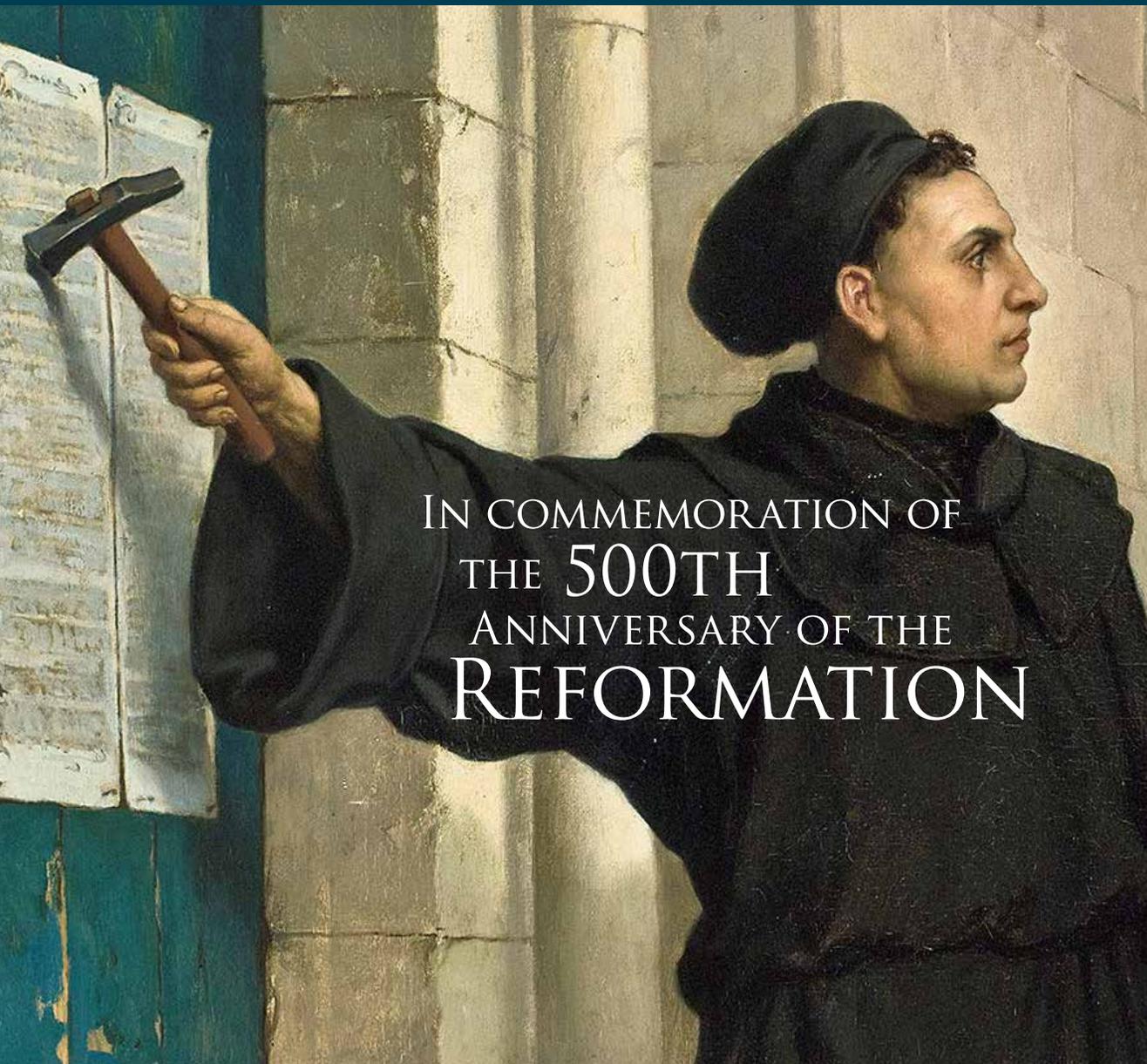
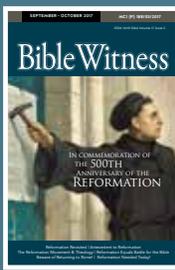


Bible Witness



IN COMMEMORATION OF
THE 500TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE
REFORMATION

Reformation Revisited | Antecedent to Reformation
The Reformation Movement & Theology | Reformation Equals Battle for the Bible
Beware of Returning to Rome! | Reformation Needed Today!



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EDITORIAL

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation calls for thanksgiving and praise to God for that great awakening which He has wrought through Martin Luther and other Reformers. Protestant Christians should never forget that great event in the history of the church. After Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517, an unstoppable movement broke out throughout all Europe. Its ripples quickly moved across the world, and its influence continues to be felt till this day. Luther's passionate witness for the Gospel of Christ and the resultant Reformation movement was one of the greatest effusions of the Holy Spirit in human history. We must give thanks for the Reformers' rediscovery and proclamation of the biblical truths of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Our reason for looking to that past event of the Reformation is also that we may learn great lessons from it and apply them. We must tell our generation and our posterity of the great exploits of the Reformation – how the Reformers challenged and stripped away the authority of the Roman Pope and Church tradition that veiled the biblical truths and how they reinstated the authority of Holy Scripture. We must also recount how they hacked away idolatries that had encrusted the Gospel of grace and how they proclaimed the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone. We must not fail to be reminded of the great price that the Reformers had paid to reform the church's worship and ministry for the glory of God.

Dear Christian readers, do not fail to take stock of our Protestant heritage of 500 years. What are we really celebrating? Many Protestants of our time who celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation are, tragically, engaged in ecumenical compromises with Rome. To be sure, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin would have nothing to do with these modern evangelicals and charismatics, who think there is no real reason for biblical separation from Roman Catholicism. As we reflect on the work of the Reformers, this milestone commemoration must not be a mere exercise in hagiography, but rather a true evaluation of our own devotion to the truths of Christ and His Word. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Prabhudas Koshy

Wittenberg.

REFORMATION REVISITED

Jeffrey Khoo



image by khanacademy.org

Indeed the Word of God is unstoppable and indestructible. This was what we learned in the 4th Reformation pilgrimage of the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) from May 10th to 22nd, 2017. The Lord opened the way for 30 pilgrims from seven churches to revisit His work of reformation in England, Scotland and Holland.

This year, many are flocking to Germany to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. But let it be known that the Reformation actually began in England in the 14th century with Oxford theologian John Wycliffe,

who is rightly called “the Morning Star of the Reformation”. Wycliffe’s teaching on salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on Scripture alone, eventually influenced Martin Luther who hit the final nail in the coffin of church corruption with his 95 theses in Wittenberg on October 31st, 1517.

The Reformation in Germany soon spread throughout Europe and Great Britain. England finally broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534, Scotland in 1560, and Holland in 1578. Indeed, “the word of God is not bound” (2

Timothy 2:9). We in Singapore eventually received the Reformation and Protestant Faith when we came under British rule in the 19th century. English missionaries set up churches and mission schools, e.g. St Andrew's School and Anglo-Chinese School. As a matter of fact, when I was in primary one in St Andrew's, I heard the Gospel and got saved.

Oxford and Cambridge

In England, the Lord used Oxford and Cambridge Universities to do the work of Reformation. Besides Wycliffe (Balliol College), Oxford produced such bright luminaries as William Tyndale (Magdalen College) who translated the English Bible from the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, John and Charles Wesley (Christ Church and Lincoln Colleges) who were the founders of Methodism, and John William Burgon who defended the Traditional Text underlying the Reformation Bible versions like the King James Version (KJV).

It was Burgon who said, "Either with the best and wisest of all ages, you must believe the whole of Scripture or with the narrow-minded infidel you must disbelieve the whole. There is no middle course open to you." The Bible is either 100% perfect or not at all. There is no such thing as a 99% perfect Bible, perfect only in the past but not today, perfect in its thoughts but not in its words. Jesus said, "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18). Verbal Plenary Preservation, no less!

Burgon graduated from Worcester College and was Vicar of the University Church. He was later appointed Gresham Professor of Divinity in London and then Dean of Chichester in Sussex. He authored

no less than five books in defence of the Traditional Text over against the corrupt text of Westcott and Hort which underlies most of the modern versions today. It is also interesting to know that Dean Burgon designed an academic hood still used by Oxford University. Incidentally, FEBC also uses the Burgon hood.

Cambridge University is the cradle of the British Reformation. In the early 16th century following the Reformation in Germany by Martin Luther, Cambridge scholars Thomas Bilney, Hugh Latimer, Robert Barnes, Nicholas Ridley, Matthew Parker, Myles Coverdale, Stephen Gardiner, John Rogers and others formed a fellowship which met at the White Horse Inn in Cambridge to discuss Reformation doctrines and practices. These scholars felt it was important to go back to the source – to Scripture itself – to test all the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in order to see if they were biblical or not. The great Renaissance scholar Erasmus was then teaching at Cambridge and had just translated a new Latin Bible from the Greek New Testament. Using Erasmus' Greek NT, these Cambridge scholars studied the writings of Luther and checked them against the Scriptures to see if they were true. They were convicted by God's Truth and became convinced that Reformation was needed in England as well. And so Cambridge became known as "Little Germany".

In 1525, in the Church of St Edward's King and Martyr in Cambridge, Robert Barnes delivered the first evangelical sermon to be preached in any church in England, proclaiming salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone and exposed the falsehoods of the Roman Catholic Church. Barnes, Bilney, Ridley

☉ send out thy light and thy truth:
let them lead me;
let them bring me unto thy holy hill,
and to thy tabernacles.

Psalm 43:3

FEBC's 4th Reformation Pilgrimage
England and Scotland
May 10-22, 2017



Pilgrims at



the Tyndale Monument, North Nibley, England

and Latimer were put to death for their biblical beliefs and evangelical preaching. Latimer told Ridley as they were about to be burned, “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God’s grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out.”

