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Reflections on Reformation

Remembering Its Quincentennial

Volume 21/2 July-December 2017

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Editorial: Reflections on Reformation

Martin Luther (1483-1546), a German Augustinian monk, initiated the Protestant Reformation in 1517 when he wrote 95 theses criticising the Catholic Church for corruption in Rome, including the buying of ecclesiastical privileges, nepotism, usury and the selling of indulgences, and nailed them on the church door in the town of Wittenberg (Burrows 2016). After some negotiation, Pope Leo X excommunicated him, but the church could not stop Luther's teachings from spreading throughout northern Europe or the world.

The Reformation led to a very violent and politically infuenetial schism throughout Europe and Christianity, prompting among other things catastrophic events like the 30 Years' War, the destruction of English monasteries, and the burning of numerous "heretics." In fact, Catholics and Protestants persecuted each other for hundreds of years.

St. Ignatius Loyola founded the Jesuit order in 1537, 20 years after Luther's protest, in part as a response to the reformation, popularly callaed "counter-reformation." Things are different now, after 500 years. In the past like most other Popes, Pope Francis also, himself a Jesuit, spoke harshly of the Protestant reformers. But recently he has changed and praised Luther.

He recently called the German theologian a reformer of his time who rightly criticized a church that was "no model

to imitate." The Pope added: "There was corruption in the church, worldliness, attachment to money and power" (Burrows 2016).

An Overview of Reformation

It is useful to have a general overview of the Protestant reformation, with view to understand its contemporary relevance.

Nobody denies that Luther's 95 theses, written in Latin, fundamentally challenged the authority and elitism of the Roman Catholic Church. They were a response against increasing corruption and in particular the highly profitable sale of indulgences to fund the building of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. Luther declared that when it came to "justification," there could be no mediation, no brokering by the church. Salvation was strictly a matter between an individual and God (Sherwood 2016).

This was indeed revolutionary. Swiftly translated into German and other European languages, Luther's ideas were the talk of Europe within weeks, spreading also due to the use of the newly discoverd printing presses around 1440 – the Google and Twitter of the medieval era – and triggering religious, political, intellectual and cultural upheaval (Sherwood 2016).

Rome condemned the monk as a heretic, removed him from the priesthood and banned his writings. In response, Luther publicly burned the papal bull. The sale of indulgences plummeted and his ideas started to take hold of the people.

"It released something that still is important: a challenge to authority that has been good for the human community," holds Richard Holloway (2017), the former Anglican bishop of Edinburgh and author of *A Little History of Religion,* who has become agonstic now.

He added: "It had a dark side, but it did move the religious debate on from divine authority imposed from above, and brought into the conversation a sense of protest against that. I think it would have happened in some other way even if it hadn't been kicked off by Luther. Humans are revolutionary species that are constantly revising and challenging their institutions."

Luther's challenge to the once impregnable Catholic Church was soon taken up by others, including John Calvin, whose ideas spread from Geneva to Scotland, France and the Low Countries. In Germany, the new ideas inspired the Peasants' War of 1524-5. In England, Henry VIII embarked on his own, less clear-cut, separation from the Catholic Church.

Rome launched a counter-reformation but by the end of the 16th century almost all of northern Europe was Protestant, though fractured into warring groups.

As well as bloodshed, the Reformation unleashed terrible destruction of religious heritage and art. In England, more than 800 monasteries, abbeys, nunneries and friaries were seized, libraries destroyed, manuscripts lost, treasures stripped and works of art appropriated. But the Reformation also gave rise to new forms of art, music and literature (Sherwood 2016).

"The dissolution of the monasteries was a tragedy," said Holloway. "A lot of beauty was lost for ever. But it also released the power of the individual, the power of the small group, against the mighty institution. Loss and gain, that's our story."

Luther was complicated, argumentative and bad-tempered, according to Nick Baines, the bishop of Leeds, who delivered a sermon about the Reformation in the monastery at Erfurt, central Germany, where Luther once lived as a monk. "He said some terrible things about Jews," Baines said, "which in turn had terrible consequences four centuries later. And he

wasn't exactly a proto-feminist. He was grasped by a concept of grace yet he didn't exercise grace towards other people. He was a very brave man, but must have been a nightmare to be around. But most people who change the world are [so]."

It took Catholics some time to see the merits of the challenges posed by Luther, but the church needed reform, according to Bishop William Kenney, the Catholic co-chair of the international dialogue between Lutherans and Catholic. "We had the problem of the sale of indulgences. There was a certain amount of corruption in parts of the church. I do think it was ultimately a good thing for the Catholic church – the Reformation, not the splitting of the church. It was forced to think again, to renew itself, and that is positive."

Yet it took until 1999 for the Catholic and Lutheran churches to agree on a joint declaration that resolved many of the theological issues at the heart of the split (Joint Declaration 1995). "That was an enormous step forward, and we're now trying to work out what the consequences of that are," added Kenney.

Popes John Paul II and Benedict engaged in some dialogue with the Lutherans and other Protestants, but Francis has really pushed it forward. "For 500 years, Europe has had this huge fault line between Catholics and Protestants," said MacCulloch. "Now the pope is going to a Lutheran country to emphasise the division is in the past. It's the culmination of a great deal of work on the part of the Lutherans and the papacy over the past 20 years" (Sherwood 2016).

Francis had "softened the tone", said Holloway. "The conversation will get warmer and sweeter, and who knows where it will lead. But the Roman Catholic church is a bit like a colossal aircraft carrier, and it takes a long time to make even tiny modifications.

"My hunch is that we're probably moving to a stage where we'll have the religious equivalent of multiculturalism. We won't seek to merge, as it were, but we'll seek to see the value in differences as long as they're balanced with a sympathetic tolerance towards each other."

From a Catholic perspective, Kenney said he thought there was a "realistic possibility" that the traditions could unite. "But there are big questions that need to be resolved," he warned.

Among those is the issue of women. Despite his warmth towards women members of the Catholic church and his frequent acknowledgement of the role they play in lay leadership, Pope Francis has insisted that "the door is closed" to women priests, though recently he showed that he was open to the possibility of women deacons.

The Lutherans have no such compunction. The Church of Sweden has had women pastors for more than half a century, the Danes for almost 70 years. And the gulf between the two churches on this issue will be underscored this week when Francis, the head of the Roman Catholic church, came face to face with the head of the Church of Sweden, Archbishop Antje Jackelén – a woman and a scholar (Sherwood 2016).

Key Dates

1517 Publication of Luther's 95 theses arguing that salvation depends on faith alone

1521 Luther refuses to recant and is formally excommunicated by Pope Leo X

1522 His translation of the New Testament into common German gives ordinary people access to the scriptures and fuels criticism of the Roman church

1524 German peasants, partly inspired by Luther, rise up against feudal overlords

1526 Publication of William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament

1534 Act of Supremacy, making Henry VIII head of the church in England, heralds the English Reformation

1545 Council of Trent opens, to clarify doctrine and reform the Catholic church

1618 Revolt in Bohemia starts Thirty Years War across Europe

1648 Peace of Westphalia entrenches Protestantism in northern Europe, but the consequences of Luther's revolt reverberate for centuries to come (Sherwood 2016).

Relevance of Reformation

On the Quincentennial of the beginning of Reformation (1517), *Jnanadeepa* wants to recall some of these significant events from a predominantly Catholic perspective and explore the significance of reformation for today. The first three articles are historical in nature. The first historical article by the eminent Church historian, Isaac Padinjarekuttu, studies the causes of reformation. The second article by the historian James Puliurumpil explores the distance from reformation to counter reformation leading to the lack of unity in the Church. The third article by Leonard Fernando highlights the change in the relationship between Catholics and Lutherans. We are now at a point of time when the wounds of history have been healed to a large extent and so we are able to look at persons, events and belief system in a more balanced way.

The next two articles are missiological ones. The eminent missiologist Jacob Kavunkal reflects on the role of laity in

Church's mission. It argues that the two key concepts of the Reformation as advocated by Luther, i.e., the spiritual authority of Scripture and the common priesthood of Christians based on baptism, can strengthen ecumenism and pave the way for church unity. The next article by Julian Saldanha explores the larger impact of reformation on mission. It surveys the Protestant approach to reformation and studies how they have rediscovered the need for mission for the contemporary times.

The article by Indologist Subhash Anand enquires the special role of faith, grace and scripture in Luther in order to reflect on its Indian significance. This is followed by an artile by Systematic Theologian Kurien Kunnumpuram who analyses the response of the Second Vatican Council to reformation. The next article by Protestant Theologian Muthuraj Swamy dwells on Freedom for a Christian, which is so precious to Martin Luther and which could be the guiding principle for today's ecumenical dialogue. The final article by the editor invites us to reflect on the contemporary relevance of Reformation, based on the definitions of Jesus, that our society accepts: both the medieval society and ours.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ

Editor June 2017

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The Causes of the Reformation

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Abstract: This article looks into some of the reasons for reformation. On 31st October, 2017, the Christian world keeps the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the event that permanently divided the western Church into Catholic and Protestant. Who could be blamed for it? Apparently, the main responsibility for it should be laid at the door of the papacy, if what has been said above is any indication, or on Martin Luther, who, according to many Catholics, should be considered the prime factor. But let us go deeper into the question and see how complex the situation was before we fix the blame on one person or one event. It was not the result of one cause or the work of one man. "Long before the outbreak of the Reformation things occurred, facts were provided, steps were taken, ideas were spread and emotions were stirred, which facilitated, made possible, provoked, and even made unavoidable the coming of a revolt against the church – so unavoidable that we can speak of an inner historical necessity." This article look at some of these factors in detail.

The successor of Pope Leo X, Adrian VI, said at his first consistorial allocution: "Depravity has become so taken for granted that those soiled by it no longer notice the stench of sin." The progress of the Reformation clearly shows the guilt of the Catholic Church in the emergence of reformation. This reminds us of saying of the famous

historian,Oswald Spengler: "Luther fought the church not because it demanded too much, but because it demanded too little."

Keywords: Reformation, causes of reformation, religion, spirituality.

The Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517), in its final decree, just three months before Martin Luther posted the ninety-five theses at Wittenberg, Germany, declared as follows in eerie unawareness of what would soon occur: "Finally it was reported to us on several occasions through the cardinals and the prelates of the three committees (of the council), that no topic remained for them to discuss and that over several months nothing at all had been brought before them by anyone."[1] How could Pope Leo X be aware of what was happening in the church? His entanglement in contemporary politics, "shocking negligence, irresponsible frivolity and prodigal love of pleasure"[2] made him, in fact, the saviour of the Reformation. "One does not find in him an awareness of duty and of the responsibility of the supreme shepherd of Christendom and a manner of life in conformity with this responsibility."[3] So the council lacked any will to reform the church and the inner strength and life needed for a reform. That was why, during the council, in 1514, a letter was sent to Archbishop Albrecht of Magdeburg and Mainz, the Curia's offer to preach the "Peter's Indulgence" in his dioceses, which provided the immediate occasion for the Reformation: for a fee of 10,000 ducats the archbishop would be allowed to hold the two seas simultaneously and for the financing of the fee, half of the indulgence offering for Saint Peter's would be made over to him. Thus a lack of seriousness and determination in the leaders, beginning with the pope himself condemned the council to ineffectiveness.[4] The successor of Leo X, Adrian VI, said at his first consistorial allocution: "Depravity has

become so taken for granted that those soiled by it no longer notice the stench of sin."[5]

On 31st October, 2017, the Christian world keeps the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the event that permanently divided the western Church into Catholic and Protestant. Who could be blamed for it? Apparently the main responsibility for it should be laid at the door of the papacy, if what has been said above is any indication, or on Martin Luther, who, according to many Catholics, should be considered the prime factor. But let us go deeper into the question and see how complex the situation was before we fix the blame on one person or one event. It was not the result of one cause or the work of one man. "Long before the outbreak of the Reformation things occurred, facts were provided, steps were taken, ideas were spread and emotions were stirred, which facilitated, made possible, provoked, and even made unavoidable the coming of a revolt against the church – so unavoidable that we can speak of an inner historical necessity."[6] Let us look at some of these factors in detail.

1. Dissolution of Christendom

By it is meant the dissolution of the medieval order, the disruption of the unity which embraced the totality of political, intellectual, and religious life in Europe, the unity of *sacerdotium* and *imperium*, created by the Gregorian Reforms.[7] This was the most striking characteristic of the Middle Ages. But the papacy itself contributed to severing this unity. For the sake of the independence and autonomy of the church, it saw itself forced to weaken the power of the *imperium*. For a while it seemed as though the pope could also assume political leadership. But the more he exercised his fullness of authority on the secular political sphere, the more decidedly he encountered the justified resistance of the new self-conscious nation states. This was clearly seen in Boniface

VIII, who replaced the "two-powers" theory of Gregory VII with his theory of monism, crassly expressed in the Bull, *Unam Sanctam* (1302): "Furthermore we declare, state and define that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of all human beings that they submit to the Roman Pontiff."[8] But in his conflict with the French King Philip the Fair, this claim to absolute power did not have any effect. The King whom the pope threatened to depose "like a naughty boy unless he comes to his senses,"[9] arrested Boniface in his palace at Anagni on 7 September 1303 and he was accused of all sorts of misdeeds by William Nogaret, the lawyer of the king: "I claim that the individual in question, surnamed Boniface, is not a pope. He has not entered by the door and must be considered a thief and a robber. I claim that the aforesaid Boniface is a manifest heretic and a horrible simonist, such as there has never been since the beginning of the world. Finally, I claim that the aforesaid Boniface has committed manifest crimes, of great enormity and infinite in number, and that he is incorrigible. It is the duty of a General Council to judge him and condemn him."[10] He was rescued by some soldiers, but badly shaken, the pope died a month later. The change from papal world power to papal powerlessness took place very abruptly. At the beginning of the thirteenth century Innocent III was still reigning gloriously while at the end of the century, Boniface VIII had to languish in prison.

The sequel to this was the Avignon exile of the popes and the Western Schism which destroyed the unity of the church. Conciliarism seemed to be the only rescue from the difficulty of the "damnable trinity of popes". But the Conciliarism of the Council of Constance (1414-1418)[11] was overcome by the popes through political means, by entering into concordats with political powers which gave more power to the states and that led to the formation of territorial churches and the dependence of the church on the secular powers. The papal policy of concordats also brought it about that the popes instead

of stressing their proper religious mission, became more and more princes among princes with whom alliances could be made and against whom war could be waged. Moreover, the popes came to hate councils. In fact, in his bull *Execrabilis* of 18 January 1460 pope Pius II condemned Conciliarism and forbad all appeal from the pope to a council as erroneous and thus rendered ineffective the only organ that was capable of bringing about reform in the church.[12]

The collapse of papal rule of the world was also caused by the rising democratic consciousness in Europe. The papacy attempted to defend its supremacy with traditional theological and legal arguments but had fewer and fewer supporters among the intellectuals on its side. By contrast, the universities and publicists of Europe had developed and disseminated democratic ideas throughout Europe. Critical spirits increasingly distanced themselves from the papal church. An intellectually mature laity challenged the clericalism that was prevalent in the church and wanted the clergy to concentrate on their religious mission. Movements like Humanism emphasized education, critical religion, subjectivism and rationalism and produced an anti-clerical, anti-Roman and anti-ecclesiastical atmosphere. Even if people did not take an aggressive attitude towards the church, they still held aloof from her dogmas, sacraments and prayer.

2. Unwillingness to Reform

The medieval church was in need of reform and there were many calls for it. Several voices were heard throughout the Middle Ages which called for a new church, the Poverty Movements like the Humiliati, Waldensians, etc., Joachim of Fiore, Girolamo Savonarola, Spiritual Franciscans, Wycliffe and Hus, Marsilius of Padua, William of Ockham, the Mystics of the Middle ages, the Conciliarists, the Humanists, etc. because the life-blood of the church had ceased to flow

through its veins. In fact, the council of Constance which was called to end the Western Schism called for reform "in head and in members" (*reformatio in capite et in membris)*,[13] but nothing happened of this intention because the councils after that, Basel-Ferrara-Florence and Lateran V failed to achieve anything in this regard.

The church's legal system was very much in need of overhaul. It was used by the Curia to tax and to extract money and was dominated by the Italians, a fact resented by other countries. Church, theology and society were overgrown by canon law. The church was in need of administrative reform. The church's administrative system, with the absolutist centralism of the Curia, had become notoriously corrupt and inefficient and was accused of nepotism. Its uncontrollable greed for money and stubborn resistance to reform were resented.

The church was in need of moral reform. The morals of the hierarchy, popes, bishops, clergy, and in the monasteries were lax and scandalous. The papacy of Leo X proved even more dangerous than the horrible scandals of the Renaissance papacy, like Alexander VI, perhaps the most notorious of all popes who kept a string of mistresses and fathered through them at least ten illegitimate children, including two who were borne by Giulia Farnese while he was pope. Leo's pontificate had not such scandals but it was marked by a shocking neglect of responsibility. "The deterioration of the Christian is achieved not only in an openly wicked life, but also furtively and hence more dangerously in an inner wasting away, a slow loss of substance, an imperceptible secularization and a confused lack of responsibility."[14] It was manifestly demonstrated during his entire pontificate. He was busy with his politics for two years, thus neglecting to proceed against Luther and his teaching, reportedly calling it a "squabble among the monks", thus becoming the saviour of the Reformation. Early on Luther

had appealed to a general council to resolve the crisis, but the papacy proved reluctant to call a new council, partly from that it might review the ghost of Conciliarism, and partly because Lateran V (1512-1517) had only recently completed its work, three months before the beginning of the Reformation, unaware of the happenings in neighbouring Germany caused by the preaching of indulgences commissioned by the Curia.

The situation of the clergy, high and low, was no better than that of the papacy. Clerical concubinage was so widespread that people were hardly scandalized by it. The real problem was lack of pastoral care. The church appeared altogether as the property of the clergy intended to bring economic advantage and profit. Needs of divine worship and care of the souls were often far less decisive than the desire to heap up grace for oneself and one's family through good works, including erecting churches and altars, founding monasteries, saying masses, etc. Creation of benefices for spiritual activities seemed to be the prime concern of the church because it had also economic benefits. Thus to the detriment of the care of souls, several bishoprics or other pastoral offices could be united in one person. So as late as 1556, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, grandson of Paul III, possessed ten Episcopal sees, twenty six monasteries, and 133 other benefices! Episcopal sees and most abbacies were open to members of the nobility only. This domination of the nobility among the higher clergy and their distance from the lower clergy led to the secularization of the rich prince bishops and monasteries. Their services could also be delegated and so there was wide spread absenteeism of bishops and priests from their dioceses and parishes as well as abbots and abbesses from their monasteries. The lower clergy formed a clerical proletariat which was far too numerous, uneducated and poor.

In these circumstances, the religious spirit and zeal for the care of souls sank and at the Roman Curia and in the rest of the

clergy the pursuit of money became the main preoccupation. At the Curia men sought to fill up the coffers by means of an elaborate system of fees and taxes and finally even indulgence offerings. The prodigal and worldly papal court, the extensive building activity, and the great expenses of war brought about a continuing need for money. It was not accidental that the dealings in indulgences provided the immediate occasion for the Reformation and it was connected with collection of money for the building of a church. In these circumstances it was no wonder that there was much anti-clericalism and anti-papalism and far reaching dissatisfaction with the church, which more and more grew into resentment and even hatred of Rome. For a whole century, people called for a reform of the church in head and members, but they were disappointed time and again. The Reformation was bringing into the open these grievances, and people who had absolutely no involvement with the teaching of the reformers acclaimed them merely because they seemed to be articulating their feelings about the situation in the church.

3. Religion or Spirituality?

The medieval church was in need of spiritual reform. Educated people wanted the church to go back to the freshness and vitality of the faith of the apostolic times by taking recourse to Scripture and the Fathers. There was plenty of religion and religious activity in the medieval society but little spirituality. Much of it was superstitious and ritualistic. A religious nervousness which often took enthusiastic-apocalyptic forms led to a frenetic religious activity manifested in an externalized liturgy and a legalistic popular piety, terrifying superstitious practices, cult of relics, pilgrimages, veneration of saints, etc. The religious nervousness can be understood only from the background of the anxiety that was characteristic of the times. The late Middle Ages was an age of anxiety at many

levels, existential, moral and spiritual.[15] In fact, the best example of it is Martin Luther himself, and his struggle to find a gracious God. Struck down by a thunderstorm and fearing imminent death, Luther vowed to become a monk. Once in the monastery, he was plagued with an overwhelming sense of guilt and assaults of dread and despair and his theology of the gracious God was born out of this anxiety.

What was the cause of the great existential anxiety, the fear of death, eternity, hell, purgatory etc. that was widespread in those times? It was caused by the many famines and plagues that occurred in Europe in the 14th century. The Bubonic Plague or Black Death from 1347-1349 wiped out one third of the European population. Death was everywhere. Death, judgement, heaven, hell etc. were the favourite themes of preaching. John of Capistrano always carried a skull when he preached and warned his congregation: "Look and see what remains of all that once pleased you, or that which once led you to sin. The worms have eaten it all."[16] The Franciscan, Richard of Paris delivered a series of sermons for ten days on the last four things, death, judgement, heaven and hell appropriately enough in the cemetery of the Holy Innocents, the most popular burial ground in Paris.

This existential anxiety led to moral anxiety, anxiety about a correct moral life, and immense guilt feelings. Death brought human beings face to face with a just God and his judgement and the anxiety that one falls short before a just God tormented people. To escape this anxiety people resorted to all sorts of piety and penitential practices. The Flagellants went from place to place and whipped themselves, atoning for their own sins, and of others. Ordinarily people preferred less severe practices, like buying of indulgences, pilgrimages, collection of relics, veneration of saints, Eucharistic adoration, recital of the rosary, etc.[17] Rich people made arrangements for masses to be said for their souls, like Henry VIII who

made arrangements for masses to be said for his soul "while the world shall endure". The moral anxiety was reinforced by the confessionals which far from conveying a sense of forgiveness merely reinforced an already ponderous weight of guilt.[18] The confessional manuals and penitential books were designed to provoke introspection and scrupulosity. The pressure to come clean of all sins, including the interior and sometimes unrecognized motives behind them placed an intolerable burden on the penitent. Once such a confession had been made, one still needed to perform works of satisfaction before absolution could be claimed and hence, the feverish activism of late medieval religion, the ceaseless efforts to earn merits through various activities. To avoid purgatory and hell, people had to do these things and so traffic in indulgences, arrangements for masses to be said for those who are dead, arrangements for churches to be built, monasteries to be endowed, etc. because, "One spark of hell fire is greater than that caused by a thousand years of a woman's labour in child birth" as pictured in an illustrated catechism in circulation in Germany.[19] The mass had become a ritual, one of the good works the priest performed. In short, here was a spirituality of works and, for many, such spirituality was deeply unsatisfying.

4. Crisis in Theology

This crisis in religion and spirituality was the result of a deeper malaise, more decisive than the personal failings of popes, priests and laity, namely, a crisis in theology. The accusation was heard from many quarters that the church had lost its intellectual heritage and deviated from the distinctive ideas of the Christian faith and Christian ethics. Scholasticism had made Christianity abstract and it itself was in crisis. There was theological uncertainty, lack of orientation, crisis of authority and doctrinal pluralism. One was not sure what was Christian faith and what was theological opinion and there was

no central authority to give clear directions and clarifications. The areas of truth and error were not delineated with sufficient clarity. People fancied themselves in accord with the church although positions had long been adopted that contradicted her teaching. Uncertainty was particularly great in regard to the concept of the church. Because of the Western Schism it was no longer generally clear that the papacy was essential to the church and people had grown accustomed to getting along without a pope. Many people believed that Luther was merely introducing some reforms in the church, but in fact, he was rejecting essential doctrines of the church.

There was a quest for the true church in the Middle Ages but there were different competing models of the church. The first was the "Curial" model represented by the Roman Curia which invested supreme authority in the hands of the papacy and defended it at any cost in spite of the loss of credibility in the wake of the Western Schism, the scandal of the Renaissance Papacy, etc. as seen above. The second model was Conciliarism, which appeared as the saviour of the church after the Western Schism. The conciliar theory set forth by thinkers like Pierre d'Ailly, Jean Gerson, Dietrich of Niem, etc. did not seek to abolish the papacy but to relegate it to its proper role within the whole church. They advocated reform of the whole church, "in head and members." The popes were opposed to it from the start and the failure of the conciliar movement contributed in part to the success of the Protestant revolt as well as the continuing cries for reform from many who remained faithful to Rome.[20] A third model was provided by the teachings of John Wycliffe (d. 1384) and Jan Hus (d. 1415). They provided the most formidable intellectual challenge to the western church in the later Middle Ages so much so that both were condemned by the Council of Constance (1414-1418). Although Wycliffe was dead long ago (1384), the council ordered his bones to be exhumed and burned. Their radical criticism of the church of the day

anticipated most of the teachings of the Reformation. The worldliness and corruption of the church led them to their concepts of predestination and the Church of the elect, and used them to undermine the claims of the corrupt church of the time. The true church is the predestined body of the elect. The church on earth, the visible church, could not be identified with the true church because in it there are the reprobates and the redeemed. The true church is the invisible church and it is possible to be in the church without being of the church. With this they attacked the institutional church at its foundations. Wycliffe applied it to the papacy and the hierarchy and said that the popes and bishops might be among the reprobates in which case they were not to be obeyed. But Wycliffe's positions went much beyond his ecclesiology as can be seen from the forty-five articles from his writings condemned by the Council of Constance.[21]

The next model was provided by the "Spiritual Franciscans", the radical branch of the Franciscan order. The power of their appeal sprang from two sources: Francis' ideal of absolute poverty and the mystical theology of Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202) which they applied to their own order and to their own times. In combination, these elements provided an explosive critique of the contemporary church. Joachim divided history into three ages associated respectively with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The dawn of the Third Age would be heralded by the coming of a new order of barefooted spiritual men who would oppose the false hierarchy of the church and prepare the way for a millennium of peace which would continue unto the last judgement. The Spirituals, embittered by their struggle with the papacy identified themselves as this new order. They did not hesitate to refer to those popes who opposed them as Antichrist. The church, of course, crushed the movement but their influence continued in various groups in Italy and France. As Wycliffe and Hus opposed the empirical church of their day with the concept of the invisible church of

the elect, so the Spiritual Franciscans held out the idea of the church of the future, the church of the soon-coming Third Age of the Holy Spirit of which they were forerunners. The Radical Reformers among the reformers inherited this theology to a great extent.[22] The Waldensians and the Poverty movements in general, devoid of the apocalyptic fervour of the Franciscan Spirituals, wanted to resurrect the model of the primitive church and its simplicity and poverty. The Poor Men of Lyons as they came to be called, founded by Valdes or Peter Waldo soon attracted a following but was condemned by the church as heretics although many of their proposals were taken over by the Franciscans and Dominicans. The official church saw in their view of the church a strong perfectionist tendency and an antisacerdotal bias. Much more any other group they tied the efficacy of the sacraments to the moral quality of the priest, a thorny issue in the medieval church.[23]

If the ecclesiologies were in flux, so were theological notions, schools and systems. In the first place, the official theological and philosophical system of the church, Scholasticism, was in crisis, being challenged as too speculative and abstract. The project of "faith seeking understanding,"[24] establishing a proper balance between faith and reason, nature and grace, natural and supernatural, undertaken by such great minds as Anselm, Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas etc. was indeed remarkable but was being challenged and major transmutations in the scholastic synthesis were brought about by theologians, like Duns Scotus (d. 1308) and William of Ockahm (d.1347). They effected major shifts in theology: the shift from "being" to "will" as the primal metaphor for understanding God; the shift from metaphysics to metahistory as a means of understanding God's relation to the created realm; the shift from ontological to logical as a method of doing theology which had far reaching consequences for theology and church.[25] For example, what are the consequences of saying that within the divine being

the divine will takes precedence over the divine intellect? An act is virtuous merely because God commands it to be so. If God is not bound by necessity to the great chain of being, he is nonetheless free to bind himself by his word, his promise. Thus they made use of the distinction between Gods "absolute power" and his "ordained power". By his absolute power God hypothetically could do anything which does not involve the law of contradiction, but then within the absolute freedom of God, he binds himself through his ordained power. As Duns Scotus suggested, by his absolute power God could have become incarnate in an ass instead of in a man, but by his ordained power God, in fact, became incarnate in the man Jesus. By his ordained power God had decreed that salvation will be dispensed through the sacraments of the church. God's covenant or pact, that is, God's promise or word is the basis of the history of salvation. Still by his absolute power God might yet suspend the rules. Conceivably God could save one outside the ordained system of sacraments and merits, by faith alone, *sola fide*. William of Ockham also denied the real existence of universal concepts, stressing instead their character as names (*nomina*) or logical constructs, thus developing Nominalism. Nominalism focused on individual realm of experience and concrete meaning, rather than general and universal categories. The famous "Ockham's Razor" simply suggested that beings, and, therefore, things and explanations, should not be multiplied unnecessarily, but should concentrate on the essentials. As for Christian life the effect on all these shifts was enormous: "By dwelling so intently on God's will rather than his being, Ockham created the conditions for a new spiritual anxiety – not the possible nonexistence of God, but the suspicion that he might not keep his word; that he could not be depended upon to do as he had promised; that the power behind all things might ultimately prove to be untrustworthy and unfriendly; that God, in a word, might be a liar. Not God's existence, but his goodness, not the

rationality of faith, but he ability to trust God – these became major spiritual problems."[26] Luther was massively influenced by Nominalism and plagued by doubts about his salvation.

