The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism

Edited by

Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Marks
The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism
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Any work that attempts to define a multifaceted movement such as Protestantism faces several Herculean tasks. Aside from the sheer immensity of its history across the entire globe and its unique manifestations and impact therein, one also has to face the post-modern charge that Protestantism is nothing more than religious modernity. Implicit in this charge is the denuding of what most Protestants would claim central to their faith, the presence of God’s redeeming activity in and through the church, in favour of a presentation of Protestantism as an ideological movement – complex to be sure, but nothing more than a series of ideas and repercussions in a steady ebb and flow that eventually threaten in the west to run out of steam, and which elsewhere seems alien or imposed. Protestantism, then, is both a church movement (or better yet an expression of a faith-based church) but also a cultural phenomenon that has been shaped and has shaped that which surrounds it. It is with this multiplicity in mind that this Companion has been designed. The Companion tries to treat Protestantism as both a church-based movement and a cultural phenomenon. It gives prominence to the theology and churches of Protestants but also looks to how each has intermingled, positively and negatively, within a wider cultural milieu that still resonates today.

Adding another layer of difficulty to the project is that Protestantism, almost from its inception and certainly from the seventeenth century onwards, is pan-global and in each locale, micro and macro, has encountered and assimilated indigenous movements and fostered new expressions. Many of these continental, national and local histories, especially in what the African theologian John Pobee calls the ‘North Atlantic Captivity’ of Europe and North America, are well studied, while many histories are overlooked or largely ignored. We have tried to address this imbalance and the very needful recognition that Protestantism is pan-global in influence (and that most Protestants now are not European or North American) by having native scholars author their own histories and by
looking to the future of Protestantism as a non-western European movement and phenomenon.

The shape of the text reflects this triad of concerns: Protestantism as pan-global, theological and ideologically loaded. The Introduction is an attempt to provide a historical theological background, from Protestantism’s own confessions, of what Protestants believe and how they organize themselves as a consequence in their church polity. Complementing this introduction is the final part, on ‘The Future of Protestantism’. In this part, the essays attempt to define and analyse the offspring of Protestantism – post-modernism, Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism; the emergence of Asian, African and South American Protestant forms; and the situation of historic western Protestant denominations. The Introduction and final part begin and end (at least for the present) the conversation about what Protestantism is in terms of its origins and its future.

Sandwiched between the Introduction and ‘The Future of Protestantism’ are two further major parts. The first, ‘The Formation of Protestant Identity: History and Ideology’, is a magisterial survey of Protestantism in various regional and national identities, as well as an opportunity for several major Protestant thinkers to be explored. The brief given to each author was not only to give a landmarked history but also to attempt a synthesis of the implications of that history within the life of the region or nation. This is purposed on two fronts. First is to avoid the catalogued rehearsal of facts covered in other works. Secondly, and more importantly to the ethos of the text, is the attempt to grapple with two of our triad of concern – that we present each history as the result of a church or faith movement that in turn impacts and is impacted by its surrounding culture. The importance of indigenous authors was paramount in this regard. Of course, while every attempt has been made to present as much of the rich diversity of Protestant identities, not all nations and histories are accounted for. To this the editors can only plead ‘guilty’ and offer space considerations (as well as target audiences) in defence, but meanwhile hoping that bibliographies offset some of the selection. Likewise, the list of who could have been highlighted, apart from the ‘big five’ of Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Schleiermacher and Barth, is disputable. It was felt, and is mitigated by the historical essays themselves in which other notable figures (and ideas) are introduced, that these five thinkers are foundational to any discussion of Protestantism in any form or context. A similar defence of space is proffered.

The next major part, ‘Protestantism and Present Identity’, is broken down into two components. Once again, these reflect the triadic concern that drives the text. ‘Protestantism and Its Relations’ frames the conversation that Protestantism has had (and continues to have) with major segments of human enterprise and culture (usually in the western context). The relationship of Protestantism to science, art, politics and law as well as itself via its Bible-centred commitments is explored, highlighting the interplay between the ‘religious’ or ‘theological’ and other presumably secular human enterprise and creations. ‘Protestantism and its Influence’ furthers this conversation by addressing Protestantism to various movements that dominate much of the present situa-
tion and constitute the grounds of future conversations elsewhere. The section explores Protestant responsibility for (and resources to combat) anti-Semitism, racial and sexual inequality, and presents two of the major Protestant variations (or reactions) in liberalism and fundamentalism. In looking forward to the ‘new Protestantism’ of the twenty-first century in new climes it seems imperative that Protestantism learns of its own critique well, if only to avoid repeating the same mistakes in new situations. This section also examines ‘how’ Protestantism has exported itself in missions and its spirituality. Again, these essays indicate how the interplay between idea theology and wider culture is transferred into real concrete situations in both pleasantly surprising and woefully shattering ways.