In Oxford today, near the site where they were executed, stands the Martyrs’ Memorial with this inscription: “To the Glory of God, and in grateful commemoration of His servants, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, Prelates of the Church of England, who near this spot yielded their bodies to be burned, bearing witness to the sacred truths which they had affirmed and maintained against the errors of the Church of Rome, and rejoicing that to them it was given not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for His sake; this monument was erected by public subscription in the year of our Lord God, MDCCCXLI (i.e. AD 1841).” Indeed, “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Hebrews 13:3).

St Andrew’s and Edinburgh

Scotland yielded martyrs Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart. They and others who paid the ultimate price paved the way for John Knox to preach against Catholic tyranny and idolatry, and introduce the Presbyterian form of church government in place of the Episcopal one.

Hamilton studied in Wittenberg under Martin Luther and, when he returned to Scotland, preached the Gospel of pure grace and sole faith. Wishart, a schoolmaster, was influenced by both Luther and John Calvin, and he preached

in the open, whereby many were convicted by the truth of the Gospel. Both Hamilton and Wishart were imprisoned in the bottle dungeon in St Andrew’s before being burned at the stake.

John Knox studied in Glasgow and later in Geneva. He had said that the four years which he spent in Geneva studying under John Calvin were his happiest. When he returned to Scotland, he earnestly contended for the Reformed Faith. He was a minister of St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh and held a powerful pulpit for 13 years until he died in 1572. By that time, the Reformed Faith and Presbyterianism had become firmly entrenched in Scotland.

Lord’s Day Worship

Fast forward to our 21st century. Despite the apostasy we see in England and Scotland



New Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, London

today, God has preserved a remnant to bear witness to the Gospel and the Reformed Faith there. In England, the 30 of us in this Reformation pilgrimage team had the opportunity to worship at New Life Bible-Presbyterian Church (morning service) and the Metropolitan Tabernacle (evening service). At New Life, we heard Dr Carl Martin preach on “Life and Labour” (1 Corinthians 3:8-15), whereby he also shared

how the Rev Dr Timothy Tow had taught him never to retire from ministry. Thus, like an old faithful horse, he had determined that he would plod on until his last breath. In Spurgeon's Tabernacle, we heard Dr Peter Masters preach Christ and His saving grace from Psalm 72. As a matter of record, back in 1986, Dr Masters had in fact arranged for Dr Timothy Tow to lecture on China's



Metropolitan Tabernacle, London

greatest revivalist, John Sung, and the Asian Awakening. Thank God for the kindred spirit that we have in the battle for the Truth, knitted through the ministry of the late Rev Dr Timothy Tow (founding pastor of Bible-Presbyterianism in Singapore and founding principal of FEBC). It was, therefore, most appropriate and meaningful that the Reformation pilgrimage team, on behalf of True Life BPC and FEBC, presented to Dr Martin and Dr Masters each a complimentary copy of Timothy Tow's *Heavenly Melodies* recently published.

In Scotland, we worshipped at the Edinburgh Free Church Continuing, where a sister from one of our local churches had earlier joined while she was an exchange student in Edinburgh. The church is strictly psalm-singing and adheres to the use of KJV. The Rev Robert McCurley was the Lord's messenger at the worship service. We thank God for him and other like-minded ministers of the

Gospel like the Rev James Gracie and the Rev William Scott in Edinburgh. Truly, thank God for the faithful remnant in the propagation of God's Truth. "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2 Corinthians 13:8)!

"Three-in-One" Blessing

During the trip, we had evening devotions where we read and meditate on God's Word, and share our thanksgiving and testimonies on the lessons learned after a day of historical sightseeing. We are thankful to the Lord for providing us with an excellent Blue Badge guide, who is a committed Christian herself. While she gave the historical information on the Reformation sites we visited, I would give the theology behind them.

As one thankful sister in the team put it, this pilgrimage was such a blessing to her and so enriching like a "three-in-one" – Bible study, Christian fellowship and sightseeing all in one. It is for this reason that we call our trip a "pilgrimage", rather than a "tour". By "pilgrimage", we do not mean to earn merits for heaven for this is impossible – salvation is God's free gift. We participate as Reformation pilgrims to remember God's providential hand in Church history, to learn from the testimony and ministry of the faithful saints and martyrs of bygone days, and to search God's Word and seek His will for our lives today. We are hereby enjoined, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:7-8). We are grateful to the Lord for yet another rewarding pilgrimage. All glory to God alone!



Pope Innocent III, image by Wikipedia.org

ANTECEDENT TO REFORMATION

Prabhudas Koshy

There is great value in learning from history. Christians must regard history as important. Christian or church history has much to teach us. At least, we can learn from mistakes of past generations, and hopefully not “let history repeat itself”.

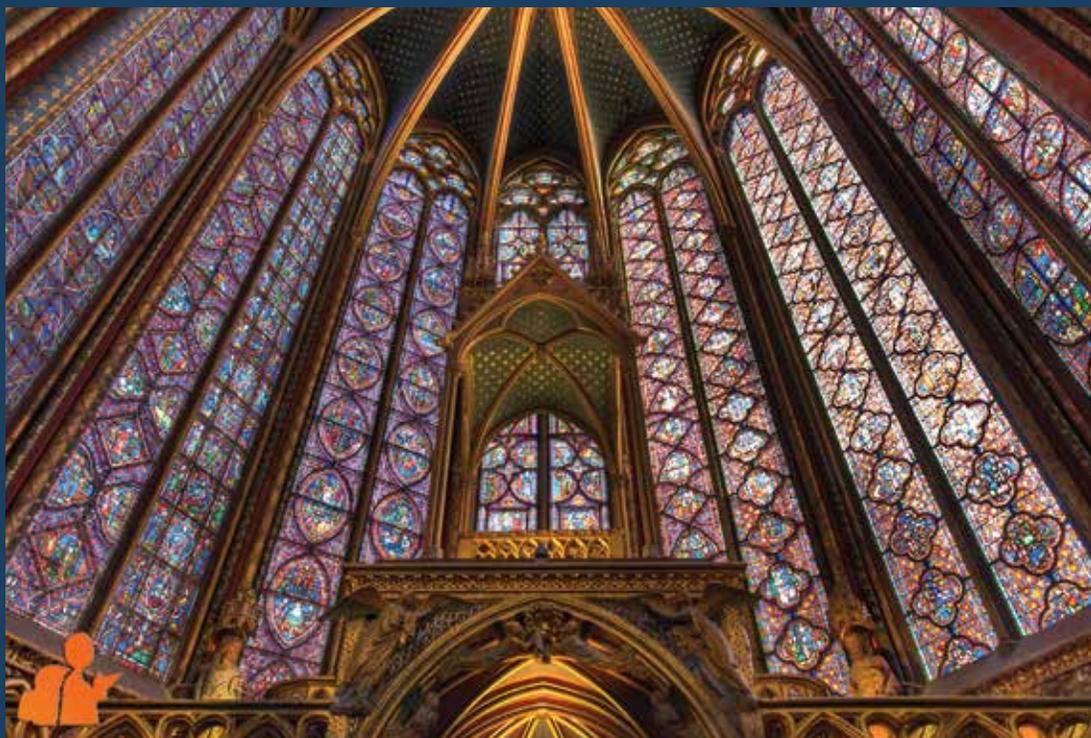
Early Years of Church History

In the days of Christ and the apostles, the nations of Palestine, North Africa and Europe were under the imperial rule of Rome. Roman rule was effective in terms of social stability, education and culture. It also brought the wonderful system of roads which facilitated movement and safe travel. Indeed, the sustained period of Roman peace, coupled with the well-paved, well-connected roads which enhanced transport links between cities and across the continent, were rather conducive to the propagation and spread of the Gospel. For several decades since the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel of Christ was carried far and wide by His faithful disciples. Farther and farther

the message spread – first “in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, (then) in Samaria, and (subsequently) unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8) – until communities of Christians appeared in almost all the chief cities of the mighty Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire was generally very accommodating as far as religion was concerned; however, Christianity faced opposition. To the imperial government, the trouble was that Christians made claims that “Jesus alone is the Lord”. To embrace the Gospel was to reject the whole galaxy of pagan deities. Above all, it meant rejecting Caesar (the Roman emperor) as a god. It was the civic duty of a Roman citizen to offer a pinch of incense at the emperor’s shrine – a practice which Christians could not submit to. It was this nonconformity which led to social ostracism and, not surprisingly, to great persecution that lasted throughout the first three centuries of church history.

Those were years when great numbers of Christians paid with their lives for



A medieval gothic church, image by digitourist.wordpress.com

their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They were imprisoned, tortured and killed – often publicly to satisfy a bloodthirsty, degenerated and depraved “spectator” populace. It is against this setting that Tertullian had said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” In spite of persecutions, the Gospel prevailed.

Christianity Adopted as Religion of the State

This dire political state of affairs continued until AD 311, when Constantine came onto the scene. While on the way to battle in his attempt to seize the imperial crown of Rome, he claimed to have seen a night vision of a cross in the sky with the words “*In hoc signo vinces*” (i.e. “by this sign you will conquer”). When he subsequently won the battle at Milvian Bridge, Constantine attributed his victory to the God of Christianity. This led him to grant

legal status to the Church after his victory. What followed was a favourable political climate for Christianity empire-wide; persecution ended almost immediately. Under Constantine’s successors, the once persecuted religion became the national religion of the Roman Empire. Needless to say, there were widespread false conversions, as people saw advantage and social favours associated with being Christian. Pagans flooded the church in great numbers for the privileges and status that it accorded. What a drastic difference! The agony and death of suffering Christians were replaced with the lustre and thrill of a religion enjoying imperial favour. Whereas once upon a time, undergoing baptism meant openly inviting torture and death, now it became a doorway to prestige, with many Christians being moved into positions of power. The Church soon became wealthy, and worldliness crept in.

