

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE POSITION AND PROSPECTS OF PROTESTANTISM IN THE POST-WAR WORLD¹

IN this brief survey I propose to look at the Protestant Church from three points of view—the numerical, the political, and the spiritual, in the hope that we may thus gain some idea of her prospects in the Post-War World.

I. THE NUMERICAL POSITION

I must trouble you with some statistics for only so can we secure anything like an adequate impression as to the present position of Protestantism. I have taken pains to secure the most reliable data possible, but, even so, I must ask you to be content with approximate figures for the simple reason that absolutely certain figures are not obtainable in all cases.

Different denominations calculate their membership on different principles. The Roman Church, for example, calculates the number of its followers by counting everyone who has been baptised into it in infancy, whether he now attends it or not, while the Baptists, at the opposite extreme, regard as members only those who have received Baptism by immersion after personal profession of faith. The figures I give, however, are reliable for purposes of comparison.

THE POPULATION OF THE WORLD. We may take the population of the world as 2,186 millions. The *Roman Catholics* claim to have 386 millions or 17.7 per cent of the population of the world. Some would put the figure even higher, but we may take 386 millions as pretty near the mark. This means that rather more than one-sixth of the human race is claimed by the Roman Church. It is true that these figures are inflated because of the manner in which the Roman Church arrives at her statistics. Let us remember, however, that on the Communion Rolls of many a Protestant Church there also figure frequently as members many who have not been inside a church for years.

¹ Address delivered to the Scottish Reformation Society in Glasgow on September 19th, 1944.

The *Protestants* in the world may be taken as 240 millions, i.e. 11 per cent of the total population of the world. We might thus say that one-ninth of the world's population is Protestant.

The *Orthodox Church* claims to have 160 millions of the world's population within her fold or 7.3 per cent of the whole.

The total Christian population of the world is 786 millions or nearly 36 per cent of all the inhabitants of this planet.

You will notice that the Protestants are, statistically, far behind the Roman Catholics. We might express the ratio by saying that for every 22 Protestants there are 35 Roman Catholics.

It is worth while glancing at the position of the other principal religions of the world:

The *Mohammedans* have 244 millions or 11.1 per cent of the world's population—just a trifle more than the total number of Protestant Christians.

The *Buddhists* number 175 millions or 8 per cent of the world's population; the *Hindus* 268 millions, i.e. 12.3 per cent of the population of the world.

The *Confucians and Taoists* number 400 millions or 18.3 per cent of the population of the world and are, thus, easily the most numerous religious group in the world.

It will be seen that the Protestants with 11 per cent of the world's population cannot by any means claim a leading place among the various religious bodies. Nevertheless it is an advantage that the majority of Protestants belong to the United States and the British Commonwealth of Nations, which have occupied such an important place in the history of our modern era. I think it could be shown that they have gained that position just because of the qualities bred in them by their Protestant principles.

THE BRITISH ISLANDS. The population of *England and Wales* in 1941 was 41,460,000. The Roman Catholics in 1940 claimed 2,406,419 for their communion out of this total, i.e. 5.8 per cent of the whole population of England and Wales.

The population of *Scotland* in 1941 was 5,007,000 and in 1940 the Roman Catholics claimed 614,419; i.e. over 12 per cent of the whole population of Scotland is Roman Catholic.

The combined population of *Eire and Northern Ireland* in

1941 was 4,188,000 of which the Roman Catholics claimed 3,013,701 in 1940; i.e. 72 per cent of the population of Ireland is Roman Catholic.

If we look at the figures for the British Islands, we cannot fail to notice that in proportion to population Scotland has more than twice as many Roman Catholics as England and Wales. This, of course, is due to the remarkable influx of Irish Roman Catholics to work on Clydeside in by-gone days. It cannot be imagined that this influx will continue in the future. Eire glories in her independence and has deliberately chosen to separate herself from the rest of the British Commonwealth of Nations in this tremendous struggle for their own freedom and for the freedom of the world. Eire cannot very well claim rights after the War as a member of the Empire and send her sons freely into Scotland while at the same time claiming to be independent.

