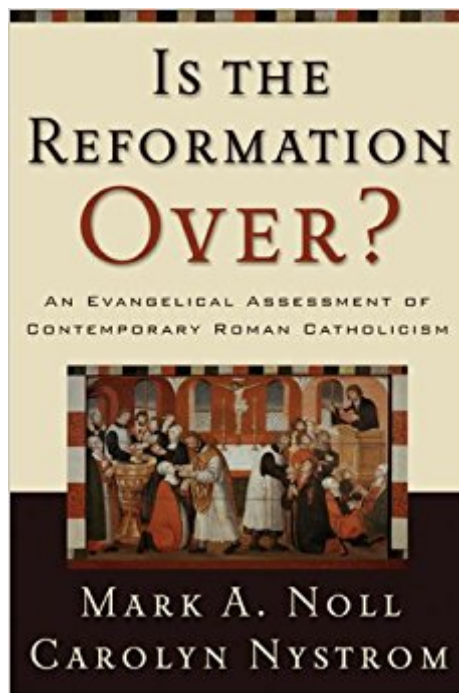




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Is The Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment Of Contemporary Roman Catholicism



Synopsis

For the last few decades, Catholics and Protestants have been working to heal the wounds caused by centuries of mistrust. This book provides an evaluation of contemporary Roman Catholicism and the changing relationship between Catholics and evangelicals. The authors examine past tensions, post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogues, and social/political issues that have brought Catholics and evangelicals together. While not ignoring significant differences that remain, the authors call evangelicals to gain a new appreciation for the current character of the Catholic Church. Written by Mark Noll, one of the premier church historians of our day, and Carolyn Nystrom, this book will appeal to those interested in the relationship between evangelicals and the Catholic Church.

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Customer Reviews

The eminent evangelical historian Noll and journalist Nystrom offer a lucid and charitable account of the current state of evangelical-Catholic relations. Only scant decades ago, they point out, Protestants inveighed against "the formalism, the anthropocentric worship, the power mongering, and the egotism" of Rome. But now, they wryly observe, all those qualities "flourish on every hand within Protestant evangelicalism." This willingness to see the proverbial beam in one's own eye is one of the great strengths of this book, which has as much to say about the authors' own Christian tradition as about Rome. Surveying the changes in Catholicism since Vatican II, and documenting the numerous encounters that have ensued between Catholics and Protestants, Noll and Nystrom find "a dramatically altered terrain" that offers hope for further rapprochement. Catholics will

appreciate the authors' focus on official teaching, especially their appreciative, though not uncritical, survey of the Church's Catechism. Not all readers will agree that on the crucial Reformation-era topic of justification, "Catholics and evangelicals now believe approximately the same thing," and Noll and Nystrom barely mention popular practices, like the cult of Guadalupe and the late Pope John Paul II's reinstatement of indulgences, that trouble evangelicals. Still, even if they never quite answer the question posed in their title, Noll and Nystrom certainly make the case that that question's time has come. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Christianity Today 2006 Book Award Winner"Here is superb theological journalism. The authors review Roman Catholic alterations of posture, if not of position, during the past half century; assess the overall shift as irreversible and transformational; and speculate provocatively on the significance of current Catholic/evangelical interaction in today's divided Christendom. Their thorough historical analysis will be a landmark resource for exploring the theological questions that Roman Catholic reconfiguration raises. This is an important book."--J. I. Packer, Regent College"Noll and Nystrom have produced a volume remarkable for its intellectual maturity and depth. Not since Berkouwer's great works on Catholicism have we seen anything like this. Written with utter clarity and directness, undergirded by immense historical and theological scholarship, this volume is the best available statement of the relationship and by itself is a vital step in making informed conversation between the parties possible."--William M. Shea, College of the Holy Cross; author, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America*"To their credit, [the authors] examine deep and difficult matters with care and moderation. . . . *Is the Reformation Over?* is most successful as a systematic, historical documentation of a complicated and often contentious relationship. This is to be expected of Noll, whose outstanding works of church history are marked by careful research and well-measured opinions."--Carl E. Olson, *Touchstone*"The Reformation is over only in the sense that to some extent it has succeeded. This book examines, with scholarly care and sensitivity, recent evangelical-Roman Catholic developments that lend credence to this possibility. This book will help all of us who are committed to exploring the common heritage, as well as the differences that still remain, between the two largest faith communities in the Christian world."--Timothy George, Beeson Divinity School; executive editor of *Christianity Today* --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

