

The Voice of Restoration

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Is There A Need For A Fresh Reformation Of The Church?

By Frank Selch

Before we can even try to answer such an emotive question, we must attempt to define the word Reformation. The dictionary offers us the following explanation:

REFORMATION; n. Reforming or being reformed, esp. radical change for the better in political, religious or social affairs; the reformation of 16th c.; religious movement directed to the reform of doctrines and practice of the Church of Rome and ending in the establishment of Reformed or Protestant Churches of central and NW Europe.

But is this an adequate definition? It may be accurate where this 16th-c. event is concerned, yet it appears to be an impotent word for this new century. Why do I say impotent?

Simply because it is not another reformation that we need, or another reshuffling of older traditions. Looking back to the work of the reformers, one needs to say with deep regret, that the outcome of the reformation has, in essence, been no more than a reshuffle of R.C. traditions. Do not misunderstand me here, Luther's work brought many powerful, positive changes to the church and the benefits of these changes can still be felt around the globe—the abolition of slavery is one such testimony; not to speak of the salvific impact of the Reformation in terms of the Gospel.¹

You may say, then why ask such a question in the first place?

One reason is, that Christians everywhere are

aware that something is very wrong, but there does not appear to be any answer available. The second reason is, that there has been an ongoing reformation in Christianity since the birth of Higher Criticism in the mid 19th c. In fairly recent times we have seen major reforms in some of the High Churches in terms of female and openly homosexual clergy, as well as homosexual marriages—even among the clergy. Denominations are reforming themselves also in terms of outward expressions of their doctrines. Ecumenism too, has brought about a merging, as well as an abolition of traditions and dogmas right across the denominational spectrum. In addition to Ecumenism — Charismaticism, Legalism, Pragmatism, Religiosity, Philosophy and Psychology are forces that continue to bring about an ongoing reformation— in fact, they have produced a state of flux where nothing remains the same for very long.

If we then speak of Reformation do we really speak in terms of Luther's doctrinal reformation, or does the word reformation have different meanings with different people?

We are living in an age of ambiguity (esp. in spiritual matters), I deem it therefore essential that it is clear to

¹ Martin Luther's insight into the true message of Romans led him to believe that this would also influence the Jewish People for Jesus. When this did not eventuate, Luther turned with a vengeance against them. His ensuing hatred of the Jewish People eventually influenced Hitler in his final solution: the Holocaust. It is entirely possible that a reason, why the Jewish People did not listen to Luther's Gospel, is the fact that it did not include the Kingdom of God.

others what our words really mean! It is regrettable, but nevertheless a fact that our language in many cases, no longer means what it says; everything has become relative and open to re-interpretation by the individual!

Martin Luther didn't have these problems. Until his day the Roman Church had a cast-iron grip on the doctrines and traditions of the church. Dissenters were killed off speedily or turned into 'Saints'. Luther had just one foe - the Roman Church and her non-Biblical doctrines, because the entire world was either Roman Catholic or Heathen! There was nothing in-between!

Today, the world abounds with every conceivable religious practice the human mind is capable of developing and most people – including professing Christians - are willing to give everyone of them a degree of validity; and often indeed even equality with Christian beliefs.

Luther's Reformation restored Biblical salvation to the people and made the written Word of God available to the common man— SOLA SCRIPTURA, ie. Scripture alone! Nevertheless, what does that mean for Christians today? In our post-Christian and post-modern world these words do no longer mean the same what they meant for Luther.

When Luther spoke about Scripture, he meant Scripture as handed down to us from the first Christians. Today, for many this simply means a translation of the Bible in accord with ones own theological point of view! Moreover, herein lies the major portion of our problem!

What Luther and Calvin did cannot be repeated, it must stand-alone in the corridors of history and both should be credited, not only for being reformers, but for attempting to restore Biblical Truth to the human race. In truth, although Luther's work reformed in the main religious expression and only some doctrine, one could say it was the beginning of the RESTORATION.

I do believe that this work of Restoration must continue in our day— lest truth perish from the earth!