Another challenge to the official theology in the Middle Ages was mysticism, the claim to direct, intuitive, sometimes ecstatic experience of God through conformity of the human will to the will of God through the successive stages of purgation, illumination and contemplation. Mystical experience had been a mainstay of Christian spirituality and in general posed little challenge to the church but in the given context of widespread criticism of the church in the Middle Ages, it became a tool for critique of the church and her institutions. Meister Eckhart (d. 1327), the German Dominican, developed a sophisticated theory of mysticism. Deep within each individual there was a spark of the divine which held the possibility for union with, or absorption into God, through a painful process of detachment, from self and all other creatures, a letting loose of oneself, when the eternal Son would be born within the soul. It seemed to some that Eckhart's doctrine of the birth of the Eternal Son within the soul led him to deny the historical birth of Jesus and more dangerously it bypassed the ministrations of the church. The church authorities were quick to discover the danger and condemned him for heresy which he denied but his ideas were influential, even for Luther who was influenced by Johannes Tauler and Heinrich Suso, two disciples of Meister Eckhart.[27]

The Humanists, dominated by the intellectuals of Europe offered their own challenge to theology by demanding the church go back to the sources (*Ad Fontes*). Erasmus of Rotterdam (d. 1536), the "Prince of the Humanists" suggested the best way for church and theology to reform itself, that is, by going back to Scripture and the Fathers. He said that theology should have only one aim, that is, the discovery of Christ. The return to Scripture and the Fathers should allow a religious purification and a practical Christianity which rejects otiose

theological speculation. As Erasmus said, "Is it impossible to be untied to the Trinity without being capable of explaining the distinction between the Father and the Son or between the Spirit and the other two persons? What matters, that to which we have to apply all our energies, is to purge our soul of passions ... Unless I have a pure heart, I shall never see God. Unless I forgive my brother, God will not forgive. We shall never be damned for not knowing whether the principle of the Holy Spirit is single or double; but we shall not escape damnation unless we try to possess the fruits of the Spirit."[28] He also said that the gospel ought to be accessible to everyone and in all languages. He himself took the initiative in providing a series of critical editions of the Bible and Church Fathers, perhaps the most positive contribution of the humanist scholars to the religious renewal of the sixteenth century.

5. Indulgence Controversy

But still, there could be no Reformation without Martin Luther, the Indulgence Controversy and the Ninety-five Theses. "The far-reaching deterioration of religious and moral strength, the want of precision in central questions of faith, the lack of a sense of pastoral responsibility in the clergy, along with so many lost opportunities for reform ... make an upheaval quite intelligible. But the fact that it occurred as it did, in what we know as the Reformation, depended to a great extent on Martin Luther himself."[29]

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany, the son of a middle-class miner. In 1501 he entered the University of Erfurt. Destined for the study of law, he turned to the monastery which he entered in 1505 as fulfilment of a vow for saving him from being struck in a thunderstorm. In 1506 he made his profession in the Augustinian Order and was ordained priest in 1507. His Order required him to teach theology and in 1512 Luther became doctor of theology and

began his teaching career as professor of Sacred Scripture at Wittenberg, Germany. Through his study and teaching of Scripture Luther obtained a remarkable grasp of the Bible which allowed him to throw an entirely new light on many pages of Scripture. This led to his development of a new understanding of God, faith, and the church. This involved him in conflict with the church, and the starting of the Reformation on October 31, 1517 when he published his Ninety-five Theses in his hometown Wittenberg, followed by his excommunication and the founding of the Lutheran Church over which he presided until his death in 1546. Behind these few sentences is a life of great faith, knowledge, courage and depth; in the words of Joseph Lortz, the great Catholic historian of the Reformation, Luther was "a sea of energies, of impulses and perceptions and experiences." Reference to his enormous literary output alone would suffice to justify this assessment. Few personalities in the history of Christianity approach the stature of Luther, but few have been the subject of such polemics. Since in this article we are dealing with the causes of the Reformation, we shall only speak of the controversy on the indulgences, the immediate cause of it, while all the foregoing observations can be considered the remote causes.

Luther's ninety-five theses, which he, according to the traditional account, nailed to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg in Germany, was an attack on indulgences, in particular those that were being offered by the Dominican preacher Johann Tetzel and his companions in return for suggested money offerings to help pay for the rebuilding of St. Peter's church in Rome.

An indulgence is remission of the temporal punishment of sins, granted by the church and effective before God.[30] The practice of indulgences going back to the eleventh century preceded its theological justification. Several factors contributed to the rise of indulgences. The introduction of

private confession brought about a connection between confession and absolution, whereby the subjective performance of penance followed reconciliation and the distinction between guilt and punishment became clearer. Adaptations began to be made whereby penitential works were adjusted to the circumstances and abilities of the penitent and various kinds of penance could be substituted for one another and the church could decide on such matters. These were prayers, almsgiving or other charitable activities or activities benefiting the church such as building of a church or participation in a crusade. Whereas the atonement was concerned primarily with the canonical penalty, the absolution referred to the punishment in God's sight. The indulgence united them, ecclesiastical penance and prayer for the remission of sin before God and it was an official act of the church justified through the doctrine of the treasury of the church of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints of which the church has the key, namely, the pope. Abuse was bound to follow with a multiplication of indulgences and ever lighter works of penance and an unscrupulous financial exploitation of them. Sin and the punishment for sin were distinguished and people were fleeing the punishment which was now made easy through payment of money, and not sin itself. It was all the more so when indulgence could also be gained for the dead. The strong financial exploitation of indulgences by the Curia led to similar practices by the territorial lords as happened in the case of Albrecht of Mainz.

In 1505 pope Julius II had begun the rebuilding of St Peter's basilica and in 1507 he announced a plenary indulgence to finance this immense building project, the Peter's Indulgence. It was renewed by Leo X. In 1513 Albrecht of Brandenburg, a twenty-three year old youth became Archbishop of Magdeburg and Administrator of Halberstadt. And in the very next year he became the Archbishop of Mainz for the payment of 14000 ducats and another 1000 ducats as dispensation fee for this

illegal accumulation of benefices. The Archbishop borrowed the money from the bank Fugger and the Curia suggested how this money could be paid back. The Archbishop was to undertake the preaching of the Peter's Indulgence for eight years and he could retain half the proceeds and the rest would go to Rome. Accompanied by the banking officials the preaching began, on 22 January 1517 by Johannes Tetzel who was appointed to preach, a whole scale commercial transaction and a full-fledged scandal.

Luther had already criticized indulgences in his lectures on the Bible and now once again he came out against it saying that the people are fleeing the penalties of sin and not sin itself. He presented his ideas in detail to the bishops in charge, his own bishop, the bishop of Brandenburg, and Albrecht of Mainz, the papal agent for the indulgences, accompanied by the now famous ninety-five theses. Only when they did not reply did he make them public. This happened on 31 October 1517, the eve of the feast of All Saints. The story of the nailing of the theses on the church door is a later legend created by the Protestants. In any case this is considered the beginning of the Reformation. The theses received wide circulation and Luther himself was taken aback and issued clarifications since they were meant not for the public but for scholars and they could be misunderstood. He sent these clarifications to the pope, his bishop and his superiors in August 1518. To pope Leo X he wrote: "I first of all declare that I intend to say and to assert nothing except what is contained primarily in Holy Scripture and then in the Church Fathers acknowledged and preserved by the Roman Church and in canon law and the papal decrees ... Through this *protestatio* of mine, it is, so I hope, made sufficiently clear that I can err but that one cannot make me out to be a heretic."[31] This shows that a real possibility of resolving the issue existed provided there was an equal measure of pastoral responsibility from the part of the pope and the concerned bishops. That this opportunity was

wasted reveals the radical weakness of the church of that time. "In this failure in the sphere of what is proper to the priesthood rather than in all the abuses lies her part of the guilt of the Reformation."[32]

The progress of the Reformation clearly shows the guilt of the Catholic Church but that is beyond the scope of this paper. Let me conclude with the words of Oswald Spengler: "Luther fought the church not because it demanded too much, but because it demanded too little."[33]

Notes

1 Norman Tanner, *New Short History of the Catholic Church* (London, New York: Burns & Oates, 2011) 167.

2 Hubert Jedin and John Dolan (eds.), *History of the Church*, 10 vols., *Reformation and Counter Reformation*, vol. V (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 7.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 10.

5 Ibid., 7.

6 Ibid., 3-10, here 3.

7 Hans Küng, *Christianity. Essence, History, and Future* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 380-403.

8 J. Neuner-J Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, (Bangalore: TPI, 1996) 281.

9 Jean Comby, *How to Read Church History*, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 173.

10 Ibid.

11 "This holy synod of Constance … declare that, legitimately assembled in the Holy Spirit … it has power immediately from Christ; and that everyone of whatever state or dignity, even papal, is bound to obey it in those matters which pertain to the faith, the eradication of the present schism and the general reform of the church of God in head and members.", Tanner, 115.

12 "A horrible abuse, unheard of in earlier times has sprung up in our period. Some men imbued with the spirit of rebellion suppose that they can appeal from the Pope, vicar of Christ to a future council. Desirous therefore of banishing this deadly poison from the Church of Christ we condemn appeals of this kind and reject them as erroneous and abominable and declare them to be completely null and void".

13 See Note 11 above.

14 Hubert Jedin and John Dolan, 7.

15 Timothy George, *The Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988) 22-30.

16 Michael Seidlmayer, *Currents of Medieval Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960) 126.

17 Particularly interesting was the craze for collecting relics. Thus the castle church in Wittenberg (Luther's church) contained the valuable collection of Prince Frederick the Wise which included: thirty five pieces of the true cross, a vial of the virgin Mary's milk, a stick from Moses' burning bush, and 204 parts of the bodies of the Holy Innocents. Cfr. John P. Dolan, *History of the Reformation* (New York: Descle Company, 1965) 204-205.

18 Steven E., Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1975) 15-16.

19 Ibid., 28.

20 Timothy George, 34.

21 See Timothy George, 35-37; Tanner, 151-154.

22 Timothy George, 37-38.

23 Timothy George, 38-40; Tanner, 150-151.

24 "I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand" (Anselm).

25 Timothy George, 42-43.

26 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1980) 61-62.

27 Timothy George, 44-46,

28 Jean Comby and Diarmaid McCulloch, *How to Read Church History*, vol II (New York: Crossroad,1995) 5.

29 Hubert Jedin and John Dolan, 11.

30 See Hubert Jedin and John Dolan, 42-51.

31 Ibid., 51.

32 Ibid.

33 Quoted by Timothy George, 51.

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The Distance from Reformation to Counter-Reformation

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Abstract: The Reformation marked the end of Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. Instead of generating the true spirit of Christ, that is, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, the Reformation made thousands suffer on account of their religion. The tragedy of the Reformation was the unresolved tension which arose from the fact that the interpretation of the fundamentals of faith was left to an unsure and changing Church government and its theologians. The Council of Trent took it as its mighty task to safeguard the Old Faith from the devastating attacks of the innovation and to restore Catholic faith and ecclesiastical discipline. Trent could valiantly defend her hierarchical constitution and successfully repel the religious subjectivism of the reformers. Thus the Reformation which threatened to destroy the Catholic Church gave the impetus for a counter-reformation, i.e., to the religious revival and Catholic restoration. Though the Reformation was religious in character, it had far-reaching effects in all fields. Thus it helped in the shaping of the modern world, along with other movements. The question whether Reformation helped the modern people or not could be answered from the effects it produced in different lands and at different times. Reformation paved the way for Catholic restoration or Counter-reformation.

Keywords: Renovation, Restoration, Reformation, Religious wars, Religious subjectivism and Council of Trent.

Introduction

Reformation is a many-sided event contributed by the religion, politics, humanism and the economics of the 15th century. It was part of the shift in European thought and experience which had begun in the 14th century. Nonetheless, at its core it was a religious movement launched to a great extent by Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. When the protagonists of Reformation saw it as a recovery of the pure revelation of primitive Christianity, the Catholic Church of the time saw it mainly as a rejection of Christian truth like the Gnosticism of the second century, a very threat to its foundations. But the modern understanding is that it was a *felix culpa*, since the reformers sought for the pure gospel and succeeded in presenting it to the Christians in the face of grave deformations.

1. Religious Innovation

In the beginning Luther's revolt appeared to be a purely personal religious aberration. But gradually it developed into a religious and political revolution of different dimensions. The multifarious effects of the Reformation are given by Bihlmeyer-Tuechle in the following lines:

> Instead of effecting the real reform of the Church, it assumed the form of an actual revolution aimed at the complete annihilation of the Church herself. It opened the door to religious individualism and religious subjectivism over the authority of the dogmas, the sacraments and the hierarchy. These fatal consequences of the innovation reached their culmination only in the movement called the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[1]

The Reformation officially began in 1517 when Martin Luther challenged the Roman Church on the matter or Indulgences. While Luther had no idea of the impact which would make on the German society and European nations, this event turned the course of history. The Reformation marked the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern

times. 'Starting from religion, it gave, directly or indirectly, a mighty impulse to every forward movement, and made Protestantism the chief propelling force in the history of modern civilization'.[2]

Religious, economic and political factors that had been brewing for centuries set the stage for the Reformation. Systems were corrupt, monasticism and scholastic theology had declined and mysticism was on the upswing.[3] At the same time there was a revival of the Greek and Roman classics; men with a spirit of enquiry and independence were discovering the new world; printing press had been invented and the Greek New Testament republished. The renaissance was also a factor in that it challenged people to use their minds. These things were all part of God's plan to bring about the greatest religious revival in the western Christendom.

1.1 Reformatio is renovatio

The word reformation (*reformatio*) was used in all realms of the political, cultural and ecclesiastical life in the 15th and 16th centuries. According to the historian Peuckert *reformatio* was a key of the 15th century. In Church history *reformatio* also meant *renovatio* (renewal) in the double sense of 'back to the original form' and 'a new start'.[4] Luther does not often use the word 'reformation', but it appears nonetheless in the course of his first public moves.[5] He used it to sum up his programme of *metanoia*, i.e., the restoration of the ancient Christian truth by living the word of the Bible. Since corruption had extended into the very essence of the Church according to the view of the Reformers, 'the reformation' was the watchword of a religious movement for renewal (*renovatio*) which did not aim at creating a breach, much less at political revolution.[6]

1.2 Passion for Reform

That was the time when the personality of Erasmus of Rotterdam reigned without a rival, scholar and supreme stylist, the man who, for a generation, influenced educated Europe as no other man before his time and he influenced the world chiefly by his passion to reform what was amiss in the general presentation of the traditional Catholic religion.[7] His great memorials are the first printed edition of the Greek N. T. and his many editions of the Church Fathers. Though dogmatically correct, his grasp of the Catholic faith was indeed often endangered by his lack of practical and speculative interest in dogma. His scriptural principle allowed in theory the authority of the Church, but in practice worked only with an eye to the magisterium of scholarship. His malicious criticisms of monks and bishops, like his *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, reinforced the tendency then widespread to hold inwardly aloof from the Church, and paved the way for the Reformation.[8]

The great reformers were not just inspired by the abuses, but this pitiable condition made it easier to fall in with their grave criticism. The credibility of the Church had suffered a lot. The theses of the reformers repeated reproaches or demands which had long been heard. Many well-educated, including monks, made common cause with the reformers out of a desire to lead a real religious life.[9] A reformation in the sense of a radical critique had become historically unavoidable. The provincial or national churches which had been supported by the papacy in pre-reformation times, for political and economic ends, made intervention in Church affairs by the local rulers easier.[10] So too the city councils had gained more and more hold over the Church, which made it easier for them to intervene in the church affairs and to seize church property and dissolve monasteries.

2. Religious Subjectivism

The doctrine of justification was the central point of Luther's theological system. To this doctrine of 'justification by faith alone' was soon added a 'denial of freedom of the will'. According to him everyone who has 'fiduciary faith' was certain of salvation. His new doctrine which he named as 'my gospel' later became known as the material principle of Protestantism or according to him the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*.[11] But Luther could not realize the consequences of his confused teaching which would result in a conflict with the Church.[12] His discovery made a clash with the existing system inevitable.

> He did not perceive that he was taking the road to religious subjectivism and shallow spiritualism; nor that his doctrine that salvation is the work of God alone to the exclusion of all created means, implied the rejection of the sacraments, the priesthood, sacrifice, indulgences and hierarchy; in a word, the entire order of the divinely established Church.[13]

The basic problem of Luther is that there is no unity in his theological formulation. This problem is rendered acute by the use of paradox. There seems to have been a strict unity only in the kernel of his doctrine, i.e., of justification as propounded and constantly held by Luther with the inclusion of a specific notion of God, Christology, Soteriology and Anthropology. His sacramental doctrines and ecclesiology are more on the periphery, where Luther often wavered.[14] Calvin was more orderly and consistent in the doctrine of faith. Zwingli aimed above all at the simple and intelligible in doctrine and spirituality. Luther meant by justification a really new creation. Behind the expression *simul justus et simul peccator* (just and sinner at the same time) is the fellowship of the Christian with Christ. Sin is here the absence or lack of fullness in love. Righteousness and new life already grow in secret. But is spite of the moral seriousness, the insertion of morals into theology was far from sufficiently successful.[15]

Zwingli saw a society strictly ruled by law as the 'situation' for the service of the glory of God. In Calvin, a sense of election displaced the notion of justification, bringing with it strong moralistic traits. 'If Luther is seen outside the polemical situation, where he appears as interested solely in justification by faith to the elimination of justice by works, agreement with him on a magisterium does not seem hopeless, in spite of all his condemnations of the papacy'.[16]

3. Religious Wars

One of the shameful consequences of Protestant revolutions in the different nations of Europe was that it gave rise to a number of wars in the name of religions, which can rightly be called as religious wars. Though a kind of peace was established among the different princes of Germany in 1555 with the Peace of Augsburg it was only a temporal truce, which could not check the outbreak of wars in the name of religions in Europe.

3.1 Peace of Augsburg of 1555

It was a treaty between the Catholic princes and the princes of the new Confession concluded on 25 September 1555[17] to establish religious peace in Germany. Princes, imperial cities and knights subject to the empire were granted the right of choosing either of the two recognized religions of Catholicism and Protestantism. The princes were also entitled to impose the religion of their choice upon their subjects. This right was based on the resolution adopted at the Diet of Speyer of 1526,[18] where was passed the rule *cuius regio, ejus religio*. The lower nobility and all other subjects were thereby obliged to obey the orders of their rulers. However, they were granted the right of migrating without loss of honour or property. The minorities of the different faith, since the introduction of the new faith, were to be tolerated. The spiritual jurisdiction of the

bishops in Protestant domains was transferred to the reigning princes. As far as church property was concerned, Protestants could retain all foundations, monasteries and churches which had been in their possession at the time of the Treaty of Passau of 1552.[19] An equal number of judges of both religions were to sit in the imperial courts.[20]

Bihlmeyer-Tuechle is of the opinion that the Peace of Augsburg consummated the religious schism in Germany and determined the relationship of the two faiths for many years. They opine that it was not a compromise, much less a peace. Neither side was satisfied, and the concessions granted, contained the seeds of new and serious conflicts. That is the reason why Pope Paul IV protested seriously telling that this treaty was a violation of the ancient and inalienable rights of the Church.[21]

3.2 Rule of Intolerance

An immediate and unfortunate effect of the Reformation was intolerance which expressed itself in persecutions and religious wars. Instead of generating the true spirit of Christ, that is, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, the Reformation made thousands suffer on account of their religion. Civil war broke out in Switzerland under Zwingli. In Germany, Lutheranism resulted in civil strife until the Treaty of Augsburg restored peace in 1555.[22] In France too, civil war broke out between the Huguenots, who were Calvinists, and those who preferred Catholicism followed by the French monarchs. Many of the Huguenots had to leave France after suffering badly. The Edict of Nantes of 1598 issued by King Henry IV restored peace in France. These civil wars were a hindrance to security, material prosperity and cultural advancement.

As a result of the Reformation, revolts and wars broke out, causing loss of life, property, prestige and power. Most important among them was the war between Spain and the Netherlands. A large number of Dutch people who had become Calvinists rose in opposition to Philip II, the ruler of the Netherlands. A terrible war took place and Holland was finally recognized as an independent state only in 1648, fifty years after Philip's death. The second important one was the Anglo-Spanish war. During the rule of Elizabeth, Protestantism was re-established in England. Philip II then sent a vast fleet of warships, the Armada in order to carry out his will forcibly. However, the valor of the English seamen as well as the violent storms, succeeded in repulsing and destroying the Armada.

In 1618, a war broke out in Germany between the Catholics and the Protestants, which lasted for thirty years.[23] Hence it is known in history as the 'Thirty years War'. This soon spread like a great fire into an international war being not only religious, but also political and economic. The various treaties of 1648 that brought the war to an end are called the Peace of Westphalia. It placed Calvinists on an equal footing with Lutherans and Catholics. Further all Church property would continue to be in the possession of those who owned it in 1624.

4. Religious Divisions in the European Christendom

It may be said that the kernel of the Reformation is its positive preaching, which thrust forward to simple structures, the words of Scripture and the common priesthood of all believers. Faith was at the centre, faith in the 'man on the Cross'. In spite of the 'sola Scriptura', the ancient Creeds and the ancient Councils were retained as obligatory. This search for the sources led in fact to a fundamental weakening of tradition and continuity.[24] The apostolic succession was not preserved, which is not just a question of the interpretation of the sacrament of Orders. It mainly concerns the magisterium.

The tragedy of the Reformation was the unresolved tension which arose from the fact that the interpretation of the fundamentals of faith was left to an unsure and changing Church government and its theologians.[25] Since there was no ultimate court of appeal a subjective principle came in which made for growing divisions. The Reformation was radically a Christian, religious reform which did not restrict itself to morals.[26] Later this essential priority of religion over morals was largely lost sight of.

Since Luther is the full and true expression of the Reformation, the tensions and contradictions can be most readily disclosed by an examination of his own life. But even this is problematic as he was affected by the situation and his partner in the dialogue. Though he was well acquainted with the scholasticism of the medieval period, he developed no system. Theology was for him *sapientia experimentalis*.[27] In his confessions of faith, throughout his preaching, he preserved much in common with the ancient church.

5. Social and Cultural Effects

As consequent to the Protestant movements the European societies witnessed thorough changes in many fields, especially the socio-cultural and religious fields. The religious schism due to the Reformation produced much distress in Germany resulting even in a frightful social revolution known as the Peasants' War of 1524. 'It is true that there had been repeated uprisings of dissatisfied peasants in southern Germany since the end of Middle Ages. But these disturbances had been confined to small sections of the country and had easily been suppressed'.[28] But the so-called Peasants' War of 1524[29] was on a larger scale and was also more dangerous.

> While the apparent causes were of an economic and social nature, it cannot be denied that the religious revolt with its incessant attacks on the old Church, the hierarchy and

> monasteries gave impetus to this new insurrection. The peasants were not particularly interested in Luther's theology; but the spiritual and temporal had become inextricably mingled in the whirlpool of events and the 'freedom of the Christian' as proclaimed by Luther could also too easily be understood in the sense of absolute independence of temporal and spiritual landlords and freedom from oppressive taxation and compulsory labour for the lord of the manor.[30]

It is interesting to note that the chief demand of the peasants was the right of the people to choose and dismiss their pastors. They again demanded that those thus chosen were obliged to preach the gospel 'purely and simply, without any human additions'. They further demanded the abolition of taxes and serfdom and the free use of water, woods and pastures which they consider as 'divine rights' based on the Old Testament.[31]

5.1 Stimulus to New Trends

While evaluating the effects of the Reformation, the religious realm must be carefully distinguished from the cultural. The religious fruitfulness is unquestionable. The establishment of the Reformation was always the great stimulus of religious movements and trends.[32] Nonetheless the effects of the Reformation were also multivalent. Many lines lead to the Enlightenment and Idealism, even though the end product here was often the total inversion of the starting point.[33] Faith was deepened and enriched, but weighed down by the contradictions of the confessions. Hence the most far-reaching effect of the Reformation was the division of the Church. On the Catholic side this meant a loss of powerful forces, a retreat on to the defensive, a restriction on freedom. Few Catholics are found in the first flight of thinkers of modern times. But the positive effects on the Catholic Church were also notable: the Reform and the theological explanations of Trent. Catholic theology in its present form would be unthinkable without the impulses, questions and examples from the Protestant side. But it can also be noted that certain principles of the Reformation

were better preserved on the Catholic side than by their direct heirs.[34]

The cultural effects of the Reformation have at times been exaggerated. Much had already been there in Catholic life and came only to fruition on the Protestant side. An exclusive primacy of the religious element could also be inhibiting. Thus cultural consequences were often rather permitted than aimed at. Nonetheless, the great release of spiritual forces also meant the release of great cultural drives: a paradox comparable to the cultural fruitfulness of the medieval monks' flight from the world.[35]

6. Secularizing Tendencies

The spread of Reformation was rapid and not merely superficial. The real force was the spirit of God's word. Since Luther first came forward as the reformer of the ancient Church, the split which was beginning was not noticed. It was only for this reason that the establishment of the Reformation in a way which split the West was possible. It was also helped by the politics and Church politics of the rulers, who had a Christian responsibility in the matter, according to Luther. Since the ministers of the Church had no concern except with spiritual matters, Luther had no fundamental objections to secularizations. Apart from strengthening in this way the local rulers, Luther who thought in terms of a patriarchal agrarian culture, displayed no great political drive, while the ecclesiastical principles of Calvin, on the contrary, became a supreme political force.[36] The many dedicated champions of the Reformation who were ready to accept persecution and death for their faith did much to spread the Reformation. The emigrants in particular formed many new communities in many places. The spirit of faith in the leaders could sweep the masses along with them.

7. Spirit of Nationalism

Owing to the Reformation, the hands of the rulers were strengthened against the Church. Thus it was a boon to the rulers. In the name of the Reformation, Henry VIII deprived the pope of any powers over the English Church. The German princes were happy to be free from the control of the pope. The kings of Europe could now build their countries according to the pattern of their choice. The spirit of nationalism was given a fresh impetus by the Reformation.

New ideas arose in the economic field where there were healthy changes. People were free from medieval ideas and the tyranny of the Orthodox Church. Thus they could pursue certain economic activities such as money lending, which was criticized in the past. Owing to the Reformation old ideas were discarded and the moneylender was given a status in the society. By annihilating the economic power of the medieval Church, the Reformation paved the way for the rise of capitalism.[37]

In Protestantism, freedom of conscience gave the impulse to deeds of daring in non-religious fields. The tolerance and the freedom preached during Reformation was a limited affair, as very harsh measures were often taken against the Catholics and fanatics. Luther emphasized the use of vernacular languages and also the need of school reform. The Reformation was to a great extent a movement affecting the schools, rooted and carried on by outstanding achievements in education. As Hampson reviews, in all these fields though Luther had good intentions, he had no competence.[38]

8. Counter-Reformation

Restoration of Catholicism in Europe was effected in many ways. The process of reviving the religious life and restoring

the Catholic faith could be called as Counter-reformation against the Protestant Reformation.