This book was recommended to me by a friend with a great heart for ecumenism, and I thank him for the recommendation. The book is well researched and documented, showing the development

of relations between Protestant/Evangelical and Catholic leaders - from mutual hostility to mutual good-will. It offers a unique, outside perspective on the modern Catholic Church. As a Catholic, I'm amazed at how respectful and dedicated Noll and Nystrom are to understanding Catholicism, but how they still get some basic ideas wrong. After introducing the book's road map in the first chapter, the authors start off with a balanced view of mutual Catholic and Protestant antagonism from Reformation-era Europe (and provides an excellent list of misconceptions from both sides on p. 42). But soon they narrow their view to North American anti-Catholic writings and actions, mostly in the 19th and early 20th century. They quote personal letters and magazine articles that show "the widespread evangelical concern about the Catholic civil threat as much as long-standing concerns about doctrinal errors." (p. 56-67) Chapters 2 and 3 left me with a number of concerns and questions, such as 'Is the entire book filled with anti-Catholic angst?', 'Are the authors endorsing these views?', 'Why is this book so one-sided?', and 'Who exactly do they mean by Evangelicals?' But my apprehension was quelled by the time I got to chapter 4, which is the best history of official Protestant and Catholic dialogues I have ever read. Since Noll was one of the original signers of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) documents, he gives an insightful account of that initiative as well. The book even recounts how those anti-Catholic sentiments mentioned so pointedly in Chapter 2 have been directed towards Evangelical leaders who signed ECT documents or otherwise friendly towards Catholicism. Still there are a number of points of Catholic doctrine that Noll and Nystrom get wrong, such as- "Catholics currently may read the Living Bible and the Good News Bible, both produced under Protestant auspices" (p. 25) implying Catholics may not read other versions. The truth is that Catholics can read any version of the Bible, and those two are not the most popular among Catholics.- The second Vatican Council had a "change of mind in matters ... as fundamental as revelation, the relation of the natural to the supernatural, salvation and doctrines of the Church and papal authority" (p. 60). Catholics claim that the council changed the Church's pastoral approach on a number of issues, but did not change any doctrines and did not formulate any new ones.- Because of ecumenical dialogues, "Catholics came to respect individual salvation and the priesthood of all believers" (p. 85) - implying that there was little Catholic teaching about these topics before the dialogues. The truth is that the Catholic Church has always believed in and taught both, even though she lives them out differently than other Christian groups.- "Humanae Vitae ... continued the Catholic prohibition against all forms of birth control except the rhythm method." (p. 223) In actuality, Humanae Vitae merely speaks of engaging "in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile" for "well-grounded reasons for spacing births" (HV 16). Also a number of forms of NFP had been developed at the time HV was published, which Pope Pius

XII had encouraged in 1951, seventeen years earlier. It is evident to me that the authors are trying to accurately describe Catholicism; they just get parts of it wrong. I think that shows that Catholic teaching is a difficult thing to grasp, even for open-minded, well educated Protestants and Evangelicals. An unexpected contribution is the authors' chapter dedicated to the 1985 Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). They describe "paragraph after paragraph leading to worship and prayer" (p.119). If nothing else, hearing a self-identified Evangelical Protestant's view of the CCC is worth reading by any one interested in Evangelical-Catholic dialogue. After reviewing many points of disagreement between Catholics and Evangelicals, the authors conclude that the Catholic notion that "Christ and his church are one" is the fundamental difference between the Catholic and Evangelical worldviews (pp. 146-147). I'm not certain if I agree with this analysis, but I do find it both fascinating and well thought-out. The book ends with a great outside (Evangelical) view of current trends in American Catholicism. In short this book offers an insightful view of how open-minded Evangelicals view Catholicism, but it is a very poor source for learning what the Catholic Church actually teaches.

I have read a lot of Catholics (or Evangelicals that have converted to Catholicism) lately. So Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom's book is a different take at Catholicism. There are some great parts of this book and some weaker parts of this book. The weakest part is the back and forth discussion of the many discussions between Protestant denominations and Catholics. This was interesting, but repetitive; it seemed to just keep going on and on. Many of the issues between Protestants and Catholics keep coming up again and again. However, I do not know a better way to present the data, and it needed to be presented. The discussion of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together statements were more interesting. For one, there were a number of interviews with the participants. These were mostly high profile and interesting people. I was disappointed that Noll did not speak specifically of his involvement narratively. (He was one of the original signers.) Noll brings the background of a historian. Early chapters are about historical background of the Catholic/Evangelical divide. And his historical background strongly influences the final assessment. Over and over again it is clear that while theological issues were and still are a significant issue between Protestants and Catholics, it is practical issues of church and practice that that will be most difficult to overcome. These two quotes are really the summary of the whole book. "For Catholics, the church constitutes believers; for evangelicals, believers constitute the church. For Catholics, individual believers are a function of the church; for evangelicals, the church is a function of individual believers." and "Theologically considered, the recent engagement of evangelicals and

Catholics testifies to a significant confluence of opposites. Catholics, whose ecclesiology is so high that the church as an institution is integral to its understanding of the gospel, and evangelicals, whose ecclesiology is so low that the church is often forgotten in their proclamation of the gospel, have been backing toward each other in a world where the gospel itself has become a costly commodity. In this awkward dance, many Catholics and evangelicals have bumped into each other, back to back. What should they do when they turn and try to ponder what to make of these others who seem so obviously to be honoring the gospel but in such strange terms, with such strange practices, and in such strange conjunction with other Christian realities?"It is a rare book that I say that the appendix is one of the best parts of the book. Noll and Nystrom tell us what we should be reading to move forward. Noll is one of those Evangelicals that is behind closer relationships between Catholics and Evangelicals and this book strongly shows that. If you are interested in the issues between Catholics and Evangelicals, without glossing over real theological and practical issues, this is a book you should pick up.

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