Believers everywhere are looking and hoping for the return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus. But Peter prophesied that the heavens MUST receive Jesus until the periods, or times, of restoration (Acts 3:21). But should He come today would He find much "...faith in the earth?" (Luke 18:8). If Jesus is looking for faith in the

earth upon His return, what exactly is He looking for?²

Because His Word is true, He will surely spew us out of His mouth if we do not turn to Him with all of our heart.

How do we, and how could we turn to Him even more, if we are already going to church (sometimes twice) every Sunday?

Jesus is quite explicit in this matter, when He addresses the seven churches in the book of Revelation; viz. we may have all the right doctrines, but where is our first love? Why aren't we either hot or cold? Only you, the reader, can answer that question!

I believe that it is possible that we can turn things around while there is still 'today'. However, that would mean restoring ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY unto the Word of God once again, by searching diligently in His Word how we can live in this world without being of it and by applying these findings to our lives (James 1:21-27). The Scriptures tell us that, '*... if today we hear the voice of God, we should not harden our heart!*' (Ps 95 & Hebrews 3) '*...¹²Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; ¹³but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have become partakers of Messiah if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, ¹⁵while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."*

These words were not spoken to hardened unbelievers, but to the people of God who had gone adrift.

Obstacles to Reform and Restoration

Reform has been a subject of great agony since the beginning of time and restoration of anything an equally

² 'faith' translates the Greek word *pistis*, meaning 'that which causes trust and faith'—**a. faithfulness, reliability.** The Hebrew origin of the word faith means '*firmness, faithfulness, truth, truthfulness, steadfastness and fidelity*' – the word Amen is derived from that. Faith is often seen today as that, which one's mind or heart desires to happen. Yet, the biblical meaning for faith is clearly '*something, or some one in whom I can trust*'. This is why Jesus says of Himself that He is '*the way, the truth and the life...*' (Jn.14:6); '*the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness.*' Rev 3:14; and again as, '*...He who sat on him was called Faithful and True...*' Rev.19:11.

painful process.

The earliest reformer on record is Noah. The Bible teaches us that he was a preacher of Righteousness among a wicked and Godless people (Gen.6:9;7:1). The very fact that God chose to save Noah and his family in such a dramatic way testifies to us today that his life must have cast a gigantic shadow among the people of his day. The Bible says, '*...he walked with God...*', but does not tell us exactly what Noah did that was pleasing to God. However, if there is one thing that we can assume with reasonable certainty it is this: Noah did not make it to the top of the popularity polls among his peers.

The greatest reformer of all times, of course, is the Lord Jesus. Being who He is, one could be forgiven for thinking that He should have had few problems in breaking through the traditions of His day. Alas! He too was a preacher of righteousness, however, God chose not to rescue Him out of the hands of His angry peers. Rather, God chose to sacrifice His own Son that the traditions of men may lose their power over those of the human race who choose to walk with God. Traditions are good and necessary for a civilisation, however, when tradition comes between God and men, it is no less than an instrument of rebellion and idolatry.

The Gospel story shows us that if tradition, especially the religious kind, will even kill the Son of the loving God to ensure its own survival, it will not shrink back from destroying those of lesser origin.

This of course was born out in the lives of the Martyrs throughout the ages. These Martyrs died accused of grave heresies against the teaching of the church. The reality is more like sacrifices on the altar of tradition and deception. Human nature is essentially religious. The proof for this can be found in our need to worship someone or something. If we do not know a god to worship, we will erect for ourselves even a monument TO THE UNKNOWN GOD', c/f Acts 17:23!

Naturally, western civilisation does not erect such monuments anymore, however, we build niches into our religious and secular traditions, which accommodate a whole pantheon of unseen statues and monuments to which we bow down— rather than the God of Heaven and Earth.

If human nature is essentially religious, it is also

essentially rebellious. The Fall of Adam cost us our Godly attributes, but we retained the following two as a testimony, viz.:

a) we are essentially religious, because we were created to worship the Creator God,

b) we are essentially rebellious simply because through Adam we have remained sinners; and sin is rebellion against God.

Our (religious) traditions, unless they are in total conformity to the Word of God are buffers, or cushions, which allow us to retain a degree of our rebelliousness, whilst appearing to be obedient toward God. Naturally, if such traditions were offensive to God in Jesus' day, they are offensive to Him today.

