

The
REFORMATION
Revisited



CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Was the 16 th Century Reformation a Mistake?	7
The Reformation and The Bible	13
The Reformation and Theology	17
The Reformation and the Gospel	23
The Reformation and Church Government	27
The Reformation and the Sacraments	33
The Reformation and the Liberty of Conscience	39
The Reformation and Music: Music is Next to Theology	43
The Reformation and Missions: Its Impact on Modern Missions	49
The 21 st Century Reformation: The Reformation and Modern Movements	55

FOREWORD

Two verses in the Bible remind and convict all believers throughout the ages that they have to be sober and ever watchful because the battle for God's TRUTH rages on. This battle will not end until the Lord's victorious return in the clouds of glory. The verses are:

Jude 3, *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”*

2 Timothy 2:1-2, *“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”*

Jude 3 charges all God's faithful servants to earnestly struggle for the faith once delivered unto the saints. It is a charge to fight for something precious. It is the Christian faith that has been handed down from one generation to the next since the fall of man. Without this TRUTH that Christ alone is able to save all sinners from sin, all sinners are doomed to hell! There is no escape. In order for a sinner to be saved, the gospel of Jesus Christ has to be preached according to Holy Scriptures. The Holy Spirit will use the gospel to bring about salvation, and upon confession and believing from the heart (cf. Romans 10:9-10), the Lord Jesus Christ will baptize him with the Holy Spirit. He will be saved for eternity! This gospel must be defended at all costs! Not only must God's faithful servants share the gospel, they must also

defend it. This means they defend the whole Bible, especially its perfection.

2 Timothy 2:1-2 emphasizes the continuity of this fight for the TRUTH. This must be passed on from one generation of faithful men to the next until the Lord's return. If God's truth is not passed on to the next generation, future generations will die in sin because they no longer have the truth. Five hundred years have come and gone since Martin Luther, an ex-Roman Catholic monk, nailed the 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg on 31st October 1517. Has the Christian faith been passed on faithfully to faithful men? The articles in this book were written as a rebuke as well as a challenge to all of God's people because the battle is far from over – it has increased in heat and momentum. Every child of God must stand in the gap and hold the fort, for his Master the Lord Jesus Christ stands with him to the very end. Be strong in the Lord to the very end. Stand fast and fight the good fight of faith, for you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58).

We thank God for the writers who have penned these articles for the blessing of God's people. The contributors of the articles include: Rev (Dr) Jeffrey Khoo, Rev (Dr) Prabhudas Koshy, Rev Tan Kian Sing, Rev Dennis Kwok, Rev Joseph Poon, Rev Paul Cheng, Rev Hien Nguyen, Rev Errol Stone, Preacher Joshua Yong, and Rev (Dr) Quek Suan Yew. We thank God for their fellowship in the ministry and for the same burden that they have for the 21st Century Reformation. Truly it is God's truth alone that can unite us in Christ.

WAS THE REFORMATION A MISTAKE?

“The Reformation of the sixteenth century is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history”, so said Church historian Philip Schaff.¹ Yet 500 years later, Protestants are disavowing the Reformation—instead of seeing it as the greatest event in the history of the Church next to Pentecost, they see it as the greatest mistake.

The Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) of 1994 led the way. It undermined the 16th Century Reformation, calling the separation then a “sin” so as to forge a new Catholic-Protestant unity and cooperation for the 21st century.² Another betrayal came from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). On 31 October 1999 the LWF signed a “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” with the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) without having the Catholics recant the dogmas of the Council of Trent.³ By so doing, the Lutherans of the LWF effectively undermined the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Luther is rolling in his grave.

The RCC has not changed a single iota of its dogma since the Reformation.⁴ The RCC has yet to renounce its anti-Reformation Council of Trent (1545-1563).⁵ Trent pronounced 125 anathemas against Protestants. For instance, Canon XII on Justification states, “If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which

remits sins for Christ’s sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.”

The Council of Trent still stands and continues to define what the RCC believes. Pope John Paul II in 1995 said, “The dogmatic affirmations of the Council of Trent naturally preserve all their value.” He praised Trent as “a great event in the history of the church” and that the Council’s declarations continue to define the doctrinal convictions of the RCC.⁶ Lest there be any doubt, the incumbent Pope Francis affirms the Council of Trent. In the 450th anniversary of the Council, Pope Francis said that the Catholic Faith is “distinctly” and “better perceived” by the Council of Trent. He went on to say that the RCC today actively “revives and reflects upon the most glorious Tridentine doctrine.”⁷ It is clear that the RCC of today is still the same RCC of yesterday. There is no change in essence or in dogma. If there is a change, it is only in tactic. Since they can no longer burn, they seduce.⁸

The ECT and LWF say it is sin to divide. There is no sin in Biblical division. Jesus Himself said, “*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division*” (Luke 12:51) for “*what concord hath Christ with Belial?*” (2 Cor 6:15). Biblical separation is no sin for it is commanded, “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers... Wherefore come*

out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Cor 6:14, 17).

Now it must be said that unity is to be commended, but unity cannot be had at the expense of truth (John 17:17). The call for unity is often made in the name of love, but we ask, what kind of love? It goes without saying that it must be the love that is defined by truth, for love "*rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth*" (1 Cor 13:6). What is truth? The Apostle John says, "*thy word is truth*" (John 17:17b). Therefore, the ECT and LWF unity with the RCC is totally out of line because the RCC remains unclean and void of the truth. It is clear what we must do; the Lord says, "*Touch not the unclean thing*" (2 Cor 6:17b).

The Reformation was a special movement raised of God to reform a most deformed Church in a very dark age. It was a movement entirely based upon the Biblical foundations of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone), *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone), and *Solus Christus* (Christ Alone). Now, let us look at the Solas of the Reformation vis-à-vis the beliefs and traditions of the RCC.

SOLA SCRIPTURA

The RCC does not believe that the Christian Faith should be based on Scripture alone. To the RCC, human traditions must be added to Holy Scripture. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states,

"Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture ...are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out of the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal." ...As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of

Revelation is entrusted, "does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the Holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence."⁹

For the RCC, it is not Scripture alone but Scripture plus tradition, and usually tradition trumps Scripture. For example, the tradition of indulgences which came into existence only in 1095 allowed a person to buy forgiveness and even time off purgatory by purchasing a letter of indulgence (a discount coupon for sins committed or yet to be committed). In 1516, Tetzel the indulgence salesman went about with this jingle, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul in purgatory springs." (Today, you can get time off purgatory if you follow the Pope's tweets.)¹⁰ This drew the ire of Martin Luther who nailed his 95 theses on the castle door of Wittenberg on 31 October 1517 in protest. He vehemently opposed the peddling of forgiveness, for salvation is free, paid for in full by the blood of Christ (Rom 3:24, 8:32 1 Pet 1:18-19)!

By what authority did Martin Luther preach and teach that salvation is free and cannot be bought or sold? It is by the authority of Scripture, and Scripture alone. In 1521, in Worms, he was given an ultimatum to recant his teachings and writings, and his "Here I Stand" has become the battle cry of the Reformation,

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do

otherwise, God help me. Amen.

Indeed, this is precisely what God demands of His people—to believe and obey the Bible and the Bible alone, no matter what any human being or authority might say. “*Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged*” (Rom 3:4). The Christian appeal is always, “*Thus saith the Lord*”, “*It is written*”. Why? It is because “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Lord Jesus enjoined the Jews who were blinded by their man-made traditions to “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me*” (John 5:39).

The Bible’s absolute authority over man and Church is well stated in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) Chapter 1, Article 4,

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.¹¹

And Article 8,

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages,

are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.¹²

And thus as a Reformation and Reformed school of theology, the Far Eastern Bible College affirms without apology at 4.1.1 of its Constitution:

We believe in the divine, Verbal Plenary Inspiration (Autographs) and Verbal Plenary Preservation (Apographs) of the Scriptures in the original languages, their consequent inerrancy and infallibility, and as the perfect Word of God, the supreme and final authority in faith and life (2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:20-21, Ps 12:6-7, Matt 5:18, 24:35).

SOLA GRATIA

The RCC does not believe that salvation is purely by the grace of God alone. It teaches that man must do good to show himself worthy or deserving of salvation. In other words, man must work for his salvation. One way of doing so is to keep the seven sacraments of the RCC, namely, Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Marriage, Ordination, and Extreme Unction. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation*.”¹³

Luther himself did all he could to find salvation through ordination as an Augustinian monk, and he confessed,

I was indeed a good monk, and kept the rules of my order so strictly that I can say: if ever a monk got to heaven through monasticism, I should have been that man. All my brothers in the monastery who know me will testify to this. I would have become a martyr through fasting, prayer, reading and

other good works had I remained a monk very much longer.¹⁴

However, the more he worked for his salvation, the more desperate and miserable he became for he found no acquittal from guilt, no forgiveness of sins, no reprieve from the judgement to come no matter what he did and how hard he tried.

Hence, Luther after his conversion appealed to Scripture and proved that salvation is by the pure grace and mercy of God alone. *“For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy”* (Rom 9:15-16). *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Tit 3:5).

How then is this grace of God received? Not by works but by faith and faith alone.

SOLA FIDE

The RCC believes that justification comes by faith and works, but the Reformation teaches that justification comes by faith alone. Luther who found no salvation by works finally found salvation by faith as taught in Romans 1:17, *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”* The Scriptures state clearly, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”* (Eph 2:8-9). Abraham, the father of faith, is an excellent example of a man justified by faith alone, *“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to*

glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom 4:1-3). *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 5:1).

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q33) states, “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” It is clear from Scripture that God declares the repentant sinner righteous by means of faith alone, on account of the righteousness of Christ alone. But for the RCC it is not faith alone, neither is it Christ alone.

SOLUS CHRISTUS

The RCC does not see Jesus Christ as sole Mediator and Saviour; Mary is considered “Co-Mediatrix”. It is well known that Catholics do not rely solely on Jesus, for they are particularly fond of Mary. They go to Mary especially when their prayers to Jesus are not answered. They are confident that Mary as “Mother of God” would get Jesus to hear and answer their prayers. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states,

The Virgin Mary... is acknowledged and honoured as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer... She is “clearly the mother of the members of the Christ”... since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of the head. Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church.¹⁶

It goes on to state,

This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly...

Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation... Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.¹⁷

What does the Bible say? The Bible in no uncertain terms says that there is only one Mediator and identifies Him as Christ Jesus, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Mary did not die for our sins, Jesus did, and hence only He can intercede and bring us the gifts of eternal salvation, “But this man [Jesus], because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:24-25). Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

The RCC says Mary is Mediatrix, but lo and behold Mary never took upon herself such a title and role. Mary never saw herself as Saviour, only a sinner. In fact in her Magnificat, she confessed her need of a Saviour, “And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46-47). There is no question Mary knew Jesus as her God and Saviour. It is all about Jesus, not her. If Mary were here, she would surely denounce the Mariolatry that is found in the RCC today.

What is more is that nowhere in the Bible

do we find any of the Apostles telling us to pray to Mary or seek the intercession of Mary. The last time Mary was mentioned in the Bible is in Acts 1:14. The rest of the Bible says nothing about her. This silence is telling. What we do find throughout the Bible is Jesus. Only Jesus, always Jesus! The Apostle Peter himself said, “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:10-12).

NO MISTAKE!

The RCC through the Council of Trent anathematizes Protestants who believe in *Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide*, and *Solus Christus*.¹⁸ Know that a gospel that is not *Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus* is no gospel at all. The Apostle Paul warned against those who would pervert the gospel of Christ and preach another gospel, “As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:9). Let it be categorically stated that it is the gospel of the Reformation and not the RCC that saves. Remember Luther’s “Here I Stand”. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1). Make no mistake about it, **the Reformation was no mistake**. Soli Deo Gloria!

-
- ¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 7:1.
- ² “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium”, *Catholic International* 5 (1994): 384-94.
- ³ For an analysis, see “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective” (St Louis: The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 1999). The Joint Declaration is appended in the paper.
- ⁴ Mary Ann Collins, *Catholicism Unveiled* (New York: iUniverse, 2004), 43. Collins, a former Catholic nun, wrote, “The declarations and anathemas of the Council of Trent have never been revoked. On the contrary, the decrees of the Council of Trent are confirmed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992).”
- ⁵ The Council of Trent, <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/index.htm>, accessed 24 June 2017.
- ⁶ “Church rightly condemned aspects of the Protestant reformation in 1600’s but...”, *The Catholic News*, 9 July 1995, 5.
- ⁷ “Pope Francis echoes Pope Benedict, underlines continuity of Council of Trent, Vatican II”, *Catholic World News*, 25 November 2013.
- ⁸ The moral corruption in the RCC is widespread. The homosexual scandal in the RCC is exposed in Donald B Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000). The pedophile scandal is clearly documented in “Church allowed abuse by priests for years”, *The Boston Globe*, 6 January 2002. Fifteen years later, the scandal continues, “Hundreds of church sex abuse victims continue to come forward”, *The Boston Globe*, 6 January 2017.
- ⁹ Geoffrey Chapman, trans, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Cassell Imprint, 1994), 25.
- ¹⁰ “Vatican offers ‘time off purgatory’ to followers of Pope Francis tweets”, *The Guardian*, 16 July 2013. “In its latest attempt to keep up with the times the Vatican has married one of its oldest traditions to the world of social media by offering ‘indulgences’ to followers of Pope Francis’ tweets.”
- ¹¹ *The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms* (London: Wickliffe Press, 1958), 21.
- ¹² *Ibid*, 23.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, 259. Emphasis in the original.
- ¹⁴ Denis R Janz, ed, *A Reformation Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 77.
- ¹⁵ *The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, 296.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, 220.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, 221.
- ¹⁸ Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), xii.