This new social and religious pattern produced the sacral society – i.e. a situation where the church and state are two aspects of the same coin. As a result of this development, missionary outreach likewise took on a new dimension, whereby it became common practice to enforce conversion on people who were conquered in wars. Thus, when Charlemagne the king defeated the Saxons, the conquered Saxons had to choose either baptism or death. This pattern continued down the ensuing centuries, which coincided with the so-called “Dark Ages” of Christianity.

The crusades were another ugly and dark chapter of Christianity, the result of the concept of an international Christian “commonwealth of nations”. The aim of the crusades, which received full backing from the church hierarchy, was to wrest the so-called holy places in Palestine from the hands of infidels. Deemed a failure (politically) and a disaster (spiritually), the crusades only left behind a legacy of bitterness and suspicion in the Muslim world. This was the doing of a people who called themselves Christians, but who had totally ignored the words of Christ: “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight ... but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36). They had also turned a deaf ear to the apostle Paul's words: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds)” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)!

Over time, the Church's assumption of secular power inevitably led to its degeneration, in particular with regard to its disciplinary methods, whereby the Church would act as judge and impose penalties

and punishments. In time, the judicial power of the Church was abused by its leadership to further its worldly ambitions. To add insult to injury, even godly and biblical men were punished brutally when they did not consent to the worldly ways of the Church. There was no recourse to a fair hearing by civil authorities, which were all under the absolute control of the Church. Truly, “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” No wonder the medieval period was known as the Dark Ages of Christianity!

The Rise of Papal Authority in the Church

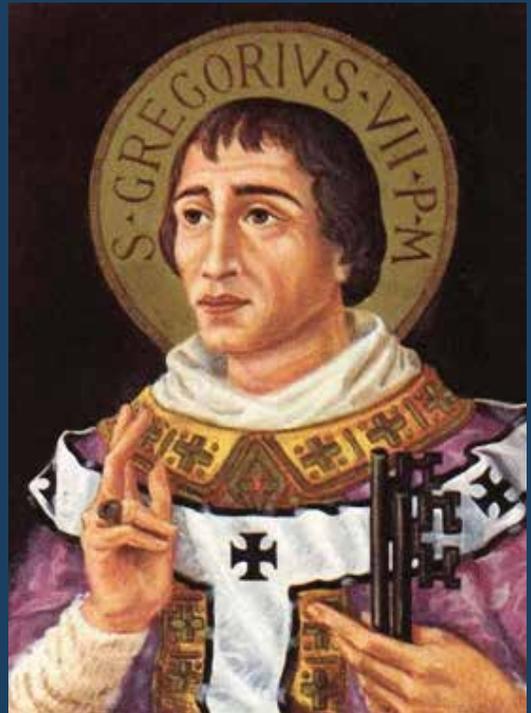


image by salvemariaregina.info

That was not all. One of the most significant results of the union of the church and state under Constantine and his successors was the increasing prominence of the bishop of Rome. Later, when Roman imperial power collapsed, the bishop of Rome's power rose to an even more prominent position. One

of the most notable of these ecclesiastical leaders was Gregory. As bishop of Rome (AD 590-604), he gained wide influence and authority like that of a patriarch. The kind of power that Gregory and his successors possessed would give rise to the title “Pappa” (Father) or “Pope” for the bishops of Rome. Now, as the national states in Europe started to rise, conflicts between kings and popes became frequent. It was in response to such pressure that Pope Boniface VIII in 1302 issued the famous bull (this word was derived from the Latin word *bullā*, meaning “the seal on the document”), *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* (i.e. “outside the church there is no salvation”). He asserted his sovereignty over the rulers of the world and insisted that for anyone to be saved, it was necessary that he be subject to the Roman pope.

were so appalling that the stories might be viewed as scurrilous inventions had it not been for solid historical evidence. The history of the papacy is not edifying at all. It makes for grim reading, what with all those sordid stories of nepotism, simony, drunkenness and neglect of the flock by the priests – evils that were spawned by a corrupt, extravagant papacy. To call these ecclesiastical leaders “holy fathers” is a misnomer. They were sensual through and through in view of the countless reports of iniquity attributed to them – in short, they were anything but “holy”!

Worse was to follow: in 1870, the first Vatican Council enacted the dogma of papal infallibility. According to this dogma, when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* (i.e. “from his throne”) as the pastor of the

Oh, church of Christ, “knowing the time,
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16th century Reformation...

As if that was not bad enough, through the centuries, the papacy became a worldly seat of power which had its own papal states in central Italy. Worldliness and blatant immorality characterised the papacy. The 9th, 10th and 11th centuries were particularly notorious. The records of lust, fornication, cruelty, greed and murder

universal Church, and when he pronounces a dogma concerning faith and morals, it is binding on all Christians and is not subject to modification by any church council. This dogma was not a new invention, but a phenomenon which had already existed for centuries in the Roman Church! The supposed infallibility of popes has filled

the modern Roman church with idolatry – Mary worship, praying to the dead “saints”, etc. The so-called infallible dogmas of the popes were the very conduits through which erroneous practices (that are forbidden by the true and infallible Word of God, the Bible) found their way into the Roman Church and became legitimatised as church traditions.

The Church’s Need of the Hour

The 16th century Protestant Reformation was not an overnight phenomenon. With all the antecedent factors and forces at work, you could say it was a movement waiting to happen. However, Reformation does not end there. Even today, Rome is a threat to the purity of the Christian faith. “All roads lead to Rome!” This is essentially the rallying slogan of ecumenism, a movement that labours to bring all churches together with Rome. Rome has not spared any effort to bring the Protestant churches back to her fold. The ecumenical movement, an arm of the Roman church, is constantly infiltrating mainstream Protestant churches, and has already made considerable progress in bringing many Protestant churches closer to Rome.

The next big merger that the world is awaiting eagerly is the Catholic-Protestant merger! What do we say about a mega-church of universal proportions led by the pope? Though widely hailed by the world, it will be a great spiritual tragedy! This is because it will betray the Lord, His Word, and the blood of the martyrs who were killed by the Roman church when they stood up for the truth. Though praised by many, it is the greatest disaster to affect the Christian church this century. It has reduced the professing churches of

this century to a collection of “bloodless”, spineless and boneless organisations, which can hardly raise a whimper in the battle for Christ’s truth! We must pray and preach with all zeal against the infiltration of ecumenism, because the popes and their dogmas seek to replace Christ and His doctrines. This is unacceptable in the light of God’s Word. The Romish popery robs Christ of His glory, because it puts sacramental efficacy in the place of His efficacious, propitiatory, once-and-for-all sacrifice (cf. 1 John 2:2; Hebrews 9:28). It subverts our most holy faith, because it propagates corrupt dogmas instead of the infallible doctrines of the Bible (cf. 2 Peter 2:1-2).

Oh, church of Christ, “knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Romans 13:11). The need of the hour in these last days is for the faithful church to stand fast with the 16th century Reformation, which was essentially all about giving the Bible (for centuries a forbidden book) back to the people so that the church may be brought back to the authority of Scripture and its biblical truths. Having known from church history why Christianity needed the Reformation should cause us to avoid any ecumenical cooperation or venture with the Roman Catholic Church like the plague. We would, without hesitation, view any such merger as tantamount to betrayal of the Reformation doctrines. No wonder the apostle Jude was stirred to “(give) all diligence to write unto (us) of the common salvation ... and exhort (us) that (we) should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3)!