Having nearly 40 different contributors, many writing in a second or even third language, makes for some stylistic variance, and we have retained the contributors’ spelling and punctuation style, whether UK or US. References and up-to-date further reading lists have been provided as springboards for further study. The reader is also encouraged to use the index as a means of maximizing the interpenetration of movements and individuals across the rich history of Protestantism.

It is the hope of the editors that the chapters be understood not merely as dictionary accounts, but as arguments, although well-researched and documented ones, which will induce fuller and more profound conversations as to the past, present and future of Protestantism in all its forms.

Finally, it is impossible to acknowledge the contribution of all the scholars who have had a hand in the shaping of this volume. A rigorous process of consultation and recommendation allowed the editors to cull the best authors in a range of topics and expertises (far outside our own). Many have assisted in this process but two are notable: Prof Ellen Charry (Princeton Theological Seminary) and Dr Chris Sugden (Oxford Centre for Mission Studies) both nominated many excellent choices who found their way into the volume. To them, and the many unnamed others who nominated scholars during the project, our thanks are given.

The Editors
Introduction: Protestantism – the Problem of Identity

Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Marks

Protestantism is traditionally understood to designate the churches and denominations that have received their inspiration from the Reformation, including the whole unfolding of that history from the sixteenth century down to the present day. This understanding of the notion informs this Companion, which aims to explore the many facets of this development, especially within Western culture. Yet it must be conceded that ‘Protestantism’ remains obstinately resistant to more precise definition. As by far the most diverse form of contemporary Christianity, it is more susceptible to description rather than definition. Its intrinsic resistance to any concept of centralized authority corresponding to the Roman Catholic magisterium has led to a remarkable degree of diversification at both the theological and sociological levels. Even though certain important patterns of commonality may be discerned, contemporary Protestantism is perhaps at least as notable for its divergences as for its shared historical roots and theological agendas.

The rapid growth of Protestant denominations in the twentieth century, given further impetus through the remarkable development of charismatic and Pentecostal groupings, has made it increasingly difficult to speak convincingly of the ‘essence of Protestantism’. While there are important debates within the movement over what its core identity and values might be, empirical observation of the movement suggests that the self-understandings of the movement have become increasingly fluid since the Second World War. The rapid expansion of the movement in its Pentecostal and charismatic forms, particularly when set against the backdrop of the decline of traditional Protestant denominations in the West, suggests that the profile of Protestantism is likely to undergo highly significant changes in the twenty-first century.

In recent times, ‘Protestant’ has increasingly become a shorthand term for a number of seemingly disparate Christian denominations and general cultural attitudes, which need to be parsed carefully. Even its more notorious and
disparaged nonreligious caricatures contain at least some truths about the nature of the movement. Thus Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber and H. Richard Niebuhr argued that ‘Protestantism’ designates an ethos that has certain specific political and economic overtones, namely those associated with Western European capitalism and politics and present-day American-style democracy. All argue with differing stresses that there are specific ideas, disguised and given authority as specific doctrines, inherent in the mainline or ‘magisterial’ Reformation that were and are catalytic to forms of the modern Western world and which have also contributed much of the woes of that culture. The commonality is the stress on the ideological penetration, usually thought of as negative, embedded in its theology, of Protestantism in the nontheological (or seemingly so) areas of politics, culture and economics.