THE 16TH CENTURY REFORMATION AND THE BIBLE?

Without the Bible, the 16th century Reformation (31st October 1517) would not have been possible.

The period before the 16th Century Reformation was a time of great spiritual darkness. It lasted for about one thousand years when the Bible was kept away and hidden within the Church of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church forbade the translation of the Bible into the vernacular language of the ordinary people. This was much easier in the past, when books were hand copied and the printing press had not yet been invented.

Only those who served and worked inside the Roman Catholic Church had access to the Bible. Such men included Martin Luther and John Calvin. They were given access to the Bible, and through the faithful study of God's Word their blind eyes were opened to the truth of God. They were converted and were used by God to light the flame of the 16th Century Reformation. The flame of God's Truth and Light shone brightly and reached to the farthest corner of the rest of the world.

Five hundred years later, we reflect on the impact of the Bible on the Reformation and how important this same Bible is to us today! Martin Luther accepted Christ as his Lord and Saviour while he was preparing to teach the Word of God. The books of the Apostle Paul brought conviction to his

aching soul and he was saved, for he learned from the Bible that that the just shall live by faith alone and not faith with works. Luther was saved by the grace of God in Christ. Luther left us this testimony of his view on the Bible:

“The Bible-scene at the university library at Erfurt 1503 © Collection privée – Luther was an Augustine monk ; in obedience to his order he studied for many years and was then appointed Professor of the Holy Scriptures at Wittenberg University. It may come as a surprise to us today, but the Bible was widely read and studied within the Catholic Church. Luther discovered texts which formed the basis of the Reformation principle “**sola gratia**” (by grace alone), while studying and making notes on Paul's epistles: man's salvation comes by God's grace alone and does not in any way depend on his works (which was not the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church). This was the basis of Luther's disagreement with traditional doctrine, and it was taken up by all the other Reformers. According to Luther, Scripture could only be read in the light of “sola gratia” which opened the reader's mind and led to “sola scriptura... In the 16th century, Cajetan, the Pope's representative, who opposed Luther, declared that any interpretation had to take into account former commentaries and reflect Church doctrine. What did Luther reply? He said that Scripture should only be interpreted according to “the conscience,

bound by the Word of God”. Luther broke away from the Church saying that the Bible was not necessarily linked to traditional interpretation. Everyone recognised the sovereign authority of the Bible, but Luther contested its traditional inextricable association with its interpretation by the Church: this is one of the meanings of “Sola scriptura”, that the Bible should not be interpreted by the clergy. In the 16th century the interpretation of the Bible had become controversial, critical of the church institution. The way in which Protestants read the Bible led to the reforming of the Church.”¹

The years between the 1st century to the 16th century were very difficult for those who served God with no Bible in their hands. The people in the street could not read the Bible, not because they did not want to, but because it was not translated into their languages for them to read, study and obey. In those days, the truth was present but it was locked away, since laws were passed forbidding the translation of the Bible, which would have unlocked the truth to the people. These laws of evil men were not without “teeth.” Anyone who was caught breaking these laws was persecuted, and some were tortured before they were eventually killed.

The following is taken from <https://romecorruptedchristianity.wordpress.com/2013/07/02/a-time-when-the-bible-was-banned-and-burned/> – emphasis original –

The Church admits this in her own Laws:

“Canon 14. We prohibit also that the laity should not be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books.” – The

Church Council of Toulouse 1229 AD Source: Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe, Scholar Press, London, England copyright 1980 by Edward Peters, ISBN 0-85967-621-8, pp. 194-195

The Council of Tarragona of 1234, in its second canon, ruled that:

“No one may possess the books of the Old and New Testaments, and if anyone possesses them he must turn them over to the local bishop within eight days, so that they may be burned...” – The Church Council of Tarragona 1234 AD; 2nd Cannon – Source: D. Lortsch, *Historie de la Bible en France*, 1910, p.14.

“Opened on Thursday alongside the Inquisition archives was the infamous Index of Forbidden Books, which Roman Catholics **were forbidden to read** or possess on pain of excommunication. They showed that even “the Bible” was once on the blacklist. Translations of the holy book ended up on the bonfires along with other “heretical” works... The Index of Forbidden Books and all excommunications relating to it were officially abolished in 1966. The Inquisition itself was established by Pope Gregory IX in 1233...” – Vatican archives reveal Bible was once banned book by Jude Webber ROME, Jan 22, 1998 (Reuters)

“Canon 14. We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; ... we **most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books.**”

To bring the gospel of Christ and the light of salvation to the rest of the world, the Bible had to be placed into the hands of men, women and children. This was not

possible because books were hand copied. They were too expensive to be owned by the majority. Thank God for the invention of the printing press around 1440 A.D. by Johannes Gutenberg.² With this invention, books were printed cheaply and by the thousands. The printing press became the tool that allowed the impact of the 16th Century Reformation to spread to the rest of the world and this impact was kept alive because they could now hold the affordable Bible in their hands! For the first time in the history of mankind, the Bible could be placed into the hands of everyone. It became affordable to the man in the streets!

Returning to the Bible after keeping the Bible under lock and key for more than one thousand years was definitely the handiwork of the almighty God. Making the Bible available to the masses was not cheap. The law forbidding the translation of the Bible and the printing of it meant that those actions were still punishable by death in the western world. No one was permitted to translate the Bible into any language without the permission of the Roman Catholic Church.

Anyone caught doing so had to pay for it with his life! Yet men like John Wycliffe (1320 to 31 December 1384) did what God placed in their hearts to do. John Wycliffe was the first man to translate the Bible into the English language. He did so before the invention of the printing press, though it was not from the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek as he did not know these languages. Instead, he translated it from the Latin Vulgate. The Roman Catholic Church wanted Wycliffe captured and killed. The Lord spared him by taking him home to glory before his capture. The Roman Catholic Church hated him for what he did and declared him a heretic even

after he died. Wycliffe was known as the morning star of the 16th Century reformation. This is a glimpse of what the Roman Catholic Church did to Wycliffe:

“The Council of Constance declared Wycliffe a heretic on 4 May 1415, and banned his writings, effectively both excommunicating him retroactively and making him an early forerunner of Protestantism. The Council decreed that Wycliffe’s works should be burned and his remains removed from consecrated ground. This order, confirmed by Pope Martin V, was carried out in 1428. Wycliffe’s corpse was exhumed and burned and the ashes cast into the River Swift, which flows through Lutterworth.”³

Wycliffe’s view of the Bible was one of great trust, and he believed it was the only authority that must regulate man’s belief in Christ. “In the years before his death in 1384 he increasingly argued for Scriptures as the authoritative centre of Christianity, that the claims of the papacy were unhistorical, that monasticism was irredeemably corrupt, and that the moral unworthiness of priests invalidated their office and sacraments. Wycliffe returned to Lutterworth, and sent out tracts against the monks and Urban VI, since the latter, contrary to Wycliffe’s hopes, had not turned out to be a reforming pope. The literary achievements of Wycliffe’s last days, such as the *Trialogus*, stand at the peak of the knowledge of his day. His last work, the *Opus evangelicum*, the last part of which he named in characteristic fashion “Of Antichrist”, remained uncompleted. While he was saying Mass in the parish church on Holy Innocents’ Day, 28 December 1384, he suffered a stroke, and died as the year ended. Wycliffe was 64 years old. The Anti-Wycliffite Statute of 1401 extended persecution to Wycliffe’s

remaining followers. The “Constitutions of Oxford” of 1408 aimed to reclaim authority in all ecclesiastical matters, and specifically named John Wycliffe as it banned certain writings, and noted that translation of Scripture into English by unlicensed laity was a crime punishable by charges of heresy.”⁴

William Tyndale (1494 to 1536) was also not spared even though he translated the Bible into the English language after the 16th Century Reformation of 1517. He was betrayed by his friend, tried, and strangled and burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church. “In May 1535, Phillips lured Tyndale away from the safety of his quarters and into the arms of soldiers. Tyndale was immediately taken to the Castle of Vilvorde, the great state prison of the Low Countries, and accused of heresy. Trials for heresy in the Netherlands were in the hands of special commissioners of the Holy Roman Empire. It took months for the law to take its course. During this time, Tyndale had many hours to reflect on his own teachings, such as this passage from one of his tracts: “Let it not make thee despair, neither yet discourage thee, O reader, that it is forbidden thee in pain of life and goods, or that it is made breaking of the king’s peace, or treason unto his highness, to read the Word of thy soul’s health—for if God be on our side, what matter maketh it who be against us, be they bishops, cardinals, popes.” Finally, in early August 1536, Tyndale was condemned as a heretic, degraded from

the priesthood, and delivered to the secular authorities for punishment. On Friday, October 6, after local officials took their seats, Tyndale was brought to the cross in the middle of the town square and given a chance to recant. That refused, he was given a moment to pray. English historian John Foxe said he cried out, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes!” Then he was bound to the beam, and both an iron chain and a rope were put around his neck. Gunpowder was added to the brush and logs. At the signal of a local official, the executioner, standing behind Tyndale, quickly tightened the noose, strangling him. Then an official took up a lighted torch and handed it to the executioner, who set the wood ablaze.”⁵

Sola Scriptura was the clarion call during the reformation period. The phrase means “only Scriptures.” The Roman Catholic Church and all her traditions were set aside by the reformers and their followers. The Bible alone has the authority and right to bind a person’s conscience. In other words, God alone can bind a person’s conscience, not man nor the church. This set the conscience of the people free from the slavery and the yoke of Rome. This breakaway was monumental after more than a thousand years of spiritual darkness without the Bible. Now the Bible is in the hands of almost every believer and this has spread across the globe within the past five hundred years. To date, the completed Bible has been translated into 553 languages and the New Testament into 1,333 languages.⁶

¹ <https://www.mu-seeprotestant.org/en/notice/the-reformation-and-the-bible-sola-scriptura/>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Printing_press

³ https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wycliffe

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/scholarsandscientists/william-tyndale.html>

⁶ <https://www.biblica.com/resources/bible-faqs/how-many-different-languages-has-the-bible-been-translated-into/>

THE REFORMATION AND THEOLOGY

REFORMATION: A THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENT BASED ON SCRIPTURE

The 16th century Protestant Reformation movement was indeed a theological awakening. Though many historians have made huge attempts to define the Reformation along social, political and economic lines, it is undeniable that the Reformation was above all a theological movement. Fundamentally, the Reformation was a battle for the Holy Scripture and its sound doctrines. The great Reformers, such as Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, among others, were theologians. Their strong convictions concerning biblical doctrines and their commitment to challenging the unbiblical beliefs and practices of the powerful Roman Catholic Church encapsulated the true story of the Reformation. Even when they were threatened with death, the Reformers stood steadfastly for their Scriptural beliefs. Without a doubt, the theological convictions which they held in common gave rise to the impetus for the Protestant Reformation. Hence, it is most befitting that we remember the Protestant Reformation as primarily a Reformation of doctrine.

The Protestant Reformation was a spiritual endeavour to bring the church back to the authority of Scripture and its biblical truths. The Reformers recognised the errors of medieval Roman Catholicism and called

people to return to sound, biblical doctrines. They believed that Scripture alone is sufficient to guide and govern God's people in matters of faith and practice, so they expounded their theology from Scripture alone, and not from traditions of the church and philosophies of man. Herein lies the distinctiveness of the theology of the Protestant Reformation – it promoted the supreme authority of the Bible by rejecting all that contradicted its clear teachings. This is clearly expressed by Martin Luther in his Smalcald Articles (his doctrinal articles) – “The rule is: The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel.”¹

Martin Luther and all other Reformers insisted on the final authority of Scripture. They proclaimed Scripture's authority as the ultimate authority by which all other authorities are to be judged. Even the creeds of church fathers or church councils were to be regarded as authoritative only if they faithfully expressed the teaching of Scripture. In this respect, Luther's disputation against Scholastic Theology (in 1516), his Ninety-Five Theses against the Power of Indulgences (in 1517), his defence at the Diet of Worms (in 1521), and all his sermons and writings unequivocally insisted that no source of authority that contradicts Scripture be accepted. Luther's famous statement at the Diet of Worms in May 1521 attested to his commitment to the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*: “Unless

I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by evident reason – for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves – I cannot and will not recant. I consider myself conquered by the Scriptures adduced by me and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.”

The Reformers’ conviction about the divine origin of Scripture, and its truthfulness, relevance and authority, was central to their theological persuasions. Hence, an appeal to Scripture was commonplace in their sermons and theological writings. Moreover, they also firmly believed in the efficacy of Scripture, and how its proper exposition under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit produces saving faith that leads to obedience. Luther affirmed in the Smalcald Articles that “in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word”². In 1522, he wrote, “I think that the pope himself, with all his devils, even though he suppresses every word of God, cannot deny that St Paul’s word is God’s word and that his order is the order of the Holy Spirit.”³

To the Reformers, Holy Scripture was not a powerless, dead writing, but a powerful, living divine testimony of the Holy Spirit to human souls that would convict, regenerate, sanctify and edify them. The authority, efficacy and finality of God’s Word undergirded the thinking of the Reformers, and that provided the firm basis for the Reformation movement of the 16th century.

REFORMED THEOLOGY

Today, what we call “Reformed Theology” is the theology of the 16th century

Protestant Reformation. The Reformation not only helped us to recognise and reject the errors of Roman Catholicism, but also to retain the “reformed” theological perspective, which is Scripture-centred, Christ-honouring soteriology (i.e. doctrine of salvation). We certainly have much to thank God for as we receive the biblical truths of the Gospel, which Martin Luther rediscovered, emphasised and defended in 1517, and which have been preserved through five centuries till this day.

