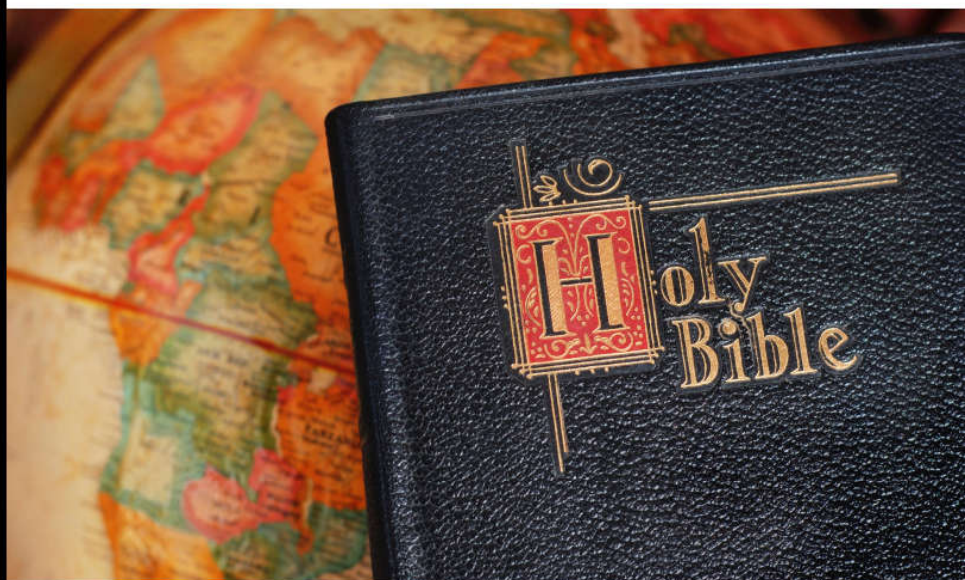


JULY 2017

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 1

Kērussōmen

A JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY FOR THE AFRICAN CHURCH



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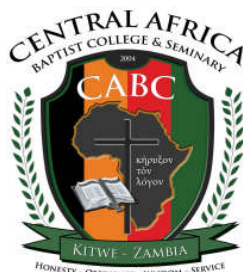
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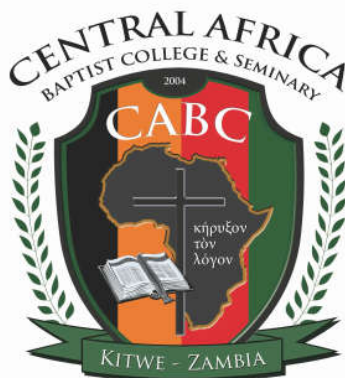
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This journal is intended to aid the work of Central Africa Baptist College & Seminary in fulfilling its purpose to train the next generation of servant leaders in Africa for Great Commission living. The journal raises issues of theological importance and practical pastoral concern in order to cultivate Biblical discussion and to build up pastors and other leaders in African churches.

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We welcome submissions to *Kērussōmen* which are in essential agreement with the beliefs and distinctives of Central Africa Baptist College & Seminary. You can read about these at the following link: www.cabcseminary.org/what-we-believe/.

Editorials: submissions should be around 1,000 to 2,000 words each, addressing a topic of practical or pastoral concern.

Articles: submissions should be between 2,000 and 5,000 words in length and be of substantive scholarly nature, addressing a topic of practical Christian concern. Article submissions should demonstrate awareness of and interaction with key resources on the topic at hand and should follow Turabian format.

Submissions may be emailed to the editors: journal@cabcollege.org. The editors reserve the right to refuse publication as well as to require recommended changes as a condition of publication.

Acknowledgements

Volumes printed in Zambia by:
Mission Press
P.O. Box 71581, Ndola, Zambia
www.missionpress.org

Cover Design by:
Tanis2Web
Micah Tanis
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It is a delight for me to write this introduction to *Kērussōmen*, a theological journal published by Central Africa Baptist College & Seminary.

This Journal will reveal our commitment at Central Africa Baptist College & Seminary to the explicit instructions Paul gave to Timothy to “Preach the Word.” In the midst of busy schedules and ministry challenges, the preacher must heed this charge. This Journal will challenge you to think deeply about doctrine, edify you with Biblical instruction, and encourage you with articles that nourish your soul.

The journal’s title, *Kērussōmen*, is a Greek name which means, “Let us preach!” We place this volume into your hands accompanied by a prayer to God that it will be a valued and helpful contribution to those across Africa who are engaged in the noble task of preaching.

We pray that Paul’s exhortation will be reality for every preacher who reads this Journal:

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:2–5 NKJV)

Please accept *Kērussōmen* as our way of reaching out to you with loving encouragement as you serve Jesus Christ in gospel ministry.

“Let us preach!”

Philip S. Hunt
President
Central Africa Baptist College & Seminary
Kitwe, Zambia

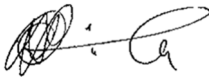
To the Reader:

We are excited to place into your hands this issue of *Kērussōmen* Volume 3 Issue 1. As we announced in our last volume, this is a special themed edition intended to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. On 31st October 1517, five centuries ago this October, a Catholic monk named Martin Luther nailed 95 theses or points of discussion to the door of the chapel in Wittenberg, Germany. That small act would give rise to a movement which had a ripple effect throughout the Christian faith and modern civilization all together.

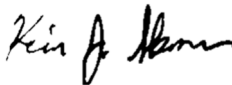
In light of the significance and impact of the Reformation on Christianity over the last 500 years, we have dedicated this edition to highlighting its historical development, discussing some of its biblical themes, and tracing its impact on the African church as we look forward to the future for the church.

It is our prayer that this edition of *Kērussōmen* will help strengthen your commitment to the ultimate authority of Scripture, the exclusivity of salvation in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone, and encourage you to strive to live for God's glory alone.

The editors:



Chopo C. Mwanza



Kevin J. Sherman



Benjamin P. Straub

TO EVERY NATION

An Editorial on the Expansion of God's Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo

by an Anonymous Congolese Christian

The Country

The Democratic Republic of Congo, hereby shortened DRC is located in central Africa. It has a short 25-mile (40-kilometre) coastline on the Atlantic Ocean but is otherwise landlocked. It is the third largest country on the continent; only the Sudan and Algeria are larger. The capital, Kinshasa, is located on the Congo River at a distance of about 320 miles from its mouth and is the largest city in central Africa. It serves as the nation's administrative, economic, and cultural center. The country is often called Congo (Kinshasa) to distinguish it from the other Congo republic, which is officially called the Republic of the Congo and is often called Congo (Brazzaville). DRC gained independence from Belgium in June 1960. There is a population of 81 million souls, the majority of which live under very adverse physical and economic



conditions. The 81 million has diverse languages, about 242, with hundreds of ethnic groups.

The wealth and economy

DRC is a country rich in economic resources. Its minerals include vast deposits of industrial diamonds, cobalt, and copper; its forest reserves are possibly the largest in Africa; and its hydroelectric potential comprises half that of the African continent. Mining produces more than half of the national budget and more than 80 percent of total exports. DR Congo, as it is sometimes called, is a leading producer of industrial diamonds, accounting for about one-third of the world's total production. It also produces about half of the world's cobalt. It is a major producer of copper and tin. Coal production is low, however, because of mining difficulties and the increasing production of hydroelectricity. Other minerals mined include cadmium, silver, manganese, gold, wolframite, columbotantalite, beryl, and monazite. The most important mining company is the state-owned Générale des Carrières et des Mines (Gécamines).

The Paradox

Although the country is endowed with all these riches, DRC has been consistently ranked amongst the worst in Africa and the world as regards corruption, crime, violence, warfare, poverty, infrastructure, and health and human services since its independence. The United Nations Human Development index is very low even when compared within the sub-Saharan Africa. It is the 187th of the 187. Furthermore DRC is far behind in 4 Critical Areas. First, Life Expectancy is at 47. Second, Per capita Income is \$320. Third, Infant Mortality rate is 1/10 as two thirds suffer from Malnutrition, and fourth Education is at the rate of 67%.

The Religious Status

The traditional religious beliefs in a supreme being, the power of the ancestors, spirits of nature, and the efficacy of magic were torn apart or greatly disturbed with the introduction of Christianity. There is a sizable Christian population, including the local sect of the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon Kimbangu (Kimbanguism). The rest of the African population continues to follow traditional beliefs or professes no religion. The foreign community includes a small Jewish population and some Hindus and Muslims.

With regard to religion, the 81 million souls can be divided as follows; only 20% which is 16 million are Protestants or evangelicals. Assuming they are saved, this leaves us with 65 million in DRC doomed to perish without an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ through Faith if they are not reached or engaged (40 million are Roman Catholics).

The State of “The Church” in DRC

Surrounded by civil wars and political turmoil, African Traditional Religion, and the strong adherence to Roman Catholicism in an extremely impoverished environment, the church faces a very big impediment for the propagation of the Gospel. The Church is nearly consumed with heresies such as “Works” Salvation taught by Catholics and Protestants alike. The prosperity (health and wealth) “gospel” is the dominant form of teaching in a lot of charismatic churches that have been mushrooming around the country. Elements of animistic religion/witchcraft are frequent in the church, even in urban areas. Heavily influenced by cults, mega-pastors/false-teachers, prophets usually engage in the abuse of charismatic “gifts” universally. Moreover, the Church suffers from tribalism, disunity and critical biblical illiteracy to mention but a few.

There is need for legitimate Bible and theological training of men who should teach and pastor churches. A great majority of pastors have little to no training in Bible, theology, expository preaching, or shepherding. Many of the church leaders are functioning without any Biblical accountability whatsoever. Worse still, 90% of church families do not have access to an affordable Bible. So, churches in Congo are sheep without shepherds, and this positions them to be prey for the wolves.

The above situation has made the churches in Congo not to understand even the foundational truths of the Faith. In fact, in many cases it could be said that “the Church” in DRC is pursuing a *different* faith than that which was transmitted to the saints through Christ and His Apostles. Christ’s Gospel is the only hope for Congo. There is need for partners to pray to the Lord for laborers in this harvest that is already ripe.

A Call to Prayer and Support

1. **For Congo to overcome the evils of its tragic history** through repentance and reconciliation.
2. **Conflict in the Congo** has produced more deaths than any war since WWII. Pray for the ceasing of conflicts and wars in Congo.
3. **The powerful spiritual** evil that influences much of this land shows itself in deeper ways than wars, killings, greed, and corruption. Wicked men committed widespread rape, unshakable brutality, cannibalism, and witchcraft against adults and children. How could these horrors spread throughout a land with over 90% percent who profess Christianity? This moves our hearts, and calls us to spiritual warfare. Cry out for God to deliver this land, and to bind the spirits that have such power over suffering people.

4. **The church** is the only national social structure to endure and work for the people. When many public, church and ministry buildings were destroyed, the Church stepped in to care for the many needs in this broken land where other institutions failed. Many hospitals, clinics, and schools operate with Christian initiative. Thank God for the educational ministries of the Roman Catholic and some protestant churches. Without them, an entire generation may have gone without education. Pray for God to raise Christian leaders of spiritual and moral maturity to serve the church and society.
5. **The DRC needs a complete re-evangelization.** In some areas, the work of the Holy Spirit led to some increase of love for God's Word, prayer movements, mobilization of youth, and new indigenous songs and hymns! Other areas have no evangelical witness and little outreach; while uncountable numbers of refugees have moved between the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, and Tanzania reveal the state of the church and the needs of the nation. Pray for a team of researchers, supported by the national Churches, to undertake this large task.
6. **The DRC has more opportunities for expatriate Christian workers** than any other African nation. Needs exist in church planting, discipleship, development, Bible teaching, leadership training, and specialized areas such as media, translation, and medical work. The destruction of roads and railways increases the strategic importance of the seven Christian agencies with aviation programs. Missionary involvement decreased radically due to wars, social instability, and the breaking down of government. Pray for a new wave of workers from around the world to live out the gospel in the DRC, and to meet the many

needs of the people. Even hundreds of workers will not be enough! Bible translation remains an unfinished task. 94 languages need Bible translation, and 29 more have works in progress. Most Congolese have never owned a Bible. Pray for ministries such as Hope Builders Ministries that is availing Bibles for Christians, and doing discipleship training programs. The other ones you can pray for are, New Life Church and the Congo Coalition that are equipping pastors to effectively communicate the true Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

Francis Kaunda

Introduction

The year 2017 is historic on our calendars. Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the wall of the church in Wittenberg, German. The Theses were a disputation on the power of indulgencies under Roman Catholicism. When you look at the 95 Theses, it becomes apparent that the battle that Luther was fighting was to uphold God's work in salvation. In defining "repentance" for example, he notes that "the word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy."¹ He wanted to show that salvation is the work of God, and that sinners are made right by God through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Another emphasis on the importance of justification by faith alone is well stated by James Boice, "It is not possible to go on with a discussion of this verse (referring to Habakkuk 2:4) without acknowledging the impact it had on history, particularly the way it gripped the heart and mind of Martin Luther and thus led in a very direct and obvious way to the Protestant Reformation."²

This article will provide a brief overview of the subject of "Justification by Faith alone." The subject will be tackled under the following topics; the history of the doctrine of justification, the biblical definition of the doctrine of justification, the foundation of the doctrine of justification, the necessity of the

¹www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html.

²James Boice, *The Minor Prophets Vol 2; An Expositional Commentary* (Baker Books; Grand Rapids 2002,) 408.

doctrine of justification and the ultimate end of the doctrine of justification.

The History of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone

Even though I will come back to define “Justification,” it is important that we have some definition upfront to work with. Justification is the act by which God declares the sinner forgiven and righteous. John Piper, in one of his sermons, points out that there are two things that God requires of us. The first is that our sin must be punished. Second, it is that our lives be righteous. We cannot do anything about this, and so God in history did a work outside of us, before us and without us. This is the whole essence of justification by faith alone. The best place to begin looking at the history to this doctrine is to go back around 1500s when the Church (what we now call the Roman Catholic Church) was very powerful both politically and spiritually in Western Europe. The reason it is so important to begin there is because the emphasis of the church then continues to be the emphasis of the times we are living in. The emphasis of our times is that one can get to heaven or obtain righteousness by his good lifestyle.

The Roman Catholic View on Justification

To appreciate the view of Roman Catholicism on justification, we must briefly compare their position with the right view. It is important therefore, that we state the meaning of justification. Justification is a divine act whereby God declares the sinner to be innocent of his sins. It is a legal action in which God declares the sinner righteous as though he has satisfied the Law of God.

However, Roman Catholic doctrine denied (and still does) justification by faith alone and says:

If anyone says, that by faith alone the ungodly is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema (Council of Trent, Canons on Justification, Canon 9).

It is very easy to think that we cannot hold this position. But before you think that way, Take time to analyse your own testimony of salvation. If one says I got saved when I was baptized, or I know I am a Christian because I go to church; they are basically saying their salvation is based on what they have done. Roman Catholicism goes on to say;

If anyone says, that man is truly pardoned from his sins and justified, because he assuredly believed himself freed and justified; or, that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, forgiveness and justification are effected; let him be anathema. (Canon 14).

Anathema, according to Catholic theology means excommunication, the exclusion of a sinner from the society of the faithful. The Greek word anathema is also translated as "accursed" or "eternally condemned" (Gal. 1:8–9). Does the Roman Catholic doctrine specifically state that we are saved by grace and works? It would be stretching the issue to accuse them of this. But a careful analysis of the canons above imply that. This is also confirmed by the Catholic religion's reliance on deeds for finding God's favour. For example, baptism in Roman Catholic

doctrine is the first requirement for justification as articulated in the following quotes:

Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it unites us with Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification, so that 'we too might walk in newness of life, (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 977).

Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ. It is granted us through Baptism. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who justifies us. It has for its goal the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life. It is the most excellent work of God's mercy (CCC, par. 2020).

The Reformation and Justification

Discussed above is the Roman Catholic view on justification. It is very clear that this view was a big shift from scripture. We now turn to analyse the reformation position as we continue with the history of this doctrine. John MacArthur is right when he says, "the Canons and Decrees of Trent are not merely the archaic opinion of some medieval bishops. They represent the official position of the church to this day."³ It disregards the teaching of scripture. This must be emphasized because they are many evangelical leaders who are not convinced about this. I will handle "Reformation and Justification under two headings:

The Path to Reformation

Reformation began first, with Luther's battle with the Roman Catholic doctrine. He began to experience a discomfort with the teachings he embraced and taught. Second, he had a spiritual

³*Justification by Faith Alone: Affirming the Doctrine by which the Church and Individual Stands or Falls.* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), p8.

crisis and concluded that no matter how good he tried to be, no matter how he tried to stay away from sin, he still found himself having sinful thoughts. He was fearful that no matter how many good works he did, he could never do enough to earn his place in heaven. Third, he had a serious struggle with the sale of indulgencies.⁴ Luther did not agree with the idea that one's sentence could be reduced in purgatory. Later on, that one's doom could change depending on their atonement in purgatory. It is very clear from scripture that the only chance people have is while they are alive (Luke 16: 26). It was these struggles that led to Martin Luther igniting the fire of reformation.

The Point of Reformation

The key phrase that stands out for this era is "Protestant Reformation." Two truths are paramount from this phrase. Reformation was first, a protest against some practices of the Roman Catholic Church. And second, reformation was an effort to reform the church. As we clock 500 years this year from that time, the question to answer is how are we doing as the Church of Jesus Christ? Are we still characterised by the passion of the reformers, or have we gone in the way of the world? In the following excerpt from "Luther and Reformation," R.C. Sproul describes the moment of awakening Martin Luther had as he read Romans 1:17: He says, "Here in it," in the gospel, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'the just shall live by faith.'" And so, the lights came on for Luther. And he began to understand that what Paul was speaking of here was a righteousness that God in His grace was making available to those who would receive it passively, not those who would achieve it

⁴A grant by the Pope of remission of the temporal punishment in purgatory still due for sins after absolution.

actively, but that would receive it by faith, and by which a person could be reconciled to a holy and righteous God.

Luther realized that there is nothing good in us. He asked on this same passage, “You mean, here Paul is not talking about the righteousness by which God Himself is righteous, but a righteousness that God gives freely by His grace to people who don’t have righteousness of their own. You mean the righteousness by which I will be saved, is not mine?”⁵

Luther sparked the Reformation in 1517 by posting, at least according to tradition, his "95 Theses" on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. These theses were a list of statements that expressed his concerns about certain Church practices—largely the sale of indulgences. They were based on Luther's deeper concerns with Roman Catholic Church doctrine.