In its strictest sense, the term ‘Protestant’ refers to the group of German princes and cities who ‘protested’ in April 1529 against the re-entrenchment by the Diet of Speyer of the Diet of Worms’s active policy of persecution of Lutheranism and Zwinglism (1521). Prior to the Diet of Speyer, those church groups which are now understood to be Protestant – namely, the Lutheran and Reformed (later to be known as Calvinist) communities – were commonly referred to as ‘evangelical’ (evangelisch or évangélique), thus stressing its centre of biblical exegesis (sola scriptura) and its doctrinal core in a faith-based redemptive Christology. At this early stage, issues of church identity were seen as subordinate to the greater question of the recovery of an authentic and biblical understanding of the gospel itself. Yet a debate over the nature of these ecclesial groupings could not be postponed. Throughout the 1530s, the issue of evangelical self-definition became of increasing importance, both to the evangelical movement itself and its increasingly concerned critics.

The question of Protestant self-definition was made more complex through the rise of what is now generally referred to as the ‘Radical Reformation’. The historical roots of this movement are complex, and interlock to no small extent with the emerging Lutheran and Reformed churches. These radicals argued that the mainline reformers – such as Luther and Zwingli – had been inconsistent or negligent in their application of their reforming principles and agendas. For example, it was argued that Luther had retained a number of traditional beliefs and practices (such as infant baptism) which were not adequately grounded in the Bible, and which ought therefore to be rejected. Furthermore, radical reformers objected to the close and positive links that Luther, Zwingli and Calvin encouraged between the church and the magistracy (hence the term ‘magisterial Reformation’), and argued that authentic Christian existence could only be attained through a return to the pre-Constantinian situation, in which the church was radically separated from the state and its values. Although small in numbers, such radical communities are of considerable interest to both historians and theologians, not least on account of the challenge they pose to the assumption that Protestantism is by definition world-affirming and prone to social assimilation.
Important though the Radical Reformation is historically, particularly in relation to the emergence of the significant and influential Baptist and Mennonite communities in North America, its emphasis upon the separation of church and state limited its impact upon the development of Western culture. For much of its history, Anabaptism’s instinctive attitude was that of social disengagement, in order to focus on spiritual and social issues within their own communities, which were often conceived as profoundly countercultural creations. As this Companion is concerned with every aspect of Protestant life and thought, it is perhaps inevitable that it should focus primarily upon the numerically larger and more socially engaging magisterial Reformation.

We have tried to avoid any hint of the hagiographical historiography of Protestantism, usually associated with the nineteenth century and its socio-political and even missionary agendas, which portrayed Protestantism as the zenith of human culture. The magisterial Reformers, according to this view, are not only founders of a theological movement but are agents of God’s providential hand in resisting a spiral of decay that continually threatens human culture. This approach to Protestantism often leads to the simple equivocation of all things good with Western European culture – an assumption that many regard as fundamental to the colonialism of the period – as well as encouraging the implicit demonization of both the non-Christian world and Catholic Europe. In terms of its view of history, this approach saw the Reformation as representing divine intervention in history, without precedent and independent of all other factors except God’s will. Its heroes became noncontextualized figures, devoid of any background in Catholic thought or history, and its opponents were often treated as deliberate opponents of the divine will. An increasing awareness of the complexity of the intellectual and social origins of the Reformation has largely dispelled such misleading stereotypes, except in popular polemical literature.

Protestantism is best regarded as a heterogeneous movement with shared theological roots that largely began in central and northern Europe, and quickly developed political, economic and social dimensions on account of its interaction with the specific societal structures and norms within which it first took root. The roots of the movement are to be sought in medieval Europe, and its theology in secular philosophical and philological movements such as Renaissance humanism, as well as in wider shifts in contemporary European culture from largely rural feudalism to urban-based economies and political structures. Each of these can be rightly considered as both connected and important to an understanding of the emergence and identity of ‘Protestantism’. For example, Protestantism was widely regarded as liberating by the increasingly important middle classes of the imperial cities of Europe, who saw the new understanding of the Christian faith as marking a break with the traditional structures of the past and offering them theological legitimization for their social and political agendas.
It will be clear that the term ‘Protestantism’ now designates a wide range of significantly different theological emphases and church structures. These are often described under four general headings, as follows:

1 Classical Protestant denominations, which trace their historical origins and theological pedigrees back to the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican forms of Protestantism might all reasonably be located in this category. Such denominations are often characterized by a concern with classical creedal formulations, as well as the distinctive traditional characteristic emphases of the denomination, often embodied in certain specific ‘confessions of faith’, such as the Formula of Concord, the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Thirty-nine Articles. Within such denominations, there is often tension between liberals and traditionalists, with the former seeking to explore and develop approaches to theology and church life which are more responsive to societal and cultural changes, often seeing traditional formulations of faith and understandings of church structure as impeding such an engagement. Traditionalists, on the other hand, argue that the identity and distinctive ethos of the denomination is defined and safeguarded by traditional formulations of faith. To meddle with such ‘givens’ is potentially to forfeit the denomination’s reason for existence, leading to a loss of theological vision and social identity.