Reformed theology holds to the Five Solas of the Reformation, which are Latin slogans that encapsulated the Reformers’ basic theological principles, pitted against certain errors of the Roman Catholic doctrines. They are (i) *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), (ii) *Sola Gratia* (Grace alone), (iii) *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), (iv) *Sola Fide* (Faith alone), and (v) *Soli Deo Gloria* (Glory to God alone). These Reformation slogans are a powerful summation of the truths of the Gospel as described in the Bible.

No doubt many theological truths have been expounded by the Reformers, but the crux of the Reformation was the proclamation and defence of the Gospel of salvation. Proper biblical understanding of the grace of God in the Gospel of His Son Christ Jesus was central to the Reformation movement. The Reformers were convinced that there was hardly any preaching of the true biblical Gospel in the Roman Catholic Church, and that whatever preaching which existed were distorted forms of the Gospel. Hence, they were determined to deal with the every kind of widespread distortion of the Gospel, even heresies such as Pelagianism⁴ and semi-Pelagianism⁵.

Reformed theology has rediscovered the Scriptural truths of the Gospel

and has proclaimed them with great clarity and firmness. These truths have come to be known as “Calvinism”, because of John Calvin’s special efforts and leadership in propounding the biblical theology of salvation. As Rev Timothy Tow, the founding pastor of Bible-Presbyterianism in Singapore, has often mentioned, “Calvinism is Paulinism systematised.” In other words, Calvinism is the plain teaching of the apostle Paul in the New Testament concerning the Gospel. It is a systematic theological presentation that outlines the biblical elements of the true Gospel of salvation, emphasising the biblical doctrine of God’s sovereign, gracious election of many unto salvation by Christ’s redemptive work on the cross and their effectual calling by the Spirit and the Gospel, as well as their eternal preservation for His glory. Reformed or Calvinistic theology is none other than a Bible-centred theological perspective of the Gospel.

Calvinism is often represented by the acronym TULIP. Each letter denotes a specific doctrine that is essential to the biblical representation of the Gospel. “T” denotes Total Depravity (cf. Romans 3:9-17; 5:12), “U” denotes Unconditional Election (cf. Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4-6), “L” denotes Limited Atonement (cf. Matthew 26:28; John 6:37; 10:26-27; Romans 5:18-19), “I” denotes Irresistible Grace (cf. John 6:37, 44; Acts 16:14; Romans 8:15; Ephesians 2:8; Hebrews 12:2), and “P” denotes Perseverance of the Saints (cf. John 10:27-28; Hebrews 7:25). These are known as the “Five Points of Calvinism”.

REFORMED AND REFORMING

Another significant theological slogan that emerged out of the Reformation was *Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda*

(i.e. “The church reformed, always reforming”). It represented nothing more than the Reformers desired for the church to return to the sound biblical theology. They never thought of their theological work as devising something altogether new. Their intent was singular – renewing or reviving the church according to the saving truths of the Word of God.

Reformers knew that the church had become corrupt, and a change in the church’s beliefs and ministry was critical. Hence, they worked relentlessly to have the church reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God. John Calvin wrote in the preface of his tract, *The Necessity for Reforming the Church*:

“We maintain, then, that at the commencement when God raised up Luther and others, who held forth a torch to light us into the way of salvation, and who, by their ministry, founded and reared our churches those heads of doctrine in which the truth of our religion, those in which the pure and legitimate worship of God, and those in which the salvation of men are comprehended, were in a great measure obsolete. We maintain that the use of the sacraments was in many ways vitiated and polluted. And we maintain that the government of the Church was converted into a species of foul and insufferable tyranny.”

In that article, Calvin’s greatest attempt was to express “how to restore the Church to its proper state.” He dealt with four topics, which he remarked as “soul and body” of the church. He referred to the topics of worship and salvation as the “soul” of the church, while sacraments and church government were called the “body” of the church. He sought to call for prompt actions to remedy the evils in

the church related to worship, salvation, sacraments and church government.

One of the most significant outcomes of the Reformation was the prominence that the preaching of the Word received in the church worship services. In the late-medieval period, sermons were not the common feature of church worship. People had to go out of the church into open fields to hear preachers. Such preachers [e.g. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444); Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498)] faced excommunication and even execution. In those days, people went to church to see ceremonies attached to Mass. Preaching was so neglected that it virtually ceased to exist in the church. However, the Reformation brought the preaching of the Word from the obscurity and secrecy of the fields back into the worship service of the church. The Reformers' battle for the Word of God had reinstated the preaching of it to its rightful place in the church.

The Reformers would not leave the souls of the spiritually hungry churchgoers in the hands of irresponsible clergymen who were not keen to feed them with the Word. So, like faithful and concerned shepherds, the Reformers strived – even though it would mean death to them – to nourish the flock of God with the truths of the Holy Scriptures. Soon the activities of the churches where the Reformers had laboured became thoroughly Word-centered. The proclamation of God's Word became their greatest concern. In Saint Pierre's Church of Geneva, where Calvin ministered, the church building was rid of all the statues of saints, relics, crucifixes and even the altar where the Mass was conducted. Even the walls and pillars were whitewashed to hide Rome's unbiblical iconography. A wooden pulpit was brought into the church and was placed in

such a way that the worshippers would be seated around it. By placing the pulpit at the center from which the sermon would be preached, Scripture was given centre stage. Such changes were also made in other churches in the surrounding areas. Thousands of sermons were preached by the Reformers, thus making available to God's flock the indispensable means of grace that provided them with salvation, sanctification, wisdom, comfort and revival.

Indeed, the Reformers were eager to get the church aligned to the Scriptural depiction of its faith and practice. Their efforts were not in vain. Eventually, Reformed Confessions of Faith (such as the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms) were drawn up to guide the church in the truths of God's Word. These standards of faith testify that the Reformers' efforts to reform the church were truly a movement to bring the church back to biblical theology. A Reformed church is a church that yields to the doctrines of Scripture. Churches in all ages and in all places must be committed to remaining faithful to Scriptural doctrines and living – all the more so because of the Scriptural warning that false teachers will arise to bring damnable heresies in to the flocks of God (Matthew 24:5, 11, 24; Acts 20:29-30; 1 Corinthians 11:19; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Ephesians 4:14; Colossians 2:8,18; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:3; Titus 1:11; 2 Peter 2:1).

CONCLUSION

Though the Roman Catholic Church has long presented itself as the true, biblical apostolic church, a host of its doctrines and practices were unknown to the apostles and the early church, not to mention the New Testament. So, the Reformers called the church to reform itself by submitting to the sound theology of the Holy Scriptures.

Sadly, many Protestant churches of our time make changes to their faith, worship, and practice based on contemporary culture. They attempt to legitimise the implemented changes by holding them up as being consistent with the Reformation principle of “The church... always reforming”. This motto was never meant to justify unbiblical changes made to the faith, life, and practice of the church. Instead, it demands that the church subject itself to the scrutiny of God’s Word and that it continually remains faithful to the truths

of the Word of God. Making the timeless authority of God’s Word subordinate to changing cultural values and scientific theories is contrary to the Reformation motto of “always reforming”.

The true intent of Reformation is to reform the church back to Scripture. Even after 500 years, the church needs this same Reformation. The Bible is the only authority for the church, and it is sufficient and efficient to bring salvation and edification to His people.

¹ Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article 2.15

² Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article 8.3

³ Thompson, M. D. (2017). *Sola Scriptura*. In M. Barrett (Ed.), *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary* (p. 157). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

⁴ This heretical teaching associated with a British monk named Pelagius (354-440 AD) denied the doctrines of original sin and predestination taught by Augustine. While it denied the transmission of Adam’s guilt to his posterity, it taught that man is capable of choosing God and doing good without God’s grace, and hence man can take the initial and fundamental steps towards salvation by his own efforts, apart from divine grace.

⁵ Semi-Pelagianism was an effort to mediate between Augustinianism (which emphasised on predestination and man’s total inability) and Pelagianism (which insisted on man’s complete ability). Semi-Pelagianism admitted that Adam’s sin affected all his posterity both in body and soul, however, it denied that fallen men were spiritually dead. Semi-Pelagianism also denied God’s sovereign election of His people.

THE REFORMATION AND THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION

The 16th Century Protestant Reformation was ordained of the Almighty God for the great purpose of rediscovering the true Gospel of Jesus Christ during the dark period of the Middle Ages. For over a thousand years the Christian Church was in darkness under the Roman Catholic system. The great evils of the medieval Church had blinded many for centuries. But praise and thank God for raising and moving devout men of God to bring back once again the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith, which was preached during the time of the Acts of the Apostles and the early Church.

REDISCOVERING AND UNDERSTANDING THE TRUE GOSPEL

How did the Reformation contribute to our understanding of the way of salvation? In the first place, why was there a Reformation? Aside from other reasons such as abusive Church practices, the Reformation happened because there was a flagrant deviation from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ that the Apostle Paul had proclaimed hundreds of years ago. In the medieval times, under the Romish system, the pure gospel was adulterated and tainted with various, detrimental shortcomings of defective faith practices. People were incorrectly taught that there could be no salvation apart from the Roman Church. There were intermediaries

(eg, intercessions of Mary, priests and saints) introduced and strange man-made rituals were deemed as mandatory, if one desires to reach God. It was necessary for sinners to approach God and to be acceptable before Him by attending masses, worshipping relics, giving penance, reciting the rosary and doing good works. It was also a requirement for sinners to confess their sins at the confessional box. As a result, people were in bondage to the Church. The Gospel of grace was distorted, if not actually lost for hundreds of years, obscured by the incorrect and unbiblical practices and doctrines.

The Reformation was a movement intended to purify the immorality in the Roman Catholic Church, and also to deliver people from their struggle with soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) for hundreds of years. It broke the yoke and bondage from the Romish “salvation by works” religion and revealed that all such practices are not biblical. It shows us from Holy Scriptures that the way to heaven is by direct access to Christ without the mediation of any saint or religious ritual. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). The Lord Himself said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

True salvation for a sinner is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as being the only Saviour – Only Jesus Saves! Once a sinner believes in this blessed truth, he will receive everlasting life (Jn 1:12 “But as many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”). He is justified by his faith alone and not by his works. This is the true gospel of redemption for all sinners (Titus 3:15 “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;” Eph 2:8-9) The Reformation was primarily the recovery of the doctrine of justification by faith. The Reformation restored the doctrine of salvation through faith in Christ alone. The lost gospel was finally rediscovered in all its fullness.

The Reformer raised by the Almighty God to spark the fire in the rediscovery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk and Professor at the Wittenberg University. He retrieved the true Gospel for people, in which God in Christ had accomplished salvation for man and offers it to man as a free gift to be received by faith alone. Martin Luther was then a very learned and devout priest who was well taught in the Roman Catholic traditions and doctrines. He faithfully practised all the religious rituals and asceticism but he did not experience any real peace in his life. After much monastic efforts as a devoted monk in the Roman Church, Luther found that he could not save himself by his good works and merits. He was overwhelmed by the utter hopelessness of his human endeavours to gain the favour of God’s forgiveness for his sins.

Everything changed due to his struggle with the question, “How can a sinful man stand

in the presence of a righteous God?” When the Holy Spirit led him to focus on Romans 1:17 and understanding the meaning of: “The just shall live by faith,” Luther was liberated in his heart and mind to know that a sinner was free to come before God not by works or self-righteousness but by grace through faith. It was a great spiritual excitement for him to rediscover the wonderful doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). Luther understood that justification by faith alone is necessary and essential to the Gospel and to salvation.

Martin Luther’s great and timely rediscovery ignited the Protestant Reformation and gave the right answer to the fundamental question of: How can a sinner be made right with God? The medieval Roman Church was promoting the sale of indulgences (or “forgiveness tickets”) to pay for the pardon of sins. One had to work and to earn righteousness. The learned, devout and courageous Reformer took issue with the obnoxious doctrine of indulgences which is in blatant contradiction to the Scriptures. He then gave a radically different but biblical answer to salvation based on Romans 1:17. He was then prompted to write and nail the *Ninety-Five Theses* on the castle door of Wittenberg on the eve of All Saints’ Day, on 31 October 1517. Luther set forth the gospel truth concerning the pardon of sins through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not by works. This ignited the fire of revival and spirit of Reformation in Germany and later Europe. The Gospel, the power of God unto salvation, was liberated from its medieval dross, and was proclaimed once again to the world.

Today we owe it to Martin Luther and the other Reformers of the 16th century. These men found themselves in an age with little understanding and access to the gospel, while facing the tyranny of the

established Roman Church. And yet, they have been instrumental in giving us the understanding of the wondrous Gospel, the power of God unto salvation. What a blessing it is to rediscover that Christ Jesus had accomplished, through His suffering and death on the cross, all that is necessary for our salvation. He is the propitiation for our sins and He has satisfied fully all the righteous demands of God. Man has no part in his redemption, for Christ had paid it all. After the fall of the first Adam, all men are born in sin and are dead in sin and trespasses (Eph 2:1). All we need to be saved is what God does for us through the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Everything is God's service to us. Salvation belongs to the Lord alone (Titus 2:10), and not to man or works. We are entirely passive, for all men are totally depraved and have no ability at all to do any good works unto salvation. We are debtors who receive the God-given faith. The Reformation is an advancement in man's understanding of the Gospel. It has solved the soteriology tension that had lasted for almost one thousand years.

DEVIATING FROM THE RESTORED GOSPEL AND PREACHING ANOTHER GOSPEL

Are there some modern views concerning the gospel today, that shows a deviation from the gospel of the Bible which the 16th Century Reformers had rediscovered? Do evangelical Christians today preach another gospel? Unfortunately and sadly, the answer is yes! Billy Graham, the foremost neo-evangelical of the 20th century, in an interview with Robert Schuller on 31 May 1997, made it very clear that you do not need Christ or the Bible to go to heaven.¹ This marks the entrance into dark days of greater error, compromise and apostasy. It is an utter deviation from the spirit of the Reformation, which the Reformers had devoted their lives to,

without fear and favour of men, even to the point of facing martyrdom, in order to redirect the mistakes of the established Roman Church together with her contra-biblical doctrines and practices to the true Gospel of Christ.

