

Catalyst

*Stimulating Action
& Effecting Change*

Why We Need a *New* Reformation!

By Stuart Simpson

Christians across America say God is about to birth a Third Great Awakening in the land. Some Native American leaders believe a national apology for the atrocities committed against the host people is a necessary precursor to this coming move of God.

Revival occurs when God pours out deep conviction of sin, souls are swept into the Kingdom, miracles occur daily, and the power of the Lord saturates the hearts and souls of Christians. In recent years many Christians have flocked to the latest hot-spot experiencing revival and many are now looking for the next one. The danger is that we continue to 'go around the same mountain', looking for the next spiritual encounter that comes by. Revivals are great but are transitory. They don't last. However, true *reformation* brings about lasting change and is the precursor to transformation. **If we are to see nations transformed, we must go beyond a desire to see souls saved to seeing true disciple-makers made, and seeing the Kingdom of God invade every sector of society.** God wants His Kingdom will to be done on earth through us! For that to happen, a new reformation is required.

The Protestant Reformation 500 years ago did *not* reform the church back to how Jesus started things in the book of Acts. Only some changes were made which were good **but they fell far short of what was necessary** (see pages 2-3). In many ways, Protestant churches today are still more akin to the Roman Catholic Church than to the New Testament church. A further reformation is still required. One that doesn't just address doctrines, but also church structures and systems. One that **revisits the foundations** and **addresses issues at the root**. This might shock you but much of what happens in church today stems not from the New Testament, but from religious tradition and pagan culture.

500 years ago Luther wanted to start a conversation about things he saw were out of alignment with the Word of God. 500 years on...and the need still exists. We need to revisit our foundations. We need to be willing to engage in reform where it is needed. Significantly, this includes how we 'do church'. Today, church typically is centred around weekly attendance at a Sunday event, where the professionals 'perform' while the rest of the Body functions largely as passive spectators. The disempowered 90% need to be empowered to truly be part of 'the priesthood of all believers', when the church gathers and when it is scattered within society.

The Church is here to be an agent of the Kingdom of God which is to grow until it *fills* the whole earth. For this to be realized we must address in *practical terms* what it means for God's Kingdom intentions to come to earth (as it is in heaven). Too often we get caught up with the hype of 'taking the world for Jesus', without even asking the questions how this is to be achieved. Also, Jesus said the world would know that God had sent His Son when we express the unity of the Trinity. Rather than being fragmented into many different parts, we need to come together in the unity of the faith.

500 Years On—New Reformation Required!

The 31st October 2017 will bring about the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. In 1517 such a reformation was desperately needed. The Church had strayed away big time from the simplicity and authenticity of the early New Testament church described in the book of Acts.

Whatever Happened to the New Testament Church?

The first 300 years from Pentecost had birthed a vibrant and dynamic church which had advanced the Kingdom of God, but at a cost. Serious persecution came with Kingdom advance. The church remained a minority at a grassroots level, disciples were imprisoned and martyred, but it was powerful and it was multiplying. However, emperor Constantine's edict in 313AD, while stopping the persecution, was to change the church's trajectory and ongoing impact, and we are still living with the consequences today!

As a result of Constantine adopting 'Christianity' as the state religion of the Roman Empire, much of the church became 'Roman Catholic' and started to focus on *buildings*. This put an end to the multiplication process. In time it became corrupted with wealth and worldly power. Instead of Jesus being the Head of His Church, He had been replaced by the Pope. Instead of the Body of Christ being made up of functioning members, this church was now disabled and controlled by those in religious power. The focus was no longer on advancing God's Kingdom, but keeping the people ignorant while leaders gained and held onto wealth and power for reasons of self-interest and self-preservation. Tragically, this situation lasted for around 1200 years. We refer to this time as the Dark (Middle) Ages.

Church and Bible Misalignment

Fast forward to 1517 and enter Martin Luther. He was just an ordinary priest and university lecturer in Germany when he posted on the door of a chapel in Wittenberg his "95 Theses," - a list of where he felt the state of the church and what he read in his Bible were at odds. In particular, he protested a specific abuse relating to the pope's sale of reprieves from penance, or indulgences, which basically meant the church would collect money in exchange for the pope releasing dead relatives from the temporary punishment of purgatory. Using today's terminology, we could say Luther's protest went 'viral' (helped by the introduction of the printing press) and ended up unleashing a whole new movement that impacted not only the nature of the church worldwide, but also paved the way for Christian civilization in the West. As a result, the church's income went down, the leaders got mad and Luther got kicked out and was called a heretic! However, the seed of change had been birthed.