AMERICA. We find in the *United States* a population of 135 millions. It is somewhat difficult to get exact figures as to the number of Roman Catholics in the United States—the figures I have seen vary from 18 to 25 millions. Let us take this latter figure, and with the knowledge that it is an exceedingly generous figure. Nevertheless, it gives them only 18.5 per cent of the population of the United States. Those who are accustomed to think of the people of the United States as predominantly Anglo-Saxon in race may think this a very large proportion; but the truth is that nowadays the United States are only very partially Anglo-Saxon as far as blood is concerned. The immigration from southern Europe, especially Italy, has been very large, as well as from intensely Roman Catholic countries like Eire, Poland, Belgium, Roman Catholic Germany, as well as Quebec, Mexico, and Central America. Taking this into account, it is truly marvellous that the proportion of Roman Catholics in the United States is not much larger than it is, and let it be remembered that the figure we have conceded them errs certainly on the generous side.

It shows that the free atmosphere of the United States where men are delivered from the shackles of every kind of traditionalism is not particularly favourable to the spirit of the Roman Hierarchy. The freedom-loving people of that country, many of whose fathers tasted bitter oppression in other lands in the past, will see to it that religious freedom is maintained

for all their citizens—including Roman Catholics. It is true that the Roman Catholic population of the United States increased 7 per cent in the decade from 1926 to 1936 according to their own statistics but this is no more than the normal growth of the population of the United States in that period.

Turning to *Canada*, we find that the population of the Dominion in 1931 was 10,400,000 of whom 4,285,000 were claimed as Roman Catholics, i.e. over 41 per cent. This, however, is explained through the large number of Canadians who are of French origin and who are increasing very rapidly indeed. So rapid is this increase that one wonders whether the prophecy of a perfervid French-Canadian priest when his people were defeated may not yet be fulfilled. He declared: "To-day the French are defeated in Canada but the time will come when the whole of this land, east and west, will yet again be under the dominion of our race." Let it be remembered that the type of Frenchman in Canada is not that of modern France but of the old pre-Revolution France with their pathetic subservience to the priest. Nevertheless, when I was in Montreal seven years ago, there were signs among the younger generation even in the Roman Catholic Province of Quebec that they do not accept the domination of the clergy quite so meekly as their fathers did. There were not a few signs of discontent and even of secession in some parts. In spite, therefore, of the very large proportion of Roman Catholics in the country I do not think they are at all likely ever to control the Dominion.¹

Let us now glance for a few moments at the situation of the Roman Church in *Latin America*.

Here you have a field which has been almost exclusively in the hands of the Roman Church for over four centuries, yet I am safe in saying that from among her own sons there has arisen there a far more bitter opposition to Roman clericalism than you find anywhere in the British Empire or in the United States.

Take *Mexico* with a population of 19½ millions. In no country has the Roman Church been so curbed and controlled

¹ If we take the *British Empire* as a whole, we find that 16½ per cent. of the Christian people are Roman Catholics, taking the figures for 1931. It is, however, rather remarkable that in the Empire there are as many Mohammedans as Christians (taking Roman Catholics and Protestants combined); and there are 2½ times as many Hindus as Christians in the Empire. In the whole British Empire, Christians to non-Christians are in the ratio of 4 to 23. Such facts ought to fill us with very serious thoughts as we think how much still remains to be done for the evangelisation of the World.

as in Mexico—to the extent in some provinces of allowing only one priest for every 50,000 people, while papal representatives have been banished from the country or imprisoned when found guilty of disobeying the laws of the Republic. And the entry of foreign priests into the country has been completely stopped. These actions of the Mexican government have often been described as “persecution”. All that they really amounted to was a determination on the part of the government to rule in their own land.