The Biblical Definition of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone

There are some who dismiss a study of this subject because they think “justification” is a big word for “theologians” We must begin by dispelling the myths that surround this thinking. These myths come from a wrong definition of the word “theology.” For example, the young people in our churches think theology is for uncles with a responsibility of teaching. The ladies will say theology is for men, and the men will say it is for those in fulltime ministry. This misunderstanding, therefore calls for a clear definition of “theology.” Theology is “the intense, personal study of God—in order to know, love, and obey the One with whom we will joyfully spend eternity”⁶. The word comes from two Greek words that put together mean the study of God. In other words,

⁵<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/justification-faith-alone-martin-luther-and-romans-117/>

⁶www.Gotquestions.org

Christian theology is an attempt to know God as he has revealed himself. In defining the term, we make three observations:

It is a legal term: Pastor Conrad Mbewe, in his sermon on “Justification by Faith Alone,” argued that the word is used in law courts and not in hospitals. He went on to say, “the court of law simply declares what is true. It does not try to change you.” We note from this that justification is not about God making you righteous but about God declaring you righteous. When God justifies you, he is dealing with the guilt of your sin and not its defilement. The Bible, in Romans 3:10–12, says we are all guilty. Justification is a declaration that you have acted in accordance with the law. It is the opposite of condemnation (Romans 5:16).

It is personal and permanent: The apostle Paul asks, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?” Justification is a work that God does on individuals. It is a work that he does permanently. Hence the declaration, “there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...” (Romans 8:1).

It is double-sided: The difference between justification and what happens in the courts of law is that justification is two sided. It does not only involve a declaration that we are righteous, but forgiveness of our sins as well.

The Foundation of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone

In the foundation of this doctrine, there are three “layers” that we must look at:

The death of Christ: Justification is firmly anchored in the death of Jesus Christ. In Romans 8:34, the question is asked “who is to condemn?” And the answer is “it is Jesus who died.” Why did Jesus, the totally sinless Son of God die on the cross? It was because he was taking our place and suffering our punishment. That is the biblical explanation of Calvary (Romans 3:23–26). On the cross, God transferred the guilt of our sin onto Jesus and

punished him just as if he was the one who had committed those sins (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21). The key word in this work is “substitution” If we lose this word we have lost the solid foundation of our justification.

The resurrection of Christ: The second layer of this foundation is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. “Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that the one who was raised...” (Romans 8:34). What is the significance of this resurrection? Is it not enough that he died? It is not! How could we know that the payment for our sin was fully made and that God was satisfied? It is by the fact that he released Jesus from death. So, the resurrection of Jesus is a clear message from God that he was fully satisfied with the payment that had been made. We do not need to fear that we may one day be apprehended by God and sent to the jail called hell. Why? Because Christ is risen! If you are not a Christian, you have reason to fear (sin is the sting of death, and unforgiven sin is the instrument of damnation).

The intercession of Christ: This is the third layer of this doctrine’s foundation. “Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that the one who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34). The Bible describes Jesus, as he sits at the right hand of God, as “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain” (Revelation 5:6). Why? It is because he is a permanent reminder to all who will accuse the people of God that the payment for their sin has been fully paid. In his intercession, Jesus acknowledges our sins before his father. But he deals with them by showing his wounds to the father saying, “I have paid it all.” He is our substitute. He has appeased his father’s wrath on our behalf. This would not be true of you if you are not a Christian. Since you have rejected the gift of God, you will have to face God in person.

The Necessity of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone

Why is justification by faith alone necessary? I provide a threefold answer to this question.

First, the reality of human guilt: All humanity is guilty of sin before God (Romans 8:33). The apostle Paul asks, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?” Justifiably, there was a charge against us (Romans 1:18-23; 2:1-2, 13-16), (3:9-10), and a universal declaration that we are all guilty was in order (Romans 3:23). God declaring us righteous was a necessity as a result. It was the only hope for us. The apostle is right in responding to our dilemma with the words- “it is God who justifies.”

Second, the reality of God’s Justice: God’s justice demands judgment for sin. According to Romans 1:17, the gospel discloses the righteousness of God that has a double edge. A righteousness that God through Christ freely gives to those who believe (Romans 5:17, 9:30, 3:21), and a righteousness that reveals God as doing what is right. God must judge sinners as they deserve (Romans 2:5, 3:5). He must justify sinners in a way that meets his judicial claims (Romans 3:25). The New Bible Dictionary referring to this righteousness says, “the righteousness of God is thus a predominantly forensic concept, denoting God’s gracious work of bestowing upon guilty sinners a justified justification, acquitting them in the court of heaven without prejudice to his justice as their judge.”⁷ God’s attribute of justice demands that he does right by punishing our sin. And yet, this was punished in his Son Jesus Christ.

Third, the reality of God’s judgment: Since God is a God of justice, he cannot betray his character. Because sin must be punished, he did not spare his own Son (Romans 8:32). He gave him up for us. The answer to God’s actions towards his Son is found in his character. He is holy. God will always judge sin justly. All those

⁷J. D. Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), 647.

who have not found refuge in his Son will have to answer for their sins on the day of judgment.

The Ultimate End of Justification by Faith Alone

The ultimate end for man: The ultimate end of justification for man is holiness. In Romans 8:28-30, the apostle Paul states the goal of our justification. It is to be like Christ. This is the point of the scriptures (see Galatians 1:4; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; Ephesians 1:3–12 comp. 4:1, 17). When writing to the scattered believers, Peter argues for holiness (1 Peter 1:16). He calls them aliens or strangers. His demand upon these believers is that because of their calling in Christ, they must be holy. He also demands that they must be holy because of the one who has called them (1 Peter 1:15–16). The point of his argument is that believers are justified in order to live a life of holiness.

The ultimate end for God: The ultimate end of justification for God is his glory. In justification, he demonstrates his justice as already noted. He punished his Son in our place (2 Cor. 5:21). As soon as his Son was identified with sin, he punished him. He also displays his wisdom. The solution to human sin is amazing. The only way it can be explained is in acknowledging that God is wise.

Conclusion

We have looked at a brief overview of the history to the doctrine of justification, the biblical definition of the doctrine of justification, the foundation of the doctrine of justification, the necessity of the doctrine of justification and the ultimate end of the doctrine of justification. This is timely as we celebrate 500 years of reformation. The challenge that remains is for us to look beyond this glorious doctrine and seek application to our own lives. What are the implications of this rich doctrine to our lives? There are many implications that emanate from a proper understanding of the doctrine of justification. Let me mention a

few. First, we cannot boast about our salvation. In salvation, it is God who does the work as a surgeon does his work on the body of his patient. Second, we must be bold as we preach the gospel. This is true in a day and time when false teachings are threatening the truth of God. There may be a cost for this boldness, especially in countries where the preaching of the gospel is forbidden. Third, our pulpits must be known for the proclamation of the truth. The reformation was a realization of the fact that the church had shifted from the truth to error. We must wholeheartedly give ourselves to the spread of this truth. Fourth, we must support this doctrine with our holy conduct. Because of the work done in justification, our lives must demonstrate that we have been delivered from sin (see 1 Peter 2:9-12). Sadly, the church of Christ today lacks the warmth of fire that restored true Christianity. May God help us to once again embrace the true Christianity that wrought the change in our lives. Amen!

***Francis Kaunda** is a graduate of Central Africa Baptist College. He is currently serving as a ministerial assistant at Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka.*

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT ON JUSTIFICATION: DID THE CONDEMNATIONS HIT THEIR MARK?

Benjamin Straub

Introduction

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther changed the course of church history. The nailing of his ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenberg chapel was the snowball that would eventually grow into the avalanche of the Protestant Reformation. While this unassuming Augustinian monk did not set out to change the tide of the Catholic Church, his passion for reform within the church, and the church's hostile response to him eventually led to the organization of large groups of fellow believers committed to protesting the corruption that they saw within the Catholic Church. The doctrine of justification, Scripture and tradition, faith and works, papal infallibility, the meaning and administration of the sacraments, clerical hierarchy, and many other significant issues soon became serious points of contention among Catholics and the newly emerging "Protestants."

With regard to the doctrine of justification serious lines of conflict were being drawn. By the opening of the sixteenth century, Catholic doctrine had undergone a series of scholastic clarifications and ecclesiastic allowances. The then current common definition of justification involved a process whereby man, being only partially corrupted by sin, was prepared for justification by God's grace, cooperated by receiving justification in the sacrament of baptism in which righteousness was imparted and became inherent in him, and added to his justification by loving God and obeying him through the performance of good works and adherence to the sacraments which accrued more grace to the believer. This grace could be

lost if the believer sinned, but could also be regained through acts of penance.¹ The developing Reformation took serious issue with several aspects of this understanding of justification, largely because it rejected the tradition in which it had developed and the rights of the Church to interpret that tradition, and instead looked to the Scriptures alone to define doctrine. The Reformers saw the sinner as completely corrupt, morally unable to respond to God without special work on his behalf. Justification then was the act of God whereby sinners were quickened to faith and declared righteous, the alien righteousness of Christ being imputed to their account through faith and faith alone. It was therefore perfect and complete, and could not be added to in any way. Good works were necessary in the life of a believer, but only as evidence of grace, not a means of obtaining it.

Because of the challenge this necessarily entailed to existing Church practices and structure, the Catholic Church could not stand idly by and let these theological “innovations” sweep through unchecked. In a short span of thirty years, the Protestant Reformation had grown to become a substantial movement throughout Europe. Several attempts had been made during this time to avoid outright confrontation, both politically and ecclesiastically. There were many who still hoped for some measure of rapprochement and reunification between the two opposing sides, yet each of these successive attempts fell short of their goal. For some time men on both sides had been calling for a church council that could address the mounting tensions and

¹It should be remembered that this was not the “official” position, because there was no official standard concerning justification. Several other formulations were held by various groups within the Church, but this was the most common view and the one that aligned best with the actual religious structure and practices of the day.

provide a definitive and authoritative answer to the questions that were being raised. Finally, in 1545, the Pope convened the Council of Trent to provide just such an answer to the rising tide of disagreement. From the outset the Protestants disapproved of the Council. They had been pushing for a general council composed of representatives from all Christian nations who could accurately reflect the full political and theological spectrum of interests. Instead, Trent was primarily composed of Italian prelates and cardinals who owed their allegiance to the Pope. Thus, instead of objectively examining the conflict and providing a unified solution, Trent seemed to be constructed as a Catholic device to pass judgment on the aberrant Protestants. And this is essentially what the Council succeeded in accomplishing. It took nearly twenty years and three separate periods of assembly to complete its work, but in the end the Council of Trent solidified Catholic doctrine and roundly condemned Protestant teaching. Or at least that is what they, and the vast majority of both Protestants and Catholics over the next five hundred years thought they did.

In recent years, because of changing thought within the ecumenical movement, the Council of Trent's sound condemnation of Protestants has been questioned. Scholars began to wonder whether Trent actually condemned the true theology of the Reformation. Did the Council fathers misunderstand the Reformers' theological positions? Were they aiming their canons wide of the target and condemning ideas not actually taught in Protestantism. Is there more that is compatible between Catholicism and Protestantism than the past five hundred years of church history would lead one to believe? That is the question this paper will seek to examine: Did the Council of Trent actually condemn Protestant doctrine, or

did they misunderstand it and merely condemn a caricature of it?²

Significance of the Question

The reason that this question is significant is because of the extent to which it has permeated the modern discussions of the ecumenical movement. Those wary of efforts at rapprochement between Protestants and Catholics have long argued that very specific condemnations of Protestant doctrine were codified into Catholic Church doctrine by the Council of Trent. This is a very strong objection, if it remains unanswered. If, however, it could be shown that the Council of Trent did not accurately understand the theology of the Reformers, and thus condemned a caricature and not the real thing, then these objections lose their force. This explains why much effort has been exerted by modern proponents of the ecumenical movement to reexamine the condemnations of the Reformation era.

Assertions by Modern Writers

The progress of the argument that the Council of Trent did not correctly understand the theology of the reformers can be traced through several stages of development. First, it seems, it was proposed by church historians merely as an observation that may have explained the strength of the condemnations. For instance A. D. Wright, in an article on the significance of the Council of Trent speaks of “the failure at the Council, in the

²While the Council of Trent covered a broad array of doctrinal and ecclesiastical considerations, this paper will primarily focus on its proclamations concerning justification. This has long been recognized as the key area of debate between Protestants and Catholics (cf. the oft-repeated statement from Luther that this is the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls), and it is in this area that most of the recent ecumenical endeavors have concentrated their efforts.

doctrinal sphere, to engage genuinely with Protestant theology, both by fearful omission and proud commission; despite the individual sympathies among the Council fathers for elements in the Protestant position.”³

By the 1980’s, this idea apparently had been suggested enough as a response to the anti-ecumenical argument concerning the condemnations that it warranted further investigation. Prompted by a 1980 papal meeting with a group of Protestants in Mainz, Germany, the Ecumenical Study Group, a multi-denominational effort started in the early twentieth century, decided to examine the condemnations and determine if they could be deemed as non-applicable to the modern day situation. The results of this study were published in the book, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*, edited by Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl Lehman, the group’s Protestant and Catholic co-chairs.⁴ Pannenberg sums up the Study Group’s findings concerning the condemnations, saying, “Point by point it is shown that these opposition [sic] were caused in part by misunderstandings, in part by deep seated differences in forms of thought and expression. Usually both are found together.”⁵ Lehman presses the point. “On both the

³A. D. Wright, “Significance of the Council of Trent.” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26 (October 1975): 354.

⁴Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds. *The Condemnation of the Reformation Era*. Margaret Kohl, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). This work examines both condemnations of Protestant doctrine by Catholics found in the Council of Trent and condemnations of Catholic doctrine by Protestants found in such Reformation documents as the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord. This paper limits its scope to the examination of the condemnations of Protestant doctrine by Catholics found in the Council of Trent.

⁵Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Can the Mutual Condemnations be Lifted?” in *Justification by Faith*. Karl Lehmann, Michael Root, and William G. Rusch, eds. (New York: Continuum: 1997): 36. This volume

Reformation and Catholic sides, there are condemnations which – as we recognize today – are not directed against the binding teachings of the church or against Reformation teachings, but are set against theological opinions.... In this context we discover condemnations which refer to extreme positions and marginal statements of the opposing side.”⁶

Having gained acceptance and legitimacy as a result of these studies, the argument was soon taken up by those in favor of ecumenical rapprochement in order to bolster their movement. In his landmark study on the doctrine of justification, Alister McGrath, when addressing the canons of the Council of Trent concerning justification, claims that “it appears that it is certain caricatures of Protestantism which are actually condemned, rather than Protestantism itself. There seems to have been considerable confusion as a consequence of the different understandings of the *nature* of justification associated with Protestants and Catholics.”⁷ Further, Anthony Lane, in his Evangelical assessment of the Catholic-Protestant dialogue concerning justification asks of the Council of Trent, “But how well did they know the views of their opponents? ... If the views rejected at Trent do not accurately represent the mature teaching of the Reformation this at least poses the question of whether the Tridentine condemnations actually touch the Protestant doctrine.”⁸

was published shortly after *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era*, and contains a series of essays written in support of the work and conclusions of the Ecumenical Study Group.

⁶Karl Lehmann, “Is the ‘Step Backward’ Ecumenical Progress?” in *Justification by Faith*, 60.

⁷Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*. (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2007): 343.

⁸Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Protestant-Catholic Dialogue*. (London: T&T Clark, 2002): 67.

While it would seem that it is mostly Protestants who make this argument in an effort to smooth relations with Catholics, it can be found in the writings of Catholic authors as well. Richard John Neuhaus, in defending the work of the statement *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* says, “Did the council fathers at Trent misunderstand what the Reformers meant by *sola fide*? Most scholars, whether Catholic or Protestant, agree that they did not understand the Reformers, especially Luther and Calvin, adequately.”⁹ Nor is he alone in this assessment. Karl Rahner, when writing on areas of debate within Catholic ecumenical circles states definitively that “with regard to the doctrine of justification, today it is no longer possible to maintain that it is certain that the doctrines of the *Confessio Augustana* and the Council of Trent are clearly contradictory.”¹⁰

Reasons for Reconsidering the Condemnations

In defending the idea that the condemnations ought to be considered as non-applicable today, ecumenical proponents give several recurring reasons which deserve to be examined here. The reason most commonly put forward is that of misunderstanding between the two opposing sides. Alister McGrath points to canon 11 as key example of the types of misunderstanding that the council fathers had concerning Reformation theology. He says that “it is clear that this condemnation is aimed at a purely extrinsic conception of justification... In fact, the canon does not censure any magisterial Protestant account of *iustificatio hominis*... Underlying

⁹Richard John Neuhaus, “The Catholic Difference,” in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds. (Dallas: Word, 1995): 209.

¹⁰Karl Rahner, “Open Questions in Dogma Considered by the Institutional Church as Definitively Answered.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 15 (Spring 1978): 213.

this canon appears to be the view that Protestants denied that transformation and renewal were of the *esse* of Christian existence, an error primarily due to terminological confusion.”¹¹ In the book, *Justification by Faith*, Otto Pesch offers a step by step examination of all thirty three canons.¹² In this essay he finds areas of misunderstanding in nearly every significant disagreement between the Council and Luther. These include: the Catholic Church defines faith as mental assent, whereas Luther sees it incorporating the ideas of hope and love; The Catholic Church mistook Luther’s insistence on passivity of the will to mean impersonality in regards to the human element in salvation; the Catholic Church thought Luther excluded any necessity of good works, when he saw them as an evidence of and not a means of grace; and the Catholic church defined justification to include both the initial action of salvation and the continuing growth in grace, whereas Luther defined justification as just the initial work of salvation and sanctification as the continuing work in the life of a believer.

A second reason that is offered for reconsidering the condemnations is that the Council fathers are sometimes reacting to extreme positions of the Reformers, and not to their fully-thought out doctrine. Lehman and Pannenberg offer an example. They argue that canon 27 is a response to an overstatement of Luther’s, stating that “the Council’s target here was a sentence in Luther’s *De captivitate Babylonica*. But Luther later defined his doctrine more closely, securing it against theological and pastoral misunderstanding. He even retracted the sentence mentioned when, in the Smalcald Articles, he

¹¹Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 343-44.