Throughout the ages, men have stood against religions traditions in support of the Word of God. As the history of Christianity shows, such men were usually disposed of - beginning with Jesus - very quickly. Their cries for truth rocked the comfortable Cruise-Ship called 'Tradition', so, rather than consider a possible change of course, those who questioned the ship's direction were cast overboard.

The Organization called Church has a vast fleet of such Cruise Ships. Some of them are incredibly luxurious liners, while others are not much more than leaky dinghies. Yet, tradition is written across all of their bows. I would say that in all of these ships, the pilot (the Bible), has for a long time been either ignored altogether, or simply locked into the Captain's cabin. Whichever the case, those who are involved in the steering of the ship no longer use the Word of God as the absolute reference manual. In fact, the steering of the ship is virtually disabled by means of established traditions.

There are many who can recognise that the course of our ship is no longer in accordance with the ship's manual, the Word of God, but who would dare to leave the comfortable ship '*so surely guided by Tradition?*' After all it has been going for a long time, surely it will make to the end!?! Didn't God promise not to leave it or forsake it?

But, there are also many to whom God has been speaking to forsake the comfort of tradition and embrace the agony of Jesus to speak words of reform and restoration through the truth of the Scriptures, e.g. '*...it is*

written!"

To the great shame of Christian Leaders and also teachers it must be said that the quest for Bibles has brought great wealth to Publishing Houses, yet, as the spiritual climate of the church indicates, most Christians must be living in abject, spiritual poverty.³ At the same time, how many Christian leaders and Bible teachers really care whether the texts they are using are corrupted or not?⁴

It is to you that the challenge of the Holy Spirit is going out, *"Are you willing to disturb the comfort of your brethren, to forsake manmade traditions, to leave your own comfort zone for the sake of Jesus' agony and the Word of God?"*

What can be done?

It is my firm belief that Jesus meant every word, when He said to Nicodemus, that *'...God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.'*¹⁷ *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved..."* John 3:16-17

Therefore, if we accept that statement by Jesus as truth, then we must also act upon it. This also means that it is never too late to try and move God's hand in mercy. It is also important to keep in mind that even if God is already on His way to pronounce judgment, He is still willing to relent on the basis of the intercession and presence of righteous ones. The Biblical author painted a very clear picture of this side of God's nature for us in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction. The narrative informs us of Abraham interceding before the Eternal One on behalf of Sodom; e.g. *'...he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?"* And He said, *"I will not destroy it for the sake of ten."* (Gen.18:16-32).

The prophets, as well as the Lord Jesus, have warned that God will bring this world to judgment for its wickedness. I firmly believe that we are rapidly

approaching that terrible day. But, I also firmly believe that the world, and especially the church, can turn from its wicked and backslidden ways and change direction.

But we need to do it God's way as He outlined it in the Scriptures.

Those who call themselves God's people need to find the courage and walk the difficult road of Restoration.

When Jesus began to proclaim His message, He spoke exclusively to His own people. I believe that today, the Spirit of God is again calling to the People of God in the first instance— be they Jewish or Gentile.

If we are serious about following Jesus, and calling ourselves the People of God, then we must take some painful steps that may cut right across the traditions of many. If it can be said that Jesus ever condemned anyone, then it must also be said that He condemned religious traditions; viz. *'...you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.'* (Matth. 15:3-9; c/f. Mark 7:8-13).

The reality today is that the church, via her leaders and teachers, has drifted so far from her origins, that today she is barely recognizable as having her origins in Hebrew Redemptive History.

The Scriptures foretell that a time of *'Restoration of all things'* is coming (Acts 3:21ff.). I believe that this time is very close. It is therefore NOW, that we must heed the voice of the Spirit, to initiate this process. A part of this process of Restoration is the proclamation of truth as a testimony against the lies the world is being drenched in. Truth is the only guarantee against the God-initiated, coming deception of the Anti-Messiah.⁵

It is not enough to know interesting things from the Word of God or to know great and wonderful thing about God. We must seek to develop fellowships where a genuine desire exists to know and to live God's Word. To this many are apt to say, but this what we are doing anyway! I can only say to such an argument, that may be true in isolated individual cases, but if it were true in a broad sense, Christianity would not be in the sorry shape it is in.

