

MARANATHA MESSENGER

Weekly Newsletter of

Private Circulation Only

# MARANATHA BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1 October 2017

*"Present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28)*

Address: 63 Cranwell Road, Singapore 509851

E-mail: [maranatha.bpc@pacific.net.sg](mailto:maranatha.bpc@pacific.net.sg)

Sunday School: 9.45 am

Sunday English / Chinese Worship Service: 10.45 am Sunday Chinese Worship Service: 7 pm

Wednesday Prayer Meeting: 8.00 pm

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## Renaissance, Reformation And Revival – Unforgettable Lessons From The 16th Century Protestantism

### Introduction

There is an important date that ought to be in the church calendar of every protestant church that is sadly neglected or ignored today and even replaced by a malevolent event instead. The diabolical celebration of Halloween, seems to have taken over and has displaced this historic commemoration of our rich protestant heritage. This year is the 500th Anniversary of this epochal spiritual change in the heart of Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. "Reformation Day" is on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517 where the Augustinian monk and professor, Martin Luther, nailed to the door of Wittenberg Church a list of 95 religious propositions, or theses to awaken the people to spiritual realities after a period of spiritual ignorance. **Christians who love the Lord ought to commemorate and celebrate this significant event of historic Protestantism, for it had tremendous significance for both the individual, the life of the family and the true churches of Jesus Christ.**

**It is tragic that the churches and Christians today have so little knowledge of the Reformation and so little interest in it.** These are compromising times when we witness the re-establishment of relations with Rome by some Protestant denominations recently. A sound understanding and knowledge of the reasons for a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation is desperately needed in our generation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### The Historical Context - Renaissance

Isaiah 59:9-19 aptly and figuratively describes the condition of the medieval church before the Reformation commonly called The Dark Ages. Isaiah 59:19 says, *'So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.'*

It was a time of great spiritual recession and superstition and spiritual darkness. The end of the middle ages from the 13th to the 15th century was eclipsed by the humanistic Renaissance which witnessed a revival of the arts, languages and architecture by renowned men like Reuchlin, Milton, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the growing interest in ancient languages like Greek, Hebrew and much thalassic travels to open up the new world and the minds of the people as well. This augurs well for the Reformation later as the enquiring mind was applied to the religious realm as well. More importantly,

the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in 1454 during the Renaissance and the editing of the Greek New Testament by Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1516 which provided the basis for the translation of the scriptures in the different languages later and the dissemination of literature in an effective manner.

**One of the precipitating factors for the Reformation was that of the sale of indulgences for the remission of sins.** This questionable practice of the medieval church motivated Luther to publish the 95 theses. The subject of the 95 theses was the indulgence issue. Indulgences were forgiveness tickets which the Roman church sold to the people for the remitting of the people's sins. The lucrative indulgence-trade was to raise funds for building St Peter's Church.

The Pope of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century at Rome was Leo X. Leo, who grew up during and was affected by the Renaissance, wanted to renovate the already magnificent St. Peter's Cathedral at Rome, Italy. To raise funds, he authorized an indulgence-selling programme throughout Germany. A super-salesman in Germany was the Dominican monk, Johann Tetzel. He went to Saxony and sold them near Wittenberg, a place where Luther was. One of his favorite claims was expressed in a ditty :

"As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,  
The soul from purgatory springs."

In the famed 95 theses pasted of the walls of the church of Wittenburg, Luther blasted this ditty expressly: "They preach human doctrine who say that the soul flies out of purgatory as soon as the money thrown into the chest rattles" (Thesis 27, see Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol VII, 160-166). It was then that Luther wrote the 95 theses against the corrupt and unbiblical practice of indulgences. The theses set forth the truth concerning the true forgiveness of sins and the imputed righteousness of Christ on sinful man before a thrice holy God.

In 1520, after failing to win him over by various means, the Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther who rejected the papal decree and burnt the papal bull publicly in front of his students in Wittenberg. A severe struggle followed, for the Pope, in alliance with the Roman emperor, Charles V. They exerted much effort to contain this monk in 1521 at the Diet of Worms but it led to a reformed protestant movement from the Roman Church. In the course of this struggle, in 1529, called the second Diet of Speyers the leaders who allied with Luther expressed their objections to the questionable teachings of Rome. In the document, they protested against the doctrines of the church. The adversaries derisively, referred to the members of the German Christian nobles and leaders as "Protestants," meant to be a "derogatory name" that has stuck with us until this day. Christians are identified with this word, as it properly represents our biblical convictions and doctrinal stand today that is diametrically different from the Roman church.

