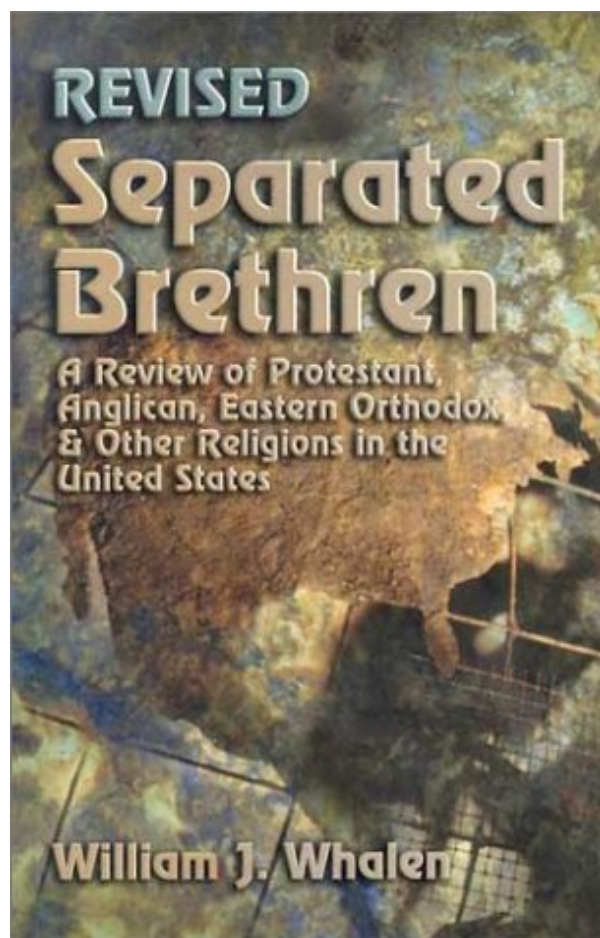
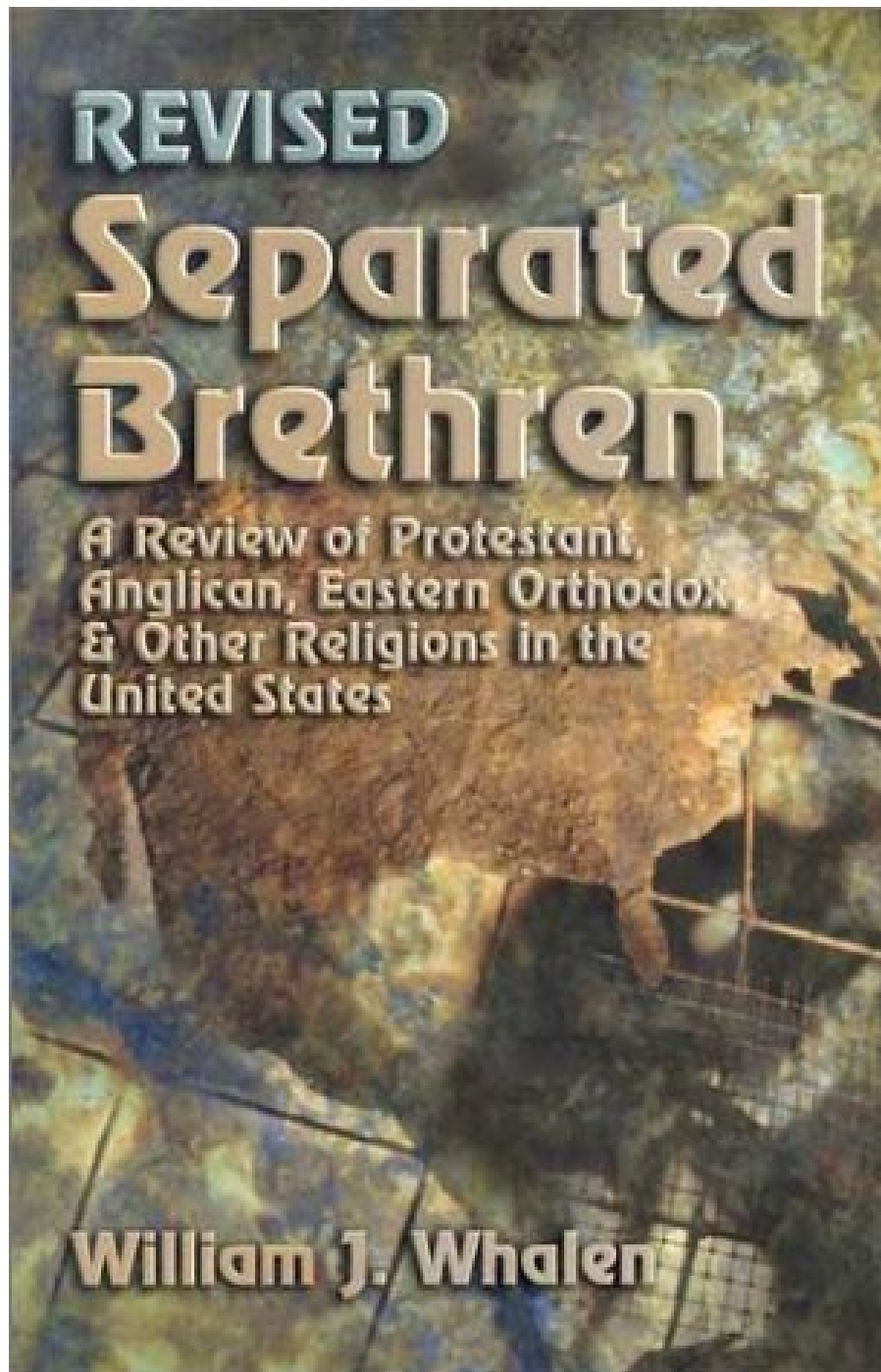


