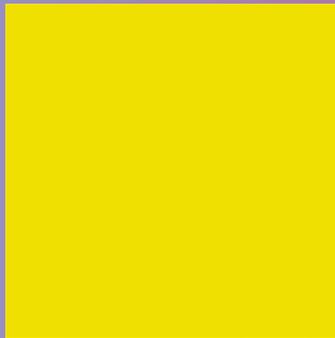


5

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PROTESTANTISM

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# PROTESTANTISM

## BEFORE WE START

1. Write down five things that come to mind when you think of Protestants.
2. Write down three questions you would like to ask about Protestantism.



Figure 5.1  
Interior of a Lutheran  
Church with an organ.  
Source: © christoph-  
mueller / Pixabay

## 5.1 A LETTER FROM HANNAH: MY FAITH, EXPERIENCE, AND LIFE AS A PROTESTANT.

Hello, I am Hannah, and I come from a Protestant family. I want to tell you about what that means for me. Protestantism arose about 500 years ago because people did not agree with the course of the 'Western' church. An important moment was when Martin Luther drew up a list of 95 points of the practices of the church of that time, which he believed were not in line with the Bible.

Let me tell you more about my life as a Protestant. When I wake up, I often try to do a quick prayer. My father has always made it clear that prayer is important because it is a way to communicate with God.

Faith is very important to us. We Protestants emphasize that God asks us to put our faith in Jesus, rather than try to live perfect lives. For most protestants, this faith is more than just saying you believe that Jesus has once walked on earth. It means that you trust him as someone who loves you and wants the best for you, also today. We call this personal faith. Such faith should also be visible in what someone does in their life.

Oh, maybe I should have started with telling you about Jesus at the start. Just as in other Christian traditions, Jesus is at the center of Protestantism. In the Bible we read that Jesus walked on this earth, was crucified, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. Traditionally, Protestants believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he did all this in order to save mankind. My sister, on the other hand, thinks Jesus is important, but she sees him only as an exemplar whose life shows how we can live together lovingly with each other.

What we believe about Jesus comes from what we find in the Bible, which is a holy book to us. For this reason, we read a section of the Bible at dinner every day. My parents also go to church for a Bible study every week. There, they reflect on the Bible together with others. When they encounter a problem in life, they often seek for guidance in the Bible, because they believe the Bible is the word of God. My sister disagrees with this. According to her, the Bible is just a book of humans, but it may serve as a valuable source of inspiration for life.



Figure 5.2  
Bible and folded hands  
as a sign of praying.  
Source: Pixabay

Every Sunday we go to church , where we sing songs, listen to a sermon, and pray together. My brother no longer attends church with us. He thinks that in traditional protestant churches, people are too much focused on themselves and on their salvation. He says he can experience what we do in church at home also by watching a church service. According to him, he can live out his faith better by being focused on others. He does a lot of volunteer work, such as helping a family of refugees who recently moved to our village.

The sermon is an important and big part of the church service for us. A lot of time is allocated to the sermon in my church, but I know of other churches where sermons are much shorter. The sermon is always about a Bible text that is applied to the Christian life. We call the person who leads the church the pastor or preacher. Our pastor is a nice man, who had to study for 6 years before he was allowed to lead our church. I also went to the church of a classmate a couple of times. In her church people are allowed to speak who have not studied but believe that God commissioned them to speak in churches.

The pastors in our church are always men. Women are not allowed to become a pastor and therefore cannot lead a church service. My father says this is what the Bible teaches us. In our church, there was a discussion about this three years ago and it was decided not to change anything about it. My sister was one of those who disagreed. She therefore went to another church. According to her, it is not at all in the Bible that women should never preach. She also thinks that this belief is outdated.



Figure 5.3  
Protestant pastor  
Source: ©  
EugenioAlbrecht /  
Pixabay

Another important part of the church service is singing together, which gives us a means to worship and praise God. In our church, this is done under the guidance of an organ. My mother likes this very much. I find it a bit old-fashioned myself. What I like better is the band with guitar, drums, and keyboard in my classmate's church.