¹²Otto Hermann Pesch, “The Canons of the Tridentine Decree on Justification,” in *Justification by Faith*, 175-216.

dissociated himself from the ‘enthusiasts.’”¹³ Pesch, referring to these types of overstatement, speaks of “the early period of the Reformation when [Luther] still hoped to be able to convince his opponents and did not, resigned and despairing, simply shoot [sic] off polemical broadsides against them.”¹⁴

A third common argument for reexamining the condemnations comes in the form of a suggestion that the Council fathers did not have adequate sources of Reformation documents before them to examine, and thus could not have adequately interacted with their theological argumentation. Anthony Lane, for instance, claims that “there is good evidence that the council fathers relied mainly on second- or third-hand compilations from the Reformers. These were mostly drawn from the years to 1526 and reflected some views that were later rejected or modified.”¹⁵ The evidence that he is referring to is an article by Erwin Iserloh, “Luther and the Council of Trent.”¹⁶ Lane is correct in the sense that he accurately reports Iserloh’s conclusion that “the abbreviated quoted excerpts from the Reformers contained in the collected lists of errors were often understood by the Council fathers without a knowledge of their context and not in their original sense.... The Council condemned many views which in their polemically exaggerated form from the years 1518-1522 were in the meantime no longer held by the Reformers.”¹⁷ However, it seems that Iserloh may

¹³Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds. *The Condemnation of the Reformation Era*, 55.

¹⁴Pesch, “The Canons of the Tridentine Decree on Justification,” 195.

¹⁵Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Protestant-Catholic Dialogue*, 67.

¹⁶Erwin Iserloh, “Luther and the Council of Trent.” *Catholic Historical Review* 69 (October 1983): 563-76.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 572.

have over-generalized his conclusions. Earlier in the article he reports that “in connection with the decree on justification, the demand was energetically made to have the Protestants take part. At least their writings must be consulted and one ought not to confide without reservation in the controversialist theologians.”¹⁸ Furthermore he states that they were urged by Cardinal Reginald Pole “also to read without prejudice the books of the Lutherans and not, for instance, to assume the position that since ‘Luther has said it, therefore, it is false.’”¹⁹ Thus it would seem that, at least in the area of justification and probably in other areas as well, the Council members did examine the Reformation documents quite carefully and were able to interact fully with the well developed theology of the Reformers’ position.

Evidence from History

While it would be easy to listen to the modern ecumenical writers and accept that times have changed and the old conflicts no longer need to divide, a critical examination of the history of the conflict may lead one to draw different conclusions than the ecumenical movement would prefer. Four successive periods of history may be noted whose events may offer clues as to just what amount of interchange of ideas took place between to two opposing sides.²⁰ If sufficient theological interchange is found in

¹⁸Ibid., 571.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰While it is not possible in this paper to present a full-orbed discussion of the history of the events from the start of the Reformation through the Council of Trent, certain highlights and patterns may be mentioned which may shed light on just how much the fathers at Trent understood. For a detailed history of this time period see: Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*. 2 vols. Ernest Graf, trans. (London: Thomas Nelson, 1961).

the years leading up to the Council, then this may cast doubt on the theory that the Council fathers did not understand the doctrine that the Reformers were espousing.

The Early Days of the Reformation

In the early days of the Reformation, the focus of Martin Luther and his allies was on working within the Catholic Church to reform the doctrine and practice that had, in their view, been corrupted by centuries of theological abuses. The sixteenth century dawned to find that the age was emerging from the shadow of scholastic theology to the light of humanism and the movement *ad fontes*, back to the sources. It was in his return to the careful study of the Scriptures alone that brought Luther to the realization of the hope that is available through the justification of God. In fleshing out this refocused emphasis in his soteriology, Luther came to realize that he was necessarily being drawn into reformulating his ecclesiology as well. This brought him to the idea of the necessity of reform within the church. As has already been mentioned, Luther's posting of the *Ninety Five Theses* as a matter for debate began the series of events that would ultimately lead to his final break with the Church. Robert McNally sums it up in this way:

“What commenced first as an academic challenge soon moved into the area of theological debate, and then on to canonical procedure which closed with the solemn excommunication of Luther. This irrevocable rupture with the old Catholic faith was not simply a personal expression of arrogance, resentment, or stubbornness. It was born rather from a new theology of the Church in which the inspired Word of God and man's response to it were all that mattered.”²¹

²¹Robert Edwin McNally, “The Council of Trent and the German Protestants.” *Theological Studies* 25 (March 1964): 5.

Because Luther was unwilling to back down from his defense of *sola Scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus*, and *solus Deo Gloria*, He was eventually excommunicated from the church by means of the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*, and at the Diet of Worms in 1521 he was censured by the emperor. But the Catholic Church went through a long and careful process of examinations and disputations before it reached this point. On this point Jared Wicks has written a helpful article examining the first year of Roman reactions to Luther.²² He describes the process whereby it was first attempted to reign in Luther through his Augustinian order, then through an Imperial Diet at Augsburg, and then through official censure from Cardinal Cajetan. Wicks describes how Luther's theological works were carefully examined in each of these periods, culminating in the especially careful work of Cardinal Cajetan to study and interact with Luther's published works. He also personally examined him and dealt with him "gently and patiently."²³ The following year Luther agreed to hold a disputation at Leipzig, in which he would publicly debate the details of his theology with Dr. Johann Eck, a Catholic scholar. Due to the tense political situation, no resolution was reached here, but it was Eck who personally went to the Pope and assisted in the preparation of the bull which would lead to Luther's excommunication.²⁴ None of these rounds of examinations and disputations were done in haste or without thorough interaction with Luther and his published works. In this early stage of the development of the Reformation and the

²²Jared Wicks, "Roman Reactions to Luther: The First Year (1518)." *Catholic Historical Review* 69 (October 1983): 521-62.

²³*Ibid.*, 538.

²⁴Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*. 2 vols. Ernest Graf, trans. (London: Thomas Nelson, 1961), 174-175.

Catholic Church's response to it, it is clear that it was done with care and cannot be said to be done devoid of understanding.

Attempts at Reunification

Once Luther was forced into officially breaking with the Church he devoted himself more fully to the idea of Reformation, and gathered around himself a growing number of theologians and political leaders sympathetic to his cause. Thus during these turbulent years the Protestants continued to organize and grow in numbers. Within the country of Germany this caused an increasing amount of confrontation between neighboring Protestant and Catholic estates. To ease this situation several political attempts were made to either achieve rapprochement or at least a calming of relations. Notable among these are the two Diets of Speyer in 1526 and 1529. The Emperor called these in order to determine how the Protestant and Catholic estates would be allowed to worship. Representatives were present and gave arguments on both sides. Eventually a temporary peace was achieved by implementing the formula "whose the reign, his the religion," meaning that the ruler of the estate could guide his own religious affairs. However, even this solution was only temporary. When in 1530 discussions were flaring up again, the estates met at the diet of Augsburg. The goal of this meeting was to be rapprochement between the two sides, and the Emperor decided to allow the Protestants to present their own views fully so that understanding might be achieved. The result was the formulation of the Augsburg Confession, a theological document drawn up by Philip Melancthon that all the Protestant theologians and princes agreed to rally around. This document is seen as the first official creed of Lutheranism. Because of mounting political and national pressures, the Protestants also felt it necessary to band together in a more organized political sense. This led the

formation of Schmalkaldic League in 1531, where Luther and his allies in the Protestant estates of Germany banded together with Zwingli and his followers from Switzerland. This was motivated more politically than religiously, but it did lead to the strengthening of the ties between the Protestants.

The last great push towards reunification can be seen in a series of three colloquies that met in the 1540's. In early 1540 the first attempt was made at Haguenau. Representatives of the Catholic Emperor and men from the Schmalkaldic League agreed to meet for a religious conference, but due to poor turnout this meeting was unsuccessful. In late 1540 they tried again at the Colloquy of Worms. At this conference there was much wrangling of words over form and procedure. Finally the group was able to reach an agreement on original sin when, for political reasons discussions were suspended by the Emperor, to be continued at a later date and in a different city. In 1541 the last and most hopeful of these colloquies met at Regensburg.²⁵ The Catholics were represented by Cardinal Contarini and Johann Eck, and the Protestants by Philip Melanchthon, Martin Bucer, and John Calvin. The Protestant and Catholic sides were actually able to reach a successful agreement on the issue of justification, in which they agreed to a statement that it was accomplished by "faith rendering itself efficacious in love." Essentially it was a Protestant-leaning statement, but the Catholics accepted it since they equated love with good works. However this great gain was ultimately lost when the two sides failed to reach an agreement concerning the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the Church, which resulted in the complete breakdown of the talks. Thus the final ecclesiastical

²⁵For a fuller summary of the events surrounding Regensburg see: Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Protestant-Catholic Dialogue*, 46-60.

attempts at rapprochement had failed. One final political attempt at rapprochement was attempted. In 1544 the Emperor called another Diet at Speyer, which several influential Protestants attended. He allowed them one more chance to state their case, and the result was a tract written by Calvin called *De Necessitate Reformandae Ecclesiae*, in which he argued cogently for reform. The Emperor made far reaching concessions to the Reformers, and agreed to arrange for another Diet in which a plan for Reform might be drawn up. The Pope, however, heard of the concessions that the Emperor was making, and reprimanded him for usurping ecclesiastical authority. This put a final end to hopes for rapprochement.

One final movement during this time must be noted, that being the significant growth of the acceptance of Protestant ideas within Catholic circles. Dermot Fenlon has examined this phenomenon in his work, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy*. He explains that “in Italy the term *spirituali* was applied to the conventicles meeting in the towns and cities, nourishing a devotion to the doctrine of justification *ex sola fide*, and hoping to see a *rapprochement* between the Church of Rome and the reformers of the north. Through their preachers these little circles seemed at one time likely to capture a substantial basis of popular support.”²⁶ In this work Fenlon describes in detail the efforts of the *spirituali*, led by a cardinal named Gasparo Contarini to bring about reform within the Church. He explains of this movement that “in its preoccupation with the question of salvation, its distrust of human works, and its emphasis on the supremacy of faith, it assumed positions which were in essence Lutheran.”²⁷ These men never came to the same dramatic

²⁶Dermot Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy: Cardinal Pole and the Counter Reformation*. (London: Cambridge, 1972): 21-22.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 15.

conclusions regarding separation from the Church that Luther was forced to reach, but in their own quiet and diplomatic way they too hoped for reform within the Church that might bring about a doctrinal shift towards the Reformation's understanding of justification. Marvin Anderson has written an article examining some of the Catholic works coming out of Italy during the years preceding Trent, and shows how by this time there were Catholics who were even willing to openly publish ideas similar to Lutheran theology.²⁸ Examples include Mario Grimaldi, who in his commentary on Romans argues for *sola fide*, and Girolamo Seripando, who was a careful student of Greek and advocated for *sola Scriptura*.

The Council of Trent

The Council of Trent was opened by Pope Paul III in 1545 and eventually ran through twenty-five sessions in three periods ranging over eighteen years. The first two periods covered doctrinal matters, while the third took up ecclesiastical considerations. The doctrine of justification was taken up by the Council in its sixth session in the first period, with debate beginning in June of 1546 and the final decree being published in January of 1547.²⁹ Despite the fact that this was to be an Ecumenical Council for the healing of the Church, there was no significant Protestant contribution to the debates of the Council. Their theology was examined and condemned without them actually being present. This was partly their choice and partly beyond their control. What was beyond their control was that

²⁸Anderson, Marvin W. "Luther's Sola Fide in Italy: 1542-1551." *Church History* 38 (March 1969): 25-42.

²⁹For fuller treatments on the debates that occurred concerning the doctrine of justification see: Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Protestant-Catholic Dialogue*, 60-78, and Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 318-357.

the Council had been set up in a way that was prejudiced against them from the outset. It was called and constructed by the Pope, who had an interest in seeing it decide a certain way. Also, there were tense political considerations which at times prevented them from travelling to the debates. Within their control, though, is that they chose as a group to not to attend since in all likelihood they would have been forced to submit to the Council had they attended, and because they concluded that its constitution was invalid. One can hardly blame them for this though since, even before the Council it had been determined by many of those in positions of power that “what the Roman Church and the Apostolic See have condemned, is condemned. The Bull *Exsurge* [which excommunicated Luther] and the Edict of Worms [which put Luther under the ban and ordered that his writings be burned] must form the basis for whatever discussions may take place. Nothing can be decided without the concurrence of the Pope.”³⁰ The only time any Protestant representatives were present for debates was during the second session, when, the Schmalkaldic League having lost a religious battle with the Emperor, he was able to force some to attend. This resulted in little actual dialogue since they were forbidden from having any say in what had already been decided, which included the doctrine of justification.

In spite of the lack of meaningful Protestant presence at the debates of the Council, the theology that they held did not go unrepresented. As has already been mentioned, by the time of the Council of Trent there was already a significant group within Catholic Church that looked sympathetically and even favorably on many aspects of Protestant doctrine. Interesting to note are the roles that certain members of this group played in official capacities connected to the actual business of the Council. By the

³⁰Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, 373.

time of the Council two significant voices for reform, both Martin Luther and Cardinal Contarini, the influential *spirituali* cardinal had died. However, several of Contarini's *spirituali* associates were appointed to important positions on the Council. Most notable of these is Cardinal Reginald Pole, who was appointed as papal legate to the committee of cardinals responsible for Council affairs. Having long moved in the circles of the *spirituali*, he held views on justification similar to Luther, but had diplomatically waited until the Council to expound them publicly. He continued to hope for rapprochement with the Protestants and saw the Council as his opportunity to work toward this goal, but this caused Pole to run into problems with other Council fathers. Fenlon explains, "For clearly an agreement with the Lutherans would entail, above all, agreement about justification; and for Pole this meant in effect something very close to an acceptance of Luther's doctrine of salvation."³¹ However, this would prove to present an insurmountable obstacle to the stricter Catholics presiding on the Council. It would inevitably force the question, if Luther was correct about salvation, "had he not been equally right about other issues – papal primacy, the priesthood, the sacraments, purgatory, penance, the intercession of the saints – the whole fabric of Catholicism, to which Pole remained deeply and irrevocably attached? ... But for Pole ... the logical dichotomy was not apparent – it appeared rather as a difficulty, and no more."³² The opposition that Pole faced and a decline in his health caused him to withdraw from the Council partway through the debate on justification. He was still consulted though by other sympathizers who remained. These included Tommaso Sanfelice,

³¹Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy: Cardinal Pole and the Counter Reformation*, 105.

³²*Ibid.*

bishop of Cava, whose views, “are commonly considered to have been closer to Protestantism than any of the views put forward by other members of the Council,”³³ and Richard Pate, bishop of Worcester, whose views are “virtually indistinguishable from the views of Luther... and there can be little doubt that he was convinced of Luther’s orthodoxy on the fundamental question of salvation.”³⁴ The efforts of these men to persuade the Council to moderate their views on justification all came to naught. The necessary implications of where that would lead in undermining sacramental and ecclesiastical dogmas were too strong to be risked, and the Council chose to follow the papal position on justification. They produced a statement on justification that consisted of sixteen chapters defining the now orthodox position on justification and thirty three canons which each listed a heretical view on justification which was anathematized. The chapters flesh out the view which has been defined by this paper as the essential Catholic position, and the canons condemn many statements that are very similar to tenets of the earlier defined Protestant position.³⁵

Reactions to the Council of Trent

In the period following the publication of the Council’s decree concerning justification, several reactions to it were published throughout Europe and may be examined to learn how those within the historical context viewed its condemnation of Reformation doctrine. In this respect Robert Kingdon has written an especially helpful article in which he examines three reactions to the Council of Trent published in

³³Ibid., 146.

³⁴Ibid., 157.

³⁵See introduction for these definitions.

France in the decades following its decrees.³⁶ He explains that “to fully understand these Tridentine decisions from an ecumenical perspective requires not only a knowledge of their texts and the debates from which they emerged. It also requires a knowledge of the hostile reactions which they aroused among the many Christians who would not accept these decisions or the authority of those who promulgated them.”³⁷ He then examines three publications: John Calvin’s *Acta Synodi Tridentinae cum antidoto*, Charles Demoulin’s *Conseil sur le fait du Concile de Trente*, and Innocent Gentillet’s *Le bureau du Concile de Trente*. Calvin’s work was published shortly after the issuing of the decree concerning justification, and is wholly theological in tone. He responds to each one of the Council’s proclamations and condemnations concerning justification. Theodore Casteel summarizes, saying, “The *Antidoto* is a testimony to the fact that the major divisive factor between Trent and Calvin, as it was between Luther and Rome, was the question ‘on what grounds are men justified?’ Calvin stood solidly with Luther in his belief that justification was by faith alone.”³⁸ Demoulin’s work, produced in 1564 by one of the greatest jurisconsults of the day, is much more legal in tone and is addressed at French courts in order to persuade them to not accept the Council’s proclamations into French law. Gentillet’s work, published in 1586, is also legal in tone, but delves more into theological and historical questions than Demoulin’s work, and is structured similar to Calvin’s. He too is seeking to convince the French legal system not to accept the decisions of the Council. What is

³⁶Robert M. Kingdon, “Some French Reactions to the Council of Trent.” *Church History* 33 (June 1964): 149-56.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 149.

³⁸Theodore W. Casteel, “Calvin and Trent: Calvin’s Reaction to the Council of Trent in the Context of His Conciliar Thought.” *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (January 1970): 113.

interesting to note is that none of these responses highlight or try to correct any misunderstanding between Trent and the Reformers. Instead, they examine the proclamations of Trent and attempt to show that they are scripturally and legally unsound or even dangerous and should not be followed.