2 Denominations and movements which trace their history and derive their theological moorings, at least in part, from the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Mennonite communities in North America are a particularly luminous example of such a denomination. However, it is also reasonable to suggest that the highly influential consortium of Baptist churches trace their origins to this sixteenth-century movement, even if that historical connection is complex, based partly on English independent churches of the early seventeenth century. Once more, tensions exist between liberals and traditionalists within these churches.

3 Denominations and movements which have arisen from tensions within mainline Protestantism, and see themselves as recapturing at least something of its original theological vision, above all a firm rooting in the Bible. Perhaps the most obvious example of such a development is the phenomenon of evangelicalism, which emerged in both the United Kingdom and the United States during the eighteenth century, and has gone on to become one of the most significant forces in contemporary English-language Protestantism. While many evangelicals see their natural ecclesiological habitat as being within mainline denominations, within which they can function as an ecclesiola in ecclesia, others have sought to create avowedly evangelical denominations in their own right.

4 Charismatic and Pentecostal groupings, whose origins lie in the twentieth century. While some charismatic Protestants are content to operate within mainline Protestant denominations, the majority operate within specifically charismatic denominations or organizations, such as the Assemblies of God.
Although relatively recent arrivals on the scene, there are persuasive indications that this style of Protestantism is coming to be of major importance in the emerging world.

Individual articles in this volume will consider these movements and their distinctive identities, regional variations and developments in agendas, and specific issues with which Protestantism has been forced to engage throughout its history. It is, however, also important to attempt to identify at least some of the leading themes that have characterized Protestantism since its emergence in the sixteenth century, not least because these are often intimately linked with the distinctive identity and agenda of the movement.

The Contours of Classical Protestant Thought

The contours of classical Protestant theology were shaped during the sixteenth century, and may be regarded as the outcome of the confluence of the ideas and methods of leading reformers and the manner in which these were received and expounded by Protestant communities. The two most significant theological epicentres of the first phase of the Reformation were at Wittenberg and Zurich. Martin Luther’s vision of the Christian gospel, which was given more systematic expression by his colleague Philip Melanchthon, focused on the evangelical proclamation of justification *sola fide* (by faith alone), with an emphasis upon the supreme authority of the Bible in matters of Christian doctrine – a notion which subsequently came to be expressed in the slogan *sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone). Although Luther was not the most systematic of writers, his ideas were widely disseminated through his two *Catechisms* (1529), and especially through Philip Melanchthon’s *Loci Communes*, which first appeared in 1521.

The Swiss city of Zurich was the centre for a quite distinct understanding of the Christian life, which initially made no reference to the notion of justification *sola fide*. For Zurich’s reformer Ulrich Zwingli, the life and morality of the church was to be reformed through a return to the vision of the Christian life. While Luther and Zwingli shared a common commitment to the authority of the Bible (and a corresponding rejection of the notion of absolute papal authority), they initially diverged significantly over how Scripture was to be interpreted, and whether the reforming agenda should focus on the doctrine or ethics of the church. A degree of convergence was achieved through the mediating influence of the second generation reformer John Calvin, and the rise of the city of Geneva as a centre for reformed theological education and evangelism, especially in Calvin’s native France. Under Calvin, a coherent vision of the Reformation as a biblically grounded reformation of both the life and thought of the church emerged, given systematic articulation in Calvin’s highly influential *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, first published in 1536, which appeared in its definitive form in 1559.
Important though Luther and Calvin are for any evaluation of the distinctive ideas of Protestantism, two important qualifications of their authority must be noted. First, both Lutheran and Reformed communities chose to define themselves, not specifically with reference to the writings of either Luther or Calvin, but with reference to certain ‘confessions of faith’. These confessions were regarded as subordinate to both the Bible and the historic creeds of the Christian church, and were understood to clarify the distinctive vision of the Christian faith associated with the Lutheran and Reformed communities. Within Lutheranism, the Augsburg Confession (1530) initially played a highly influential role, although this was gradually supplanted following the publication of the Formula of Concord (1578). Reformed communities throughout Europe drew up confessions of faith which expressed their leading theological commitments, above all to the supreme authority of the Bible in matters of faith and doctrine. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) may be taken as representative of this general trend:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; to which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Among these Reformed confessions, the following are of particular interest: the Ten Theses of Berne (1528), the Tetrapolitan Confession of 1530, the Lausanne Articles and the Geneva Confession of 1536, the Second Helvetic Confession (1566).