The Reformation

Movement & Theology

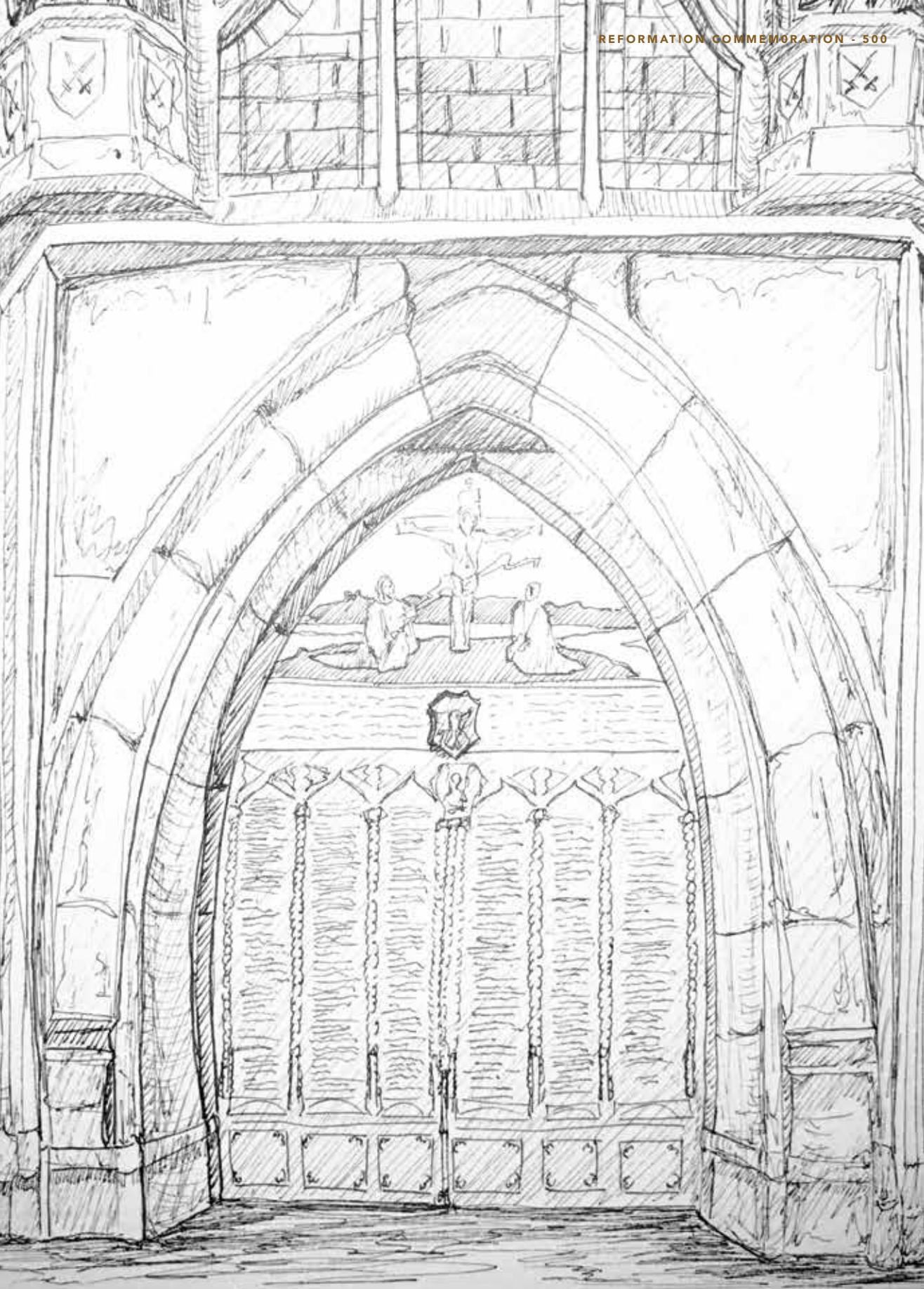
Prabhudas Koshy

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, Uldrich Zwingli and John Calvin, among others, were theologians. Their strong convictions concerning the biblical doctrines and their commitment to challenge 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 the 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.”

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, its truthfulness, relevance and authority was central to their theological persuasions, and hence an appeal to Scripture was commonplace in their sermons and theological writings. Moreover, they also firmly believed in the efficacy of Scripture, whereby 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” (chapter VIII, para 3). 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.”¹

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 as “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 have certainly much to thank God for the biblical truths of the Gospel, which Martin Luther rediscovered, emphasised and defended in 1517, and which have continued 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,

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

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 existed were distorted forms of the Gospel. Hence, they were determined to deal with every kind of widespread distortions of the Gospel, even heresies such as Pelagianism² and semi-Pelagianism.³

2 This heretical teaching associated with a British monk named Pelagius (AD 354-440) 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.

3 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.

Reformed theology has rediscovered the Scriptural truths of the Gospel and has proclaimed them with great clarity and firmness. These 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, had 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), "I" denotes Irresistible Grace (cf. John 6:37, 44), 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’ desire for the church to return to 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, Reformation brought 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 its preaching 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 the 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-centred. 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 centre 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 remain 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 had 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.

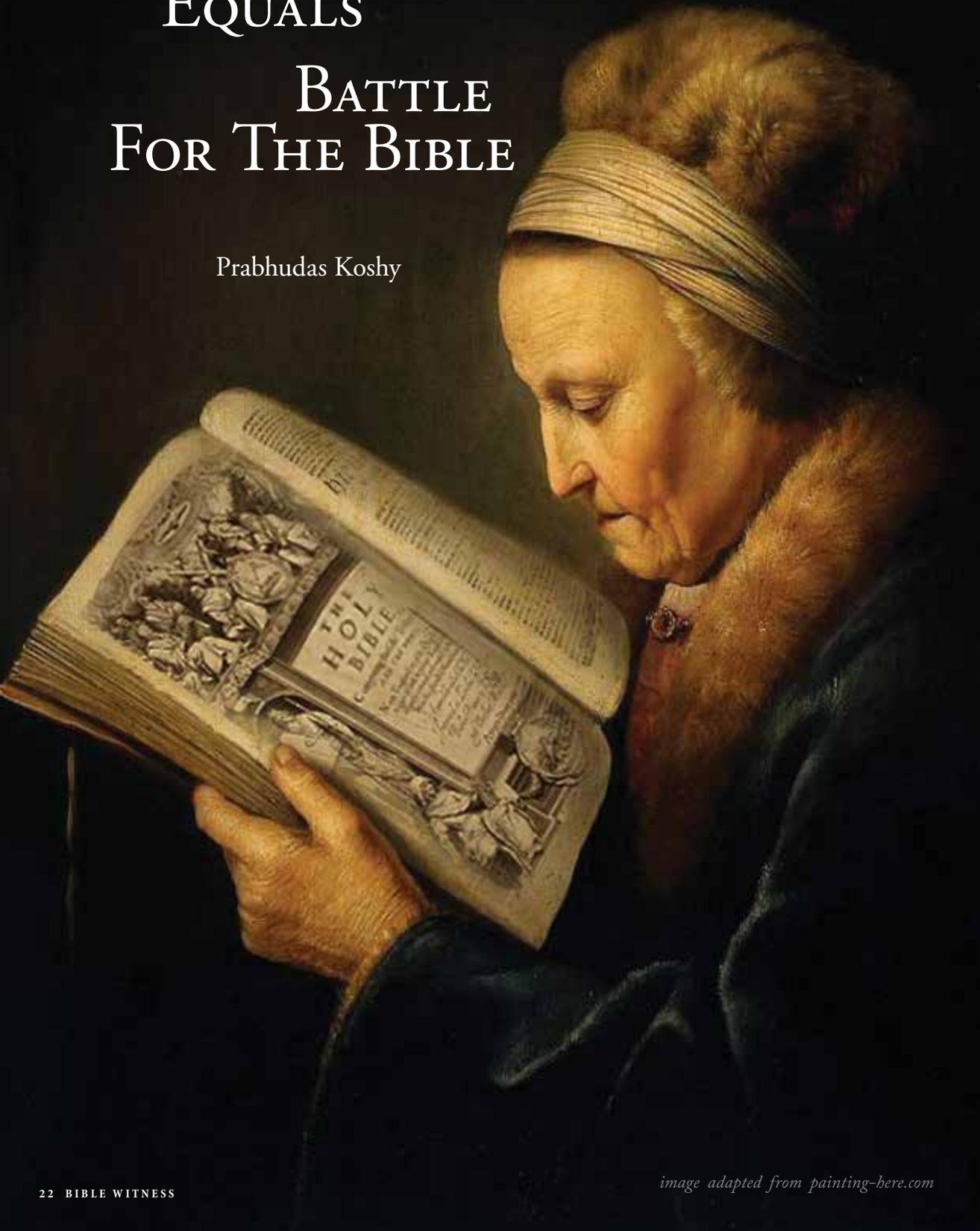
Sadly, many protestant churches of our time make changes to their faith, worship and practice based on contemporary culture. They attempt to legitimise the implemented changes by holding them up as consistent with the Reformation principle of "The church ... always reforming". This motto was never meant 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 remain 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.



REFORMATION EQUALS BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE

Prabhudas Koshy



The period that preceded and followed the Reformation was a time of unprecedented activity of Bible translation into the vernacular, so that the common people could have access to the Word of God. The undergirding motivation was the restoration of the Bible to its authoritative place in the ministry of the Lord's church.

By the 14th century, the Roman Catholic Church was Western Europe's undisputed religious and political authority. The pope and the clergy held enormous power, and secular authorities looked to the Church for legitimacy. Its dogmas and practices were so designed to demand maximum submission to the Church. Not only were those in high places made subject to ecclesiastical rule, the general populace were also to be brought under the Church's grip. In order to render the lay people inefficient and reliant on the clergy, the Church conducted all its rituals in Latin, a language inaccessible to the uneducated faithful. Even the Bible was available only in Latin, which only a small number of the better-educated could read. The public was completely dependent on the priesthood for so-called access to salvation, which was portrayed to be only through mysterious rituals conducted in an unfamiliar tongue, namely Latin, instead of the local vernacular of respective provinces and nations.

Pre-Reformation Attempts at Giving the Bible Back to the Laity

One leading figure of the priesthood in the 14th century who was most concerned that the Bible should be available in the common tongue was John Wycliffe. Born around 1320, Wycliffe became an outstanding theologian at Oxford University and a



John Wycliffe

prominent ecclesiastical leader in the dark period of English history following the decimation of Europe's population by the Black Plague. He became convinced through his own scholarship that Scripture itself, rather than the Mass, should be seen as the source of Christian authority. Wycliffe's love of the Scriptures and his burning conviction that these ought to be widely available moved him to attempt to translate the Bible into the common tongue for the edification of all believers.

The result was the first English Bible – for his beloved English countrymen – translated from the Latin Bible. It was such a momentous and inspiring work that it spawned a movement. Hundreds of so-called “Wycliffe Bibles” were hand-copied. Soon, the English Bible became part of an underground movement that came to be known as the “Lollardy”, which continued to spread the English Bibles even after Wycliffe's death in 1384. The circulation of English Bibles worried the Roman Catholic Church authorities. In 1407, the English translation was denounced as unauthorised. Translating the Bible and using translated Bibles were defined as heresy and declared a crime, which would be punished with death by burning. Wycliffe

himself was denounced posthumously as a heretic. Notwithstanding the ban, Wycliffe Bibles continued to be produced in great numbers.

Over the next century, however, life in England and in Europe changed radically. By the providence of God, godly scholars began to rediscover more copies of the Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek, which are the original languages of Holy Scripture. Attempts were made again to produce new translations, even as the wide use of the printing press (which was invented by Gutenberg in the 1450's) made possible the mass production of books. Perhaps the most influential publication of the early 16th century was the Dutch theologian Desiderius Erasmus' 1516 edition of the Greek New Testament. He also produced a new Latin translation, which was different from the Catholic Church's Latin Bible. All these made possible Martin Luther's 1522 publication of a German translation of the Bible, which became the key text for the Reformation cause.

