most good and would not be wasted. I know from seeing for myself that is still how Protestantism recruits and keeps many people in the Third World. I do not deny that doctrine and practice can be important to these church members but we also have to keep in mind the greater social context.

The resulting mix of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is not much different than the diversity of Hinduism. If all Christian churches could be brought together in one comprehensive organization it would

be like institutionalized Hinduism. Protestantism is like to the Roman Catholic Church as Buddhism is to Hinduism, and for many of the same reasons.

Protestant Ideas.

Some key doctrines, practices, and beliefs of Protestant churches are as below. The Roman Catholic Church recognizes some points of criticism but denies it made any fatal errors. Protestants are not faultless and they do make some of the same errors. The reader has to decide. Much of Protestantism seems like a return to strict legalistic Augustinianism.

Degeneration of Rome and Return to Original Christianity.

Protestants believed that the Roman Catholic Church had become corrupt, and did not represent Jesus. The Roman Catholic Church had lost apostolic continuity and authority. Opinion varied as to when the break occurred but some modern Protestants say it happened when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire about 313 (the Edict of Milan only officially made religious tolerance policy but it also de facto made Christianity the official religion too). Protestants felt the Roman Catholic Church could not be cured but had to be abandoned. To cure their religious selves of Roman diseases, Protestants wished to return to the correct beliefs and institutions of the early Christian Church as evident in the Bible before Rome dominated. It is harder to specify these beliefs and institutions than you might think.

Scripture Alone ("sola scriptura").

The Roman Catholic Church founds its authority on the Bible, the traditions of the Church, and the decisions of Church officers. Protestants say they found their authority on the Bible only. For Protestants, all items of belief and all institutions have to be founded on passages of the Bible.

The Roman Catholic Church counter-argues that the Bible nowhere declares itself to be the only foundation for Church belief and practice. The sole authority of the Bible is not in any Biblical passage and thus it is not a Biblical doctrine. To say that the Bible is the sole authority is somewhat idolatrous. The earliest Christians used traditions and the opinions of officials as foundation for beliefs and practices from the beginning, as is evident in passages of the New Testament.

Faith Alone ("sola fide").

Only faith in God and Jesus can lead to salvation. Faith alone does not insure salvation (see below) but it is necessary to salvation. Nothing else can substitute for faith, including sacraments, church membership, or good works. There is nothing bad in those as such but they cannot substitute for faith, and to think they can is to make a fatal mistake.

Protestants argued in this way to insure the Roman Catholic Church could not gain control over people by specifying and controlling any acts aimed at salvation, such as confession, penance, praying for the dead, giving donations, etc. Protestants did not want the Roman Catholic Church to set up any institutions for control.

To solidify this position, Martin Luther wished to remove the letter of James from the New Testament because James states clearly that faith without works is not enough, works are to be done, and works are not to be despised.

In stressing faith over works, Protestants fell back on an old Western dichotomy between the inside and outside, with the inside better than the outside. This dichotomy goes along with other dichotomies such as between spirit and matter, intention and law, organic and machine, and person and institution. Although Protestants intend to stress the first pole of all those dichotomies, and believe that Roman Catholics have stressed the second pole of those dichotomies, we will see that Protestants ended up stressing the second poles about as much as Roman Catholics. Protestants ended up depending on institutions and outside appearances about as much as Roman Catholics. Religious reformers say that they seek the balance between these dichotomies but I have not seen too many that actually achieve it.

Grace Alone ("sola gracia").

Faith opens the door to salvation but only God can step through the door or only God can pull us through the door. Faith is necessary but not enough. Intellectual knowledge of God alone is not enough. Demons have faith in God in that they know he exists but they are damned because they reject God. Membership in a church is not enough because (at least some and perhaps all) members of the Roman Catholic Church are not saved. God decides to whom he will extend grace or to whom he will deny grace.

If faith alone could produce salvation, then we could compel God to save us by believing in him. We might be able to force God to save us by believing in Him even if we were not very good people or if we did bad things. Faith alone could make up for a bad will or could make up for original sin. Demons could compel God to save them just by believing in him. None of this is acceptable.