In what follows, we shall explore some of the basic ideas that emerge as characteristic of magisterial Protestantism in this formative period.

An exegetical Christological foundation

The two slogans that are usually thought to lie at the heart of the theological vision of the magisterial Reformation are *sola fide* and *sola scriptura* – the doctrine of justification by faith and the claim that the life and thought of the church must find their basis in the Bible alone. Both of these slogans can be argued to be subsidiary to a more fundamental doctrine that is derived from an *exegetical Christology* that many modern theologians regard as the true (but not exclusive) purview of the Reformation in general, and of both Luther and Calvin in particular.

Luther and Calvin were primarily exegetes of the Bible and saw in its message the announcement of the gospel as revealed fully in Christ. This message was nothing more than the promise of God to forgive sinners. The authority and the guiding hermeneutical principle thus reside in the Bible, understood as the witness to God’s objective declaration of salvation in Christ Jesus. Both theologians saw in the Bible the truth that the Christian shares a radical new rela-
tionship with God because of Christ, and that this saving work – our justification – therefore lies wholly beyond any human possibility and capacity. Salvation is an act of grace given in the economy of the Triune God, of which Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and humanity.

Both Luther and Calvin can be argued to share a radical vision of Christocentrism – often summarized in the slogan *soli Christo* – derived from their reading of the Bible. Both emphasize that God’s gift to humanity in Christ is nothing less than Christ himself, wherein human beings are grafted into that which properly only belongs to the God-man in all his life, death, resurrection, ascension and heavenly ministry. Both stress that humans can do nothing to merit divine forgiveness or to assuage divine wrath. As a consequence, the bond between Christ and his church is established solely on the merit of Christ alone and subsequently in the work of the Triune God as justifier, sanctifier and regenerator. The remainders of their respective theologies can be regarded as footnotes to this radical Christocentrism derived from their biblical exegesis, and its subsequent application to the life and witness of the church.

On the nature of justification

A comparison of Luther’s doctrine of justification with Calvin’s treatment of the matter suggests that Luther held a more prescriptive view of the doctrine than Calvin, who tends to adopt a largely descriptive approach. Both, nonetheless, stress the basic insight that Christ meets us in and through his Word, and that this transformative action is grounded in God’s freedom, which is totally independent of human merit or capacity. It is possible to misunderstand Luther by placing an emphasis upon faith, rather than Christ; to stress the role which human faith itself plays (*pisteology*) is to reduce Luther’s emphasis that salvation is wholly the work of God, which is received by faith. As Luther and Melanchthon both stressed, justification takes place *propter Christum per fidem* (on account of Christ, through faith), where a false reading of Luther holds it to take place *propter fidem*. According to this misunderstanding, the Christian repents and has faith in God’s promises, which then brings about new life. This preoccupation with subjectivity – as one’s sense of status before God – has been often argued as a central motif of modernity and as the theological parent of the Enlightenment’s conception of the autonomous self.

Calvin roots justification more centrally into the notion of covenant and the Lordship of Christ, making the question of justification rest not on one’s faith but rather on the faithfulness of faith’s object. With the context of the Christian’s incorporation into Christ, Calvin argues that the Christian is made ‘holy’ objectively in God, so that justification and sanctification are to be seen as the double unfolding (*la double grâce*) of that objective promise. Faith is a response or the working out of our radical new justified existence in the obedience of that alteration by God, as the Holy Spirit works on the human will. For Calvin, the consequence of faith is thus worship and repentance. In contrast to Luther,
Calvin argues that faith is given in our union with Christ, not as a part or precondition of that union. To think otherwise would represent a challenge to Christ’s Lordship, the simple Trinitarian understanding that in Christ God is fully present, and to the covenant of God that in the work of the Son God redeems and thereby shares with humanity the *beneficia Christi*. Calvin, as we shall see, thus goes on to root his doctrine of justification in a robust notion of predestination or election. The prominence of election is thus ultimately derived from his more foundational doctrine of justification. Sanctification and justification are simultaneous in the gifting of grace, in that the presence of Christ is always dependent on God’s prevenience.

