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**PROTESTANTISM IN THE USA**

**Eva Šnebergová**

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**PROTESTANTISM IN THE USA**

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Děkuji vedoucí mé bakalářské práce Mgr. Kamile Velkoborské,  
Ph.D. za pomoc a podporu při zpracování.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of the Bachelor's thesis is to present contemporary Protestantism in the United States of America. Protestant Church is very old and the most widespread Church in America and it may appear as an outdated or uninteresting religion. My objective is to acquaint the reader with the main characteristics, key terms and self-presentation of today's American Protestants.

Protestantism is a very extensive religion. In today's America, there exists large number of Protestants denominations which have a constant tendency to the splitting. It also means that Protestants can differ in their opinions or beliefs among themselves. Therefore, I try to simplify it and provide the major information.

The thesis contains the introduction, one main part which is further divided into twelve subsections, and the conclusion. The first three subchapters provide the general information about the definition of the term Protestantism, the main characteristics of religion and the brief history.

In the fourth subsection of my thesis I explain basic terms related to Protestantism. It can help the reader to better understand context of my Bachelor's thesis.

The fifth subchapter is dedicated to the difference between mainline and evangelical Protestants who are considered to be the two principal categories of contemporary American Protestants.

The next part deals with three main Protestant denominations, American Baptist Churches USA, United Methodist Church and



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They are described from a theological point of view according to their official webpages.

The seventh subsection is called Self-presentation of Protestants. It presents Protestants beliefs and also their moral attitudes to social questions, e.g. homosexuality. Mostly, there are provided opinions of three main denominations which are described in the previous subchapter. However, this part also contains moral attitudes of some other Protestant denominations.

In the eight part I work with statistical data collected from religious census and compare results.

The last four subchapters inform about the contemporary role of women in Protestantism, teenagers and Protestant religion, culture and a scandal to which the Protestant Church faces.

The reason why I chose Protestantism in the USA as a topic for my Bachelor's thesis is because my grandparents are Roman Catholics and therefore, I am baptized. In spite of this fact, I consider myself to be an atheist because my baptism happened when I was a child. I have to confess that I am not interested in Roman Catholicism therefore I want to learn about another Christian religion which seems to me more logical.

## **2 PROTESTANTISM IN THE USA**

### **2.1 The definition of the term Protestantism, Protestant**

Protestantism is a movement which appeared in northern Europe in the 16th century, opposing a teaching and tenets of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Together with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism is one of the three main branches in Christianity. [1]

Protestant is one who obeys the principles of Protestantism which foundations are established on the rules of the Reformation in Europe. Protestants are the people who do not agree with the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. The origin of the term comes from French or German word *protestant* – “protesting”, but they both derived it from Latin. [2]

### **2.2 The main principles of Protestantism**

Protestantism has three fundamental principles. These are following:

1. Justification by Faith Alone (Sola Fide)
2. Scripture as the supreme authority in faith and practice (Sola Scriptura)
3. Priesthood of the believer. [3]

Justification by Faith Alone was founded to be the central doctrinal issue under conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the 16th century. It means that a man is justified before God, and is also saved, by faith alone. He is not justified by doing good works like in Catholicism but through his relation of the faith to God. Certainly, Protestants do not lower

a value of good works, they only claim that good works should not be considered as conditions or sources of justification. [4]

Scripture as the supreme authority in faith and practice was one of the fundamental slogans of the Reformation. This principle claims that the Bible is the only authority in the Christian faith, life and behaviour. The Scripture is superior to the teaching and traditions of the church. [5]

The idea of the third doctrine, Priesthood of all believers, consists in having the direct access to God. Protestants do not accept any earthly mediators between them and the God. They refuse the Pope and other habits that are common for the Roman Catholic Church such as a confession to a priest, indulgences, prayer for a dead or an execution of services in Latin language. Protestants have the only mediator between them and God and that is Jesus Christ. [6] [7]

## **2.3 History of Protestantism**

### **2.3.1 Formation of Protestantism in Europe and the Reformation**

In the 16th century the Roman Catholic Church represented the large powerful organization that guarded Europe, especially Northern Europe. At that time, the Church controlled almost every part of people's lives. It influenced the politics because representatives of the Church cooperated with kings or princes. The Church was also very rich. The relationship between a man and the Church was based on money. Ordinary people had to pay for marriage, funeral and many other religious services. Priests were often corrupted because they were considered to be the "entrance" to the heaven. People were afraid that if they irritated the Church, they would come to hell. [8]

Protestantism appeared first in Germany, Switzerland and in England. Very important character of it was Martin Luther (1483–1546). By publishing a document called *The Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517, he demanded the reforms of Roman Catholicism. Luther strongly disagreed with the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, e.g. with the selling of indulgences. He also tried to persuade believers that the Bible needed to be interpreted as a supreme authority over the teaching of the Church. [9]

Protestantism caused not only the religious division but also the political separation of the Europe. This religion succeeded because it was supported by some kings or affluent people. English king Henry VIII (1491-1547) had a conflict with Rome, John Calvin (Swiss reformer, 1509-64) had the aid from the officials to lead the reforms and Martin Luther was supported by German princes. The protestant opinions spread across the Europe to many other countries. [10]

### **2.3.2 Birth of Protestantism in the USA**

After the discovery of America in 1492, it was supposed that the New World would be Catholic because the majority of settlers came from Spain or Portugal, the two main Catholic powers. Also Catholic France colonized there and owned the territory of today's Canada. Protestant England started to settle Jamestown in Virginia as late as at the beginning of 17th century. The settlers established the ministry of worship according to the Church of England and the official religion was called Anglicanism. Several American colonies became the new home for English people who were affected by the religious conflicts in the United Kingdom. [11] [12]

In 1620, the Pilgrims settled Plymouth, Massachusetts.