Examination of the Canons

When the Council of Trent published its decree on justification, it appended to the positive argumentation thirty three statements, which anathematized anyone who held to any position delineated therein. These are the canons of the decree, and are the condemnations which many in today's ecumenical movement are proposing no longer need be held in any sense that divides Protestants and Catholics. The problem with thus assertion is that when these thirty three canons are examined, it becomes clear that they include several statements that are aimed directly at tenets of Protestant doctrine. The instances below will bear this out:³⁹

Canon 5

If anyone says that after the sin of Adam man's free will was lost and destroyed, or that it is a thing only in name,

³⁹The scope of this paper only allows for highlighting of the most significant areas of disagreement between the Council's canons and Protestant doctrine. For full responses to all of the Council's proclamations see: John Calvin, "Antidote to the Sixth Session of Council of Trent on the Doctrine of Justification." R. Scott Clark, ed. http://www.the-highway.com/antidote_Calvin.html, accessed 3/19/2010; and Oliver K. Olson and Franz Posset, trans. *Outmoded Condemnations?: Antitheses between the Council of Trent and the Reformation on Justification, the Sacrament, and the Ministry - Then and Now*. (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Luther Academy, 1992): 1-56, which will both be referenced herein.

indeed a name without a reality, a fiction introduced into the Church by Satan, let him be anathema.⁴⁰

The authors of the work *Outmoded Condemnations?* state concerning this canon that it “affects the Evangelical churches because as the context shows, it refers to the freedom in the relationship to God. This freedom supposedly is not lost and thus makes the preparation and cooperation as stated in other canon possible. Precisely this is rejected by Reformation theology (Augsburg Confession, article 18).”⁴¹ Calvin also takes issue with this in his *Antidoto*. He states that “as by Free-will they understand a faculty of choice perfectly free and unbiased to either side; those who affirm that this is merely to use a name without a substance, have the authority of Christ when he says, that they are free whom the Son makes free, and that all others are the slaves of sin.”⁴² Thus this canon is squarely aimed at Reformation doctrine.

Canon 9

If any says that a sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema.⁴³

⁴⁰H. J. Schroeder, trans. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1978), 43.

⁴¹Oliver K. Olson and Franz Posset, trans. *Outmoded Condemnations?*, 35.

⁴²John Calvin, “Antidote to the Sixth Session of Council of Trent on the Doctrine of Justification,” 25.

⁴³H. J. Schroeder, trans. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 43.

This canon is aimed at the heart of Reformation doctrine, that a man is justified by faith alone. Calvin resorts to mocking this canon, “This Canon is very far from being canonical; ... Between them and us there is this difference, that they persuade themselves that the movement [of the will] comes from the man himself, whereas we maintain that faith is voluntary, because God draws our will to himself.”⁴⁴ The authors of the work *Outmoded Condemnations?* add that this canon which assigns “to the – surviving – free will the function of preparing for the reception of justification and the function of cooperating, applies to the Evangelical doctrine which denies any possibility of such a ‘preparation’ and ‘cooperation.’”⁴⁵

Canon 17

If anyone says that the grace of justification is shared by those only who are predestined to life, but that all others who are called are called indeed but receive not grace, as if they are divine power predestined to evil, let him be anathema.⁴⁶

Calvin feels that the words of Scripture are all that is necessary to respond to this canon. “The words of Luke are, ‘All who had been pre-ordained to life believed.’ (Acts 13:48.) He intimates whence it was that in one audience such a difference existed that some believed, and others persisted in their obstinacy. In like manner Paul asserts that those are called

⁴⁴John Calvin, “Antidote to the Sixth Session of Council of Trent on the Doctrine of Justification,” 27.

⁴⁵Oliver K. Olson and Franz Posset, trans. *Outmoded Condemnations?*, 36.

⁴⁶H. J. Schroeder, trans. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 44.

whom God has previously chosen. (Romans 8:29.)”⁴⁷ Thus he defends what is condemned in this canon and it must be concluded that it is aimed at true Reformation theology.

Canon 24

If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that these works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.⁴⁸

Calvin responds, “That God visits the good works of the godly with reward, and to former adds new and ampler grace, we deny not. But whosoever asserts that works have the effect of increasing justification, understands neither what is the meaning of justification nor its cause.”⁴⁹ The authors of the work *Outmoded Condemnations?* draw a clear distinction at this point. “This canon does affect the Evangelical position... For according to the Reformation understanding, the righteousness of the Christian cannot grow at all because it is the perfect righteousness of Christ which the believer has appropriated. Thus, his good works are nothing other than the fruits and the visible signs of this righteousness.”⁵⁰ Thus, all four of these canons offer clear, direct condemnations of central tenets to the Protestant understanding of justification. To deny that this is so

⁴⁷John Calvin, “Antidote to the Sixth Session of Council of Trent on the Doctrine of Justification,” 29.

⁴⁸H. J. Schroeder, trans. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 45.

⁴⁹John Calvin, “Antidote to the Sixth Session of Council of Trent on the Doctrine of Justification,” 31.

⁵⁰Oliver K. Olson and Franz Posset, trans. *Outmoded Condemnations?*, 45.

requires word wrangling and overlooking of the clear intent of both the condemnations of the Council of Trent and the Protestant doctrine. Since this is the case we must conclude with the authors of the work *Outmoded Condemnations?* that “the difference between the two is an antithetical definition of the relationship between God and man... and as long as there is no agreement on this, the denominational breach cannot be considered a mere fact of the past, nor a mere option for the future..., but remains the painful present.”⁵¹

Conclusion

This paper has asked the question: Did the Council of Trent actually condemn Protestant doctrine, or did they misunderstand it and merely condemn a caricature of it? It has examined the assertions made by modern proponents of the ecumenical movement and the arguments used to defend those assertions. It has looked into the history of the Council of Trent for clues that may shed light on what the Council fathers would have understood of the Reformer’s doctrine, and found that the estimation of Fenlon on this matter seems appropriate. “Some modern writers ... have supposed that there is no real contradiction between the Protestant doctrine of justification and the teaching of the Church of Rome. An historian cannot help wondering whether the process of [this] argument is not a little historically insensitive. Luther did not suppose that what he was saying was compatible with fidelity to the Church of Rome.”⁵² It has examined the canons themselves and found that they contain clear language that is directly aimed at the heart of the Reformer’s doctrinal formulations concerning justification.

⁵¹Ibid., 56.

⁵²Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy: Cardinal Pole and the Counter Reformation*, 21.

In conclusion, in response to the arguments given by ecumenical proponents for why the condemnations ought to be considered no longer applicable, several questions may be asked. At the Council of Trent, did the fathers see themselves at a definite point of opposition with the Reformers? Furthermore, did the historical situation provide ample opportunity for those within the Catholic Church to study and come to a clear understanding on just what the Reformers were teaching? To both of these questions this paper answers yes, to do otherwise would be to do history an injustice. However, did the Council fathers understand and define every single point of doctrine in the exact same way as the Reformers? Is it possible that there was some degree of misunderstanding between the two sides? This question may, and should, be answered in the affirmative without undermining the weight of the condemnations that the Church leveled at the Reformers. The purpose, after all was to juxtapose two *competing understandings* of the doctrine of justification so that one may be struck down and the other firmly established. This was what the Council of Trent set out to do, and this is what it accomplished, forever dividing the Church into two separate streams with distinct and competing understandings of what it means to be justified.

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CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH: A CATHOLIC CHURCH
GALATIANS 3:26–29¹

Mark Dever

Introduction

The Nicene Creed (written in 381AD) defines the attributes of the church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” We now come to that third attribute—catholic. What does “catholic” mean?

Though few today remember it, this was an explosive issue in presidential politics in America in the 20th century. Not just in 1960, but much more so in 1928. In that year, the Republican nominee, Herbert Hoover, faced the popular Democratic governor of New York, Al Smith. Smith was also a Roman Catholic. The first Roman Catholic to be nominated by a major party for the office of President of the United States. Anti-Catholic rumors abounded. Protestant marriages were to be annulled. The Pope was preparing to move to America. The new Holland Tunnel was being secretly extended to the Vatican. To alleviate concerns, Governor Smith decided to go to Oklahoma City in September to give a major speech on the matter of religion. And he did. But his speech was quickly forgotten when, the following night, in the same auditorium, the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church of New York City, John Roach Straton, came and gave a speech entitled “Al Smith and the Forces of Hell”! Straton was giving his time to denouncing Smith’s Catholicism. He equated Smith with the urban evils of “card playing, cocktail drinking, poodle dogs, divorces, novels, stuffy rooms, dancing,

¹Taken from *The Church: One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (ISBN 978-0-87552-614-0): Chapter 4, pages 67-92. Used with permission from P&R Publishing Co. (P O Box 817, Phillipsburg, N J 08865) www.prpbooks.com.

evolution, Clarence Darrow, overeating, nude art, prize-fighting, actors, greyhound racing, and modernism.”²

One eastern lady who had come to Oklahoma to support Smith and speak for him had a run in with a lady from a small town, who was a devout Baptist. “So you be the woman speaker, be you?” said the Oklahoman, “and you’re for Smith?”

“Yes,” said the Eastern lady.

“Well, I ain’t.”

“Perhaps if you would let me talk to you, I might change your mind,” said the Smith supporter.

“No you couldn’t” said the old woman. “Smith’s one of them Catholics and they brought in sprinklin’!”³

In their great wisdom and humor the organizers of our conference have asked a Southern Baptist minister to come and speak to you about “a catholic church.”

What is the catholicity of the church? And why is it significant for us to consider at this conference on Reformation theology?

The Roman Catholic Church says that it alone is the truly Catholic church. Their arguments are several:

1. Only they have a unified, world-wide authority.
2. Only they exist in every country.
3. Only they have always existed since Christ.
4. Only they have the fullness of grace and truth.
5. Only they are the majority of those who call themselves Christians.

In short, they claim to be everywhere and always. As their motto puts it, they are *semper eadem*, always the same.

²Paul F. Boller, Jr., *Presidential Campaigns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 226.

³Boller, 229.

I cannot affirm that “catholic” is an accurate description of that visible organization which is in submission to the authority of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. In fact, the two words Roman and Catholic together—one limiting, and the other universal—make up an oxymoron. No one church alone can rightly be called “The” catholic church.

The word “catholic” comes from the Greek word *katholikos* which means “whole, entire, complete, general, universal.” While this adjective is nowhere used of the church in the New Testament, or of anything else, the adverbial form of it does appear once in Acts 4:18, where the apostles are commanded not to speak or preach *at all katholou* in the name of Jesus. The simple equivalent for “catholic” in modern English is the adjective “universal.” Such universality is not the attribute of any one group of true Christians alone.

“Universal” or “catholic” is used primarily in opposition to “local.” While a local church is indigenous, in the sense that its members are taken from the local population, and it is able to congregate all together, its nature is one which is heavenly, which is in Christ, and which therefore can participate in the same unity, holiness and apostolicity which all other truly Christian churches participate in, regardless of where they may be located. In one sense, *the catholicism of the church is simply its other attributes—unity, holiness, apostolicity—appearing everywhere and anytime there has been a true church or true Christians.*

So the catholicity of the church is the simple acknowledgement that the church is not confined to any one place or people. In that sense it is not like the Jewish nation, which was limited to the bounds of one nation.

In this address, we want to examine catholicity first historically, and then exegetically, and then, finally, consider some practical implications of the catholic nature of the church.

History

First, let us consider the use of the word—and the idea behind it—historically. The first known occasion of the use of this word in connection with the church was in Ignatius of Antioch's letter to the Smyrnans, written around 112AD. Ignatius mentions that "where Jesus Christ is there is the universal church." Early writers believed in the catholic church, in the sense that they believed that Christians everywhere believed in one God, confessed one faith, had one baptism and shared one mission. In that sense, "catholic church" first meant real or authentic church.

From about the third century on, the word came to be used as particularly synonymous with orthodox. So, the "catholic" church was opposed to an heretical or schismatic church. Clement of Alexandria, around 200AD, wrote that "The one Church is violently split up by the heretics into many sects. In essence, in idea, in origin, in pre-eminence we say that the ancient Catholic Church is the only church. This Church brings together, by the will of the one God through the one Lord . . . those who were already appointed; whom God fore-ordained, knowing before the world's foundation that they would be righteous."⁴

By the middle of the fourth century, we find being added to the word not only the idea of authentic and orthodox (as opposed to false) but particularly the idea of the extensive reach of the church to every land and every class of person. Cyril of Jerusalem, lecturing to those preparing for baptism around 350AD clearly had this idea of what the word "Catholic" meant. He said that the church "is called Catholic then because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other; and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men's knowledge, concerning things both

⁴Henry Bettenson, ed., *The Early Christian Fathers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 247.

visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; and because it brings into subjection to godliness the whole race of mankind, governors and governed, learned and unlearned; and because it universally treats and heals the whole class of sins, which are committed by soul or body, and possesses in itself every form of virtue which is named, both in deeds and words, and in every kind of spiritual gifts.”⁵

In 381 the Nicene Creed defined the attributes of the church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” By the middle of the next century, the word “catholic” was inserted in the Apostles’ Creed.

By the time of the 11th century, when the eastern and western churches divided, the eastern writers clearly preferred the description “Orthodox”, while those in the west used the description “Catholic” but to mean essentially “Orthodox.” So from the second or third century, up until the modern period, the word “catholic” was a term used for exclusion and definition, to mark off regular from irregular, similar to the way modern conservative American Christians might say something is “evangelical” rather than a “cult.”⁶

As regional heresies sprang up in the early church, powerful apologists like Augustine refuted the heretics or schismatics by asking them how they could claim to be the universal church when they couldn’t be found in most places where the church was. In the early fifth century, Vincent of Lerins, a monk, laid down a threefold test for what is truly catholic—what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all. This has been called the

⁵Cyril of Jerusalem, in his *Catechetical Lectures*, trans. E. W. Gifford, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, volume 7, (rpt. Peabody, Massachusetts: Henrickson Publishers, 1994), 139-140.

⁶Ironically, in the modern period, the word “catholic” as an adjective has come to mean almost exactly the opposite—someone who doesn’t draw distinctions, and tries to learn from the good in all.

Vincentian Canon, and has been used, particularly by the church of Rome, to evaluate the worth of various traditions.

Now, as you can well understand, the Vincentian Canon proved to be difficult for the sixteenth-century Reformers. This was difficult because the Protestants were not everywhere, they were only in Europe. And the Protestants had not always existed; “Where was your church before Luther?” was the taunt. And the Protestants were not all the people of Christendom; their numbers were very small compared to those of the Church of Rome.

In what sense, then, could the new Protestant churches claim to be “catholic”? Luther and Calvin gave primacy in the definition of catholicity not to the “everywhere” and “by all” aspects, but to the “always.” They defined “universal” or “catholic” not as primarily a category about space, but time, not about the church’s spatial extensiveness, but it’s temporal continuity. In this sense, they spoke of their continuity with the apostolic church.

Question 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks “What believest thou concerning the ‘Holy Catholic Church’ of Christ?” Answer: “That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends and preserves to himself, by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church, chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am, and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.”

Ursinus commented, “The Church is called catholic, first in respect to place; because it is spread over the whole world, and is not tied or restricted to any particular place, kingdom, or certain succession. The catholicity of the church, in this respect, commenced at the time of the Apostles; because prior to this time the church was circumscribed in narrow limits, being confined to the Jewish nation. Secondly, in respect to men, because the church is gathered from all classes of men of every nation. Thirdly, in respect of time, because it will endure throughout

every period of the world: “I will be with you always even to the end of the world;” and because there is only one true Church of all times, which is of such a peculiar constitution as to embrace the whole world, and not to be tied down to any one particular place.” Since the church of Rome differed from the teaching of the apostolic church, it could not claim such temporal universality.

Among Protestants this idea of temporal catholicity—that is that the church that exists now is the same church in which the apostles were and are—has replaced, or at least largely supplanted, thoughts of catholicity in terms of space alone. In that sense, catholicity, among Protestants has seemed very much like apostolicity. To be apostolic is to be catholic, and to be catholic is to be apostolic, because the widespread acceptance of a teaching among self-confessed Christians is one of the marks of the truth of the teaching. The sense of the faithful is not unerring, but is normally correct.

What a comfort and encouragement this truth is to us! As James Bannerman put it, “The assemblies of Christians in every quarter of the globe, who worship God in sincerity and truth, are one in such a sense as their distance from one another admits of; and they must all be regarded as branches of the universal Church of Christ throughout the world, --the great community of believers, separated by distance and kindred and tongue, who cannot meet together in the body, but who really meet together in the Spirit. The invisible Church of Christ on earth is local, but it is also catholic.”⁷

Let me speak to Baptists particularly for a moment. Some Baptists have had a great reluctance to speak of any universal church at all, other than that final assembly of all the redeemed

⁷James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (rpt. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), volume I, pages 43-44.

in Heaven. Where does this hesitancy come from? This reluctance has been there not because we have thought that we are the only Christians. We do not now, nor have we ever believed that. But there are a few other reasons, each related to the others.

In part, this reluctance has come because of the understanding—common among Protestants—that the nearly universal definition of the church in the New Testament is “congregation.” This was so much taken to be the case that William Tyndale in his great work which stands behind all our English translations simply translated *evkkhlhsi*,^a as “congregation.” This strand of “congregation-only” ecclesiology has survived in various corners of Protestantism, including the 19th-century Landmark movement among Baptists, a movement that still has strength in many congregations.

Another part of Baptist reluctance to understand the visible church as having a catholic aspect on earth is the underlying assumption of many Christians that a visible church must have a visible organization. In a strange way, the Baptist insistence on the primacy of the congregational understanding of the church has led to our own kind of ecumenism. We share with most other Christians the idea that Christ’s church should be one, and we are confident that it is, and that that unity will one day be manifested perfectly. But before the Lord’s return, we feel that no officers, no organization, no polity has been given to all of that portion of the universal church which happens to be militant (alive) and visible at any one time, except for the officers, organization and polity of the local congregation. We may cooperate together with other Christians, but no organization of human invention (e.g., popes, general assemblies or conventions) should be allowed to usurp the Biblically-mandated authority of the local congregation gathered.

Still a third source of reluctance among Baptists to speak easily of the universal church as encompassing all visible

Christian churches has been our difficulty in understanding the existence of true (or at least regular) churches without the practice of baptism (which we understand to be only of believers). We would no sooner admit unbaptized persons to membership than would those of you who are our paedo-baptist brothers & sisters; and we have reached different conclusions about what baptism is than you have. These three considerations—or some combination of them—have led some Baptists and other evangelicals to sometimes deny the reality of the universal church anywhere other than in heaven.

But, the hesitations of some evangelicals aside, the New Testament in Matthew 16:18, in Ephesians (1:22-23; 3:10, 21; 4:4; 5:23-32) and elsewhere (*I Cor.* 10:32; 11:22; 12:28; *Col.* 1:18, 24; *Heb.* 12:23), clearly speaks of a church which is not merely local, but which is universal and catholic, and yet which exists not only in the future, but exists now, in this world. It needs no earthly head to create its unity; Christ alone is its head. It is marked by the word rightly preached, and by baptism and the Lord's Supper rightly administered to believers (and some would say, and to their children). It is this church—the universal church—and no one local church that has inherited the universal mission of the church that Christ set out in Matthew 28.