In March 1994, there was the historic signing of the *Evangelicals Catholics Together* (ECT) document by a number of well-known neo-evangelicals and Roman Catholics. Some of these men who signed the ecumenical agreement were prominent preachers and authors in the evangelical community. They knew that there is a substantive difference between Catholics and Protestants. They understood that the two faiths are primarily at variance with each other, with regards to the essential gospel of salvation. The ECT document minimises, comprises or relinquishes the very important doctrinal difference concerning the key doctrine of justification by faith alone (which Martin Luther called it "the article of the standing or falling Church.") The Reformation and the doctrine of salvation through grace by faith alone, was the cause for which Luther and the other Reformers fought for with their lives, and they had to leave the Roman Church in the 16th century. But today, in exchange for ecumenical unity and false peace, Protestants have compromised at the expense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the other fundamental beliefs of the Protestant faith. Sadly, this is a deliberate and shameful betrayal of the Protestant faith and a surrender of all which the Reformers had fought for in the 16th Century Protestant Reformation.

Today, the Reformation is much forgotten by Protestant Churches. We are seeing increasing apostasy, compromise and accommodation of the neo-evangelicals with the Roman Catholic Church and the

liberals. The Protestant faith and the Gospel of Christ is under attack again. The pure Gospel of Jesus Christ has been adulterated widely today. The Holy Bible is undermined by many inaccurate and adulterated modern versions of the Bible. Liberal scholars of the Jesus Seminar, had with much skepticism truncated the Gospels with the removal of the precious words of our Lord. The World Council of Churches (WCC) and its ecumenical movement efforts is working towards world-wide unity among contrary faiths, leading to a deceitful compromise of the pure Gospel. The widespread charismatic phenomenon with the Holy Laughter movement and the Signs and Wonders movement (Third Wave) have confused people to believe in emotions, experiences, visions and extra-biblical revelations instead of the true Gospel of Christ. The New Age movement propagates its pantheistic and syncretistic heresies to distract the people from the straight and narrow way of salvation. The psychoheresy movement of today has lured people into believing that the answer to man's problems of sin, is man-made psychological therapies, positive thinking and self-esteem, instead of admitting and confessing sinful behaviours and coming to God for repentance and forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

The Reformation was a mighty work of Divine grace, in which the wondrous doctrine of justification by faith alone is renewed for our understanding of the true and only way of salvation in Christ Jesus. It was a God-inspired movement that delivered true believers out of the Roman yoke of spiritual bondage. Nevertheless, Satan, our adversary, who was the master of deception behind the evils of the medieval church, has not changed his strategy and intent in attacking the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The accuser of the brethren is still aiming to get true believers shipwrecked, as they embrace the rediscovered true and pure Gospel. Therefore, we need to beware of the devil's subtle attacks in tempting the Protestant Church with false peace and ecumenical unity with the Roman Church, so that the pure gospel of justification by faith would not be compromised again. May the Lord give us a sense of conviction and courage, just like the Reformers of the 16th century, to propagate, defend, contend and advance the gospel truth without fear and favour of men. Let us continue with vigilance and watchfulness in these last days with the Reformation spirit, with total reliance on the finished work of Christ alone at Calvary. Amen.

¹ Reynolds, *Foundation*, May-June 1997, 22-25

THE REFORMATION AND CHURCH GOVERNMENT

INTRODUCTION

The book of Acts sets for us an example of church government being exercised in Acts 15. There we have the example of a council made up of apostles and elders convening to discuss and deliberate on matters concerning the church. Throughout the New Testament we continue to see the proper form of government being described and practiced within churches. Church government is a very important part of the life of the church, as it will affect how matters are decided, how order is maintained, and how directions are set.

Throughout the centuries, as Christian churches grew, different forms of government were developed and defined. Today, there are essentially three forms of church government adopted by churches. They are known as the Episcopalian, Presbyterian and Congregational forms of church government.

The Episcopalian form of church government is one where churches are governed by bishops. Within this system, bishops are subject to higher-ranking bishops. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, a bishop will have authority over a diocese,¹ but will ultimately be subjected to the overall head of the Church, whom they refer to as the Pope. Apart from the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox, Anglican Churches and certain Lutheran denominations also adopt the Episcopalian

form of church government. Arguments for the Episcopalian form of church government are often based on historical rather than Scriptural reasons.

The congregational form of church government is one where the congregational members of local churches will govern the church. In this system of government, each individual church will stand independently from other churches. The congregation in these local churches will have full authority in making decisions relating to the affairs of the church. This form of governance is usually adopted by Baptists and other independent churches.

The Presbyterian form of church government is one based on the oversight of elders or presbyters. Elders will form a governing body within a local church known as the session.² Sessions of local churches are then subject to a higher level of governing body known as the presbytery. In some Presbyterian churches, there may be higher governing bodies known as the synod or general assembly. This is a form of church governance held by Presbyterian churches. We believe that the Presbyterian form of government is most consistent with Scripture.

THE RISE OF THE PAPACY

From the 5th Century to the 16th Century, also known as the Dark Ages, the Roman Catholic Church held great power and

had both political and spiritual influence. Consequently, the authority figure of the church the people came to recognise and revere was the Pope. The question though, is how did the Pope rise to such power in the first place?

Between AD 100 – 313, the Christian Church was facing a period of great struggle. The Church faced problems both from without and within. From without, the Roman state was persecuting Christians. From within, the Church had to deal with the problems of heresy and false teaching.

The Church had to respond to these internal and external problems and one of her responses was to exalt the role of the Bishop in the church. Churches needed strong leadership to meet the problems of persecution. Strong leadership was also seen as the means to deal with heresies. Authority was needed to enforce doctrinal purity in the churches. What churches then needed was firm organization and discipline. The Episcopalian system was then thought to be the ideal solution to meet those needs.

Philip Schaff gives an excellent description for the rise of the episcopate:

The whole church spirit of the age tended towards centralization; it everywhere felt a demand for compact, solid unity; and this inward bent, amidst the surrounding dangers of persecution and heresy, carried the church irresistibly towards the episcopate. In so critical and stormy a time, the principle, union is strength, division is weakness, prevailed over all. In fact, the existence of the church at that period may be said to have depended in a great measure on the preservation and promotion of unity, and that in an outward, tangible form,

suited to the existing grade of culture. Such a unity was offered in the bishop, who held a monarchical, or more properly a patriarchal relation to the congregation. In the bishop was found the visible representative of Christ, the great Head of the whole church. In the bishop, therefore, all sentiments of piety found a centre. In the bishop the whole religious posture of the people towards God and towards Christ had its outward support and guide.³

This soon brought about a hierarchical system in the church. Initially the bishops were equal in dignity and power, but they would then be classified into ranks depending on their political and ecclesiastical influence in their districts.⁴

During the early days of the episcopate, there were four ranks. The first level consisted of the Bishops of country churches. These were the bishops of the lowest level, who had authority over village churches. The second level consisted of the Bishops of city churches. These bishops were given more recognition and honour than those of village churches. The third level consisted of the Bishops of the Metropolitan. They were the heads of the churches of capital cities of provinces. The fourth level consisted of the Bishops of churches which were in the capitals of the three main divisions of the Roman Empire. These were the churches in Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria.

The Episcopal system and the emphasis of the power of one man as the head of the church would give rise to the establishing of the authority of the papacy.

Leo I⁵ who became the Bishop of Rome in AD 440 was the one who advanced the position of the Bishop of Rome. Leo I made

extensive use of the title *papas* which means “Pope” in Latin.⁶ He strongly believed that the bishop of Rome was the successor of Peter and he used this belief to establish the power of the papacy. He secured the reputation of his Papal authority when on two occasions he successfully defended the city of Rome against foreign attack. The first was in AD 452 when he persuaded Attila and the Huns against invading the city of Rome. Then again in AD 455, he used diplomacy to come to an agreement with Gaiseric and his Vandals to spare the city of Rome.

Under the leadership of Gelasius,⁷ the papacy gained even more influence. Gelasius recognised that there were two kinds of authority – to the pope belonged spiritual authority and to the king belonged temporal authority. He taught that because the pope had to give an account to God for the deeds of the king at the judgment, the spiritual power of the pope is more important than the temporal power of the king. Consequently, the king had to submit to the church. Gelasius believed that the pope had so much authority that he received the title “Vicar of Christ,” which was granted at the Roman Synod in AD 495.

It was with the consecration of Gregory I as the Bishop of Rome in 590 that marked the ushering in of a new era – the medieval period. Often known as “the Great,” he organised the papal government into a powerful system. Under Gregory I, the papacy not only possessed spiritual power, but great temporal power as well. Philip Hughes a Roman Catholic wrote “... It was St. Gregory who, in these years (AD 590 onwards), was the real ruler of Rome and in a very real sense he is the founder of the papal monarchy.”⁸ Although Gregory I himself officially refused the

title of pope, he in fact exercised the role and authority of popes who came before and after him. As a pope he exercised the papal power as supreme pontiff.⁹ Future popes would build their papal authority on the foundation which Gregory I had firmly established. The authority and power of the papacy, though challenged several times through the centuries, would remain unshaken until the 16th Century Reformation.

THE REFORMATION CHALLENGED PAPAL AUTHORITY

On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Church in Wittenberg. In these statements though Luther condemned the corrupt practice of indulgences in the Roman Catholic Church, and though he believed that the pope’s authority should be limited, he still submitted to the authority of the pope and the Roman Church. Luther soon realised, however, that true reform could never be brought about in the Roman Church. Real reformation could only be achieved by separating from the Roman Church and returning to what the Scripture taught concerning the Church.

In June 1520, the Roman Church had issued an official papal document, *Exsurge Domine*, which resulted in the excommunication of Luther. When Luther received this document he responded by burning it publically. This was a public show of protest and expressed Luther’s rejection of the pope’s authority. Luther became convinced that the pope was not the rightful head of the Church and he soon broke away from the Roman Church.

In the *Smalcald Articles*¹⁰ written by Luther in 1537, the corruption of the pope was exposed and the pope was compared to the antichrist:

The Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God. This is, properly speaking to exalt himself above all that is called God as Paul says, 2 Thess. 2, 4. ...Therefore, just as little as we can worship the devil himself as Lord and God, we can endure his apostle, the Pope, or Antichrist, in his rule as head or lord. For to lie and to kill, and to destroy body and soul eternally, that is wherein his papal government really consists, ... The Pope, however, prohibits this faith, saying that to be saved a person must obey him.... This all proceeds from the fact that the Pope has wished to be called the supreme head of the Christian Church by divine right. Accordingly he had to make himself equal and superior to Christ, and had to cause himself to be proclaimed the head and then the lord of the Church, and finally of the whole world, and simply God on earth, until he has dared to issue commands even to the angels in heaven....¹¹

Luther wrote that the pope was “false, mischievous, blasphemous, and arrogant,” and he showed how for more than 500 years, the church had wrongly been under the pope’s authority. He regarded the pope as just a “human figment which is not commanded, and is unnecessary and useless.” Luther believed that the church could exist without the pope and that the church would in fact have been purer and more prosperous without such a figure.¹²

As Luther’s teaching and influence grew, he soon had to develop a proper system of government for Lutheran churches. In

1526, at the Diet¹³ of Speier, influential followers of Luther who were princes were able to influence the Diet to agree that each state was to follow the faith of its ruler. An attempt to cancel the decision made at this Diet led to the princes reading a *Protestation*. This resulted in the opponents of these princes then using the term “Protestants” to describe those who were non-Catholics. Luther’s influence spread throughout northern Germany, though the south remained predominantly Catholic. The Protestant princes formed a league in 1531, to defend their faith against the south, even with arms if necessary. In 1546, war broke out between the Protestant north and the Catholic south. This war finally ended in 1555 with the signing of the Peace of Augsburg treatise. This treatise influenced the governance of the church, as it made the prince the authority of the church.

Luther believed that though the ruler of the state had no authority over the individual’s salvation, the state was appointed by God to maintain order even in matters concerning the church. Though he kept the authority of the church and state separate, he believed that these authorities were interdependent and rulers of the state had authority in the matters of the church, especially where governance and order were concerned.

Luther’s contribution to the understanding of the authority in the church was significant. He freed the church from the bondage of the papacy, and taught that Christ was the true head of the Church. In 1535 the university of Wittenberg also began to examine and ordain pastors for local congregations. These events reformed the practice of church governance. Indeed it may be said that the work of the Reformation was also a reformation of church government.

THE PRESBYTERIAN FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The Reformation movement soon spread throughout Europe and it was in Switzerland that Presbyterianism would find its roots. As the Lord was using Martin Luther in Germany, the Lord was using men such as Zwingli, William Farel and John Calvin in Switzerland. In 1542, when John Calvin returned to Geneva the second time, he published the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* to provide guidelines concerning the church. In this document, he addressed issues such as training for ministers, church discipline and church officers and governance.

In the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, Calvin identified four offices in the church that he believed were taught in Scriptures: Ministers, Elders, Doctors or Teachers, and Deacons. It was based on the offices of Ministers and Elders that Calvin then formed the Presbyterian system of church governance.

