



REFORMATION



The official publication of the Lutheran Study Centre

AN INITIATIVE OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Message from the Director's Desk

Reformation Day is celebrated each year on October 31st, in remembrance of the occasion when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Castle Church at Wittenberg in 1517. Hence, it has become the tradition of the Lutheran Churches worldwide, that during this month various activities are organized to revisit the 16th century Reformation history, objectives and changes initiated by Martin Luther and his compatriots, in the life and theology of the Church. The question that is often asked is - why the Reformation was initiated? The Reformation process that Martin Luther and his compatriots were engaged in had the objective to educate and purify the Church of wrong theological doctrines, practices and traditions which were not compatible with the Bible; yet were being practiced by the Church then. What were some of these key practices and doctrines which required re-formation.



“What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition already have a right to full remission and blessings?”

LUTHER QUESTIONED THE SALE OF INDULGENCES

The sale of indulgences was one of the key issues addressed. Church members then were taught by the Roman Church that after they die they will certainly face judgment and punishment for their sins, which they had committed in this life. The Roman Church also taught that this punishment could be partially erased by performing good works; which included, attending Sunday mass, pilgrimage to holy cities and sites, giving donations to charity and seeking absolution. However, this would not erase their major sins.

Hence, the concept of purgatory was used to support the sale of indulgences. Purgatory was a place where the Christian would go after death to suffer punishment. It is a place to cleanse themselves of the stain of their sins by suffering punishment before they can be freed. Pope Urban II (1035–1099) formalized the indulgence system at the Council of Clermont in 1095, whereby it was affirmed that the individual would accumulate enough good deeds through the purchase of indulgence from the Pope or Bishops or other appointees, which would then prevent their soul from punishment and pain in purgatory. Luther objected to this sale of indulgences as it was not only against the biblical teaching of salvation by faith alone and grace alone, it too had become a highly corrupt practice and money making activity. Hence in Thesis 87 Luther writes, “What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition already have a right to full remission and blessings?” (<https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Martin-Luthers-95-Theses/quotes>)



Luther Questioned Why Only the Bread (Body) is Given to the Lay People When Celebrating the Holy Communion

It was a common Church practice in Luther's time that only one element (the bread) was given to lay, while the clergy received both bread and wine. The Catholics understood that the bread already contains the body and blood of Jesus, hence just the bread alone would be sufficient for the lay people. Luther objected to this in his treatise on the BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH, "The sacrament does not belong to the priests, but to everyone. The priests are not lords but servants whose duty is to administer both kinds to those who desire them." (LW 36:27). Luther argued that there is no justification for the Church's practice in holding back the cup from lay people as it is theologically inconsistent and a clear violation of the commands of our Lord Jesus - "take and eat" and "take and drink". For Luther the Church practices must be consistent with the Word of God in order to reflect its authority and credibility. By this too, Luther was directly questioning the claim of papal infallibility and final authority as claimed by the Roman Church then. For the reformers the Church needs to affirm the Bible as the final authority ("Sola Scriptura") and therefore its theology and practices ought to be guided by it; it was an attempt to relocate the spiritual and theological authority back to the Scripture.

Luther Translated and Made the Bible Accessible to Lay People.

Luther realized that the lack of biblical knowledge was the key to spiritual ignorance and weak discipleship among the church members. Prior to Reformation, the Bible used in the Roman Church was of the Latin translation only as there was a restriction in translating the Bible into other local languages. Hence, the lay people were prevented from reading the Bible and only the clergy who were educated in Latin could read it and preached from it. Martin Luther translated Bible into the German language and distributed it to the church members. When people started reading; their faith, practice and spirituality was enhanced and the authority of the Bible was reinstated. This was precisely Luther's objective, that all people should be given the opportunity to read and taste for themselves the pure Word of God.