8.3 Religious Revival

Religious life or monastic life was the most seriously affected realm due to the new trends in faith in the beginning of the modern period. One can rightly say that there was no other time when the religious and ecclesial life so disastrously affected. This is very explicit in Germany, the place of the outbreak of the Protestant revolution, where a multitude of religious condemned their vows and embraced the new doctrine. The south European countries like Italy, Spain and Portugal were the less affected nations of Europe. In 1537 Pope Paul III formed a reform commission of cardinals and bishops with in view of initiating reform movements. From the Orders themselves there were initiatives to reform the life of the monks and launch new ways of administration of temporalities. This time there started also a number of new religious Congregations, Institutes and Societies intended for the reform of the Church. Montgomery writes about the role of France in effecting the revival of Catholic life in Europe:

> Besides these reforms of already existing Orders, a large number of new congregations for the practical performance of the works of mercy were established between the opening of the Council of Trent and the middle of the seventeenth century. This fat gives evidence of the revival of Catholic life which began with the Council of Trent. From the end of the sixteenth century, France, spiritually renewed, took the lead in fostering religious life and became a nursery of sanctity and a school of genuine mysticism.[39]

8.2 Catholic Restoration

The role of the newly founded religious Congregation of the Society of Jesus in bringing about the religious reform of the post-reformation period is praiseworthy. Its members took

a leading role in the ecclesiastical reform of the sixteenth and the subsequent centuries.

> Endowed with papal privileges, the Jesuits devoted themselves for the catholic reform in many and varied ways. The Society of Jesus, inspired by the militant and chivalrous spirit of its founder, strove with tenacity of purpose to conquer the world for Christ. During the second half of the sixteenth century it proved to be a strong support of the Catholic reform movement and a driving force in the Counter-Reformation and Catholic Restoration.[40]

There are even certain accusations that the Society of Jesus was formed to fight against Protestantism in Europe. Regarding the same Bihlmeyer-Tuchele opines:

> While it is incorrect to assert that the Society was founded specially to combat Protestantism, the circumstances of the times forced the Jesuits to do valiant battle with both Lutheranism and Calvinism; for which reason they incurred the lasting hatred of the entire Protestant camp. It was due to the efficiency and sacrifice of the Jesuits more than anything else that Protestantism was checked in southern and western Germany and that regions which seemed lost to the Church were regained. It was chiefly by means of education that the Society was able to exert a powerful influence and strengthen the Catholic cause.[41]

It was the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which took it as its mighty task to safeguard the Old Faith from the devastating attacks of the innovation and to restore Catholic faith and ecclesiastical discipline. Though the Council could save the Catholic Church in many countries it could not restore the unity of faith in Western Europe. Trent clearly defined and proclaimed the Catholic faith in opposition to new false doctrines and through its reform decrees a programme for the religious and moral renewal of the clergy and the people. Trent could valiantly defend her hierarchical constitution and successfully repel the religious subjectivism of the reformers. Thus the Reformation which threatened to destroy the Catholic

Church gave the impetus for a counter-reformation, i.e., to the religious revival and Catholic restoration.

Conclusion

Though the Reformation was religious in character, it had far-reaching effects in all fields. Thus it helped in the shaping of the modern world, along with other movements. One cannot accuse the reformers for their good intentions or the clear conscience. The results of Reformation vary from country to country and from person to person. The goal of the Reformation, a purified Christianity in the one Church, was but not attained. This goal is a permanent task. It cannot be brought out by men, but it cannot be granted without them. The question whether Reformation helped the modern persons or not could be answered from the effects it produced in different lands and at different times. Reformation paved the way for Catholic restoration or Counter-reformation. Both sides are to be blamed in for not preserving the unity of the Church in Europe.

Notes

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3 J. Lortz, *The Reformation, A Problem for Today* (Westminster 1964) 74.

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5 *Weimarer Ausgabe* I, p. 627, as is quoted in K. Adam, *The Roots of Reformation* (Paris 1957) 187.

6 R. H. Fife, *The Revolution of Martin Luther* (New York 1957) 203.

7 Philip Hughes, *A Popular History of the Reformation* (New York 1960) 72.

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12 J. H. Hayes, *History of Europe since 1500* (New York 1956) 80

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14 Hubert Jedin (ed.), *History of the Church*, vol. V (London 1980) 38-39.

15 Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions* (Cambridge 2001) 107.

16 *Sacramentum Mundi*, *An Encyclopaedia of Theology* vol 5 & 6, ed. by Karl Rahner, Cornelius Ernst and Kevin Smyth (Bangalore 1975), 232.

17 See for details K. Brandi, *Der Augsburgische Religionsfriede* (1927) and N. Paulus, *Religionsfreiheit und Augsburgische Religionsfriede* (1912).

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20 See for details Hubert Jedin (ed.), *History of the Church*, vol. V (London 1980) 296-297.

21 Karl Bihlmeyer & Hermann Tuechle, *Church History*, vol. III (Modern and Recent times) (Westminster 1966) 58.

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29 For the details of the Peasants' War see Hubert Jedin (ed.), *History of the Church,* vol. V (London 1980) 138-140.

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From Condemnation and Rejection to Appreciation and Acceptance

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Abstract: His deep religious experience led Martin Luther to speak against the abuses in the medieval church, especially the selling of indulgences. But the officials of the Catholic Church who had earlier rejected other reformers condemned him also. His excommunication and the support of princes and people led to the growth of Reformation and division in the Western Church. The Catholic Church condemned Lutherans and rejected the changes they brought about. The enmity continued also in the mission lands where Lutherans and Catholics worked. But in the twentieth century began the process of understanding and appreciation. Vatican II document *Unitatis Redintegratio* initiated the first official Catholic-Lutheran talks, which eventually in 1998 produced the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. And in India ecumenical ventures to respond to the problems which beset Christians in particular and Indians in general brought the Lutherans and Catholics to work together. Now on the eve of the commemoration of the 500-year Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, the celebrations and conferences together are paving way towards reconciliation and communion. This article highlights the change in the relationship between Catholics and Lutherans. We are now at a point of time when the wounds of history have been healed to a large extent and we are able to look at persons, events and belief system in a more balanced way.

Keywords: Martin Luther, Tarangambadi, Doctrine of Justification, Pope Francis, Lutherans, Catholics, common priesthood, people of God.

From harbouring an attitude of condemnation and rejection Catholics and Lutherans have now moved into an era of mutual appreciation and acceptance. This change is succinctly expressed by Pope Francis' address to International Conference of Study organized by the Pontifical Council for Historical Sciences,[1] to mark the 500-Year Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation (1517-2017) on the theme: *'Luther, 500 years later' A Reflection on the Protestant Reform in the Historic, Ecclesial Context*. He said:

> I confess that my first response to this praiseworthy initiative of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences was one of gratitude to God, together with a certain surprise, since not long ago a meeting like this would have been unthinkable. Catholics and Lutherans together, discussing Luther, at a meeting organized by an Office of the Holy See: truly we are experiencing the results of the working of the Holy Spirit, who overcomes every obstacle and turns conflicts into occasions for growth in communion. From Conflict to Communion is precisely the title of the document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission prepared for our joint commemoration of the fifth centenary of the beginning of Luther's reform.[2]

Worldwide Repercussions

In the past, for many years Catholics regarded Reformation initiated by Luther and continued by others in different parts of Europe as something evil, because it brought about division in the Western Church. Loss of members in the Catholic Church in Europe with growing sharp criticism of the leaders of the Catholic Church, its belief system and ritual celebrations by Luther and his followers added fuel to the fire. This animosity towards Luther did not remain restricted to Europe where it originated, but spread in countries where Catholics and Lutherans pitched their tents.

Long Line of Reformers

To understand well Luther in his historical context we must situate him in the long line of reformers of the Catholic Church. The call for reform was not sudden. It was up in the air demanding attention and action to be taken. But the Church turned a blind eye to that or put down the new proposals and challenges in a high handed way.

The monument that commemorates Luther in Worms, Germany, portrays four reformers, who belonged to the period before Luther. They too tried to bring about change in the Church. The earliest among them was Peter Waldo (c. 1140 - c. 1205), one of the richest merchants of Lyons. He became uneasy about the source of his wealth, sold all his possessions, gave to poor and began preaching the Gospel. His apostolic life of poverty and preaching inspired others to join him. Those who followed him were known as Waldensians. They prayed, read scriptures in their local language and preached in market places: "you cannot serve two masters, God and mammon." Some officials of the Church saw them as a threat. In 1184 a Synod in Verona condemned and excommunicated them. But that could not stop them. They began to organize themselves apart from the institutional church. According to them life-style determined the true minister. And they were convinced that everyone had the right to read and interpret scripture. For this they produced translations of the Bible in local languages. They continued to grow in spite of repeated repressive measures against them. Later most Waldensians joined the Calvinist wing of the Protestant Reformation.[3]

The second person in the monument was John Wycliff (1320-1384), regarded as the first translator of the Bible into English. He challenged the right of the Church to own properties and criticised immoral priests. For these and other issues raised by him he was accused of heresy by the Pope and the University of Oxford. The opposition to him was so strong

that even after his death and burial he was "punished". In 1436 by the order of Pope Martin V, his bones were exhumed, burned and thrown in the River Swift.

John Hus (c. 1370 – 1415) from Prague was the third pre-Reformation figure. Like Luther he too criticised indulgences. He also spoke against simony and papal immorality. He was excommunicated and on July 6, 1415, he was burnt at the stake, and his ashes thrown over the river Rhine.

The fourth one in the monument was Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), a Dominican friar. He was a fiery preacher who attacked the abuses of the papacy under Pope Alexander VI and wanted to reform the lives of people who lived in Florence. But he was burnt at the stake on May 23, 1498.

Thus there were many Christians before Martin Luther who called for reform and met with opposition. Referring to the monument in Worms Scott highlights why nineteenth century Protestants consider Luther as the most important person. He observes:

> In Worms, the monument that commemorates him [Luther] also memorializes four excommunicated reformers who preceded him, and one each from Bohemia, Italy, France and England. Luther stands tall at the centre since he survived both excommunication and the threat of execution to become a hero in the eyes of 19th century Protestants who erected the memorial.[4]

To these reformers one should add Erasmus (1469-1536), a contemporary of Luther, who too spoke against the abuses in the church, advocated a better knowledge of scripture and translation of the Bible and prayers in local languages. He asked: "what indecency is there in reciting the gospel in one's native language, the tongue which everyone understands: the French in French, the German in German, the Indian in Indian? It seems to me far more indecent and even ridiculous that uninstructed people and women should sing the psalms and

Sunday prayer, like parrots, in Latin, without understanding what they are saying!"[5]

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries social, religious and political criticisms in Europe demanded reform. Luther, Erasmus and other humanists were critical of political and ecclesiastical corruption. Moreover, many Christians and princes called for a reform council. In 1512 Pope Julius II opened the Fifth Lateran Council, criticised the abuses in the Church and gave reform programme. But that failed to bring about any change. On March 16, 1517, the Lateran Council ended. On October 31 of the same year (1517) in Wittenberg Luther protested with his 95 theses against the false security given by indulgences.

Martin Luther's escape from execution was only one reason that he was the most influential of the other reformers before him. "No other medieval reformer initiated a religious movement that attained the geographical scope and political support enjoyed by the 16th-century Protestant Reformation," says Scott.[6] "On studying Luther's life and work, one thing is clear: the much needed Reformation took place, not because Luther decided that it would be so, but rather because the time was ripe for it, and because the Reformer and many others with him were ready to fulfil their historical responsibility," observes Justo Gonzalez.[7]

Priesthood of All Believers

Luther denounced the hierarchical church of the Middle Ages with the growing gap and estrangement between the clergy and laity. As a contrast to them he advocated priesthood of all believers. He wrote:

Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this, that we are all equally priests, that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word

and the sacraments. However, no one may make use of this power except by the consent of the community or by the call of a superior. (For what is the common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself, unless he is called). And therefore this sacrament of ordination, if it is anything at all, is nothing else than a certain rite whereby one is called to the ministry of the church.[8]

The insistence on priesthood of all believers led to lay theologians expressing their views with courage. Elsie Mckee observes:

> If there is one thing which can be said about all lay theologians in the sixteenth century, it is that they expressed themselves with amazing confidence in their right to be heard and taken seriously as Christian voices. For most, the basis of this confidence was the priesthood of believers, the conviction that all Christians have equal access. Whatever their specific doctrinal stance, lay theologians claimed and exercised a voice and a choice with an assurance that was historically unprecedented, at least in scale if not in kind.[9]

Primacy of Scripture and Translations

In his work *The Freedom of a Christian*, one of the issues Luther stressed was the Primacy of Scripture. He was aware that the Bible remained distant from the people because of its language. Though Peter Waldo and the Waldensians had already begun the process of translating scripture texts in their mother tongue and used them in their street preaching, the Bible that was available in the Middle Ages was not in one's mother tongue. Luther sought to rectify that by translating New Testament into German. It is interesting to note that he completed this momentous task within eleven weeks and that too during one of the most crucial moments of his life spent in the Wartburg castle. Wartburg castle above the town of Eisenach in Saxony was the place of refuge for Martin Luther provided by Prince Frederick the Wise after the meeting at

Worms in 1521. Luther had already been excommunicated by the Pope. Now after the meeting in Worms he was also under the ban of the empire.

> He [Luther] was now the ultimate outsider, both heretic and outlaw. His marvelous hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," which still inspires people today, recalls this time of crisis and yet confidence.... Despite the threats he was under and his inner turmoil, he succeeded in translating the New Testament into pulsing, vivid German within eleven weeks.[10]

The printing press put the Bible in German language in the hands of the lay people who were literate. The illiterate too gained the knowledge of the scripture and interiorized it by learning by heart scripture texts through memorizing texts and singing psalms. Thus the lay became empowered with the power of the knowledge of the Gospel and their right to interpret it.

Liturgical Celebrations in Local Languages

Luther not only translated Christian Scripture into German but he also saw to it that the linguistic distance of celebration of mass in Latin which the people did not understand gave way to rituals in local language. This led to greater participation by the congregation gathered for worship. This insistence on local language was followed by Lutheran missionaries in different lands. For example, when the first Indian Lutheran pastor Aaron in Tamil Nadu was ordained the rite of ordination was in Tamil. Moreover, during Services the pastors preached directly to the people. The physical separation because of rood screens that was part of the medieval churches was not there between the pastor and the people.

Catholic Response to Reformation in Europe

The Catholic Church rejected many of the features of the Reformation movement. Some of the texts of the Council of

Trent, held between 1545 and 1563, were marked by anti-Protestantism. Certain practices were condemned just because they were in use among Protestants, for example, use of the local language in the liturgy. The Catholic Church continued to insist on a hierarchical church with the Pope as the focal point. This situation continued into the twentieth century too. Pope Pius X (1835-1914) insisted on "hierarchology." He wrote:

> The Church is essentially an unequal society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors.[11]

Catholic and Lutheran Missionaries in India

When the first Lutheran missionaries Barthalomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau landed in Tarangambadi, Tamilnadu on July 9, 1706, a Catholic community was already in existence there for more than hundred years. In course of time the Lutheran missionaries also began to convert the local people to the Protestant Church. In this new situation the Catholics had to share a common "mission field"[12] with the Lutherans. What made matters worse was that members of one community crossed over to the other group. For example, in the space of one year, between October 1727 and October 1728, 104 persons became Lutherans, and 40 of them were from Catholic church. This did not go well with the Catholic missionaries. When not only some Catholics, but also a few catechists in Tarangambadi and in Thanjavur district became Lutherans, the feelings of enmity reached a high pitch.

True Christianity

The Catholic and Lutheran missionaries in India saw each other as a threat.[13] Each group considered itself as the true Christianity, and the other as false. The Annual Letters of Jesuits, when referring to Lutherans, call them heretics and Lutheranism a heresy. The first time this is mentioned with respect to Lutheran missionaries is in the Annual Letter of 1727 written by the Jesuits to the General of the Society of Jesus: "Would to God that we could equally avert the ruin which threatens us from the Danish heretics, settled at *Tarancambadi*."[14] In the same letter the negative word 'plague' is used to describe the Lutheranism: "Let Your Paternity be kind enough to ask our brethren to pray to God that this plague may disappear."[15]

Not Different from Hindus

By the time the Lutherans landed in India the Catholics had adapted many of the Indian cultural and religious expressions into Catholicism.[16] And Lutheran missionaries like Ziegenbalg were suspicious of these practices and said that the ceremonies in the Catholic Church were not very different from the ones performed in Hindu temples and that the Catholics were not very different from the pagans. He wanted to bring the Catholics to the "true" Christian faith, besides converting Hindus to Christianity. It is interesting to note that the Lutherans saw the presence of Catholic religion in Thanjavur as a preparation for the establishment of Lutheranism, *preparatio evangelica* - a fulfillment theology! This claim about being true Christianity was made by different churches down the ages.

Ecumenical Movement

For a long time the Catholic Church thought of Christians in different Churches as separated brethren and considered itself

as the only true church to which all should return. Though other Christian communities were opening themselves to ecumenical collaborations since the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, Catholic Church took decisive steps towards ecumenism only during Vatican II. Vatican II document *Unitatis Redintegratio* initiated the first official Catholic-Lutheran talks, which eventually in 1998 produced the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.[17] The forthcoming 500th year Celebration and the preparations for it have strengthened the bond more.

Pastoral and Biblical

"The origins of the whole Reformation have often been traced back to Luther's perhaps apocryphal nailing of his Ninety-Five Theses against indulgences to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. More important than any such symbolic act is that he tossed out philosophical language in favor of biblical and pastoral," says Matheson.[18] This pastoral and biblical approach was adopted by Vatican II. Moreover, the Council brought forth changes in the church and in this way the Catholic Church has adopted some of the features of the Church advocated by Luther.

People of God

Stanford observes, "Luther has gone down in history as the man who shattered the unity of Western Christendom. But he was reluctant to leave the Catholic Church, and if he returned today he would find that many of the reforms he proposed have come to pass."[19] One of the reforms proposed by Luther was common priesthood. This concept, common priesthood, has been expressed in the concept people of God in Vatican II. Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, one of the leading voices in the Second Vatican Council emphatically said:

If we were to be asked what we consider to be that seed of life deriving from the council which is most fruitful in pastoral consequences, we would answer without any hesitation: it is the rediscovery of the people of God as a whole, as a single reality, and then by way of consequence, the co-responsibility thus implied for every member of the church.[20]

Church is People of God. It is not primarily an institution but people, pilgrim people of God. This phrase "People of God" is the principal paradigm of the Church in Vatican II – the most important term to explain what the Church is. The term "People of God" includes all the faithful – pope, bishops, priests, religious and the laity. In this way Clergy-laity divide is overcome. The council Fathers insisted on what is common to all, baptism. They pointed out that all Christians are first and foremost "the faithful" – the deepest meaning of the word faithful being "the believers." They insisted that all Christians belong to the People of God and they enjoy equal dignity:

The chosen People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). As members they share a common dignity from their rebirth in Christ. They have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection. They possess in common one salvation, one hope, and one undivided charity (LG 32).

They underlined the mutual ordination of common and ministerial priesthood in this way: "The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are ... interrelated. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ" (LG 10).

Participative Liturgical Celebrations in Local Languages

One of the aims of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) was "full, conscious and,

active participation in liturgical celebrations ... demanded by the very nature of the liturgy" (SC 14). Of the reforms initiated by the Council regarding liturgy the pride of place must be given to the restoration of the proclamation of the Word to a position of prominence in the liturgical celebrations. This step has been criticised by some as "Protestant".

Vatican II encouraged the use of local languages in liturgical celebration. Though this step was also criticised as Protestant in the beginning days, now it has become an established feature of liturgical celebrations and has also led to the use of local cultural elements like music and dance in liturgical celebrations.

Change in Attitude

The Ninety-five Theses[21] of Luther on October 31, 1517, did not lead to open discussion on the issues raised as Luther had envisaged. On August 7, 1518, Luther was ordered to appear in Rome. Attempts to silence him failed. Luther continued to write more books expressing his opinions. In June 1520 Pope Leo X in his bull *Exsurge Domine* condemned as heretical 41 of Luther's theses. On December 10, 1520, Luther burnt the bull at the gates of Wittenberg. On January 3, 1521, Pope formally excommunicated Luther.

"Luther may have been violent in the language that he used in his tracts and sermons to decry "papists", and indeed popes, but increasingly, in the final third of his life, he was also in his calmer moments hinting at an empty space inside him since falling out with the Church of his birth and formation,"[22] says Stanford. Earlier the Popes too were harsh on Luther or like Pope Adrian VI (1459-1523) dismissed Luther as "this petty monk."

But after Vatican II things have changed for the better. In 2008, during a visit to the former Augustinian friary in Erfurt,

where Luther was a student, Pope Benedict XVI spoke so positively about Luther that some began to speculate that the excommunication order on Luther was going to be lifted. In 2016 Pope Francis travelled to Sweden, where he stood side by side with Lutheran leaders at events that commemorated the Reformation. "His bold and generous gesture represents a new moment in Catholic-Protestant relations, and validates the Catholic Church's sometimes hesitant journey towards Christian unity,"[23] comments Christopher Lamb.

Conclusion

On the eve of the commemoration of the 500-year Anniversary of the Protestant Reform Pope Francis calls Catholics and Lutherans for purification of memory, to be free from past prejudices and to seek God's grace of reconciliation. On March 2017 Pope Francis said in his address to International Conference of Study organized by the Pontifical Council for Historical Sciences mentioned earlier in this article:

All of us are well aware that the past cannot be changed. Yet today, after fifty years of ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Protestants, it is possible to engage in a purification of memory. This is not to undertake an impracticable correction of all that happened five hundred years ago, but rather "to tell that history differently,"[24] free of any lingering trace of the resentment over past injuries that has distorted our view of one another. Today, as Christians, all of us are called to put behind us all prejudice towards the faith that others profess with a different emphasis or language, to offer one another forgiveness for the sin committed by those who have gone before us, and together to implore from God the gift of reconciliation and unity.[25]

As observed rightly by Stanford, "The healing process is now in full swing, although even after half a millennium,

schism cannot just be magicked away by time, good will, fine words – or even by papal leadership. But it is a cause for celebration, and the distance covered is impressive."[26]

Notes

1 It took place in Rome, March 29-31, 2017.

2 See https://zenit.org/articles/popes-address-to- luther-500-years-after-conference/ March 31, 2017, accessed on April 2, 2017.

3 Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 6.

4 Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, 5.

5 Erasmus, 'Note to the Reader' in his Paraphrases of St. Matthew (1522) as cited in Jean Comby with Diarmaid Mancull-och, *How to Read Church History*, vol. 2, London: SCM Press, 1989, 4.

6 Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, 5.

7 Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Reformation to the Present Day. The Story of Christianity, vol. 2*, New York: HarperCollins, 1985, 15.

8 Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 36 edited by A.R. Wentz, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, 116.

9 Elsie Mckee, "The Emergence of Lay Theologies," in *Reformation Christianity, A People's History of Christianity, Vol. 5*, edited by Peter Matheson, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, 212.

10 Peter Matheson, "Reforming from Below," in *Reformation Christianity, A People's History of Christianity, Vol. 5*, edited by Peter Matheson, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, 1.

11 *Vehementer Nos* (1906), 8.

12 See Anders Norgaard, *Mission und Obrigkeit: Die Dänish-hallische Mission in Tranquebar* 1706-1845, Gerd Mohn: Gutersloher Verlagshaus, 1988, 176.

13 Leonard Fernando, "The First Encounters between Catholics and Lutherans on Indian Soil," in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, vol, 2, edited by Andreas Gross, Y. Vincent Kumaradoss and Heike Liebau, Halle: Franckesche Stiftungen, 2006, 783-796.

14 Annual Letter of 1727 by Prosper Giuliani dated 16 July 1728.

15 *Ibid.*

16 This happened due to the adaptation policy "Malabar rite" begun and promoted by Roberto de Nobili and the Jesuit Madura Mission.

17 On October 31, 1999 "The Doctrine of Justification" Joint Declaration was made by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. It was signed by Bishop Christian Krause, President, on behalf of the LWF and Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, on behalf of the Catholic Church in Augsburg, Germany. This event marks an important milestone in ecumenical movement. This "decisive step forward" is the result of more than thirty years of prayer, meetings and dialogue between both the Churches as partners with equal rights. (See Joint Declaration n. 44). The document does not say that earlier conflicts were based only on mutual misunderstandings. Neither does it do away with all the differences in understanding this important doctrine. In spite of the differences it sees the possibility of both the groups being open to each other. As the Declarations states: "the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their differences open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding the basic truths" (40). The differences, which are accepted, are looked at in a new light. And devoid of polemics one another's formulations have become true, complementary and acceptable.

18 Peter Matheson, "The Language of the Common Folk," in *Reformation Christianity, A People's History of Christianity,*

Vol. 5, edited by Peter Matheson, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, 269.

19 Peter Stanford, "Once a Catholic," *The Tablet*, 18 March 2017, 8.

20 Léon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *Coresponsibility in the Church*, London: Burns and Oates, 1968, 30.

21 The evidence is thin that he actually nailed them in the castle church in Wittenberg

22 Stanford, "Once a Catholic," 8.

23 Christopher Lamb, "On a New Path to unity," *The Tablet*, 5 November 2016, 6.

24 Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict to Communion*, 17 June 2013, 16.

25 See https://zenit.org/articles/popes -address-to- luther-500-years-after-conference/ March 31, 2017 Accessed on 2nd April 2017

26 Stanford, "Once a Catholic," 9.

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The Reformation and the Laity's Role in Church's Mission Today

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Abstract: The quincentennial commemoration of the Reformation as well as the fifty year anniversary of Vatican II with its emphasis on the people of God along with the centrality of mission invite the Christian community to spell out the need for focusing on the baptismal call of every Christian based on Scripture. Two key concepts of the Reformation as advocated by Luther were the spiritual authority of Scripture and the common priesthood of Christians based on baptism. The paper argues how these ideas can strengthen ecumenism and pave the way for church unity.

Keywords: Ecumenism, Reformation, common priesthood, mission, Martin Luther

The year 2017 is the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation that Martin Luther gave rise to. The quincentennial commemoration of the reformation movement is an invitation to revisit some of the principles that Luther emphasised and which are also basic to Christian Faith. The course of events and developments that have transpired during the past five centuries as well as the distance in time enable

one to review what Luther said with a certain equanimity but also with a view to enrich the church's life and mission today.

As Hans Kung has pointed out[1] the Reformation may be attributed to several persons and factors though basically it was Luther who triggered the event by his questioning of the church's granting indulgence, that is, remittance of punishment due to a dead person, in return for the money a living person gives to the church. The conflict concerning the indulgences developed into a question of spiritual authority which Luther understood in terms of the Scripture.[2]

The five hundred-year anniversary of the Reformation must prove to be an event strengthening ecumenism, eventually paving the way for the unity of the Church. "Commitment to ecumenism responds to the prayer of the Lord Jesus that 'they be one' (Jn 17:21)," wrote Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) (no 214). The Pope went on to say: "The credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions and the Church could realize the fullness of catholicity proper to her."

In the same spirit the Pope in his address to the Ecumenical event in Malmo Arena, Sweden on 31 October 2016, remembering the 500 anniversary of the Reformation, said: "We remember this anniversary with a renewed spirit and in the recognition that Christian Unity is a priority, because we realize that much more unites us than separates us."[3] In this the Pope is only following one of the leading guidelines of Vatican II saying that the Church of Christ has to be unique and one (UR 1).

Charting that path of ecumenism, this paper will argue how the Catholic Church can draw inspiration from Luther to make the Church ever more missionary, especially with regard to the role of the Laity. For this, the paper will depend on Luther's

insistence on the priority of the Word of God as well as the Common priesthood of the people of God, always in the light of Vatican II.