In *South America*, out of 61 million people there are only 2 million Protestants, but this figure reveals remarkable Protestant progress in the last half century.

In every South American country there is a very large proportion of the people strongly in favour of religious freedom for all. I should say that at least 60 per cent of the people have perfectly open minds in matters of religion, and when Protestants have suffered something bordering upon persecution it has always been due to the pressure of the Roman Catholic hierarchy on dictatorial government authorities who happen to be in power for the time being. The danger to the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America does not arise so much from Protestant missionaries as from her own discontented children.

Strange as it may seem, the Roman Catholic Church in recent times has been far more secure in Great Britain and the United States with their passionate love of religious freedom for all, than in those traditionally Roman Catholic lands where other faiths were so long cruelly crushed by the iron hand of clerical oppression. In Britain and the United States priests are respected like any other members of the community and we do not hear those crushing comments on priests which we hear in purely Roman Catholic countries like Spain, where it is a common saying: “Beware of the bull from the front, of the mule from behind, and of the priest from all points of the compass.”

II. THE POLITICAL POSITION

AMERICA. I was in South America while Mussolini and Hitler were consolidating their position and building up their Totalitarian States. I speak of the effect of their influence in South America.

The view had been sedulously spread abroad that both Italy and Germany had been led to the verge of ruin by the intransigence of the parties of the Left. Mussolini and Hitler were constantly represented as saviours of their countries. They were born psychologists and knew not only how to influence their own people but other lands as well. They were everywhere regarded as strong men. They seemed to be leading their people in the path of progress and prosperity. Their commerce increased amazingly and their propaganda was incessant. The British and American nations were represented as decadent pluto-democracies. Our day was supposed to be done. We appeared to have grown weak and confused.

Hitler broke treaties, but the British, French, and Americans did not seem to mind. We were insulted, but we seemed to take it because of our weakness. The Japanese subjected our nationals in China to revolting treatment—even to stripping them naked in the public streets—but the once powerful British lion seemed too old and feeble to do anything about it.

Our greatness seemed to be a thing of the past like the glory that was Greece or the greatness that was Rome. As Totalitarianism in Europe went on constantly increasing its power and prestige, you could see before your very eyes the governments of South America and the South American Press veering round more and more in their favour. It seemed a matter of political necessity; for the democracies appeared too weak or too decadent to defend either themselves or their friends, and it seemed positively dangerous not to be on the winning side of Fascism and Nazism.

At the same time you could see the claims of the Roman Church increasing visibly year by year. Britain and America, the great bulwarks of Protestantism, seemed to be broken reeds. It was natural that an authoritarian Church should feel a certain kinship with authoritarian governments and exert her power more and more as these seemed to get everything their own way.

In 1933 a very farseeing Peruvian educated in the United States and afterwards occupant of an important government post in Lima, said to me, "You mark my words, we are in for a period of intense Conservatism for some years". He spoke the truth. Conservatism in South America means close association of government with the Roman Hierarchy. That

was the year Adolf Hitler attained to power. Explain it how you will but Conservatism in South America kept step with the progress of Totalitarianism in Europe. It was duly noted in Latin America how the Pope made a Concordat with Hitler; and later how he blessed the armies of Mussolini as they were setting forth for the conquest of Abyssinia. It was also carefully noted how Mussolini gave back to the Pope his temporal sovereignty and the Vatican State was set up. They saw also how German and Italian troops in collaboration with Mohammedan Moors helped to overthrow the constitutional Republican government of Spain; and how this combination nowhere received so much approval as in the Vatican where General Franco was known as the favourite son of the Roman Church. It was duly observed, too, in Latin America that the democracies of Britain and France were either indifferent to the fate of democracy in Spain or were too weak to make their influence felt.

While all this went on, the Roman Church in South America redoubled her efforts. She tried to control all education, not only public but private; tried to exclude Protestant missionaries; through her emissaries Protestant preachers were arrested and Protestant meetings were broken up.

