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"For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9)

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REFORMATION: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

Over the past five years, we have seen Protestants making greater concessions to the Roman Catholic church in the historic signing of the *Evangelicals Catholics Together* 1994 and 1997. There is a strong prevailing disposition among the neo-evangelical community to give up or at least minimise the major doctrinal differences between Protestant churches and the Roman church. There is either a lack of knowledge and understanding or discernment on the gravity of the matter, or a deliberate and calculated betrayal of the Protestant faith.

As we commemorate the 482nd Anniversary of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation, we need to ask the crucial basic question of why the Reformation took place and whether there is a dire need to continue today in the spirit of that Reformation.

Why was there a Reformation in the first place? One of the reasons why the Reformation happened was due to the **rediscovery of the attractiveness of the pure gospel**. After the Renaissance (13th to 15th centuries), the minds of the people in Europe were opened to the searching of the arts, literature, and ancient works. People in Europe began to question the teachings and practices of the established church. Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, the humanist scholar, did us a great favour by the translation of the Greek New Testament in 1516. Men like Thomas Bilney, Luther and others read the NT first hand and began to discover for themselves the spiritual vitality and beauty that was lacking in the medieval church. They could not contain this great spiritual excitement in rediscovering the watershed doctrine of justification by faith alone. It gives meaning, purpose and life to the Church and the Church was invariably revived. Is this prized heritage something to be jettisoned overnight? We need to pray for wisdom and discernment, ponder carefully and not barter Truth for peace to our detriment in these hazardous times.

The Middle Ages was a time of **theological declension**. The worship of relics, saints, indulgences, mass, ceremonies, rosaries, and works reigned supreme in the hearts of the ordinary people in the church for 1,000 years. John Wycliffe, a Pre-Reformer in the 14th century, asked an English commoner how he hoped to go to heaven, and he replied that his priest had assured him that he could buy his way to heaven. That would probably be the average answer you would get from most people living during those pathetic times. The Reformation broke that yoke and bondage from a work-for-your-salvation religion, and restored the doctrine of salvation through faith in Christ alone (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5, Rom 1:17).

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Today, the New Age Movement and other religious movements have generally this theme in mind: we have to placate the gods with “good life and the works of our hands,” and we are ourselves gods too (cf. Gen 3:5). Protestant Christianity stands radically different from the rest. Jesus says, in John 14:6, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*

The clergy of the Middle Ages were blind spiritual guides and their unmarried monks were often guilty of moral excesses, corruption, gluttony and other social wiles. The people were starved spiritually and frustrated. Like what Isaiah said, they waited for light (Isa 59:9). The Waldenses (started by Peter Waldo) provided the light in the Pre-Reformation days of the 12th and 13th centuries, but were mercilessly persecuted and martyred. But the sovereign Lord had predestined a time for revival.

The Reformation changed the **role of the clergy**. Luther called himself a pastor, not a priest, because the Bible teaches the universal priesthood of believers (1 Pet 2:9). He would hear no auricular confession before a confessional box. For the first time, after more than 1,000 years, priests would be redundant in the church for those who know Christ Jesus personally. Every man is to pray directly to his God because of Christ Jesus, our only Mediator (1 Tim 2:5). Luther and Calvin (and others) got married and started the Christian family living in a covenant home. Children were catechised and brought up in the fear and nurture of the Word. Celibacy was never a burden the Lord meant His servants to bear (1 Tim 3:1–5).

The late medieval times became a period of enormous interest in Christianity. People flocked to Wittenberg and Geneva to hear Luther and Calvin; and Zwingli in Zurich (Knox was also influencing Scotland in no small way later). The success of Tetzel, Rome’s super salesman of indulgences, sanctioned by Pope Leo X for the rebuilding of St. Peter’s Church for Rome, diminished as the enlightened people realised that forgiveness is rich and free in Christ Jesus alone, and not a commodity that can be bought in the ‘spiritual’ marketplace. The financial corruption and spiritual deception of the church was finally over. It would never be the same again after the 16th century revelation through the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation brought home the **importance of Christian education**. In the medieval times, only the priests were educated. Now, every true believer needs to understand his new-found faith. The Bible is to be given to them in their own vernacular language, and they are to read it, relish and apply it. One of the great ideas of the Reformation was to unravel the enormous wealth of Holy Scriptures and have it savoured by the common people. We thank God for the works of Luther, Wycliffe, Tyndale and others for their legacy. Calvin encouraged learning in Geneva, and soon John Knox of Scotland and others came from afar. With the invention of the moveable type printing press by Johann Guttenberg in 1454–1455 (a divine provision), literature could be duplicated quickly and disseminated all over Europe. The development of exegetical works, commentaries and biblical theological text books like *Calvin’s Institutes* flooded Europe. These relieved the people of erroneous and heretical preaching and practices all those years. The Reformers’ motto was “Back to the Scriptures,” recommended to the Western world in all their writings.