Significance of Church Unity/Ecumenism

It is widely recognized how the world at large is changing in interactions and collaborations, tending to greater unity, despite the fissiparous tendencies fostered by narrow-minded vested interests. This has not left the Christian churches unaffected as shown by the many joint study groups and inter-ecclesial commissions to usher in greater unity among Christians. The ecumenical ideal is upheld by all churches, more so by the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches and the Orthodox Churches.[4]

Christian mission has to take into account the socio-cultural context. A core element of Asian culture is harmony and interdependence. This is further compounded by the plurality of religions in Asia, in the midst of which Christians are called to render their service. The Lord of the Church reminds Christians how they are to be one so that the world may believe in them (Jn 17:21). The vexing problems that the western churches face with regard to ecumenism must be relativised in terms of the missionary priority in Asia. This missionary priority makes inter denominational confrontation obsolete and insignificant. The common Christian call to mission compels Asian Christians to make use of ecumenical opportunities to be faithful to the Christian call to witness to the Gospel. While the past cannot be changed, what the churches remember and celebrate today can affect Christian mission vitally.

No wonder, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 500 years of the Reformation the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church have taken further steps towards

reconciliation and move forward in the field of joint service to express and strengthen their commitment to seek unity. This is amply expressed in their joint study document, "From Conflict to Communion."[5] It advocates how Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world. No 243 of the document reads: "Ecumenical engagement for the unity of the Church, does not serve only the Church, but also the world, so that the world may believe."

As disciples of Jesus both the Catholics and the Lutherans have the irreplaceable duty to be best advocates of human lives, animated by the Christian faith, in a secularised world. Christians believe that the God who sent Jesus Christ is working through his Church, the community of his disciples, to confront evil and rebuild lives. The two churches are looking forward to work together in harmony and collaboration.

The commemoration is a fitting occasion to look back on the events that occurred 500 years back, putting the Gospel of Jesus Christ at the centre with the intent how this Gospel can be celebrated and communicated to the people of contemporary times, so that the world may believe how God gave God's self to humans and calls them into communion with God in the Church. In that spirit the present paper builds on Luther's contribution in order to make every Christian responsible in his/her vocation. This, in turn, can reinvent the ecumenical dialogue and the common journey.

As the joint commission of Catholics and Lutherans pointed out in its statement in 1983, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth, Christians, whether Protestants or Catholics, cannot disregard the person and message of this man.[6] "Luther's reforming agenda poses a spiritual and theological challenge for both contemporary Catholics and Lutherans."[7] They offer us both opportunities and obligations. This paper will emphasise the implications

of Luther's teachings for the mission of the church especially with regard to the laity.

The 2017 quincentennial of the Reformation has added significance due to the fact that it is the first ecumenical celebration of the Reformation in which Catholics also participate. Equally, it offers Catholics the opportunity to interpret their theological tradition and mission adopting and accepting Luther's influence.

It is to be acknowledged that even if initially Catholics firewalled themselves against Luther's ideas, in the long run they had their impact on the Catholic Church as well. A major area of this impact was Scripture. With his encyclical *Divino Aflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII opened the floodgates of the study of Scripture in the Catholic Church.

As the joint declaration From Conflict to Communion underlined the Reformation should be freed from the notion of separation or division in the Church. What Luther intended was reform, not division which was the result of various factors, including the institutional failure to assess the situation. Equally, it was due to the political climate of the Supreme authority of the Holy Roman Empire from which many wanted to free themselves. Nor was it a 'rediscovery of the gospel' as many of the followers of Luther traditionally claimed.[8]

Even if the present cannot cancel what has happened in history, the remembrance can enable Christians to recreate the past for the present. They can narrate that history in a fresh way. The many secular events like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations (1948), the growing phenomenon of secularization, the revival of world's religions as well as the mutual influence of Catholics and Protestants, more so in recent times, all invite Christians to a new era of collaboration and unity. They impel Christians to search for

what is common among them rather than what is dividing them and pursue ways of working towards overcoming the differences.

Centrality of Scripture

Until John Guttenberg's (1394-1468) discovery of the printing press, the bible remained for ordinary Christians, by and large, a closed book, except for the occasional sermons and through art works. True, as pointed out earlier, there were trail-blazing minds such as that of John Wycliff and Jan Hus that attempted to popularize the bible by translating it into local languages but were met with stiff opposition. However, it is Luther's merit that he made scripture the integral part of Christian life.

Luther along with colleagues from the University of Wittenberg translated the New Testament into German and with the help of the recently introduced printing press made it easily accessible to ordinary Christians. Luther was a biblical scholar and was convinced of the power of the Word of God in his own life.[9]

Luther recommended for the study of the scripture a process of three steps: prayer, meditation and affliction. One should read the scripture in the presence of God, in prayer and while meditating on the words of the Scripture one must be attentive to the situations in life that often seem to contradict what is found in the scripture. Through this process scripture proves its authority by overcoming those afflictions. "Note that the struggle of the Scripture is this, that it is not changed into the one who studies it, but that it transforms one who loves it into itself and its strength."[10] A person not only interprets the Scripture but is also interpreted by it, which is the power and authority of Scripture.

Luther's central teaching that the bible is the core source of religion and authority opened a rising wave of interest and study of Scripture and this has continued to the present.

The Common Priesthood

An associate idea of Luther, and flowing from the centrality of the Scripture, is the dignity and responsibility of every baptized person. In contrast to the prevailing medieval division of Christians into spiritual (hierarchy) and temporal (the laity), Luther insisted how all Christians are priests in the eyes of God and that they have direct access to God. In his letter to the German nobility he put forward the doctrine that all baptized Christians were priests and spiritual, dismissing the existence of two classes of believers, the spiritual and the secular.[11]

Luther understood the relationship of believers to Christ as a "joyful exchange, in which the believer takes part in the properties of Christ, and thus also in his priesthood."[12] Commenting on 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," Luther insisted, "We are all consecrated priests through baptism."[13] Similarly, in his writing, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) he wrote: "In this way we are all priests, as many of us are Christians. There are indeed priests whom we call ministers."[14]

Luther held that all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there are no differences among them, except that of office.[15] "There is no true basic difference between layman and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of authority."[16] Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:12, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ,"

he explained, "This applies to all of us because we have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all equally Christians. For baptism, gospel and faith alone make men (sic) religious, and create a Christian people."[17]

However, Luther's teaching on the Common Priesthood of the baptized was not at the expense of the ministerial priesthood. Thus, in article 14 of his *Augsburg Confession*, he wrote: "No one should publicly teach or administer sacraments in the church unless properly called."[18] It may also be pointed out how all through his career at the University of Wittenberg there used to be ordinations for the ministerial priests.

Even if Luther made a distinction between priesthood and ministers who have an office in the Church as a preacher, the fact of sharing in Christ's priesthood is an invitation to share in Christ's ministry, to witness to the Gospel that Christ did all through his ministry. This is significant for the mission of the Church today which the paper will develop in the following pages.

Some Key Teachings of Vatican II

As the Catholic-Lutheran joint document, "From Conflict to Communion" points out, today Catholics and Lutherans are able to narrate the story of Luther and his reformation together, overcoming traditional mutual prejudices that, in the past, frequently afflicted the interpretation of each other (no 35). In fact, some of the fresh teachings of the Second Vatican Council have their remote incubation beginning with Luther.

A major aspect of Luther's call for reform was his invoking the importance of the bible and its role in Christian life. The bible is so fundamental to Vatican II that most of its teachings are founded on the bible, in contrast to the earlier Councils. Already in 1943 Pope Pius XII, through his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, had liberated Catholic biblical research that

had suffered a setback due to the fear of 'modernism' and encouraged Catholic Scholars to use critical methods in the study of Scripture and this in turn paved the way for one of the key texts of Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.

The very opening sentence of *Dei Verbum* signals the biblical spirit that envelops the Council as well as this document specifically: "Hearing the Word of God reverently and proclaiming it confidently..." (DV 1). The bible is the narrative of salvation history in terms of the words and deeds of God, intrinsically bound together (DV 2). *Dei Verbum* made the Word of God central to the life and worship and spirituality of the Church and affirmed how the teaching authority of the Church is not above the Word of God but stands at its service (DV 10). "The force and power in the Word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life" (DV 21). Therefore, *Dei Verbum* admonishes the faithful to read Scripture through which God speaks to them (DV 25). It calls for a biblical revival in the formation of priests, in liturgy, in the Church's mission and in every aspect of the Church's life. In short, the document set in motion a biblical culture that underpinned the huge renewal program that the Council gave rise to.

Vatican II was a reforming Council and the greatest impact of this was felt in the very self perception of the Church as "a sacrament of God's reign in the world (LG 8)." Its identity is to serve as a sign to the world, its vocation is to actualize and to symbolize God's reign in its life and through this inviting the world to be transformed to this divine reign and this is done by the Church as a whole. In contrast to the previously held view of perceiving the hierarchy as the main part of the Church, Vatican II defined the Church as "the people of God" (LG 10) with different ministries. This is an acknowledgement

of the significance of every member of the Church. No wonder, in the decree on the Religious Life, the Council spoke of the "Universal Call to Holiness," in sharp contrast to different states of perfection!

The Church as a sign, with the same call to holiness of all members, reminds all Christians how they all share in the same mission of bringing the message of the good news of God's reign to the world. *Lumen Gentium,* the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, rather than beginning with the Pope and the hierarchy and working downwards, in the first two chapters describes the Church as a mystery and as the people of God. The following chapters speak about the hierarchy, situating it as a service to the people of God. Further, *Lumen Gentium* (and later the Mission Decree *Ad Gentes* as well) showed how the Church, as the continuation of God's mission to the world through Jesus Christ and God's Spirit, is missionary by its very nature. To be involved in mission is the very purpose of its existence.

The Council, thus, was a liberating and hence, an exuberant event in the life of the Church, of the Catholic Community. The new starting point is the fresh perspective on mission, as projecting the image of the Kingdom, always inviting the world to be conformed to the Kingdom and equally significant is the description of the Church as a community, sharing in the priesthood of Christ, making every Christian responsible to witness to the Good News. The Council's teaching "make a serious claim on the conscience of the Catholic Christian," wrote the German theologian and Cardinal Walter Kasper.[19]

In as much as the Council found it appropriate to enact a decree on the laity, *Apostolicam Autuositatem,* (AA) and lay concerns were treated in many Conciliar discourses, one can qualify the Council as a 'Council of the laity'.[20] The laity came a long way from the status: 'pay, obey and pray' or better in the words of Pope Pius X, "the one duty of the laity is to allow

themselves to be led and, like a docile flock, to follow their pastors,"[21] to that of being called to assume their responsibility to be actively involved in the church's mission (LG 30, 33).

As the internationally recognized Canadian Canonist Ladislas Orsy pointed out, already in 1938 Pope Pius XI said, while addressing a group of seminarians in Rome: "The Church, the mystical body of Christ, has become a monstrosity. The head is very large but the body is shrunken. You the priests must rebuild that body of the Church and the only way in which you can rebuild it is to mobilize the lay people. You must call upon the lay people to become, along with you, the witnesses to Christ. You must call them especially to bring Christ back to the workplace, the market place."[22] This prophetic words of the Pope about rebuilding the Church was initiated by Vatican II by rectifying the disproportionality of the various parts of the body of the Church. No doubt, the efforts of Catholic Religious Orders like the Dominicans, the Jesuits and others, as well as the writings of many theologians like Yves Congar, Joseph Cardign and others,[23] prepared the way for Vatican II in its retrieval of the role and dignity of the laity in the Church.

As Dolores R. Lecky has shown, "By the time the Second Vatican Council was convened in the fall of 1962, the movements and organizations that had been promoting increased responsibility for the laity within the Church and those that had been exploring the new frontiers of Christian education converged in significant ways."[24] For the first time the Council was attended also by laymen and women, even if only as 'auditors'. Similarly, qualified lay persons like Patrick Keegan, President of the Catholic Workers' Movement, addressed the Council. No wonder the Decree on the Laity stated: "Since in our time women are taking an increasingly active share in the whole life of the society, it is very important that their participation in the various sections of the church's apostolate should likewise develop" (AA no 9).

AA no 4 while situating family life within secular concerns and as a means of holiness in the life of the laity uses the idea of vocation. The very use of the word 'vocation' is significant in so far as it was a word used almost exclusively to refer to the call of priests and religious. The laity are called by God to forward the reign of God in the world and in the church (AA no 4). The spirit of God is making the laity more conscious of their calling and their responsibility. The Council made it foundational that the laity share in the redemptive responsibility of the Church, participating in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Jesus Christ confirmed by the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation (AA no 2). There is a diversity of ministry in the Church to fulfil the one mission (AA no 2).

Laity and the Mission of the Church Today

Vatican II's affirmation of the vocation of the laity anchored on Baptism and Confirmation is very much scriptural. Already in the Old Testament, just before Israel is made as God's people through the covenant (Ex 20-24), God informs the people of the very purpose of the whole process: "That you may be holy and a priestly people, and a kingly nation..." (Ex 19: 4-5). Israel is constituted as God's people for the sake of a mission, that they may serve as light to the nations (Is 42: 6, 49:6). The role of a priest and a king is that of service to the people.

Ex 19:4-5 is almost verbatim repeated by St. Peter in his first letter to the Christian community: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who call you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pt 2:9). The purpose of the Christian community is precisely that it may declare the wonderful deeds of God.

The missionary vocation of the Christian community is reflected in every page of the New Testament. Evangelist

Mark is very precise in his call narrative: "He called unto him whom he was wanting to call and made them twelve – created a community - to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim and to cast out demons" (3:14-15).[25] Though there are individual differences among the evangelists the major elements are common to all: creation of a new community, presence of the community with the Lord and mission through word and deed. It is obvious from Acts 11:19ff that the Risen Lord's mandate to be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem and to the ends of the world (Acts 1:8) is discharged by the community as a whole. Interestingly, the very first Gentile community is the fruit not of any of the Apostles' proclamation, but of the ordinary Christians (Acts 11:19-26).

However, the Post-Constantinean era witnessed a steady marginalization of the laity in the Church, especially with regard to their role in mission. This was aggravated also due to the changed understanding of mission. If mission in the Apostolic era was primarily a matter of sharing of an experience leading to transformation (see 1Jn 1:1-4), gradually it becomes a question of conquest, displacement and expansion, especially, during colonial days. It was executed by professional missionaries belonging to the Religious Orders, who were sent to the 'pagan lands' to save the souls of 'the natives'. That missionary era began to change with Vatican II.

Luther rightly insisted on the beauty and dignity of Christian baptism. However, due to his polemic against the Roman Curia, he did not devote equal space to the duties that baptism brings to every Christian, more so the missionary character of baptism. It is to the merit of Vatican II that the Council spelt out the missionary nature of the whole Church, basing it solidly on God's love. The greatest insight of Vatican II, I would suggest, is its declaration that God is a "fountain like love" (AG 2). The first five articles of the Mission Decree *Ad Gentes* spells out this love further in terms of God's reaching

out to the world through God's Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ, and through God's Spirit. As the nature of love is reaching out the whole process of mission can be described as the divine dynamism of self-reaching out, beginning with creation. Thus, *Ad Gentes* goes beyond what some theologians name as *Missio Dei* (God's mission) and say how God, as self-expansive love, **is Mission.** Church is missionary by nature because God in God's being is missionary!

True, *Ad Gentes* used the traditional concept of sending. In so far as sending is more congenial to a geographical sense of mission, not to speak of its colonial hangovers, and since the contemporary context of mission is much more complex than geography, mission has to make use of the self-diffusive nature of love as reaching out. This would be more meaningful when we speak of the mission of the laity in so far as they are not sent out as the professional missionaries.

In Jesus Christ God entered human history and Jesus told his listeners how in him God's reign has come (Mk 1:15, Mt 4:17). Love and service are foundational to Divine reign. When a lawyer asked Jesus what was the basic norm of life, Jesus replied to him through the love command and outlined Christian life through the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37). This is the good news of the Gospel. Vatican II's reform movement was precisely to take this good news to the heart of every human person, in his/her living context.[26] Every Christian is called to bring this good news to the neighbour through the practice of the Christian reaching out to the neighbour.

Christian living cannot be limited to certain devotional practices or the Sunday masses, but must include a genuine Christian outlook that does not shutout the neighbour. Mary's concern for the wedding host who ran out of wine must inspire any Christian. Reaching out to anyone who is in genuine need is the ultimate Christian value (Lk 10:37). The Christian

preoccupation is not so much the salvation of one's soul as much as becoming a blessing to others even as Abraham is called to be a blessing to all the families of the world (Gen 12.). That is how the common identity of the Church as the light to the world (Mt 5:13-14) is concretized at the individual level. Only then can we appreciate the Lucan inaugural proclamation of the Lord (Lk 4:16-19).

The prophetic dimension of Christian baptism sharing in the mission of the prophet from Nazareth (Mt 21:11) must be exercised by every Christian. In a world where there is so much self-seeking and lying, the very Christian life has to become an unsettling presence, powerful enough to effect a disturbance in the hearts and minds of the onlookers. Such a missionary perspective is present in most documents of Vatican II but more so in the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. Having said how the Church, "coming forth from the eternal Father's love, founded in time by Christ the Redeemer and made one in the Holy Spirit," article 40 of *Gaudium et Spes* goes on to say: "she serves as a leaven and a kind of soul for the human society[27] as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family."

All this spells out the baptismal foundation of mission rather than the priestly ordination or the religious vows, though the ordained ministers in their ministry can raise the awareness of the Christian community of its basic call to mission and to do everything possible that the community fulfils this vocation. Through their baptism Christians are 'reconfigured' (Gaillardetz) so as to have this constant habitual outlook of reaching out, even as the Good Samaritan did. The vocation of the laity for mission is not transitional or substitutional, i.e., temporary or filling a gap. It is the permanent call to make present God's other-centeredness experiential to people, and thus to become 'God with us, Emmanuel' (Mt 1:23).

Conclusion

The 500th anniversary of the Luther-inspired reformation is an invitation to get rid of any prejudice about what Luther did and stood for. In the middle ages the concept of the reformation meant the idea of changing a bad present and retrieving the pristine purity as the Religious Orders spoke about the reformation of the order to overcome a decline in the religious spirit. The Council of Constance (1414-1418) regarded the freeform of the Church a necessity.[28] Thus, Luther advocated a reformation of the Church. Equally we have to be sensitive to the social and political context.

While the Council of Trent (1545-1563) dealt with the moral reformation of the Church that Luther advocated, it was equally a guarding against Luther, as far as the church teachings were concerned. Generally speaking, Luther's teachings bore fruit in Vatican II which the paper examined. The focal interest of the paper was Luther's insistence on the baptismal priesthood as the basis of the ministerial priesthood.[29] This was unpacked in the light of the teachings of Vatican II with regard to the missionary nature of the Church. The quincentennial of commemoration of the Reformation can release new energy and commitment to make the Church truly the sacrament of divine reign by the active involvement of every Christian.

Notes

1 Hans Kung, *Christianity: The Religious Situation of Our Time,* London: Collins, 1995, 525. The humanistic revival that began during the late middle ages, to a large extent, paved the way for the reformation. People wanted to hear more enlightened sermons from the ministers. (See John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther, Selections from his Writings,* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961, 166). Similarly, John Wycliffe (1320-1384), a century before Luther, had advocated the translation of the

Bible into English and it influenced Jan Hus (1352-1445) who, though, was burned at the stake.

2 Luther, in his struggle, sought the help of the Nobility of Germany, as he felt powerless before the well-entrenched institutional power of the church of the time. Luther was convinced of the need for a General Council to discuss and usher in reform, especially with regard to the spiritual authority that the Church claimed to have, namely, to change divine will regarding a person who is in purgatory to be taken out by a substitutionary order of the Church in the form of a total indulgence which one could win for oneself or for one in purgatory, by paying money for the construction of the basilica of St. Peter.

3 See https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco_20161031_svezia-evento-ecumenico.html (accessed on 20/01/2017).

4 See the Declaration on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redentigratio) of Vatican II. The Church: Towards a Common Vision, (Faith and Order Paper 214, WCC).

5 From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. www.bonifatius.de.

6 From Conflict to Communion, no 2.

7 From Conflict to Communion, no 3.

8 As mentioned in foot note 1, persons like John Wicliffe and Jan Hus had already advocated the need for translating the bible into the languages of the people and the place of the bible in the lives of the faithful.

9 Cf. Ronald D. Witterup, *Rediscovering Vatican II: Scripture,* New York: Paulist Press, 2006, 5.

10 Luther, *First Lecture on the Psalms,* in Herbert J.A. Bouman, *Luther's Writings, WA 3,* 397, 9-11, quoted in Conflict and Communion, no.197.

11 See *An Appeal to the Ruling Class,* in *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther,* Bertran Lees Woolf (ed), Library of Ecclesiastical History, 1952, 114.

12 See From Conflict to Communion, no 162.

13 Letter to the Christian Nobility, in *Weinmar Gusgabe 6*, p.407. See Conflict and Communion, foot note no 3.

14 Ibid. I may add that this idea is foreshadowed already in the Old Testament when God reminds the people just before the making of the Covenant that they are to be a holy priestly and kingly people at the service of God (Ex 19: 6-7).

15 See Helmut T Lehmann (ed), *Luther's Works,* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970, 5.

16 Lehmann, 14.

17 Bertran Lees Woolf (ed), "An Appeal to the Ruling Class," in *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther,* 113.

18 Timothy J Wengert, *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops: Public Ministry for the Reformation and Today,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, v.

19 Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church,* London: SCM Press, 1989, 9.

20 Dolores R. Lecky, *The Laity and Christian Education,* New York: Paulist Press, 2006, 1.

21 Ibid.

22 Ladislas Orsy, *Receiving the Council,* Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009, 36, quoted by Neil Ormerod, "The Laity in the Australian Church," in N. Ormerod *et al.*(eds), *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church,* Mulgrave, Vic: Garratt Pub., 2012, 62.

23 The late Cardinal Valerian Gracias of Bombay made a presentation at the World Congress for the Lay Apostolate in 1951, advocating a theology of the laity who shared responsibility for the Church's mission. Others like Cardinal Newman, Cardinal Suhard, G.K. Chesterton, Frank Sheed, Maisie Ward *et al*., had their formative impact on the Council.

24 Dolores Lecky, *The Laity and Christian Education,* 11.

25 This is my translation of the original Greek text.

26 The Pastoral Constitution of the Church, *Gaudium et Spes,* which deals with this service to the world, begins with the words: "The joys, the agonies and the aspirations of the world are our joys, our agonies and our aspirations..." (GS 1).

27 *Letter to Diognetus*, an early Church document taught how Christians were to serve the world as soul did to the body (n 6).

28 Session 3, 26 March 1415.

29 "Appeal to the Ruling Class," in Bertran Lee Woolf, *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther,* Library of Ecclesiastical History, 1952, 114.

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Impact of the Reformation on Mission

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Abstract: From its very inception, the Reformation had an enormous impact on mission. For various reasons, the Reformers did not see the need for mission. The "Great Commission" was considered to be limited to the Apostles. Belief in predestination rendered mission superfluous. Preoccupation with the Reformation in Europe, together with political and military struggles, led the Reformers to be inward looking. Protestants lost a massive pool of full-time personnel, in the form of dedicated monks and celibates. Also the scandal of division and competition proved a great obstacle to mission. However, thanks to pioneering thinkers and the ecumenical movement, all these obstacles to mission began to be addressed, so that the situation today is vastly different.

Keywords: Reformation, mission, ecumenism

The Reformation had an enormous impact on mission, from its very inception. Strange as it may sound, it resulted in the loss of a sizeable part of Christian Europe from engagement with mission. The conduct of Protestant missions in India is formally dated from 1706, when Ziegenbalg and Plütschau of the Danish-Halle mission landed at the Danish colony of Tranquebar in present day Tamil Nadu. The few chaplains attached to the centres of the British East India Company in the seventeenth century ministered to the English residents and

did not engage in missionary work. Meanwhile already from the early sixteenth century, Roman Catholic missions were fast spreading in South America and Asia. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), who considered missionary activity as a mark of the true Church, reproached the Protestants for their lack of it: "Heretics are never said to have converted either pagans or Jews to the faith, but only to have perverted Christians. But in this one century the Catholics have converted many thousands of heathens in the new world."[1]

The reasons for the tardy entry of the Reformation churches and communities into mission are manifold.

1. Denial of the Missionary Obligation

For one thing, they believed that the "Great Commission" in Mt 28:18-20 was limited to the apostles. If it were admitted that it was inherited by their successors, one would have to admit that other mandates given to the apostles, e.g. that of binding and loosing, had also passed to their successors. The extremely meagre quotations available from the writings of Luther do not warrant the conclusion that he had a vision for world mission. The flip side of exclusive insistence on justification by faith is pointed out by Bosch (1991: 242): "since the initiative remains God's, and God is the One who sovereignly elects those who will be saved, any human attempt at saving people would be blasphemy." The fact that Luther expected the Parousia in the year 1558 did not help. He ignored the whole idea of foreign mission. He felt that the Apostles had already preached the Gospel in the whole world. To this, the teacher Johann Comenius (1592-1670) retorted: "The apostles preached all over the *then known* world." Melanchton likewise saw the mission command as valid only for the Apostles; it was the *civil* authorities who had a missionary obligation towards their non-Christian subjects. The church authorities remained passive about

it. The theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg took a formal position on the issue through a publication in 1652, stating that missionary responsibility lay with the state, not with the church. They explained that God had revealed himself sufficiently to all people through the preaching of the apostles. The Calvinist doctrine of predestination acted as a further dampener on any missionary zeal. The well-known Lutheran theologian John Gerard (1582-1637) held that unknown missionaries had brought Christianity to the inhabitants of Mexico and Brazil; the same must be true of the Peruvians, Brahmins and others, because their religions bear so many similarities with Christianity. Thus it was left to the colonial authorities, like the Dutch East India Company, to send missionaries to their colonies abroad. It was not that the Protestants lacked colonies overseas to provide them with a goad to develop their missionary obligation. The first English colony in Virginia was founded in 1584. The Dutch ruled a colony in Ceylon from 1640-1796.

2. Forerunners of Change

Nevertheless, there were a few Protestants who may be considered pioneers and forerunners of a theory and practice of mission. Among them should be mentioned **Adrian Saravia** (1531-1613), a Dutch theologian and contemporary of Calvin. In a treatise written in 1590 he argued that the mission command given to the apostles is inherited by the bishops who clearly stand in the line of apostolic succession. He further held that the promise of Jesus in Mt 28:20 is applicable to us, provided we fulfil the commission to which it is attached. He thereby maintained that the commission is meant to be fulfilled "to the end of the age". Not surprisingly, his views met with severe opposition from many, including Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva and from John Gerard. Also meriting special mention is **Gisbert Voetius** (1589-

1676), professor at the university of Utrecht. He visualized three goals of mission, each subordinated to the next: the conversion of non-Christians → planting churches → the glory of God. He eschewed coercion in religious matters and rejected the distinction of 'younger' and 'older' churches, for he saw them as equals. His pupil **Johannes Hoornbeeck** (1617-1666) made an interesting application of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Reformation Christians were like the priest and Levite who "passed by on the other side" (Lk 10:31-32), when presented with missions to non-Christians. The Roman Catholics were like the Samaritan in their missionary zeal. Hoornbeeck also visualized a Protestant organisation like the Roman Catholic "Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith" and comprising international membership. The example of Roman Catholic missions undoubtedly exercised an influence on a re-thinking of the mission imperative among Protestants and is reflected in their early missiological essays. The New England Company, the first of its kind, was founded in England in 1649 to foster missionary activity in the north American colonies.