Thus no set of criteria that we could meet could possibly be enough for salvation because then we could compel God by meeting that set of criteria.

So nothing we can do can save us; but, if we have faith, and do not follow faith with bad behavior, then there is a good chance God will extend grace and will save us.

Again, this attitude helps to prevent any church from establishing ideas or institutions that can intervene between God and any person, and that can bolster the power of the church. This attitude eliminates any need for the church, although the church can still be useful.

Do not disparage this attitude. This attitude speaks to deep powerful feelings in most human beings. We all feel helpless sometimes. We all know that we need help sometimes. We all know that just to wish for help is not enough, and that just needing help alone is not enough. We all know that we have a lot of bad in us and that we are not deeply worthy even if we have a good side. Someone has to reach out to us. This Protestant attitude acknowledges these human realities and gives people hope in the face of these realities. If you have not felt something like this deeply at least sometime in your life then you have missed out on something truly human.

Christ Alone ("Solus Christus").

Since Jesus, the only way to God's grace is to accept Jesus' coming, dying, resurrection, and expected return. There is no other way to God or God's grace except Jesus.

We can and should establish a personal relation with Jesus by accepting who he is and what he did for us. This point sets up the idea of a personal relation with Jesus that is common among modern evangelicals.

In the early Church, this idea of salvation only through Jesus likely was aimed at Jews who did not accept the idea that Jesus was God. Since the rise of Protestantism, I think the primary target of the idea has been the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church cannot substitute for God or Jesus. We have to have a direct relation to Jesus-God.

Glory to God Alone ("Solo Deo Gloria").

Protestants felt that the respect people gave to the Roman Catholic Church, its officials, its institutions, Mary, and the saints, was a kind of idolatry. At the least, respect to humans or to institutions gets in the way of giving proper respect to God. Unless we focus on God alone, we can get diverted. To get diverted from God is to lose hope of grace and of salvation. So we should worship God alone. God includes Jesus.

Biblical Inerrancy.

If you base religion on the Bible alone, then the Bible had better be accurate, infallible, complete, self-explanatory, free of contradictions, without need of hard interpretation, and without possibility for conflicting opinions. Not all Protestants claim all this for the Bible but many do. They claim that any limitations, contradictions, or variant interpretations are the fault of misguided people, limited human intelligence, or bad intentions. If we only pay attention to the Bible, it will tell us all we need to know without confusion. The way to express these ideas is to call the Bible "the inspired Word of God". The Holy Spirit inspired the writers.

Of course, Protestants do conflict, the Bible is not internally consistent, and the Bible is not an accurate scientific portrayal of the world. Many Protestants just deny these simple facts in a kind of blind holding action.

If Protestants were to accept the limitations and true character of the Bible, then they could not use it alone as the basis for faith and institutions. They would have to allow the need for interpretation, traditions, and institutions. In other words, they would come over to the general Orthodox (including Roman Catholic) position, although they could still disagree on many specifics.

Of course, in actual practice, Protestants do offer different interpretations, and do appeal to tradition, authority, and institutions. That is why the United States has 30,000 different Protestant groups. Protestants keep their interpretations as much as possible within the bounds of the core Protestant ideas listed above, and they try to appeal only to accepted Protestant sources of tradition and authority such as

Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Lutheran Church, and the Reformed Church. Few Protestants accept an interpretation of the Bible other than that given by the church into which they were born or into which they converted.

Two casualties of this attitude are science in general and Darwinian evolution in particular. It is possible to offer a logically coherent alternative to science and to Darwin but it is not at all convincing to anybody with open eyes. It amazes me how much some Protestants twist the truth so as to fight science and to preserve the Bible in their own eyes. Roman Catholics did the same in their time as well. They are wrong, and they betray God's work in creating our intellect and our senses. The Roman Catholic Church now accepts most of modern science, including Darwinian evolution.