Under Calvin's influence, John Knox would introduce Presbyterianism and its form of government into Scotland. It was in Scotland where Presbyterianism was able to take root and flourish. In 1560, the parliament of Scotland adopted the Scottish confession as its creed. In the same year, John Knox published the *Book of Discipline*, which outlined the Presbyterian form of government modelled after that taught by Calvin. It was however in the year 1567, where the *Second Book of Discipline* was published and adopted by the Church of Scotland, that further clarification and

solidification of the Presbyterian form of government took place. In this second book, it clearly delineated the system of governance where the church was to come under the supervision of groups of elected church leaders represented in presbyteries, synods and the general assembly.

CONCLUSION

For more than 1000 years before the Reformation, the Roman Church during the dark ages was governed by a system which exalted a man. The Church regarded the pope as the head of the Church. This is not what Scriptures says governance in the Church should be. Scripture always emphasises the exaltation of Christ. Apostle Paul declares in Colossians 1:18 concerning Christ: "*And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*"

We thank God that the Reformation has freed the Church not only from falsehood and error concerning salvation, but it has also directed us back to the proper form of governance as prescribed in Scripture. Martin Luther first recognised that the system of governance practiced by the Roman Church, where the pope held supreme authority, was never Biblical. John Calvin then in recognising the various offices of leaders described in Scripture, then taught the Presbyterian form of Church government. This form of government seeks to conform to what Churches in the New Testament practiced.

-
- ¹ A diocese within the Roman Catholic Church would refer to a particular area under the supervision of a Bishop.
- ² This is a term more commonly used in America to describe what we would commonly refer to in Singapore as the Board of Elders.
- ³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, (Electronic Edition: E-Sword 7.98), Vol. 2 Chapter 4, Section 44.
- ⁴ Ibid, Vol. 2 Chapter 4, Section 49.
- ⁵ He was pope from 440-461
- ⁶ Earl E. Cairns, *Christianity through the centuries*, (Zondervan Publish House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), 152
- ⁷ He was pope from 492-496.
- ⁸ Philip Hughes, *A Popular History of the Catholic Church*, quoted by: Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 127. Parenthesis mine.
- ⁹ The term “pontiff” actually means “bridge builder” which is synonymous with the term “Pontifex Maximus” which pagan Roman emperors used to refer to themselves as the bridges between this life and the next. Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 125.
- ¹⁰ These articles are a summary of the Christian doctrine and faith written by Luther.
- ¹¹ *Smalcald Articles*, Part 2, Article 4, <http://bookofconcord.org/smalcald.php#article4>
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ A *Diet* was a formal deliberatively assembly or council.

THE REFORMATION AND THE SACRAMENTS

The Great Protestant Reformation began 500 years ago on 31st October 1517. This great event had an immense impact on the Church and Christianity, and it marks a sacramental and liturgical break from the erroneous teachings of the Catholic Church. This article seeks to briefly explain the impact of the reformation on our understanding of the sacraments. Today, we believe that according to Scripture, there are two sacraments ordained of the Lord – the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We believe that the Lord has divinely instituted these sacraments, and there are spiritual blessings in the obedient keeping of them. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, we do not believe that salvation is earned by the keeping of these sacraments; neither do we believe that a person is justified by observing these sacraments. Yet, this was how the Roman Catholic Church understood salvation and the sacraments. Their teaching concerning the sacraments would go unchallenged for nearly a thousand years until the 16th Century Reformation.

THE SACRAMENTS PRIOR THE REFORMATION

The Roman Catholic Church mistakenly believes that there are seven sacraments the Church has to observe. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (“CCC”), there are seven Roman Catholic sacraments, which are summarized as follows:

1. Baptism: “Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.’” (CCC, 1213).
2. Confirmation: Confirmation is anointment of those who have been baptized, with holy oil, where the baptized “are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit.” (CCC, 1285).
3. Eucharist: This is the partaking of the Holy Communion. The Roman Catholic believes that in the partaking of the bread and the cup, they are receiving and consuming the actual body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their catechism writes: “by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.” (CCC, 1376).
4. Penance: The Roman Catholic Church teaches that, “Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins

and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion.” (CCC, 1422). The sale of indulgences tickets and confession to a priest are part of this sacrament.

5. Anointing of the Sick: This is where a priest anoints a sick with oil for the purpose of healing. When this anointing is done for a dying person, it is known as the “extreme unction”.
6. Holy Orders: This is the sacrament through which a person is ordained into an office of the Roman Catholic Church.
7. Matrimony: Marriage is regarded as a sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that the keeping of these 7 sacraments is necessary for salvation. They stated this plainly in their catechism, “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation.” (CCC, 1129). They wrongfully teach that the sacraments are necessary for the imparting of grace and for the accomplishing of full salvation and eternal life. So important is the keeping of these sacraments to the Catholic Church, that they brazenly pronounced a curse on anyone who dared to disagree: “If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous; and that, without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain of God, through faith alone, the grace of justification; -though all (the sacraments) are not indeed necessary for every individual; let him be anathema.¹⁷”

In other words, the Roman Catholic Church believes that participating in their 7 listed sacraments, including baptism, partaking of the Eucharist, the performing of penance, and doing indulgences, are all necessary for a sinner to attain and

maintain his salvation. This would mean and imply that what Christ accomplished on the cross was not enough. It would also mean that Christ’s work of atonement was not complete. Salvation to them, is therefore not by grace, through faith, or in Christ alone. Such an understanding is unbiblical and dangerous, as it goes against the Scripture.

Many of the sacraments of the Roman Church were in fact man-made traditions, which were introduced into the Church over time. Their inventions include: The Mass – as a daily ritual (AD 394); Sale of indulgences (AD 1190); Seven sacraments, defined by Peter Lombard (12th century); Transubstantiation was defined by Pope Innocent III (AD 1215); Auricular confession of sins to a priest instead of God was instituted by Pope Innocent III (AD 1215); Adoration of the wafer (host), was decreed by Pope Honorius III (AD 1220).

THE REFORMERS REJECTED

ROME’S VIEW OF THE SACRAMENTS

The Reformers were greatly incensed by the unscriptural inventions of the Church of Rome. Their desire was to correct these religious abuses, which had no Scriptural basis. The Roman Catholic Church had brought about the onset of theological decay and decline, beginning with the worship of relics and the saints, the sale of indulgences (forgiveness tickets), the mass, ceremonies, rosaries, and good works which purportedly prevailed unto salvation.

Reformers such as Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, Tyndale and many others, were united in their rejection of Rome’s understanding of the Sacraments.

One of the first reformers who wrote against the Roman Church’s view of the sacraments

was John Wycliffe. In 1380, Wycliffe published his work *De Eucharistia* (On the Eucharist) where he condemned the Roman Catholic's doctrine of the Eucharist and of transubstantiation. He identifies transubstantiation as a "blasphemous folly", a "deceit" which "despoils the people and leads them to commit idolatry."

In a similar vein, John Knox highlighted how the Catholic Church's seven sacraments goes against the teachings of Paul in God's Word: "How can you deny the opinion of your Mass to be false and vain? You say it is a sacrifice for sin, but Jesus Christ and Paul say, The only death of Christ was sufficient for sin, and after it resteth none other sacrifice... the words of Paul bind you more straitly than that so you may escape: for in his whole disputation, contendeth he not only that there is no other sacrifice for sin, but also that the self same sacrifice, once offered, is sufficient, and never may be offered again."²

The reformers rejected Rome's teaching that the Eucharist is a propitiatory sacrifice which has to be offered for the sins of the living and the dead. Instead they believe that the Jesus' sacrifice, where He offered Himself on the cross, is enough on its own to save a sinner from His sins.

In the Roman Church, justification involves human actions, supplemented by accompanying faith. These actions are defined as the performance of good works. God's Word, however states that justification is an act of God, where He declares a sinner to be righteous in His sight, having forgiven his sins and imputed to him His own righteousness (Rom 3:21-4:8). God's Word is clear: justification is by faith alone (Rom 3:28; 4:5; Eph 2:8-10).

They claim that the sacrificial work of

redemption is continually carried out through the Sacrifice of the Mass, but what the Bible teaches us is that the sacrificial work of redemption was finished when Jesus Christ gave His life for us on the cross (Eph 1:7; Heb 1:3).

HOW DID THE REFORMERS UNDERSTAND THE SACRAMENTS?

While the Roman Church wrongly believed that the sacraments were a form of good works to earn merits, the Reformers believed that the sacraments are outward signs of the inward working of grace. Unlike the Roman Church, they also believed that there are only two sacraments which Christ has instituted for the Church.

John Calvin wrote in his institutes that the sacraments are "an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences his promises of good-will toward us, in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety toward him, both before himself, and before angels as well as men. We may also define more briefly by calling it a testimony of the divine favour toward us, confirmed by an external sign, with a corresponding attestation of our faith towards Him"³

The Westminster Confession of Faith (AD 1646) best expresses our understanding of the sacraments today. It states, "Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, (Rom. 4:11; Gen. 17:7) immediately instituted by God, (Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23) to represent Christ and His benefits; and to confirm our interest in Him: (1 Cor 10:16; 11:25, 26; Gal 3:17, 27) as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; (Rom 15:8; Ex 12:48; Gen 34:14) and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His Word." (WCF Ch. XXVII:1)

It goes on to say, "There are only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained." (Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:20, 23; cf. 1 Cor 4:1; Heb 5:4). (WCF Ch. XXVII:IV)

Regarding baptism, Calvin wrote: "Baptism is the initiatory sign by which we are admitted to the fellowship of the Church, that being ingrafted into Christ we may be accounted children of God. Moreover, the end for which God has given it is, first, that it may be conducive to our faith in him; and, secondly, that it may serve the purpose of a confession among men....The first object... is to be a sign and evidence of our purification, or it is a kind of sealed instrument by which he assures us that all our sins are so deleted, covered, and effaced, that they will never come into his sight, never be mentioned, never imputed."

Regarding the Lord's Supper there are three main views the Reformers took:

One view is known as "*consubstantiation*." This was the view taught and held by Luther. Although Luther rejected the view of transubstantiation, he did not sever himself completely from the Roman Church's understanding of the Lord's Supper. Luther believed the elements are not physically, chemically, mystically, magically transformed. However, Luther believed that the presence of Jesus Christ is "*in, with and under, around, above and below*" the bread and the cup, "*is the actual and blood of Christ, upon which the communicant feeds.*"⁴

A second view, which views the Lord's Supper as purely symbolical, is the

view taught by Zwingli. Most Baptist, Congregational and Brethren churches hold this view. They consider the elements as a representation of the body and blood of Jesus Christ and not a means of grace.

The third view sees the Lord's Supper as not merely symbolical, but that there is a special bestowal of blessing in the worthy partaking of it. This view sees the Lord's Supper as a Means of grace and is the view held by most Presbyterians. What this means is that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace toward re-consecration and devotion to Jesus Christ who died for the believer. This is different from that of the Roman Church. Calvin did not believe this means of grace as a means towards salvation, but as a means towards spiritual blessing. As those who partake of the elements of the Lord's Supper unworthily have a severe punishment imposed by the Lord (1 Cor 11:27-30), those who partake of it worthily can enjoy the blessings accompanying this sacrament. This view is most consistent with what the Scripture teaches concerning the Lord's Supper.

CONCLUSION

Our understanding of the sacraments today was greatly impacted by the Reformation. By God's providence we have been delivered from the falsehood of salvation through the sacraments. Through the study of His word, it is clear that the Catholic idea of the seven sacraments as means of salvation is false, untrue and unbiblical. God has given the sacraments for the blessings of His people. It is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Christ's saving grace is received by genuine faith in Jesus as the Saviour, and not by the observing of rituals or the keeping of sacraments. Eph 2:8-9 says, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*"

-
- ¹ *The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent*, Seventh Session, Canon IV
- ² The Roman Catholic Teaching on Salvation and Justification, <https://www.christiantruth.com/articles/RCJustification.html>
- ³ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.14.1
- ⁴ This was J. Oliver Buswell's understanding of Luther's view of consubstantiation.

THE REFORMATION AND THE LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

One of the legacies of the Reformation movement is that it has enlightened us about the 'Liberty of the Conscience', and granted us freedom from the oppression of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the papacy and its council. How should we then understand the importance of the conscience and its relationship to the Church? What does it mean to have a clear conscience not bound by the creeds and councils of men? The purpose of this article is to answer these important questions for our knowledge and edification.

THE REFORMATION

Exactly 500 years ago, on 30 Oct 1517, the 16th century Protestant Reformation emerged against the great evil of the Roman Catholic Church. It is a significant movement that ended the thousand-year oppression of the Dark Ages. Truly, God's Word stands forever, as it is written, 'For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth' (2 Corinthians 13:8). Imagine how the Church was in a state of spiritual darkness for a millennium, before God raised His servants— Martin Luther, John Calvin and many other reformers. They brought about a revival of Christianity and freedom from the abusive power of the Roman Catholic Church.

Prior to the 16th century Reformation, Christianity in Europe only existed in the form of Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church emerged after the fall of

the Roman empire in the 5th century and it began to spread across Europe, eventually becoming the main religion for all. This time period is known as the medieval 'Dark Ages' and it lasted for a millennium. The Roman Catholic Church then possessed complete hegemony over Christian theology and its power even extended to politics. There was no separation between the State and the Church in Rome. Both institutions had overlapping authorities and they became intertwined in a relationship that exerted full ecclesiastical and political control over the people.

As the Catholic Church wielded absolute power, it took steps to persecute and eliminate minorities that it considered as unbelievers, such as pagans, Jews and other religious or ethnic groups. No one dared to speak up against the ruthless hegemony and corrupted power of the Roman Catholic Church. Those who did so were conveniently denounced as heretics and burned at the stake. As such, the people feared the Roman Catholic Church and were enslaved by the Church's tyrannical power and spiritual abuse. The Bible was also kept away from the people. No one was allowed to possess the Bible or to read the Bible on their own. It was also prohibited to translate the Bible into people's native, vernacular languages so that everyone could read and understand. The Bible could only be read in Latin, a romance language that was only understood by educated elites

and the Word could only be taught by the appointed clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, the Catholic Church also decreed that the keeping of Church traditions and orders of the Pope are of equal, if not, greater authority, than the Bible. The people back then lived in spiritual darkness and ignorance, oppressed by the Roman Catholic Church's monopoly over both their secular and religious lives.