Another element in our services we consider important is the Lord's Supper. In some churches, this is even more important than the sermon. In my church, we celebrate this once a month during a church service. The Lord's Supper involves remembering what Jesus did for us and consists of eating bread and drinking wine. The bread represents the body of Jesus and the wine the blood of Jesus. Jesus himself said that his followers should do this regularly to remember him. By consuming bread and wine, we remember that Jesus died to save us.



Figure 5.4  
Lord's supper symbols  
Source: Pxfuel

During a vacation in South America with my uncle and aunt, we visited a church that was nothing like ours. There was a lot more singing and a lot of dancing. They also spoke in a strange language. My uncle called it "speaking in tongues." They also prayed for people while laying hands on them. My uncle told me this is a Pentecostal church. He said that Pentecostals consider it important to listen to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power of God who works through people. Protestants believe with other Christians that there is one God, but he exists of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I don't understand this well, but it is called 'the Trinity.'



Figure 5.5  
Pentecostal youth  
worshipping God during  
a youth congress in  
Mexico.  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Another symbol that is important to us is baptism. This ritual symbolizes the purification of a person and the admission into the community of God. In our church we administer what is called infant baptism, in which water is sprinkled over a baby's forehead. In my classmate's church, on the other hand, they believe that a person should not be baptized until they make a conscious decision themselves to be baptized. This is called believer's baptism and happens later in life and the person is fully immersed in water. Both forms are usually done while proclaiming the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Figure 5.6  
Adult baptism in the  
Jordan River in Israel (left)  
Source: © Pxfuel



Figure 5.7  
Infant baptism in a  
Church (right)  
Sources: © Pxhere



Faith in God, central in Protestantism, is not just saying you believe but also showing it in rituals and in living as a follower of Jesus. This means that we must act loving and caring for each other and the world as Jesus did.

## 5.2 EXERCISES

### Exercise 1: Understanding the letter

*Answer the following questions to better understand the contents of Hannah's letter.*

1. Hannah was talking about prayer. Which statement is consistent with what she said?
  - a. Protestants only pray at fixed times of the day.
  - b. Prayer is a way for Protestants to communicate with God.
  - c. Prayer plays a minor role in the Protestant church service.
  - d. Protestants only pray together with others.
  
2. Select everything important in a Protestant church service
  - a. Penance
  - b. Eating together
  - c. Icons
  - d. Rituals
  - e. Music and singing
  - f. The Bible
  - g. Prayer
  - h. Being together
  - i. Dancing
  - j. j. Kneel down
  - k. Meditation
  - l. Sitting still

3. For each statement, indicate whether it is true or false:
- a. Protestants usually believe that the Bible is the word of God.
  - b. Protestants believe there are three Gods.
  - c. All Protestants believe that a pastor should always have a specific degree.
  - d. The Sunday church service plays an important role in Protestantism.
  - e. Personal faith is important to Protestants.
  - f. In Pentecostalism, they believe that the Holy Spirit is irrelevant today.
4. Which two forms of baptism exist in Protestant churches and how do they differ?
- ...baptism and the ...baptism
5. In her story Hannah talks about herself, her parents, her sister, brother, classmate, uncle and aunt. All of them are Protestants, but they don't always agree in their beliefs. Fill the correct person for each descriptions of a person.

*Brother, Classmate, Hannah, Parents, Sister, Uncle/Aunt*

Believes that Jesus is an example and that the Bible serves as a source of inspiration.	
Attends a church where choosing to follow Jesus marks an important moment through baptism.	
Likes more modern music in the church and finds churches that differ in form and style from his own church very interesting.	
Attend a church where experiencing the holy spirit is important.	
Finds it important to practice his faith together with others and has not so much with the individual focus of many churches.	
The Bible is the word of God for them and they use it to make life decisions.	

## Exercise 2: Practice

For many Protestants, the concept of personal faith is very important. If you look at the story, what does this personal faith look like in the life of a Protestant?

What does faith or searching for meaning in life look like for you?