The Roman Catholic Church rightly points out that allowing anybody or any church to interpret the Bible inevitably calls forth a multitude of personal interpretations, invites schism, and makes ordinary people confused and open to bad ideas. Without central authority, the Church inevitably breaks apart, even when it has a single common central text of God's inspired Word. Protestants rightly respond back that accepting somebody else's interpretation is to give up personal integrity, makes ordinary people confused, makes ordinary people open to somebody else's bad ideas, and intrudes somebody or some church between a person and God. It substitutes grace from an institution for grace from God. The Roman Catholic Church rightly points out that most Protestants do accept the interpretation of somebody else, in their case the opinions of some people within their own particular Protestant church rather than the opinions of the Roman Catholic Church. Few people even read the Bible, even Protestants, let alone interpret it for themselves. The Roman Catholic Church points out that, if we begin to allow traditions, authorities, and institutions, then we have to go back to the earliest obvious ones, and that path very likely takes us back to the Church and to the Bible as understood by the pre-split Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

I say that all groups, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant, use standards to interpret the Bible other than the Bible; use authority, traditions, and institutions; and use standards in addition to authority, traditions, and institutions. They use additional standards even when they say they work only within a Biblical framework, or even when they say they use only the traditions, authorities, and institutions of their church or of the early church. Additional standards include ideas of fairness that prevail in their culture, any biases and prejudices that prevail in their culture, fear of power, desire to appease power, desire for power, and ideals of Western morality as in the great works of literature and philosophy. Because the Bible is not accurate, infallible, complete, self-explanatory, free of contradiction, easy to interpret, and free of possible conflicting interpretations, there is no logical way out of the dilemmas.

Direct Relation With God and Jesus.

Protestants emphasize a direct relation with God and Jesus unmediated by any large church. Some Protestant groups call this "having a personal relation with Jesus". Partly they do this out of inner feelings and partly they do this to minimize any possibility that the Roman Catholic Church can define the content of religion and so control worshippers. Protestants recruit (evangelize) by encouraging people to cultivate their own personal relation with Jesus.

I do not judge what people call a personal relation with Jesus. I made having a relation with God part of my beliefs, so I appreciate the importance of having a personal relation with Jesus.

I do point out that Protestants deny this relation can happen within the Roman Catholic Church but insist it can happen within their own Protestant church. In fact, the Protestants I have known who have a personal relation with Jesus seem to need to share this relation with other people of the same church and seem best able to express this relation within the context of church activity and church doctrine. They seem to need their church to have a personal relation with Jesus as much as Roman Catholics need the church to fulfill their religion. I have met Roman Catholics that seem to have a personal relation with Jesus and who see no problem in showing their personal relation with Jesus to other Roman Catholics or expressing their personal relation with Jesus through the activities of their church. I have seen Hindus who seem to have this kind of relation with some manifestation of Vishnu or Shiva. I have known Buddhists who have this kind of personal relation with “Lord Mother Kuan Im” (in Chinese, “Kwan Yim”), the high Goddess, a future Buddha. She is very like Mary Queen of Heaven. I have seen animists have personal relations with various spirits such as the spirit of a great tree, and these spirits are not demons to their devotees. For a while, many Americans had a real relationship with a personal animal spirit companion such as Eagle. Protestants need to think about why their relation with Jesus might be genuine and why the relation of other people with Jesus or with other deities might be false, and they need to think about the role of social context in the creation and shaping of this special relation with Jesus. All Christians need to think about why a personal relation with Jesus is different than the devotion to any personal deity such as found in some kinds of Hinduism (“bhakti”); but that is another topic.

Simplifications.

Protestants simplified many features of Christianity, partly to aid church members in cultivating a direct personal relation with God and Jesus. Protestants see simplification as a return to the early church that arose after Jesus died. The church and the institutions that remained after simplification became quite strong.

Most Protestant churches eliminated private confession, although some small churches reintroduced public confession.