This was the historic occasion of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century protestant Reformation. The main issues were the meaning of the true gospel that is the only means to the regeneration of a soul, the authority and sufficiency (i.e. not rituals or relics or sacraments nor visions and dreams or the extrabiblical apocrypha) of the Word of God over man's authority and the essence of true spiritual life of a believer at its very heart.

### **The Precipitating Factor of the Reformation**

The Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was not an act of insubordination by a recalcitrant monk at Wittenberg as some would have us to think today. The Reformation was not a political or social movement, nor an economic one. Such was the analysis of it by some secular or even religious historians. It was not the assertion of independence by the German nation, the arising of a nationalistic, patriotic fervour, and the overthrowing of a foreign domination.

**The Reformation was definitely a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the sphere of the church that effected a radical re-forming of the church after the word of God. The Reformation as a movement stood for the absolute authority and veracity of the Word of God over and against the fallible words of man.** It proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ over against "another gospel" which is no gospels at all (Galatians 1:7). It sought the salvation of the elect of God as they were overwhelmed with superstition and unsound teachings. The significance of the Reformation was that it revived the true church in the midst of the spiritually dead and bankrupt church of the Middle Ages. The significance of the Reformation was what Luther voiced already in the 95 theses of 1517.

### **The Theology of the Reformers**

The chief significance of the Reformation, which was doctrinal in essence, was the theological controversy on the doctrine of salvation, which is ever so relevant to the individual person.

The Reformation had to do with this question: How can a sinful man be made right with a all righteous God? The practice of indulgences was an answer of the church to this basic question that we must pay for that pardon; and earn that righteousness; and save ourselves by our works. Man's righteousness before God as the basis of salvation is made up of a strange combination of Christ's work and man's own works. His salvation depends upon his own good works which is contrary to scriptural injunctions (Ephesians 2:8, 9 and Titus 3:5). The Reformation took issue with this doctrine, the judgment that it was the denial of the gospel of Christ itself. The righteousness with which a man is made righteous before God is based on the work of Jesus Christ alone (2 Corinthians 5:21) (see Mark Shaw, *10 Great Ideas from Church History*, 18). **The satisfaction for sins, the suffering of the full punishment, and the obtaining of the perfect righteousness is possible only by Jesus in His vicarious atoning death on the cross.** This righteousness is in Christ and salvation is through faith in Christ Jesus alone as the crucified and risen Saviour (2 Corinthians 5:20). The way of faith is the way of complete trust in Christ Jesus as Lord and His perfect righteousness, based on God's promises in His Word. To the question, "How am I a sinner to be made just before God?" the Reformation gave a new, radically different answer, "*Not by works which I do, but by faith alone*" (Titus 3:5). Romans 1:17 states, "*The just shall live by faith*"; and this is also mentioned in three other occasions in Habakkuk, Galatians and Hebrews. Romans 3:28 says, "*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*" Luther found this through his meditation of the word of God from Romans 1:16 that "*the just or justified shall live by faith*" and that directed the course of the German Reformation. This is the singular most important rediscovery of the truths of the way to everlasting life and peace with God. Luther also wrote against the practice in a works based salvation through canonized saints, the Mass, and the worship of images and the female mediatrix between God and man (Heiko Oberman, *The Impact of the Reformation*, 242)

**This pure gospel of grace was what Luther proclaimed in the 95 theses:** "The true treasure of the church is the holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God" (Thesis 62, see Philip Schaff, Vol VII, 160-166). There are two other truths that are closely connected with the truth of justification by faith alone. The first is the truth that Christ Jesus accomplished everything that was necessary to obtain righteousness for His chosen people. He did this by His suffering and death, once accomplished on the cross. He satisfied fully for the sins of all for whom He died, and obtained their righteousness. After His death, no payment for sin was necessary for the sinner and this demolished the teaching of purgatory. John Wycliffe of Oxford in the 14th century exposed the doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches the repeated sacrifice of Christ for sins, denying the once and for all sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The Reformation established that no amount of works can be good enough to save ourselves from our total depravity.

**The second truth intimately bound up with justification by faith alone is the truth of the total**

**depravity of man** as man , apart from the Holy Spirit of Christ and His regenerating grace (Ephesians 2:8,9). The medieval church taught that man had to perform good works upon which his salvation depended. The Reformation struck at the very heart of this error by proclaiming that man had no ability to do good works of himself, because in himself man is totally depraved and incapable of doing anything to redeem his lost condition (Romans 3:10-12). After the fall of Adam, all men are devoid of any good and have no ability for good. As Ephesians 2:1 says, that Man is dead in trespasses and sins and his salvation does not depend on him but on God alone.