Sometimes we quote approvingly John Wesley's comment that "The world is my parish." And when we set Wesley's statement over against a narrow parochialism which appears unconcerned about what goes on outside one's own immediate community or sphere of responsibility, we can appreciate what he is saying. The sentiment is correct, even admirable.

However, strictly taken, Wesley's statement is false. Ride however many thousands of miles upon his horseback he might—being in Newcastle and Bristol every year—the world could never be Wesley's parish. He was limited in space and limited in time.

His mission was limited. No single Methodist chapel was the universal church. Nor was the whole Methodist conference, nor the church of England, nor all the Protestant churches in the 18th century.

Having said all that, there is still a sense in which it is correct that each Christian have a concern for all other Christians elsewhere, as God gives opportunity. After all, the universal church stretches across time from the cross to the consummation, and across space from Jerusalem to London to Buenos Aires to Tokyo. And they are all our extended family in Christ. This is the reality of the Catholic Church.

And though this “attribute” of the church is not talked about explicitly in Scripture, cherishing it helps to cherish the gospel, because it is rooted in the very dispute which is at the center of the New Testament from Acts on—the question of whether the church would be Jewish, or would be multi-national and multi-ethnic.

Paul, in Galatians, understood this question to be closely entwined with the very gospel itself. Let’s turn now to the book of Galatians and remind ourselves of what Paul was contending for there.

The Bible

Could both Jews and Gentiles be children of Abraham, and of God’s promises to Abraham? Basically, could they be children of God? Did it matter who their parents were or what nation they resided in? Though Paul didn’t ask the question with these words, you could also ask the question, “Is Christ’s Church Catholic?” For the answer, look particularly at Galatians 3:26-29.

²⁶You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷for [all of] you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor

female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

How are you forgiven of your sins, freed from its penalty and power and adopted into God's family? The false teachers among the Galatians evidently thought they were saved through Christ, but they didn't accept the idea that salvation came through Christ alone. They may have even thought that they had accepted the idea of faith in Christ being the way these blessings come; but they had certainly not understood that it is by faith alone, and not by observing the law. And it is this that brings us to the heart of the teaching of every part of the true, universal church.

Paul introduces the problem to us nicely by that line of questioning he engages in in Galatians 3:1-5:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

If you asked these people how they had received the Spirit, how they had been justified before God, declared innocent before Him, how they had been freed from the penalty of sin, and were even now being saved from the power of sin, as God had included them in His family—if you asked these Christians how all of these wonderful things had happened, you would find that there was a confusion arising among them.

Some were saying that all of this happened because they observed the Law. Others knew that all of this had happened simply because they had believed the gospel of Christ which they had heard. Who can say which was really the cause? True, Paul had taught that faith in Christ was the way, but now these other teachers, who were also claiming to be speaking as those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, were saying that observing the Law was not enough in itself, but that it was necessary. That teaching perhaps sounded a little strange at first in some of these young churches. It wasn't exactly what Paul had taught them, was it? But soon, that message began to sound more plausible.

It's amazing how opinions begin to seem credible by the simple repetition of a position, particularly if the people who advocate them are at all eloquent and earnest; even more, among Christians, if they're known to be personally pious. Perhaps that's how these teachers sounded.

And through their words, these teachers brought into question, the very gospel itself. Christ had died for our sins—they were not questioning that. They were not crude self-salvationists. Look at Galatians 1:3-4. *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father . . .* I think that they may have said they believed this. They may well have affirmed that God is holy and perfect, that He made us in His image, but that we had sinned against Him, and that Christ came to live and die and rise again, to bear and bear away God's wrath against us for our sins. But the point they were making is that we were to apprehend Christ and those benefits of His death how? We were to gain these hard won benefits' of Christ's death how? By believing? Just believing? Really? Then what about our lives? Do we really want to say that it is merely belief that is the means of obtaining the benefits that Christ has won for us? Or

now that we think of it, could it be our repentance? Our changing our way of life? Our adapting our living to God's revealed will?

Certainly God would not want His ancient people Israel to disappear by assimilation. Surely those special signs that marked off God's people—circumcision, Sabbath, sacrifices, ritual cleanness rules—surely these signs were to be continued. That would honor God, and His Word, wouldn't it? And surely the continuation of these signs would please God and would bring His Spirit's presence to us.

What do you think?

Whatever questions you may have, Paul had no doubt. In Galatians 3:1, he called those who were tempted to believe such things "*foolish.*" The Galatians were in great danger! Paul had preached clearly to them of what Christ had done, but now they seemed to be forgetting exactly that, or misunderstanding it. Paul had preached of the crucifixion of Christ among them, they had presumably partaken of the Lord's supper. They understood Christ's substitutionary death (which, thereby showed that they should have understood the futility of trying to gain salvation by obeying the Law).

So, rather than simply arguing with them, Paul asked them a question there in 3:2, that would send them back to indisputable truth—truth they themselves had experienced: *I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?*

Paul gave them two alternatives. It was, he said, either by observing the law, or by believing what you heard. "Now," he was saying, "which was it?" This was his basic question to those Galatian Christians throughout this little letter.

How do we win with God—How are we justified & declared righteous? How are we freed from sin's grip? From its grim wages

and its just punishment? How are we reconciled with God, and re-established in our relationship with Him?

These are the questions at the heart of Galatians, and the answer to this gives us, in no small part, the key to the description of the true catholic church.

First, Paul is concerned that all Christian churches everywhere teach how to be forgiven for our sins, or, as Paul puts it here, how to be justified. Granted that we sin, that we do that which we should not, and that we do not do what we should, how then on the last day can we hope to win, to be declared righteous by God, the Ever-Just Judge? Not by observing the Law, but by only faith in Christ alone.

What then is the answer? We win, we are justified, declared righteous not by observing the law, but by faith in Christ. Paul says that in Galatians 2:16 and again in 2:20 when he writes that *“the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

Paul returns to the object of our faith—Christ and what he has done for us. Paul had already mentioned this in his introduction, in 1:3-4. Christ is central. He is essential to what Paul is saying here. You shouldn’t think that Paul is teaching that our faith itself is the ground of our justification, the basis of it, the reason for it—the ground is only the work of Christ. Faith in Christ alone is simply the instrument by which God gives us our justification.

Reflecting on this wonderful truth, John Bunyan wrote about this in his spiritual autobiography, “But one day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, ‘Thy righteousness is in heaven:’ and methought withal, I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God’s right hand; there, I say, as my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was adoring, God could not say of me, ‘He wants [that

is, lacks] my righteousness,' for that was just before Him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."⁸

It is not the mere cognitive belief in justification by faith alone that will save you, but rather it is the personal trusting, the faithing in Christ alone by which God graciously unites us to Christ, to his suffering, death and resurrection, and thereby justifies us.

Paul also has a second concern that all Christian churches everywhere agree on: and that is on how we are to be freed from sin's penalty and power. And this freedom from sin comes not by observing the Law he says, but by faith in Christ alone. Look at Galatians 3:21-22:

Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

A third aspect of this great truth that Paul presents here that all truly Christian churches everywhere must agree on, is on how we could be included, adopted as God's children. These false teachers were obviously teaching that the way to relate to God is through observing the law. Paul, however, says that this leads only back into servitude. Remember what he said in 4:9, "Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?"

⁸John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 229.

The way to have a relationship with God—whoever, whenever, wherever—is by faith in Christ alone. Paul says they—Jewish and Gentile believers—are all sons of God. Look with me at that great text which has within it the universal nature of the church, Galatians 3:26-4:7:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

This is the background to Paul's use of the contrast between Abraham's two sons—one by the free woman, and one by the slave woman, sketched out there at the end of chapter four. And we Christians are, Paul says in 4:28, *like Isaac . . . children of promise*. All Christians—Jewish or Gentile—have been adopted as Free Sons with full rights.

So Paul taught that the unity of the Galatian Christians came by means of faith in Christ alone. And note how this unity did not come—through the works of the law (see Gal. 2:16). The thrust of Paul's argument in the passage above is from *all sons* in verse 26 to *all one* in verse 28.

This is important because the Galatian teachers were teaching a different way; a distinction between those Galatian Christians who were circumcised and those Galatian Christians who were not circumcised. So these false teachers were teaching an identity, and a unity not based solely on the faith which they all supposedly shared, but on cultural practices.

The practical importance of the uniqueness of faith then begins to appear. There is one way for all people, and that unity reflects the unity of God. Paul has argued back in 3:7 that all of these Christians together are children of Abraham exactly because they are justified by faith alone. Unity in Christ knows no cultural, class or gender distinctions. Paul was being emphatic about this. A skeptic could say that he had really gambled his ministry on this very point.

Again, look at Galatians 3:28-29: ²⁸*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* ²⁹*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

The false teachers were trying to introduce another way, which would balkanize the body, and so reflect Christ falsely. Their way would make Christ appear divided when He is not. All of this unifying happened through the one who is the seed of Abraham. The fact that that seed is referred to in the singular in Genesis is Paul's point in Galatians 3:16 and 3:19. Have you noticed Paul's statement there in those verses?

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ. . . . What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

Talk about believing that every word is inspired! Paul believes that a noun being singular rather than plural is of immense significance! Through this one Seed, the promise has come to all who believe.

I wonder if this section surprises you? Did you assume that we are all born children of God? No, friends, we must be adopted. Though we were created by Him, we had separated ourselves from Him by our sins. The Bible even calls us naturally enemies of God.

But here, in Christ, a way is made for us to be rescued from slavery to sin. And more than that! Isn't it wonderful, that God didn't simply rescue us from slavery by redeeming us, but that He went further, that He adopted us as sons? Imagine a wealthy man, taking a slave youth, and not just giving him his freedom, but also making him his son! That and so much more is what God has done for us in Christ!

So we read in Galatians 4:4-7:

⁴But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶Because you are sons, God sent out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

What a privilege! Look again at verse 6: *Because you are sons, God sent out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."* This is the other sending. So, God sent His Son into our world, and then he sent *the Spirit of His Son*. How did you imagine that you were accepted into God's family? Did you think it was perhaps by your attendance at church? Turn up enough, and maybe He'll start to know your name? Did you think it was by the growing righteousness of your own life? Friends, we cannot perform ourselves into God's family.

Such a glorious adoption does not come by our obeying God's laws, but by trusting in Jesus Christ, and His righteousness, whoever we are.

This is what all true Christians everywhere have always believed. This is the truly catholic faith of the truly catholic church.

Some Implications

Finally and briefly, what are some of the implications of the universality of the church? Understanding the catholicity of the church cuts against some problems in our churches.

1) *Contra-provincialism.* An understanding of the catholicity of the church is a blessing in that it cuts across the mild provincialisms of our world. How many times have we heard in a church the justification for this or that practice, "but we've always done it this way." Paul to the Galatians was calling them back to continue in a way they had begun in—the very gospel itself. But our traditions are sometimes not as firmly rooted in the very gospel itself. They are sometimes of more recent origin, and more particular to our own country, our own denomination, our own congregation, even our own preferences.

The universal church is not to entrust itself to the will of any one earthly pastor, whether in Rome or elsewhere. While the universal church exists in all cultures, it should be limited to none. The gospel is displayed when Christians of different cultures show themselves all preaching and believing the same gospel.

Some things we take for granted, and become wrongly committed to, that we never submit to the searching examination of Scripture. This is one reason that travel can be useful for a Christian—getting out to see how they do it in other places. One of the quickest ways to grow in understanding your own culture

is to live in another one. Things which you've always assumed, you begin to realize are not assumed by others. Is there a correct way? A right answer? Sometimes there is; but sometimes there isn't. It is useful to know what is of the essence of the faith, and what is merely a certain particular expression of it. Understanding the truly catholic nature of the true church works against our provincialism.

2) *Contra sectarianism.* From a congregational perspective like my own, denominations are para-church organizations. But even for those of you with a presbyterian or episcopalian polity, you recognize that your own "church" and its distinctives are not coextensive with the universal church. Therefore, denominations, and those distinctives which separate us off from other evangelicals should never be allowed to become ultimate.

So, confessing that there is a catholic church does not mean that denominations are necessarily wrong. Insofar as they allow Christians in conscience to work for the kingdom, and they do not breed an uncharitable, and wrongly divisive spirit, they can be helpful. But the recognition of what we hold in common among true, faithful Christians must always be valued more highly and held more deeply than that which divides us.

The gospel is displayed in its essentials when our distinctives are relegated to important, but non-essential status. Understanding the truly catholic nature of the true church works against our wrong sectarianism.

3) *Contra racism.* This great truth of the universal nature of the true church seriously challenges our uni-racial churches. Certainly it disallows any kind of churches which only allow people of one race into their membership.

And it at least raises questions about the practical segregation that we know in our churches. God forgive our historically Caucasian congregations for any of the ways we have

wrongly forbidden those of other races from joining us. Also, in America, there is a great story in the African-American churches that were built by our Christian brothers and sisters who knew so much oppression and misery from their Christian “masters.” In black churches, black Christians were allowed to exercise leadership and make decisions. From tiny financial means, they built great churches and denominations.

Nevertheless, today, it has to be said that our racially divided congregations do not commend the gospel. Understanding the catholic nature of the catholic church at least raises a question about the church which has a multi-racial surrounding populations but whose congregation is composed of only one race. Why is this the case? What has been done to better display the fact that the gospel is not limited to this one kind of person? What can we do?

Charles Bridges began his wonderful book on the Christian ministry with the statement that “The Church is the mirror, that reflects the whole effulgence of the Divine character. It is the grand scene, in which the perfections of Jehovah are displayed to the universe.”⁹ My friends, this perfect God is not white. And He’s not black. He’s not Asian, and He’s not European. We must divide for practicality over language. As much as we can, let us not divide our churches for other cultural reasons. The gospel is displayed when those whom the world understands as having no reasons for commonality, and perhaps even have reasons for animosity, stand together, united in love.¹⁰ Understanding the

⁹Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980), 1.

¹⁰Two qualifications I would make to this call are divisions first, for the purpose of language, and second, for the purpose of evangelism. Language is an inherent part of the Christian life. If preaching is to be central to the congregation’s life, it should be understood. Therefore, organizing congregations around understood languages is necessary.

truly catholic nature of the truly catholic church works against our racisms.

4) *Contra churches becoming para-churches.* Having a ministry to evangelize one particular group of people—for example college students, or businessmen—or disciple one particular group—mothers of young children, or those in the military—are understandable Christian endeavors. These are what many Christian parachurch ministries are about. Yet trying to constitute an entire Christian congregation as a kind of niche-only church seems to defeat the very display that the church is to be.

It is entirely appropriate for a group of Christians to band together to work among blue- or white-collar workers, or among skate-boarders, or any other countless number of groups by which people identify themselves. But the truly catholic witness of the church to the fact that the gospel is for every kind of person is undermined when we allow such a specific vision or mission statement to focus an entire congregation only on one small part of what a congregation is to be. God, in His sovereignty, will use various congregations differently. And we trust that that is part of His glorious display of Himself. But what it is that actually composes any and every congregation does not change, and we should never make the congregation more specific than God does, lest we unwittingly miscommunicate about the universality of God's concern in the gospel.

Second, evangelistic outreaches can certainly focus on one particular sub-group in a culture. But such a desire for evangelizing a group or community should be very careful not to distort the gospel by the churches they begin, the very churches which are intended by Christ to personify the gospel. Ephesians 2, Acts 6 and Revelation 7 are good chapters to consider carefully for some of the reasons and challenges of multi-ethnic congregations.

God's gospel is more greatly magnified when our churches display a greater range of the kinds of people that Christ saves by His own mercy. Understanding the truly catholic nature of the truly catholic church undermines our misguided attempts at subjugating God's church to one particular ministry of it, and so obscuring the comprehensive nature of Christ's mission.

In conclusion, we must see that Christ chooses the living stones that compose His church, not us. And, by God's grace, we can savingly trust in Christ anywhere, anytime, regardless of who our parents are. The catholicity of the church is rooted in and bounded by the catholicity of the gospel. Anytime, anywhere, any one can be forgiven of their sins by faith alone in the one and only Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the true catholic doctrine of the true catholic church. If your church doesn't teach that, it isn't catholic, no matter what's on the sign outside.

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THE REFORMATION IN ZAMBIA AND AFRICA

Conrad Mbewe

It has been said, and I think rightly so, that when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of his church in Wittenberg on the morning of Sunday 31st October 1571 he had no clue what that one act was going to result in for the rest of human history. All that Martin Luther wanted was a debate on the selling of indulgences, which no doubt had outraged him. He felt very strongly that it was wrong and he was willing to prove it. However, the domino effect of that one act of his putting a summary of his arguments against the selling of indulgences on the church door resulted in what has since been called “the Protestant Reformation” and has engulfed humanity for the next 500 years.

In this article, I wish to trace how this Protestant Reformation found its way from Germany in 1517 to Zambia in Central Africa. I also wish to discuss how its principal teachings have been spreading across the country and impacting the continent. It is my hope and prayer that a recounting of this reality will result in a renewed appreciation of the grace of God to us here in Zambia and will redound to the praise and glory of the God that was honoured by the men and women who risked their lives in embracing and propagating the Reformed Faith.

The meaning of “Reformation”

To begin with, we need to define what we mean by the term “Reformation”. Historically, it is the movement associated with men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, etc., in Europe in the 16th century. However, it is best defined by its doctrinal beliefs. What were its primary tenets? Perhaps the best encapsulation of the doctrinal beliefs of the Protestant

Reformation is in what has been termed as “the Five Solas of the Reformation”. This refers to the five statements by which the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was defined by the Reformers. These five statements are:

1. By Scripture alone (Sola Scriptura)
2. By faith alone (Sola Fide)
3. By grace alone (Sola Gratia)
4. Through Christ alone (Solus Christus)
5. To the glory of God alone (Soli Deo Gloria)

In summary, the Reformers taught that the only basis for us to understand the gospel is Scripture (without bringing in the teaching of Popes and Church Councils). Once the data in Scripture was examined, it became clear that salvation was by faith alone (without good works), by grace alone (without any merit on our part), through the finished work of Christ alone (without any help from the Virgin Mary or any saints or priests), and to the glory of God alone. Notice how the emphasis on “alone” excluded various options and additions that the church over time had added to the gospel. I trust that other writers have covered this matter in this journal.

