

Unit 4 RASNET Seminar

Protestantism

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What is Protestantism?

- A movement – not a denomination or a religion
- The Protestant Reformation (1517 +)
- Martin Luther (Wittenberg)
 - How can I be saved from the power of my own sin?
 - Justification by grace alone [not works]
 - Priesthood of all believers [no mediator]
- Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, Presbyterians ...
- Evangelicals (evangel = the gospel, good news)

Key Protestant ideas

- *Sola scriptura*, scripture alone (not tradition)
Nature of sin, salvation and the afterlife
- Centrality of God's grace, not law or works
- Role of individual conscience
- Role of Holy Spirit, inspires the believer(s)

Outcome – a methodology, an approach to Christian life that could engage new ideas and behaviours

How does Protestantism work?

Questions the status quo – but how far?

- State Church?
- Alternate society?
- Resistance movement?

No Pope or central authority – but who decides?

- Bishops? Monarchs? Synods? Councils?
Congregations? Individuals?

4 key attributes

The “Bebbington quadrilateral” (Evangelicals)

- Biblicism
- Crucicentrism (Cross-centred)
- Conversionism
- Activism

David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989)

Protestant Challenges

How have Protestants, especially in Australia, responded to challenges old and new? How have Protestant beliefs and behaviours shaped those responses?

1. Missions
2. Religious Education
3. Ministry of Women
4. Sexuality
5. Survival

Challenge 1: Missions

Protestant missionary expansion: extraordinary success (spread of Protestant Christianity) – and harm (subjugation of First Nations)

- Scripture: Matthew 28 “go and make disciples”
- Learning from experience: local converts make the best missionaries
- Church and world: the “handmaid of empire”, or “inculturation of the gospel”?
- Charitable works, or proselytising?

Challenge 2: Religious Education

Religion in Australia: private, sectarian, superstition, harmless / harmful... but should it be taught in schools and universities?

- Preserve scripture and prayer in education
- Set up (many) separate school systems
- Volunteer access to state schools
- Campaign for state school RE (credibility)
- The University of Divinity (MCD, 1910)

Peter Sherlock, "The Foundation of the Melbourne College of Divinity", *Journal of Religious History* 40 (2016): 204-224.

Challenge 3: Ministry of Women

Professional roles for women emerge in C19: but can women be ministers / priests?

- Scripture: relationship of women and men, authority of women? how does it apply today?
- Nature of ministry: can women do it?
- Relationship of church to world: adapt, resist, indifferent? Different rules?
- Evangelical imperative: does the gospel take precedence over gender?

Challenge 4: Sexuality

Community acceptance of diverse sexual identities:
but can LGBTQIA+ people be included in the church?

- Scripture: rules of sexual conduct? Vision of human relations? How does it apply today?
- Relationship of church to world: adapt, resist, tolerate, indifferent?
- Who decides? Extent of authority; “first order” or “second order” matter?
- Centrality of “conversion” as a Protestant idea

Challenge 5: Survival

(some early thoughts)

- Decline in numbers (in Australia) – old world issues?
- Political shift – in a secular society, still tied to Establishment, but capitalism no longer needs it?
- Epistemology – approach to scripture, conscience, authority is fundamentally modernist? Open to new ideas (content) but not to new ways of thinking (form)?
- Fragmented identity – too many churches, nationalist not internationalist?
- Rise in Pentecostalism and non-denominational churches – a more postmodern movement?