Figure 5.8  
Man praying in an empty church.  
Source: © Pexels / Pixabay

### Exercise 3: Doctrines of Faith

The five solas of the Reformation are five principles that describe what Protestants in the 16th century considered important, formulated in Latin. Although these principles were central during the birth of Protestantism, there has been much discussion about them in the past 2 centuries. Protestants differ in their valuing of the different principles today.

<i>Sola Scriptura</i> Only through Scripture	Protestants have traditionally believed that one can only know God with certainty through the Bible. The Bible is therefore considered the Word of God.
<i>Sola Gratia</i> Only by grace	Important to Protestants is the belief that not the works of men but only God's grace can save someone. Grace is getting something that one doesn't deserve.
<i>Sola Fide</i> Only by faith	This principle implies that people become justified in God's eyes only by faith in Jesus. This principle is in line with the Sola Gratia because it emphasizes that righteousness is not due to human actions.
<i>Solus Christ</i> Only Christ	This principle means that only Jesus plays the crucial role in salvation and can bridge the distance between humans and God. For Protestants this also means that Jesus can be worshipped as he is the Son of God.
<i>Soli Deo Gloria</i> Glory to God alone	This means that everything people do should be for the glory of God and not for their own honor.

What do you notice about the five principles? What do these principles reveal about Protestants?

These principles reflect what is important to many Protestants. What principles would you set for yourself as important for your life and/or faith? Why do you think this is important?

#### Exercise 4: Contemporary developments - gender

The Bible speaks of men and women in several places. These Bible texts are not only about the relationship between men and women, but also about the roles given to women in the life of the church. Gender roles and what the Bible says about that is a topic discussed in many Protestant churches. The Bible text below often plays an important role in the discussion.

##### *Ephesians 5:21-33:(NIV)*

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Read the following 2 quotes about the role of women:

“Men and women, though equal in essence, were designed for different roles. Women are in no sense intellectually or spiritually inferior to men, but they were quite clearly created for a distinctive purpose. In the economy of church and family, the Bible says women should be subordinate to the authority of men. Yet scripture also recognizes that in a completely different sense, women are exalted above men - because they are the living and breathing manifestation of the glory of a race made in God’s image.” ~ John F. MacArthur Jr.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John MacArthur, *Twelve Extraordinary Women: How God Shaped Women of the Bible and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson Books, 2005), 8.

*"If a woman is held back, minimized, pushed down, or downplayed, she is not walking in the fullness God intended for her as his image bearer, as his ezer warrior.<sup>2</sup> If we minimize our gifts, hush our voice, and stay small in a misguided attempt to fit a weak and culturally conditioned standard of femininity, we cannot give our brothers the partner they require in God's mission for the world. " ~ Sarah Bessey<sup>3</sup>*

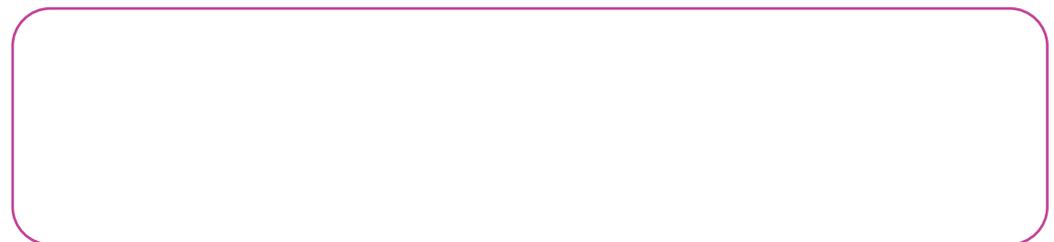
MacArthur and Bessey represent two different camps within Protestantism. John MacArthur represents the first position. He believes that men and women have different but complementary roles in the world. Sarah Bessey represents the second position, and she believes that men and women are equal in the roles they are allowed to fulfill.

Compare the quotes with the Bible text. What questions do you have about this Bible text? Do you think these questions are easy to answer?



The discussion about gender roles is very sensitive and often focuses on discussions of how the Bible should be interpreted. For some protestants this discussion impedes on the principle of Sola Scriptura. The discussion can lead to frustrations, anger and even churches that split. Are there discussions you have in life that conflict with your principles of Exercise 3? How do you deal with them?