Luther Reinforced the Biblical Understanding That a Person is Considered Righteous by God and Granted Salvation by Grace Through Faith

Luther through the study of the Book of Romans in particular and the Bible as a whole, began to see justification by grace through faith as the mother of all doctrines. It was revealed by the Holy Spirit to him that every dimension of salvation depends exclusively upon God's grace. This was in contrast to the Roman Church's teaching which focused on the penitential deeds that needed to be performed in order to acquire forgiveness from sin and reduce the time to be spent in purgatory; going through pain and suffering. Luther viewed this as a distortion of the biblical teaching concerning salvation as it was promoting salvation by works on the contrary. Hence in contrast, Luther taught that Christ's work on the Cross leads to atonement and redemption; thus salvation it is a free gift from God. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) / "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;" (Ephesians 2:8).

The Protestant Reformation Inspired the Roman Church to Initiate its Own Reform.

This in history is referred to as the Counter-Reformation. The spiritual groups within the Roman Church began to see that something was wrong with the life of their Church and needs to be corrected; especially the worldly attitudes, secular policies and ambiguous doctrines of the Church. Hence, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) was called to listen, discuss and correct abuses. The meeting too attempted to define the Catholic doctrines, reorganize spiritual education of the Church, improve theological education and training of the priests, and mission activities. But the Council of Trent too ruled against Luther's doctrine of justification through grace alone and by faith alone. The Council of Trent decreed that a person is inwardly justified by cooperating with Divine grace which God bestows graciously. Hence the Roman Church affirmed that it would be wrong to say that good works are just fruits and signs of justification; but good works are a part of justification. ([https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/ 9 Things You Should Know About the Council of Trent.org](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/9-Things-You-Should-Know-About-the-Council-of-Trent.org)).

Do Protestants and Roman Catholics Agree on Justification by Grace Through Faith Alone Today



The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, “was a historic agreement signed by Lutherans and Catholics in 1999, effectively resolving one of the key theological conflicts of the Reformation, the understanding of salvation.”. The doctrine of Justification by faith alone grace alone was acknowledged.

(https://www.lutheranworld/joint_declaration_2019_en.pdf.org) Reference from the Official Common Statement:

- 1) “On the basis of the agreements reached in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD), the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together: “The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics” (JD 40). On the basis of this consensus the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together: “The teaching of the Lutheran Churches presented in the Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration” (Joint Declaration 41).
- 2) “Lutherans and Catholics will continue their efforts ecumenically in their common witness to interpret the message of justification in language relevant for human beings today, and with reference both to individual and social concerns of our times.” (https://www.lutheranworld/joint_declaration_2019_en.pdf.org)

*On behalf of the Lutheran Study Center-
Malaysia, I would like to this opportunity to
wish all our Lutheran member Churches and
the Protestant community a blessed
Reformation Day.*

Important Reformation Dates

Oct. 31, 1517



Reformationstag
Reformation Day

- 10 November 1483
Birthday of Martin Luther
- 11 November 1483
Baptism of Martin Luther
- 16 February 1497
Birthday of Philip Melanchthon
- 29 January 1499
Birthday of Katharina von Bora
- 2 July 1505
Storm Experience of Martin Luther
- 17 July 1505
Martin Luther joins the monastery
- 3 April 1507
Luther ordained priest at Erfurt Cathedral
- 18-19 October 1512
Luther awarded Doctor of Theology degree,
- 31 October 1517
Luther nails Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg
- April 1518
Heidelberg Disputation
- 3 January 1521
Luther excommunicated by papal bull
- December 1521 – March 1522
Luther translates New Testament into German
- 13 June 1525
Luther marries Katharina von Bora
- 1527
Plague strikes Wittenberg; Luther turns part of his house into a hospital
- 1527
Luther writes "A Mighty Fortress"
- 1529 (April/May)
Luther publishes Large Catechism and Small Catechism
- 25 June 1530
Augsburg Confession presented to Charles V at Diet of Augsburg,
- 14 February 1546
Luther preaches his last sermon
- 18 February 1546
Luther dies at Eisleben

QUOTES FROM MARTIN LUTHER

1. "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer."
2. "If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write."
3. "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible then to be alive without healing."
4. "Prayer is a strong wall and fortress of the church; it is a Godly Christian weapon."
5. "There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage."
6. "You are not only responsible for what you say, but also for what you do not say."
7. "I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."
8. "The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid."
9. "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."
10. "I am afraid that the schools will prove the very gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures and engraving them in the heart of the youth."
11. "To be convinced in our hearts that we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God by grace alone is the hardest thing."
12. "The Holy Ghost must here be our only master and tutor."
13. "Therefore, we should be guided in all our works by this one thought alone – that we may serve and benefit others in everything that is done, having nothing before our eyes except the need and advantage of the neighbor."

