

ALISTER McGRATH. CHRISTIANITY'S DANGEROUS IDEA: THE PROTESTANT REVOLUTION – A HISTORY FROM THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY TO THE TWENTY-FIRST.

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation gave rise to a surge in publications of various kinds and quality. Against this background Alister McGrath's book really stands out: the Oxford professor studies the history of the Protestant revolution from 16th to 21st centuries. The book was published in 2006; the Ukrainian translation ("Dukh i litera" publishing house) appeared in 2017 through the effort of the Resource and Research Center of the Euro-Asian Accrediting Association of evangelical schools.

The Ukrainian reader is quite overwhelmed by the amount of Reformation-related rhetoric that became ubiquitous in this year of celebration: another chronicle of the historical development of Protestantism is probably the last thing he/she wants. That seems to be the chief disadvantage of works covering large historical periods. In this respect, however, McGrath's research is qualitatively different. The Protestant insistence on the individual's right to study the Bible independently is what the author calls a "dangerous idea". That idea defined the key stages in the development of Protestant movements. In light of this foundational principle McGrath studies the manifestations of Protestantism in history, seeking to discover the identity and the inner dynamics of this movement. Such an approach allows the reader, on the one hand, to understand the unexpected growth and expansion of Protestantism, and, on the other hand, to appreciate the complex nature of the movement – the movement that a priori cannot avoid new tensions and conflicts, while having a unique capacity of adapting to changes in local contexts.

For the East-European reader, the chief value of this research has to do with its holistic character, since in our part of the world, knowledge about Reformation is usually quite fragmented. In one book, McGrath studies the origins of Protestantism, its distinctive features, and future potential. In doing that he takes into account both the radical changes in the scholarship that were occurring around the turn of the century and the transformation that is taking place in Protestantism itself. That transformation, in turn, stimulates new studies of its nature. The author's desire to avoid wide-spread clichés and stereotypes relating to Protestantism deserves special attention. In this work, we will not find simplistic generalizations and trite typology. For example, the author is not in a hurry to identify the "Reformation" with "Protestantism"; rather he demonstrates the complicated relationship between the two terms. In his usual manner McGrath defines Protestantism as a combination of reformist movements – as some sort of "movement of movements" that share common aspirations but have different ways of striving for them. Also, his work reflects a renewed interest in the social history with its emphasis on social structures and institutions, which questions the validity of describing Reformation exclusively in terms of its leaders' theological views. At the same time, McGrath rejects the attempts of marginalizing the key figures of the Reformation: their views and activities are given proper treatment. In a similar way, the author seeks to avoid excessive "demonization" of the

medieval Catholicism and shows the multidimensional life of the church in whose depths the demand for reform emerged preparing the soil for Protestantism. The historical events are described from the perspective according to which the “the past not only shapes and illuminates the present but anticipates the future” (p. 10). Given the wide chronological and thematic scope of the material, the author admits that he did not attempt “[t]o provide a thorough survey of this vast subject,” which would be “unrealistic” (p. 11). Rather, using a selective treatment of the narrative of Protestantism, he gives special attention to those aspects of the narrative that influenced its further development. McGrath calls it “an interpretative history, a highly focused reading, a broad-brush approach that aims to identify and interpret what turns out to have

been significant rather than to chronicle everything that happened” (p. 11). Such a retrospective approach, somewhat pragmatic, is highly useful for the Ukrainian reader who comes across a massive amount of literature on Protestant history and is in danger of getting lost in details, thus failing to identify the core ideas that shaped the trajectories of the development of that movement. It is important to note that the development and expansion of Protestantism is not described through a binary opposition “Catholicism – Lutheranism”: a wide range of Protestant beliefs and practices is shown.