A huge change in the attitude towards missionary activity came about with the rise of **Pietism**. This was a movement whose earliest protagonists were P. Spener (1635-1705) and A. Francke (1663-1727). They stressed, among other things, personal conversion, lay initiative and the duty of the Great Commission.Halle (Germany), where Francke taught, was the centre of this movement. It exercised a profound influence on missionary thinking among Protestants, whether Calvinist, Lutheran, Anglican, or Methodist, and resulted in the founding of missionary societies and works. The king of Denmark,Frederick IV, could not find missionaries in his own country, so he sent to Tranquebarthe two Germans, Ziegenbalg (1682-1719) and Plütschau (1677-1752). Both were moulded by Pietism and were paid a salary by the Danish king.In sending them out, he met with opposition from Denmark's

state church. The first baptisms took place in 1707 and by the turn of that century there were an estimated 36,970 converts (Neill 1964:160, 679). The Pietist movement brought to the fore the missionary enterprise of ordinary Christians.

Another important figure marking a shift to a missionary outlook was **William Carey** (1761-1834), a Baptist pastor. In a publication[2] in 1792 he challenged the Calvinist position, that it was not necessary to engage in missionary activity. That same year, thanks to his efforts, there was founded the "Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen". Carey came to India as the first missionary of that Society and was later joined by two other Englishmen, J. Marshman and W. Ward.

Late though it was, the 19th century was the great century of Protestant missionary endeavour. The way had been prepared by the above mentioned pioneers. The number of Protestant missionaries grew from only 190 in 1792 to 29,188 in 1923.[3] **Gustav Warneck** (1834-1910) is generally regarded as the founder of modern missiology; his five-volume *Evangelische Missionslehre* was published between 1892-1903. He founded a missiological journal (*Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift*) in 1874 and became the first German professor of missiology at Halle in 1896. He fostered fellowship among the various missionary societies in Germany. His *Sketch of the History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Day* (1892) went into ten reprints!

3. Local Preoccupations

While the great reserve towards accepting the "Great Commission" remains the chief reason for the lack of missionary endeavour on the part of Protestants in the early centuries of the Reformation, one may adduce additional factors which contributed to that situation. The *preoccupations*

of the Reformers with the Reformation in Europe caused them to be inward looking. Each new Reformed church or community was preoccupied with defining itself over against the others. So while the Reformers did expend their energies on re-Christianizing Europe as they understood it, they did not focus their gaze on the wider missionary task. Yet the fact remains, that similar difficulties experienced by the Catholic Church did not hinder it from engaging in missionary activity. Exceptional for the Protestants was the evangelization of the Lapps of Scandinavia, the last remaining non-Christians in Europe, by Swedish Lutherans in the sixteenth century. This mission was promoted by King Gustav Vasa of Sweden and was partly motivated by political considerations.

4. Inward looking

The Reformation also resulted in a huge *political and military struggle* between Protestants and Roman Catholics, of whichthe Thirty Years War (1618-1648) was a notable example. The whole of Europe was drawn into the conflagration. While all this contributed to making the Protestants so much more inward looking, it led the Roman Catholics to stress that the Roman form of Christianity was the best and only one. This contributed to the biggest shortcoming in their missionary endeavours, namely the near total lack of inculturation.

5. Short on Personnel

With the Reformation, Protestants *lost a massive pool of full-time personnel*, like the dedicated monks and celibates, who would form the pioneering vanguard of the Roman Catholic missionary movement.

6. Stress on Differences

Differences were stressed, not similarities. Furthermore, the hostilities and polemics which were nurtured in Europe were exported to distant mission fields. Thus it was that Blessed Inacio de Azevedo (†1570) and his 39 companions were massacred by French Huguenots near the Canary islands on their way to Brazil. Catholic and Protestant missionaries could not evangelize in colonies belonging to the other. 'Sheep stealing' caused a lot of heartburn on all sides.[4] American Protestants, for example, considered South America and the Caribbean region as mission fields, because they felt that many Roman Catholics were only nominally Christian. On the other hand, Roman Catholic missionaries made much effort to win over Protestants in the Pacific islands. As far as India is concerned, S. Neill notes: "Some of the great Christian families which had spread throughout the whole of the Tamil area found themselves by the accident of geography divided up among half a dozen Christian confessions, some of which did not permit intercommunion with those of other forms of the Christian faith."[5] Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (1889-1964), one of only two Christians in the first Cabinet, wrote to Mahatma Gandhi: "The warring sects of the various Christian churches have each formed their own communities in India, with the result that the seed of those very dissensions which have been the cause of strife within the Christian Church in the West has been sown here regardless of the fact that this in itself was a stumbling block to the people whom they wished to convert to a 'better' religion."[6]

7. Scandal of Division Hampers Mission

The 19th century witnessed some important steps being taken to remedy this situation. One was the introduction of '**Comity**', which referred to the mutual division of territory "to prevent wasteful duplication, competition, and presentation of

variant forms of worship and polity which might confuse non-Christians and hinder communication of the gospel" (Neill 1964: 123). Apart from this, colonial governments themselves sometimes assigned separate areas to Protestant and Roman Catholic missions. **World Missionary Conferences** (WMC) marked another initiative towards growing cooperation between the churches in their missionary activity. Indeed we might say that the ecumenical movement traces its origins to these Conferences. During the century beginning in 1860 (Liverpool), there were ten such conferences upto 1963 (Mexico); thereafter, up to 1996 (Brazil) there were ten more. In the WMC held in Mexico City in 1963, Roman Catholic observers and Orthodox members were present for the first time. Since then, there has been no turning back. Out of the WMC of Edinburgh (1910) grew the "International Missionary Council" in 1921, which was integrated into the World Council of Churches in 1961. Theologically, the 'Great Commission' came gradually to be placed in the broader context of the purpose of the Triune God.

It is particularly in the mission field that the negative impact of the division of Christians is felt most keenly. Cardinal Tatsuo Doi of Tokyo, spoke about this at Vatican II, in the name of the Japanese bishops. In an intervention on an earlier draft of the Decree on Ecumenism, he said we must mitigate the scandal of division. The problem of ecumenism must be seen from its missionary aspect. Namely the vast non-Christian population do not understand the reasons for divisions among Christians; it is a great impediment for the diffusion of the gospel.[7] In his intervention, Cardinal Rugambwa of Bukoba (Tanzania) observed: "In the missions, where the separation is daily lived as a drama, we have also suffered the effects and the damage as a kind of new original sin".[8] These interventions had their impact on the final draft of the Decree on Ecumenism which states in the opening paragraph: "Without doubt, this discord openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling

block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the gospel to every creature" (N. 1).

The polemical attitude often endured into modern times in the former mission churches, even though the mother churches in Europe had long since embraced an ecumenical spirit. Echoes of this situation are found in No. 15 of Vatican II's Decree on Missionary Activity. A section here which aroused strong reactions from the Council Fathers was the one which develops the assertion, that "The ecumenical spirit should be nurtured in the neophytes". It went on to explain: "...they can make before the nations a common profession of faith in God and in Jesus Christ. They can collaborate in social and in technical projects as well as in cultural and religious ones." Fifty-eight council Fathers wanted this whole section to be suppressed or completely changed, because of the special conditions of the missions. The neophytes, they said, are generally uneducated and "understand nothing about ecumenism". They have to cope with the sectarianism of the separated Christians. The deletion is necessary, to avoid indifferentism and confusion. Three council Fathers wanted suppressed the exhortation to collaboration in Christ's name, not only between individuals but also between Churches. They felt it favours a euphoric ecumenism, and in no wise the propagation of the Catholic faith. One council Father felt that the entire No.15 seems to contain the danger of syncretism and indifferentism and to confirm the doctrine to be found in India, that all religions are good and ways to God.[9] All these concerns explain why the final text is hedged with exhortations to prudence and cautions "insofar as religious conditions allow". Thanks to the intervention of a Protestant observer at the council, Lukas Vischer, the final text explicitly bases collaboration between individuals and among Churches/ ecclesial communities on Christ: "Let them work together especially for the sake of Christ, their common Lord. Let his Name be the bond that unites them!"

Conclusion

The Reformers probably did not foresee the long-term effects of the movement they had unleashed: the divisions among the Protestant churches/communities themselves (apart from the separation from the Roman Catholic Church) and the scandalous effect this would have in mission areas. As the reality of this scandal began to sink in, there grew the ecumenical movement, with a view to healing the rift.In 1947 several churches, episcopal and non-episcopal, united to form the Church of South India. This was a "first" of its kind since the Reformation and was motivated very much by the needs of mission. A similar effort resulted in the formation of the Church of North India in 1970. There has also been wide-ranging collaboration between the churches in India, including the Roman Catholic Church. The "Fellowship of Indian Missiologists" was formed in 1991;its membership is inter-denominational and includes Roman Catholics. One of its purposes is to relate the message of Jesus Christ to the Indian context. To date, it has published fifteen volumes which are widely used by scholars and students. In our times, the ecumenical movement has brought forth some important results for mission, as for instance the Statement on "The challenge of proselytism and the calling to common witness", by a Joint Working Group of the RC-WCC in 1995 (*Information Service*, 1966, N. 91, pp 77-82). Also the long standing dialogue between Roman Catholics and Pentecostals has produced statements on evangelization, proselytism and common witness.[10]

We have certainly come a long way in this ongoing journey of healing the discord of the Reformation, which "openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the gospel to every creature" (Vat. II, Decree on Ecumenism, N. 1).

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1 Quoted in: S. Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, Penguin Books, 1964, p 221

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8 Ibid., pp 555-556

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The Brave Soloist: The Indian Significance of Martin Luther

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Abstract: The article discusses the exclusive ('*sola*') role of scripture, faith and grace in Luther's programme for Church renewal. Jesus holds the three together: scripture speaks to us about him; we can accept him only through faith; this faith itself is the fruit of God's grace. This perspective of Luther is basically in harmony with what the New Testament tells us. Luther, however, needs to be seen within the frame of his time.

Keywords: Jesus, Church, Luther, scripture, faith, grace, justification

Martin Luther was educated in *Via Moderna* associated with William of Ockham.[1] As "the initial effort of the pious soul, this school encouraged voluntary acts of devotion."[2] In search of peace with God, the young Augustinian monk was very devoted to prayer and penance. "The more he tried to do for God, it seemed, the more aware he became of his sinfulness."[3] Slowly he came to believe "that salvation is a gift of God's grace received by faith...This, he believed was God's work from beginning to end."[4] This was not the result of some hasty conclusion, but the fruit of "his prolonged spiritual development."[5] For him "theology was no mere academic

pursuit, but the struggle for oneself...[and] a struggle for and with God" (*ACEC*).

In 1517 he openly criticized the Dominicans who made fantastic claims for indulgences. The Dominican Johann Tetzel is reported to have said: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."[6] As was to be expected, the Dominicans, the pope's trusted spokespersons, were furious and wanted Rome to condemn him. "The papacy responded with *heavy-handed authoritarianism* combined with diplomatic appeasement of Luther's prince...and a failure seriously to address the theological issues."[7] Gradually Luther became more and more alienated from Rome and "forever changed Christianity when he began the Protestant Reformation."[8]

Five hundred years later, indulgences have taken a back seat in the thinking of many Roman Catholics. Some also think that Luther was correct. Even Rome has moved away from its original response to Luther. Benedict XVI admitted: "As the Bishop of Rome, it is deeply moving for me to be meeting you here... 'How do I receive the grace of God?' The fact that this question was the driving force of his [Luther's] whole life never ceases to make a deep impression on me" (*ACEC*). We all need to make this question our own and more than even before we need to listen to Luther with evangelical openness.

Luther "articulated a radical understanding of the gospel that subsequent Lutheranism framed by its three famous *solas*—*sola gratia, sola fide* and *sola scriptura*...The core of these *solas* may be summed up in one phrase—*solus Christus*."[9] We need to critique Luther in the light of contemporary scholarship and interpret him anew not only within the ecumenical concern so important for the West, but also within the multi-religious context so challenging for Indian Christians.

1. *Solus Christus*: Christ Alone

In the introduction to his commentary on Paul's letter to the Galatians, Luther states his position very clearly: "For the one doctrine which I have supremely at heart, is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth day and night." Concluding this letter he says: "I bear on my body the marks (*stigma*) of Jesus" (6.17b). Luther enlarges Paul's claim: "I am the servant of Jesus Christ...I openly teach and confess, that no man can obtain the favour of God...but by Christ alone, therefore it behoveth me to bear the badges of Christ my Lord" (*CG*, 6.17b). "In the ancient world masters placed a *stigma* on their slaves."[10] Luther is also expressing his own deep belonging to Christ. "Luther's thinking, his whole spirituality, was thoroughly Christocentric: 'What promotes Christ's cause' was for Luther the decisive hermeneutical criterion for the exegesis of sacred Scripture" (*ACEC*).

1. 1 The Necessity of Jesus

Even though an avid student of Scripture, Luther failed to see that the God of Jesus is above all a loving Abba. The philosophical image of God seems to have been more powerful in his thought. "If you seek thus to comprehend God, and would pacify him without Christ the mediator, making your works a means between him and yourself, it cannot be but that you must fall...For, as God is in his own nature immeasurable, incomprehensible, and infinite so is he to man's nature intolerable" (*CG*, 1.3). God is totally beyond our reach. Also the image of a God who is angry with sinful humans continues to affect Luther. In his commentary on Rom 1.18 ("The wrath of God is revealed..."), Luther says: "Through the Gospel, God is revealing his wrath from heaven upon all mankind because of the godless and unjust lives they live" (*CR*). For

Luther the Good News becomes the revelation of the wrath of God. Hence the need of a mediator: "When so ever you... dispute with yourself how God is to be found...then know you that there is no other God besides this man Christ Jesus...I know by experience what I say" (*CG*, 1.3). In the early years of his monastic life Luther did much penance to free himself from an angry God, till he realized that only God can free him through the mediation of Jesus.

Commenting on Gal 1.1 ("Paul an apostle...through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead") Luther says that some may think "that the adding of these words: 'And by God the Father, etc.' is not necessary...[but they are needed] to preach the righteousness of God, which is called the resurrection of the dead...the righteousness of Christ, who was raised up by God the Father from the dead; by the which alone we are made righteous." Jesus was accused of blasphemy, and as a result "he suffered the most reproachful death of the Cross" (*CG*, 3.6). He "is made a curse for us, and is hanged upon the cross as a wicked man, a blasphemer, a murderer and a traitor" (*CG*, 3.13). By raising him from the dead the Father justified him. The same Father now justifies us through his Risen Son.

Luther insists that "Christ himself, in the unity of his divine-human person, is the righteousness by which human beings are saved."[11] Christ's mediation is rooted in the mystery of his incarnation.

> Christ is the Son of God and of a woman, who for us sinners was made under the law, to redeem us that were under the law. These words express both the person of Christ and the office of Christ. His person consists of his divine and human nature...Christ therefore is very God and very man. His office he sets forth in these words: "Being made under the law to redeem them that were under the law" (CG, 4.4).

Accepting the mystery of Incarnation, we can agree with Luther that no other mediator is now needed. "Wherefore mark

this well in the matter of justification...we must look upon no other God, but only this God incarnate and clothed with man's nature" (*CG*, 1.3). In explaining the uniqueness of Jesus we have to keep in mind two important theological concerns. First, Jesus is the way to the Father. Christian theology is theocentric, but for Luther "the gospel is defined primarily by its Christological content."[12] Even for many Roman Catholics spirituality is largely Christocentric. Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, calling him Abba. Today very few do that. Second, our explanation must always bring out more forcefully the grace of God revealed in Jesus. An exclusivist position will make the Father of Jesus a tribal God.

1.2 The Sufficiency of Jesus

Commenting on Gal 2.20b ("I live by faith in the Son of God...") Luther says: "Paul sets out most lively the priesthood and offices of Christ: which are, to pacify God, to make intercession for sinners, to offer up himself a sacrifice for their sins...etc." Luther thinks that there are two aspects of the mediating role of Jesus. One is 'historical'—through his passion and death, "because he had to pay the penalty of death and suffer in our stead the torments of hell..."[13] The other is 'eschatological'—through his intercession: "So long as He sits at the right hand of God to intercede for us..." (*CG*, 4.6). Both these modes of mediation raise serious questions.

Luther thinks that because of our sin God is angry. He needs to be placated. "If the law be the ministry of sin, then it is also the ministry of wrath...it shows unto man the wrath of God..." (*CG*, 2.17). What sort of God is he? Also, to placate that angry God, it would be an act of injustice to require an innocent person to suffer on behalf of that sinner. The 'historical' dimension of Christ's mediation is not his passion and death, but in his being human and divine. "His person consists of his divine and human nature...His office he sets forth in these

words: 'Being made under the law to redeem them that were under the law'" (*CG*, 4.4). When an honourable person sits with lepers and dines with them, he restores their dignity.

So too the 'eschatological' mediation as intercession is not that Jesus is constantly praying for us. No! The loving Father needs no reminders. Jesus "sits...at the right hand of his Father...made unto us of God...he is our high-priest entreating for us, and reigning over us and in us by race" (*CG*, int.). The high-priestly role of Jesus is precisely the coming together of the divine and the human in his person. His very presence in the glory of the Father is an assurance for us that one day we too will be in that glory. Jesus is an assurance given to us by the Father. In his mediatory role, both in its historical expression and its eschatological form, he is not our mediator before God, but God's mediator before us, for us; not because he takes us to God, but brings God to us. In the Incarnation, the Father makes visible his love for us. Commenting on Gal 1.4, Luther quotes Jn 3.16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..." God remains faithful even though we have sinned. Being divine and human, only Jesus can intercede for us; and this is sufficient.

Convinced of the necessity and sufficiency of Christ, Luther looks back to his earlier days with regret: "For we all...taught that Mary was to be held in Christ's place; we held Christ to be our angry judge and Mary to be our throne of grace... [we] took Christ's office from Him and gave it to Mary...Sheer idolatry is what we learned."[14] Luther is not exaggerating. "The *Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri (d. 1321) sums up the Mariology of the Middle Ages by depicting her as having influence throughout the entire universe...even hell. Thus on the eve of the Reformation, the central and unique role of Christ in our redemption had become obscured."[15] This was not a divine comedy but a deeply human tragedy: we were becoming idolaters, and thus debasing ourselves.

Aware of what is happening in our country, I cannot but agree with Luther. "Mary, made a common idol, with innumerable services, celebrations, fasts, hymns, and antiphons."[16] Commenting on Lk 2.12 ("And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe..."), Luther asks: "Why does he [the angel] not direct them to Mary and Joseph..? The reason is that God will not point us to any saint...for they may all err...a special place must be pointed out where Christ is...even if Joseph and Mary were not present."[17] Those who think that devotion to Mary and the saints is necessary are suggesting "that Christ is a good workman, who has indeed begun a building, but he has not finished it" (*CG*, 1.6). Jesus is the Way, "you shall find no other way to the Father" (*CG*, 1.3).

The traditional Roman distinction between *latria*: worship reserved to God alone, *dulia*: veneration of saints, and *hyper-dulia*: special veneration of Mary, is quite neat on paper. But we need to honestly examine the ground reality in our parishes and shrines. The commission of the clergy more than the mission of Jesus explains better the flourishing cult of Mary and the saints. "There is a kind of Christianity made up of devotions reflecting an individual and sentimental faith life which does not in fact correspond to authentic "popular piety". Some people promote these expressions...and in certain cases they do so in order to obtain economic benefits or some power over others (*EG*, 70). To me the growth of popular devotions is a convenient alibi for a clergy that is not adequately motivated for real pastoral work, and inadequately equipped for it. Already in the 1980's it was noted that "by and large, the people who accept and respect the priests [and bishops] today are the uneducated, not the educated."[18] Pope Francis expresses his concern: "We are suffering from religious illiteracy to the point that, in some shrines around the world, things get confused...[where some] sell objects of superstition because people seek salvation in superstition."[19] The Roman Church in India is a Church of the past. "By the

Late Middle Ages indulgences had become a central part of piety for many people in the Western Church but were also a useful means of financial support for a cash-strapped papacy, so that indulgence preaching was labeled a *sacrum negotium* (holy business)."[20] When the clergy needs money simony can become sacred, and superstition can become faith.

2. *Sola Gratia*: Grace Alone

A Christian is not one "who has no sin...but he to whom God imputes no sin" (*CG*, 2.16). It is the working of God's grace "that we are accounted completely just before God. God's grace is not divided into bits and pieces, as are the gifts, but grace takes us up completely into God's favour... so that the gifts may begin their work in us" (*CR*). Here we need to understand what Luther means by 'impute', and why he distinguishes between grace and gifts. I shall try to explain this through the parable of the Lost Son (Lk 15.11-25).

2.1 Justification as Relation

The younger son wanted to break away completely from his father, and be his own master. He is far away from home and starving to death. He has lost all his dignity: caring for pigs—the dirtiest creatures on earth! When he is in this hell, he remembers his father as a rich landlord with many servants. He does not expect to be easily accepted. Hence he prepares a three-tiered plea—a confession: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;" an acceptance of the consequences of his misbehaviour: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son;" and a petition: "Treat me as one of your hired servants." The third part is in anticipation of his father telling him to get lost.

The father had not forgotten him—how could he? Every day, morning and evening he would go up to the roof of his

house and look all around. Luke paints a powerfully appealing picture of the compassionate father. While the son "was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." Luke packs five verbs in one breath. The father does not wait for the son to come near and prostrate himself at his feet and ask forgiveness. He welcomes him as if a good bridegroom for his daughter was coming. This was what the boy least expected. This is grace: the restoration of the lost relationship. This is justification: the father treats that young man as his son, even though he is stinking. Grace, for Luther, is not divided into bits and pieces, because grace is not something, but accepting the gaze of a loving God.

The boy needs a good bath, a new set of clothes, a new pair of sandals. These are the 'gifts': a process of many parts. In the meanwhile, the servants get a grand dinner ready. All in the neighbourhood must know that the dead son is alive, and he who was lost is found, and he has been fully reinstated as the son. The gifts do not end there. He is emaciated: skin and bones. He will need some months to recover his health fully: to be healthy as he was before.

2.2 Relation as Grace

Even on the human level love is always a free gift. We cannot compel anybody to love us. Love is always a mystery of faith and hope. When I stand in the presence of a person with a hope that he accepts me, I also do so with the faith that he can really love me. When the other loves me, he puts his faith in me and hopes that I will accept and reciprocate his love. All real love is the experience of grace. Christ is "the Giver of grace and life...who gave himself, not for our merits...but for our sins" (*CG*, 1.4). The lost son did not expect that the father would welcome him as his son. Hence he came prepared with a plea that he be accepted as a servant.

The way Luther speaks gives the impression that God's grace to us is linked with Christ's death on the cross. Jesus has "given himself for our sins, and with one oblation has put away the sins of the whole world, has fastened them upon the cross, and put them clean out by himself" (*CG*, 1.4). This is what many Christians believe: God sent his Son to save us from our sins. This in a way makes grace God's response to our sin. Grace is God's eternal purpose (Eph 3.11). Before the foundation of the world he chose us in his Son (Jn 1.1-2; Eph 1.5-6, 9-10; Col 1.15-16). What then happens to Luther's *theologia crucis*? For him "the Gospel of Christ crucified [is] the word of the cross and the foolishness of preaching" (*CG*, 3.6). This explains why the Church is not attractive. "For the Gospel which is the Word of the Cross...shines not so brightly as the doctrine of the law and works, and therefore she has not so many disciples...because she preaches the word of the cross of Christ crucified, against all the wisdom of the flesh" (*CG*, 4.27).

Our interpretation of Luther's *theologia crucis* can make sense only if it harmonizes with the New Testament. We need to shift from an expiation- to a compassion-paradigm to understand Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus died not for us but with us. He died in compassion with all the victims of the powers of darkness, powers that unleash all kinds of violence on innocent people. The death of Jesus is the final self-emptying of the God who is Love: to be with the beloved even in hell. In Jesus' resurrection we all rise with him. Our humanity is already in glory. The *theologia crucis* discloses the vulnerability of love. The Church lives the *theologia crucis* only through the radical self-emptying that love demands. Then she will withdraw to make place for God's Kingdom. Today we have a lot of the Church, but very little of the Kingdom.

3. *Sola Fides*: Faith Alone

Luther rightly said that many speak about faith "without understanding their own words" (*FC*, p. 104). A distinction must be made between faith and belief. The former is an existential mystery: a relation to a person. The latter is the cognitive content that is presupposed by, accompanies and follows faith. The failure to make this distinction has led to some horrible crimes in the past. We have burnt some people to death because they did not share our belief. The difference between faith and belief is seen in Abraham. He is our father in faith even though strictly speaking he was not even a monotheist.

3.1 Faith: The Acceptance of Justification

Luther considers Paul's letter to the Romans "the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel... almost bright enough to illumine the entire Scripture" (*CR*). The letter was perceived as an attack on "a creed of merit and system of works unworthy of devotion or even of toleration."[21] This creed gives great importance to Law. Luther believes that we cannot keep the Law if properly understood. It is not enough to fulfil the Law outwardly, but we must do so with inner freedom and love for the Law. But "everyone finds inside himself an aversion to good and a craving for evil. Where there is no free desire for good, there the heart has not set itself on God's law...[The Law] is spiritual, [and] no one can satisfy it unless everything he does springs from the depths of the heart" (*CR*). It is wrong to think that we can prepare ourselves "for grace by means of works. How can anybody prepare himself for good by means of works if he does no good work except with aversion and constraint in his heart?" (*CR*). Only when we are filled with love by the Holy Spirit will we be able to

keep the Law properly. The Spirit, however, "is given only in, with, and through faith in Jesus Christ" (*CR*).

Justification is not something but a relation with God. Only God in his goodness can invite us to himself; otherwise he would not be God, but some earthly figure. We have to accept this invitation in faith. "For the word of God cannot be received and honoured by any works, but by faith alone...as the soul needs the word alone for life and justification, so it is justified by faith alone" (*FC*, p. 107).

3.2 Works: The Expression of Justification

Luther distinguishes between naked or abstract and concrete or incarnate faith (*CG*, 3.10). When people are filled with faith, "then do they love God and their neighbour, then do they good works...This is to do the law indeed" (*idem.*). These good works are animated by faith: "faith must always be the divinity of works and so spread throughout the works as is the divinity throughout the humanity of Christ" (*idem.*).

Real faith takes us towards our neighbour. "Through faith, a person will do good to everyone without coercion, willingly and happily; he will serve everyone, suffer everything for the love and praise of God, who has shown him such grace. It is as impossible to separate works from faith as burning and shining from fire" (*CR*). Faith is the firm conviction "of the overflowing good will that God has shown in Christ: he had him die for us before we could ask him for it, yes, even while we were still his enemies" (*idem.*). This does not mean that good works are not needed. We too must love and serve others even before they ask us.

4. *Sola Scriptura*: Scripture Alone

Towards the end of his *Large Catechism* Luther warns his readers: a God-fearing person is bound to have enemies. He

should remember that he does not belong to this world, "and only keep to the Scriptures" (*LC*), because "what is asserted without Scripture or an approved revelation, may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed" (*OL*). Popes have made claims that today we would not approve of. Hence "who would help Christendom when the pope errs, if we were not to believe another, who had the Scriptures on his side, more than the pope?" (*OL*). "The Reformation happened because the pope tried to hinder him [Luther] from fulfilling his vocation of expounding the Scriptures."[22] Luther was a student also of the early Fathers. Though important, they have a limited function: "the writings of all the holy fathers should be read only for a time, in order that through them we may be led to the Holy Scriptures...[because] the Scriptures alone are our vineyard in which we ought all to work and toil" (*OL*). No wonder then that Luther is reported to have said: "A simple layman armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it."[23] After Luther launched the Reformation, questions concerning epistemology and hermeneutics have engaged many scholars. All this must make us more critical when discussing the role of Scripture in our life today.

4.1 Scripture as Authority

This insistence of Luther to have recourse to Scripture alone "only underlined his concern for finding a direct approach to Christ, one in which the individual is illumined by the interior witness of the Holy Spirit (*sola gratia*, 'grace alone')."[24] The fact is that many others claim to have their holy book, the only source of truth. Their 'truths' at times clearly contradict each other.[25] Different groups use their sacred book to justify unacceptable ways of thinking and acting. The Bible has been quoted to justify genocide (1 Sam 15.2-3), extreme attitude towards homosexuals (Lev 20.13), death penalty (Lev 20.2,

9), male domination in the Church (1 Tim 2.11-14), slavery (Eph 6.5-8), etc.