Reformation Attempts at Bible Translation from Original Languages

Meanwhile in England, William Tyndale (an excellent linguist and Bible scholar), who was Luther's contemporary, had set about creating an authoritative English translation of the Bible from the original language (i.e. Hebrew and Greek) texts. Admittedly, Tyndale had to work in a harsher political environment than Luther did on the Continent. The German authorities did not censure the Reformers, while Tyndale was reprimanded by and had run-ins with the high-handed English Catholic leaders; he eventually left England for Europe (to Germany) in

1524 in order to continue his Reformation work of publishing the first English Bible translated from the original languages.

In 1526, Tyndale finally published his New Testament in Cologne and



William Tyndale

Worms (Germany) which he managed to subsequently smuggle into England in large numbers from Antwerp (Belgium), where he had found refuge during the late 1520's. It became a bestseller, popularised by itinerant preachers who recited Tyndale's words despite the fact that they risked being burnt at the stake. The version of the Bible that Tyndale completed in exile became one of the most influential works of literature in the English language. His translation was at once a major work of translation of the sacred texts, which challenged the unbiblical and corrupt authority of the Catholic hierarchy. It also gave new understanding concerning the church in its redefining of "priests" as "elders", and of "salvation" as a gift of God to those who believe on Christ, rather than a reward for works.

Sadly, in 1535, the authorities finally caught up with Tyndale through betrayal of a false friend; he was imprisoned for



King Henry VIII

more than a year in Brussels before being burned at the stake. But Tyndale had done enough to “re-ignite” the Reformation flame in England. His words (via his word-for-word English translation of the Scriptural texts) had taken root on English soil. Nonetheless, it would still take a political upheaval to finally bring the Bible to the English masses (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:1; 11).

Post-Reformation Attempts at One Unifying, Authorised English Bible

Truly, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Proverbs 21:1). As the unseen Hand of God’s providence would dictate, the political scene in England was quickly turning against the political power of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1534, King

Henry VIII, without male heirs, sought but failed to obtain a divorce permit from the pope so that he could remarry. He resorted to getting religious backing from Thomas Cranmer, a well-respected professor of theology and a powerful priest (whom he would subsequently appoint as Archbishop of Canterbury), and took the unprecedented bold step of assuming control of the English Church. In backing the unspiritual King Henry in this matter, Cranmer actually sought to break the Church of England from Rome’s control and advance the Reformation in England using his authority as archbishop. Heavily influenced by Luther, he envisioned a very different English Church, which would include some of the ideas pioneered by the German Reformation. He worked hard at removing all Roman Catholic superstitions and errors from the Church of England. He also supported English translations of the Bible and would later help to put the English Bible into parish churches throughout England.

To Cranmer, the distribution of an English Bible was key to establishing a reformist church in his country. By his influence, the king granted permission for the issuance of an English Bible (popularly known as the “Matthew Bible”), printed in Antwerp which contained much of Tyndale’s New Testament. Even as England in the ensuing years swung between Catholicism and Protestantism (due to the accessions to the throne of respective monarchs with different religious persuasions), the idea of a Bible in the common tongue had already taken hold on the English populace. It flourished in several versions – the Matthew Bible, the Geneva Bible (the choice of the growing Puritan movement), and the official Anglican Bishop’s Bible – which

all fought for the minds and spirits of English citizens.

As Scripture tells us, “There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Proverbs 19:21). All these would culminate in paving the way for the commissioning of a new authorised version of the Bible that would satisfy all parties. When King James of Scotland came to power in 1603, he called for the Hampton Court Conference in order to work out a compromise with the English Puritans and to unite the feuding Christian factions in the country. The outcome was the King James Bible (published in 1611). Much of the language used hearkened back to Tyndale's translation. This new Bible made Tyndale's words central to Protestantism in the English-speaking world thereafter.

Reasons for the 21st Century Reformation Battle for the KJB

It is this King James Bible (KJB) – born of the Reformation period – that we hold dearly as the best English Bible. Being in English, which is the lingua franca of the world, it is the Bible that reaches the most parts of the earth. Alas, Satan, our adversary, is a wily foe. He knows the Bible could not be hidden from the masses now, so he is bent on attacking God's Word by undermining the fundamental truths of the Christian Faith, and thereby subverting the “once-delivered” faith of God's saints. It is no coincidence that the most attacked version today is the KJB, which is the most accurate and faithful word-for-word translation from the original language texts. This subtle diabolical attack is manifested in the proliferation of modern English versions with their diluted and adulterated doctrines (through their liberal

textual changes and thought-for-thought translation technique), and the growing universal desire to replace the KJB with them. To the discerning Bible readers, there are many reasons why the KJB ought to remain the preferred version.

First and foremost, it is the translation of God's inspired words of Scripture, which have been preserved or, as the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it, “kept pure in all ages”. Unlike the modern versions (such as the NIV), which are translations of corrupted texts gathered by liberal scholars like Westcott and Hort, the KJB is a translation based solidly on the original text of Scripture. The latter was “kept pure in all ages” and identified by the Reformers and the Puritans as the “pure words” of the LORD (Psalm 12:6), i.e. the inspired words of the autograph (original text) that were perfectly preserved in the widely received apographs (copies).

Secondly, it is a faithful translation. It is a translation that faithfully renders into the English language the words of the text of Scripture. No one needs to doubt that when he holds the KJB in his hand, he is holding the very Word of God in English.

Thirdly, the KJB is clear. Critics of the KJB often say its archaic English makes it difficult to understand. Though it is true that there are archaic words, the KJB is characterised by clarity. Those archaic terms can easily be mastered by any ardent student of the English Bible. This was corroborated even by one severe critic who conceded that the “... major portion of the KJV is understandable to any person who reads English ...” (Jack P. Lewis). Certainly, our own experience bears this out. Not only are our children able to read and understand the KJB, our overseas mission churches which have been using

the KJB over the years can also vouch for the proven clarity of the KJB. Indeed, the KJB is not only understandable but eminently readable. There is a dignified, eloquent, free-flowing style about the KJB that puts it in a class of its own, in terms of readability and beauty of language.

Oh, church of Christ, let us retain the KJB. Let us use it in our personal study and searching of the Scriptures. Let us use it in our family devotions and for the teaching of our children. Let us use it in our Sunday school and children’s Bible programmes. Let us use it in our church worship,

preaching and teaching. Let us use it in our bible colleges and mission fields. In so doing, let us continue to partake of the blessed fruit and legacy enjoyed over the past four centuries by the church since the Reformation. Every English-speaking Christian congregation, institution or

image by bible-support.org



An Old King James Bible, 1611

Fourthly, the KJB, more than any other version, is best-suited for memorisation. As the *Christian History* magazine commented in this regard, “There is a cadence, a sentence rhythm in the KJV that has never been matched in other English Bibles. If this beauty has detracted some readers from hearing the message (a judgment with which we take issue), it has nevertheless been incredibly memorable and, therefore, memorisable. If learning Scripture is important, then committing it to memory is paramount, and we know that poetry – or poetic prose – is easier to memorise than flat prose. Today ... four hundred years later, most people who can quote the Bible quote the version published in 1611 (namely the KJB).”

individual that desires to remain faithful to God’s Word, need only look to the KJB for the best English translation of Scripture.

The Reformation was all about the Reformers’ battle for the Bible. Today, this battle continues. Doubtless, when we think of the inferiority (nay, treacherous subversiveness) of the pernicious modern versions which “privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them” (2 Peter 2:1b), and compare them to the faithful and time-tested KJB, we should have no qualms in retaining the Reformation Bible as the Bible of English-speaking churches today – namely the King James Bible, which is freely available in our hands. To God alone be the glory!



The signing of a joint declaration by the Pope and the Lutherans in 2016, image by theguardian.com



OF RETURNING TO ROME!

Prabhudas Koshy

Most Protestant churches of our time are vehemently pursuing the ecumenical course of compromise, which is tantamount to betrayal of Reformation doctrines. Such precious biblical doctrines which in time past had had the blessed effect of causing the separation of the Protestants from the corrupt Roman Catholic Church. Almost all the mainline Protestant churches – Presbyterian, Reformed, Methodist, Anglican or Baptist – have been sparing no effort in finding ways and means to seek common ground with the Catholics. In so doing, they dilute the truth for which the Reformers had separated themselves from the Catholics – all for the sake of so-called Christian unity.

Christian Unity At All Costs?

Since the Second Vatican Council meeting (Vatican II) in the 1960's, Catholic leaders have changed tack in their treatment of Protestants. The latter are now termed

as “separated brethren”, no more labelled as apostates. Many Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians have hailed the Council's irenic treatment of Protestants as an open door to reunion. Many on both sides went so far as to regard it as Rome's “reformation”. Vatican II has provided an unparalleled impetus for fervent dialogue between Catholics and Protestants, as well as with other religions. Every major Protestant denomination now has its own official commissions and conferences with Rome, and these ecumenical exchanges have doubtless initiated and egged Protestants on an inexorable journey back to Catholicism.

More recently, a joint movement, known as the ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together), made statements that gave vent to the overriding priority of unity over adherence to Scriptural truth. The underlying message on both camps seems to be that both have the same mission – “As

Christ is one, so the Christian mission is one. Legitimate diversity, however, should not be confused with existing divisions between Christians that obscure the one Christ and hinder the one mission. There is a necessary connection between the visible unity of Christians and the mission of the one Christ.” Any regard for the precious doctrine of biblical separation is blatantly brushed aside by the ECT calling upon both Evangelicals and Catholics to “confess [their] sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples”.

While we agree that there must be unity of Christians, that unity ought to be a unity in the truth of His Word. The Word of God prohibits any unity with falsehood; in fact, it teaches us to separate ourselves from those who teach doctrines and practices that are contrary to God’s truth. Scripture commands: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:17-18). How much clearer can God’s Word be!