The historical variety within Protestantism comes from its unique foundational ideas and is reflected in its specific influence on culture. Using results of historical, cultural, and conceptual analysis, McGrath convincingly demonstrates that the main differences between the Protestants stem from different ways of interpreting the Scripture, which resulted in the variety of ways for solving theological, ecclesiological, social, and practical problems. One cannot but agree with the author: the entrepreneurial mindset typical for many Protestants had a great influence on the Western civilization, especially in the area of economics, while the multitude of the competing visions within Protestantism resulted in a variety of cultural influences. Describing the great missionary expansion of the 19th century, McGrath prefers to speak about the emergence of “local Protestantisms” that seek to interpret and apply the Bible in their own contexts without feeling the need to conform their own views to the Western ideas or values.

The last part of the book deals with the transformation of Protestantism in the 20th century – the process related to the global cultural domination of the United States, the remarkable growth of Pentecostalism, and the spread of Protestantism in the global South. Reinterpretation, transformation, and the world-wide expansion of Protestant ideas affect all levels of Protestant identity. These processes are related to ecumenism, missionary activity, theology, spirituality, and ecclesiological innovations – phenomena that, according to McGrath, are connected with globalization.

The author is convinced that in the 20th century the external factors influencing the Protestant identity changed. While the main internal factor – the central meaning of the biblical text – remains, the external force that helped the Protestants unite in spite of their differences, was “the other.” Until recently, Catholicism was seen as that “other” – the common enemy, yet the changes in the relationship between the branches of Christianity resulted in the search for a new enemy. For the conservative Protestants, it is the modern secularism that became “the other.” At the same time, a considerable number

of Protestants see it as some sort of ally: under his influence the church may return to its authentic status – that of a witness – without having any aspirations to power.

Unlike many other authors who study Protestantism, Alister McGrath in his research gives considerable attention to the Pentecostal revolution in Protestantism. Such deep interest in the Christians baptized by the Holy Spirit comes not just from the explosion-like numerical growth of the relatively young movement (within one century Pentecostalism gained more followers than all the other branches of Protestantism put together), but also from its unique ability to adjust in different contexts, especially in the global South and from the adaptation of the Pentecostal experience by the mainstream Protestant groups. While not attempting a comprehensive analysis, McGrath describes those aspects of the Pentecostal teaching that made it so popular, but he does not accept the widespread interpretation of Pentecostalism as the “new” (“second”) Reformation.

Toward the end of the book, the author seeks to visualize the future of Protestantism considering such factors as its expansion to the global South, emergence of more contextualized theological systems, lack of centralization, and further “mutations” caused by a new reading of the Scripture by the next generation.

Putting together a number of stories, Alister McGrath attempts to create a “grand narrative” (p. 461) of the origin, development and renewal of Protestantism, and that attempt deserves the modern reader’s attention. Given the impressive selection of the sources used for the research and the author’s effort to be on the cutting edge of the studies in the history of Protestantism, one can recommend this book as one of the best to those who join the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

*Mikhailo Mokiienko  
The Research Center of EAAA  
Lviv, Ukraine*

*МАРТИН ЛЮТЕР. БУНТАРЬ В ЭПОХУ ПОТряСЕНИЙ [MARTIN LUTHER: REBEL IN AN AGE OF UPHEAVAL]. ШИЛЛИНГ ХАЙНЦ. ПЕР. С НЕМ. (СЕРИЯ “ИСТОРИЯ ЦЕРКВИ”). М.: ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ББИ, 2017. XVI + 710 С.; ISBN 978-5-89647-358-9; 1180 РУБ., 540.00 ГРН.*

Пятисотлетний юбилей Реформации вызвал целую лавину как популярных, так и научных публикаций, посвященных историко-богословскому осмыслению важнейшего события европейской истории. Учитывая первостепенную роль Мартина Лютера в формировании богословских контуров Реформации, не приходится удивляться также новым исследованиям жизненного пути и наследия немецкого реформатора. Некоторые из этих книг отдают дань юбилейным празднованиям, пересказывая на новый лад знакомые истории и их традиционные интерпретации. В то же время, нужно отметить значительное число свежих публикаций, авторы которых пытаются привлечь во внимание как новейшие