*First to arrive were the Pilgrims, a small separatist group from the most radical wing of the Puritan movement, with no interest in government ties. [13]*

They were not interested in any authority, such as popes or bishops. Ten years later, they were followed by another English Protestant group. These people settled the Boston area and called themselves the Puritans. The Puritans were strict about their religion and required a bigger observance of the faith. [14] [15]

These early Puritans believed in the teaching of John Calvin that God elected only some people to the salvation which means that the others had no possibility to come into a heaven. This teaching is part of the *Doctrine of Predestination*. [16] [17]

### **2.3.3 The First Great Awakening**

The term itself means the religious revival or recovery. The First Great Awakening took place at the beginning of 18th century in the British American colonies. American Protestants wanted to revitalize the Christian faith, the religious worship that disappeared at that time. The main characters were called “revivalists” or “revival preachers”. [18]

They impressed the believers with the dynamic prayer and preaching and they also organized the public preaching. George Whitefield or Jonathan Edwards were two key figures at that time who were able to attract the attention of believers. They became well-known for preaching in the open areas and crowds of people were listening to their speech. [19] [20]

### 2.3.4 The Second Great Awakening

The Second Great Awakening was a period of a revivalist movement in the early 19th century. It presented Protestantism as a religion of the people and for the people. The Second Great Awakening is known by the holding of the camp meetings. Especially Methodists and Baptists developed these camp meetings because they wanted to spread the religion.

*People travelled to the camp meetings from long distances, and the preachers proclaimed day and night at improvised pulpits in the woods. [21]*

The camp meetings also offered religious encouragement and social communication to the settlers. The Second Awakening transformed Protestant theology in America. [22] (See Appendix 1, p. 60)

It led to create the idea that everyone had the equal access to the salvation and the religion itself was a matter of choice. It meant that Puritans teaching about the predestination was on the decline. It is also called the “organizing process” because it spreaded Christianity to newly discovered places and helped to develop a religious and educational surroundings. [23] [24]

The preachers of the Second Great Awakening were often not very educated but their preaching was so enthusiastic that they were able to catch listener’s attention without any problem. This has remained till these days.

*..., as often preachers who have little formal theological education and are not credentialed by major religious denominations lead the largest megachurches and television ministries. [25]*

Both Awakenings were a period of a religious excitement and inventiveness. The new Churches were established and changes in existing denominations were made, e.g. Methodists and Baptists became the largest religious communities in the country. [26]

One of the results of two Great Awakenings can be that the Americans feel stronger because of the religion.

*They feel empowered by religion against other forces that sometimes seek to dominate their lives.* [27]

It is a contrast to Europe where the states often support the Church. Ordinary people perceive the religion unified with the institutions that control their lives. That can be probably the reason why Europeans often turn to secular or antireligious organizations. [28]

In the time of the Second Great Awakening, The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was adopted (1791). It guaranteed the freedom of religion and freedom of expression. The First Amendment also contained the clause about the separation of church and state in the United States. [29]

## **2.4 Explication of some Protestant terms**

Protestants use many terms which have their origin in Catholic Church. However these terms can have another meaning in Protestant faith. The meanings of terms can also vary in terminology within the Protestantism because the religion contains many denominations. [30]

### **2.4.1 Baptism**

The baptism is one of two principal sacraments practiced during the Protestant rites. It symbolizes a covenant between God and an individual.

The baptism is usually done by sprinkling or pouring water on a man's forehead or by immersing him or her into water. There exist two types of baptism, an infant baptism and an adult baptism. Every Protestant denomination practices only one of these two. The infant baptism is mentioned below in a chapter about the United Methodist Church. In any case, through the baptism a person is welcomed to the Church community, to the "God's kingdom" and proclaims his commitment to the gospel. [31] [32]

#### **2.4.2 Benediction**

This word means any act or saying of blessing. Traditionally, the benediction is expressed at the end of the service. The minister or the official books of the church may pronounce the benediction. [33]

#### **2.4.3 Fellowship**

This term simply marks out the association of people sharing the same opinions or ideas. For Protestants the word means that all the components in a church are spiritually connected with its members. Fellowship may be characterized as a community of individuals who can appreciate the unity of human family and they also suppose that Christian love works as the guide for personal behaviour and for defeating evil. [34]

#### **2.4.4 Lord's Supper**

Lord's Supper is the second most significant sacrament in Protestant rites. It generally describes the Holy Communion. Lord's Supper, which symbolizes Christ's Last Supper, his death and



resurrection, is considered as a spiritual meal. The bread stands for the Christ body and the wine symbolizes the Jesus blood. [35] [36]

#### **2.4.5 Minister**

This term is most common used and stands for a person who is in charge of a Protestant congregation. The minister is charged with spiritual functions but he is not superior to the others. He is chosen by his peers to minister to his fellow Christians. [37]

#### **2.4.6 Ordinances**

These have the identical meaning as sacraments. The expression ordinance is regularly utilized to define the baptism and the Lord's Supper within the Protestantism. The term sacrament is used in Catholicism to express five other sacraments (Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony and Extreme Unction) that are not admitted by the Protestant Church. However, the term sacrament is often used by contemporary Protestants which means that the difference between both expressions is not so noticeable. [38]

#### **2.4.7 Vestry**

In its literal sense, a vestry is a room which is connected to a church and serves as a place for the clergy. The ministers prepare there for a divine worship and also the sacred vestments and equipment for liturgical services are stored here. [39] [40]

## 2.5 Mainline vs. Evangelical Protestants

Every Protestant denomination can be classified as mainline or evangelical. Both have their beliefs and opinions. On the basis of these beliefs, it can be determined if Protestants rank among mainline or evangelical. However in some cases, their opinions or attitudes can interconnect which mean that in beliefs of mainline Protestants can be found some features of evangelical Protestants and in beliefs of evangelical Protestants can be found features of mainline Protestants. [41]

### 2.5.1 Evangelical Protestants

Evangelicals accept four beliefs that distinguish them from mainline Protestants.