(The Reformation is one of the most life-shaping and life-changing movements in modern history.) Biblical illiteracy of the common people for so many centuries was finally over. Hosea 4:6 says,

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected...

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knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

The Church regained its true sense of spiritual direction and rediscovered the real dynamics of the early Church in expository preaching and right observance of the sacraments, true worship and prayer, and evangelical repentance. It was almost a second Pentecost revival initiated by the Holy Spirit.

Why was there a Reformation? Because **there was a lost gospel to be rediscovered in all its fullness**. Because the Church had veered off from the straight and narrow way. The Reformation gave us some bearings, landmarks and pertinent lessons to address today's issues and problems with the inspiration and the resources of the past.

We need four things today and always.

1. A Reformatory Mind

"The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17). That gave Luther a new heart in the truth of Holy Scriptures. We need a new spirit to pursue and defend the truth. Salvation belongs to the Lord alone (Titus 2:10), not to man or works. I am convinced that one of the battlefields today is the mind (Phil 4:8). God has given to us a sound mind (2 Tim 1:7), and we must strive to understand and know what and why we believe. Emotions must not take centre-stage in our lives, understanding of the Scriptures should be instead. Paul speaks of the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:1–2) that comes about as a result of knowing and applying God's Word, and *"bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Cor 10:5).

Children of the Reformation are single-hearted. It is a heart dominated exclusively by one principle, love for God, His Kingdom, His cause, His Church and His Truth. It is a heart of discernment and evangelical obedience to God's Word. It is submission to the will of God and total reliance on the finished work of Christ alone at Calvary. It is a disciplined, vigilant and diligent mental spirit to advance the cause of Christ against all foes. An informed and reformed mind must pervade every Christian today.

2. A Reformatory Family

The Reformation literally reformed and transformed the Christian home. With Luther and Katherine von Bora's marriage (Calvin and Idelette, and others also), they started catechising the children and had regular family worship. It was unheard of for a priest to have a wife, let alone have children at home. The Reformers blazed the trail of the setting up of a covenant relationship at home. It was an example for others on how to raise children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. The English Reformers and Puritans taught their children the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Shorter Catechism of Westminster and the Bible.

Do we fill our children with the Word and prayer or are their minds filled with the things of the world only? The average family, the most basic building block of our society, is under siege by the adversary today. There is an increase in divorce, recalcitrant children and irresponsible parents. The English Reformers paid great attention to giving domestic instruction to their children. Families are destroyed by a lack of knowledge of God's Word and spiritual fidelity to God first and then to each other. Today we need a reformation of the family, from worldly values and earthly pursuits to holiness, godliness and the principles of the Reformed faith found in God's Word. Moses advised in Deuteronomy 6:6–7,...

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And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Let fathers and mothers follow the examples of the Reformation forebears, and preserve the sanctity, vitality and harmony of the Christian home (Ps 127:1).

Where the Christ-centred home is, the fear and worship of God will be there also.

3. A Reformatory Church

What about the church that we are in? It is a separated, gospel-preaching and faith-defending Reformed Church. It is an assembly of saints that stands firmly on the doctrines of grace taught in the Scriptures and will not compromise nor barter it for anything. It is a redeemed community jealously guarding, protecting and defending the precious tenets of true religion, especially the non-negotiable issues concerning salvation, the authority, sufficiency and perspicuity of God's Word. The motto of the Church should be "reformed yet reforming." The preponderance of defective versions of the Bible is a matter of grave concern today. Many inaccurate and unreliable versions have arisen, that do not contribute to the proper understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures. We do well to stick to the Authorised Version, which is time-tested in its accuracy and reliability over 300 years.

There is to be a sense of militancy and urgency for the propagation of sound biblical doctrines, unadulterated with worldly ideas and human philosophies. No New Age teachings, psychology, ecumenical or humanistic or modernistic, liberal wisdom, or any hotchpotch ECT theology should rob us of the Truth again. The Church of Christ must stand firmly on this and not waver, compromise or be ignorant in the tumultuous days ahead.

We need the gumption and tenacity just like the Reformers to propagate and advance gospel truth without fear and favour of men. Being human, we are vulnerable to deception and falsehood. A vigilant and obedient church is the answer. Truth is lost by wickedness as well as weakness. The days will be few when men will endure sound teaching and biblical truth. Our time is soon running out, with the imminent coming of Christ (Titus 2:13; Rev 22:12, 20). The Church of Christ must continue steadfast and faithful to contend and defend the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

4. A Reformatory Preaching

The 16th Century Reformation was accompanied by strong and uncompromising doctrinal expository preaching of the Word of God. Luther, Calvin, Knox and Zwingli were gifted and eloquent preachers and teachers of the Holy Scriptures. They wasted no time in sharing with the masses what they discovered from the canonical Scriptures, as opposed to traditions and church councils. Today, we desperately need a return to God-honouring and cross-centred biblical preaching, without the fear and favour of men, and with the power and unction from above. John Robbins of the Trinity Foundation has commented aptly here:

Biblical preaching is preaching that declares the whole counsel of God and not just snippets from that counsel. Most "evangelical" congregations are starving, living hand to mouth from the crumbs that fall from the pulpits. Neither the preachers nor the congregations suspect that there is a system of doctrine in Scripture, a system...