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"I have other sheep...."

By A Customer

"Separated Brethren" was first published 40 years ago and has been revised and updated twice since then. That this book is still around is proof of its being an excellent one-volume reference guide on religious denominations in the United States; I myself found this title very instructive and well-written. The book mostly concerns Christian denominations not in union with the Roman Catholic Church, yet author William J. Whalen includes non-Christian religions as well, such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, the Baha'i faith, and the better-known cults. Given the fact that Mr. Whalen is Catholic and Our Sunday Visitor is a well-known Catholic publishing house, the book compares the beliefs of the "separated brethren" to Catholic teaching, yet it is remarkably objective at the same time. Mr. Whalen does not fall into a condescending or critical mode; he simply discusses the origins of the different churches and describes their beliefs. He will at times provide slightly droll commentary on teachings that appear odd to mainstream Christians, especially teachings from denominations that claim to be Christian such as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. A lot, though, has happened in the non-Catholic religious world since this third edition of "Separated Brethren" came out in 1979; take, for example, the merger of two major Lutheran churches in the United States; the establishment of ultra-traditionalist Catholic groups which have separated from Rome; the rise of Messianic Judaism; renewed debates in the larger Protestant denominations on matters of morality; increased defections of conservative Anglicans/Episcopalians into the Catholic Church; and the role of the Orthodox churches in a post-Communist Russia and Eastern Europe. All these events, plus the hopelessly outdated church figures some 20-plus years old, make it necessary for the book to be revised as soon as possible.

27 of 29 people found the following review helpful.

Table of Contents	
By A Customer	
preface	7
I. America's religious panorama	9
II. basic differences between Catholicism and Protestantism	18
III. the Lutherans	25
IV. the Presbyterians	39
V. the Episcopalians	49
VI. the Methodists	60
VII. the Baptists	72
VIII. the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ	81
IX. the United Churchmen	89
X. the Quakers	96
XI. the Perfectionists	104
XII. the Pentacostals	108
XIII. the Seventh-Day Adventists	117
XIV. other Protestants	125
the Moravians	125
the Mennonites	127
the Reformed	130
the Christian Reformed	131
the Brethren	131
the Salvationists	134
the Covenanters	136
XV. the Unitarian Universalists	138
XVI. the Eastern Orthodox	145
XVII. the Old Catholics	152
XVIII. the Cultists	167
the Swedenborgians	168
the Spiritualists	169
the Unity School of Christianity	171
the New Thinkers	173
the Worldwide Church of God	175
the Hare Krishnas	177
the Scientologists	178
the Moonies	179
XIX. the Mormons	184
XX. the Jehovah's Witnesses	198
XXI. the Christian Scientists	207
XXII. the Jews	218
XXIII. the Muslims	226
XXIV. the Baha'is	230
XXV. the Buddhists	238
church membership statistics	241
general bibliography	247
index	249
252 pages total	