In upholding Scripture as a sure foundation for religious truth, we are engaged in a vicious circle. Vatican II states that the Church "relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20.31; 2 Tim 3.16; 2 Peter 1.19-20, 3.15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself" (*DV*, 11). How on earth could the Apostles know about the books of the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, when scholars today think that "the history of the development of the OT canon is a matter of controversy…[and] the formation of the NT canon also had its vicissitudes."[26] Further, the Council—the Church—uses Biblical texts to make its claim for the Bible and to show that Jesus founded the Church.

Some scholars claim that the Church did not really create the Canon. "To say the church chose the canon is a misleading half-truth. A closer approximation would be to say that the church recognized the canon...there were certain documents which had been exercising authority within a widening circle of churches since they were delivered to their first readers."[27] Granting the factuality of the claim does not legitimize the conclusion. Let me cite two examples.

The *Shepherd of Hermas* was "widely popular in the second and third centuries (there are more surviving copies of *The Shepherd* than of many canonical writings);"[28] and "in the Greek Church of the 2nd and 3rd cents. the work was widely regarded as Scripture."[29] Some in the third century were uncomfortable with the *Book of Revelation* because it was "a favourite text of the Montanists."[30] Today it is part of the Canon, while the former is not. At what point in her history did the Church recognize the Canon? How do we have

three different Canons today: Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Protestant?

The problem is further complicated if we accept that "with regard to their original formation Scripture and the Church are on the same level and cannot, in the last analysis, provide a mutual basis for each other. To suggest this would be to fall in the circle of 'Church – canon – Church'."[31] This brings us face to face with two problems: 1. How do we know that the Church is a divine institution? 2. How do we get the assurance that the Bible is divinely inspired? "While all Christians accept that the Bible is authoritative, there is a surprising range of opinions about why this is so."[32] Should not this surprising range of opinions make us more sceptical?

4.2 Scripture as Identity

We cannot read a text composed two millennia ago the way it was read then. Being in history means journeying in knowledge and understanding. The context of the community plays an important part in shaping and interpreting its Scripture, even modifying the text created by others. Three examples make this clear.

David rapes Bathsheba and gets Uriah killed to hide his crime (2 Sam 11.1-27). This account begins with "In the spring of the year..." (2 Sam 11.1). The next episode is reported thus. "Now Joab fought against Rabbah... (12.26). The author of the *First Book of Chronicles* totally omits the David-Bathsheba episode. His version reads. "In the spring of the year...Joab led out the army...and besieged Rabbah" (20.1). He was a Davidic loyalist and so he whitewashes David. This should caution us: people in power can create Scripture to suit their selfish needs.

Mark and Matthew tell us that the people of Nazareth were not impressed by Jesus. As a result, "he *could do no* mighty work there" (Mk 6.5). Matthew, with his comparatively

advanced Christology, felt that was offensive. He tones it down: "he *did not* do many mighty works there" (13.58). The four reports of the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:23-26; Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26- 29; Lk 22:19-20) differ significantly. The writers are reporting not the Last Supper but the way the Eucharist was celebrated in their community. All this seems "to make access to the real event virtually impossible."[33]

The sacred text of a community mirrors its shifting loyalties and concerns. This explains the conflicting claims made by different Churches on the basis of the same text. Vatican II tells us that "Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation" (*DV*, 11). How do we know which truth is needed for our salvation? Today even Catholic biblical scholars question most of the dogmas proclaimed by Rome during the last thousand years. We can (ab)use Scripture to reflect and thereby legitimize what we are. Instead of Scripture shaping the Church, the Church shapes the Scripture. Texts do not exist in the air; they continue to be active through the interpretation we give. Hence our interpretation is the shape we give to the text. Yet we cannot be arbitrary in our interpretation.

4.3 Scripture as Experience

Texts that acquire a sacred significance are related to some deep experience of the writers. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete" (1 Jn 1.1-4). The author repeatedly assures us that he is sharing with us an experience so profound that even writing about it gives him joy. He wants not to provide us with some dogmatic

formulae, but to draw us into that fellowship which he has experienced. My impression is that in the Roman Church Scripture is primarily a *locus theologicus*. Yet it seems to have forgotten that "exegesis is, after all, a matter of obedience."[34] The more thorough our exegesis the greater will be our obedience to Scripture.

We need to remind ourselves that "in the sacred books, the Father…meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the…the everlasting source of spiritual life" (*DV*, 21). If Luther gave so much importance to Scripture, it is precisely because he saw it as the source of deep religious experience. "Let us therefore hold it for certain...that the soul can do without everything, except the word of God...having the word, it is rich... since that is the word of life,...and of every good thing. It is on this account that the prophet in a whole psalm [Ps 119], and in many other places, sighs for and calls upon the word of God with so many groanings" (*FC*, p. 106). Here Luther is not speaking of the text of Scripture, but of the experience of being guided by God. He also recalls Amos 8.11, where the prophet speaks about a famine of hearing the word of God. Scripture will impact us to the extent we internalize it: "For if the touch of Christ was healing, how much more does that most tender spiritual touch, nay, absorption of the word, communicate to the soul all that belongs to the word" (*FC*, p. 109). Scripture originates in experience; it must also mediate an experience.

4.4 Scripture as Interpretation

The New Testament is an effort to interpret the life and teaching of the historical Jesus. A person articulates his experience in the way he understands it. The problem becomes more complex when we keep in mind that the four Gospels are not the works of individual authors, but were

nurtured within different communities. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the books of the New Testament were not written at the same time. Hence it is characterized by unity and diversity. We cannot put aside the legitimacy of pluralism by suggesting that it smacks of relativism. After spending many years of study on the New Testament, this is the conclusion James Dunn arrives at: "I have come to see more and more clearly that Christian unity is impossible without diversity, that without sufficient diversity Christian unity will be (heretically) narrow...[and] Christian unity will be as ludicrously lopsided and grotesque as the body which consists only of an eye or an ear (1 Cor. 12.17–20)."[35] The Spirit "alone can raise up diversity, plurality and multiplicity while at the same time bringing about unity" (*EG*, 131).

4.5 Scripture as Compassion

The "the fundamental message [of the Bible is] the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship" (*EG*, 128). God desires steadfast love (*ḥesed*; LXX: *eleos*) and not sacrifice (Hos 6.6). In the Old Testament, *ḥesed* "has a relational aspect that is essential to any proper definition of the term...[on the human level] *ḥesed* connotes mutual obligation on the part of individuals or groups... *ḥesed* is the 'essence' of the covenantal relationship."[36] In other words, originally the prophet was inviting the Israelites to be faithful to God by dealing fairly with each other as he deals with them, his covenantal people. This obligation was more important than cultic worship. In Mt 9.13 and 12.7, Jesus quotes Hos 6.6, in both cases to justify some behaviour which pious Jews considered questionable—eating with tax collectors and sinners, and plucking heads of grain on a Sabbath. The Good Samaritan was moved with compassion (Lk 10.33) for the victim of the robbers and had mercy on him (*eleos*, v. 37: the

kindness we show to a person in need, without expecting any return). As the pilgrim moves ahead, so does the text: from within the frame of the covenant to the wider human concern.

The Roman Catholic teaching about divorce and remarriage is based on Mk 10.5-12. Matthew adds a mitigating clause: "Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity (*porneia*), and marries another, commits adultery" (19.9). We have this except-clause also in 5.32. Many commentators think that "these words [except for unchastity] are not part of the saying as originally uttered, but are a community regulation later inserted into the text."[37] Whatever be the occasion of this insertion, the result was the mitigation of the absolute requirement found in Mark. Jesus sees the "Mosaic permission as a departure from the standards presupposed in the creation of a single pair made for each other."[38] He had claimed to be greater than Jonah and Solomon (Mt 12.41-42). He could rightly claim: "There is somebody greater than even Moses here." I believe that the Holy Spirit, that guided Moses and the community of Matthew to respond to a pastoral problem with compassion, is also guiding the Church today.

Some Jewish Christians insisted that the Gentile Christians be circumcised (Acts 15.1). Peter objected: "Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (v. 10). The elders draft a letter to the gentile Christians: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us... that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity" (Acts 15.28-29). The books of the Old Testament "contain some things which are incomplete and temporary" (*DV*, 15). This is also true of the books of the New Testament. Today many of us ignore the first three norms unanimously decreed by the Jerusalem Council.

Matthew shows Jesus again and again telling his audience: "You have heard that it was said..." and each time he quotes a text from the Old Testament (Ex 20.13, 14; 21.24; Lev 19.12, 18), and then adds: "But I say to you..." (Mt 5.21-22, 27-28, 33-24, 38-39, 43-44). What Jesus then says will be substantially accepted by all people, even if they do not believe in God. He was fully aware that the Old Testament is the story of a pilgrim people. It was not merely a geographical and political pilgrimage, from one place to another, from bondage to freedom. It was also a moral, spiritual and theological pilgrimage. All books reflect their context, and as such have a qualified significance for the future. Can any text be fully final for a truly pilgrim community?

4.6 Scripture as History

To profess Jesus we need to know him, the Jesus who lived two thousand years ago. For this the New Testament helps us, but we need to keep in mind its limit. "As we know, the Sacred Scriptures are the written testimony of the divine word, the canonical memorial that testifies to the event of Revelation. The Word of God therefore precedes and exceeds the Bible. This is why our faith is not only centred on a book but on a history of salvation and above all on a Person, Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh."[39] We are not Biblians, but Christians. The person of Jesus is an historical reality. If God's revelation comes to us through history, we need to take the Jesus of history very seriously. This becomes an imperative in a multi-religious context, and in the postmodern age. The "historical Jesus subverts not just some ideologies but all ideologies...Properly understood, the historical Jesus is a bulwark against the reduction of Christian faith in general and Christology in particular to 'relevant' ideology of any stripe... [therefore] a constant stimulus to theological renewal."[40]

Jesus saw himself as the final prophet. He believed that the end of the world was coming very soon, and that the whole ministry of the apostles would be confined only to Israel (Mt 10.1-23). Paul thought that he would be alive to receive the Lord when he returns (1 Thess 4.17). Guided by the historic-critical method we can say that Jesus of Nazareth did not start a new religion. He did not found the hierarchical Church, institute a ministerial priesthood, prescribe any special rituals.[41] He did not expect his disciples to have their own special book. In Luther's thinking, "each *sola* affirmed the centrality of Jesus Christ. Christ is the sole content of Scripture and the principle for selectivity within Scripture."[42]

Jesus shared with his disciples the insight he gained from the many hours he spent in silence: God is the one loving parent of all and, hence, we ought to love one another. Being sensitive to human need was the principle that guided Jesus, and he had no qualms of conscience in ignoring institutions of human making, however sacred they might have been.[43] This conclusion may help us to deal with Postmodernism. "A major issue facing Christian theology today is the question of power. On the wider cultural level, the postmodern critique of thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and especially Michel Foucault contains the charge that all claims to truth, including the claims of theology, are merely secret bids for power."[44] The Jesus of history is the canon within the canon. All our understanding of Scripture must bring us closer to that compassionate Jesus. If the Sabbath is for humankind, so is Scripture.

Notes

1 References to Luther's writings and Roman documents are provided within the main text of my study. They have been downloaded—unless indicated otherwise—from godrules.net/library/luther on 30th November 2016. Those marked with an asterisk (*) do not have any section or paragraph numbering. In

some cases, I have 'modernized' the language. I shall be using the following abbreviations:

ACEC BENEDICT XVI, "Address to the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany", 23 September 2011, w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110923_evangelical-church-erfurt.html; ao 31-12-2016.

ao accessed on

BC *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.* *

CG *Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians.** I shall try to indicate the verse on which Luther is commenting.

DV VATICAN II, *Dei Verbum.*

EG Pope FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium.*

FC *On the Freedom of a Christian*, sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/luther-freedomchristian.asp; ao 31-12-2016.

LC *Large Catechism.**

OCCT Adrian HASTINGS (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

ODCC F. L. CROSS & E. A. LIVINGSTONE, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd rev. ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

OL *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.**

2 Euan CAMERON, "Luther, Martin", *OCCT*, pp. 398b-401b, here pp. 398b-399a.

3 See www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-Bible-history/martin-luther.html; ao 31-12-2016.

4 *Idem.*

5 CAMERON, "Luther, Martin", p. 399a.

6 Martin BRECHT, *Martin Luther: A Biography*, 3 vols., Tr. James L. SCHAAF, Fortress Press,1993–1999, vol. 1, p. 182, qt. by www.theopedia.com/martin-luther; ao 30-09-2016.

7 CAMERON, "Luther, Martin", p. 399a, emphasis added.

8 See www.biography.com/people/martin-luther-9389283, ao 31-12-2016.

9 Carl E. BRAATEN, "Lutheranism", *OCCT*, pp. 401b-403b, here p. 402a.

10 Frank J. MATERA: *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina Series: 9, Collegeville (Minn): Liturgical Press, 1992, p. 227.

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12 *Idem*.

13 See godrules.net/library/luther/129luther_c25.htm; ao 31-12-2016.

14 See www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_d22.htm; ao 31-12-2016.

15 Richard P. McBRIEN, *Catholicism*, 3rd ed., London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, rep. 2000, p. 1089.

16 *Idem*.

17 See godrules.net/library/luther/129luther_b2.htm; ao 31-12-2016.

18 Paul PARATHAZIIAM, "Catholic Priests in India: Reflections on a Survey", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 52 (1988), pp.379-389, here p. 388.

19 See w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches /2016/july/ documents/papa-francesco _20160727_polonia-vescovi.html; ao 31-12-2016.

20 See www.augsburgfortress. org/media/downloads / 97814 51482799_Excerpt%20from%20 Chapter%201 .pdf; ao 31-12-2016.

21 Craig C. HILL, "Romans", in John BARTON & John MUDDIMAN, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 1083-1108, here p. 1083b.

22 Timothy GEORGE, "Dr. Luther's Theology", *Christian History*, 34 (1992), www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/dr-luthers-theology ao 31-12-2016.

23 See www.azquotes.com/quote/866577; ao 31-12-2016.

24 McBRIEN, *Catholicism*, p. 1029.

25 Christians and Muslims, both claim that they follow the final prophet.

26 "Canon of Scripture", *ODCC* , pp. 281b-282b, here p. 281b.

27 James J. D. DUNN, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 2nd ed., London: SCM Press / Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, (1977) 1990, p. xxxi.

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29 "Hermas", *ODCC* , pp. 764a-765a, here p. 764b.

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33 Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two: Holy Week*, London\San Francisco: Catholic Truth Society\Ignatius Press, 2011, 103.

34 Joachim. JEREMIAS, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, London: SCM, 1990, p. 8.

35 DUNN, "Foreword", *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, p. xix; emphasis added. The 'twelve years' refer to the time between the first and the second edition of this book.

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37 W. F. ALBRIGHT & C. S. MANN, *The Gospel of Matthew*, An chor Bible: 26, New York: Doubleday, 1971, p. 226.

38 *Idem*.

39 See w2.vatican.va/content/ francesco/en/speeches /2013/april/ documents/papa-francesco_ 20130412_commissione-biblica. html; ao 31-12-2016.

40 John P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols., New York: Doubleday, 1991-2009, vol. 1, p. 199.

41 See Subhash ANAND, "Announcing the Uniqueness of the Christ-event in the Pluralistic Context of India", *Journal of Indian Theology*, 8-3 (2015 December), pp. 6-53.

42 Timothy GEORGE, "Dr. Luther's Theology", *Christian History*, 34 (1992), www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/ article/dr-luthers-theology ao 31-12-2016.

43 See Subhash ANAND, "The Religionless Prophet: Revisioning Jesus of Nazareth", *Third Millennium*, 17/4 (October-December 2014), pp. 31-52.

44 Graham TOMLIN, "Theology of the Cross: Subversive: Theology for a Postmodern World?", www.theologynetwork.org/ the-cross/theology-of-the-cross--subversive-theology-for-a-postmodern-world.htm; ao 31-12-2016.

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The Challenge of Martin Luther's Reformation: The Response of Vatican II

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Abstract: After describing the challenges posed by Martin Luther, this paper studies the response given by Vatican II, in terms of challenge of authority, scripture, justification, salvation, and sacraments. Martin Luther was a great Christian who was deeply devoted to Jesus Christ and passionately attached to his gospel. He was a genuinely religious person who prayed and asked people to pray. He was a hard-working man who wrote a lot. His collected works run into 55 volumes of about 350 pages each. In eleven weeks he translated the New Testament into German. He was also musically gifted. It may be asserted that Luther had no intention of dividing the Church or founding a new Church. All that he wanted was to recover the authentic Christianity which he thought had been lost.

Keywords: Authority, scripture, justification, salvation, sacraments, Vatican II, Martin Luther

The beginnings of Martin Luther's reformation can be traced back to October 31, 1517. On that day Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany. In those days it was common practice among professors to post their theses in public places as an invitation to debate.

What is remarkable about Luther's 95 Theses is that they make a radical critique of the practice of indulgence sale authorized by the Pope. As Paul W. Robinson has observed:

> Although the theses tend to defy a simple analysis, three broad categories of Luther's concern can be identified. The theses express, first of all, Luther's understanding of penance as it relates to indulgences. The very first states, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of the believer to be one of repentance." As Luther explained in the second thesis, the repentance Christ preached meant much more than doing the penances assigned by the priest... For Luther, indulgences fostered a mechanical understanding of repentance that undermined the biblical teaching... Second, Luther called into question the belief that indulgences could be purchased on behalf of a soul in purgatory, freeing that soul to enter heaven. This common belief preached by Tetzel, "When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs," which Luther quoted in Thesis 27, became the object of his scorn in Thesis 28: "It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased." The observation about souls in purgatory led Luther to put forth a more restrictive view of the pope's power... Thesis 5: "The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons." and that, in any case, souls in purgatory were beyond his jurisdiction... Third, Luther described indulgences, or at least trust in them, as detrimental to genuine Christian living. He would rather see the money used for indulgences spent on the poor and the time people spent in acquiring indulgences spent in prayer instead... Thesis 48: "Christians are to be taught that the pope... needs and thus desires their devout prayer more than their money."[1]

From these small beginnings Luther's efforts grew into a radical reform movement.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) discussed the main points of Luther's Reformation and articulated a Catholic response to his questions. Looking back on that council and its decrees one wonders if the council Fathers really tried to understand Luther sympathetically and respond to him constructively. Today the acts of Trent appear to be quite one-

sided and reactionary. It was a critical time when the very existence of Catholicism was seriously threatened.[2] Hence the council of Trent was primarily concerned about defending the Church and its essential teaching. It had no time and interest in understanding Luther's genuine concern for the reform of the Church.

It was probably Vatican II that constructively responded to the challenge of Luther's Reformation. In this paper I shall discuss the main challenges of Luther's Reformation and explain the response of Vatican II.

1. The Challenge to Church Authority

There are four points in Luther's position on Church authority:

1. The Pope has no spiritual authority, but only secular authority. In Luther's time "the pope functioned and was treated as another secular ruler"[3], the ruler of the papal states. Many German Catholics were of the same opinion as Luther.

2. Luther denied that the Pope has authority by divine right. As Paul W. Robinson has observed:

> Luther asserted (during his disputation with Johann Eck at Leipzik in 1519) that the Pope had his authority by human arrangement rather than by divine right. He did not yet argue against the pope's authority or against the need for unity in the Church, but he could not find the institution of the papacy in Scripture. As for the Church Fathers, Luther argued that more could be cited against divine institution than for it.[4]

Hence Luther sought to demolish what he called the three walls papacy had built around itself: "the idea that the pope was not subject to any temporal authority, that only the pope could interpret Scripture, and that only the pope could call a general council of the church."[5]

3. It is interesting to note that in 1540, when he was challenged by more radical reformers, Luther admitted that there is much that is good and Christian in the papal church:

> We on our part confess that much is Christian and good under the papacy; indeed everything that is Christian and good is to be found there and has come from that source. For instance,... the true holy scriptures, true baptism, the true sacrament of the altar, the true keys to the forgiveness of sins, the true office of the ministry, the true catechism in the form of the Lord's prayer, the ten commandments, and the articles of the creed.[6]

If this is true why then did Luther criticize the Roman Church and regard the pope as antichrist? Luther's answer:

> Because [the pope] does not keep these treasures of Christendom which he has inherited from the apostles. He makes additions of the devil and does not use these treasures for the improvement of the temple. Instead, he works toward its destruction by setting his commandments above the ordinance of Christ. But Christ preserves his Christendom even in the midst of such destruction.... In fact both remain: the antichrist sits in the temple of God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4), while the temple still is and remains the temple of God through the power of Christ.[7]

4. Luther held that a general council of the church was a higher authority than the pope. This was a Conciliarist view which was widely held in Germany in 16th century. But Luther's acceptance of the council's authority was qualified. During his disputation with Johann Eck in Leipzik in 1519, Luther articulated his position thus:

> I agree with the lord doctor that the statutes of the councils in those things that concern the faith ought to be honored in every way. I reserve for myself this alone, which indeed must be reserved, that a council has erred at times and is able to err at any time, especially in those things that do not concern the faith. Nor does a council have authority to establish new articles of faith, otherwise we would have as many such articles as there are human opinions.[8]

How did Vatican II respond to this challenge of Luther? The Council's response can be summed up in three points.

1. "In virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he can always exercise the power freely.[9] The Council adds: "For the Lord made Simon Peter alone the rock and key bearer of the Church (See Mt 16:18-19), and appointed him shepherd of the whole flock (See Jn 21:15 ff.).[10] "And all this teaching (of Vatican I) about the institution, the perpetuity, the force and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff… this sacred synod again proposes to be firmly believed by all this faithful.[11]

In this connection it is worth noting that a growing number of non-Catholic Christian theologians now accept the pope as a sign and agent of the unity of the Church.[12]

2. Vatican II has made two statements about the bishops which are important for the Council's understanding of Church authority.

1) The Council has taught that the college of bishops together with and under the pope is the subject of supreme power over the universal Church.[13]

Unfortunately Vatican II made no serious effort to reconcile its teaching on the collegiality of bishops with the dogma of the primacy of the pope defined by Vatican I and repeatedly cited by it. How many subjects of supreme authority are there in the Church?

Some believe that there are two – the pope alone and the college of bishops together with the pope. But I am inclined to agree with Karl Rahner when he states:

> It seems more correct and simpler to say that, juridically speaking, there is only one wielder of supreme power: the college constituted under the Pope as its primatial head. This does not exclude, but rather implies, that the Pope for his

part can act "alone" as primate, since in such an action he need not make use of a regularly constituted collegial act in the strict sense. But even so, he always acts as head of the college, since this does not mean that he has to be lawfully delegated and appointed for such an act by the other bishops. We have already indicated that every primatial action of the Pope contains de facto a reference to the college as a whole."[14]

The Council seems to favour this view in its formulation of infallibility of the pope. While defining the pope's infallibility Vatican I made no reference to the college of bishops. But Vatican II teaches that the pope as head of the college enjoys infallibility.[15] What is said here of the teaching authority of the Pope can be rightly be extended to all aspects of his authority.

2) The Council teaches that a person becomes a member of the college by the reception of a sacrament – the episcopate.[16] Like all sacraments the episcopate is of divine origin. This is of some importance for the understanding of the structure of the Church. Whatever be the mode of appointment of a bishop – and today it is by a papal decision – the episcopate exists in the Church not through the kind favour of the pope. And the pope cannot choose to abolish it. The sacramentality of the episcopal ordination guarantees the continued existence of the episcopate as a constitutive element of the Church.

3. Vatican II has clearly spelt out the conditions under which the pope and the college of bishops together with the pope are infallible as well as the extent of their infallibility. The pope as head of the college enjoys infallibility "when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith (See Lk 22:32), he proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals."[17] Something similar can be said of the infallibility of the college of bishops together with the pope.

The Council goes on to state that "this infallibility…. extends as far as the deposit of divine revelation which must

be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded."[18] Many theologians hold that the pope and the college of bishops are infallible when they teach some truths like the existence of God, the fact of revelation etc. which are not revealed, but which are necessary to guard and expound the deposit of revelation.

2. The Challenge of Scripture Alone

During the Imperial Dict of 1521 held at Worms, Luther was asked if he stood by all that he had written or if he wished to disown some of it. The representative of Emperor Charles V asked Luther for a clear and simple answer. This was Luther's reply:

> Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen.[19]

The touchstone of Luther's interpretation of the Scriptures was the Gospel, which he defined as "a discourse about Christ, that he is the son of God, and became human for us, that he died and was raised, that he has been established Lord over all things." In his preface to the New Testament, he placed the gospel of John and the epistles of Paul and Peter above the other books: "They showed Christ and taught everything that was necessary to know about salvation." Luther believed that "All genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate Christ.[20]

Scott H. Hendrix has pointed out that we need to have a nuanced understanding of Luther's view on Scripture alone:

> 'Scripture alone' (sola scriptura), which for some became the motto of the Protestantism, never meant for Luther that the Bible was the exclusive authority on every issue or that it offered a clear-cut, objective answer to every question. It did mean that on matters of dispute in the church it was the chief authority. The formula 'scripture alone' arose in Luther's conflict with the papacy as a statement of the Bible's superiority over the opinions of earlier theologians, the rules of canon law, and the decrees of councils and of popes.[21]

Now how does Vatican II respond to Luther's contention of "scripture alone"? The Council makes two statement:

1) It emphasizes the importance of Scripture in the life of the Church. In the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation the Council declares:

> The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy. She has always regarded the Scriptures together with sacred tradition as the supreme rule of faith, and will ever do so. For, inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life.[22]

2) Vatican II highlights the importance of tradition. It uses the term tradition in two senses: 1. What is handed on, 2. How it is transmitted? (the process of handing on)[23]

Now what is handed on consists of all that the apostles had received from the lips of Christ, from living with him, from what he did, or what they had learned through the prompting

of the Holy Spirit.[24] Commenting on this J. Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) wrote:

> The point is certainly not to play off the theology of salvation history against word theology, but in place of a narrowly doctrinal conception of revelation, as had been expressed in the Tridentine word theology, to open up a comprehensive view of the real character of revelation, which precisely because it is concerned with the whole man is founded not only on the word that Christ preached, but in the whole of the living experience of his person, thus embracing what is said and what is unsaid, what the apostles in their turn are not able to express fully in words, but which is found in the whole reality of the Christian existence of which they speak, far transcending the framework of what has been explicitly formulated in words.[25]

The Council sums this up by stating: "Now what was handed on by the apostles comprises everything that serves to make the people of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith."[26]

Because of the comprehensive nature of what is transmitted there are different ways of handing it on. Vatican II teaches that the apostles handed on what they had received by oral preaching, by example and by ordinances.[27] It also points out how the church in her teaching life and worship perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is and all that she believes.[28] Hence we can say tradition is primarily not a question of words and propositions, but the entire life of the believing, praying and worshipping community.

Vatican II makes two more statements which have a bearing on Luther's position. 1) "Hence there is a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and sacred scripture." 2) "It is not from sacred scripture alone that the Church draws its certainty about everything which has been revealed."[29] This last sentence need not cause any problem from an ecumenical point of view. As Protestant theologian H. Ott says: "Moreover it is surely also true for a Protestant who has forgotten the basis of the Reformation that we do not

acquire certainty about God's revelation only from Scripture, but also through preaching and the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit".[30]

3. The Challenge of Justification and Salvation

For Luther both justification and salvation are God's gift. This is how Luther describes the insight that he got about justification:

> I began to understand that the righteousness of God meant that those who were righteous lived by a gift of God, which is the passive righteousness by which God justifies us through faith, as it is written: 'They who through faith are righteous shall live' (Habakkuk 2:4). I felt I was altogether born again and had entered paradise through open gates.[31]

The faith in question was trust in God's promises that were fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

In December 1525 Luther finished the book, *The Bondage of the Will*. In it he asserted quite clearly his belief that human beings depended entirely on God's grace for salvation. As Paul W. Robinson briefly summarises Luther's position: "The human will was completely bound, as the title suggests, by sin and unable to make any move towards God. Salvation was accomplished, therefore, not by any human choice but by God's choice and by God's gift."[32]

Now how does Vatican II respond to Luther's ideas on justification and salvation?