1. The Bible is absolutely faultless and they accept it as the principal authority. Sometimes the Bible is interpreted literally because evangelicals are persuaded that it is the Word of God. All the statements about the nature of the world and God are without mistakes.
2. The second belief says the only manner which led to salvation is through belief in Jesus Christ. [42]
3. The third one is the conviction that *“the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a life long process of following Jesus.”* [43] From this moment, the believer turns from from darkness to light, from sin to salvation. This moment determines the beginning of a new life in which the faithful tries to achieve a godly life or to observe spiritual traditions. [44]

4. The last belief concerns the need of spreading their faith, to evangelize the others. [45]

### **2.5.2 Mainline Protestants**

Mainline Protestants have a different attitude. Their theology is more modernist because they are less enthusiastic about reading the Bible. While evangelicals interpret the Bible in its literal sense, mainline Protestants see it more as a “historical or mythological” writing. Certainly, the Bible is considered to be the God’s Word full of essential truths but it is required to be explained in every age by people of that time and that place. [46]

Mainline Protestants are able to believe that perhaps other methods to salvation are possible. Surely, the main process of salvation is through Jesus Christ but they would admit that it is not the only option.

*People in other religious traditions, even outside of Christianity, may have access to God's grace and to salvation as well, on their own terms, and through their own means.* [47] says John Green, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, known for his work on religion and politics. [48]

Eventually, mainline Protestants are less engaged in turning the other people to the faith. Surely, it is something they believe in but they prefer sharing of the faith with others voluntarily and not for the purpose of compulsory conversion. [49] [50]

However, evangelical and mainline Protestants are not always clearly distinguishable from each other. There are believers in the evangelical tradition which may have more modernist attitudes as well there are mainline Protestants who can have more traditional opinions or approaches. [51]

The table below serves for better specification and sorting some of the mainline and evangelical Protestant denominations.

<b>EVANGELICAL DENOMINATIONS</b>	<b>MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS</b>
Advent Christian General Conference	American Baptist Churches USA
Anglican Mission in America	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Assemblies of God	Episcopal Church in the USA
The Brethren Church	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
Brethen in Christ Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Christian & Missionary Alliance	International Council of Community Churches
Christian Reformed Church in North America	Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Christian Union	Moravian Church in America
Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.)	National Association of Congregational Christian Churches
Church of the Nazarene	Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Conservative Congretional Christian Conference	Reformed Church in America
Converge Worldwide	United Church of Christ
Elim Fellowship	United Methodist Church
Evangelical Assembly of Presbyterian Churches	Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

The Evangelical Church	
Evangelical Congregational Church	
Evangelical Free Church of America	
Evangelical Friends Church International	
Evangelical Presbyterian Church	
Every Nation Churches	
Fellowship of Evangelical Churches	
The Foursquare Church	
Free Methodist Church USA	
General Association of General Baptists	
Grace Communion International	
Great Commission Churches	
International Pentecostal Church of Christ	
International Pentecostal Holiness Church	
Missionary Church, Inc.	
North American Baptist Conference	
Open Bible Churches	
Presbyterian Church in America	
Primitive Methodist Church USA	
The Salvation Army	
Southern Baptist Convention	
United Brethren in Christ	
US Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches	
Vineyard, USA	
The Wesleyan Church	

[52] [53] [54]

## 2.6 Protestant denominations

A large number of Protestant denominations exist in today's United States. It can be said that it is caused by a tendency of continual splitting of denominations. Protestants have a motto, "*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*". It is originated in the 16th century from Latin and can be translated as "*The church always needs to be reformed*". [55] [56]

The motto served as a purpose for the Reformation because reformers believed that the church was corrupted and needed to be purified. In contemporary America, this motto is used in a little different way. The interpreting of the slogan gives a pretext to the splitting of denominations. Since someone may say that his or her attitude is more reformed than the attitudes of others. [57] [58]

The fact that there is more than one Baptist denomination can serve as one of the examples of a division. (Southern Baptist Convention, Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, American Baptist Churches USA and tens of the others) [59] [60] [61]

The next part of the thesis describes three main American Protestant denominations (American Baptist Churches USA, United Methodist Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). It is introduced how the denominations present themselves on their official websites.

### 2.6.1 American Baptist Churches USA

American Baptists proclaim the statement that defines their approach:

*American Baptist Churches are healthy missionary churches that nurture devoted disciples of Jesus Christ who live their lives in mission and ministry for the healing of the world through the love of God. [62]*

Baptists worship the Holy Trinity which is God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are people who are ethnically diverse and they have a very strong commitment to Christ Jesus. Baptists call themselves “people of prayer, purpose and passion“. As they say, they can make a society of faith where people of all races, nationality or culture assemble. They gather to worship, service and work. [63]

American Baptists strongly appreciate the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. who was devoted Christian, Baptist and primarily a leader in the African-American Civil Right Movement (dated to the 2nd half of the 20th century). That is the reason why they celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on January 21<sup>st</sup>. They commemorated Luther’s teaching and his struggle for freedom. [64]

### **2.6.1.1 Facts about American Baptist Churches USA**

American Baptists have “ten facts” that specify their faith. It has a long tradition which began in the 17th century and continues to these days. The tradition underlines a guarantee of freedom of worship and belief, a direct relationship with God, an interpretation of Scripture or believer’s baptism. The thesis describes five facts that characterize faith of American Baptist Churches USA in the most appropriate way. [65]

1. *American Baptists believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, and that the Bible is divinely inspired word of God that serves as the final written authority for living out the Christian faith. [66]*

American Baptists believe that the faith in Jesus Christ guarantees them a salvation and a permanent fellowship with God. The Bible, composed of the New and Old Testaments, is the most credible and authoritative manual of knowing and serving the God. [67]

*2. American Baptists partake of two ordinances: believers' baptism and The Lord's Supper. [68]*

In the process of baptism, the person has to be intellectually mature to understand the baptism's intense and symbolic sense which is the resurrection to new life in Christ. During the Lord's Supper, which is also called Holy Communion, the bread and a cup are indispensable requisites, symbolizing Christ's body and blood. [69]

*3. American Baptists take seriously the call to evangelism and missionary work. [70]*

The missionary work for American Baptists is a very significant assignment. They spread the Christ's thoughts in the U.S. and all around the world through the assistance of the missionaries, who are cooperating with others. [71]

*4. American Baptists support religious freedom and respect the expressions of faith of others. [72]*

They are the believers whose ancestors often met with the intolerance. That is the reason why American Baptists appreciate and protect their freedom and struggle to expand it to the others around the world. To express this idea, they defend the people everywhere and provide them the right to worship freely without discrimination. [73]

*5. American Baptist Churches USA celebrates the racial, cultural and theological diversity witnessed within its membership. [74]*



American Baptists are the most racially diverse denomination of the Protestant unit. In the churches, the different worship manners, the cultural habits or the attitudes to a biblical interpretation are represented. The respect, fellowship or collective support cause that Baptists are able to face to these challenges. [75]

American Baptist Churches USA are described from theological point of view. The thesis characterizes their basic religious beliefs, commitment to the Bible, God and missionary work.