THE LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

With the end of the Dark Ages, Protestant churches began to spread across the globe and multiplied, across nearly every nation, race and ethnicity. Yet, the Roman Catholic Church still pridefully refuses to see the gospel light and continues to deceive and subject many to the despotism of the papacy and its council. Hence, it is important that Protestant churches today, must continue to teach the truth faithfully so that those who are blinded or suppressed can find freedom from spiritual bondage to the Roman Catholic Church. The return to the truth of the Scripture is the only way of escape. The power of God's Word will work amongst Christians, so that believers can understand how to exercise the 'liberty of the conscience' in relation to the Church's authority and power. God has given his people the 'liberty of conscience, which can only be exercised as far as God permits, according to His revealed will, the Bible.

The Westminster Assembly of Divines was a council which God had raised during the Reformation period. Together, they produced an important document called 'The Westminster Confession of Faith.' In sections 2 to 4 of the chapter entitled 'Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience', the 'liberty of conscience' is summarised excellently as follows:

Section 2 - God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

Section 3 - They who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that be-ing delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life.

Section 4 - And because the powers which God has ordained, and the liberty which Christ has purchased are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And, for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or con-versation), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ has established in the Church, they may lawfully be called to account,

and proceeded against, by the censures of the Church. and by the power of the civil magistrate.

THE CONSCIENCE OF MAN

God alone is Lord of man's conscience (James 4:12; Romans 14:4). The conscience refers to an innate awareness of morality and the discernment of right and wrong. Because of sin and man's fallen nature, the natural conscience no longer works perfectly in accordance to God's holiness. The unbeliever's conscience has been corrupted by sin, and while unbelievers are able to feel guilt or remorse, they will not know the full extent of their sinfulness and the wicked they have committed against God. However, when a sinner is led to salvation in Christ, his conscience is now under the supervision and guardianship of God's Spirit and God's Word. The conscience will then be on the road to perfection, which will happen at glorification. It is important for every believer to keep a clear conscience by making deliberate effort to obey God and His perfect Word.

Without exception, all men have always been answerable to and subjected to the authority of God. The conscience has to be held captive to the Word of God, and not to any other institutions or man-created traditions. However, the Roman Catholic Church wrongfully claims to possess the authority of binding or loosing the consciences of men. They wrongly believe that divine authority has been accorded to the papacy and its council, through inheriting the apostolic ministry of Peter. A.A. Hodge rightly observes this of the Catholic Church's misjudgement, "They hold that this Church has power to define doctrines and enact laws in God's name, binding the consciences of men; and that it possesses, in the power of the

keys, the right, in execution of these laws, to absolve or condemn in God's name, to bind or loose the subject, and open or shut the kingdom of heaven, and to impose ecclesiastical penalties." Through this misconstruction of authority, the Catholic Church has managed to exert control over the conscience of men and render them slaves to its papacy and council.

It must be clear to all that the Church can never be placed above the Bible in terms of importance and authority. The Church exists because of the Bible. God defines the Church as His people who are called out of the world and He gives us the privilege to bear His name in order to shine for Him in this sin-sick world. The conscience of man, therefore can never be under the jurisdiction of any mere men. We must submit our conscience to God and His infallible, inerrant Word— the Bible.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The Church's function and purpose must be according to what has been prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. It was never intended for the church to fulfil man's desires or to take direction from men. God is the One who has sole authority over the Church, and He has ordained two main offices, elders and deacons, to form the spiritual leadership for each local church. They are to lead His people in accordance to His Word. Correspondingly, we are to submit to the church government's leadership, as long as they are committed to fulfilling God's purpose. Such submission even includes the exercise of church discipline to mete out just punishment for any erring brother or sister.

So what exactly is God's purpose for the church? Every Bible-believing church must teach and preach God's Word faithfully. The Great Commission is the church's

primary duty, which is to reach the world for Jesus and to teach others about Him. No church traditions or human opinions should ever take priority over the plain teaching and preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only that, all Christians are to search the Scriptures in order to ensure that the truth is faithfully taught and not adulterated. (John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:15-17). God is no respecter of persons, and this also applies to the church leaders, who are also human and susceptible to sin and the Devil's manipulation, if they are not careful. All believers, without exception, must submit and convict their conscience to the same standard and yardstick, which is none other than God's Word.

The church leaders have the grave responsi-

bility of watching over the souls of God's people. They fulfil the authority God has given to them on earth by ministering to their spiritual needs. They also have the duty of teaching the whole counsel of God according to His revealed will, the Bible. No church leader is to introduce any human-centric philosophies or ideas to change, replace or add to the divine instruction of the Bible. God's Word is complete and perfect. To do otherwise by referring to man-centric knowledge, traditions or council, is to undermine the sole authority of the Holy Scripture.

May the 16th Century Reformation be forever remembered for enlightening us about the liberty of conscience, a revelation which had set people free from the evil bind of the Roman Catholic Church. Amen.

THE REFORMATION AND MUSIC: MUSIC IS NEXT TO THEOLOGY

The aims given for this article are twofold:

1. to discuss the emphasis the Reformers placed on music and worship, and
2. to discuss how have churches today have changed in their view of music and worship.

REFORMERS ON MUSIC AND WORSHIP

While the church was going through sweeping changes during the time of the Reformation, music – within and outside of the church – was also going through many changes. Things were so bad then that, frowning on the church music back in 1516, Erasmus wrote that it “is so constructed that the congregation cannot hear one distinct word.” As one writer noted, “Such music was three times removed from the common people: by the foreign language, by the elaboration that disguised the text, and by their own non-participation. Reformers wanted to remedy all these faults, with varying degrees of extremism.”¹ These Reformers influenced the church’s music in many areas through the changes that they made.

Among them was Martin Luther, a lover of music with a pleasant tenor voice. While Luther believed that music is God’s gift of creation, and that “music is next to theology because both accomplish similar results,”² his efforts were not directed at perfecting music as an art. The following

are some key focuses of the Reformers on music and worship and what they did to reform church music.

Music proclaims Theology

Luther embraced a high view of music because of the theology embedded in the words of the song - “the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man.”³ As Colossians 3:16 emphasizes the didactic purpose of music, Luther used music to strengthen the teaching of God’s Word. To do this, he put the “Word of God into song,” making them theological expressions in musical form, creating a strong link between hymnody and catechesis. Heretical texts were removed from the Roman Catholic hymns, and reformed liturgical chants were included in his new hymnals.⁴ As a reflection of Luther’s high view of theology in song, the words of the song must not be “slang, nor pretentious words, the words must be easy to understand but also be fitting and pure.”⁵ Luther’s hymns and chants are as much theological statements as they are musical forms.

Songs must be understood

In order to fulfil a theological proclamatory and teaching function, songs sung must be understood by everyone. The Reformers did not promote music merely as an emotional tool, nor as a form of entertainment of the masses. In order for songs to be edifying, music must serve as an accompaniment

to words, not overwhelm the latter, and the words must be understood by the congregation. Hence, songs sung had to be in a common language understood by the congregation. This was not so in the medieval Roman Catholic Church because their Masses were in Latin, with participation reserved to a small group of clergy or trained lay musicians. Changing this, Luther began to replace Latin hymns with German ones so that the congregation could sing together. Likewise, John Calvin was also a proponent of congregational singing in the common language of the people so that it could be understood. Calvin taught that God's intent was not to amuse the world but to instruct people. In *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.20.31, Calvin greatly commends singing, "for in this way the thought of God is kept alive on our minds", if the singing was accompanied with understanding.

Music is for the congregation to sing to

Pre-reformation music in the Papal Catholic church was through the presentation of the clergy and trained musicians. Perhaps Luther's most famous reform to church music was the notable restoration of singing to the body of believers. When he initiated the first fully German mass in 1526, congregational singing was given the "pride of place in his liturgical theology" – a previously uncommon practice in Catholic churches. To Luther, "singing together was an essential part of worship."⁶ Music, through the heartfelt understanding of the words sung, conveys theology. Song served "as a vehicle of reverence" with "sincerity of feeling."⁷ "Therefore, as the word is the understanding, so the [singing] voice is its feeling."⁸ In similar fashion, John Calvin's hymnal preface encourages the reader to focus on the meaning of song – "Song has a great power and influence to move

and to arouse the human heart to invoke and praise God with greater eagerness and ardour."⁹ The high value that the Reformers put on congregational singing is important, because even in their hymn compositions (which we shall discuss next), the music that they sought was not for the professional choir, but for the layman. The tunes they would use would be simple and easy for the congregation to remember, tunes that the congregation could sing together without much difficulty. To aid the congregation, Luther "helped to invent the metrical psalm for congregations; that is, the translation of psalms into German metrical stanzas in such a form that a body of people could sing them in unison. This was soon the important part of Protestant hymn books."¹⁰ John Calvin, too, is known for the publication of the Genevan Psalter, which put the psalms into metrical verse. It must be added though, that while some Reformers restricted singing to Psalms only, this is a view that contradicts the Bible. We are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing not only Psalms, but also in hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16). Besides, by singing only Psalms we will not sing of the Lord Jesus' Name nor His completed work on the Cross, and doctrines more clearly revealed in the New Testament.

Music must be fitting

Both Luther and Calvin generally rejected the elaborate "excesses of late-medieval choral polyphony"¹¹, but this was not because they were musically illiterate. Luther would have studied music in his curriculum during his university days in Erfurt. Such study would have included the harmonic aspects of melodic composition, where it was thought of as "a study of the mathematical arts."¹² His understanding of music was more than that of a semi-skilled amateur. Music, Luther understood,

followed strict laws, and he frowned on the dissonance caused by even a semitone difference between singers and the instruments.¹³ With his musicianship, his simple and sturdy German Reformation hymns had the congregation singing in unison with the primary harmonic chords of the tonic, subdominant and dominant chords. Though there was harmonisation, the music was not aimed at being the music of a professional presentation, but it was simple enough for congregatio to sing to.

While instruments were used, Luther's focus was not on instrumental music, but upon texts set to music and sung to convey the message of the gospel. The chorale *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* reflects Luther's style. The tune emphasises the tonic (1st scale degree) and dominant (5th scale degree) notes of the key, making it easy for the congregation to sing. Notably, "both text and tune possess a certain militant tone, urging the Lutheran faithful to fight the good fight against the forces of evil."¹⁴

Careful views and use of music

On the other hand, the tunes that Calvin used were single line melodies, without accompanying parts and without instruments. Careful to ensure that music in the church would not become an artform, the simplest polyphonic psalm harmonisations were rejected as frills in Calvinist services. But of all the reformers, Ulrich Zwingli had by far the most restrictive view of music. While Zwingli himself was an exceptionally gifted musician, he was suspicious of the liturgical practices of the medieval church. At the same time, he held "a hermeneutic that dictated that any practice not explicitly commanded by Scripture" should be forbidden.¹⁵ Hence, at his insistence, all choral and instrumental music was eliminated from the church in Zurich. In a hostile response

to liturgy, the Swiss German Reformed churches sponsored public burnings of organs and liturgical music-books.¹⁶ While we do believe there is a proper place for instruments and music in worship and while we certainly do not take the view of Calvin and Zwingli in forbidding the use of instruments and harmonisations in church music, it would do us well to take heed to Calvin's valid principles and cautions concerning music. Calvin warned, saying "We must, however, carefully beware, lest our ears be more intent on the music than our minds on the spiritual meaning of the words... songs composed merely to tickle and delight the ear are unbecoming the majesty of the Church, and cannot but be most displeasing to God." (Inst. 3.20.32). This is an astute observation made against backdrop of rapid changes to the secular music scene.

Worship, not concert

By the turn of the century after the Reformation, in order to draw people into their church as part of their Counter Reformation, the Roman Catholic church service was to all intents and purposes a "concert." Cathedral services in Venice at the peak of the Counter Reformation "could well be looked upon as the earliest public concerts (for a "mass" audience, so to speak). Huge congregations flocked to them, and their fame was spread abroad so that travellers made special journeys to hear the music. The most spectacular impression was made not by the singers but by the massed instrumentalists."¹⁷ The power of music to draw people into the Roman Catholic church was unashamedly used to counter the Protestant Reformation.

On the other hand, the Reformers' emphasis was to have simple music which believers could sing to as they went about their

normal life. “[The Lutheran musician’s] aim was not to bowl you over... but to furnish an attractive, craftsmanly, not overly polished setting for a cherished article of common faith. Even at its fanciest, Lutheran church music was... not a court music, ...[but] seeking beauty in the commonplace. It did not reject the *ars perfecta* but placed limits on its exercise.”¹⁸

HOW MUSIC AND WORSHIP HAVE CHANGED

Has the church’s view of music changed since the 16th Century Reformation? Are Protestant churches still holding on to the same Reformation Spirit today?” The answer to the first question would be a resounding “yes” in many cases, and hence “no” to the second.

Music above theology

While many would propound Luther’s saying that “music is next to theology”, what they mean in effect is that music – not the theology put to music – is key. The Reformers emphasized sound theological music which served a didactic purpose. God never intended the church to entertain, but to edify (1 Cor 14:15-17) – and Biblical edification is always and only through the Word. However, the genre known as Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) today features songs that are often shallow or even unsound in theology. Repetitive phrases and words are used and are often man-centred. Unlike the Reformation, the focus today is predominantly on music as a form of entertainment.