*On the nature of predestination or election*

Classically the two major differences between Calvin and Luther are held to be located in their Eucharistic theology and in the doctrine of predestination. According to this viewpoint, Christological differences are the source of contention in the Eucharist while the doctrine of election is due to Calvin’s working from a doctrine of God that emphasizes the free objectivity of God over Luther’s starting point of subjectivity and faith. There is much to be commended in this view but the differences seem to be more rooted in Christology than in competing views of the doctrine of God or justification’s keynotes. Luther, for example, in his *de Servo Arbitrio* argues for a doctrine of predestination, derived from Augustine, that corresponds closely to Calvin’s later doctrine. Luther, here opposing Erasmus and a perceived threat of Pelagianism, argues that not only does God elect those who are to be saved but also that God actively hardens those who reject the gospel. This is a form of double predestination, that God elects both the saved and the condemned independent of human action. Regardless of their respective starting points, both use the doctrine as a foundation of the believer’s confidence that God has prepared a way of grace independent of human merit.

The source of difference, however, lies primarily in the application of their exegetically derived Christology. Luther is much more attuned to the biblical position that the will of God revealed in Christ is primarily a will to save. In short, Christology is a reflection on the grace of God as revealed in Christ. For Luther, to seek the grounds for this decision by God, the so-called ‘secret will’ of God, is to miss or misunderstand the basic comfort of the gospel that God has come for sinners in Christ. Luther’s Christology is preoccupied with the reality that Christ is God and demonstrates God’s will for humanity, which is the promise of forgiveness and union with Christ as known to the believer. Predestination is a secondary aspect of the guiding principle of Luther’s Christology as the justifying Saviour known by faith. Calvin, on the other hand, is more rigorous in the application of his Christology. The biblical identification of Christ with God – not merely as God’s revelation but as the Lord – is understood by Calvin as not only to relate to the application of salvation (here following Luther), but
to represent a fundamental statement concerning divine Trinitarian ontology. For Calvin, Luther threatens the unity of divine ontology, God as Triune, by raising the possibility of two wills in God, one hidden in the pre-Creation will of God, and the other revealed in Christ. For Calvin, to think that somehow Christ represents a different expression of God’s will is to challenge not only the coherence of a doctrine of God but also his Christology and its simple identification of Christ as the Lord. Predestination can thus be seen as an integral aspect of Calvin’s application of his Christology: in Christ the whole being and will of God including God’s transcendental freedom above creation is made known, fully and reliably.

Developments within later Lutheranism might seem to lend some weight to Calvin’s concerns. Lutheran scholasticism, apparently borrowing from the Jesuit doctrine of *scientia media*, came to distinguish a unity of purpose from a nonabsolute and therefore contingent divine will in relation to the application of salvation. According to this view, while God desires all to be saved, God knows beforehand that some will reject salvation and therefore excludes them in reality from the application of Christ’s work. This ‘middle-knowledge’, with its distinction between passive foreknowledge (*praescientia*) and active foreordination (*praedestinatio*) effectively bifurcates the divine will, forcing a distinction between a general and absolute will to save (*voluntas universalis sive antecedens*), and a more restricted will by which God foresees (*praevision*) the concrete and contingent application of salvation won by Christ (*voluntas specialis sive consequens*). This is more a doctrine of the human election of God than a doctrine of how in Christ God comes to humanity. Particularly in nineteenth-century Lutheranism the manifestation of the two Christological stresses becomes a foundation for an anthropologically based liberalism, and the increasing evaluation of theology as nothing more than anthropology. Religion, including Christianity, is thus to be construed as an expression of the human need or experience of God. In reaction to this development, it is to Karl Barth’s credit that his theology represents a return to both Luther and Calvin’s insistence that whatever election is, it must be a reflection of Christology and not another theological starting point.