### **2.6.2 United Methodist Church**

The United Methodist Church was founded in 1968 and follows in the doctrine of John Wesley (1703-1791). John Wesley was a Christian theologian and a founder of Methodist Church in the 18th century. [76]

Concerning the Methodist's beliefs, they share the ordinary traditions with all Christians. They believe in Trinity which presents God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God represents a sovereign power that created the world and all the things in it. The attitude to Jesus Christ of United Methodists is: [77]

- *We believe that Jesus was human. He lived as a man and died when he was crucified.*
- *We believe that Jesus is divine. He is the Son of God.*
- *We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and that the risen Christ lives today.* [78]

The Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, is the main authority and God's Word for the faith and practice.

Together with other Protestant denominations, Methodists accept two sacraments which are the Baptism and The Lord's Supper. [79]

However Methodists also practice the infant baptism that is not very common in other denominations. The baptism of children should be considered as a special opportunity for children's parents who want to baptize their offsprings and who are often the mature believers. Methodists claim that parents make many decisions for their children and baptism is one of them. It is possible that the child can later refuse the faith but this alternative does not discourage the parents either. [80]

The whole procedure of baptism can be done by three modes, sprinkling, pouring or immersion. A man can admit the sacrament of baptism only once during the life. The Lord's Supper is a bread and wine, symbolizing the body and blood of Christ Jesus. By sharing this holy meal, they express the gratitude for Christ's sacrifice. [81] [82]

Like as Baptists, Methodists also have their mission which consists in making disciples. They try to approach the people and to embrace them into their faith. Methodists claim that they hold a responsibility for the area around their church, the fellowship in which they and others study, work, etc. In today's world, there live many people having problems, doubts or questions. Methodists's mission is helping these people and listening to them. The next task of the mission is an effort to make the relationship with God deeper. It is performed by worships, prayers to find out that the Holy Spirit is present. Methodists try to involve people of all ages into Christian belief. According to them, the church exists because of helping the others. They attend the church services because of doing the work and preparing themselves to be the Christ's disciples in the fellowship. [83]

United Methodist Church is also described from theological point of view. The thesis characterizes its main religious beliefs, commitment to the Bible and God and also presents the attitude to infant baptism.

### **2.6.3 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is relatively young as it was established in 1988 from three separate North American church bodies, The American Lutheran Church, The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and The Lutheran Church in America. It is the largest Lutheran group in North America. [84]

The Evangelical Lutherans are people of faith that share a desire to make changes in the world. They are a diverse group of believers who are persuaded that the Holy Spirit is leading them to the unity of God. Lutherans adopted the ideas of Martin Luther, the German theologian and reformer, and until today they follow the basic rules of Luther's theological teaching. Lutherans claim to be saved by the grace of God alone, the salvation is through faith alone and the Bible is the rule for faith and life. [85]

Their church believes in the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and considers Jesus Christ to be Lord and Savior. Through the Gospel, God can save all believers. Lutherans admit the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. They regard them as the Word of God. An accepting of two sacraments, the baptism and the Lord's Supper, is also an inseparable component of their faith. [86]

### **2.6.3.1 Social issues in the ELCA**

#### **Abortion**

Evangelical Lutherans claim that they are united in the faith in Jesus Christ and with all the Christians. However, the topic of an abortion is a very delicate question. Within the members of Evangelical Lutheran Church are serious disagreements about this problem. They are a community which supports life therefore their social statement says that the abortion should be a choice of a last resort. [87]

The Christian assumption is to protect and maintain the life and that is the reason why Lutherans try to decrease the need of a termination of pregnancy. In many cases, the Church aids women with unintended pregnancies. However, they must be realistic and when there are no available resources to raise the children, the adoptive or foster parents could be one of the positive options. The church also attempts to prevent unintended pregnancies by providing adequate forms of sex education in schools, pregnancy prevention programs or parenting training lessons. As well as, they are realizing that the contraceptives should be more available. [88]

Another disagreement that Lutherans have among themselves is the question of the regulation of abortion by the law. One side believes that the problem of abortion is not a governmental matter but it is an issue of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, protected by the First Amendment. They insist on the opinion that the regulation takes away the women's liberty to choose the option of abortion. The opposite side claims that the law protects the prenatal life, the new life. According to them, there are an increasing numbers of abortions made illegal and the regulation should prevent this. [89]

Nevertheless, the official attitude of the church to this issue is clear. The government has a legitimate role in the regulating abortions. Since Lutherans are persuaded that the life of a women and life of an unborn child have to be respected by the law, they do not agree with the total lack of regulation of abortion or with the laws that stop couples from using contraception. If the life of a mother is in danger, the abortion should not be prohibited by the law. [90]

### **Death penalty**

Equally as the question of abortion, the issue of death penalty is highly discussed topic among American Lutherans. The government has a protective role over its citizens, which was given to it by God. God put this power to the state to take away the human life if he endangers a society. However, this does not authorize the state to take the life unlimitedly. Also it does not mean that the government has to punish a crime by death. The main question is, whether it is possible to execute the death penalty rightfully. Basically, Lutherans conclude that it is not. One of the reasons could be that human beings make mistakes. In the past, many innocent people have been executed and certainly will be executed in the future. The practice of death penalty weakens morality and it does not make the society better or safer. [91]

Certainly, there are some believers who are in favour of death penalty.