(<https://quotes.thefamouspeople.com/martin-luther-92.php>)

REFORMATION SERMON SUGGESTION

Bible Text: Ephesians 2: 6-10 "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."

Introduction: When Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the Cathedral door in Wittenberg, Germany, on 31 October, the action was result of his renewed understanding of the scriptural teaching concerning salvation by grace alone and faith alone. His call to reform the Roman Church from false teachings and practices was a spiritual action guided by the Holy Spirit. His theology concerning salvation was affirmed through the Bible in general and study of the book of Romans in particular; "the just shall live by faith" – Romans 1:17.

1. Church Needs Right Theology – Christ is the Centre of the Bible

- a. Bible is the Word of God with Final Authority - Central to the Lutheran Reformation was the restoration of the supreme authority of Bible within the life of the Church. Creeds, Confession, Church laws etc. are important and good as long as they do not contradict the Bible. Luther saw the Bible as the cradle which holds Christ.
- b. Saved by grace through faith - Luther came to realize that people are justified by faith alone; that they cannot contribute anything to their salvation because on the cross Christ has already achieved everything for them. Luther understood that justification is a gracious act of God by which a believer is declared righteous.
- c. We are Sinner and Saint and the Same Time (Romans 3:23) - For Luther, every Christian is a saint and a sinner at the same time. A saint because one has been brought into a relationship with God and has become believer. A sinner because we still fall far short and sin daily. But we are forgiven sinners in Jesus Christ and we know what is sin and feel sorry when we break God's law. Thus we need to live a repentant life.

2. Mission - Share the Gospel Without Shame (Romans 1:15)

- a. Paul says it does not matter what others think, because we owe it to my Lord and to the world around us. We need not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is the power of God for everyone.
- b. Luther too also saw the need to take the gospel to all nations. He recognized the importance of Christian believers going to those who had not heard of Christ and witnessing to them. Disciples are charged to make disciples.
- c. It is a Christian responsibility. The sharing the gospel is a 'holy gossip' - that only through Jesus there is salvation and it is a free gift. (Romans 5:1-2)

3. Reformation is Ongoing

- a. For the Church and Christianity to be vital, spiritual, vibrant and evangelistic, we must constantly reform ourselves and Church. To reform means we allow the Word of God to correct, change and purify us and the practices of the Church that contradict God's Word and obstruct ministry and mission.
- b. When we are prepared to reform, we can address decline in spirituality, mission, giving, Church attendance and participation in Church activities.
- c. When we are prepared to reform, we can quickly identify and get rid of false teachings and prevent it from coming into the Church and destroy our faith, ministry and mission. (2 Timothy 3:16). Hence, for reformation to take place, we must know what the Bible teaches – we must listen to the Word, we must read the Word, we must study the Word, we must meditate the Word and we must memorize the Word.

SOME PROGRAM FOR 2022

1.

One year Certificate in Lutheran Studies

– Lutheran Distinctives for theological students, ministry candidates, leaders of youth fellowship, Sunday School teachers and leaders of Women's fellowship (On Saturdays)

- -Date of Commencement: March 2022 – April 2023
- -Fees: An affordable fee will be charged for each module
- -16 Credit Hours to complete the Certificate program
- -8 Modules (2 credit Hour each = 30 class hours)

2.

Symposium in conjunction with the 10th LSC Anniversary Celebration: Friday 11th March

3.

Seminar for Lay leaders - "Lutherans Preach the Gospel as Goodnews and Teach the Bible as Word of God."

4.

Seminar for Youth Group: "Lutheran Youths as a Reforming Generation."

5.

Seminar: Church, Ministry and Mission - Reflecting on the Lutheran Framework

6.

FELCMS Pastors' School - Training for Pastors and Pastoral Candidates in Enriching Lutheran Identity

7.

Training for Women - Say No to Violence Against Women

- Women - A Circle of Love