Concert rather than worship

In many churches, performers and their instruments once again take centre stage, like in a concert. While the audience (a.k.a. congregation) may enjoy the music and perhaps still sing along, there is little

doubt who is the spectator and who is the singer. Music is about providing the right “atmosphere” so that one can have that emotional “encounter with God” as part of the “worship experience”. With such a desire in worship music, Reformation hymns and hymnbooks are naturally considered dated. Instead, an ever-new, ever-changing variety of songs is now projected on screens. With uplifted hands and dancing, the congregation sings, not to bless God, but to receive a “blessing” from God in this “worship encounter”. The Reformation spirit in music was to draw attention to God but CCM today draws more attention to the music, the instruments used, and the performers.

Any form of music accepted without cautiousness

Unlike the strict harmonic rules, and the orderly laws of classical form that governed the music of the Reformers, harmonic music is de-emphasised today. Many church musicians and modern song writers adopt the musical styles of jazz, pop, and rock genres. It is often asked what is wrong with these genres for church music? It must be remembered that Reformation hymnody music was of the genre broadly known as classical music. The world began to take this form of music, changing and distorting¹⁹ its composition rules, and breaking away from classical conventions and structures to form these other genres with their own carnal styles for the worldling’s consumption. But the Christians adopted these worldly genres into churches because it appeals to and attracts the masses. In the modern craving for the emotional “worship experience”, music is used to stimulate the emotions, where once theology used to do so. We must worship God with emotions as well but where previously the doctrines in the song would teach, edify, and stir the

singer and listener, music is generally now the main driver designed to “move” the singer emotionally and bring about a physical response. This is often done through increased syncopation by irregular rhythms and off-beat emphasis. “Edification” has also been redefined. It is no more about being built up through the Word, but it is usually about getting an emotionally and physically “high” experience. The focus of the Reformers was that music is a natural *response* of the hearts understanding God through theology. In contrast today, music is used to manipulate *emotions* with the hope that the hearts will respond to God. How would one describe today’s church music? Perhaps it would be tempting to say that today, “theology is next to music”. “If this church does not have music that I like, so what if it has sound theology, I’ll go to another”. Or, “If this church has music that I like, never mind the poor theology, I’ll stay.”

DISCERNMENT NEEDED TODAY

Exodus 32:17 *“And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.”* Notice the “noise” of music sung when Satan first

introduced syncretic worship. Perhaps he was not as successful in making it part of Israel’s worship thereafter. But it seems he has succeeded today in the NT churches despite and after the Reformation. Perhaps you say, “we don’t have such music in our church”. However, few churches end up with full blown rock and pop Contemporary Christian music in church overnight. Such churches usually go through the “grey areas” first. Hence, discernment is needed more than ever before because CCM is here to stay.

While many Bible Presbyterian churches remain sound and separated from false doctrines and worship styles of Charismatic churches, this carefulness must extend to the music realm as well, especially in this day and age. It can be our potential “Achilles heel” if we are complacent. It is quite common that when the music goes carnal, the life of the church follows. Safeguards must be carefully put in place to stringently and objectively evaluate any music we allow into our churches today. The Reformers understood that music is not subjective. Whether BP churches will still be sound in music years from now depends upon church leaders seriously making it a point to be so today. If music is truly next to theology, we must ensure that music continues to be subject and second to theology.

-
- ¹ Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church: Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10.
- ² Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 285.
- ³ Martin Luther in the Preface to Georg Rhaus "Symphoniae Lucundae." *Luther's Works*, LIII
- ⁴ Robin A. Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 19.
- ⁵ Owen Chadwick, *Early Reformation on the Continent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 191.
- ⁶ Rob Sorensen, *Martin Luther and the German Reformation* (London: Anthem Press, 2016), 77.
- ⁷ Chadwick, *Early Reformation*, 191.
- ⁸ Wengert, ed., *The Pastoral Luther*, 276.
- ⁹ Miikka E. Anttila, *Luther's Theology of Music: Spiritual Beauty and Pleasure* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 187.
- ¹⁰ Chadwick, *Early Reformation*, 191.
- ¹¹ Jonathan Willis, *Church Music and Protestantism in Post-Reformation England: Discourses, Sites and Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 39.
- ¹² James L. Brauer, *Luther's Hymn Melodies* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Seminary Press, 2016), 12.
- ¹³ Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music*, 102.
- ¹⁴ Timothy J. Roden, Craig Wright and Bryan R. Simms, *Anthology for Music in Western Civilization, Volume I: Media Update* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2009), 246.
- ¹⁵ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, ed., *The Encyclopedica of Christianity* (Minneapolis: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 371.
- ¹⁶ Richard Taruskin, "Chapter 18 Reformations and Counter Reformations." In *Music from the Earliest Notations to the Sixteenth Century*, Oxford University Press. (New York, USA, n.d.). Retrieved 21 Jul. 2017, from <http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.ezproxy.ecu.edu.au/view/Volume1/actrade-9780195384819-chapter-018.xml>.
- ¹⁷ Taruskin, *Music from the Earliest Notations*.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Sigmund Spaeth, *At Home With Music* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co, 1945), 256-259.

THE REFORMATION AND MISSION: ITS IMPACT ON MODERN MISSIONS

After the 16th century Protestant Reformation broke out in Europe, the movement soon spread all over the world and changed the course of Christianity. However, it still took the Protestant churches almost two centuries to begin any significant missionary movements. The reformers initially focused all their efforts on fighting the good fight and defending the essentials of Christianity against the doctrinal errors of the Roman Catholic Church. Once the fundamental theological convictions were firmly established, the pure gospel of Christ could then be disseminated throughout the uttermost parts of the world (cf. Matthew 28:18-20). Undeniably, the reformers laid the doctrinal foundation for later missions. In considering the lives of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and the other reformers, one cannot help but be moved by a deep sense of admiration for the resilience and evangelistic mission of this movement.

THE REFORMATION AND MISSIONS IN RETROSPECT

The reformers have often been mistakenly portrayed as being indifferent and lukewarm about world missions. This is due in part to the common misinterpretation of the 'Doctrine of Election', where many erroneously associated it with fatalism, saying that missions appear inconsequential and futile if God had already chosen those whom He would save. Such a misunderstanding of the reformers definitely

did not accurately reflect the actual fervour and passion that many of them had for God's work. William Carey was once chided by an older minister, "Young man, sit down! You're an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine." Nonetheless, William's zeal for missions was not dampened by those despairing words. He soon embarked on his missionary endeavours in India and was later known as the "father of modern missions."

Secondly, there is another misconception that the early Protestants taught that the Great Commission had been fulfilled in the time of the Apostles. This erroneous impression could not be further from the truth, as some of the most prominent names fronting the modern missionary movement, were Calvinists such as John Eliot, David Brainerd, Isaac McCoy, William Carey, David Livingstone and many others who had their roots in the Puritan tradition. There were also evangelists like George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon, who established their missionary efforts based on their theological convictions that it was God alone who saves sinner according to His will.

It is crucial to recognise that one of the challenges faced by the reformers was that the early Protestant churches lacked the necessary organizational structures for

spreading the gospel, unlike the Roman Catholics whose Jesuits mission order had reached almost all the continents by the 15th century. Colonialism had also effectively expanded the geographical reach of the Roman Catholic Church. Despite facing daunting difficulties and opposition, the reformers were relentless in their missionary efforts.

John Calvin, was perhaps the most missionary-minded of all the reformers. He had sent dozens of evangelists to his homeland France and had also commissioned four French Huguenots to evangelise to the Indians of Brazil. The first Lutheran to attempt missionary work was an Austrian named Baron Justinian von Weltz, who issued a clarion call to the church in 1664 to assume her missionary responsibilities.

The initial 16th Century Reformation was then followed by the emergence of the Puritans, the Quakers and the beginning of Pietism in the 17th Century. These four movements, namely Puritanism, Pietism, Moravianism and Evangelicalism, became the launch pad for the Protestant churches' world mission movement in the 18th Century.

The first Puritans formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1629. They were extremely devoted in their missionary efforts to the Indians of New England and made concerted efforts to convert as many souls as possible.

Philip Spencer (1635-1705), commonly known as the father of Pietism, started the Pietist movement as a revolt against the dead orthodoxy and formalism of the State Churches in Protestant Europe. The Pietistic theology could be summed up in the statement, "There can be no missionary

vision without evangelistic zeal; there can be no evangelistic zeal without personal piety; there can be no personal piety without a genuine conversion experience." Philip established the Halle University which then became the first Protestant mission, the Danish Halle Mission.

The Moravian movement was started by John Huss in the early 15th century. Later, Nickolaus von Zinzendorf became the leader of the growing Moravian church and he challenged believers to heed the missionary call. In the wake of his plea, the Moravians sent out over two thousand missionaries over a period of 150 years. All the missionaries were self-supporting and some even sold themselves into slavery to the West Indies in order to proclaim the gospel to those who had not heard it.

The great preachers of the Evangelical Awakening were John Wesley and George Whitefield in England and Jonathan Edwards in America. It was an evangelical and revitalization movement that resulted from powerful preaching, which had inspired the listeners with a deep sense of personal conviction of their need for salvation through Jesus Christ.

The 18th century, also recognised as "the Great Century", was known as the modern missionary movement because many mission societies were born in England and America; the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the London Missionary Society (1795), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810) and Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (1813). The discovery of new trade routes and the commercial revolution had enabled the missionaries to travel from place to place, to locations which were once never thought possible to reach.

The Protestant Reformation began when many dedicated Christian scholars studied the Bible and realised that the Roman Catholic Church was teaching false doctrines. These scholars were faced with a difficulty: no common person could understand the Latin Bible which the church read publicly. The priests taught what they wanted the people to believe, changing doctrines to support their practices and omitting truths that were vital to the gospel. By God's providence, the reformers translated the Bible into the vernacular for the common people. The subsequent missionaries adopted this practice and went through great lengths to learn the indigenous languages as well as the original biblical languages in order to translate the Holy Scriptures into the vernacular. For example, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg translated the Bible into the Tamil language (1706), and Adoniram Judson made the first complete translation of the Bible from the original languages into Burmese (1834). With the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1440, the Bible and other Christian literature could be mass-produced and shared throughout the world. Needless to say, the gospel tract was an invaluable gem in the cause of mission outreach.

The early missionaries planted churches in almost every country in the world. Wherever they went, they opened hospitals and schools, but their primary purpose was to build and establish churches. To this end, they devoted all their energy and resources. At least in the beginning, the schools were intended to be supplementary enterprises, that were designed to complement the building of strong churches with an educated ministry. Everywhere the gospel was preached; the Bible was translated, Christian

literature was disseminated, catechists were instructed in the faith, converts were baptised, pastors and evangelists were trained, churches were organised and the sacrament were administered. The Sunday school movement was made popular by Robert Raikes in 1780 to evangelise and teach the little children in the Christian faith.

However, their endeavours were inevitably faced with challenges. Despite the scarcity of resources, the early missionaries had to face incredible difficulties pertaining to food security, health, climate, language and cultural differences, and also opposition and persecution. Yet they were willing to be separated from their own children and the comfort of their homes. Nothing could deter them because they were motivated by a steadfast and self-sacrificing love for the lost souls, *"So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us"* (1 Thessalonians 2:8). The missionaries had to preach boldly and courageously against idolatry, which could be tremendously offensive to the indigenous people they meet. Oftentimes, they preached even at the expense of losing their own lives.

THE REFORMATION AND MISSIONS IN PROSPECT

Today, we live in fast-moving times. In the last 50 years, the world has seen rapid changes in politics, the economy and social culture at an unprecedented pace. Most notably, people's attitudes towards religion has shifted unpredictably between arrogant disregard and renewed interest. No one can predict with certainty about which form the church's mission will morph into, nonetheless the biblical mandate remains unchanged across time. *"Go ye therefore, and teach all*

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Go – The only way one can make disciples is to go and take action. The phrase go ye therefore implies that we must take the initiative to reach out to the lost. Like the reformers, we cannot expect the lost to come to us, we must go to them. The biblical mission is about reaching out to the lost souls of this world. From time to time, God may bring people into the church but the command given to the disciples is to go!

Teach – We are to teach all nations and that is to declare the full gospel about sin and the Saviour, repentance and faith, the grace of God, the atonement of Christ and His finished work. The reformers fought and defended valiantly all these fundamental doctrines and today, these precious truths had been handled down to us so that we should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3b). If the church be not mission-minded, how can the nations be taught?

Baptise – Through the power of the Word and work of the Holy Spirit, the people are converted from sin to Christ and thereafter follow Him. The next command is baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. This is to call sinners to outwardly profess their faith in Christ. After they are baptized, they would be ushered into the local church as a member in order to be taught to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. This is a continuous, life-long process of

teaching and grounding the believers in the fundamental truths of the Bible, just like the early missionaries who committed themselves to a lifetime of service in a particular place they are called to.

There is also a growing emphasis on social work as a essential part of the mission mandate. Social services on the part of the missionaries are not new, the old reformers have always operated schools, hospitals and engaged in other humanitarian endeavours, but such efforts have always been regarded as auxiliary ministries and not an integral part of the gospel mandate. Evangelism is fundamentally the proclamation of the Good News. Evangelicals today are adopting a more holistic and multifarious approach to missions. However, such missions have been mistakenly redefined as evangelism plus social work.

In the past, the missionaries were better trained and many of them were ordained ministers. Today, church leaders are more interested in quantity than quality. Many modern mission boards would gladly accept candidates who have only completed the bare minimum requirements in biblical studies, with little or no training in church history, cross-cultural communications and the theology of missions. We need sound biblical bible colleges to train and equip the missionaries. The late Rev Timothy Tow said, “Without the Bible College, the church is dead.” If the church be dead, where cometh missions?