The Roman Catholic Church Has Not Changed!

Dear Christian readers, let us not forget that the mission of the Roman Church has not changed a tad. Its mission has always been to bring all men and women into communion with the pope and the sacerdotal system of the Church (Mass), which the Reformers had assiduously and conscientiously exposed and resisted through their faithful preaching of the Word. The Reformers rightly thought

of the mission of Rome to be downright sacrilegious and unbiblical, even willing to put their lives on the line in denouncing its doctrinal declension and corrupt practices. Alas, the erroneous practice of Mass and other teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, which the Reformers had refuted as unbiblical, are still being upheld by the Church. Even as Rome pursues ecumenical union with the Protestants, it has no intention to recant nor to repent of its false doctrines, as evidently highlighted by the following quote from the *Unitatis Redintegratio* (i.e. “Decree on Ecumenism”) of Rome’s Vatican II:

“Furthermore, in ecumenical dialogue, Catholic theologians, standing fast by the teaching of the church, yet searching together with severed brethren into the divine mysteries, should do so with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility. When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened whereby this kind of ‘fraternal rivalry’ will incite all to a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ” (para 11c, 21 November 1964). In other words, the Catholics, in accommodating the “severed brethren” (a reference to the Protestants) into their fold, have categorically declared that they will not budge an inch when it comes to the traditional teachings and dogmas of the Church, which are known to be counter-Scriptural.

In this regard, the Roman Catholic Church remains an idolatrous church. Nothing has changed since the 25th session of the Council of Trent, where

it was decreed that the images of Christ and the Virgin Mary, and of other saints were to be retained in the churches, and that honour and veneration were to be given to them. The Catholic Church continues to proclaim the Marian dogmas,

the Christian religion, as laid down by Scripture. Oh, do not be deceived! When we realise from church history how the Roman Catholic Church had suppressed God's Word from God's people, resulting in the Dark Ages of Christianity, we should

When we realise from church history how the Roman Catholic Church had suppressed God's Word from God's people, resulting in the Dark Ages of Christianity, we should steel our resolve never to return to Rome.

including her exaltation as "queen of heaven", "mother of the church", etc. It also promotes Mary as a "mediatrix" (i.e. one who mediates for sinners), and thus making her a distributor of the graces of the redemption, and principal intercessor to Jesus Christ. What blasphemy!

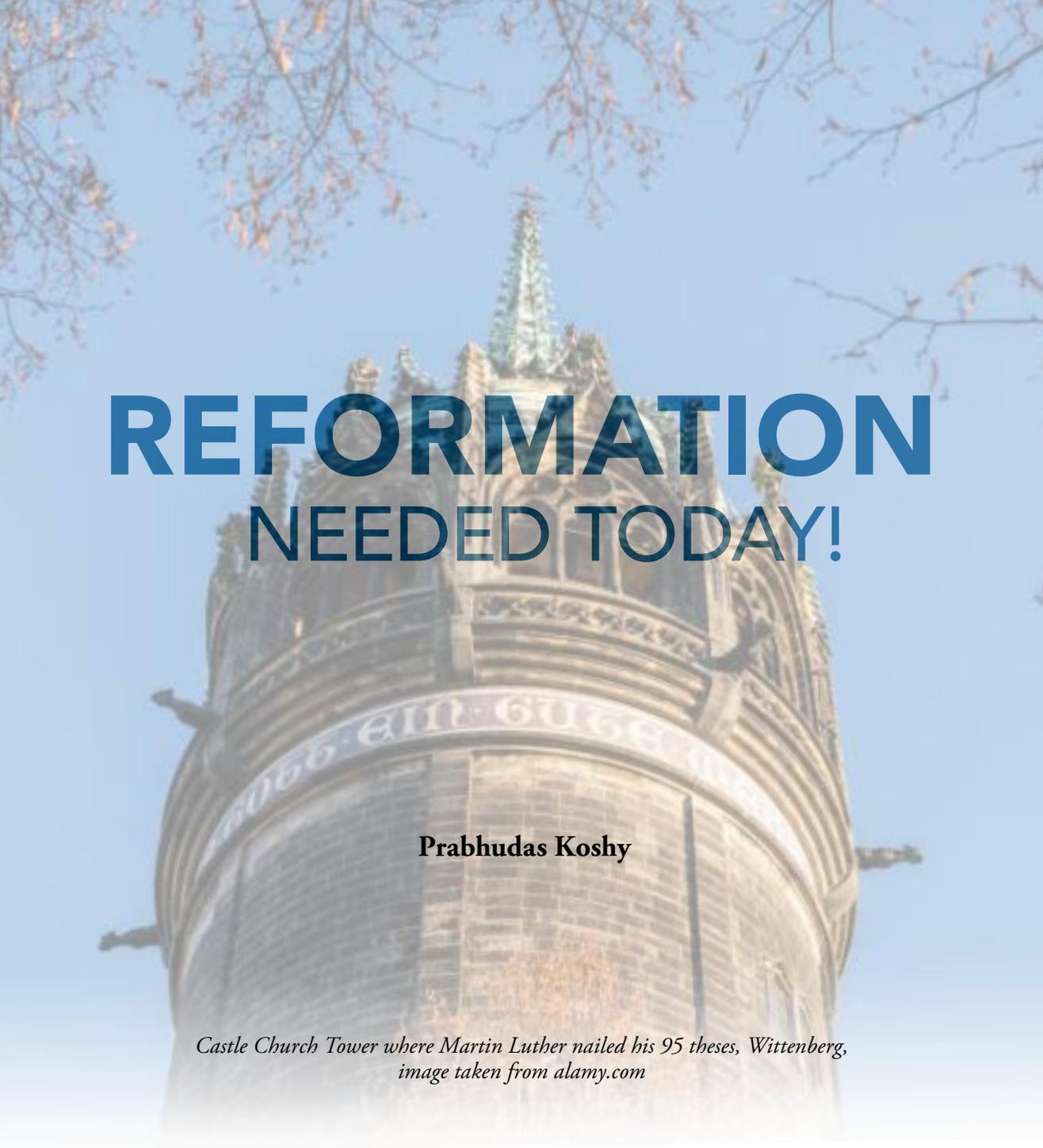
Let Those Who Preach Another Gospel Be Accursed!

Dear brethren, we maintain that Christ forbids unity with anyone who preaches any other gospel than the one that was delivered by our Lord and His apostles with great clarity in His Word. Galatians 1:8 cautions us: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." The mission of the true church is to spread the unadulterated Gospel of Christ, preach the Word correctly and rightly administer the sacraments.

The effort to return to the Catholic fold is nothing but apostasy. It is a liberal Protestantism that seeks ecumenical union with Catholics. The efforts of the ecumenical Protestants are a deliberate, premeditated, studied departure from

steel our resolve never to return to Rome. It makes no sense for evangelicals to yearn for Rome again; the ECT movement ought to be viewed as something ungodly and a snare. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). The true church that had been liberated from the chains of papal dominance would surely avoid being in bondage again!

Dear saints of God, we can never be on the negotiation table to facilitate a merger with Rome. We are at variance with the Roman Church for her doctrines corrupt the truths of the Bible. All those who love the Word of God sincerely will say together with the apostle Paul, "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2 Corinthians 13:8). Let us resist the subversive seduction of ecumenism and stand firm in the great doctrines of the Bible, which honour our Lord Jesus Christ. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness" (2 Peter 3:17).



REFORMATION NEEDED TODAY!

Prabhudas Koshy

*Castle Church Tower where Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses, Wittenberg,
image taken from alamy.com*

Today's church is in desperate need of reformation. Tragically, Protestant churches are moving towards a total compromise with the world and the false ideologies of ancient heathen religions. Today, so-called "evangelical" churches are

embracing liberalism, worldliness, New Age doctrines, and other unbiblical beliefs and practices. It doesn't take too much intelligence to realise that the root cause of all these is a rather sceptical attitude towards the Word of God.

Spiritual Declension of the Churches of Our Day

Pursuit of Worldly Philosophy

Like the liberals of the past, modern evangelicals use the Bible's words, but give them new meanings. Sin becomes "dysfunctional behaviour". Salvation becomes "self-esteem" or "wholeness". Faith becomes "possibility thinking". Jesus becomes more of an example for right living than being our Saviour from sin. People are told how to succeed in business, have happy marriages and raise nice children, but not how to get right with an offended God. It appears that the "bottom line" of much evangelical preaching today is feeling good and accumulating wealth. The pastors are more focused on making people more earthly-minded than heavenly-minded. They preach to suit the passions of a worldly-minded crowd that flock to churches to be entertained!

Ashamedly, modern pastors have no confidence in the power of the Gospel and the sound doctrines of the Bible. They believe that the way to win the people of the world is to cater to their tastes. As a result, preachers are adapting their messages in order to tone down the offence of the cross (cf. Galatians 5:11) and accommodate the prevailing philosophy of the time. The churches of pastors who oppose these so-called innovative approaches and defend the unadulterated Gospel are derided as unsophisticated, provincial, or even brutish troublemakers.

Pursuit of Material Glory and Worldliness

The increasing worldliness of modern churches is undeniable, and is a sure sign of backsliding and even an outward, visible sign of their spiritual demise. Disturbingly, the prevailing mood among people in the

churches of our time is towards unity, cooperation and inclusivity. In the face of prevalent doctrinal liberalism sweeping over Christendom today, exclusive claims to the truth and exclusive demands for consecrated living are not only frowned upon, but are also labelled as arrogant and intolerant. Mergers with contemporary culture, worldliness, and even with Roman Catholicism (as manifested in the ECT or "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" movement), are considered worthy and compatible goals to aspire to. Ecumenical cooperation seems to be the way to go forward in this postmodern, advanced, sophisticated era. But this contravenes the apostolic injunction to the church, which is to be presented as "a chaste virgin to Christ", to separate herself, that she be not "beguiled ... (and) corrupted from the simplicity (or single-hearted faith) that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). All true believers, as the "bride of Christ", must surely cringe at any unchaste "flirtations" with the world!