*Those who would retain the death penalty testify to the value of the life God has given and the murderer has taken; they assert the value of the victim's life by demanding the offender's death. [92]*

They agree with it on the basis of Scripture where it is said, that life should be laid down for another one. [93]

### **Sexuality**

Lutherans believe that trust is a fundamental character of a real relationship. They claim that they try to be trustworthy in their human sexuality and seek to build social institutions where a trust and reliable relationships can prosper. [94]

*When God created human beings, sexuality was made integral to their nature. Sexuality is a good and wondrous gift, a rich and diverse combination of relational, emotional, and physical interactions and possibilities. Because of sin, however, it also can cause great harm. [95]*

For Lutherans, marriage and the family are two principal social forms. They see the marriage as a pledge of mutual promises, commitment and trust. This all is legally approved by the state and blessed by God. For many years, Lutherans have admitted the marriage as a promise between a woman and a man. The family is an essential social institution because it has a function of forming conditions of trust and protection for the unprotected children. Families are responsible for providing safety and creating trustworthy relationships. [96]

During the last few decades, the church began to understand the need of same-gender marriages and knows that these marriages need to rely on the support of the public and the state. Certainly, this has led to a contradiction of opinions on these types of relationships inside the Christian community. There appears the question if the wedding of two same-gender people can be called the marriage. In spite of the fact that the Lutheran Church does not still reach the agreement about this issue, the Church aids to all people to live in the faith in the community of

believers. Lutherans insist on the mutual respect and they try to achieve the good for all. [97]

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is introduced from theological point of view. It describes the basic religious beliefs. The thesis also presents ELCA statements on certain social issues because Evangelical Lutherans are the only one of these three denominations that provides this information on the websites.

## **2.7 Self-presentation of Protestants**

This part of bachelor thesis is focused on the self-image of Protestant denominations, especially on American Baptist Churches, United Methodists and Evangelical Lutherans. It describes what features they have in common and in what characteristics they differ. However, not only the self-presentation of the three denominations is defined here but also the attitudes of some other denominations, which are considered to be evangelical Protestants, are characterized in this chapter.

It is definitely clear that American Baptist Churches USA, United Methodist Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are very active in serving to God, in practicing their faith. It is evident when opening their official websites because all three denominations have there a short slogan which proves it. *“Serving as the hands and feet of Christ”* [98] is a motto of American Baptists, *“Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.”* [99] is a motto of United Methodists and slogan *“God’s work. Our hands.”* [100] characterizes Evangelical Lutherans.

They worship the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the Bible is the principle authority for them. Basically, all three churches have the mission which consists in making disciples, doing better world and

spreading the faith. As all Protestants, they accept the Lord's Supper and the baptism. However, United Methodist Church practises also the infant baptism which differs from the two others. Baptists and Lutherans claim that a person should be intellectually mature to go through the process of baptism. According to Methodists, the infant baptism is an occasion for the parents to let the children enter to family of God. [101]

Evangelical Lutherans are the only one of three denominations who expresses the attitude to certain social issues on their official websites. In the thesis are described only three statements, an abortion, a death penalty and a sexuality but on their websites there are many others. However, the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey made in 2007, which is published in websites of the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), may show what approach holds American Baptist Churches and United Methodist Church to these social matters. [102]

<b><i>Moral Attitudes</i></b>	<i>American Baptist Churches in the USA</i>	<i>Evangelical Lutheran Church In America</i>	<i>United Methodist Church</i>
<i>Percent who think that abortion should be illegal in all cases.</i>	20.4%	6.3%	6.4%
<i>Percent that think that "homosexuality" is a way of life that should be discouraged by society.</i>	48.8%	33.1%	39%

[103]

These numbers affirm the statement of Evangelical Lutherans about the abortion and homosexuality which are defined in section 2.5.3.1 Social issues in the ELCA. Nevertheless, the figures also indicate that less than



half of American Baptists do not support the homosexual relationships and 20% of them are against abortions. In comparison to Evangelical Lutherans and United Methodists, American Baptists can have more conservative attitude about these topics but the figures are still relatively low.

<b><i>Other Beliefs and Attitudes</i></b>	<i>American Baptist Churches in the USA</i>	<i>Evangelical Lutheran Church in America</i>	<i>United Methodist Church</i>
<i>Percent that "mostly agree" or "completely agree" that "evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth"</i>	34.4%	45.7%	48.5%
<b><i>Religious Beliefs</i></b>			
<i>Percent that believe that many religions can lead to eternal life</i>	72.8%	84.8%	85.1%

[104]

This part survey can also prove the statement that all three denominations have opinions that count them among mainline Protestants. Almost one half of Evangelical Lutherans and United Methodists admit that the evolution could be the cause of origin of human life. Approximately about 80% of all three churches believe that not only the faith in God can lead to eternal life. These two results of the survey may serve as a clear proof of modernist opinions of American Baptists, Evangelical Lutherans and United Methodists in the USA.

Comparing the attitudes of Evangelical Lutheran Church with Southern Baptist Convention and Presbyterian Church in America, it is obvious that the first one belongs to mainline Protestants and the two remaining are evangelical Protestants.

<b><i>Moral attitudes</i></b>	<i>Evangelical Lutheran Church In America</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Convention</i>	<i>Presbyterian Church in America</i>
<i>Percent who think that abortion should be illegal in all cases.</i>	6.3%	21.8%	17.2%
<i>Percent that think that "homosexuality" is a way of life that should be discouraged by society.</i>	33.1%	68.4%	51.6%
<b><i>Other Beliefs and Attitudes</i></b>			
<i>Percent that "mostly agree" or "completely agree" that "evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth"</i>	45.7%	24.1%	37%

[105]

The figures showing the approach to the topic of abortion are not so much divergent. Certainly, Southern Baptists do not agree with the abortion by 21.8% and Presbyterian Church in America by 17.2% but still, the difference with Evangelical Lutherans is not so radical. Relating to the issue of homosexuality, more than a half of Presbyterians do not support same-gender relationships and almost 70% of Southern Baptists have the same opinion. These results indicate a very conservative and traditional

attitude. 37% of Presbyterians go along with the theory of evolution and only 24.1% of Southern Baptists admit this theory too. That can show their conservative and traditional thoughts.