Other sacraments were eliminated, leaving only baptism, marriage, sometimes Holy Communion (Eucharist or the Lord's Supper), and sometimes confirmation. The sacraments that did remain mostly have to do with the “family values” that are needed for success and with church solidarity.

Some churches reduced the clergy to deacons, presbyters, and a church leader such as a minister. Perhaps to stress distinctions from Rome, some churches avoid the words “priest” and “bishop”. Instead they use “minister”, “pastor”, “reverend”, “preacher”, etc. Often I cannot remember what to call a church official. Small churches and fewer clergy ideally lead to less hierarchy and to more equality between members, that is, to more social justice within the church but the actual practice varies by church.

Married Clergy. After Luther, many churches allowed the clergy to marry. In this too, they believed they were returning to the early church, and point out that Peter and other important early church leaders were married.

After Luke defeats the Emperor in "Star Wars", he institutes reforms to minimize the possibility that another Sith might arise. Among the reforms was allowing marriage for the Jedi. I think Luke had a family.

Ecstatic Practices.

Protestants are more likely to speak in tongues, lay on hands, and prophesy. I do not go into this topic here.

Unity of Church and State.

John Calvin was one of the most important founders of Protestantism in the 1600s. Calvin merged the government of Geneva, Switzerland with the Protestant church there (even if the union was not declared in law). Since then, many Protestants see the ideal state as a theocracy, where the church controls the state. In the 1600s, Protestants almost succeeded in setting up a theocracy in England. Several of the early American colonies were church states. Protestants work to build theocracies even though they blame the fall from early pure Christianity on the union of church and state under Constantine, and apparently they do not see the contradiction. Maybe they think they can do better. It seems as if they think of a unified church-and-state as a version of the Kingdom of God on earth, or as one real manifestation of the Kingdom of God, despite the fact that the Kingdom of God is not supposed to be of this world. This idea of a unified church-and-state is strong in American fundamentalism despite denials by fundamentalists. I disagree totally with the unification of church and state. I insist on separation of church and state.

Attitudes.

Where Roman Catholics emphasize rituals such as confirmation, Protestants emphasize attitudes and associated experiences such as having a personal relation with Jesus and being "born again". Attitudes are key in Protestantism, even among groups that seem to wish to suppress many normal human emotions.

The combination of stressing attitudes but suppressing emotions seems odd and hypocritical to people outside of Protestantism, and it can have odd effects on social relations and institutions. The combination of attitudes and emotional suppression is a common theme in a type of American literature as represented by that perennial high school classic, "The Scarlet Letter".

Protestant Inside and Outside.

This section describes a Protestant dilemma that Max Weber made famous in his explanation of the role of Protestantism in capitalism. This section shows how Protestants tend to return to the outside pole of the inside-outside dichotomy. Once people believe they are either saved or damned, they cannot rest

ignorant of God's judgment. People need to know if they have received God's grace or not. Officially in Protestantism, there can be no signs. Unofficially, Protestants use signs. The signs of God's grace are also the signs of success in the world such as wealth, power, prominence, a good business, an office such as town mayor, a good marriage, and a good family including what biologists call "reproductive success". If you have one or more of these traits, you are saved. Otherwise you are likely damned. Members of the community have to respect the saved and have to go along with the saved, that is, with the rich and powerful. In contrast, members of the community may disrespect and otherwise exploit the damned, that is, the poor and weak. Eventually it became hard to tell whether people wanted wealth and power because those were signs of God's grace or because those were good in themselves and gave a license to exploit. Religion became the way to validate worldly success, an ironic inversion of the original goal of Jesus and a return to what Protestants had disliked about Roman Catholicism. Protestants once again became the caricature of the Pharisees that Christianity had condemned in its early development. Christianity once again lapsed into contradiction.

As an anthropologist, I think the actual direction of causes was likely backwards from the story told above: successful people got the church to validate markers of success by taking over the ideology of justification and salvation. I cannot go into the question any more here. Much of the reaction against Christianity and religion in the modern West has to do exactly with this hypocrisy. It seems very hard to root out this hypocrisy. I think it is based in human nature.