Modern worldwide radio and internet broadcasts can bring the gospel message to places where missionaries cannot step foot into. Illiterate persons who cannot benefit from Christian literature, can hear and understand the gospel coming to them in both the audible and visible form. On

the contrary, these advanced technologies have also sadly turned into dangerous platforms for the enemies to propagate the false gospel.

The early missionaries had to endure treacherous journeys that took months, or even years, to reach their destinations. With the invention of modern aviation, one could easily travel around the globe from places to places in a matter of hours, yet the irony is that biblical missions have been on the decrease. The church and missions are both intertwined, and as long as the church

exists in this world, missions will always be a vital part of her ministry. The true believer must have this evangelistic burden in his or her heart to share the gospel with the unreached.

Indeed, the Protestant Reformation Movement has made vital contributions in the Christian mission, souls were saved and the lives of many were impacted. May the Lord help us to learn from the reformers to take heed of His missionary call, as Jesus said, “...*as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*” (John 20:21).

THE 21TH CENTURY REFORMATION: THE REFORMATION AND MODERN MOVEMENTS

Time has gone by so quickly as this year we shall celebrate the 500 years of the 16th Century Reformation, which was not of men, but of God the Creator alone. While the established Church was in the spiritual darkness of ungodliness, unbiblical doctrines, man made traditions, superstitions, and idolatry, God sovereignly and graciously raised up His servants the Reformers to ignite the Reformation in order to bring His people back to Himself, His Word and Truth. Sadly, many professing Christians and churches today do not appreciate God's great and gracious work of the 16th Century Reformation!

THE SPIRITUAL HERITAGE OF THE REFORMATION

We must thank God for His grace, goodness, and mercy that we are enjoying the spiritual heritage of the Reformation from which the five Sola phrases were conceived from His Word. It is a blessed liberty when you and I can have a firm foundation for our salvation. These five Solae are:

1. *Sola Scriptura* - **God's Word alone** and not human words, doctrines and church traditions (*Sola Scriptura* – Deut 6:4-9; 2 Tim 3:15-16);
2. *Sola Gratia* - **God's grace alone** and not on our good works and unbiblical rituals and practices for our salvation (*Sola Gratia* – Eph 2:8; Titus 3:5-7);
3. *Sola Fide* - **Faith in God**, in Christ and in His Word alone, and not rely on

human efforts, merits, feelings, and experiences (*Sola Fide* – Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17);

- a. *Solus Christus* - **Christ alone** and not religious leaders is the one and true mediator between God and man (*Solo Christo* – Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12); and
- b. *Soli Deo Gloria* - **All glory is to be given to God alone**, and not to any man, angel or church (*Soli Deo Gloria* – Ps 115:1; Jn 16:13-14).

Sadly, many professing Christians and churches nowadays do not appreciate, nor remember, nor hold to the Reformation heritage!

BACKSLIDING STEPS TO APOSTASY
Once professing Christians or churches drift away from the Five Sola Statements they unawares, are backsliding and gradually turning to compromise, worldliness, unbiblical doctrines and movements, ungodliness and apostasy. Why? It is due to our human sinful and deceitful nature as well as the temptations, deceit and attacks from Satan.

Totally sinful and deceitful hearts: God's Word exposes the sinful, deceitful, wicked and rebellious heart of mankind due to Adam and Eve's disobedience (Jer 5:23; 17:9; Rom 5:12; 8:7). Exactly, after God's judgment upon this wicked world through the Global Flood, only the godly man

Noah and his family were saved in the ark by God's grace and mercy. However, from this one family, the generations after Noah slowly became worldly, ungodly, sinful and idolatrous. From among the sinful and idolatrous peoples, God graciously chose Abraham, from whom came the people of Israel to carry out His plan of salvation for mankind through God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Gen 3:15; Isa 7:14; Mt 1:23). But after God's servants passed away, the people of Israel turned sinful, ungodly, and idolatrous again and again! For example, when Joshua and his faithful generation passed away, *"there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, ... And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers..."* (Josh 2:10-12). Later, they persecuted God's servants the prophets and even crucified God's only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, while they thought that they were serving God (Jn 16:1-2)!

Knowing this truth, we should not be surprised when once Christian nations like the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand wherein reformed churches and Bible seminaries used to be faithful and godly, only to become compromising, worldly, ungodly, and ecumenical only after a few generations, all the while thinking they are serving God! How sinful and deceitful human nature is!

Temptations, Deceits and Attacks from Satan: Besides our sinful, deceitful and corrupt nature, even since the fall of Adam and Eve, Satan has continuously worked hard to deceive and tempt mankind to follow him. Satan's subtle work over the centuries is still the same:

- **To Attack God's Word and Truth** (Gen 3:1-5): Satan has cast doubt on and twisted

God's Word since the beginning. Today it is manifested in textual criticism¹, the fruit of which is so many modern English Bible versions. Satan has also misled church leaders and churchmen away from God's Truth with His attacks on the doctrines of God (open theism), the Trinity (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Christian Science, International Church of Christ, etc), God's Creation (theistic evolution), and Christ's eternal deity, humanity, virgin birth, atoning death, bodily resurrection and His Second Coming (liberalism, modernism, post-modernism, Jesus Seminar, cults, etc.).

- **To Deceive the Whole World** (Rev 12:9): Satan does not want anyone to believe and to be saved, so he always comes to *"take away the word out of their hearts"* (Lk 8:12). Satan, the father of lies, has misled mankind into believing false doctrines even *"doctrines of devils"* (1 Tim 4:1), lying signs and wonders (2 Thess 2:9), worldly philosophies and psychology, heathen religions, cults, occults, and false "so-called" science (e.g. evolutionism). Satan has *"blinded the minds of them which believe not"* (2 Cor 4:4), and they are worshipping Satan and his demons unawares! (1 Cor 10:20-21; Rev 9:20)

- **To Attack Christ's Church and Believers:** Satan still works hard to *"accuse"* and afflict believers (Job 1-2; Rev 12:10), to *"seek whom he may devour"* (1 Pet 5:8), to tempt believers (1 Chr 21:1; Mark 1:13), to sift believers (Lk 22:31), to hinder God's work (Mt 16:23), to persecute believers (Rev 2:10), to bring unbiblical doctrines into the church (Rev 2:14-15), to turn the church unholy and lukewarm (Rev 2:20-24; 3:16) and so forth.

Understanding the work of Satan, we can see his subtle deception in unbiblical

modern movements leading many churches and Bible seminaries away from God and His Word, contrary to the spirit of the 16th Century Reformation Movement and uniting all professing churches, denominations, and religions together, paving the way to One-World Religion (Rev 13:11-18):

1. **The Neo-Evangelical Movement** emphasizes scholarship and admires those “scholars” with great credentials. They compromise and willingly sacrifice God’s Truth for the sake of love and unity. They have a low view of the Holy Scriptures. They have replaced the doctrine of Biblical Separation with the doctrine of infiltration. They willingly work with all denominations regardless of fundamental doctrinal differences and participate in the World Council of Churches (WCC).²
2. **The Charismatic Movement** promotes sign gifts (speaking in tongues, healing, performing miracles, new revelations through prophecies, visions and dreams) and overemphasizes experiences, emotions, and feelings. This movement helps unite the Roman Catholic church and Protestant churches, promoting ecumenicalism.³
3. **The Ecumenical Movement** has its goal first to unite all Protestant churches, and then to unite all Protestant churches with the Roman Catholic church, and finally to unite all religions together. The WCC is on its way to the final step of their goal of a One-World Religion. In order to achieve this goal, they ignore all doctrinal differences, tolerate and even welcome all kinds of faiths and beliefs.⁴
4. **The New-Calvinism Movement** has

spread through American churches and denominations, starting with The Gospel Coalition in 2007 and then to many churches all over the world through their books, Internet networks of social media: bloggers, Twitter with popular but compromising leaders like Tim Keller, John Piper, Mark Driscoll, Matt Chandler, Mark Driscoll, Mark Dever, Al Mohler, Joshua Harris, and so forth. Those who are not discerning nor deep rooted in the Lord Jesus and His Word are easily deceived by their unbiblical views, doctrines and movement :⁵

- a. Not truly submit to the authority of God’s Word, Truth and moral law (not Scripture alone);
 - b. Contextualise God’s Truth to make it relevant to the hearers, to attract them, please them and win them (not by grace nor by faith alone);
 - c. Use the zeal of the Puritans to extol modern-day leaders and pastors who are popular and successful in terms of zeal, size and number of their congregations (not Christ Alone nor Glory to God Alone);
 - d. Regard worldliness, contemporary worship, charismatic beliefs, unbiblical culture and practices as an acceptable norm of Christian life (not unto godliness and holiness); and
 - e. Not separate themselves unto the Lord but compromise and engage in the ecumenical movement (not Biblical Separation).
5. **The Emergent Church Movement** is very subtle and dangerous since it promotes love, peace, justice, harmony, unity in the postmodern world, but ignores God’s will, Word, Truth and Commandments. It started in the late 1990s with the Leadership Network to

evangelize to a postmodern generation. Later in 2001 a group of leaders including Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Tim Keel, Chris Seay, Tim Conder and Brad Cecil named their network Young Leaders Network, Theological Working Group, and then The Emergent Village to promote their emergent church movement with Tony Jones as National Coordinator, but after that this Emergent Village network broke away and formed different networks using their books, bloggers, Twitter, and Facebook to spread their emergent movement.⁶ In brief, they are like the Israelites in the days of Judges, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg 17:6; 21:25):

- a. No absolute truth. Instead, plurality of interpretation, and relativism in their mindsets, leading to compromise, tolerance, and acceptance of all kinds of views, beliefs and faiths (not Scripture Alone);
- b. No statement of faith, no fundamentals of the Christian faith, no foundation for their beliefs. Rather, their interest is in experiences, feelings, conversation, contextual culture, mystical worship forms, etc. (not by Faith Alone);
- c. No Biblical gospel nor sole salvation in Christ, but just a social gospel, missional living, trying to make the world better (not Grace Alone, nor Christ Alone);
- d. No Biblical knowledge of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit and of God’s Kingdom, but with a different God (loving without wrath), a different Jesus Christ (only focusing on social works), a different gospel (without repentance), a different Kingdom on earth now (without Christ as the coming King), which does not bring Glory to God at all; and

- e. No Biblical Separation, no godliness, no consecration, no sanctification, no hell, no condemnation, etc. True Christians who faithfully submit to the authority of God’s Word in life and worship who are separate from wrong doctrines, worldliness, ungodliness, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, abortion, etc. are regarded as judgemental, unfriendly, unloving, divisive and dangerous for the peace and unity of the world according to their compromising, postmodern, ecumenical and emergent mindsets!

THE 21ST CENTURY REFORMATION – AN ONGOING REFORMATION

It is by God’s grace and mercy that we still faithfully uphold and treasure the Reformation heritage of the Five Sola. However, due to the totally sinful, depraved and deceitful heart of human beings as well as the temptations and attacks from Satan, this world is getting worse and worse morally and spiritually, so the 21st Century Reformation is an ongoing reformation. What about our young generation who are bombarded with temptations and unbiblical doctrines and movements around them from their friends, schools, the Internet, mass media, false teachers and churches? Will they be still faithful to God and His Truth when we are called home? These are the vital reminders we should do for our generation while we are still alive:

1. Make sure that they are born again with the power of the Gospel of Christ and the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:3-7; Rom 1:16-17).
2. Make sure that they have a personal heart knowledge of God and God’s Word and Truth through biblical teaching and preaching (2 Tim 3:15-17).

3. Guard them and warn them of unbiblical doctrines and movements (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Tim 4:1-4; 2 Pet 2:1-3).
 4. Help them practise biblical separation, consecration and sanctification according to God's Word and the Holy Spirit (Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Heb 12:14).
 5. Train and equip them with God's Truth to continue the ongoing Reformation in their lives and church and in turn train up the next generation (2 Tim 2:2).
- I truly thank God for the sound and Biblical training at the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore that I am able to stand firm in God's Truth by His grace and strength.

¹ Textual criticism when applied to the Bible is a form of literary criticism that is concerned with the determining of textual variants in either manuscripts or printed texts. This is based on the assumption that there are scribal errors in the Bible and that Bible we currently possess is not actually completely God's Word. Textual criticism therefore seeks to find these "missing words" of the Bible. This is a dangerous practice and view of the Bible, which is to be rejected.

² Brief extract from *Contemporary Theology II - The Neo-Evangelical Movement*. Lecture notes (Electronic copy). Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, prepared by Suan Yew Quek.

³ Brief extract from *Contemporary Theology III - The Charismatic Movement*. Lecture notes (Electronic copy). Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, prepared by Suan Yew Quek.

⁴ Brief extract from *Contemporary Theology IV - The Ecumenical Movement*. Lecture notes (Electronic copy). Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, prepared by Suan Yew Quek.

⁵ Brief extract from articles on *New-Calvinism Movement* from: *New Calvinism - The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness*, by Peter Masters. Available from <http://www.metropolitantabernacle.org/Christian-Article/New-Calvinism-Merger-of-Calvinism-and-Worldliness/Sword-and-Trowel-Magazine>. Internet. Accessed July 1, 2017.

Characteristics of New Calvinism. Available from <http://www.newcalvinist.com/>. Internet. Accessed July 1, 2017.

⁶ Brief extract from articles on Emergent Church Movement from: *Emerging Church*. Available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church. Internet. Accessed July 1, 2017. *What's So Dangerous About the Emerging Church?* by John McArthur. Available from <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/GTY107>. Internet. Accessed July 1, 2017.

The Emergent Church: Theological Postmodernism, by Norman L. Geisler. Available from <http://normangeisler.com/the-emergent-church-theological-postmodernism/>. Internet. Accessed July 1, 2017.