The following factors need to be brought again into

³ Zondervan Publishing Company, based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is a subsidiary of Harper Collins, which is owned by media magnate **Rupert Murdoch**. ...

⁴ Good examples are the NIV published by Zondervan and 'The Message' by Eugene Peterson. Both versions are seriously flawed as translations and in many parts do not even resemble the Biblical texts— rather emotional ramblings.

⁵ Anti-Messiah, or more commonly referred to as Anti-Christ, does not only mean one opposed to the true Messiah, but one who seeks to replace the true Messiah (Christ); indeed, even God Himself, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 14:13-14.

the light of the Scriptures, if the path forward is meant to become visible once more.

1. Redemption
2. The Blessed Hope
3. The Messiah & the Gospel
 - a. *Who is Jesus*
 - b. *What is the true Gospel*
4. Our Hebraic Roots:
 - a. *Understanding the whole Bible from a Hebrew Perspective*
 - b. *The Covenants*
 - c. *The Jewish People and the Restoration Israel*
 - d. *The Biblical Feasts,*
 - e. *The Sabbath,*
5. The Family
6. A return to Biblical Worship
7. Biblical Ethics & Morality⁶

Summary

The reality is surfacing around the world that the Christian Church (whatever the denomination) does not have the answer for the world's predicaments.

On the one hand, and beginning with 9/11, the world is uniting more and more behind a 'global spirituality', when it comes to mourning over disasters of whatever kind, which however excludes Biblical Christianity. Not only does the world in general exclude Biblical Christians, but such are already being labelled as obstacles to world peace and harmony by mainstream Christian bodies, like RC, Anglican and Uniting Churches.⁷

⁶ It is not possible to address these issues here in detail. However, over the next few months I will seek to deal with them in a reasonable depth.

⁷ Recently, a Judge in Melbourne handed down a judgment against two Australian Pastors who were found guilty of 'vilifying Muslims' through teaching Christians about Islamic doctrines. The following is an excerpt from an article published by 'Saltshakers' immediately subsequent to the judgment. 'The UCA had a media release ready to hand to the media stating they, "welcomed today's ruling in VCAT... it sends a warning message to groups who seek to use religion to promote hatred and hostility of those with different religious beliefs." This is despite 'hatred and hostility' NOT being part of the seminar run by Daniel Scot and Catch the Fire Ministries. The (UCA) media release also said "We are concerned about small Christian extremist groups that are damaging the reputation and good name of the broader Christian community". Clearly the inference is that Catch The Fire and all those who are concerned about Islam's growth in Australia are 'Christian extremists'.

Those seen to be representing these three 'denominations' only represent a very small number or part of their respective denominations. The UCA and

On the other hand, however, among Christians there seems to be an ever-widening gap as to what constitutes Biblical Christianity. And this is incredibly tragic! This gap is brought about by a rather careless use of language where the Scriptures are concerned. It seems rather obvious that people, in general, are little concerned what the Scriptures really teach, as long as it somehow fits in with the current fads, irrespective of how they are generated. Many times, it is the songwriters who formulate popular theological thought. This is then carefully mixed with the understanding (or lack of) poorly trained Pastors and Evangelists and hey, presto, the poison chalice is filled to the brim.

It is obvious that centuries of non-Biblical thinking cannot be undone over night—and probably not at all. However, in what little time the human race may have left, those, who are serious about their relationship with the Saviour, do have the power to stop and set out on the path that is fully illuminated by the Word of God (Ps. 119:105). As I pointed out in several of my writings, one of the key references of the Bible relates to hearing God (Deut.6:4ff.).

May the Eternal One grant all His people the ability to hear the voice of His Spirit. The church is deeply in need of Restoration. Believers need to find true fellowship with the saints again, for what passes for much of Christian fellowship today is often little more than a gathering of people at an entertainment venue.

So, what is it that I am calling for?