The Reformation comes to Central Africa

How did this understanding of the gospel of salvation find its way to this part of Africa? It was initially through the labours of the well-known explorer and missionary, Dr. David Livingstone (1813–1873). The Protestant Faith came to the coastal regions of West Africa, South Africa, and East Africa in the 19th century through various Protestant missionary societies. Jonathan Hildebrandt wrote, “It is not until the beginning of the seventeenth century that we first begin to read about Protestant missionary efforts. However, those efforts were rather small and not very effective. In the eighteenth century there was a little more activity, but when this is compared with the nineteenth

century, it seems very small indeed.”¹ David Livingstone himself was sent by the London Missionary Society (LMS) and initially settled in what is now South Africa. However, he was not content to remain there and so trekked into Central Africa, which at that time was a blank space on the world map. His trekking in this part of the world was dangerous due to wild animals and slave traders. It, however, enabled geographers to update the world map and open up this part of the world to civilisation and Christianity.

David Livingstone urged Protestant missionary societies to send missionaries into Central Africa whenever he had the opportunity to do so, especially during his visits back in the United Kingdom. Soon after he died, many of these missionary societies sent missionaries into Central Africa. By the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th century almost all the major tribes of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) had at least one missionary society working among them. The proof that the Zambian people appreciated the labours of David Livingstone can be seen in what transpired when Zambia gained independence from Great Britain in 1964. All the towns that had foreign names had their names changed to African names...except the town called Livingstone. To this day, it is the only town in the whole of Zambia with a foreign name.

A Comity Arrangement was entered into by many of these Protestant missionary societies, which enabled them to concentrate on one specific major tribal grouping per society. This was a real blessing initially because by concentrating on only one tribal language, the missionary society could use its small team of missionaries to major in that language and produce the grammars for it and ultimately translate the whole Bible into that language. This added great efficiency to the work of evangelising

¹Hildebrandt, Jonathan, 1990. *History of the Church in Africa*. African Christian Press, Achimoto, p. 70.

the local people and developing indigenous leaders for the young fledgling churches.

However, what was once a blessing in due season became a curse. The Protestant denominations that grew out of the Comity Arrangement began to identify themselves more with the tribe that they comprised of rather than the Protestant doctrinal position of their church. For instance, the Reformed Church in Zambia was identified with the Nyanja speaking people, the United Church in Zambia was identified with the Bemba speaking people, the Baptist Church was identified with the Lamba speaking people, and the Brethren in Christ Church was identified with the Tonga speaking people. All these are Protestant churches but the emphasis in the church was not so much what they believed doctrinally but what tribe they belonged to. Even when such churches were planted in the more urban centres where there is a mixture of tribes in the same town and English is the primary language of communication, you will still find that one tribal group still dominates the church. By the end of the 20th century, almost all the Protestant churches are in the hands of indigenous leaders but the Protestant doctrinal emphasis of the pioneering missionaries has been largely lost. Many church leaders do not know what is contained in the doctrinal sections of their church constitutions—and they are not bothered that they do not know. This has been a tragic loss.

Many of the Protestant churches have Bible colleges dotted around the country. There, those who are training to become pastors are taught the doctrinal position of their churches. Yet, their understanding tends to be that these doctrinal truths are only for them because they would be filling the pulpits of their churches to preach to their congregations. When they go into the churches there is very little effort to teach the congregants “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20). Thus the ignorance of basic Protestant tenets is tragic in the churches in Zambia. Many of the

churches are Protestant in name only.

Reformed Baptists in Zambia

There has been a group of churches in Zambia that has mushroomed in the last 30 years that has had a rather different emphasis. They are a totally indigenous movement, having started without the involvement of any international missionaries. Their primary emphasis has been doctrinal rather than tribal or denominational. This group of churches has come to be called the “Reformed Baptist” churches.² They are baptistic in their church polity but lay a lot of emphasis on the tenets of the Reformation as their doctrinal distinctive. Their churches have adopted a fuller doctrinal statement than most churches care to even look at. Their doctrinal basis is the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. Although these churches are fewer in number than almost all the other Protestant church groupings, their doctrinal emphasis has caused them to be noticed and to have a growing impact not only in Zambia but also across the continent of Africa.

It would be wrong to suggest that only these churches are Reformed in terms of officially holding on to the tenets of the Protestant Reformation because there are many other churches in the country that would call themselves “Reformed” in that sense. Some of them, like the Presbyterian Church, even have the Westminster Confession of Faith as their doctrinal standard. The Reformed Church in Zambia uses the Belgic Confession of Faith as its doctrinal standard. The main difference between the Zambian Reformed Baptist churches and these other churches is that for

²Since I am part of this movement it may sound like someone blowing their own trumpet. I was asked to write on this topic by the editors and have attempted to be as objective as possible. Nonetheless, my bias will probably still be noticed in this section. I beg your pardon.

the former there is doctrinal clarity and robustness even among the ordinary church members. For most churches, their doctrinal statement lies archived in their church constitutions. It is not a living and active document among their members. The Reformed Baptists actually study the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith and give it to their members to read. Thus, you hear the phrase “the Reformed Faith” even on the lips of their young people. These youths argue about the Five Points of Calvinism with those who think that the doctrines of predestination and election, or limited atonement and the final perseverance of the saints, are wrong. The 5 Solas are often topics for their youth meetings and camps. The church magazine that their churches run is called *Reformation Zambia*. Their annual conference is called “The Zambian Reformed Conferences”. So, you are not long among them before you start wanting to know and gain clarity on what this “Reformation” is all about!

Another reason the Reformed Baptists in Zambia have had this clarity is that they have had a well thought through cessationist position with respect to the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. Again, they are not the only ones. With the coming of the Pentecostal movement into Zambia, and as it matured into what has come to be called the Charismatic movement, many churches have suffered haemorrhage at best or actual splits at worst. Three major splits that have taken place in churches that grew out of the Protestant Reformation due to the growth and influence of the Charismatic movement in Zambia have been in the Christian Brethren, the United Church in Zambia, and the Reformed Church in Zambia. The three churches that were born out of these splits were the Christian Fellowship of Zambia, the Grace Ministries, and Bible Gospel Church of Africa. Why has this been the case with these and other churches? This has often been because their members cannot go to the Bible itself and show how it teaches that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit ceased with the

passing on of the apostles. They simply accept it as the position of their church. Thus they have been swept off their feet by the so-called apostles and prophets who have descended upon the evangelical church today, claiming to be hearing directly from God a word for his people. The efforts made by their church leaders to stop the haemorrhage or prevent the splits is often “too little too late”.

One more reason why the Reformed Baptists in Zambia have had a greater emphasis on the Reformed Faith is that they have never felt that this is something foreign that they have to accept. What do I mean by this? Often when foreign missionaries start churches, indigenous people take long to own the message being taught in all its fullness. They unconsciously tend to be content with the heart of the gospel message. Foreign missionaries are, therefore, often looking for indigenous leaders who will show that they have not only understood the message being brought to them “hook, line, and sinker” but that they also own it passionately. Such leaders take long to come up. Even when they do, the congregations they are leading take even longer to embrace the full message because they still see it as belonging to the missionaries. The Reformed Baptists in Zambia did not need to go through that process because from the beginning they have been an indigenous movement based on the Reformed Faith. Their pioneering leaders were already Zambian Christians who were constantly pointing to the Bible to say that the Reformed Faith is what the Bible itself teaches. They have seen themselves as inheriting a historic faith from a bygone era rather than being taught a faith from across the oceans. This is something unconscious. However, it has resulted in a greater level of owning of the Reformed Faith by the men and women in the pews and not only by those who preach to them.

It is this excitement with the Reformed Faith among indigenous Africans that I am tracing in terms of its growth and

impact on the continent, rather than the growth and impact of churches and denominations that would consider themselves to have come from the Protestant Reformation. By doing so, I am not suggesting in any way that the latter grouping is not important. It is. In many African countries, the churches and denominations that can trace their spiritual lineage from the Protestant Reformation have kept the Christian Faith going on the continent since our pioneering missionaries arrived on our shores. They have built churches, trained leaders, and shaped much of the Africa that we have today. However, in this 500th year of the Protestant Reformation it is vital that we see where the Africans themselves on the African continent are conspicuously cherishing the truths of the Protestant Reformation.

Reformation in “Black” South Africa

Let us take the example of South Africa. Once upon a time, the phrase “Reformed Faith” on the lips of a black³ man or woman would have been considered a betrayal of the black population there. This was because it was deeply associated with the Dutch Reformed Church, who were the architects of the Apartheid philosophy that resulted in the oppression of the black people of South Africa. However, in the recent past there have been a significant and growing number of people across South Africa,

³You will notice that I have suddenly changed from using the word “African” to the use of the word “black” in describing indigenous Africans. This is because in South Africa the more popular way of calling the people I have thus far had in mind as indigenous Africans is by the phrase “black”. This is because there are many “white” people in South Africa who have been there for so many generations that they consider themselves to be indigenous Africans. They have no other home. They feel precisely the same way as Americans feel whose great grandparents many generations ago emigrated there from other continents. They are Americans! So, while we deal with South Africa I will use “black” and “white”.

who are largely young professionals in their twenties and thirties, and who have recently embraced the Reformed Faith. They have come to this position almost exclusively by listening to sermons on the Internet. Having grown up within extreme Charismatic or mainline Liberal church circles that are Protestant, they did not know any better. However, a growing discontentment has caused them to search the Internet for sermons that would feed their famished souls.

In due seasons, they have come across sermons of men like John MacArthur Jr., John Piper, and Paul Washer. Sometimes, it has been because a friend in church or across town or even in another part of the country has made the discovery and commended the site to them. Sometimes this search has been occasioned by a lively debate among them over Christian doctrine. With the Internet now available on smartphones, they have gone searching for answers so as to return the next day with arguments to win the day. This has landed them in the laps of these preachers. The testimony of these young men and women has been universally the same. They have listened to a few of the sermons and felt like men and women who have been starved for years and who have now stumbled into a room with food meant for a king. Hence, they have listened to everything that they can lay their hands on. They have also foraged the blogosphere for Reformed discussions and monologues. Upon listening to a number of these preachers, they have invariably added names and words to their vocabulary that they either never knew existed or had been wrongly informed about. They have come to know about preachers like John Calvin, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, plus a whole host of Puritan writers, etc. They have read anything they could find written by them.

They have wrestled with and finally come to know and love the doctrines of grace and the basics of the Reformed Faith. All this has been happening while they are still going to the churches

that believe the exact opposite of what they have now come to embrace. This has set them on the path of searching for churches on the continent that believe what they have now come to believe.

Whereas previously the Reformed Faith in this robust form was almost a monopoly of the “white” South Africans and “blacks” shunned the R-word because of its associations with Apartheid, yet these “black” young adults love the R-word and are changing the demographics altogether. A number of them have come up with a Facebook page that they are calling “Township Reformation”. Their cover photo has the word “Reformed” screaming out at you. Then the subtitle reads, “Explicitly Calvinistic Language, Christocentric Themes, and Strong References to Sovereignty.” This is not coming from graduates of Bible colleges with theological degrees. These are young professionals expressing their newfound faith!

As the frustration grows among these young professionals due to their failure to find churches in their own townships in South Africa that unashamedly proclaim the truths of the Reformed Faith, they have begun to look to the Zambian Reformed Baptist movement for help. They want to establish churches in their own townships that will reflect what they have come to believe. In the meantime, the African Pastors Conferences, which use pastors from the Zambian Reformed Baptist movement to speak at their conferences, have been holding conferences in the South African townships that emphasise the Reformed Faith. During these conferences, good Christian books from Reformed and Evangelical publishers are sold at considerably discounted prices and even given out freely to all participants. Through these conferences, the Zambian movement is having an impact not only on the South African situation but also in other African countries where these conferences are being held. At the time of writing this article, the

African Pastors Conferences are being held in Zambia, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria.

Reformation in other African countries

What is happening in South Africa is also happening in other English-speaking African countries. The Reformed Faith lies buried in the constitutions of mainline Protestant churches while the pulpit that once was powerfully evangelical has now suffered the blight of Liberalism or gone off the rails promising social miracles in the direction of the Charismatic movement. As this sad situation obtains, there is a fresh wind of Reformation that is emphasising the Reformed Faith once again as we have seen in the South African situation.

Look for instance at Kenya. The mainline Protestant churches have been there for many years. They have many churches scattered around the country, with many pastors. However, the teachings of the Reformation have not been the staple diet in many of these denominations outside their Bible colleges. This has begun to change as more and more Kenyan pastors are finding these truths and wanting them to be known among their congregants. A case in point is a recent movement called “Reformation Carried Forward by Kenyans (RECFOK)”. The pastors who are involved in this movement are basically saying that it is time for Kenyans themselves to push the Reformation agenda instead of waiting for foreign missionaries to lead the way.

This is beginning to happen in Sierra Leone, in Nigeria, in Uganda, in Swaziland, in Botswana, in Namibia, in Malawi, etc. Many of the church leaders in these countries are looking to Zambia not only for inspiration as a role model but also for tangible help. Ultimately, these are indigenous movements that should have a lighting and salting effect on the churches and on their nations. The Reformation as a robust doctrinal movement is

growing across Africa!

Conclusion

The growth of the Reformation not only in Zambia but also in a small way across Africa must be appreciated in terms of the effect it is sure to have on the health of the churches. The twin evils of Liberalism and the African version of the Charismatic movement with its apostles and prophets have not spared the African church. In both cases, the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is being lost in the churches. The word “gospel” is still heard in such churches, but the heart of the gospel as defined for us in the Protestant Reformation is largely lost. Liberalism has turned churches into nothing more than social organisations that want to improve the living conditions of the African people through provision of clean water, political peace, educational and health facilities, etc. The Charismatic movement has turned churches into moneymaking machines for pastors. Congregants are being financially defrauded and sexually abused. Their churches are full but that has nothing to do with spiritual vitality because those who attend such churches are looking for temporal blessings in the form of miraculous jobs, marriages, pregnancies, healing, etc.

Whereas, as we have seen, there are many other churches that have not gone in those two routes, it is the churches that have emphasised the teaching of the Reformed Faith that have a robustness of doctrine that enables them to challenge these twin evils. Without going back 500 years in time to the Protestant Reformation they nonetheless have come to embrace the same truths that once caused the cleavage to occur between the Roman Catholic Church and the new Protestant churches. They celebrate those truths in the fuller doctrinal confessions that they read and study. Those truths give the Bible an unrivalled place among them. They uphold it in its supernatural form against all the

wilting effects of Liberalism. They also uphold it in its sufficiency against all the wildfires of the Charismatic movement. As such churches grow and multiply across Africa, we look forward to a better day when Christians being shepherded in healthier churches will have a positive spiritual impact on the continent. May that day come soon!

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THE REFORMATION AND THE TERMS “REFORMED” AND “REFORMED THEOLOGY”

Kennedy Bota

Introduction

Although ‘The Protestant Reformation’ refers to a phenomenal historical event or movement which occurred in Western Europe and Christendom during the 16th Century, the terms ‘Protestant Reformation’, reference to ‘Reformed’ and ‘Reformed Theology’, ‘Reformed Doctrine’, ‘the Reformed Faith’, etc., 500 years down the line, is not universally descriptive of all the offshoot or successors and all theology and doctrinal positions resultant from this historical event. The renderings ‘Reformed’ and ‘Reformed Theology’, ‘Reformed Doctrine’ and ‘the Reformed faith’ have over the years attained distinctive identity and meaning which is clearly distinguishable from other positions and theologies and doctrines traceable to this said single historical movement, the Protestant Reformation. In other words the terms ‘Reformed’ and ‘Reformed Theology’ and ‘Reformed Doctrine’ are not representative of all the doctrinal and theological positions that emerged from the one historical event, the Reformation. This article seeks to trace and mark out the historical developments in church history relating to what has defined and distinguished the position or status ‘Reformed’, and ‘Reformed Theology’ and ‘Reformed Doctrine’.

The Reformation

The Protestant Reformation as a historical event could be severally defined, but it is essentially understood to be a movement aimed to purge or end the abuses prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church and restore the doctrine and practices which the Reformers perceived not to be in conformity with the

Scriptures and the New Testament model of the Church. The Reformation ended the ecclesiastical supremacy which the Pope as head of the Roman church had enjoyed over centuries and resulted in the establishment of Protestant churches. A momentous world historical movement, the Reformation is reckoned as being “the greatest event or series of events that has occurred since the close of the canon of Scriptures.”¹

Although the general ramification of the Reformation was cross-cutting as it affected all spheres of society – literature, civilization, individuals, liberty and general social order – it was fundamentally a religious movement. Issues central to the Reformation were related to three principles: the sole authority of the scriptures, justification by faith alone and, the priesthood of the believer. And the populace emerged out of the Reformation with enhanced opportunities to make a choice of either remaining a Catholic or opting to be a Protestant of one sort or another.

The Epithets Reformed and Reformed Theology

The Epithet ‘Reformed’

In theological and ecclesiastical terms, the term ‘Reformed’ is a term not used merely as it is used in common parlance generally. Rather, it is readily identified with some specific theological position.² Getting back to the height of the Reformation – and importantly so – the term ‘Reformed’ attained a clear distinction from the term ‘Lutheran’ for example. The

¹William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 1.

²One case in point is the entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of English* 3rd edition (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010) 1493 defines reformed only from the perspective of ‘Reformed Church’ as ‘Church that has accepted the principles of the Reformation, especially a Calvinistic Church (as distinct from Lutheran).’

authors of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* put this across in the following words:

Originally, the word ‘reformed’ was used indiscriminately by all the established churches having common cause against Rome, including Lutherans; but the disputes over Christ’s presence in the elements of the Last Supper, which grew grave in 1529, *separated the Lutherans from the Reformed*. The Reformed movement began in Switzerland and spread rapidly to Germany, the Netherlands, England, Wales, Scotland, Hungary, Poland, and America.³ (Emphasis supplied)

Arguably, the ‘Sacramentarian Controversy’⁴ was one characteristic tipping point in the unity among the Reformers. Like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli of Switzerland was German speaking and had espoused the Protestant cause and his ideas came to the attention of Martin Luther and other Reformers. Zwingli though belonged to a constituency different from Luther’s and desiring to foster unity on the Protestant Reformation front, a German royalty by the name of Prince Philip of Hesse facilitated a meeting between the two men – Zwingli and Luther. Disagreement on the one issue relating to sacraments stood out so much that the meeting has been described as a ‘complete failure.’⁵ The year was 1529 and following this disastrous meeting, the Swiss brethren associated themselves

³*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co. 1967), Vol. 12, 190.