By 1525, Luther was engaged in a fierce theological conflict over the question: Does man have a free will? One of the humanist scholars, Erasmus Desiderius of Rotterdam, taught that the natural man was not totally devoid of goodness and hence was not wholly sinful and evil. Erasmus wrote publicly, in a book called **On Free Will**, that man, apart from Christ, had a will that could choose God, or Christ, or good. Luther saw this teaching as defective and that salvation also depends on man's good works. Against the theory of free will by Erasmus, Luther wrote the book, **The Bondage of the Will**. In it Luther maintained that the very will of man is bound as a slave to sin: "and he (man) has no 'free will,' but is a captive, prisoner and bond slave to the will of Satan and sin (Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:28-29) which is biblically correct (read Earl Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 281-290).

**The third truth is that the Reformation confessed sovereignty of God, gracious election rather than man centred work based redemption.** Standing strongly in defense of the truth of sovereign predestination and salvation by faith alone (Romans 8:29-30) are John Huss, Zwingli, John Calvin, Tyndale, Bullinger and the English puritans later. The Reformation was clear in preaching God's gracious election as the eternal fountain of salvation by grace and not by man's whims and fancies (Matthew 1:21, Philippians 2:12).

What solid, sure foundation did Luther and the Reformation stand on in order once more to proclaim the gospel of grace and form the church anew? Standing for the gospel of justification by faith alone, on Christ alone and by grace alone (not by man's works or traditions) arrayed them against very powerful foes (see Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, IVF, 1999, 289-291).

The institutional Roman church at that time condemned the biblical teaching as "heresy." The climax came at Worms, in April 1521, where the church and state assembled to demand that Martin Luther recant. Yet, it was there that he said, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God, Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen." God answered that prayer and vindicated him with protection and deliverance (see Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Part III Renaissance and Reformation*, Grace Publications Trust, 2004, 98-99).

**Besides the doctrine of justification by faith, the solid foundation on which the Reformation stood was the absolute authority, sufficiency and perspicuity of the Word of God, the Scriptures, they also stressed the biblical teaching of the universal priesthood of believers** (1 Peter 2:9). We may come to God directly in faith and repentance because of what Christ our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) had done for us and not through some human priests or female mediatrix or saints who cannot save us. The application is the clarion call to fervent prayers and intercession and the sincere confession and repentance of our sins before the Lord. This was one of the outstanding truths proclaimed by the Reformation. The Word of God alone has the sole authority over believers and the church. This had since been lost during the spiritually darkened middle ages for almost 1,000 years. The authority then was founded in the encyclicals and hierarchy of the Church of Rome and the priesthood.

The Scriptures were almost entirely absent from the life of the medieval church. The Reformation asserted : "Scripture alone or the sufficiency of the Word of God that is being undermined today." The scripture, as the infallibly inspired and authoritative and sufficient Word of God, is the sole authority in

the church. In contradistinction from tradition, opinions of men, even popes and cardinals, the Scripture alone governs our entire faith and daily life. **The veritable Scriptures is given to every believer in their own languages, and not to some elite in the church. Everyone ought to read and can understand it by the Spirit who enlightens us.** This Scripture plainly proclaims the sovereign gospel of grace, said the Reformers, and therefore we must carry on the Reformation faithfully and study and apply God's inerrant word. Later the Bible was translated into German in 1522 (NT) and 1534 (whole German Bible) and given to the common people and into English by Tyndale in 1525 (NT) and 1536 (the whole English Bible completed later by 1538) and made available to the ploughmen. This brought the Reformation forward and altered the course of English history (read Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, 378-381). There is a practical element in our understanding of the Reformation and we ought to propagate these precepts and practices of the reformed movement relevant to the church today (read Houghton, *Sketches from Church History*, 90-95).

### **Revival - The Application of the Reformers' Teachings**

**What the Reformation stood for 500 years ago is true, as relevant, and as vital today as it was then. Justification by faith alone as the basis of salvation and the absolute authority of the unchanging Scripture as God's inspired and sufficient Word.** The gospel is sovereignly preserved by God and does not change from age to age; it will never be surpassed nor outdated, nor there be a new message that outstrips the gospel in importance. The Reformation is no historical curiosity or anachronism but a living, on-going reality, because of the Christ-centred unadulterated gospel of grace it preached. It is the sound biblical theology of the cross as it is by the "foolishness of preaching" that one may be saved (1 Corinthians 1:21). Contrary to the deception and truncated gospels of our times (i.e. Prosperity gospel, the movie, the 'Passion of the Christ', the defective 'Alpha Course' and the subtle half-truths and lies of the Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown). Salvation calls for true evangelical repentance, saving faith in Christ alone.

