

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 44 issued September 2003

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The Pastor's Letter

(W.J. Seaton - October 1967)

Dear Friends,

Four hundred and fifty years ago this month an event took place which, to all intents and purposes, sparked off the Protestant Reformation.

In the other pages of the Wicket Gate this month you will be able to read more about that event and its effects, but for now, let me just bring you one incident from those by-gone days.

One of England's own Reformers was a man named William Tyndale. He it was who translated the scriptures into one of the greatest English versions. It was a work that was carried out under great hardship and personal danger, but for Tyndale, the work was one that had been formed in the womb of determination.



When still a young man he had been employed as a tutor to a well-to-do family in Gloucestershire, and there he came into much opposition with the local Roman Catholic priests. He reasoned with them from the Scriptures, but to no avail, and finally he left that place with his own challenge ringing in his ears and embedded in his heart ... "If God spare my life", he had told the priests, "ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more Scripture than thou dost". And so, he set about translating the Word of God so that all might be able to buy it and read of God's way of salvation in Christ.

Now, in many ways, that is what the Reformation was all about. It was the bringing of God's gospel of free grace to those who had for years sat in darkness - it was the spreading of the Evangel.

Let us pray for a continuation of the Reformation, "till all the ransomed Church of God be saved to sin no more".

Yours in Christ,
W. J. Seaton (October 1967)

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Almost every Christian is aware of the fact that there once occurred in the history of the Christian Church an event which has since become known as the Protestant Reformation. It was that event which delivered men and women in many places from the clutches and domination of the apostate Church of Rome, which had sunk to the depths of idolatry and superstition.

Like most great movements in the history of the Church, or the world in general, it would be difficult to set an exact date and say when the Reformation actually began. But, if we were to have an annual memorial to the event, it would most likely fall on the 31st of this month of October. It was on that date in the year 1517 - 450 years ago this year (Note - article reproduced from Wicket Gate of 1967) that the young monk, Martin Luther, boldly stepped up to the door of the Castle Church in the town of Wittenberg in Germany and nailed to that door "Ninety-five Theses of Religion". These denounced the sale of "The Pope's Indulgence", a paper which gave direct forgiveness from the Pope for those who had sinned, or ever would sin. Through the purchase of these Indulgences, the faithful were told that they could free the souls of the loved ones now in the pains of "Purgatory", and assure forgiveness for them and themselves.

As we've said, it would be difficult to stamp an exact date on the Protestant Reformation. We look away back to the Waldenses and there we see the smolderings of the Reformation fire; we think of our own John Wycliff - the "Morning Star of the Reformation"; and of John Huss, who so willingly went to the stake rather than submit to the dictates of Rome's corrupt doctrine and practices. For over 300 years the Reformation was in the smelting pot. But, as young Martin Luther's hammer swung into the nail that fastened his protest to that Castle Church in that little town in Germany, the blow was to echo throughout Europe and break the chains of popery that held so many in bondage.

How true it was what John Huss had cried out to his persecutors as the flames had begun to burn into his flesh; "Today, you are cooking an old goose", he had told them, "but tomorrow, a swan will rise from the ashes". And here, standing so nobly on the steps of the Castle Church was the one of whom Huss had so accurately spoken.

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But, what kind of a man was Martin Luther? In these days when so many would discredit the whole work of the Reformation and brand it as "a mistake", they would also label the Reformers as "misguided fanatics". But what a travesty of the true situation this is. If Martin Luther was wrong, then his mistake grew out of nothing less than a desire to know God and the forgiveness of his sins before the Almighty.

Luther was born into a strict German Roman Catholic family, where the main ingredients of his religious instruction were the dread of God's judgment and the power of the Pope of Rome. Luther was a brilliant student, and by the time he was 22, had graduated as Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy from the most famous University - Erfurt - of his day. In spite of all, however, young Martin Luther was still concerned about his soul; he could only see God as the indignant judge ready to hurl down thunderbolts upon his head, and one night, when Luther was caught out in a thunderstorm, he felt sure that the time of recompense had come. He prayed to St. Anne - his patron saint - and promised that if he ever got out of this situation alive, he would surely devote himself to a monastic life. He was spared, of course, and to the disgust of his parents entered the Order of St. Augustine.



As Luther had been the diligent student, so he became the zealous monk. With fastings and beatings of his own body, and privations of many kinds, Luther hoped to win pardon for his sins and peace with God. But, as he looked at those around him and his own inner condition, his frustration grew until, God in His sovereign mercy, turned him to His own precious truth.

As Luther read the Bible, the light of God's free salvation through the gift of faith began to dawn on him.

"Therefore, being justified by faith", he read, "we have peace with God throughout our Lord Jesus Christ". His heart rejoiced at the knowledge God had given him, and he began to "teach others also" as young Timothy had been exhorted to do. The movement grew, until that night of which we have spoken when Martin Luther's hammer struck a death blow at the heart of the Church of Rome.

From that night, his blood was sought; but God was with him. And as he stood arraigned before the might of the power of medieval Rome, his famous vow sealed all that he had done and would do for the cause of God's Truth ... "Here I stand; I can do no other".