⁴William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 107.

⁵Wikipedia, “Protestant Reformation”, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant_Reformation, accessed on October 28, 2016.

into an organisation called the Reformed Church in contradistinction from what emerged to be referred to as the Lutheran Church.⁶ Cunningham overtly and decidedly partisan and inclined to Zwingli's camp describes the difference between the two camps as follows:

But the great error of Luther, that which gives the most unfavorable impression of his character and mental structure, and which, in its influence, most extensively injured his usefulness and obstructed the cause of the Reformation, was his obstinate adherence to the unintelligible absurdity, commonly called Consubstantiation, -the real presence not of Christ but of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, or the co-existence, in some way, of the real flesh and blood of Christ, in, with, or under, in, cum, or sub, the bread and wine in the Eucharist. This was the real remnant of Popery, to which, after throwing almost everything in the doctrine of the Papists upon this subject that makes it valuable to them and offensive to us, viz., transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of the one into that of the other, as implying the annihilation of the substance of the bread and wine, -the sacrifice of the Mass, -and the adoration of the host founded on this transubstantiation, *he adhered with an obstinacy and intolerance most discreditable and most injurious to the Reformed cause. This was the chief subject of controversy, among the Reformers, in the earlier period of their labors.*⁷ (Emphasis supplied)

⁶S.M. Houghton, *Sketches from Church History*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 100.

⁷William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 106.

By way of emphasis, it needs to be re-iterated that it is from this juncture of the fallout or unresolved doctrinal difference between Zwingli and Luther that there opened up the specific identification of Reformed churches which were part of the Protestant Reformation. This was a development that occurred pretty early in the Reformation subsequent to which the Reformed constituency within and among the Reformers was identified with or adherent to the Helvic Confessions of Faith – one published in 1536 and another in 1566. The Helvic Confession of Faith of 1566 is recognized as one of the most authoritative statements of Reformed Theology.

Identified with the Reformed churches during the Reformation were Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, Heinrich Bullinger and John Calvin. Although John Calvin was not the first but in fact only a subsequent player in the Reformation, his doctrinal position and principles ultimately became so dominant that the Reformed churches became identified with him than any other.

There is a strand identified with the Reformed churches traceable to the 1529 Sacramentarian Controversy and identified with the Helvic Confessions of Faith which represents a “tradition of interpretation of the Scriptures”, as Paul Helms⁸ puts it, based upon Scripture which is a strand that is navigated by Calvin and his successors in different European countries and is identified *inter alia* with the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1648, the Savoy Confession of Faith of 1658 and the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. It is this strand which is ‘Reformed’.

One broad summation of the position ‘Reformed’ is what is stated on the Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) website, viz:

⁸Paul Helms, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trist, 1982), 2.

We call ourselves reformed because RTS is rooted in the Protestant Reformation. In the sixteenth century, many believers protested against false teaching in the church and returned to the true gospel under the leadership of Reformers such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. The term “Reformed” was associated primarily with Calvin’s work in the church of Geneva, but all Protestant Reformers held certain cardinal views in common.⁹

Tim Challies’ attempt at a definition is more specific albeit compendious when he effectively propounds that although finding a worthwhile definition of ‘Reformed’ is difficult, one definition that is more complete is one by Professor Byron Curtis who breaks the definition into four parts being, first to confess the consensus of the five first centuries of the church; second, to confess the five solas; three, to confess the distinctives of the Reformed faith; four, to affirm other Reformed Distinctives - which include the Regulative Principle of Worship and Covenant theology - and finally, in everything, giving God the glory, *Soli Deo Gloria*.¹⁰ There is also the idea that to be Reformed is to be predisposed to the principle that the work of Reformation must continue and that the sixteenth century Reformation was incomplete and ought to be continued in keeping with the Reformation slogan, *‘Ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda secuncdum verbum Dei’* (meaning, ‘the Church Reformed and always reforming according to the word of God’); the short form being, *‘Semper Reformanda’* (meaning, ‘Always Reforming’). Reformed means seeking the reformation of doctrine according to the Bible and only making reference to leaders like John Calvin

⁹“The Reformed Tradition”, http://www.rts.edu/site/about/reformed_tradition/reformed_tradition, accessed on April 19, 2017.

¹⁰Tim Challies, “What it Means to Be Reformed”, <http://www.challies.com/articles/what-it-means-to-be-reformed>, accessed on April 21, 2017

only because “they were men who stood for the principle *sola scriptura*.”¹¹

To be Reformed is tied to Calvin or Calvinism and this is evident from an entry in Wikipedia when it is said of Calvinism as follows:

Calvinists broke from the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. Calvinism differs from Lutherans on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, theories of worship, and the use of God's law for believers, among other things. Its basic principle is that the Bible is to be interpreted by itself, meaning the parts that are harder to understand are examined in the light of other passages where the Bible is more explicit on the matter. The term *Calvinism* can be misleading, because the religious tradition which it denotes has always been diverse, with a wide range of influences rather than a single founder. The movement was first called *Calvinism* by Lutherans who opposed it, and many within the tradition would prefer to use the word *Reformed*.¹²

The Epithets Reformed Theology and Reformed Doctrine

Reformed Theology is a theology that is traced to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century and with the credo of *Sola Scriptura* seeks to continue with the doctrine of the apostles; it is a theology that is associated with the historic creeds and confessions of faith and generally approximates or is synonymous to Calvinism. In outline form, the summation of Reformed

¹¹Frank Walker, “Why Should I be Reformed?” <http://gracesermons.com/robeeee/reformed.html> accessed on May 4, 2017

¹²“Calvinism”, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvinism> accessed on May 5, 2017.

Theology would be as broken down in at least three of the four parts preferred by Bryon Curtis¹³ and we proceed to discuss the same under the heads that firstly, Reformed Theology confesses the consensus of the five first centuries of the church, second it is to confess the five *solas* and, third it is to confess the distinctives of the Reformed faith.

Reformed Theology as Confession of the Consensus of the First Five Centuries of the Church

In confessing the consensus of the first five centuries of the Church, there is here a generic adherence to the Protestant faith rather than the Reformed faith specifically. Reliance is here placed upon creeds and conclusions of councils of these early centuries of Christianity and Christian inheritance which is of fundamental importance. As Gerald Bray puts it, creeds and councils of those years “have proved their worth in centuries of turmoil, and it was to their teaching that the great Reformers appealed in their efforts to purify the Church.”¹⁴ We find in the confession and consensus of the first five centuries a set of beliefs which were unadulterated by the Roman church and the Papacy: the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed; these were premised on the biblically derived beliefs as interpreted by the apostles and the early church fathers but got altered and were altogether adulterated from the fifth century and subsequently with the rise of the Papacy. The Reformation could rightly be said to have been a time to rediscover this confession and consensus of the first five centuries of the church.

¹³As cited by Tim Challies, “What it Means to Be Reformed”, <http://www.challies.com/articles/what-it-means-to-be-reformed>, accessed on April 21, 2017, opcit.

¹⁴Gerald Bray, “Creeds, Councils and Christ” (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984) 10.

Reformed Theology as Confession of the Five Solas

The five essential doctrines of the whole Protestant Reformation were capsuled in what came to be known as the “Five Solas”. *Sola* is the Latin word for “alone”. The five solas in reference are *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), *Sola Gracia* (Grace alone), *Sola Fide* (Faith alone), *Solus Christus* (In Christ alone) and *Soli Deo Gloria*, (For the Glory of God Alone). A cursory look at each of these will suffice for this paper.

Under the first *Sola* – *Sola Scriptura*, Scripture Alone – the Bible alone is upheld as the sole authority for all matters of faith and practice; it is to be the standard or yardstick by which all teachings and traditions of the church are to be measured. Consistent with this doctrine, Martin Luther in the speech “that shook the world” said those immortalised words:

Unless I am convinced by *testimonies of the Scriptures* or by clear arguments that I am in error – for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves – I cannot withdraw, for *I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted; my conscience is captive to the Word of God*. It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one’s conscience. Hear I stand; I cannot do otherwise. So help me God.¹⁵ (Emphasis supplied)

The doctrine *Sola Gracia* – salvation being by grace alone – underscores that salvation is only possible as a result of God’s undeserved favour by which sinners are rescued from His wrath. It is not because of any works that we perform that we are saved. *Sola Fides*, salvation being by grace alone underscores that we are justified by faith in Christ alone and not by the works of the law. Again, speaking of Luther, a realisation came to him regarding

¹⁵S. M. Houghton, *Sketches From Church History*, Opcit, 89.

this truth as he meditated upon Romans 4:5; Luther realised forcefully that “The Just Shall live by Faith”.

Solus Christus, Salvation is In Christ Alone: It is only in Jesus Christ alone that we find salvation. Nothing else can save but Jesus’ vicarious death on the cross is what suffices for our justification and reconciliation to God.

In Everything *Soli Deo Gloria* – For God Alone be the Glory in all things – is the sola expressing the conviction that salvation belongs to God who has accomplished it for His glory alone. And this applies to all spheres of life; glory is to be given to God alone. As believers, we are duty bound to magnify Him at all times and to live our lives in a manner that is conscious of His presence and compliant with His authority and bidding and for His glory.

Reformed Theology as a Confession of the Distinctives of the Reformed Faith

The overriding distinctive of Reformed Theology is the affirmation that God alone saves. The Reformed position on this matter of God alone being the Savior identifies with Augustine as against Pelagius and Calvinism as against Arminianism in the enduring historical debate of Monergism –vs– Synergism. Augustine who lived between 354 AD and 430 AD’s position was that on its own, humanity can neither obey God nor do what God requires of it. Pelagius, a contemporary of Augustine on the other hand posited that humankind is capable of responding to God and can be saved without God’s involvement at all. The Augustinian position is known as Monergism which is derived from the a compound Greek word that means “to work alone” while the Pelagian position is Synergism also derived from Greek and implying “to work together”. Monergism is the view espoused by Calvinists and represents what are known as “the doctrines of grace.” Arminians are on the side of Synergism and to them, God works together with sinners in effecting salvation.

The doctrines of grace imply the Five Points of Calvinism which ought necessarily to be given rather extended space in this article. Simply stated, the Five Points of Calvinism are represented by the acronym TULIP which stands for five distinct points relating to salvation: T: Total Depravity of Man; U: Unconditional Predestination; L: Limited Atonement; I: Irresistible Grace and; P: Final Perseverance and Preservation of the Saints.

The background to the Five Points of Calvinism invariably brings into focus a man by the name of Jacobus Arminius born four years before the death of John Calvin (Calvin lived between 1560 to 1609). Arminius studied in Geneva under Theodore Beza who was John Calvin's successor and became professor of Theology at University of Leydon in 1603. John Calvin was the celebrated theologian of the Reformation who was the most distinguished Reformer who though marked out with Martin Luther was of exceeding excellence in intellect and learning as well as influence more so through his commentaries on the Bible and his *magnum opus* the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

John Calvin's imprint upon the theology of the Reformation generally and Reformed Theology in particular was settled if not indelible by the time of Arminius' birth but Arminius took issues with certain of teachings propounded by Calvin and brew controversy which spread all over Holland his native home and where the Reformed church had majority. With Arminius at its helm, the Dutch Remonstrant Movement mooted a creed in Five Article called the Remonstrance which they presented to the authorities of Holland in 1610. An international synod of Reformed people was held between 1618 and 1619 at Dordrecht with the main purpose of adjudicating the Arminian theological controversy and responding to the Remonstrance. The outcome of the Synod was the articulation of what came to be famously known as the Canons of Dort. The Canons of Dort as a confession

is essentially polemic and outlines Calvinistic beliefs which are a direct rebuttal of the Five Points that the Arminians had raised in the Remonstrance. John Piper says the following regarding the Five Points:

It is more important to give a positive biblical position on the five points than to know the exact form of the original controversy. These five points are still at the heart of biblical theology. They are not unimportant. Where we stand on these things deeply affects our view of God, man, salvation, the atonement, regeneration, assurance, worship, and missions. Somewhere along the way (nobody knows for sure when or how), the five points came to be summarized in English under the acronym TULIP.¹⁶

Under the first point, the Total Depravity of Man, it is taught that sin has so affected all parts of man that although man is not necessarily as sinful as he can be, man is completely affected by sin: the heart, the emotions, the will, the mind and the body are all affected by sin. Man is a slave of sin, he does not seek for God and he cannot understand spiritual things. In Article 3 of the Canons, it was articulated that “Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit from any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin. Without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither

¹⁶John Piper, “What We Believe on the Five Points of Calvinism”, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism>, (Accessed on 6 May, 2017).

willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform”.¹⁷

Under the second point, Unconditional Election, it was held that God’s election is not based on anything to do with man or anything which God sees in an individual. Rather, God chose the elect premised only on His will without considering any merit within the individual. Under Article 7 of the Canons, it is articulated as follows:

Election is God’s unchangeable purpose by which he did the following:

Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will, God chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. God did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation.

And so God decreed to give to Christ those chosen for salvation, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ’s fellowship through the Word and Spirit. In other words, God decreed to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of the Son, to glorify them.¹⁸

¹⁷Christian Reformed Church, “Canons of Dort”, <http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/canons-dort> (Accessed, 3 May 2017).

¹⁸Ibid.

The third point, Limited Atonement relates to the extent of the atonement and effectively answers the question: for whom did Christ die? Is it for the whole world – including those who reject Him and who will eventually end up in hell, or is it only for those who will actually be saved and enjoy eternal life with Him in heaven? The Calvinistic answer is that Jesus died only for the elect; Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient for all, but it was not efficacious for all; He died for the sins of the elect. Article 2.8 of the Canons:

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all the elect, in order that God might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that Christ should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, he acquired for them by his death). It was also God's will that Christ should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.¹⁹

Under the fourth point being Irresistible Grace, it is taught that when God calls the elect into salvation, they cannot resist. To

¹⁹Ibid.

the elect is extended by God an internal call which cannot be resisted. This is a call by the Holy Spirit who works upon the hearts and minds of the elect and brings them to repentance and regeneration that enables them to come to God willingly. Under Article 7.11 of the Canons of Dort, it is articulated as follows:

Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in the elect, or works true conversion in them, God not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, God also penetrates into the inmost being, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. God infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant. God activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.²⁰

The fifth and final point on the Final Perseverance of Saints, the understanding is that one cannot lose his or her salvation: once saved, always saved. Believers are eternally secure in their salvation, in the Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus' sheep, they shall never perish, their salvation is everlasting as God who saves them is faithful and sure to perfect His own. Article 8 of the Canons of Dort spells this as follows:

So it is not by their own merits or strength but by God's undeserved mercy that they neither forfeit faith and grace

²⁰Ibid.

totally nor remain in their downfalls to the end and are lost. With respect to themselves this not only easily could happen, but also undoubtedly would happen; but with respect to God it cannot possibly happen. God's plan cannot be changed; God's promise cannot fail; the calling according to God's purpose cannot be revoked; the merit of Christ as well as his interceding and preserving cannot be nullified; and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be invalidated nor wiped out.²¹

Now, the Canons of Dort, it ought to be admitted, were at the time of authorship a matter for the pertinent denomination and historically it is the Presbyterian and Reformed denominations adherent to earlier doctrinal and confessional standards – the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism – whose it was. Full adherence to these standards as a collective calls for identification with set type of church government and church polity which is Presbyterian and the practice of paedobaptism or the baptism of infants. However, it is arguable that the Canons of Dort as a stand-alone doctrinal standard facilitated the separation of Reformed soteriology from the other related standards thus facilitating the “transportation” of the Five Points into other contexts and giving rise to circumstances ideal for the adaptation and spread of Reformed soteriology to other contexts. Writing on what he calls “The Unintended Disembedding at the Synod of Dort”, Carl Truman states the following:

What I am contending, however, is that – in the decades that followed the Synod of Dort – the five points from Dort took on a life of their own, independent of aspect of Reformed theology – the soteriological aspect – that was no longer

²¹Ibid.

inextricably entwined with the more comprehensive Reformed confessions and catechisms. Extricated from its original context, Reformed soteriology was transported into other contexts – credobaptist churches, for example – where neither the Belgic Confession nor the Heidelberg Catechism could have been embraced in their entirety. The dissembling of Reformed soteriology in the Synod of Dort’s response to the Arminian Remonstrants contributed to the long-term resilience and expansion of the Reformed doctrine by making these doctrines transferable beyond their original context.²²

Exclusion of Different Species within the Reformed, Clamour for the Title

One question to be paused by way of addressing the implications of the instant discourse relates to the sustained and ragging concern, to wit whether or not it is tenable or consistent for one to be referred to as Reformed without one fully subscribing to or being fully compliant with the typical historical Reformed standards which include more particularly the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort; does one ‘qualify’ to be Reformed without espousing the Regulative Principle of worship and Covenant Theology that in practice entails paedobaptism and Presbyterianism in church polity? Calvinism – it is argued – is paedobaptistic and of definite church government namely Presbyterianism and therefore one cannot be heard to claim to be Calvinistic without being paedobaptistic and Presbyterian in church polity, because the ‘owners’ of Calvinism are not piece meal adherents of what Calvin stood for but are such as imbibe

²²Carl Trueman, “The Reformed Mind”, <http://thereformedmind.wordpress.com/category/theology-and-doctrine>. Accessed on 19 April 19, 2017.

Calvin's doctrine in toto. On the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) (a typical American Presbyterian church) website, the following question is featured:

I am deeply confused on the major differences between Reformed Baptist Christians and the OPC. I understand the main issue is the Believer's Baptism. But I've read articles where Reformed Christians don't care for Reformed Baptists calling themselves "Reformed." Why is this? I know there is more to Reformed Theology than the doctrines of grace. Can you please explain the major differences and why some might suggest a Reformed Baptist truly isn't "Reformed"?²³

In a recent editorial of *Reformation Today*, it was lamented that occasionally Presbyterians object to Baptists calling themselves 'Reformed'. "How can they be Reformed if they do not follow Calvin's teaching on infant baptism?"²⁴

There is to the foregoing questions betrayal of some definite clamor for exclusive title or right to the label 'Reformed' by the Presbyterian and Reformed churches or denominations with direct ancestry to the 16th and 17th Century Reformed churches. Yet to be reckoned and admitted is the fact that with years upwards from 17th Century, the epithet 'Reformed' has been affixed to movements beyond the Presbyterian and Reformed church denominations and, arguably, Reformed soteriology as expounded in the Canons of Dort which is a stand-alone instrument has been a defining factor. The words of Ricker cited by Poh are worthy of note:

²³Questions and Answers,
http://www.opc.org/qa.html?questions_id=498 Accessed on May 07, 2017.