**What practical, urgent and relevant conclusions for the church and for the believers, can we come to, from this understanding of the Reformation?**

Firstly, the Reformation was about salvation by God's grace in Jesus Christ alone. It was about Scripture, as the only authority in the church. The spiritual condition of Protestantism today needs a spiritual revival. Much of Protestantism is unconcerned about the truths of the Reformation in its doctrine and practice, and some even compromise these biblical truths.

**Secondly, much of Protestantism today is desperately ignorant of the Scriptures as the Roman church was at the time of the Reformation.** Some have implicitly set aside Scripture as the basis of our faith and life by its acceptance of evolution or theistic evolution, the teaching of secular psychology and the confusion over ethical issues of our day, e.g. transgenderism, abortion, homosexuality, cloning and euthanasia relying instead on science, prevailing social opinions, and man's reason rather than the veritable and indestructible word of God. Knowledge of God and His Word are important and this is where we need to make a conscious effort to meditate on the Word, apply it and to teach it as well (Ezra 7:10).

**Thirdly, we need to stress on personal revival and defense of the pure gospel and the saving of lost souls.** The heart of the Reformation and the 95 theses was expressed in Thesis 62: "The true treasure of the Church is the holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God." We need to bring the unadulterated gospel to the lost and the reformation stand for biblical evangelism and gospel missions. John Calvin sent out a mission team to Spain in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> Century although it did not bear forth much discernible fruit. Nonetheless, it showed the missionary zeal and heartbeat of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformers in the saving of souls and the zeal for gospel missions.

## Current Trends and Implications

The church today is not much different to the Pre-Reformation times. There is still profound ignorance, indifference to God, superstition, spiritual idolatry (i.e. worship of self, money, work, and images and icons), and the obsession with the terror of man (i.e. terrorism) rather than the reverential fear and knowledge of God today.

**There ought to be a personal and ecclesiastical response to the Reformation.** There are 4 relevant applications namely, **Know it** yourself first, **Share it** with others, **Apply it** personally and **Defend it** courageously and unashamedly. The 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation started with the internal spiritual transformation of the Reformers first in their hearts as they searched for God in the Word. There is to be a sincere desire to please God and seek and serve Him faithfully with our gifts and talents and obey His Word. The Reformers were diligent and serious students of the Word of God and they meditated and kept the Word (2 Timothy 2:15, James 1:22). **The truly reformed Christian today will delve into and apply the Word of God and study it with great interest and discipline as the reformers of old. The Reformation also gave to the individual and the church proper understanding of the gospel, the right meaning of the sacraments with their right administration, and the Holy Scriptures preached and applied.** Doctrine was spread abroad with the 95 theses all over Germany and Europe. Teaching sound doctrine and the expository preaching of the cross are the implications of the Reformation. We ought to pray to the Lord for a burden for souls and sharing the truth of the gospel and repentance of our sins, justification by faith in Christ alone before it is too late.

## A Reformed and Transformed Mind

*“The just shall live by faith”* (Romans 1:17). That gave Luther a new mind and heart in the truth of Holy Scriptures. We need a renewed mind to know, apply and pursue and defend the truth of salvation (Jude 3, 4). Salvation belongs to the Lord alone (Titus 2:10), not by man or his works. One of the battlefields today is the mind (Philippians 4:8). God has given to us a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7), and we must strive to understand and know what and why we believe. Emotions must not take centre-stage in our lives, understanding of the Scriptures should be instead. Paul speaks of the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:1–2) that comes about as a result of knowing and applying God’s Word, and *“bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). We need to discipline our minds with the word of God and not the seductive pictures in the videos, internet and movies web portals and worldly magazines of today.

**The Children of the Reformation ought to be single-hearted and God minded by application. It is a heart and mind dominated exclusively by one principle, love for God, His Kingdom, His cause, His Church and His Truth. It is a heart of discernment and evangelical obedience to God’s Word.** It is submission to the will of God and total reliance on the finished work of Christ alone at Calvary and not by man’s defective works. It is a disciplined, vigilant and diligent mental spirit to advance the cause of Christ to the saving of souls. An informed and reformed mind must pervade every Christian today (Romans 12:1, 2).