## **2.8 Religious census**

The religious census shows what changes happened in Protestant religion in recent years. In 2008, American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) was made in the United States. The results were compared with years 2001 and 1990. The survey can be called a self-described religious identification of adult population and consisted in doing telephone interviews by asking the open-ended questions about people's religion. The value of the surveys is recognized by the U.S. Bureau of Census. [106]

The aim of the survey was to determine if people considered themselves as members of some religious community. The estimated figures specified only the adult population. [107]

<b>Religious group</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2008</b>
<i>Baptist</i>	33,964,000	33,820,000	36,148,000
<i>Methodist</i>	14,174,000	14,039,000	11,366,000
<i>Lutheran</i>	9,110,000	9,580,000	8,674,000
<i>Presbyterian</i>	4,985,000	5,596,000	4,723,000
<i>Christian Generic</i>	25,980,000	22,546,000	32,441,000
<i>Christian Unspecified</i>	8,073,000	14,190,000	16,834,000
<i>Non-Denom. Christian</i>	194,000	2,489,000	8,032,000

[108]

The table shows only several Protestant churches and does not reveal the specific denominations, e.g. the changes in American Baptist Churches USA or Southern Baptist Convention. It has a simple explanation. The most frequent answer among the respondents was simply the “Baptist“. Between 1990 and 2001, the Baptists were relatively stable. In 2008, the number of Baptists increased because people recognized themselves as Baptists again. There were also more detailed types of Baptist denominations provided by interviewees. The decrease of adherents in Methodist Church was caused by the universal answer “Christian” or “non-denominational Christian“. People preferred this reply rather than determining the specific church. Especially the answer “non-denominational Christian” became very favoured since 1990 because the number increased from nearly 200,000 to 8,000,000 adherents. [109]

This last survey made in 2008 indicated that American Protestantism is in decline. Since people do not have a need to belong to one specific denomination. They simply content with a fact that they are Christians who believe in God.

## **2.9 Protestantism and women**

The role of women in Protestant Church is improving. There is a slow but constant progress in admission of women within the Church. That means more women are ordained to be the pastors or they can hold a function in a leadership of the church. [110]

Especially in past few decades, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have started to hire women to the leadership. A majority (almost 90%) of mainline Protestant denominations agree with a women's ordination in any circumstances. This is again an evident example of difference between mainline and evangelical Protestants because hardly a half of evangelical Protestants agree with this statement (for example Southern Baptist Convention does not recognize women as pastors). [111]

According to The Barna Group, a visionary research and resource company, there is an increasing number of female senior pastors during the last several years. Between 1990 and 1999, only 5% senior pastors were women. However, the figure has doubled to 10% in 2009. The average age of women is 55 years. 58% of these women are associated with mainline Protestant denominations such as American Baptist Churches USA, United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) or United Methodist or Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In comparison with a representation of male senior pastors there are only 23% of men who are incorporated with mainline ministry. [112]

This research was based upon an annual monitoring surveys done via telephone by The Barna Group among some Protestant Churches. [113]

## **2.10 Protestantism and teenagers**

In 2005, National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) together with two sociologists made a survey based on data collected by the NSYR. The aim of the survey was to examine the religious beliefs and practices of American Protestant teenagers. The NSYR is dedicated to studies of the religious and spiritual lives of contemporary American teenagers. [114]

### **Churchgoing and religious participation**

A lot of American Protestant teenagers participate in churchgoing and other religious activities. According to the survey, 65% teenagers attend a church at least one a month. Teenagers whose parents belong to evangelical (conservative) denominations participate the religious services regularly. Less than a half of them is active in other religious youth activity such as religious summer camps. [115]

### **Religious beliefs**

Most of Protestant teenagers recognize essential Christian beliefs. 90% of them believe in God. The differences between mainline and evangelical denominations are here also evident. Apparently, teenagers whose parents are a part of evangelical denominations generally believe in God than their counterparts from mainline denominations. [116]

### **Religious practices, sharing faith**

Protestant teenagers keep their personal devotion and religious activity even outside the church. More than a half of teenagers pray alone

several times a week, 47% teenagers pray with their parents and about 30% teenagers read the Bible once a week. One of the most common ways of sharing faith is an expression of beliefs at school. About 40% of teenagers speak about their religion openly and approximately 50% talk about their beliefs with someone not of the same beliefs. Regular attendance of church enables teenagers to share their religion easily. [117]

### **Opinion on the Church**

Regular attenders of a church have mostly positive opinions on their churches. They consider the church to be a welcoming place. However, there are also teenagers who claim that attendance of the church is boring. Less than a half of teenagers think that the church is a right place to talk about serious problems. [118]

### **Moral attitudes**

The mainline and evangelical Protestant teenagers were compared in this part of survey. Both of them agree (by 63%) that people should have sex after getting married but mainline teenagers are less confirmed in this statement than evangelical (conservative) Protestant teenagers. However, conservative teenagers just as mainline teenagers have no problem with smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, cheating at school or lying to their parents. [119]

## **2.11 Ceremonies, symbolism and televangelism**

In this part the thesis describes some of Protestant ceremonies, typical symbols of Protestant religion and it also explains the term televangelism.