²⁴ "Reformation Today," January – February 2010 Issue 233, 1.

Reformed Theology... was not monolithic from its inception; there was space for diversity within its boundaries. It is important to make a distinction between extra- and intra-confessional debates. The Reformed orthodox disputed with those outside the family (Socinians, Papists, Anabaptists, Arminians, etc) and also with those within.

All of these many were accommodated within the broad confines of the orthodox Reformed stream. In light of the diversity, it is hardly possible to confer an autocrite papale to Calvin as if he were the rule against which the whole Reformed tradition were to be measured.²⁵

To be met are some rather interesting species of ‘Reformed’ people or Christians who include ‘Reformed Charismatics’ mentioned here without necessarily being endorsed by this author to be Reformed. In a blog posted by one Sam Hamstra, there is some terse comment in answer to the question, “What is Reformed Charismatic?”²⁶ Under which it is said in effect that a Reformed Charismatic is first and foremost a person who seeks to harmonise the dominant convictions of the Reformed faith as articulated by people like Calvin with those of the Pentecostals like Gordon Fee. To a Reformed Charismatic – according to Hamstra – there is the interest of trying to get the best of both Calvinism and Pentecostalism; and there is *inter alia* the belief that the Holy Spirit may choose and often does work today as He worked in the first century, that regeneration precedes faith and that there is no second baptism of the Spirit. Admittedly, the foregoing is apparently Monergistic soteriologically.

²⁵C B S Poh, “A Garden Enclosed”, (Damasara Utuma: Good News Enterprise, 2013) 67, 68.

²⁶“What is Reformed Charismatic?”,
<http://network.crcna.org/blog/what-reformed-charismatic>

Perhaps one way to resolve this clamour for title to 'Reformed' is to simply reckon that the motto '*Semper Reformanda*' anticipates no closure to how far and in what contexts the Reformed strand could be applied. The whole discourse on what it means to be Reformed and Reformed Theology and Reformed Doctrine transcends the Reformed denominations which identify themselves as such on constitutional papers and in official doctrinal standards. Take the Five Solas for example: surely these are not the preserve of groups that are labeled Reformed! Rather, these ought to be common to all whose progenitors the Protestant Reformers are; that is not to say they are in common though. Neither is it tenable to hold that only entities labeled Reformed and Reformed churches have exclusive title to the Five Points of Calvinism. These points of Calvinism are biblically based and were not in any event coined by John Calvin.

Another way to resolve the clamour for the title in issue is - we argue - for Christians to on one hand be free from being contented with labels and to on the other hand not be so allergic to labels as to altogether be without any doctrinal clarity thus ending up being liable or prone to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Therein lies the distinction and therein are accolades of Reformed Theology and Reformed Doctrine: an attempt and a commitment to trace the thread of consistency from the consensus of the first five centuries of Christianity through to the moving principles of the Reformation at its incipency and all the way to its articulation by the leading minds at the zenith of the Reformation, subject to the motto *Semper Reformanda*.

Conclusion

The epithets Reformed, Reformed Theology and Reformed Doctrine though emergent from the same single event, the Protestant Reformation, are only applicable to a specific position

and specific theological disposition. Lutheran Theology emerged from the Protestant Reformation as well as did Reformed Theology but the two are distinct. In this paper, we sought to demonstrate how it came to be that to be reformed meant not to be Lutheran; to be reformed meant not to be Arminian. The defining historical point of the Sacramentarian Controversy of 1529 when Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther failed to see eye to eye regarding the doctrine of the nature of the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper and went separate ways has been highlighted. The development of the Reformed position and Reformed Theology subsequent to the Sacramentarian Controversy has been tracked through several doctrinal standards and principles – including the Canons of Dort – the summation of which is that to be Reformed or Reformed Theology and Reformed Doctrine has to do with confessing the consensus of the first five centuries of the church which were unadulterated by the Roman church's errors, it means confessing the Five Solas and it means confessing the distinctives of the Reformed faith – notably the Five points of Calvinism also known as the Doctrines of Grace. A question has been posed which is effectively whether or not denominations with direct ancestry to the 16th and 17th Century Reformed churches have the exclusive title to the epithet 'Reformed' to which a terse suggestion has been made to wit that perhaps the Reformation motto of *Semper Reformanda* could resolve this as it implies a strand of no closure to the Reformation.

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SEMPER REFORMANDA

Chopo Mwanza

There is something about Evangelicals and mottos, especially if they are in Latin. Who doesn't love a good Latin slogan? Much has been made of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and rightly so. Books and articles have been written, conferences and seminars have been and will be held throughout the world to highlight the importance and significance of the events that began with Martin Luther nailing the 95 thesis to the door at Wittenberg. With the reformation on everyone's mind the teachings that were brilliantly and faithfully defended have in a special way come the fore once more.

These teachings are beautifully summarized in five Latin slogans: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Christus* and *Sola Deo Gloria*, which mean Scripture alone, Faith Alone, Grace alone, through Christ Alone and God's glory alone. In other words the reformers taught that salvation comes by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and all this is to God's glory alone and the Scripture alone is the rule of faith and practice for the Christian and the church. These teachings have come to be called the Five Solas.

Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda: "the reformed church, always reforming" is a phrase generally attributed to a devotional book written by Jodocus van Lodenstein in 1674. Lodenstein was born into a prominent family in the city of Delft in 1620.¹ He sat under the teaching of two distinguished Reformed professors of the day: Gisbertus Voetius of Utrecht and Johannes Cocceius of Franeker. Scholars suggest Lodenstein was particularly influenced

¹Mike Horton (2012:116).

by Gisbertus Voetius who placed great emphasis on the need for precise theology and Christian living. Consequently in his pastorate Van Lodenstein encouraged believers to faithfulness and disciplined Christian lives.²

In fact, when Van Lodenstein coined the phrase, he was writing to a church that fully held to Reformed Calvinistic theology and was pretty much on the same wave length as the reformed church in the rest of Europe. So what exactly did Pastor Lodenstein mean when he called for *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*?

In order to rightly understand the meaning of the phrase, it has to be taken in its entirety. *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* is a complete statement. The first half of the statement helps define and limit the second half. First half, namely *Ecclesia Reformata*, “the reformed church,” pointed to the fact that the church had established and settled on its doctrinal convictions as taught by the scriptures. The Dutch Reformed Church had come to hold to the Five Solas of the reformation and was doctrinally on solid ground. It is this church that stands on solid theological ground that he rallies to *Semper reformanda*.

What the Phrase Does Not Mean

One of the best ways to explain what something means with clarity is stating what it does not mean. So here are two misconceptions that have developed over the years concerning the meaning of the phrase.

1. Semper Reformanda does not mean creation of new doctrine

It is interesting to notice how this phrase has been used by both conservatives and liberals alike to support whatever

²Robert Godfrey. <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-semper-reformanda-mean/>. (Accessed March 24, 2017).

teaching they are propagating. Often times the teaching, program or method being propagated is actually a new doctrine and subsequently a compromise on sound doctrine. Let me highlight at least three theological innovations that have been propagated in the recent past (these are in reality old teachings coming to the fore rather than new teachings per se) and in a way the need to always reform has been used as a reason for the church to hold to this doctrine.

a. The homosexual campaign

The world has over the years been engaged in a battle about sexuality. This debate has not left the church untouched as Christians from all persuasions have been dragged into the debate about whether God created them male and female. Some have argued that the issue of sexuality can and should be left to an individual.

Andrew Atherstone in his article “The implications of Semper Reformanda,” recounts the story of Chris Glaser a former evangelical Christian who was involved in a homosexual relationship and later married his partner Mark King. Atherstone writes:

In his autobiography Glaser tells how he married his lover, Mark King, in a ‘ceremony of the heart’ in the sanctuary at Ormewood Park Presbyterian Church in Atlanta in October 1994. The day chosen for their ‘marriage’ was Reformation Sunday – the annual commemoration of the iconic occasion when Martin Luther is said to have nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Schlosskirche in Wittenberg, protesting loudly at the corrupt and oppressive teaching of the medieval church. That Reformation Sunday morning, before Chris and Mark’s wedding, their pastor lamented that ‘the reformed church, always reforming’ had too often become ‘the controlled church, always controlling’. The

implications were that those who genuinely believe in *ecclesia semper reformanda* should welcome same-sex marriage as an authentic expression of Christian discipleship and that people like Chris Glaser are the true heirs of Martin Luther.³

David Randall records how the Church of Scotland has sadly fallen into liberalism and has subsequently come to accept homosexual marriages even admitting and ordaining ministers who are in such marriages. During their church council debates one arguments given by liberals was to urge evangelicals to accept the decision, was basically that the church has throughout history accepted changes and homosexual marriages should be just another teaching added to the list. Randall states this mindset in his book “A Sad Departure” when he says:

In British society at large, the government probably expects that the people will meekly come to accept their redefinition of marriage and the introduction of same-sex marriage as a *fait accompli*; in the church, liberals probably anticipate a similar process of acquiescence. Conservatives, traditionalists, evangelicals (which ever term is used) will be expected to moan and complain for a while but they will gradually come to accept the ordination of practicing homosexuals.⁴

Therein lies the danger of splitting the phrase *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*. One can be tempted into thinking *Semper Reformanda* simply means the church adopting new doctrine even though that doctrine is contrary to the teaching of

³Andrew Atherstone (2003:33).

⁴David Randall (2015:54).

Scripture. Evangelicals now more than ever need to heed Karl Barth's call:

It is not the newness, the modernity, the up-to-dateness of a Church which as such proves and commends it as the true and Catholic Church. Modernity, up-to-dateness, has nothing whatever to do with the question of the truth of the Church. For that reason the idea of progress is a highly doubtful one as applied to the Church. What counts in the Church is not progress but reformation.⁵

Barth later on states:

Semper reformari, however, does not mean always to go with the time, to let the current spirit of the age be the judge of what is true and false, but in every age, and in controversy with the spirit of the age, to ask concerning the form and doctrine and order and ministry which is in accordance with the unalterable essence of the Church. It means never to grow tired of returning not to the origin in time, but to the origin in substance of the community.⁶

The Evangelical church should always stand on the foundational truths of the scriptures as expressed or summarized in the Five Solas:

Sola scriptura (the Bible alone). The scriptures are the final authority for the church and all its teachings must be grounded in the word of alone. Anyone who seeks to reform the church must therefore continually go back to the Scriptures and be guided by it.

Sola Fide (faith alone) *Sola Gratia (grace alone)*; *Sola Christo (Christ alone)*. Salvation is by the grace of God alone through faith in the

⁵Barth (1956:704).

⁶Barth (1956:705).

finished vicarious work of Jesus Christ alone, for there is no other name whether in heaven or on earth by which men can be saved. It is this gospel that the church should be proclaiming and we dare not preach another gospel lest we be accursed.

Soli Deo Gloria (glory to God alone). Our goal and drive as the evangelical church is to do all to the glory of God alone. Paul rightly summarizes how Christians ought to live in 1 Corinthians 10:31 so, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Andrew Atherstone's words on the need to hold on to the teachings from scripture as summed up in the solas cannot be bettered, so I can only quote him.

Once those anchors are in place, and within those limits, radicalism is very welcome. But as soon as our innovations begin to undermine the foundations of the reformed faith, which is biblical Christianity, the church will come crashing down. These wonderful gospel truths, encapsulated by the solas, need to be clearly and enthusiastically proclaimed without hesitation in every generation.⁷

b. Worldliness in the church

One of the greatest dangers the Evangelical church has faced over the years has not come from outside but from within. This danger from within has been the rampant worldliness that has come in all shapes and sizes. One form of worldliness has come in the shape of pragmatism at the expense of doctrine. Many Christian ministers are more preoccupied with methodology than they are with doctrine. John MacArthur in his "Ashamed of the gospel" laments:

The effect of such of such a philosophy is apparent; more and more people-pleasers fill the pulpits of our churches.

⁷Andrew Atherstone (2009:34).

Moreover, scripture is overruled by the marketing plan as the authoritative guide for ministry. One textbook on church marketing includes this statement: “the marketing plan is the bible of the marketing game; everything that happens in the life of the product occurs because the plan wills it” Applied to church ministry that means a human strategy- not the word of God- becomes the fountain of all church activity, and the standard by which ministry is measured.⁸

J. S Stewart further observes:

The greatest drag on Christianity today, the most serious menace to the church’s mission, is not the secularism without, it is the reduced Christianity within: the religious generalities and innocuous platitudes of a pallid, anemic Christianity which is simply (in the language of arithmeticians) the highest common factor of half a dozen different religions. Did not Paul himself say ‘I am become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some’? Yes, indeed: but not at the self-defeating cost of changing Christianity into else, not at the cost of soft-peddalling the historical-supernatural elements without which Christianity does not exist, or of dissolving the divine intolerance of the faith in a morass of religious relativism.⁹

Because of this philosophy of ministry churches have been compromised and the scriptures are slowly if not quickly been thrown out of the window. Ministers are more concerned with what works and what gets the people in. The reasoning behind this compromise is that doctrine (truth) does not attract the masses. Invariably this has led to a philosophy of ministry that

⁸John MacArthur (1993:49).

⁹J.S. Stewart (1953:31).

focuses less and less on the word of God and more and more on programs and activities that appeal to the masses.

Elmer L Towns captured this mindset in his book “An inside look at 10 of today’s most innovative churches,” when says “formerly, a doctrinal statement represented the reason for a denomination’s existence. Today, methodology is the glue that holds churches together. A statement of ministry defines them and their denominational existence”¹⁰

Harry Emerson Fosdick’s statement written ninety-eight years ago as quoted by John MacArthur in his book “Ashamed of the Gospel,” is sadly the mindset of many today who seek to better the church or improve it (reform) by changing it message. Fosdick charged; “Preachers who pick out texts from the bible and then proceed to give their historic settings, their logical meaning in the context, their place in theology of the writer with a few practical reflections appended, are grossly misusing the bible.”¹¹ Fosdick further charges:

Could any procedure be more surely predestined to dullness and futility? Who seriously supposes that, as a matter of fact, one in a hundred of the congregation cares, to start with, what Moses, Isaiah, Paul or John meant in those special verses, or came to church deeply concerned it? Nobody who talks to the public so assumes that the vital interests of the people are located in the meaning of words spoken two thousand years ago.¹²

A lot of ministers and churches have fallen for this line of thinking with the aim of been better ministers and with the desire of finding better ways of reaching the lost. While those desires are

¹⁰Elmer Towns (1990:249).

¹¹John MacArthur (1993:81).

¹²Ibid, 82.

admirable and while it's true methods can and in some cases should change. The message of the scripture should remain constant. We should never adopt methods and seek to do ministry in ways that undermines from the doctrine of the bible. Semper Reformanda does not negate Sola Scriptura.

2. Semper Reformanda is not just a slogan for mere repetition

One of the great dangers with slogans and mottos is that they become simply that, memorized, repeated and meaningless phrases that qualify you to be part of the cool club if you use them. The danger reformed people face is the problem of the preacher who deceives himself into thinking because he has said it, he has lived it. Simply stating and repeating a phrase does not mean you have understood it and actually lived it out.

I fear many people have mastered theological terms, read theological books and memorized cool sounding Latin slogans like Semper Reformanda or any of the Solas and yet they do not apply those truths to their lives. Furthermore it is important to note that while the truths of scripture is unchanging, cultures are not. Semper Reformanda does not mean we lock ourselves in the way of living and doing things of centuries ago. In other words, having the same order of service as the reformers or using the same language as the puritans does not necessarily mean you are holy neither does it make a reformer or a puritan.

Michael Horton perfectly explains what it means in “Always Reforming: Essays in honor of Robert Godfrey”:

The great concern of ministers like van Lodenstein was not the externals of religion—as absolutely important as they are—but rather the internal side of religion. Van Lodenstein was a Reformed pietist and part of the Dutch Second Reformation. As such, his religious concerns were very similar to those of the English Puritans. They all believed that once the externals of religion had been carefully and

faithfully reformed according to the Word of God, the great need was for ministers to lead people in the true religion of the heart. They saw the great danger of their day not as false doctrine or superstition or idolatry, but as formalism. The danger of formalism is that a church member could subscribe to true doctrine, participate in true worship in a biblically regulated church, and yet still not have true faith. As Jesus had warned against the Pharisees of His day, citing the prophet Isaiah, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matt. 15:8).¹³

Another point that scholars say is worth noting is the fact that the verb *reformanda* in the Latin is passive. Meaning the church is not doing the reforming but is always being reformed by the Spirit of God through the word of God faithfully and consistently preached and taught. In other words, God continues to work in his people who abide in his word. This is the reason some people prefer the more complete statement: *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda, secundum verbum dei*: “the reformed church, always reforming, under the word of God.”

Conclusion

I leave you with the rallying charge from Kevin DeYoung concerning the meaning and implications of *Semper Reformanda*:

Semper reformanda is not about constant fluctuations, but about firm foundations. It is about radical adherence to the Holy Scriptures, no matter the cost to ourselves, our traditions, or our own fallible sense of cultural relevance. If Christians want to change the church’s sexual ethics, so be it. But don’t claim the mantle of the Reformers in so doing. The

¹³Mike Horton (2012:117).

only Reformation worth promoting and praying for is the one that gets us deeper into our Bibles, not farther away. Stand your ground, hold fast, and guard the good deposit. And be open to change whenever we drift from the truth or fail to grow up in it as we should.¹⁴

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¹⁴<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2016/10/27/semper-reformanda/>

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Central Africa Baptist College & Seminary exists to train the next generation of servant-leaders in Africa for Great Commission living.



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The mission of Central Africa Baptist College is to glorify God by advancing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by equipping servant-leaders to be pastors, evangelists, educators, and trainers of Christian leaders for service to Christ our King in strategic African ministry.



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Honesty

Being transparent with God and others.

Obedience

Doing what I should do, when I should do it, how I should do it, with the right heart attitude and spirit toward the authority asking me to do it.

Wisdom

Skill, ability and insight gained from God's word for the purpose of living a life that honors and glorifies God.

Service

Investing my life in ministry for the good of others rather than for the pleasure or advancement of self.