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so rich and satisfying that no one need starve or go hungry, a system built upon the revelation of Jesus Christ alone, a system that answers all questions, and supplies all needs. "Evangelical" preachers have rejected the idea that the Bible is sufficient, and its corollary, the sufficiency of Christ. They deny that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation. They are careless shepherds, betraying the trust of their Lord and their sheep. Many of them are false shepherds, preaching only the doctrines and commandments of men.

The power of the Gospel to salvation is implicitly denied and the Gospel itself dishonoured by such ministerial machinations. Psychological manipulation has become the substitute for the power of the Gospel in many churches today.

The Gospel is not merely a gate to Christianity; it is the narrow road as well. It is the focus and centre of Christian doctrine and worship. Paul's determination in preaching must be ours: To know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (*The Trinity Review, September 1999*, 3).

The solid and in-depth exposition of the gospel has been replaced by the superficial and shallow homilies in many modern churches. Preaching is theatrical, melodramatic, entertaining and emotional. Its focus is personal experience (one remembered hearing a message for Good Friday service, where the minister shared about his experiences in his recent mission trip, and not Christ and the atonement). The congregation is often regaled with the psychological theories and life experiences of men and other banter that pander to the itching ears of some. Worldly advice and psychological tips are passed around from the pulpit, and from the seminaries as though they are biblical truths today, to unsuspecting gullible members and friends. A church devoid of sound biblical doctrinal preaching is spiritually malnourished and emaciated, and vulnerable to falsehood and heresies.

Conclusion

An informed, knowledgeable and vigilant Christianity is the answer to the widespread heresies and seductive false teachings of today. We must not be content with a superficial acquaintance with the Word, but we must strive to be thoroughly grounded and rooted in the most holy faith. We need more than just a resuscitation of the ailing economy, we need a true reformation of the churches, families and individual lives, with a profound knowledge of the Scriptures, and faith and obedience in Christ. Amen.

Rev Jack Sin

(Adapted from a message at Kelapa Sawit BPC Tamil Congregation on 24 October 1999)

Note: This year marks the 490th Anniversary of the Reformation.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

CHURCH THEME: WALK IN THE NEWNESS OF LIFE (*Romans 6:4*)

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	Today: 21/10/2007	Next Week: 28/10/2007	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We specially welcome Alison Garratt and Baden Pattealston to the morning worship service last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	John Poh	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	The Divine Provision: The Resurrection	The Perspectives on Salvation	
<i>Text:</i>	1 Corinthians 15:12-19	Ephesians 2:8-10	
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Yanning	
Evening			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Jonathan Kim	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	The Rock Was Christ	God's Throne of Grace	
<i>Text:</i>	Exodus 17:6	Exodus 25:17-22	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Grace	Joy	
Other Duties			
	Today: 21/10/2007	Next Week: 28/10/2007	
<i>Ushers</i>	Jee/Joyce	Daniel/Chin Kiong	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Carol	Yanning	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	No Bible Study	DHW - Genesis	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 26 Oct	7:00 pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Combined meeting with SGAT	
Sat 27 Oct	4.00 pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Pr Mok	
<u>Last Week's Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering:	£345.70	Lunch:	£36.42
<u>Memory Verse</u>			
<i>Previous Week (Oct 07 Wk 1): Mark 8:36-38</i>			
For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.			
<i>This Week (Oct 07 Wk 2): Romans 6:5-6</i>			
For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory Verse for 3rd Quarter: Please note that the deadline for the review is Nov 2007. • Family Worship: Those who would like to open up their homes or student hostels for family worship for the months of October and November, please inform Pr Mok. • Those serving on the Lord's Day for both morning and evening worship services: Please gather behind the pulpit area at 10.30am for prayer. • End of British Summer Time: Please take note that next weekend marks the end of the British Summer Time, and therefore the clocks will be going back by 1 hour. • Road Closure: Please take note that the road along Summerfield Avenue will be closed between 29 Oct 07 and 17 Nov 07 due to water works. • Sabbath School: Please note that class is held at the Library after the morning worship. You are encouraged to bring children of ages 6-12 for the lessons. Children of age 6 onwards are encouraged to sit with their parents during the main service. 			