### **2.11.1 The Sunday service of worship**

The Sunday services persisted from the time of the Reformation until these days. The services serve as a high point of the spiritual life for most Protestants. According to the tradition of the early Church, Protestants serve the service on Sunday. They commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A few Protestant denominations serve the service on Saturday because Sunday is a day which God reserved to a rest, after creation of the world. [120]

During the service, Protestants concentrate particularly at the preaching of the Word. That has a simple reason. Protestants believe that the salvation comes when God forgives them all their sins and that is possible just through the preaching of the God's Word. Protestant services also contain the reading of the Scripture because it is necessary to hear the God's word. [121] [122]

### **2.11.2 Marriages**

The wedding is considered to be a formal covenant between man and woman in the presence of God. Each Protestant denomination has various traditions or habits during the wedding. Certain denominations are more open-minded in their interpretation of the service and can be also more liberal about the nontraditional components. Every church or couple



have an option of their own choice concerning the music, sermons or audience participation. [123] [124]

Protestant marriage mostly contains some of these traditions: The bridegroom wears or a tuxedo a suit. The bride wears a white wedding dress, a veil and holds a bouquet. It is common that the bride has the bridesmaids. The couple also can have the flower girl and ring bearer. [125]

Traditionally, Protestant marriage begins with a call to worship. The Episcopalian call to worship looks like this:

*We are gathered here today in the presence of God to join this man and this woman in holy marriage.* [126]

That is very similar to Presbyterian beginning:

*We are gathered here today to witness the marriage of (bride's name) and (groom's name) in holy matrimony.* [127]

Then, the wedding pastor can read some extracts from the Bible and have a short sermon towards the bride and bridegroom. Afterwards, the moment of taking the vows comes. The content can differ between the denominations or even some couples write their own vows. The bride and bridegroom exchange their rings which have been blessed by the priest before the putting on the couple's fingers. Finally, the pastor terminates the ceremony by concluding blessing:

*I now pronounce you husband and wife. What God has joined together let no man put asunder.* [128]

### **2.11.3 Funerals**

Since many Protestant denominations exist, the funeral rites can differ in some ways. The funerals can include a diversity of traditions

according to the wishes of the deceased or family. Usually, a Protestant pastor or other clergyman goes through the content of the funeral with the family. The service can be done at home or at a church, commonly within a few days after the death. Before the service itself, the body of deceased can be exhibited in an open coffin to express “saying goodbye” by the relatives. [129]

The funeral is accompanied by church music, by funeral oration of the bereaved and by reading from the Bible and sermon. The coffin and the church are decorated with flowers. Protestants have no ban on a cremacy. The body is buried at a cemetery near the church or family members scatter the ashes around the grave. Funeral guests should wear appropriate dress, usually in dark colours. After the funeral, the family may hold a reception which is a kind of social gathering where the food and drinks are served. In Protestantism, there is no set official period of mourning as in other religions. [130]

#### **2.11.4 Symbolism**

For most Protestant denominations the cross is the main and most common symbol. The important characteristic of the Protestant cross is that majority of crosses are not crucifixes (typical for the Roman Catholic Church). It means it is a bare cross without the body of Jesus figured. Protestants do not want to remind Jesus death by crucifixion that is why they prefer the empty cross. The cross rather represents the life and resurrection of Christ. [131] (See Appendix 2, 3, p. 60, 61)

Another symbol of Protestantism may be the fact that churches are not so decorated as the Roman Catholic churches. That is a consequence of the Reformation. In most cases, a simple bare cross is placed in the

Protestant churches and simple geometric patterns create the decorations of the interior. [132] (See Appendix 4, p. 61, 62)

The churches are decorated with images that picture the Holy Trinity. A dove often symbolizes the Holy Spirit. [133] (See Appendix 5, 6, p. 62, 63)

### **2.11.5 The term televangelism**

The term itself is composed of two words, television and evangelism, and means:

*Evangelism through religious programs on television.* [134] (See Appendix 7, p. 63)

In the second half of 20th century, television became a principal component of American culture. It was the opportunity for Protestant preachers to spread their ideas and faith through this mass media. George Whitefield, Anglican preacher, can be considered as a predecessor of televangelists through his enthusiastic sermons during the period of the First Great Awakening.

In 1950s, Billy Graham started to spread the faith through television and is considered to be the pioneer of televangelism. The significant growth of televangelism took place in 1970s and 1980s. The policy of mandating free time for religious broadcasts was changed and TV stations could sell an air time for religious broadcasting to the “faith groups” and receive money for religious programs. Stations also sold the time to the highest bidder. [135]

When Ronald Reagan became President of United States, he introduced almost complete deregulation of radio and television. He

weakened the power of FCC (The Federal Communications Commission). The FCC is an independent US government agency that regulates interstate and international communications by radio or television. [136] The consequence of this deregulation was the rapid purchase of stations by large networks. This also caused the centralisation of power to only a few multinational corporations who now possessed every part of broadcasting system. Almost every program became commercialized, including news, sports or weather forecast. The business and also televangelist had benefits from this change. Listeners and viewers sent money to televangelists. That enabled televangelists to buy many radio and TV station licences. Some of televangelist associations turned into multi-millionaires. Through legal fund-raising in the air time televangelists were able to establish a great distribution system. In addition to that, they were tax free as religious organizations. [137]

Certainly, the money in televangelism caused various forms of corruption and scandals and that led to mistrust of televangelists. [138]

The criticism of televangelists has continued till these days. Ordinary people do not agree with the fact that televangelists are so wealthy. TBN, Trinity Broadcasting Network, is a major American religious network and most watched faith channel in the USA, started in the 1970s. [139]

Paul and Janice Crouch are the founders of TBN. In 2010, the amount of donations, which they received, was calculated to 93 million dollars. They are mainly criticized for unclear utilization of these donations. The company has also conflicts with its employees who are accused of stealing some money from TBN and the employees try to defame the company by revealing some frauds inside TBN. [140]

## 2.12 Scandals in Protestant Church

Also the Protestant Church sometimes has to face scandals. In the USA, there are three major companies that insure American Protestant Churches. In 2007, they declared they get about 260 notices per year about the sex abuse of minors. The young people were sexually abused by clergy, staff and other church-related members. A determination of exact numbers of abuse was difficult because the Protestant denominations are less centralized and many of them are independent. Certainly, notices about the sexual abuse do not always mean that the accused is guilty. According to the three insurance companies, the accusations do not end up by paying the indemnity. During the last two decades, the number of sex abuse cases has kept stable. It can be a merit of churches because they try to prevent child sex abuse. They control play areas or demand at least two adults in a room with a child. Some advocates of abused victims propose to create a public list of accused clergy and post it up. The Baptist General Convention of Texas became to do the list of accused clergy a few years ago. However, the list was not accessible to the public. Some experts say that this is the main problem. Churches do not have to announce the cases of sexual abuse and they do not want to reveal the names of the accused clergy which means they do not contribute to solve this problem. [141]

### **3 CONCLUSION**

The goal of the Bachelor's thesis was to present contemporary Protestantism in the United States of America, to explain its principles, key terms and the self-image of American Protestants. A large number of various books about Protestantism in general and internet sources were used to elaborate the thesis.

