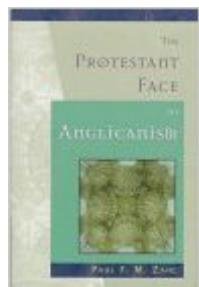


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The Protestant Face Of Anglicanism



Synopsis

This volume tells a story that is virtually unknown today: The Protestant background and history of Anglican Christianity. Through a fascinating exploration of the development of Anglicanism and its wider Protestant context, Paul Zahl attempts to show-contrary to the opinion of many present-day "Anglican writers"-that Anglicanism is not just a via media (between Rome and Geneva, for example) but has been stamped decisively by classic Protestant insights and concerns. He also discusses the implications of Anglicanism's Protestant history for our own age, suggesting that this dimension has an important contribution to make to the worldwide Christian community in the new millennium. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

This book is a manifesto that intends "to restore the distinctly Protestant face of Anglicanism" (7), despite the fact that Anglicanism has always understood itself as a reformed Catholicism first, its relation to continental Protestantism being depending upon the former. Zahl's attempted restoration aims for much, for it aims at undercutting the self-understanding that Anglicans have always had (regardless of the various shades of understanding that "catholicity" has embodied in Anglicanism - as in the rest of the Church); in short, Zahl attempts a complete recreation of Anglican identity. The sources that he argues against throughout this work are predominately secondary sources (those that he dislikes the most are almost all found in a fairly thick volume titled *The Study of Anglicanism*) and his arguments are largely constructed by secondary sources against one another. Such a

method reflects neither a mature nor thoughtful scholarship but, instead, a rather peurile approach to a fairly significant claim: that Anglicanism isn't what we think it is. One must wonder: why doesn't Zahl engage classic Anglican thinkers - as well as the medieval theologians and the Church Fathers? He seems neither to know classic Anglican thinkers such as Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes nor to know that these persons built upon a legacy of 1,500 years, for any engagement with Anglican theology must be an engagement with the Church Fathers and the medieval doctors, especially St. Thomas Aquinas (who, although he does not hold the place for Anglicans that he holds for Roman Catholics, is nonetheless quite influential). Anyone can quote secondary sources, especially when they are all contained in a single volume! It takes a far greater and far deeper level of reading to get into the very foundation of any theological movement for the foundation is what grounds the worldview. It means getting into theologians as well as liturgies and hymns, art and poetry. He does none of this. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Zahl writes that Anglicans have never done any hard theological work. Yet, this is clearly not the case: Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* was the greatest consideration of the nature of the Church during the Reformation; the King James Bible and the Revised Standard Version are both products of Anglicanism; Archbishop William Laud was a tremendous patron of the sciences; the great Catholic "revivals" (which Zahl has a clear dislike for) in the 19th century were initiated by scholars at Oxford and Cambridge; the late 19th century Biblical and Patristic scholarship of Bishops Westcott, Lightfoot and Hort is still used today; Archbishop William Temple and Austin Ferrar were both invited to give the Gifford Lectures in their lifetimes (and the Gifford Lectures are among the most prestigious philosophical lectures in the world); Evelyn Underhill's great work *Mysticism* quite literally recreated the field of religious studies in the early 20th century; C. S. Lewis was one of the greatest apologists of the 20th century. To claim that Anglicanism lacks substantive theology or that Anglicans have never done any hard theological work fails to look at the facts. Bizarre theological assertions further injure his case. For example, he writes that creation "is not the starting point of Christianity" (73) - a point that is hard to square with the fact that the Bible not only begins with creation, but claims that creation is good. It is this latter point, in particular, that has historically held a very strong place in the Christian imagination. Against heretics on the one hand, who denigrated creation (especially the body) and against philosophers on the other hand who saw creation as an accidental emanation from God, the **ethos** that the first few chapters of Genesis gives is one that flies in the face of what Zahl wants to claim. This repudiation of the goodness of the created order continues when he writes that "The world on its own terms is no canvass for a portrait of God that is either unified or compassionate" (74). The Psalmic (and therefore Patristic, medieval and Anglican)

notion that "the heavens are telling the glory of God" is consequently repudiated. Yet, Christians have historically believed that in addition to the Scriptures, one could turn to "the book of nature" and see something of God revealed there as well. Although the latter has always been subsumed to the former, it has never been absent. To undercut creation is to undercut the God that creates - and this is no small matter! In repudiating so much of Anglicanism then, "the Protestant face of Anglicanism" comes across as being entirely out of touch with Anglicanism's 2,000 year history. If this work is truly intended to "restore" something, one must wonder how this is going to take place as it seems both historically uninformed and theologically violent. This is a book that restores nothing but attempts to destroy much, and will therefore cause considerable confusion. This is a book whose outlook will eventually destroy itself.

Concise historical review supporting the author's thesis that Anglicanism's Protestant "face" actually forms the very essence of the English reformation, and that this aspect has been neglected-even cast aside-through the years.

Zahl does an interesting historical analysis of the rise of Anglicanism, the Church of England, and analyzes the strong Protestant forces that have kept it together. I agree that many today are blinded by the Protestant reality of Anglicanism, and that it owes a great deal to that movement. Unfortunately, while Zahl does state he does not want to be "anti-Catholic", he ends up being just that. His greatest error is his broad-brush theological characterization of the difference between Protestant and Catholic, namely, that the latter is "incarnational" and the other is "atonement" based. While there is some general truth to that, one may ask if both have merit, for he clearly has problems with the incarnational perspective. By "incarnational", Zahl refers specifically to the Orthodox (not even Catholic!) view of theosis. If he wants to do that, then he needs to see how strongly catholic even Luther was and even reflected strong theosis sympathies, as shown by the Helsinki school of Lutheran study. In the end, Zahl is simply being polemical at this point. I agree, as an evangelical protestant Anglican, that Anglicanism is not a "third way", but rather a Protestant faith with an Episcopal, historic model. Nonetheless, there is ALSO a "Catholic" face to Anglicanism, whether he (or I!) like it or not. Moreover, he uses "Protestant" and "evangelical" very loosely and I was often unclear what his definitions were. In the end, the book captured my interest, but was thankfully short. I got this feeling it was written by someone who was annoyed by Anglo-catholic elements in his denomination and wanted to write against them. I also found the dearth of discussion around third world Anglicanism (a VERY protestant and evangelical movement!) to imply

that England, and to a lesser extent, the US, was where one discussed "Anglicanism". This is a mistake.

While I don't expect my Anglo-Catholic friends and brothers to like this book, I did find much of the history included in the "Protestant Face of Anglicanism" to be refreshing. While not an exhaustive treatment of the subject, Fr. Zahl's book contains many quotations from the English Reformers that clearly demonstrate their protestant outlook on things such as Salvation, the nature of Holy Communion (including transubstantiation) and the other Sacraments. While many Anglicans today prefer to forget our protestant beginnings, the fact of the matter cannot be denied, especially when looking at the 39 Articles which were heavily influenced by the theology of Martin Luther and others. While I don't think this book will "convince" those who disagree with Zahl's positions, I do find that it may be useful as a book that at least presents the "other side of the argument" that one often hears between Anglo-Catholics and "low-Church" or "Protestant Evangelical Anglicans". Maybe the beauty of this treatment is that Anglican Christians on both sides of these issues still find ways to live in communion with each other, and that just may be one of the best elements of true Anglicanism that the book contains.

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