Things reached a climax in January 1942. Archbishop Antonio Dos Santos Cabral of Rio de Janeiro wrote the American Ambassador asking the United States government to take steps to exclude Protestant missionaries from Brazil which for long had been a most liberal country where a young Protestant Church had grown up—a vigorous Church both spiritually and intellectually, and respected in the country. In January 1942 the Archbishop declared in his letter to the American Ambassador that Protestant work “was causing antipathy and resentment against the United States of America” and urging that for the maintenance of a better understanding with the United States, Mr. Sumner Welles and President Roosevelt should intervene by taking “the necessary precautions” against Protestant workers coming from the United States to South America. The letter of the Archbishop was the signal for a great hue and cry against Protestant missionaries all over South America. In this campaign certain Protestant journalists played an ignoble part. The great cry was that Protestant work in South America was endangering President

Roosevelt's "Good Neighbour Policy". Please note the utterly intolerable nature of this claim. It is, in effect, a claim that where Roman Catholics are in the ascendant no Protestant workers must enter on any account—or it will cause international complications politically and produce "antipathy and bitterness".

Worse than anything from South America was a statement issued on November 14th, 1942, in name of all the Archbishops and Bishops of the Roman Church in the United States. They homologated the attitude of the Roman Catholic leaders in South America; and sought to take advantage of the War situation to force the United States government to issue an order prohibiting Protestant preachers from leaving the United States to go to Roman Catholic countries.

Dr. George Howard, an evangelist, born in Buenos Aires and a citizen of the Argentine, undertook to visit all the countries of South America and ascertain on the spot whether the presence of American Protestant missionaries in South America really endangered Roosevelt's "Good Neighbour Policy". In Santiago, the capital of Chile, where I was at that time, he secured glowing testimonies from leading intellectuals and public men, including three ex-Presidents of the Republic, expressing in unmistakable terms their admiration for the Protestant missionaries and thankfulness for their work. There was no mistaking the enthusiasm of their communications, and yet they were all nominally Roman Catholics. He had practically the same kind of communications wherever he went—and the result of his investigations is being published in book form.

This whole question raised no small stir in the United States and at first many were inclined to accept the Roman Catholic presentation of the case, but with further enlightenment the tide turned completely and in the end the Roman Catholic leaders were sorry that they had ever raised the question.

At the end of last War, a regular wave of Liberalism passed over Latin America, and Protestant missionaries and lecturers were welcomed as never before. As Fascism and Nazism gained influence in the world, the attitude of governments stiffened towards Protestantism. Now that we are about to win another World War, I venture to predict that Liberalism will come into its own once more in South America—and this

will mean immediately more freedom for Protestant work and every kind of Protestant institutions.

EUROPE. I can say the same with equal confidence regarding *Italy* which henceforth is to have a Democratic government. Two examples will illustrate this. As soon as Sicily was liberated by the Allies there appeared immediately a Protestant newspaper edited by Dr. Teodoro Balma, the pastor of the Waldensian Church at Catania. This paper, *El Correo Siciliano*, with its free discussion of religion and life, is a symbol of the new era in Italy after years of suppression and censorship.

So also is the case of Signor Nicolo Introna, an honoured Elder of the Waldensian Church in Rome. He was Vice-President of the Bank of Italy, and was summoned by Mussolini who in a wild harangue called him "Mason, *Waldense*, *Protestante*, and vile anti-Fascist". Signor Introna replied: "I am a *Waldense*—I believe and preach the equality of all men before God." Mussolini retaliated by having posters placed all over Rome vilifying him; but when the armies of Liberation entered Rome Marshal Badoglio made him President of the Bank of Italy. If such events could occur under Badoglio much more may we expect freedom of worship and freedom of speech under a still more democratic government in Italy.