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Excellent survey of religions practicing in United States

By A Customer

This is a sweeping, informative, wide survey of every major branch of Christianity (and several other non-Christian religions) practicing in the United States. This book is written, assuming a knowledge of Roman Catholic Christianity (theology & ritual), which is used as the basis of comparison to all of the other denominations and sects of Christianity. This book primarily focuses on the differences these religions have from Latin Rite Roman Catholic Christianity. This perspective is due 1) to the author's background, 2) to the Roman Catholic publishing house which publishes this book, and 3) to the historical fact that the world's branches of Christianity formed in some way, directly or indirectly, as a reaction to (Western European) Roman Catholic Christianity, to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, or to pre-1054CE (CE=Christian Era) unified Catholic-Orthodox Christianity.

Although this book assumes familiarity with both pre- and post-Vatican II Latin Rite Roman Catholic Christian theology & rituals, it is easily accessible by Catholic Christians practicing non-Latin Rites, Eastern Orthodox Christians, High Church Anglican Christians, and other Christians whose theology and/or rituals resemble Catholic or Orthodox Christianity's. This book is also accessible (with only slight mental translation) to Protestant denominations and sects, especially those readers who are well-versed in the history and theological underpinnings of their own faith.

This book is "catholic" in that its perspective is that the Christian denominations and sects are all branches of one worldwide Christian church (presumably implying the divergent "separated" and convergent "brethren" in the title). This book is "orthodox" in 2 ways: 1) It tries to not teach heresy and 2) it assumes that there is a Christian Church which specifies an official interpretation of Christianity (e.g., Roman Catholic and/or Eastern Orthodoxy) from which various Protestant denominations and sects have diverged. If the reader keeps this perspective in mind, this book is extremely objective and is not overtly preachy or condescending. If the reader is violently offended to their very core (as I suspect that some Americans are) by the very concepts of catholicism (i.e., one worldwide Christian Church) or of orthodoxy (i.e., one official interpretation of Christianity), then the informative content of this book may at first be overshadowed by its catholic/orthodox assumptions & perspective. All Christians in the United States should read this book to understand how their religion fits into the history of the United States, into the history of the world, and into the diversity of Christian theology & ritual.

This book has not been updated in nearly 2 decades. (Dear Our Sunday Visitor & Bishop John D'Arcy, please release an updated edition.) Thus, this book's statistics are dated and stale. But this quantitative tarnishing does not diminish the immensely-informative qualitative explanations which are timeless (other than the absence of the 1980s and 1990s).

I was thoroughly enthralled by each and every chapter, as this book reveals the interconnections between every major branch of Christianity practicing in the United States or their ancestral forms in Europe. Other non-Christian religions are also discussed. I learned so many interesting tidbits from this book. There are Protestants who make the Sign of the Cross and genuflect. There are Protestant Christians who do *not* believe in the Trinity (i.e., 3 Persons in one God), but rather Jesus only. There are Protestants who predate the Reformation. Eastern Orthodoxy baptizes by triple immersion, one for each person in the Trinity. Eastern Orthodoxy not only has infant baptism, but also infant confirmation/chrisamation. Papal corruption, the existence of convents of Protestant nuns, churches with 1, 3, or 8 sacraments (instead of Catholic/Orthodox Christianity's 7): it is all in this book and more. "John Calvin" was not John Calvin's actual name in his native French; it was Anglicized. Who was Zwingli? So what do the 2 words "unitarian" versus "universalist" mean, anyway? These are just some of things which I learned and more. Any reader who is curious about other branches of Christianity (and about world religions in general) will find this book fascinating.

The views expressed in this feedback are my personal opinions and are in no way connected with my employer or any other organization.

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