1. The Bible must again come to the forefront of our lives; not just as a reference manual, but as our guide to life in the here and now, as well as forever long this here and now may last.
2. We must begin to preach the complete Good News (Gospel) that Jesus preached
3. The change I am calling for is not a different way of '*doing church*', but one based on the true meaning of

Catholic Church representatives were the ones who had applied to intervene in the case on behalf of the Muslims. One of the Anglicans present was Garry Bouma (Anglican Church Priest and professor of sociology) who said when speaking as an 'expert witness' FOR the Muslims during the hearing, 'that we have a low-temperature Christianity in Australia'. Bouma, when being cross-examined, went on to agree with the proposition made by David Perkins (Barrister for CTF) that he (Bouma) considered that "those Christians who did not conform to this average (low temperature 'norm') were offensive".⁶

- repentance; an internal transformation empowered by the Spirit of God— not by someone’s charisma.
4. We must present the true Messiah to the world
 5. We need to learn what Biblical worship really means
 6. We must find the way of presenting a greater righteousness to the world than anybody else. The excuse that we are mere sinners saved by Grace and are therefore entitled to live like devils, must no longer be tolerated in our midst.
 7. We must find the courage to live as Kingdom people – no matter what the cost in terms of morality and ethics.

Recently I watched a portion of the Jesus video with my 4 year-old granddaughter. As conclusion to the film, a male voice invites viewers to give their lives to Jesus— based on what they have seen. As part of his talk is the statement that Jesus is the one person who has been and still is the most powerful influence in the world for the last two thousand years and still is today.

As much as I would like to agree with that speaker, I am forced to strongly rebut his assertion. Although Jesus, through His birth, life, death and resurrection provided the impetus for a movement with the potential to change the world for Good, history tells us that it is not so. One only has to ask the average Jewish person and one will quickly discover, that the (perceived) influence of Jesus on His (perceived) followers brought naught, but persecution, death and destruction upon Jewish lives— the flesh and blood brethren of the Messiah.⁸

The 16th c. Reformation had the potential to turn all that around, but tradition was again the winner!

Although Jesus is still the one to raise the temperature of any discussion, debate or argument, His tangible influence upon Christians in general is minimal. Although John writes, *‘This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.’* (2 Jn. 6), Christians in general are relatively unconcerned about Biblical Commandments of any kind, because they are seen as

‘bringing one under law’.

The very harsh reality is that the influence of Jesus on Christian lives is very minimal. The true influence in the world, for better or for worse, is the church— always has been and will be until the end. People are being brought to church so that they may find Jesus, rather than be brought to Jesus in the first place so that they may create the *Ekklesia* (the ones called out) or church⁹. What people do find are ideals and illusions, because the truth is not being preached and their function, except for a select few who make it to an invisible inner circle, are kept there as cash cows.

I would greatly rejoice if I found one church where its leaders had the courage to truly teach, as well as empower, its congregation to function in the five-fold ministry as spoken of by the Apostle Paul.¹⁰

I want you, dear reader, to ponder the words of Jesus, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”*²² *“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’”*²³ *“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*¹¹ Matth. 7:21-23; c/f. Lk. 6:46; 13:25

⁸ The standard argument still prevails in many sectors of Christianity that ‘the Jews deserved that because they killed Christ (God). This is the overall picture of history. Tucked away in the crevasses of this history, however, are incidents where followers of Jesus actually laid down their lives for Jewish People; regrettably these incidents pale into insignificance by comparison.

⁹ The term ‘church’ is in fact NOT a Biblical term; it is a meaningless word derived from another meaningless construct based on a substitute Greek word. It only emerged in the Middle Ages when the Bible began to be translated into the vernacular. When early translations were made into German and English, a new word surfaced: ‘*kuriakon*’ (belonging to the Lord), from which came the work *kirk* (Germ. *Kirche*) and which later transmuted into church. The Greek word used by Jesus in Matthew 16 is ‘*Ekklesia*’ (meaning: called out) and was also transliterated into Latin in that way. The true meaning of *Ekklesia* (Hebr./Aram. K’hilla) is ‘*a select gathering or community*’.

¹⁰ Eph. 4:10-16 – Based on Paul’s teachings, these ministries are intended to be carried out by ‘ordinary’ followers of Jesus as part of the body (c/f. 1Cor. Ch. 12-14). There is no evidence that Paul encourages, or supports, a hierarchy of ‘Ministers’.

¹¹ The term *lawlessness* does not mean the absence of judicial law and order, but the absence of Torah (the divine instructions embodied in Holy Scripture).