I am not without hope that a better day for *Spain* may dawn in the not distant future. The intolerant government of General Franco, under which nearly every Protestant place of worship in the country has been closed down, may not last for long if for no other reason than that the economic condition of the country is deplorable under his regime. When the hundreds of thousands of Republicans now in prison camps are released their influence on public opinion will be profound.

France is once more to have a democratic regime. It is no small gain that this great country so long consecrated to freedom of speech and freedom of religion is now once more to stand for these great principles. In matters of faith France has in recent times a good tradition in regard to tolerance; and the one million Protestants of Huguenot descent will have before them a great opportunity in the years which lie immediately ahead.

Holland with her vigorous and evangelical Calvinism may be depended on to maintain fully her great Protestant heritage both at home and in her Colonies.

Denmark and *Norway* seem to have learned a great deal spiritually during the War while in the furnace of affliction. It does not seem too much to look for a revived and more evangelical Lutheranism among them.

Who can tell what the future of *Germany* is going to be with a people poisoned by the teachings of Adolf Hitler? It is rational to expect, however, that when the War ends German evangelicals like Pastor Niemöller who have suffered so bitterly for their faith will come into their own and exercise a mighty influence for the cause of God. It is almost the only ray of hope for the spiritual future of the German people.

Czechoslovakia. Who can doubt that when the dark night of oppression is past, the land of John Hus and of the great President Masaryk may be relied on to keep an open door for the Evangel?

Hungary has a tolerably good record in the matter of religious toleration, and with her large and influential Reformed Church may be reckoned on to do well in the new world in which we are promised freedom of conscience after the trammels of tyranny are removed.

Russia. The whole world rejoiced last year at the recognition granted by the Soviet Government to the Greek Orthodox Church. There can be no question that the Church in Russia needed a time of cleansing in the fire. She has had such a time. In spite of all opposition, the Baptists have made great progress in Russia and we may well pray for the advance of this branch of the Protestant family in that land. Who knows but that with their innate mysticism the Russians may yet become a mighty evangelical power?

ASIA. What shall we say of the mighty continent of Asia with its ancient history and ancient religions?

In the *Holy Land* once again after so many centuries of Mohammedan domination the door is wide open to preach the Gospel to Jew and Gentile.

In *India* with its seething millions there are still only about six millions of Christians, but the Christians there can become a leavening influence to leaven the whole lump. There is a danger that if India secured Dominion status fanatical Hinduism might place obstacles in the way of Christian Missions. This matter ought to be carefully watched when it is proposed to give India her independence.

China with her 450 million people is already envisaged as one of the greatest nations of the future—because of the qualities of her people, her vast population, and her extensive territory. One of the greatest encouragements in the world of to-day is the noble Christian character of the majority of the Chinese Cabinet where no less than twelve are out and out Christians. I know of no other government in the world which in hours of crisis has adjourned for two or three days to engage in prayer for God's guidance. Let us keep our eyes on China. Once more "light cometh from the East".

AFRICA. On the continent of Africa there appears to be nothing inimical to the Protestant cause—in fact it is all the other way. In *South Africa* the Dutch are a vigorous Protestant force to be reckoned with. Throughout the continent there are powerful Protestant missions—but it must be sadly acknowledged that the Protestants and Roman Catholics combined form only some 6 per cent of the total population of the continent. There is the menace of 44 millions of Mohammedans with their fierce fanaticism—and there are no less than 90 million Animists. A revival among the ten million people in the Coptic Church would work wonders for the continent, and there is the cheering fact that in *Ethiopia* there is set before the Protestant world to-day a more open door for co-operation with the Copts than for countless centuries.

From this hasty survey of world conditions we can safely say that there is "a great door and effectual opened" to the Protestant Church. We are living in a day of opportunity which calls for great activity.

It is safe to say that Eire, Spain, Poland, Austria, and the Province of Quebec remain at this moment the greatest strongholds of the Roman Church. But these countries represent a comparatively small proportion of the human race and cannot be regarded as countries destined to influence profoundly the immediate destinies of men.