I introduced the birth of Protestantism in Europe, in America and explained key words used in Protestant religion. I primarily focused on the presentation of three main denominations, on their beliefs and opinions.

Although Protestants are divided into two main groups, evangelical and mainline, I found out that this sorting is not often so clear. It can be basically said that evangelical Protestants are more conservative and have traditional opinions. Mainline Protestants are less conservative and have more modernist attitudes. According to my study, it is not the rule.

In part 2.7 where I described the self-presentation of Protestants, it is obvious that question of homosexuality is still delicate topic among mainline Protestants. American Baptist Churches USA, United Methodist Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America do not admit homosexuality by 40% on average. This figure seems to me quite high and it shows that even mainline Protestants can have more conservative attitudes to some issues.

I also found out that Protestant religion is in decline according to the surveys made in last several years. Americans do not have a need to recognize themselves to one particular denomination. They rather say to be a Christian generic.

The thesis deals with the role of women in Protestantism and the approach of teenagers to this religion. I think that basically women's position in Protestantism is improving because more and more women are in leadership positions of churches. Concerning American Protestant teenagers, the majority of them participate in churchgoing and other religious services.

Finally, I described Protestant marriages and funerals. I think there is no noticeable difference in comparison to the atheist ones. Then I explained meaning of the term televangelism. Preachers (televangelists) spreaded the faith through television and it had a great success at its beginning. In recent years, however, televangelists have become very wealthy and certainly that is a fact which is hard to accept by believers. It appears to me that American society is little indignant about that. I consider the conception of televangelism to be a very smart idea because television can have a strong impact on people and it is also an equivalent of the camp meetings during the Great Awakenings.

In the last part of the thesis I presented a scandal about sex abuse of children by clergy staff which the Protestant Church faces. I think that every Church in today's world, not only in America, has to cope with accusation like this whether it is justified or not.

The objectives I was aiming to meet were fulfilled. Thanks to the structure of the thesis, the main characteristics of Protestantism, attitudes of Protestants and aspects of Protestant culture are described.

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## **6 ABSTRACT**

The aim of the thesis is to present main principles of contemporary Protestantism and Protestants beliefs in the United States of America. I briefly describe the history of Protestantism and key terms of this religion. An important part of my thesis comprises the description of three main Protestant denominations and self-presentation of American Protestants according to their moral attitudes to social questions, e.g. homosexuality. The thesis also deals with religious census that shows a decline in Protestant religion during the last several years. Finally, the thesis presents a role of women in Protestantism, teenagers and their perception of the Church and a few aspects of culture in Protestantism.

## 7 RÉSUMÉ

Cílem této bakalářské práce je představit hlavní zásady současného protestantismu a přesvědčení protestantů ve Spojených státech amerických. Stručně popisují historii protestantismu a klíčové pojmy spojené s tímto náboženstvím. Důležitou součástí mé práce je popis tří hlavních protestantských denominací a vlastní představení amerických protestantů z hlediska jejich morálních postojů k sociálním otázkám, např. homosexualitě. Práce se dále zabývá náboženským sčítáním lidu, který ukazuje, že zájem o protestantskou víru klesá. V závěru práce poukazuji na postavení žen v protestantské církvi, dospívající mládež a její vnímání církve a na několik kulturních aspektů v protestantismu.

## 8 APPENDICES

### Chapter 2.3.4 The Second Great Awakening

#### Appendix 1



#### Camp meeting

<http://www.cowart.info/blog/?p=1125> [Retrieved 20 April 2013]

### Chapter 2.11 Ceremonies, Symbolism and televangelism

#### Appendix 2



**Protestant cross** <http://www.catholic-convert.com/2012/11/13/the-cross-the-crucifix-letter-to-a-fundamentalist/> [Retrieved 20 April 2013]

### Appendix 3



### Crucifix

<http://www.4crucifix.com/crucifix.html> [Retrieved 20 April 2013]

### Appendix 4



### Protestant church

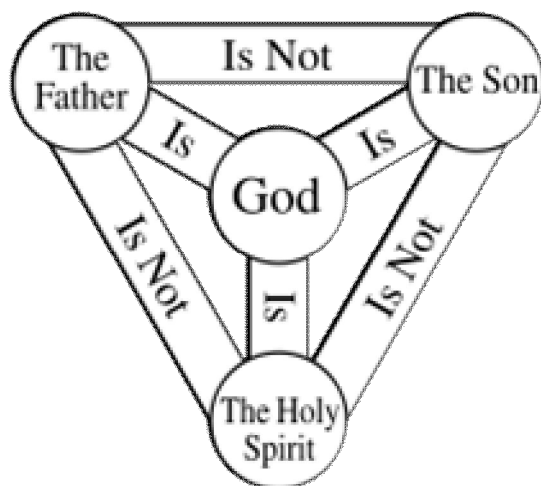
<http://ecumethodist.blogspot.cz/2012/03/shambles-of-mainline.html>  
[Retrieved 20 April 2013]



**Protestant church inside**

<http://www.nj.searchroots.com/EG/stpeters.htm> [Retrieved 20 April 2013]

### **Appendix 5**



### **Holy Trinity**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity> [Retrieved 20 April 2013]

## Appendix 6



### Dove

<http://www.watton.org/clipart/doves/doves.shtml> [Retrieved 20 April 2013]

## Appendix 7



### Preaching televangelist

<http://www.theinternationalman.com/religion-and-philosophy.php>  
[Retrieved 20 April 2013]