The Council does not say much about justification since the Council of Trent had dealt with it at length. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church quotes Romans 4:25: Christ "who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification". And the Decree on Ecumenism states: "Nevertheless all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ".[33]

With regard to human freedom and salvation Vatican II makes three significant statements; 1. Authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image in the human being.[34] We remember that the image of God was a key idea in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. 2. Since human freedom has been damaged by sin, only by help of God's grace can a man and a woman bring a relationship with God into full flower.[35] It is quite clear that the Council does not agree with Luther when he says that human freedom has been destroyed by sin. 3. God has willed that the human being be left in the hand of his or her counsel so that he or she can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him.[36] For Vatican II salvation is both God's gift and human achievement.

4. The Challenge of the Sacraments

Scott H. Hendrix has given a brief summary of Luther's views on the sacraments:

> In a 1520 treatise entitled The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Luther argued that the seven sacraments of the late medieval church should be reduced to three: baptism, the Lord's Supper, and penance, the last of which he called confession and absolution. According to his definition, sacraments had to be commanded in scripture and attached to both a spiritual promise and a material element that were clearly audible and visible when the sacrament was administered. For Luther, only baptism and the Lord's Supper unequivocally fulfilled these requirements. Water was applied in baptism, and bread and wine were consumed in the Lord's Supper, but no physical element was involved in confession and absolution. Soon penance was no longer considered a sacrament - especially because it did no more than renew the lifelong promise of forgiveness and salvation bestowed at baptism. [37]

There are three more points in Luther's position on the sacraments. 1. Luther retained public and private confession, but abolished the element of penance. He believed that absolution from sin, whether private or public, took complete

effect immediately because free forgiveness was guaranteed through baptism. "The promise of forgiveness and salvation applied in baptism was valid forever and became the foundation of Christian life at whatever age a person was baptized. For that reason, Luther retained infant baptism and considered it the most important sacrament"[38] 2. Luther believed in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. He took quite seriously Jesus' words during the Last Supper: "This is my body" "This is my blood". 3. Luther denied that Holy Eucharist was a sacrifice. He rejected the medieval interpretation of the Last Supper as a repetition of the sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross for the sins of humankind. He was against abuses like the multiplication of Masses which that interpretation made possible. "As a holy offering made by the priest, the Mass was easily considered a miraculous good work that could earn merit for laity who either watched the mass being performed or who paid priests to say regular posthumous Masses for themselves and their loved ones."[39] It was also true that some people thought that the more masses they attended the more merit would accrue to them

How did Vatican II respond to Luther's view on the sacraments?

The Second Vatican Council did not deal with the sacraments at length. It did not give a clear definition of the sacrament. But from the way it spoke of the different sacraments one can deduce that the Council accepted Trent's understanding of the sacrament. For the Council of Trent a sacrament had three aspects: 1. Sign aspect: Sacrament is a visible sign of invisible grace. 2. Agent aspect: The sacrament confers the grace it signifies. 3. Presence: The sacrament makes present the grace which it signifies and confers. So the sacrament is a symbol which contains the grace which it signifies and brings about.[40]

Trent's understanding of the sacrament is quite different from that of Luther. For him only that rite is a sacrament to

which God's promise of forgiveness is attached. But Trent believes that God's dealings with the believers in the sacrament should not be restricted to the offer of the forgiveness of sin. God can through the sacrament give us grace to grow in spiritual life and effectively fulfil our Christian mission. Moreover, Christians can cooperate with God's grace, given through the sacrament, by fulfilling the purpose for which it is given.

All this is involved in the description of the sacraments Vatican II gives in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church:

> Incorporated into the Church through baptism, the faithful are consecrated by the baptismal character to the exercise of the cult of the Christian religion. Reborn as children of God, they must confess before men the faith which they have received from God through the Church. Bound more intimately to the Church by the sacrament of confirmation, they are endowed by the Holy Spirit with special strength. Hence they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith both by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ.
>
> Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the fount and apex, of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It. Thus, both by the act of oblation and through holy Communion, all perform their proper part in this liturgical service, not indeed, all in the same way but each in that way which is appropriate to himself. Strengthened anew at the holy table by the Body of Christ, they manifest in a practical way that unity of God's People which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most awesome sacrament.[41]

The Council deals with the truth that the Eucharist is a sacrifice. In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy it declares:

> At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and

resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.[42]

5. The Challenge to Marian Piety

Luther's views on Marian piety can be summed up in four points:

1. He was against rituals or titles used in Marian devotion that infringed on the unique role of Jesus in the redemption of the human race. Hence Mary was not a co-redeemer with Jesus.
2. The title "queen of heaven" was in a sense true, but "it did not make her a goddess who could grant gifts or render aid as some suppose when they pray and flee to her rather than God."
3. The ancient title "mother of God" was the greatest thing a believer could say of her.[43]
4. Luther suggested that those who wish to honour Mary must not isolate her,

> but set her in the presence of God and far beneath God, strip her of all honour and regard her 'low estate' (Luke 1:48), then marvel at the exceedingly abundant grace of God, who regards, embraces, and blesses so despised a mortal.... She does not want you to come to her, but through her to God.[44]

How does Vatican II respond to Luther's views on Marian Piety? There are four points in the Council's response which I wish to highlight.

1. Vatican II decided not to have a separate document on the Blessed Virgin Mary. Instead it has a chapter in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, titled: "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church." Commenting on this Evelyn Monteiro has stated:

> Inserting it in Lumen Gentium would also provide a balanced understanding of the mystery of the Church as both redeemed and redeeming by emphasizing Mary's relationship to the Church and Christ. Relating Mary to Christ and the Church would strengthen the devotional life of the faithful regarding the essentials of faith in the incarnation and redemption and Mary's unique role in these mysteries of faith. Finally, it would have ecumenical importance - Mary's role as Theotokos or God-bearer would enhance dialogue with the Orthodox Churches of the East, and the Protestants would be receptive to a biblical portrait of Mary as the type of the Church (Jn 18:25; Acts 2:14)[45]

2. The Council clearly affirms the unique mediatorship of Jesus Christ. It quotes 1 Timothy 2:5-6 which says that there is one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus. Then it goes on to add:

> The maternal duty of Mary towards human beings in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. For all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on human beings originate, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. They flow forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rest on His meditation, depend entirely on it, and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather they foster this union.[46]

3. Vatican II asks theologians and pastors that, while dealing with the dignity of the Mother of God, they should avoid all exaggerations:

> But this Synod earnestly exhorts theologians and preachers of the divine word that in treating of the unique dignity of the Mother of God, they carefully and equally avoid the falsity of exaggeration on the one hand, and the excess of narrow-mindedness on the other. Pursuing the study of sacred Scripture, the holy fathers, the doctors, and liturgies of the Church, and under the guidance of the Church's teaching authority, let them rightly explain the offices and privileges of the Blessed Virgin which are always related to Christ, the Source of all truth, sanctity, and piety.

> Let them painstakingly guard against any word or deed which could lead separated brethren or anyone else into error regarding the true doctrine of the Church.[47]

4. The Council explains to the faithful the nature of true devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary:

> Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion, nor in a certain vain credulity. Rather, it proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother or God, and are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues.[48]

Conclusion

By way of conclusion I would like to say that Martin Luther was a great Christian who was deeply devoted to Jesus Christ and passionately attached to his gospel. He was a genuinely religious person who prayed and asked people to pray. He was a hard-working man who wrote a lot. His collected works run into 55 volumes of about 350 pages each. In eleven weeks he translated the New Testament into German. He was also musically gifted. He translated or composed more than 35 hymns, of which the best known was *A Mighty Fortress is our God*.

Luther had no intention of dividing the Church or founding a new Church. All that he wanted was to recover the authentic Christianity which he thought had been lost.

Notes

1 P. W. Robinson, *Martin Luther: A Life Reformed*, Boston: Longman, 2010, p. 25.

2 See G. Alberigo, "The Christian Situation after Vatican II," in G. Alberigo and others (eds.), *The Reception of Vatican II*, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987, p. 13.

3 P. W. Robinson, *Martin Luther: A Life Reformed*, p. 31.

4 *Ibid.* p. 29.

5 *Ibid.* p. 40.

6 As quoted by S. H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 47.

7 *Ibid.* pp. 47-48

8 As quoted by P. W. Robinson, *Martin Luther: A Life Reformed*, p. 30.

9 Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Rome, 1964, p. 22.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.* p. 18.

12 See K. Rahner and H. Fries, *Unity of the Church: An Actual Possibility*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, pp. 59-82.

13 Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, p. 22.

14 K. Rahner, "Commentary on Chapter III of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" in H. Vorgrimlar, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. I, New York: Herder and Herder, 1967, p. 203.

15 Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, p. 25.

16 *Ibid.* p. 22.

17 *Ibid.* p. 25.

18 *Ibid.*

19 As quoted in P. W. Robinson, *Martin Luther: A Life Reformed*, p. 45.

20 S. H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction,* p. 42.

21 *Ibid.* pp. 43-44.

22 Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, p. 21.

23 *Ibid.* pp. 7-10.

24 *Ibid.* p. 7.

25 J. Ratzinger, "Commentary of on Chapter II of the Constitution on Divine Revelation," in H. Vorgrimlar, *Commentary on the*

Documents of Vatican II Vol. I, London: Burns and Oats LTD, 1969, p. 182.

26 Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, n. 7.

27 *Ibid.* 28 *Ibid.* 29 *Ibid.*

30 As quoted in J. Ratzinger, "Commentary of on Chapter II of the Constitution on Divine Revelation," in H. Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* Vol. I, p. 195.

31 S. H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction,* p. 23.

32 P. W. Robinson, *Martin Luther: A Life Reformed*, p. 60.

33 Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, p. 3.

34 Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, p. 17.

35 *Ibid.* 36 *Ibid.*

37 S. H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction,* pp. 52-53.

38 *Ibid.* p. 53.

39 *Ibid.* pp. 53-54.

40 See J. Neuner - J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, Bangalore: TPI, 2008, nos. 1316-1318.

41 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, p. 11.

42 Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, p. 47.

43 See S. H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction,* p. 48.

44 *Ibid.*

45 E. Monteiro, "Mary's New look: From the Perspective of Vatican II" in *Asian Journal for Priests and Religious* 52 (2007) 2, p. 9.

46 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, p. 60.

47 *Ibid.* p. 67.

48 *Ibid.*

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Reading Martin Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* as Roman Catholics and Protestants Together

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Abstract: In the light of the ongoing efforts for the common commemoration of the Reformation by the Catholic and Protestant Christians, this essay discusses (re-reads) one of the writings of Martin Luther, The Freedom of a Christian, written in 1520. Today, the 16th century Reformation has to be looked at without the burden of its five centuries history, and within the various efforts for ecumenical relationship in the present context. Locating the treatise within the immediate context in which it was written, this essay offers a summary of the treatise particularly focusing on Luther's discussion of works – both his critical perspectives on it when comes to salvation as well as his appreciation for works in Christian life – which can offer important insights for our ecumenical activities today, and invites to read this treatise as Roman Catholics and Protestants together.

Keywords: Martin Luther, Reformation, Freedom of a Christian, Ecumenism, Catholic-Protestant Unity

"The things that unite us are greater than those that divide us" (Pope John XXIII). It is quite an obvious fact that the world today is struggling with various issues

especially in terms of relationships and cooperation between communities, nations, cultures and peoples. The current developments in various parts of the world including USA, India, Turkey and other places are examples for how people are easily persuaded, often successfully, by totalitarian and extremist ideologies which see that communities and people are divided and kept in eternal tensions and conflicts so that the very few power elites can make their ways easily without any hurdles. There are systematic efforts to see that people and communities are filled with hate for each other rather than working for maintaining better relationships among others that are essential for the well-being of both the present and the future.

In such a context of negativities, troubles, conflicts and violence, it is highly remarkable that the two major traditions within Christianity, Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches, troubles between which began a few centuries ago, are now coming together for a common commemoration of the 500th year of the Reformation. This is particularly important and exciting because it is this same event, coupled with various other factors, had led to the very division and conflicts between these two traditions. Thanks to the many ecumenical efforts since the Second Vatican Council among the Roman Catholics and various attempts by and the formation of different ecumenical bodies among the Protestant churches such as the Anglican Communion, World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation and the World Communion of Reformed Churches and others, today relatively a better situation has emerged – though still a long way to go – to commemorate an anniversary of the Reformation as both Roman Catholics and Protestants together. In this context, the publication of the joint document *From Conflict to Communion*[1] is a highly remarkable effort which needs to be lauded.

A common commemoration of the Reformation involves a number of developments in Christianity, of course. It first of all involves a critical unlearning of the various available histories of the Reformation and the subsequent developments in Europe and outside Europe – written by both the sides. Most often, as obvious, the histories of the Reformation have been polemic histories accusing each other. While the particularities of each tradition has to be respected and maintained, nevertheless the various histories that often put the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches in a strong binary condition and in a state of inbuilt eternal enmity have to be interrogated. Such histories present the Roman Catholics and Protestant as always fighting and that they cannot come together at all as if they are fundamentally different in all aspects.

Second, a common commemoration of the Reformation also involves studying the Reformation not simply as a division between the churches, but as reformation within its multiple social, political, economic, cultural and other factors with which the event is closely related. Moreover, there were many identities involved in the process of the spread of the Reformation, which made the process even complex, so a simple categorization does not work here. Because of the various histories of the Reformation, a kind of 'Protestant Martin Luther attacking the Roman Catholic Church' myth has been strongly built during the last few centuries, and there are recently efforts for challenging such a generalising approach within ecumenical frameworks. By no means, this perspective of looking at the Reformation and the subsequent developments within the complex environment is a new endeavour, but the context of the common commemoration should make such directions in research and historiography being brought to the centre.

Third, the common commemoration emphasises the importance of remembering the past in the present rather than remembering the past in itself. While what happened in the past cannot be changed, how it is remembered in the present

can be influenced in the light of the changing environments and contexts, and this can help different church denominations to come into cooperation and unity.

Fourth, a common commemoration of the Reformation also means that re-looking at the writings of the reformers as well as who were critical of them in new lights. This has to be done, though not easy, without the burden of the five centuries history of the Reformation, and within the various efforts for ecumenical relationship in the present context. This essay attempts to contribute to the this aspect by re-reading one of the works of Luther for how some of the discussions of it can be of helpful for Christians in general in our Christian living.

The Freedom of a Christian, written by Martin Luther (1483-1546) is considered here for the purpose. After briefly discussing the immediate context in which the treatise was written, this essay offers a summary followed by a discussion, in the light of the common commemoration, for how some of the concerns can be critically appropriated by Roman Catholics and Protestants together.

1. The Background of The *Freedom of a Christian*

The Freedom of a Christian comes as the third treatise written by Luther in 1520 followed by *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nations* and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Compared to these two, *The Freedom of a Christian* was written rather in a manner in which Luther attempts to make clear how his intention was not to divide from the church, unlike many people around Pope Leo X (1475–1521) had shown it to be. Perhaps Luther kept Johann Eck (1486–1543), a German Scholastic theologian who was vehemently opposed to him, in his mind. This treatise is accompanied with a letter to the Pope Leo X, where Luther expresses his concerns. This letter was very much due to the efforts by Karl von Miltitz (1490–1529), a papal nuncio and

a Mainz Cathedral canon, who persuaded Luther to mend the relationships with Rome.

When read without the burden of the last many centuries polemical histories of Reformation, one can appreciate the many reasons and factors that prompted Luther to write these treatises, particularly this one. Reducing everything to a binary of Martin Luther versus the Roman Church has had dangerous consequences. As a theologian Luther held much importance for doctrine, and once said that 'take away assertions, and you take away Christianity.'[2] He thought that these assertions were influenced by various external factors that need to be challenged. Among such factors he was targeting, the Scholastic theological system and Humanism were two of the important developments in his times.

Medieval theology was mostly enveloped by the Scholastic subtleties which were functioning on Aristotelian dialectics and idle speculations. Scholastic theology failed to look at the great doctrines of the gospel, according to Luther.[3] Further, the Pelegian idea of salvation that humanity is justified on the basis of its merits also was popular in this time. William of Ockham was of the idea that, God is capable of accepting a sinner directly without the need of any intermediate stage or entity,[4] and thus did not allow grace or faith to be there between a sinner and God's justification of him/her. Duns Scotus was another Scholastic theologian whose characteristic was to 'disturb faith and to open again questions.' He was also of the opinion that external reward can be achieved by good works, and that human freedom consists in their ability to choose.[5]

Another factor Luther was critical of was the piety of Christians, which, supposed to proceed from the soul's union with Christ, was mainly depended on the mechanical performances. Good works were done only with selfish motives of reward, he held.[6] In this regard, some of the internal factors he was critical of were: the authoritative priesthood which replaced the individual conscience and the virtue of faith,

and the preaching the Word of God which was neglected and which mostly had reference to indulgences, alms, pilgrimages and processions.[7]

Apart from the external factors that were present in Luther's time, the other important personal factor that led Luther to write this treatise was his own personal experience. The struggle he took for understanding the righteousness of God was enormous one and this obviously was influencing him to develop his doctrine of 'justification by grace through faith alone' and particularly to write this treatise on freedom which mostly discusses the doctrine of faith.

Thus, primarily, in *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther continues discussing his personal struggles in seeking a justification from a righteous God, and offers a very long discussion of the importance of faith and not works. Then, very interestingly, he discusses the importance of works not as a means of salvation, but as fruits of being a believing and faithful Christian. He attempts to show how the works are important for being and living as a Christian. At the end Luther argues against those who glorify works and claim that the works are needed for salvation, and also against those who completely despise works. Luther invites Christians to strike a middle path.

2. An Open Letter to Leo X

Along with the treatise, Luther writes a letter to Pope Leo X. In the letter, he attempts to make clear that he does not have any problem with the church concerning its morals and so with Leo X. His problem is regarding the word of truth; the Word of God. He is deeply concerned that there should not be any fixed rules for the interpretation of the Word of God. It should not be bound because it teaches freedom in all matters. He is critical of the Roman Curia, and in doing so Luther almost seems like advising the Pope regarding his office and equalling his letter with Bernard of Clairvux's letter

to Pope Eugenius III (1145-1153) where Bernard discussed the duties of the Pope and the dangers connected with his office. He holds that the power of the Pope is to serve others. In spite of such advisory nature of the letter, by and large, the letter seems to be one of mending relationships and makes it clear that Luther's intention was not to separate from the church. Church historians comment that it is not clear the letter as well as the treatise ever reached the Pope.[8]

3. The Freedom of a Christian: A Summary

When referring to his treatise on 'The Freedom of a Christian' in his open letters to Leo X, Luther says that 'it contains the whole of Christian life in a brief form.' Luther's whole treatise is based on his understanding of faith as against works. Briefly speaking, the whole of this treatise spells out the importance of faith for Christian life and discourages any idea that works can replace faith. Luther formalises his whole treatise on the basis of the following propositions:

- A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
- A Christian is perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

These two theses, says Luther, even though seem to contradict each other, should be found to fit together in order to serve the purpose. On this basis he divides his treatise into two: discussion on inner man and discussion on outer man.

3.1 Inner Man (Human)

Human beings have a two-fold nature. One is the inner or spiritual which is identified as Soul. The other is the outer or bodily which is called flesh. Luther has taken it from II Cor. 4: 16, where Paul says 'though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed everyday.' The inner man is righteous and free and according to Luther, an external thing has no influence in producing Christian righteousness and

freedom or producing unrighteousness and servitude. Soul is not affected by the body and body is not affected by the soul.

Soul does not need anything for its righteousness or freedom except the Word of God. Word of God is the Gospel of God concerning God's Jesus Christ, and faith alone can be the 'saving and efficacious use of the Word of God'. (Rom. 10: 9). The Word of God cannot be received and cherished by any works but only by faith. Since, thus, the soul needs only the Word of God and faith in it, it is justified or made righteous only by faith and not by any works.

The process of justification by faith in the soul happens as follows: Once one starts to have faith he/she knows that he/she is sinful. Once the knowledge of sinfulness arises, the knowledge of the necessity of Christ for the justification occurs. Once one believes him, through this faith he/she becomes a new man/woman and it is justified by the merits of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the unbelief of the heart, and not any outer work, makes one guilty and damnable servant to sin.

Having discussed this, Luther provides three kinds of power of faith. In order to discuss the first power, he starts with a question that is raised against his above position – justification only by faith. The question is this: If faith alone justifies what is the use of so many works, ceremonies and laws that are prescribed in Scripture? Luther answers to this saying that Scripture can be divided into two: commandments and promises. Commandments tell us what we should do, but do not provide us the power to do it. They teach us our inability to do good and prove that we are sinners. But promises help us to be saved. If we wish to fulfil a commandment, we have to believe in Christ in whom grace, righteousness, peace and freedom are promised. Thus the promises of God gives what the commandments of God require, and we receive these promises in faith. Thus a Christian has everything in faith for

his/her justification of the soul and needs nothing apart from it. This is the first power of faith.

The second power of faith is that it honours one whom it trusts. So when the soul believes God's promises it honours God and regards God as truthful and righteous. In turn, due to the faith of the soul, God honours it by making it righteous. Thus faith works righteousness by giving God what belongs to God.

Thirdly, faith unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. Christ is full of grace, life and salvation, and the soul is full of sin, death and damnation. A believing soul can claim everything what Christ has as its own as a bride does with her bridegroom. Thus faith comes between the soul and Christ, and sin, death and damnation are Christ's while grace, life and salvation are soul's. Adding to this we also receive a two-fold honour which Christ has made possible for us: priesthood and kingship. Through faith we receive kingship, which is a spiritual power that makes us lord of all things and the priesthood which is possible for everyone.

Luther urges that one should not stop with preaching the works, life and words of Christ as mere historical facts. The knowledge of these alone is not enough for justification. Rather Christ should be preached to the end that faith on him is established in one.

3.2 Outer Man (Human)

Even through faith we do not become wholly inner and perfectly spiritual. Rather it happens only at the last day – the day of the resurrection of the dead. As long as we live in flesh we can only make progress towards future. But the fact that we live in flesh in this world indicates that we have a contrary will in our own flesh. As we are placed among our neighbours, we have to control our bodies and have dealings with our neighbours, so that it will obey and conform to the inner man

and faith and will not revolt against faith and hinder the inner man. Because the contrary will in the body always seeks its own advantage. However the good works by the body never helps for justification.

In this section, Luther talks about three kinds of works of a justified person. As 'good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works,' a justified, freed person does good works. So whatever one does, he/she does it out of pure liberty and freely. Any work done is done not for salvation, for salvation has been already received, but done freely. For Luther, with what expectation we do work is important. This is the work done for one's own self.

Second kind of work is the work towards one's neighbours. As one does not live for oneself but for others, to this end, one has to bring one's body into subjection that one may sincerely and freely serve others. Here faith is active through love. However one's works towards one's neighbours also do not bring justification or righteousness. By serving the neighbours without expecting any reward, one is satisfied with the fullness of faith. Here one should follow Jesus Christ as an example in freely serving others.

Third kind of work is the work which pleases God. It is not that through our work we please God so that God justifies us, but that because God has justified us and given God's riches in our faith, we do things that please God. Thus works towards God and works towards neighbours stem from the righteousness which we receive by faith. And for Luther, any work that is not done for the purpose of keeping the body under control or serving one's neighbours, that work is neither good nor Christian. The moment we think that we are justified by our works the Christian freedom perishes altogether.

In the last part of his treatise Luther rebukes both those who criticize the ceremonies, traditions and human laws

thinking that they are free and those who innocently follows the ceremonies, traditions, etc, thinking that they are saved by them. Luther urges the (freed) Christian to take a middle course and offend the former and educate the latter. We should not despise ceremonies and traditions, but we should use them as models and plans among builders and artisans. Models are important for constructing a building; but once the structures are over, the models should be laid aside. They are not permanent. In the same way ceremonies, traditions and works in our Christian life are important; but they should not be regarded as something which brings justification or righteousness in our souls. Faith only can make this and this is the freedom of a Christian.

4. The Freedom of a Christian: A Contemporary Evaluation

One of the crucial developments in the contemporary context due to various ecumenical efforts is to attempt for a self-critical reading of Luther's writings, rather than merely seeing them as being always directed to the Roman Church. Such a reading brings out the strengths and the limitations in Luther's thought, and open up a space for how his ideas and theologies can be critically appropriated for Christians today. Below, I attempt to offer an evaluation within such a framework.

At the outset, as stated earlier, *The Freedom of a Christian* should be understood within the context of Luther's personal spiritual struggle he had with the idea of righteousness or justification. In 1545, in his preface to his Latin writings, he wrote: "I hated the (that) phrase righteousness of God, which I had been taught to understand as the righteousness but which God is righteous, and punishes unrighteous sinners. Although I lived a blameless life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with my works. Far from loving that righteous God who punishes sinners, I actually hated him."[9] Luther went on to say that, as he

continuously meditated upon it, he found that 'righteousness of God' meant that the righteous person lives by the gift of God (faith), and 'the righteousness of God is revealed' meant that the merciful God justifies human beings by faith. It is through his own personal struggle against the works that make God justify us, Luther come to the understanding of the justification by faith.[10] True, Luther was not alone in having such a struggle, and most of the people in his time too had the same struggles. Obviously, 'what should one do for his/her salvation' was an important question of Luther's time. Hence Luther himself considered his works on freedom, the bondage of human will and justification by grace through faith alone as more important than any other of his works or of his difficulties with the church and papacy.[11] This point is significant, because in the history of Reformation, however, Christians from both the sides have concentrated far too much on the latter aspects.

Secondly Luther's main aim, as he shows in this treatise, was to attempt for a purification of theology from the Scholastic and Humanistic line of thinking. Once he regarded human work as a precondition for justification. But once he realized that justification was God's work and human beings had nothing to do with that except believing Christ, he looked at the whole of theology from this view point. Whatever came against this, he considered dangerous and poisonous.[12]

In this relation, Luther's dispute with Erasmus on free-will, which ended in Luther writing a treatise on *The Bondage of the Will* also should be considered. Luther writes it five years after his treatise on *The Freedom of a Christian*, and this also is considered as one of the important works of Luther. Erasmus had defined free-will as "a power of the human will by which man may apply himself to those things that lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from the same."[13] Luther opposed this and denied of any free-will. Accordingly, to him, the denial of free-will is "the foundation of the Biblical doctrine of grace, and a hearty endorsement of that denial is the first step for anyone who would understand the Gospel and come

to faith in God."[14] While Erasmus maintained that though sin weakened humans, it has not made them utterly incapable of meritorious acts, Luther held that meritorious acts can never earn justification. For him the individual sinner is incapable of self-justification.

In Luther's view, sin and righteousness co-exist: "we remain sinners inwardly, but are righteous extrinsically, in the sight of God." When we confess our sins in faith, we stand in a right and righteous relationship with God. Thus we are growing towards righteousness. The righteousness helps us, being a protective covering, to battle with our sin. As the gradual transformation takes place in believers, there is the possibility of the future elimination of sin. For Luther, sin basically points to the 'continued need to entrust one's person to the gentle care of God.' Luther therefore declares a believer is "at one and the same time righteous and a sinner."[15] For him it is basically a declaratory and judicial act of God: it is a 'judicial act of heart and will."[16]

The reformation Luther intended mainly was the reformation of the dogmatic Christianity, as he himself accepted, even though its effects could be found in the ecclesial levels also. Luther was mostly concerned with the doctrines, particularly the doctrines that were related to the questions at the psychological level. Questions like, "Am I saved?," "How have I been saved?," "Whether my works have anything to do with my salvation?" were some of the important questions for him and many people during his time. However, these are very much applicable to the question of the individual sin. Luther seemed to be less concerned with collective sin. He did not take seriously the collective sin that was found in his own time against the present. Thus, though Luther's idea of the freedom of a Christian, i.e., the justification by grace through faith alone may answer to some of the questions at personal and individual levels, its practicality in terms of community life is limited.

