

“Are Lutherans Protestants?”

Dear Antwort Mann,

In a recent Bible Class, the teacher made what was, to me, a startling statement. He said that Lutherans are not Protestants. I’m not sure how I feel about that. So, are Lutherans Protestants, or not?

Signed,

“Protestant, I Think,”

Dear “Think,”

The short answer to your question is: “Yes – and No.” It all depends on what you mean by the word “Protestant.”

Luther, and those who followed him were the first Protestants in that they protested the abuses of doctrine and practice in the Roman Church of that time. Yet, the Lutherans wanted to retain the doctrines and historic practices of the Church that were faithful to the Scriptures and beneficial for upholding the Gospel. The Lutheran Movement was a Conservative effort to reform the Church and remain in it, not to eliminate it. This is why much of our liturgies, church year calendars, and “worship forms” look just like what the Catholics have.

On the other hand, there was also a more radical reform movement that sought to completely reject anything that was identified with Rome. Liturgies, vestments by the clergy, candles, incense, altars, crucifixes, and so much more were rejected by these radical reformers. Even the doctrines of the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion were altered from God’s gracious acts on our behalf that impart grace and forgiveness to us, to ordinances or commands from God that we are to do for Him. This particular branch of the “Protestant Movement” sought to completely separate from the Roman Church and reject anything that was part of her history and practice.

So, when the phrase “Protestant” is used today, it usually is reflective of those groups coming out of the Radical Reformation movement: Baptists, Calvinists, Quakers and Puritans, and later Methodists, Pentecostals, etc.

Lutherans really hold the middle ground between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism (and get shot at by both sides). We are “Protestants” in that we were the first to protest Rome’s abuses in order to correct them. We are “Evangelicals” (in fact, we were the first evangelicals) in that our doctrine and practice are firmly anchored in the Gospel and the grace of God to sinners through Christ. And we are “catholics” (notice the little “c”?) in that we are part of, not separate from “the one holy, catholic (universal, Christian) and apostolic Church” as confessed in the Creeds.

True Lutheranism, in its doctrine and practice (not in the perversions by those “wannabe” Romanists or Reformists), is the best of both worlds. It upholds the truth of all Scripture as centered in Christ, and respects and practices those traditions in keeping

with the Gospel that have been handed down by the entire Church catholic from her beginnings.

So, if by Protestant you mean “not part of the Church of Rome,” then yes, we are. If by it you mean, “just like the Baptists and other Reformed churches,” then no, we aren’t. Simple, huh?

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

Best regards,
Der Antwort Mann