Sadly, the spirit of the world controls the leaders and members of the modern churches. Their talk, dressing, mannerisms, appearances and activities are all fashioned by the world. Instead of walking in the opposite direction, most Christians go to worldly places to partake in worldly entertainment. Increasingly, Christians are being enslaved by the worldly philosophies because of their unchecked participation in worldly entertainment. The line of separation has been blurred between godliness and worldliness, between the church and the world, and between those who fear God and those who fear Him not.

Instead of the churches revolutionising the world, the reverse has happened. Churches have been converted to the world.

Many in our churches fail to recognise the deception and damnation of worldliness because they have presented themselves to the world without reservation. It appears that Christians have made many easy alliances with the modern culture of sin and materialism. Needless to say, within a few decades, many churches have moved into the devil's domain, even the world. Do not churches of our time need a reformation?

Cause of Spiritual Declension of the Churches of Our Day

To begin with, we must realise that the root cause of such a spiritual declension in our churches today is the lack of confidence in the accuracy, authority and appropriateness of the Bible. The Bible is doubted, criticised and even sidelined in the pulpits of most churches. This casual and disinterested attitude was succinctly captured in a Malaysian newspaper article, which had this damning thing to say of Christian pastors: while the Muslims believe that their scripture is preserved without error, many Christian pastors have no confidence about the Bible's perfect preservation! These "scholarly" pastors even teach their congregations to avoid men who preach that God has preserved every word of the Bible, labelling them as extremists and impractical men!

What irony! What contradiction! Evangelical pastors, on the one hand, preach about the authenticity of the Bible, but on the other hand, deny that God has preserved His Word. Have they not read in Deuteronomy 29:29, that "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law"? Now, how can we "do all the words

of this law (referring to God's Word)" if some words have been lost? Impossible! They are literally denying the words of Christ in Matthew 24:35 – "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Are these pastors conscious that they are leading their congregations down a slippery path from which they can never recover?

What's more, do they realise how confusing it can be when people are told that they must follow a Bible that has errors? Though they may argue that those errors only pertain to matters not essential to salvation, where do they draw the line? If the Bible has errors, then it may err when it speaks about the nature of man, family relationships, sexual lifestyles or other issues related to Christian living. It arbitrarily gives licence to people to question purportedly small details of Scripture, which would eventually lead them to doubt larger and vital doctrines as well, as evidenced by church history. Be that as it may, "let God be true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). God's Word is unchangeable, for it is "For ever ... settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89).

Not only are modern churchgoers losing total confidence in the Scriptures, but they are also fed with worldly philosophies that the Scriptures expressly forbid. The inevitable result is, over time, modern churches have become a fertile ground for churchgoers' spiritual declension.

Need for Reformation in Our Churches Today

Oh, may the Spirit of God awaken men to proclaim God's Word without doubt and shame! May our hearts yield to His Word with faith and obedience. May we resist

the devil and the world. May the battle of Reformation rage on even today.

This battle must continue, firstly because the Bible commands believers to do so. “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12). Attacks on the true doctrines of the Bible have been raging since the time of the

another, but we can never be friends with one another’s error. We cannot have any truce or treaty with divers errors that have crept into the church; nor would we regard them with complacency. Being one another’s “brother’s keeper” in the church, we must be prepared to give and receive open rebuke cheerfully if any of us “err from the truth” (James 5:19; cf. Proverbs 27:5). Let us all be true to one another by

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apostles, though in varying forms. It is no different today. Our adversary the devil is always on the prowl to “infest” the church with his deceptive and demonic doctrines. Hence, believers must always be vigilant and ready to fight the spiritual fight. In a sense, the Christian church today must be a militant church, ever ready to face the constant attack against the subversion of her precious faith. Only by being vigilant to expose and challenge every appearance of evil and false doctrines can the church keep herself pure for the Lord’s glory.

Alas, this battle must also continue because giant errors have entered evangelical as well as fundamental churches. We must fight the Lord’s battles against falsehood whichever shape it takes, and deal with every error that pollutes the church. We can be friends with one

being true to Christ and His Word. As soon as we perceive an error, even if it only manifests itself as a “shadow” of unbelief, let us root it out and drive it from us, lest it plague the whole body and put “leprosy” into the entire fabric of the church. Indeed, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9). Dear church of Christ, may we have no peace with sin or with falsehood – only war forever with error and deceit!

Oh, may “Christ (who) ... loved the church, and gave himself for it” be pleased to “sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Amen.

William Tyndale

(1494 – 1536)

“THE FATHER OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE”

(Retold from “Heroes of the Reformation” by F. G. Llewelin, published by The Protestant Truth Society;

“Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History” written by Richard M. Hannula, published by Canon Press;

“Masters of the English Reformation” by Sir Marcus Loane, published by The Banner of Truth Trust)

Retold by Jenny Lok

Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy



<http://media1.britannica.com>

WILLIAM TYNDALE (1494-1536)

From his private room at the back of the Manor House of Little Sodbury (which was situated on the south-western slope of the Cotswolds in England), William Tyndale loved to behold the beauty of the lovely wooded valley and the distant hills. Nonetheless, far greater than the splendour before him was his great desire to study the Scriptures amid the peace and quietness of the Manor House. For 3 years since 1520, Tyndale had stayed in this beautiful home of Sir John Walsh and his wife Lady Anne. They had invited him to tutor their children after he left Cambridge University, which was highly regarded as “the world of books and learning” in the 16th century. Prior to that, he had already obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1512, and his Master’s degree 3 years later, from the University of Oxford. In the meantime, he had also entered the priesthood.

Tyndale’s conviction of the truth of the Gospel came as a result of his study of the New Testament in Greek while in Cambridge.

Since then, he had grown in his love and knowledge of God's Word. He realised that the teachings of the Roman Church were not biblical, especially in areas of salvation and the authority of the Scriptures. It was also during this time that the Reformation movement (intended mainly to break away from the false teachings of the Roman Church) was spreading throughout Europe, and the universities in England were greatly influenced. Tyndale was no doubt inspired by the Reformers of his day to share his faith in Christ. This he did when Sir John Walsh invited certain dignitaries (which included some leaders of the church) to the Manor House. At every opportunity, he would "always [offer] them the simple words of Scripture as his reason for the hope that was now in him". However, these leaders were offended and considered his words as heresies which originated from Martin Luther, who incidentally started the 16th century Reformation with the posting of his 95 theses in 1517. Not wanting to waste any precious time while in the Manor House, Tyndale found opportunities to preach to crowds at Bristol (about 15 miles from Sodbury), right in front of the Augustinian Convent. He was subsequently given a stern warning not to engage in public preaching anymore.



Original Photo from Visitation of Seats by JB Burke

LITTLE SODBURY MANOR HOUSE

Despite facing opposition from his enemies, namely the Roman Church and the government leaders, Tyndale was truly convinced that "the root cause of the ills of the Church" was that the people did not realise that God's Word was able to deliver them from their sins and save their souls from eternal hell fire. He concluded that: "The one thing to open the eyes of the people would be to give them the Bible in their own tongue." Tyndale knew very well that thus far, the Bible had remained a closed book to the ordinary folk who were unable to read Greek, Hebrew or Latin. In fact, the church leaders had refused to let them read the Bible for fear that they would rebel against the authorities. Anyone who dared to translate, publish or distribute the Bibles in the common language would face the death penalty.

Once, Tyndale met a wealthy and scholarly man at Little Sodbury. This man was so annoyed with Tyndale's habit of quoting the Scriptures that he shouted angrily, "We would be better off without God's law than the pope's." In reply, Tyndale said, "I defy the pope and all his laws. If God spared my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough (a farm boy) to know more of the Scriptures than thou doest." From then onwards, Tyndale was determined to translate the Bible into English as he was well versed in both Greek and Hebrew. However, it soon dawned on Tyndale that he could not do his translation work at Sodbury because that would put his host, Sir John Walsh and his family, at risk of being arrested. Moreover, he needed support for the translation and publishing of the Bible in English. So he left Sodbury for London in 1523 to seek help from Bishop Tunstall, a well-known churchman, but was greatly disappointed when he turned him down. However, God's providence brought him into contact with a London businessman named Humphrey Monmouth. For over a year, Monmouth took care of Tyndale's needs at his home. Tyndale was then able to concentrate on his translation of the New Testament into English for about 6 months before he fled England as the danger of trying to complete the translation work increased by the day. Forsaking all

comfort and ease that he used to enjoy, Tyndale braced himself to live henceforth as a fugitive. Thereafter, he never set foot in England again!

From London, Tyndale went to Germany – first to Hamburg, a leading port city, and then to the city of Worms where he finally printed his first edition of the English New Testament. By 1526, about 6,000 copies of the English New Testament had been printed. Tyndale arranged for the English Bibles to be smuggled into England. Merchants helped him by hiding them in boxes, linen and barrels of grain. The Battle of the Book was on!

News of the circulation of Tyndale's New Testament soon reached the ears of the Roman authorities and what followed was the public burning of many copies of the English Bible. Tyndale was declared a heretic right away! Despite this, he would only say, "I expected they would burn the New Testament, and they may one day burn me also.