Positive Changes

On the plus side, the resulting reformation established the Bible as the sole authority of Christian faith and practice, removing the church leaders' authority in this regard. Instead of needing church mediation and the use of the sacraments, it brought a new understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Significantly, it put the Bible back into the

hands of the people so that they could access and receive revelation from God themselves, rather than depend on the religious leaders of the day to tell them what it said and meant.

The scope of the resulting reforms were not limited to the “religious sphere”. With the involvement of other reformers such as John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli (in Switzerland), and William Tyndale (in England), it also caused a political, intellectual and cultural upheaval that defined the European continent in the modern era. Luther’s theological transformation therefore led to a social transformation that created the modern world.

Shortcomings

On the negative side, the disruption triggered wars and persecution. Rather than seek to unify the church around the truth, the result was division and a splintering of the Body of Christ. As much of northern Europe began to separate from the Roman Catholic Church, the result became the formation of several new church groups such as the Lutheran Church and the Reformed Church. Over the past 500 years we now have (according to the World Christian Encyclopedia) 33,000 denominations and church groupings, largely based on doctrinal differences, instead of the one church Jesus gave His life for and prayed for in John 17!

Although the Protestant Reformation challenged the dualistic worldview of having ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’ that had crept into the church during the Middle Ages and stressed that all work, provided it was not evil but consecrated before God, was sacred and of equal value, it never went far enough. This is evidenced today that 500 years later, surveys indicate that most Christians feel disempowered, a sad result of dualistic thinking still embedded in evangelicalism!

The Protestant Reformation also completely overlooked a missionary emphasis. Its focus was more inward-looking and so it wasn’t until the Great Awakening in the 1700’s that the church once again took the ‘Great Commission’ seriously.

Changes to Doctrine but Not Church Structures or Liturgy

We can be thankful that in a number of areas we have seen further reforms during the past 500 years. For example, the radical reformers called “Anabaptists” insisted on a return to believers’ baptism by immersion; the Methodist movement emphasized the need for sanctification; the Pentecostal and subsequent Charismatic movements restored the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the Ephesians 4 five-fold ministry gifts.

However, although the teachings of the Reformation and subsequent renewal movements affected certain religious church doctrines, the one area that has remained largely untouched is *church structure and liturgy*. Whatever denomination or church ‘stream’ one considers today, much of the essential church format as when it was Roman Catholic has largely been retained. The early Protestant church was still a state church. The Protestant Order of Worship still varies little from the Catholic Mass. The Bible replaced the Eucharist and the minister or pastor replaced the priest. The Reformation spread downwards so if your ruler (city or country) was Protestant, then you were Protestant too. Individual freedoms would have to wait for the rise of Pietism and the departure of the Puritans to the Americas in the 17th century. Even here, church forms, structures and liturgy remained very Roman, even through more recent Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.

If ***you*** were going to nail some issues you think are in need of reform on the door of a church building, what would they be?

Here are **7 reasons** why
the Church today needs a
New Reformation:

BIBLICAL TRUTH - to return to the *authority of God's Word* rather than allow society to shape what we believe through 'political correctness', and recover the voice of protest where things are no longer in alignment with the Word; to revisit theology (e.g. where shaped by cultural traditions and beliefs).

HEADSHIP - to allow Jesus to once again be the *functioning* Head of His church where *He* is the practical leader of the gathering, able to speak through *every member* of His body (1 Corinthians 14:26). Many people have forgotten how or have never learnt how to do this.

CHURCH FORMS - to release *new forms of church*—organic wineskins, ones that *multiply* and continue to reproduce; to function as a spiritual *ekklesia* (Heaven's governing body on Earth); (i.e. revisit how we 'do church').

DISCIPLESHIP - to reinstate *obedience-based discipleship* which focuses on teaching people to *obey* the commands of Jesus, rather than an information model (knowledge-based discipleship) that teaches Bible content and often only fills heads with knowledge (need knowing, being and doing).

EMPOWERMENT - to eradicate any vestiges of a sacred/secular divide and *empower every believer* to function in their God-given callings, whether in church gatherings or in their particular spheres of influence within society.

KINGDOM MISSION - to return to Christ's mandate to '*disciple nations*' (a Kingdom gospel) whereby individual transformation leads to societal transformation (rather than just a gospel of salvation); to revisit how we 'do mission' (e.g. not exporting culture or 'brands').

UNITY - to come together in the *unity of the faith* in accordance with Ephesians 4:13, rather than hinder the prayer of Jesus with 30,000-40,000 splintered groups/denominations.



Stuart & Michelle Simpson are based in northern Arizona, on the edge of the Navajo Reservation. They are the founders of Catalyst Ministries (www.catalystmin.org). To partner with them in this ministry, financially support, and learn more about effective cross-cultural ministry and mission, contact them at: catalystmin@gmail.com.