There is the question as to what the Vatican may do, or try to do, after the War, especially in connection with the freedom of worship promised to all nations in the Atlantic Charter. I must say from my own experience in South America that I have found a strong tendency among leading Roman Catholics to interpret freedom of religion as freedom to maintain the Roman Church and as a corollary freedom to prevent

the Protestant from carrying on his religious work in the community. It is worth while watching to see that genuine religious freedom is assured for the world on the basis of the Atlantic Charter and that no false interpretations are allowed to be placed upon it.

III. THE SPIRITUAL POSITION

We can take it as certain that, after the War, there will be a wide open door for the Protestant Church to carry on her Gospel work in practically every land. What more could we wish for? Those of us who have lived in lands where freedom of worship has been denied or where it has been conceded grudgingly, can realise what an immense gain this is going to be.

As to the prospect for the Protestant Church, everything depends upon her spiritual condition. The question is how far the Protestant bodies will have sufficient spiritual vitality to take advantage of the great opportunities which will present themselves in the not distant future.

If we are to fail it will not be because of anything the Roman Church can do, but because we ourselves are not on fire with zeal for the extension of Christ's Kingdom.

To do our work in the future every Protestant Church in the world needs solemnly to examine its defects and lack of spirituality. We need to humiliate ourselves before God for past failures, and pray with heart and soul for a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.

It is not enough to point out the errors of Romanism, or point out one another's errors. It is not enough to protest continually against one abuse or another. Protests are of value only up to a certain point. Beyond that I believe they do more harm than good. I respectfully suggest, therefore, that we protest somewhat less than we have been doing and teach our people a great deal more than we have hitherto done in regard to the great eternal verities of the faith. Instead of always preaching our ministers would do well to take a turn at teaching from their pulpits as well as in their Bible Classes. In this way most important questions of doctrine as well as living religious questions of the hour can be most effectively dealt with. I am persuaded that this is a crying need, and that if it

were wisely done would be welcomed in our congregations and do a vast amount of good.

We must never forget that we are Ambassadors for Christ and that the function of an Ambassador is to speak not in his own name but in the name of the power which sent him. As preachers of the Gospel we are sent to expound the Word given us by Christ Who sent us. Outside of Scotland I have often had to listen to men who had not even a text from Scripture. All the time they were trying to tell what *they* thought and not delivering the message Christ had given. In Scotland itself we have all seen the type of preacher who says in effect, "Let us look the text squarely in the face and then pass on". We must never forget that "the Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants". We can never exhaust its riches, and its interpretation will give ample scope to the greatest intellects in our pulpits.

A good deal more could be done by our people in the way of keeping in touch with our legislators. I am sure many of them would welcome the suggestions of Christian men and women. Members of our congregations could represent to their members of Parliament, far more than they do, what laws should be passed in a Christian land; and, above all, Church members should see to it that their influence is felt at election time—at both Parliamentary and Municipal elections.

I do not think that anyone would pretend that we are to-day enjoying an epoch of spiritual prosperity—no denomination which is honest with itself could claim such a thing. There is one great source of hope—that the Churches of the Reformation are to-day more conscious of their weaknesses, and are more humble than at any time within the lifetime of any of us. Is it too much to hope that this means that we are all going to fall back upon the inexhaustible power and resources of God more than we have ever done?

In the Protestant Church we have a wonderful machine, brought to a high degree of perfection, capable of achieving the most marvellous results—but it needs more driving power from on high.

God grant that in every land where the Evangel is known Ministers, office-bearers and communicants may be filled indeed with the blessed power of the Holy Spirit. Should

this happen, the Roman Catholic question would soon cease to trouble us and many another Church problem would be solved. The first great step, therefore, is to seek reformation for ourselves, and the rest will follow.

A. M. RENWICK.

*Free Church College,
Edinburgh.*