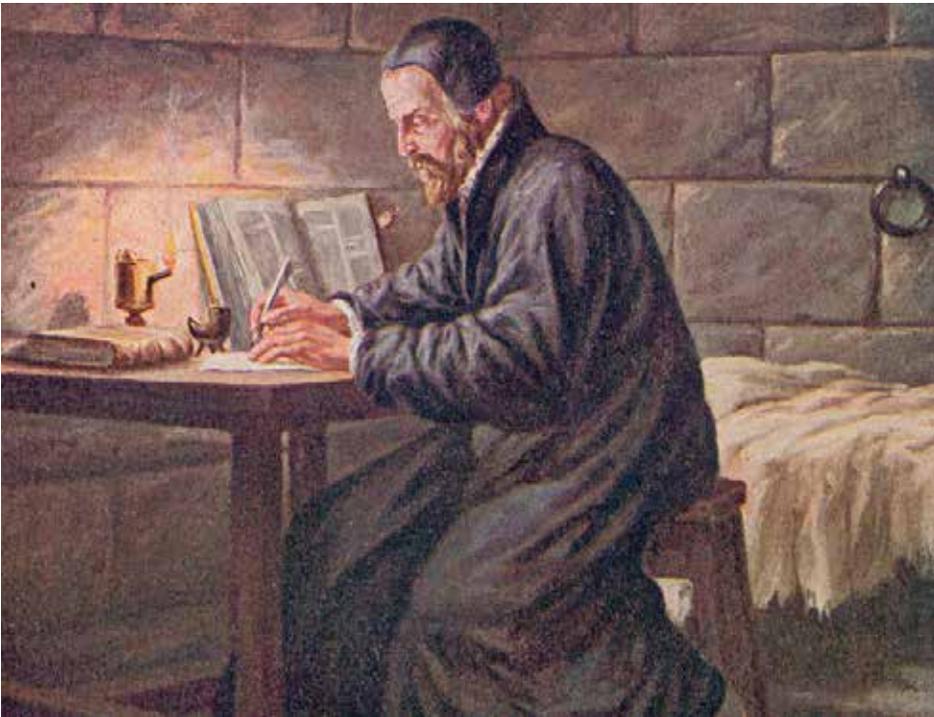
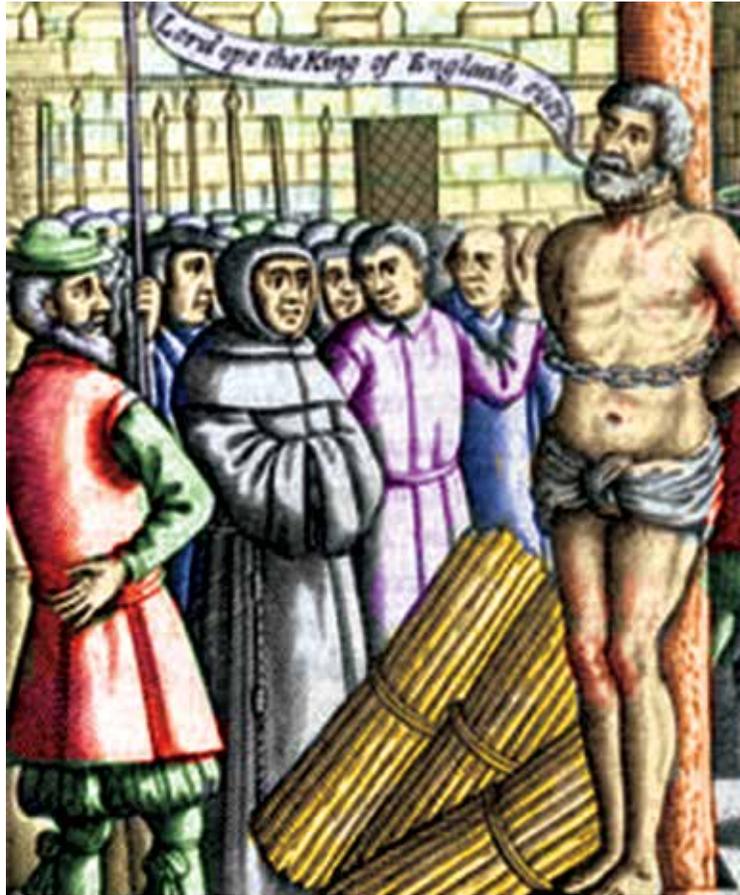


Photo from Getty Images

ILLUSTRATION OF WILLIAM TYNDALE (1494-1536)
WHILE IMPRISONED AT VILVORDE.

I am content to do God's will." Tyndale was prepared to die in order to "do the will of God and to publish His word". Having completed the translation of the New Testament, Tyndale turned his attention to translating the Old Testament from its original Hebrew language, beginning with the first 5 books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Eventually, he completed the work and went to Antwerp, which was the wealthiest port in Europe, to arrange for its publication and shipment to England.

In Antwerp, Belgium, a godly English merchant named Thomas Poyntz invited Tyndale to stay at his home. Tyndale was grateful to be given a comfortable bed, good meals and a study room to continue with his translation work. At the same time, he also befriended an Englishman by the name of Henry Phillips who encouraged him to persevere in his work. Unknown to Tyndale, Phillips was a spy sent by the church leaders in England to seek the whereabouts of Tyndale so as to find an opportunity to arrest him. One day in 1535, while Poyntz was away, Tyndale accepted an invitation by Phillips to dinner. Officers from Brussels lay in wait along a narrow alley outside Poyntz's house. Once Tyndale appeared, they caught hold of him, tied



"LORD, OPEN THE KING

him up and threw him into a “damp, dark windowless dungeon” in the great castle of Vilvorde, which was “a huge medieval fortress”. For months, Tyndale lay in the cold prison cell, all alone and at the mercy of his evil captors.

In early August 1536, Tyndale was condemned as a heretic, defrocked from the priesthood, and left to await his death which came shortly on 6th October. A huge crowd gathered to witness Tyndale’s execution. He was chained to a wooden pole and at his feet were straw and faggots, “sprinkled with gun powder”. Tyndale prayed for the last time, crying aloud, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.” Right after that, the signal was given to strangle him. The

faggots were then ignited and a huge blaze rose to the air, burning the dead body to ashes. Tyndale died a martyr! However, his death was not in vain. In less than 2 years, King Henry VIII permitted the publication of the English Bible and “decreed that a copy of the English Bible be placed in every church in the kingdom”. This was fulfilled in 1539 when the Great Bible was published and used as the official Bible in the Church of England. Besides the Great Bible, there were others that were published earlier – the Coverdale Bible in 1535 and the Thomas



Original Photograph: Hulton Archive / Getty Images

OF ENGLAND'S EYES.”

Matthew Bible (also known as Matthew-Tyndale Bible) in 1537. Later publications were the Geneva Bible in 1560, the Bishop's Bible in 1568 and finally in 1611, the King James Bible. In all these, Tyndale's translations were greatly used, particularly in the case of the King James Bible.



Photo from en.wikipedia.org

THE TYNDALE BIBLE ON DISPLAY
AT THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY, OXFORD

Dear children, as we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, let us thank God for the Reformers of the 16th century who had fought a long, hard battle for the Bible. Tyndale, among others, had willingly sacrificed his life to advance the Reformation cause – to spread the Word of God and uphold its truths. Praise God that we are made right with Him by our faith in Christ alone (cf. Romans 5:1). Know with all certainty that only God can forgive our sins (cf. Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14) and rejoice that today, we are able to read His Word in our own language. Therefore, let us cherish God's Word and live according to His precious truths. *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone)!

**“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:
but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”**

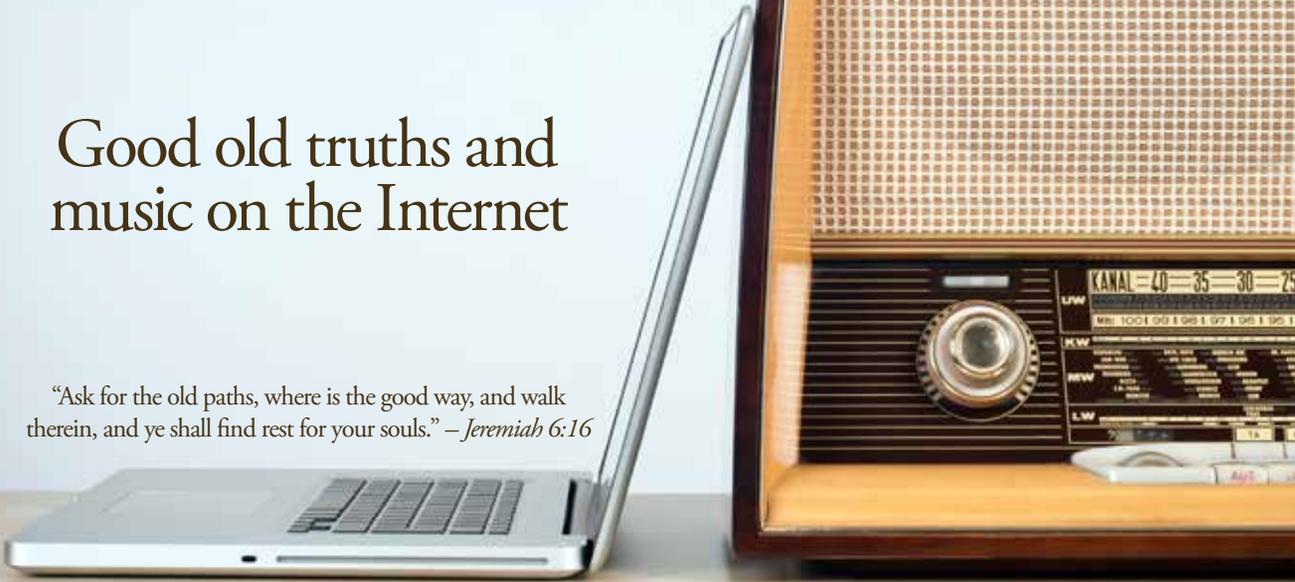
Isaiah 40:8

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not grudgingly,
or of necessity:
for God loveth
a cheerful giver.”
2 Corinthians 9:7*

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