On the nature of the gospel and law dialectic

A fundamental difference in Christological emphasis can also be argued to underlie the different understandings of Luther and Calvin on the relationship to law and gospel. Both Luther and Calvin root law in their respective Christologies, holding that in Christ the compulsion and curse of the law is removed and, despite their moral imperfections, foolish and hopeful sinners can find comfort and sustenance for their ethical lives. Luther’s law–gospel dialectic is a reflection of his preoccupation with the application of his Christological rule that Christ saves. Before the comfort of the gospel, humanity stands in a negative relationship to God and knows only the law, and the law condemns.
Humanity stands under the wrath of God. Law, understood as not only conscience but primarily as the revelation of the Old Testament, functions to demonstrate sin and is an expression of original sin. However, paralleling his incipient double-will theology, Luther thinks that law is an ‘alien work’ (opus alienum), when compared with the ‘true work’ (opus proprium) of Christ – that is, the comfort of the gospel. Law, therefore, has an apparently different function before and after conversion. Before conversion law has a pedagogical and a political use; it prepares for grace and restrains sin, particularly in its manifestation as societal precepts as found in the Mosaic commandments and the Noachic orders of creation such as the role of the family. After conversion, the law possesses a usus normativus by which it directs and informs the Christian life, enabling believers, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to fulfil God’s will for their lives. Once again, it is Luther’s application of his Christology understood as connected to the notion of justification that drives his understanding. Law is understood in light of the Christological maxim ‘Christ justifies’.

Calvin, likewise, works from his Christological maxim that Christ is God, and rejects Luther’s abstraction of law from Christology for the reasons given in his doctrine of election. To posit that law – originating in God as God’s will for humanity – is different from gospel, is to abstract God from Christ. There is no abstract law as a means to or reflection of God but only God in Christ. Law, for Calvin, must rest firmly in the covenant faithfulness of God found in Christ. Law is explained in Christology. Calvin thus only accepts Luther’s ‘third’ use of the law (opus normativus) where Luther argues that once joined to Christ our works, as obedience, are able to fulfil God’s mandate and then only because of Christ’s promise of Spirit.

On the Eucharist

There is little doubt that one of the most significant divergences between Luther and Calvin related to the Eucharist. Numerous attempts to find an evangelical compromise, urged upon them by the conciliatory Philip Melanchthon and Martin Bucer, were rejected by Luther himself, and later by the Formula of Concord. It is here that their respective Christological differences find clearest expression. Despite their differences on this matter, however, both Luther and Calvin rejected Zwingli’s earlier ‘memorialism’ as an inadequate account of the Eucharistic event, arguing that his portrayal of the Eucharist as an act of remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice reduces the Eucharist to a human act, and therefore by implication our unio mystica is not a statement of God’s grace but is tied to human effort. For both Luther and Calvin, whatever the Eucharist symbolizes, it is at the most profound level a reflection of their Christology and the common magisterial Reformation principle that God alone, in Christ, justifies independent of human merit. Both Eucharistic theologies stress the objectivity of the sacrament – that its effectiveness and meaning stands outside human merit or understanding and is based in God’s promises in Christ.
Luther’s Eucharistic theology is often referred to in terms of ‘consubstantialion’, thus emphasizing its contradistinction to the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. According to this doctrine of transubstantiation, the consecrated bread and wine substantially become in property or substance the body and blood of Christ. This had two unacceptable implications for Luther. First, that the elements themselves became improper objects of worship; second, that the mass is seen as another aspect of what Christ singularly did in his vicarious action on the cross. Luther rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, and in its place offered a doctrine of consubstantiation which takes as its starting point the declaration that while the elements are not transmuted materially, they are nevertheless more than just bread and wine. Luther develops this important notion in two ways. First, Luther argued that the elements derive their meaning solely due to the Word itself. It is because Christ commanded the elements to be celebrated that they have any meaning at all. Second, and more centrally, because of the Word they come to be more than bread and wine (but not transformed into the body and blood) in that in and through them we really receive the promise (and therefore substance) of Christ, meaning forgiveness.