Luther's differentiation of soul-body relationship is based on the dualistic idea. He differentiates between both in the first part of his treatise where he discusses about the 'inner man,' but brings some relationship between the two in terms of their dependency in the second part where he discusses about the 'outer man', and thus seems to contradict. Further, in Luther's view, righteousness and sin co-exist. Is it possible, when there is both dependency and non-dependency between the soul and the body? Even though one is declared righteous, he/she is not wholly inner or spiritual according to Luther. There is only imperfect faith, but taking the righteousness as a protective covering, one progress towards transformation. Then what is faith? And where does lie its source? Even though Luther talks about the power and functions of faith, a clear definition of faith is lacking, which may not be easily possible.

In the treatise Luther is critical of a passive submission to faith. The only place the faith comes active is in one's relationship with one's neighbour. Here the faith is active through love. However he does not allow this to have any influence with the righteousness or justification. Justification is only God's act. God commands and God God Himself fulfils by God's own promises. In between commanding and fulfilling lies the justification of a sinner in faith. If God does everything what is the use of human life and how does one bring the 'Godself' or the qualities of God in human life?

5. Reading *The Freedom of a Christian* as Roman Catholics and Protestants Together

One of the most important aspects that has to be considered in looking at this text is how the treatise is basically building on the personal struggle of Luther, rather than simply initiating or following up a doctrinal controversy with the church. The personal struggle that Luther went through is common to all Christians – be they Roman Catholic or Protestant or Orthodox. The questions that occupied Luther mostly were:

'am I justified?'; 'how I am justified?'; 'how do I feel relived from the bondage of sin' and similar questions. In spite of the availability of many doctrines, dogmas and sacraments, Christians continue to live with these questions which in fact are unavoidable in Christian being and living. These are not questions of doubt and disbelief. Thus what we, Roman Catholics and Protestants together can appreciate is the personal spiritual struggle that Luther was undergoing, and we can draw parallels to our own lives. His reflection and contemplation on justification by faith and grace and not by works, come from these genuine spiritual struggles rather than a partisan polemic against the Church.

Second, today, after 500 years of various polemic histories of the Reformation and oppositions to it, it is easy to find points in the text which can be used as a Protestant attack on the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, the treatise and the letter to Leo X where Luther calls the pope his Father make clear his intention that it was not to separate from the church. Rather he was presenting his arguments more as a self-critique of a faithful member of the church. Luther was clear that he was talking about the church, and highlighting some of the issues that can be improved, as a member of the church rather than as an outsider. In this way, his reflection on the importance of faith and the limitations of works can be seen as self-criticism, rather than pitting one against the other.

Third, as we see in the text, Luther is not attempting to take extreme sides when it comes to works. While he is clear that our works cannot save us because it is ultimately God's grace that saves us – with which no Christian should have a problem – he nevertheless clearly affirms the importance of the works for being and living as a Christian.

Fourth, Luther's discussion of works in Christian life as serving one's neighbours, and not directing the works for one's own benefits, has important message for all Christians. Especially, his discussion of consideration of others, and

works aimed not at one's own salvation but for the sake of the welfare of the others are common to all Christians. It is, after all, the basic scriptural message which has been clearly asserted and reasserted by Jesus Christ, Paul and the other apostles. This emphasis on work aimed at the welfare of the others, itself seems to have contributed to the division of the church, has in fact insights for ecumenism if one wants to, for, after all, ecumenism is not a concern for oneself but involves the wellbeing of everyone with the cooperation of the other.

Fifth, a reading which is not influenced by the polemic Reformation history can show that Luther was *clear in relating to the church rather than separating from it*. The way he talks about the Christian community united by the works of the believing Christians has the roots for the many ecumenical activities that we are currently undertaking to bring together Christian communities. If read from this light, rather than a political and politicised history of the Reformation, Luther's treatise has a lot to offer for all Christians who are open to come forward to embrace ecumenism and cooperation.

This does not mean that the text is entirely non-polemic or that it was not at all influenced by the realities and affairs of the time – political, social, economic and others. But a reading of this treatise as we move from conflict to communion can be read differently to draw critical insights for all Christians in our common journey.

Conclusion

In short, Luther's personal struggle that come out clearly in his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* is common to all Christians. Luther has attempted to live faithful to the gospel which is important. Even though the treatise is believed to have given rise to the dividing elements in the church, and in fact it has been used for forcing divisions and conflicts, today a non-polemical reading that overcomes the centuries of 'history of reformation' by both the sides will help us to understand and

appreciate that there can be a number of insights learned from this treatise for personal lives of Christians as well as for the ecumenical activities we are involved in.

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Towards New Definitions of Jesus: The Contemporary Significance of Reformation, Dialogue and Pope Francis

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Abstract: After analysing broadly the events leading from reformation, this article looks at its significance in terms of Lutherans and Christians common attempt to come together. While acknowledging that this is a very praiseworthy move, we need to ask some harsh questions about the violence and loss of life it has led to. The dialogue between Christians, symbolised by the words and deeds of Pope Francis, is truly remarkable. At the same time, we need to evolve our definitions of Jesus, which alone can prevent a re-enactment of the harm caused by reformation, while appreciating the positive contributions of this great event.

Keywords: Definitions of Jesus, Reformation, dialoge, Pope Francis, Lutheran-Catholic communion.

As we know, Martin Luther, a German monk, started the movement of Reformation in 1517 when he wrote 95 theses criticizing the Catholic Church for corruption, including the buying of ecclesiastical privileges, nepotism, usury and the selling of indulgences.

According to many historians, Luther never intended his 95 theses – which may or may not actually have been nailed

to the church doors to a church door in Wittenburg, Germany – to spark a revolution. "He started by wanting reform. He never planned to split away from the Latin church; that wasn't where it began," said Bishop William Kenney, the Catholic co-chair of the international dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics, who accompanied the pope to Sweden in October 2016 (Sherwood 2016).

In this article, I want to focus almost exclusively on the attempt of Catholics and Lutherans to bring about the reconciliation 500 years after the reformation. While talking about "walking ecumenism" initiated by Pope Francis, we also talk of the healing of memories made possible by prayer and works of mercy. This prayer helps us to bring the Word to the world, brining healing and reconciliation. Then we discuss genuine dialogue, which heralds God's unconditional love for all humans.

Finally, after learning the hard lessons of reformation (including 3-11,000,000 people lost in Thirty Year's War), we speak of the need to rediscover the definition of Jesus and God for today. The challenge facing us to rediscover this definition in terms an all-embracing and merciful love. That definition will determine our own life and how we look at God, Jesus and our fellow-human beings.

1. Walking Ecumenism: Working Together on Social Issues

"We too must look with love and honesty at our past, recognizing error and seeking forgiveness, for God alone is our judge," said Pope Francis, in October 2016 in the cathedral of Lund, which was confiscated from Catholics after Lutheranism became the state religion in 16th century (Pullella & PultzNielsen 2016).

In his address during the joint prayer service held in Lund, where the Lutheran World Federation was founded in 1947, Francis acknowledged that some good came from Luther and the Reformation, particularly his emphasis on the Gospel. "With gratitude we acknowledge that the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred scripture in the (Catholic) Church's life," he said (Pullella & PultzNielsen 2016).

For Gerard O'Connell, Vatican correspondent for the Jesuit magazine *America*, the pope's participation in commemorating the Reformation is proof of the extraordinary change in Catholic-Lutheran relations.

"A recognition, perhaps, that both sides missed something at the time of the Protestant Reformation," says O'Connell. "The Catholic Church missed ways of reforming itself. Luther and those around him pressed in a way that just couldn't be taken on board, so, in a way, both sides misspoke" (Poggioli 2016).

To be honest, there are still some doctrinal disputes. But Pope Francis says that while theologians iron out their differences, the two churches can work together on social issues like caring for the poor, migrants and refugees, and combating persecution of Christians.

This way of Francis, according to Jens-Martin Kruse, pastor of the Lutheran Church in Rome, is "walking ecumenism" (Poggioli 2016). "We are moving together, this is a new experience that we are together on this walk," Kruse adds. "Walking together, we find that we have lots of things more in [common than] we thought before." Kruss acknowledges: "today, we are at the point where a lot of these topics from Luther are common for Catholics and Lutherans."

In June 2015, Pope Francis went so far as to praise Luther as a great reformer. On his flight back to Rome from Armenia, the pope told reporters: "The church was not a role model,

there was corruption, there was worldliness, there was greed, and lust for power. He protested against this. And he was an intelligent man" (Poggioli 2016).

However, a document signed On the eve of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation by dozens of Protestant evangelicals and entitled "Is the Reformation Over?" says that although cooperation between the two traditions should be encouraged in areas of common concern, "the issues that gave birth to the Reformation 500 years ago are still very much alive in the 21st century for the whole church" (Sherwood 2016).

2. Healing of Memories: Shifting towards Prayer and the Works of Mercy

In a rare gesture of unity among Christians, on Oct. 31, 2016, Pope Francis traveled to Sweden to mark the start of commemorations for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformations and the split between Catholics and Lutherans. It was held in southern Swedish city of Lund (le Miere 2016). The Pope was welcomed by Sweden's Prime Minister Stefan Lofven.

"It will not be easy to go forward because of the different ways of understanding some theological questions," Francis told the Jesuit Journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*. He added: "Personally, I believe that enthusiasm must shift towards common prayer and the works of mercy – work done together to help the sick, the poor, and the imprisoned. To do something together is a high and effective form of dialogue" (le Miere 2016).

One of the terrible Consequences of this reformation is the Thirty Years' War in 1618, which took place mainly in Germany and by some estimates cost the country up to 40 percent of its population. It also impacted much of Europe.

The signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 effectively ended the Roman Catholic Church's claim to authority across the continent. We will have more to say on it in the Conclusion.

It is sad to note that healing of memories was attempted only in the 1960s when moves were afoot to bring about greater Christian unity with the beginning of ecumenical dialogue. That continued with the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification in 1999 and, in 2013, the joint publication by the Catholic and Lutheran church of a document entitled "From Conflict to Reformation" (le Miere 2016).

3. Praying Together: Bringing His WORD to the World

Francis delivered the homily at the ecumenical prayer service at Lund in Sweden on 31st October 2016 (Francis 2016), on the theme: "Abide in me as I abide in you" (Jn 15:4). The following is a summary of Pope's reflections at this ecumenical prayer service, which has great lessons for Lutheran-Catholic relationship and the relevance of reformation for today.

The Pope said that the words, spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper, allow us to peer into the heart of Christ just before his ultimate sacrifice on the cross. We can feel his heart beating with love for us and his desire for the unity of all who believe in him. He tells us that he is the true vine and that we are the branches, that just as he is one with the Father, so we must be one with him if we wish to bear fruit.

The Pope wished to manifest our shared desire to remain one with Christ, so that we may have life. The Pope went on: "We ask him, 'Lord, help us by your grace to be more closely united to you and thus, together, to bear a more effective witness of faith, hope and love'. This is also a moment to thank God for the efforts of our many brothers and sisters from different ecclesial communities who refused to be resigned

to division, but instead kept alive the hope of reconciliation among all who believe in the one Lord" (Francis 2016).

He reminded both Catholics and Lutherans, that we have undertaken a common journey of reconciliation. Now, in the context of the commemoration of the Reformation, we have a new opportunity to accept a common path, one that has taken shape over the past fifty years in the ecumenical dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. Nor can we be resigned to the division and distance that our separation has created between us. We have the opportunity to mend a critical moment of our history by moving beyond the controversies and disagreements that have often prevented us from understanding one another.

Jesus tells us that the Father is the "vinedresser" who tends and prunes the vine in order to make it bear more fruit. The Father is constantly concerned for our relationship with Jesus, to see if we are truly one with him. He watches over us, and his gaze of love inspires us to purify our past and to work in the present to bring about the future of unity that he so greatly desires (Francis 2016).

Pope Francis urges us to look with love and honesty at our past, recognizing error and seeking forgiveness, for God alone is our judge. So the Pope pleaded.

> We ought to recognize with the same honesty and love that our division distanced us from the primordial intuition of God's people, who naturally yearn to be one, and that it was perpetuated historically by the powerful of this world rather than the faithful people, which always and everywhere needs to be guided surely and lovingly by its Good Shepherd. Certainly, there was a sincere will on the part of both sides to profess and uphold the true faith, but at the same time we realize that we closed in on ourselves out of fear or bias with regard to the faith which others profess with a different accent and language.

Then he quoted Pope John Paul II: "We must not allow ourselves to be guided by the intention of setting ourselves up as judges of history but solely by the motive of understanding better what happened and of becoming messengers of truth." God is the vinedresser, who with immense love tends and protects the vine; let us be moved by his watchful gaze. The one thing he desires is for us to abide like living branches in his Son Jesus. With this new look at the past, we do not claim to realize an impracticable correction of what took place, but "to tell that history differently," said the Pope citing "Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity," 2013.

The Pope realled the words of Jesuss: "Apart from me, you can do nothing." He is the one who sustains us and spurs us on to find ways to make our unity ever more visible. Certainly, our separation has been an immense source of suffering and misunderstanding, yet it has also led us to recognize honestly that without him we can do nothing; in this way it has enabled us to understand better some aspects of our faith. With gratitude we acknowledge that the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred Scripture in the Church's life. Through shared hearing of the word of God in the Scriptures, important steps forward have been taken in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, whose fiftieth anniversary we are presently celebrating. Let us ask the Lord that his word may keep us united, for it is a source of nourishment and life; without its inspiration we can do nothing.

The Pope again called to mind the challenges posed by Martin Luther: "The spiritual experience of Martin Luther challenges us to remember that apart from God we can do nothing. 'How can I get a propitious God?' This is the question that haunted Luther. In effect, the question of a just relationship with God is the decisive question for our lives." Pope Francis said that Luther encountered that propitious God

in the Good News of Jesus, incarnate, dead and risen. With the concept "by grace alone," he reminds us that God always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as he seeks to awaken that response. "The doctrine of justification thus expresses the essence of human existence before God," he affirmed.

Jesus intercedes for us as our mediator before the Father; he asks him that his disciples may be one, "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). This is what comforts us and inspires us to be one with Jesus, and thus to pray: "Grant us the gift of unity, so that the world may believe in the power of your mercy". This is the testimony the world expects from us. He added: "We Christians will be credible witnesses of mercy to the extent that forgiveness, renewal and reconciliation are daily experienced in our midst. Together we can proclaim and manifest God's mercy, concretely and joyfully, by upholding and promoting the dignity of every person. Without this service to the world and in the world, Christian faith is incomplete."

As Lutherans and Catholics, we pray together, "conscious that without God we can do nothing. We ask his help, so that we can be living members, abiding in him, ever in need of his grace, so that together we may bring his Word to the world, which so greatly needs his tender love and mercy" (Francis 2016).

He went on: 'We have the opportunity to mend a critical moment of our history by moving beyond the controversies and disagreements that have often prevented us from understanding one another." Then again: "We too must look with love and honesty at our past, recognizing error and seeking forgiveness, for God alone is our judge."

In a symbolic gesture, after the Lund event, the Vatican and Lutheran delegations rode together on a bus to attend an event

highlighting both churches' peace-making and humanitarian efforts.

4. Dialoguing With: Heralding God's Boundless Love for All Humanity

In keeping with this dialogical approach, in 2013, a joint publication by the Catholic and Lutheran church of a document entitled "From Conflict to Reformation" was released (Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission On Unity 2013). Later Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Yunan, president of the Lutheran World Federation, signed the Joint Declaration at the Lutheran Cathedral of Lund, Sweden (Joint Statement 2016). Below we go through some of the salient features of this common document.

With Thankful Hearts

With this Joint Statement, the Lutherans an Catholics express joyful gratitude to God, as we begin the year commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. Fifty years of sustained and fruitful ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans have helped us to overcome many differences, and have deepened our mutual understanding and trust. At the same time, we have drawn closer to one another through joint service to our neighbours – often in circumstances of suffering and persecution. "Through dialogue and shared witness we are no longer strangers. Rather, we have learned that what unites us is greater than what divides us" (Joint Statement 2016).

Moving from Conflict to Communion

While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics

have wounded the visible unity of the Church. Theological differences were accompanied by prejudice and conflicts, and religion was instrumentalized for political ends. Our common faith in Jesus Christ and our baptism demand of us a daily conversion, by which we cast off the historical disagreements and conflicts that impede the ministry of reconciliation. They also acknowledge: "While the past cannot be changed, what is remembered and how it is remembered can be transformed. We pray for the healing of our wounds and of the memories that cloud our view of one another. We emphatically reject all hatred and violence, past and present, especially that expressed in the name of religion. Today, we hear God's command to set aside all conflict. We recognize that we are freed by grace to move towards the communion to which God continually calls us' (Joint Statement 2016).

Our Commitment to Common Witness

The document holds that as we move beyond those episodes in history that burden us, "we pledge to witness together to God's merciful grace, made visible in the crucified and risen Christ." Aware that the way we relate to one another shapes our witness to the Gospel, we commit ourselves to further growth in communion rooted in Baptism, as we seek to remove the remaining obstacles that hinder us from attaining full unity. Christ desires that we be one, so that the world may believe (cf. John 17:21).

Regarding the common Eucharistic fellowship the document says: Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God's redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We acknowledge our joint pastoral responsibility to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of

our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the Body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavours, which we wish to advance, also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue.

We pray to God that Catholics and Lutherans will be able to witness together to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, inviting humanity to hear and receive the good news of God's redeeming action. We pray to God for inspiration, encouragement and strength so that we may stand together in service, upholding human dignity and rights, especially for the poor, working for justice, and rejecting all forms of violence. God summons us to be close to all those who yearn for dignity, justice, peace and reconciliation. Today in particular, we raise our voices for an end to the violence and extremism which affect so many countries and communities, and countless sisters and brothers in Christ. So Lutherans and Catholics are urged to work together "to welcome the stranger, to come to the aid of those forced to flee because of war and persecution, and to defend the rights of refugees and those who seek asylum."

It adds: "We realize that our joint service in this world must extend to God's creation, which suffers exploitation and the effects of insatiable greed. We recognize the right of future generations to enjoy God's world in all its potential and beauty. We pray for a change of hearts and minds that leads to a loving and responsible way to care for creation."

They also make a fervent plea to all Christians all over the wrold, on this auspicious occasion (Joint Statement 2016):

> As we recommit ourselves to move from conflict to communion, we do so as part of the one Body of Christ, into which we are incorporated through Baptism. We invite our ecumenical partners to remind us of our commitments and to encourage us. We ask them to continue to pray for us, to walk with us, to support us in living out the prayerful commitments we express today.

The Reformation is one of the great and dramatic instances of definitions of human beings and human difference: Christians in the sixteenth did not agree on what the word meant, what it entailed for a person trying to live it, and sadly they killed one another over the content of the word. Christian might mean refusing to take oaths and being baptized as an adult; Christian might mean infant baptism and a collective commemoration of the Last Supper; Christian might mean infant baptism and the Mass as collective worship. Many images capture the emotional power of the growing distance between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, husbands and wives: the shattering of a glass vessel, the sundering of a tree, the shredding of a tapestry. Those images point toward the emotional power of the experience of difference. But in those same years, Christians told stories in which one group was God's instrument, another, the Devil's; one position was not simply right for a group of people, it was divine and true (Wandel 2016). The power of those stories abide to this day and we are collectively living it.

Today our stories are different. For example, the Holy Week reminds us of a model for how we might speak of wrenching, harrowing human difference - not the kind of difference we think about, but the kind of difference we feel, experience viscerally, as those Europeans did now five hundred years ago. According to journalist Lee Palmer Wendel, "That story begins by taking God out of it. This is a human story, not a divine story. There are no divine instruments. It is a question of perspective: God alone knows who God's instruments are. Our work is to tell a story of human beings, from our perspective" (Wendel 2016).

The story of reformation and the present attempts at dialoge revolve around the core mystery of Christianity: the Incarnation. All Christians share the belief that, in the words of the ancient Nicene Creed, Jesus Christ was "begotten, not

Finally, the document calls upon Catholics and Lutherans worldwide "to be bold and creative, joyful and hopeful in their commitment to continue the great journey ahead of us. Rather than conflicts of the past, God's gift of unity among us shall guide cooperation and deepen our solidarity." Further, it goes on: "By drawing close in faith to Christ, by praying together, by listening to one another, by living Christ's love in our relationships, we, Catholics and Lutherans, open ourselves to the power of the Triune God. Rooted in Christ and witnessing to him, we renew our determination to be faithful heralds of God's boundless love for all humanity" (Joint Statement 2016).

5. Conclusion: Dialogue as Way of Life

In conclusion, I want to talk about three aspects. Frist, why the story of reformation and the attempts at rapprochement after 500 years is significant for us today. Then I look on one of the tragic aspects of the reformation, that has stolen millions of years. Finally, as a symbol of reconciliation and dialogue, we refers I refer to Martin Luther's plaza. This leads to the possible future for Christianity and humanity based on common experience of Jesus, dialogue with one another and also the reduction and elimination of evil and violence.

5.1 The Definition of Jesus: Significance of the Story of Reformation for Today

Why does it matter how anyone tells the story of the Reformation? Sixteenth-century chroniclers, contemporaries of Martin Luther, drew on the Bible for the structuring of their narrative; Luther and Calvin were cast as instruments of divine revelation, embedded in the playing out of divine will in human time. That model, of divine revelation realized through individual human lives, did not end with the sixteenth century (Wandel 2016). It is relevant even for today.

made," the Son of God, at once divine and human. But what is it, to be "human"? In the sixteenth century, that question acquired terrible force; in the early years of the century, it was already troubling. It was an ancient question - the Greeks had asked in in many different forms - but with the proliferation of humanist texts in the fifteenth century and, at the end of that century, Columbus's landing on an island populated with persons no European had seen before, the question was no longer one of self-reflection. It was one of definition: definition of who God and Jesus are (Wandel 2016). Today, like the time of reformation, we also need new definition for Jesus for our collective self-understanding. Such a definiton or story can enable us to live together as brother and sisters, even with non-Christians and atheists.

5.2 The Terrible Consequence: The Thirty Year War

The Thirty Years' War was fought between 1618 and 1648, principally on the territory of today's Germany, and involved most of the major European continental powers. Although it was ostensibly a religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics, the rivalry between the Habsburg dynasty and other powers was a more central motive, as shown by the fact that Catholic France under the de facto rule of Cardinal Richelieu supported the Protestant side in order to weaken the Habsburgs, thereby furthering France's position as the pre-eminent European power (Thirty Yeas' War n.d.). This increased the France-Habsburg rivalry which led later to direct war between France and Spain. The major impact of the Thirty Years' War, in which mercenary armies were extensively used, was the devastation of entire regions scavenged bare by the foraging armies. Episodes of widespread famine and disease (a starving body has little resistance to illnesses) devastated the population of the German states and, to a lesser extent, the Low Countries and Italy, while bankrupting many of the

powers involved. The war may have lasted for 30 years, but the conflicts that triggered it continued unresolved for a much longer time. The war ended with the Treaty of Münster, a part of the wider Peace of Westphalia (Thirty Years' War n.d.).

During the war, Germany's population was reduced by 30 percent on average; in the territory of Brandenburg, the losses had amounted to half, while in some areas an estimated two thirds of the population died. Germany's male population was reduced by almost half. The population of the Czech lands declined by a third. The Swedish armies alone destroyed 2,000 castles, 18,000 villages and 1,500 towns in Germany, one-third of all German towns (Thirty Years' War n.d.). The edicts agreed upon during the signing of the Peace of Westphalia were instrumental in laying the foundations for what are even today considered the basic tenets of the sovereign nation-state. in addition to establishing fixed territorial boundaries for many of the countries involved in the ordeal, the Peace of Westphalia changed the relationship of subjects to their rulers. In earlier times, people had tended to have overlapping political and religious loyalties. Now, it was agreed that the citizenry of a respective nation were subjected first and foremost to the laws and whims of their own respective government rather than to those of neighbouring powers, be they religious or secular. As a result of this religiously sanctioned conflict, some began to advocate that no religion should enjoy a privileged relationship with the state but that apart from allowing citizens their religious liberty, religion ought to be a matter for each individual's conscience (Thirty Years' War n.d.).

It is estimated that 3,000,000 to 11,500,000 people lost their lives due to this long-drawn war. A truly tragic consequence of a story lived, shared and fought together. The terribe and tragic power of a story being enacted!

5.3 The Symbolic Reconciliation: Piazza Martin Lutero

As we know Luther was excommunicated in 1521 and was never allowed to return to the Catholic Church. Today Vatican's views have changed, both symbolically and significantly. So hilltop square in Rome is due to be named Piazza Martin Lutero, in memory of Luther's achievements. The site chosen is the Oppian Hill, a park area that overlooks the Colosseum.

The move has been six years in a making, said an Italian daily *La Repubblica*. The original plan was to inaugurate the square in time for the 500th anniversary of Luther's historic trip to Rome in 2010. City officials were not able to discuss the process behind naming the square or the reason for the holdup. The move contrasts sharply from views held by Luther around the time of his visit to Rome, when he asserted repeatedly: "If there is a hell, Rome is built over it."

The creative dialogue that has enabled both Catholics and Lutherans to come together is truly welcome. Their desire to forget the past and work for a better definition of Jesus (and God), hopefully, will enable humanity to enter a better world of dialogue and reconciliation. That definition of Jesus is given by Pope Francis when he talks of Jesus as God's Unconditional Love and Mercy for the whole of humanity.

May be such a reconciliation will make war useless and violence superfluous! Inspired by Reformation and challenged by Pope Francis, can we collectively dream of a new humanity of peace, justice and dialogue? Can we formulate new definitions of Jesus, new collective stories, which alone can prevent further bloodshed and violence, in his very name? Can we Christiand come together, share our stories, our understanding of Jesus and God, enabling us to live and work for peace and harmony in the world?

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Book Review

Binoy Pichalakkattu SJ Bridging Mathematics, Philosophy, and Theology Fuzzy Logical Thinking for Science-Religion Dialogue. Christian World Imprints, New Delhi. ISBN 9789351482116 (HB) pp. 128+xiv Rs 400.

More and more people, both at the popular and academic levels, are convinced today of the need for creative and critical dialogue between science and religion. Such a dialogue is essential for the future of humanity. This recent book by Dr Binoy Pichalakkatt SJ is an attempt to place such a dialogue in the framework of fuzzy logic.

The book argues that a fuzzy model of critical realism will provide a mathematical base to overcome the binary thinking without indulging in reductionism and relativism. The author believes the model offered by fuzzy logic will offer an inclusive epistemological framework for science-theology dialogue where multiple referential claims reinforce one another. possibilities of fuzzy logic in comparison with binary, relativist and probabilistic thinking. It also brings to light the limits of fuzzy logic and thereby the limits of a fuzzy model of critical realism. The study ends by suggesting a few possibilities for exploring fuzzy thinking in religions and developing a fuzzy language for talking about God and religions. Such an attempt enables a deeper and creative way of dealing with science, religion, theology and philosophy.

After explaining the insights of fuzziness in a way understandable to the popular audience, he explores the significance of critical realism as a starting point to encounter reality. Then he explores the rich mathematical insights from fuzzy logic and provides a new and dynamic model for science-theology interaction. Such an attempt, we are convinced, is essential for developing a fertile womb for meaningful science-religion dialogue.

The author explores the insights of "critical realism" in the first part of the book. Then he asks the pertinent question: What is critical about critical realism? This takes him to study fuzzy models of critical realism. Finally, he applies his findings of critical realism and fuzzy models to issues like time, eternity and truth. In the conclusion, he probes the limits and possibilities of fuzzy thinking and models for science-religion dialogue.

The work is significant from the point of view of method of dialoguing between science and religion. According to the Second Vatican Council, "Methodological research in all branches of knowledge provided it is carried on in a truly scientific manner and in accordance with moral norms, can never conflict with faith, because the things of the world and things of faith derive from the same God." (GS 36).

The suggestion in the next reprint of the book is have elaborate more on both the basic concepts of "critical realism" and "fuzzy logic." Without hesitation, I shall recommend this book for all those who are interested in philosophical, theological or scientific research.

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