## A Reformed Covenant Home

**One application of the Reformation is the reformed and transformed Christian home.** With Luther and Katherine von Bora’s marriage (Calvin and Idelette, and John Knox and Margaret Bowes and Anna Reinhard and Zwingli and others also), they started catechising the children and had regular family worship. It was unheard of for a priest to have a wife at that time, let alone have children at home. The Reformers blazed the trail in the setting up of covenant families and edifying relationships at home. It was an example for others on how to raise godly children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. The

English Reformers and Puritans taught their children the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of faith (1643-47) and the holy Bible, and many children and youths came to know and embrace Christ as Saviour and Lord at a tender age. (Alexander, *Ladies of the Reformation*, Gospel Standard Strict Baptist Trust Ltd, 1977).

Do we fill our children / family with the Word of God and prayer or are their minds filled with the things of the world (HP games and Youtube videos) only? The average family, the basic building block of our society, is under siege by the adversary today. There is an increase in divorce, recalcitrant children in dysfunctional families. **The English Reformers paid great attention to biblical domestic instruction to their children. Families are destroyed by a lack of knowledge of God's Word (Hosea 4:6) and the lack of spiritual fidelity to God first and then to each other. Today we need a reformation of the family, from worldly values and earthly pursuits to holiness, fear of God and the principles of the Reformed faith found in God's Word.** Moses advised in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, *'And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.'*

**Let godly fathers and mothers follow the examples of the Reformation forebears, and protect and preserve the sanctity, vitality and harmony of the Christian home in the midst of the demise of the homes wrecked by the lack of devotion to God** leading to divorces, spousal violence, teenage rebellion and godlessness (Psalm 127:1, Genesis 18:19). Where the Word is honoured and applied in the Christ-centred home there will be the growth in the fear and reverential worship of God by every member there.

### **Defense of the Faith**

The response, by the individual believer and the Christian covenant home and by the congregation, must be one of a staunch willingness to share the gospel, defend the truth of the pure and unadulterated gospel, preach and stand for the authority, perspicuity and the sufficiency of the indestructible Word of God. The Reformation also stood for the truth of God in the universal priesthood of believers. The 21st Century Reformation stands against the practice of new age movement, unsound teachings in the cultism, agnosticism, pervasive occultism of our times and the growing ecumenical and charismatic movement with the contemporary worship that have invaded the churches. **Sadly, much of Protestantism is given to spiritual compromise. It is spiritual lukewarmness and nonchalance as in the church of Laodicea** have affected the churches. The Reformation stands for a new spirit and fresh zeal of the Lord to preach Christ and to defend the truth of the gospel for the gospel is the revelation of the glory of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ. This is the greatest and most pressing issue of all life: How shall God be glorified in us? For the glory of God and the pure gospel of Christ, we must stand fast and be faithful to the end. **One needs to continue steadfast to grow in the knowledge of God and to press on the important confession of our faith (1 Timothy 6:11, 12) in the faithful and vigilant propagation of the pure gospel and the defence of the reformed faith and His Word till Jesus' second advent.**

### **Conclusion**

**Finally, the heart of the Reformation is the reformation of the heart.** The 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation stood for justification by faith, the universal priesthood of believers and the indestructible, authoritative and sufficient Bible as the only rule of faith and practice, Christ alone as supreme in salvation, the grace of God alone and not works, faith in Christ risen from the grave, the substitutionary atonement and the glory of God. This will impact and transform the lives of believers today in revival, holiness, salvation and total consecration to Him.

There is much to be learnt from Luther and the other Reformers from their teachings and writings that can be applied in our churches today. We need to also examine ourselves to see if we are still walking faith, in the straight and narrow way. We stand for the authority of His Word, sound gospel evangelism and missions for God in the midst of opposition and to persevere for the cause of Christ in these last perilous days. We abide by the theology of the cross in declaring the pure gospel of salvation to our loved ones and friends peradventure they may be saved before the Lord comes. **This is the true spirit of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Tyndale and the Reformation is not over yet! We should continue steadfastly in the redemption of the hearts of men into the 21<sup>st</sup> century till our Lord returns.**

Jack Sin

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MBPC congratulates Pr Barnabas Song and Ting Ting on the birth of their second baby boy, Song Muxuan on 26 September



Getting ready for evangelism on Sunday to the various dorms.



Brother Tianqi Chen witnessing to a new comer with the gospel.



Praise the Lord for 4 new visitors who came and heard the gospel last Sunday.

Rev Kim Khawl and Pr Jeremy Lal Pek Liana started a new church in Yangon in the latter's home.



**Theme for the Quarter :**  
**Knowing, Serving And Glorifying the Supremacy Of Christ In The Church**  
**(Studies in the Book of Colossians)**  
**English Worship Service**

Rev Dr Jack Sin  
speaks on  
*Faith, Hope And Love In God*  
(Scripture Text : Colossians 1:1-8; Responsive Reading : John 15:1-17)

[*End of MM*]