This exercise is focused on letting students reflect on their own conflicts. The goal is to make students understand some of the underlying conflicts in a person that often fuel discussions within religions.



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<sup>2</sup>Ezer Warrior is a term used to emphasize the strength of womanhood.

<sup>3</sup>Sarah Bessey, *Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible's View of Women*, First Howard Books trade paperback edition. (New York: Howard Books, A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2013), 80.

## Exercise 5: Contemporary developments - Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is a fast-growing movement within Protestantism. This movement has experienced strong growth, especially in South America and Africa. Pentecostalism can be described as a movement of energy and strength. The working of the Holy Spirit is central. This means that supernatural experiences are often emphasized by Pentecostals. Consider, for example, divine healing and prophesying. Pentecostalism gives much value to the experience of people. Living with the Holy Spirit then means personally and physically experiencing the Holy Spirit.

An important concept to talk about is *supernatural*. It refers to everything that does not fit into our common perception of the laws of nature. This is a very important concept in the Pentecostal movement. Below is a black and white photo of people praying for divine healing for a woman in a wheelchair. Not all Protestants necessarily believe in God working in supernatural ways. Some may believe that the miracles in the Bible were supernatural, but do not believe that supernatural events occur in our time.



Figure 5.9  
Laying on of Hand in the  
Church of God in Lejunior  
Kentucky on 9 May 1946  
Source: [Wikimedia  
Commons](#)

A frequently described supernatural experience is prophecy. Prophecy means passing on a message from God that says something special about the world, the direction of the church, or people's lives. In Pentecostalism, this is a common practice, but in Protestantism as a whole, there is a great deal of disagreement on this subject. Many Protestants do believe that God can speak to a person's heart, but they do not believe in prophetic messages supposedly given to some people.

Why does the concept of prophecy lead to discussion within Protestantism?  
Use the principle of Sola Scriptura from Exercise 3 in your answer.



What is your view on the concept supernatural?



## 5.3 GLOSSARY

### **Bible**

The Bible is the sacred book of Christians. It is composed of two parts: the Old and the New Testament. The Bible is actually a collection of various types of books, such as poetry, narratives, visions, and numerous other genres. To Protestants, the Bible is made up of 66 books.

### **Baptism**

Baptism is a ritual that symbolizes the purification of a person and his/her admission into the church. In some churches, a baptism involves sprinkling water on the head, usually of a baby. In other churches, an (older) person is completely immersed in water.

### **Church**

Church is a term that is used in several ways. It can be used to refer to a community of believers that are engaged in activities with one another. In addition, the term church can be used to describe the community of all believers in the world. Finally, the buildings that are built specifically for Christians to gather on Sundays are also called a church.

### **Pastor**

A pastor is a person who leads a Protestant church community. In some denominations, this person must undergo training before they are allowed to do so.

### **Faith**

Faith is a strongly held belief and trust in a thing or person. In Protestantism and Christianity in general faith is put in Jesus and God.

### **Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is one of the three persons in the Trinity. Pentecost celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church.

### **Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper is a sacred act that Christians perform in all traditions perform. It consists of eating bread and drinking wine. By consuming bread and wine believers remember that Jesus died to save humanity. According to the Bible, Jesus himself instructed his followers to perform this act regularly.

### **New Testament**

The New Testament are the 27 books of the Bible written after the life of Jesus.

### **Old Testament**

In the Protestant Bible, the Old Testament contains 39 books which were all written before the time of Jesus.

**Pentecostalism**

Pentecostalism is a movement within Protestantism that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit through people.

**Salvation**

The word 'salvation' means that someone is saved from harm. In Protestantism the term is used to indicate that a solution has been provided so that people can bridge the distance between mankind and God.

**Sermon**

A sermon is a speech by a pastor on a Bible text with the aim of teaching people about Christian faith and life.

**Sola's**

The Solas are a set of principles that make clear what Protestants in the 16th century, and often still today, consider important in their religious life

**Trinity**

The Trinity is a central doctrine within Christianity. This teaching states that there is one God who consists of three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

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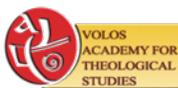


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