In his controversy with Zwingli, Luther was clear to argue (and possibly overstate) that the elements were not merely instruments through which faith was strengthened on the basis of Christ’s work; in some way, they also conveyed Christ. The Eucharist becomes a ‘means of grace’ as the elements become the body and blood of Christ ‘in, with and under’ the bread and wine. Luther’s Eucharistic theology is driven by his simple equivocation of the mode and form of Christ with that of the elements, so that he needs to use another doctrine to explain how Christ can be ‘in, with and under’ the elements and yet remain both God and human. The material – the elements – can be understood as competing with the primary stress of promise as found in the Word. The key area that comes under scrutiny is not whether Christ is God, and therefore can be ubiquitous in presence, but what happens to his humanity in the supper. The question is whether this ‘repletive’ mode of presence extends only to Christ’s divine nature or whether his human nature is likewise able to be everywhere at once. For Luther’s critics, the employment of the *communicatio idiomatum* (a statement that in the incarnation both natures of Christ are mutually penetrating so that humanity shares divinity and vice versa) in his Eucharistic theology threatens the human nature of Christ and therefore his role as saviour and mediator and his ongoing ministry to the church. Christ’s human nature, the basis of our *unio mystica*, if having the property of ubiquity (being in all places at all times), cannot be said to be like any other human nature. This raises the question of what is human nature, both fallen and redeemed, and threatens the entire unity of God to creation and Christ’s role as mediator and as saviour. Later Lutheran theologians would pick up this theme in Luther with the two state theologies of humiliation and exaltation and the doctrine of *kenosis*. The incarnation, Christ’s humiliation, is either an emptying or a concealment of divinity and threatens the equation of Christ to God and reduces his sufferings.
and work to that of an illusion. What is lost is the solidarity of Christ to humanity. As ever, the theological issue is one of Christology.

What Luther is at pains to avoid in his Eucharistic theology is the transformation of the Eucharist into either a human symbol (as in Zwingli’s account) or into another Christ (as in the doctrine of transubstantiation). Luther is keen to preserve the fact, derived from his exegetical Christology and founded on his notion of _unio mystica_, that the gift in the elements is Christ himself. This spiritual presence, ‘in, with and under’ the elements, is due to God’s promise and action in Christ. The Eucharist is boldly claimed by the Christian as nothing less than Christ, and therefore the promise of forgiveness which in turn shapes the Christian’s life in reality.

Calvin, likewise, roots his Eucharistic theology in the primacy of God’s action and promise in Christ. The elements are signs, God’s sensual accommodation to us, of the true spiritual reality which is becoming true in faith. The content of that reality is Christ and the symbols are portents of that reality. The elements are not the substance of Christ, but instruments pointing to that reality. They are nonetheless spiritual food in that they are the gift of the union with the Mediator, but this action is founded on the Trinitarian life of God, as it is the Spirit of Christ that bonds us and not our faith. In the elements, God condescends in the Spirit to fulfill the promise of Christ’s presence to his church. In contradistinction to Luther, it is not ‘by mouth’, meaning the physical elements, that we partake of Christ but the Spirit’s filling the vessel of faith.

Calvin’s distinctive teaching is that Christ’s human nature subsequent to the ascension remains human. Central to Calvin’s Eucharistic theology is the recognition that it is not necessary to explain the mechanism of the mystery of Christ’s _corporalis praesentia_. This distinguishes him from Luther. What distinguishes him from Anabaptism and Zwinglianism is his insistence with Luther that the ground of the Eucharist (and baptism) is the objectivity of God so that in the sacraments the content or substance, spiritually or instrumentally, is nothing less than Christ. This removes the requirement of piety or its attestation as a factor in salvation or faith. For both magisterial reformers, working from their exegesis of the Bible, the focus of the sacraments is the reality of that person whom they signify, and the gift of Christ therein to the church.

On the doctrine of the church and the priesthood of all believers

From what has been said thus far, the importance of the church to both Luther and Calvin will be obvious. Both theologians understand the church as the unique place in which God manifests the promise of Christ to the world. The church is not merely a society of like-minded people but absolutely central in its function as witness through sacrament and ministry of the Word (primarily preaching as exegesis of the Bible) to the objectivity of God and redemption. The defining marks of the church are thus identified as the preaching of the gospel, and the proper administration of the sacraments. Both see the church as visible