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WHAT DO WE OWE TO THE REFORMATION?

(By Bishop J. C. Ryle)

THE REFORMATION DELIVERED ENGLAND FROM AN IMMENSE QUANTITY OF EVILS.

For one thing the Reformation delivered England from gross religious ignorance and spiritual darkness.

No doubt there was a professing Church of Christ in the land when Henry V111 ascended the throne. But, for any useful and soul saving purposes the English Church was practically dead, and if St. Paul had come out of his grave and visited it, I doubt if he would have called it a Church at all. The plain truth is that it was a Church without a Bible; and such a Church is as useless as a lighthouse without a light - a candlestick without a candle - or a steam engine without fire.

As to the CLERGY, as a general rule, their religion was the merest form, and scarcely deserved to be called Christianity at all. As to the LAITY, it is not too much to say that the bulk of them, except in the hour of trial, sickness and death, had no religion at all.

For another thing, the Reformation delivered England from the most grovelling, childish and superstitious practices in religion. I allude especially to the worship of RELICS. Destitute of the slightest scriptural knowledge, our forefathers were taught by the priests to seek spiritual benefit from the so-called relics of dead saints, and to treat them with divine honour.

At Reading Abbey, in Berkshire, the following things, among many others, were exhibited by the monks on great occasions, and most religiously honoured by the people. An angel with one wing - the spearhead which pierced our Saviour's side - two pieces of the Holy Cross - St. James' hand - St. Philip's stole - a bone of Mary Magdalene, and a bone of Salome.

At Bury St. Edmunds ... the coals that roasted St. Laurence, the parings of St. Edmund's toe nails, Thomas a'Becket's penknife and boots, and as many pieces of our Saviour's cross as would have made, if joined together, one large whole cross.

Records like these are so amazingly silly, as well as painful, that one hardly knows whether to laugh or to cry over them. But it is positively necessary to bring them forward,

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in order that men might know what was the religion of our forefathers in the days when Rome ruled the land before the Reformation.

For another thing, the Reformation delivered England from the degrading tyranny and swindling impostures of the Romish priesthood.

In the last days of the Pope's supremacy in this land, the laity were thoroughly "sat upon" by the clergy, and could hardly call their souls their own. One great object which the priests steadily kept in view was to enrich the Church and to fill the pockets of their own order. To accomplish this end they employed many devices. Sometimes they persuaded tender-hearted, affectionate persons to give money to get the souls of their relatives out of Purgatory by procuring Masses to be said for them. Sometimes they induced dying sinners to give vast tracts of land for abbeys and monasteries, in order to atone for their bad lives.

The other object, which they never forgot for a moment was to keep their own power. For this purpose they claimed to hold the keys of heaven literally and really. To them confession must be made. Without their absolution and extreme unction (last rites), no professing Christian could be saved. Without their masses no soul could be redeemed from Purgatory. To please and honour them were the first duties; to injure them was the greatest of sins.

The Reformation delivered England from the worst plague that can afflict a nation, I mean the plague of unholiness and immorality among the clergy.

The lives of the clergy, as a general rule, were simply scandalous, and the moral tone of the laity was naturally at the lowest ebb. The parochial priesthood became unhappily notorious for gluttony, drunkenness and gambling. "... loiterers of the alehouse bench - dicers, scarce able to say by rota their paternoster (Our Father), often unable to repeat the Ten Commandments - Mass priests who could just read their breviaries and no more - men often dubbed by the uncomplimentary names of Sir John Lack-Latin, Sir John Mumble-Mattins, or Babbling and Blind Sir John.

The very carvings still extant in some old ecclesiastical buildings tell a story in stone and wood which speak volumes to this day. Friars were often represented in those carvings as foxes preaching with the neck of a stolen goose peeping out of the hood behind - as wolves giving absolution, with a sheep muffled up their cloaks - as apes sitting by a sick man's bed, with a crucifix in one hand and with the other in the sufferer's pocket.

But the blackest spot on the character of our pre-reformation clergy in England is one of which it is painful to speak. I mean the impurity of their lives and their horrible contempt

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of the Seventh Commandment. The results of auricular confession, carried on by men bound by their vow never to marry, were such that I dare not enter into them. The consequences of shutting up herds of men and women in the prime of life, in monasteries and nunneries were such that I will not defile my paper by dwelling upon them.

But what shall we say to the modern proposals to give up the principles of the Reformation, and to return to the communion of the Church of Rome? What shall we say indeed! I say the man who makes such a proposal must have taken leave of his senses, or be utterly ignorant of the facts of history. Let the Israelite return to Egypt, if he will. Let the prodigal go back to his husks among the swine. Let the dog return to his vomit. But let no Englishman with brains in his head ever listen to the idea of exchanging Protestantism for Popery and returning to the bondage of the Church of Rome. No indeed! We owe a debt to the Reformation for having delivered us from an enormous mass of evil.

Taken from the booklet: "What Do We Owe To The Reformation?" by Bishop Ryle

Thank God for an open Bible,
Thank God for the men so true -
Wycliffe, Tyndale and Cranmer,
And a host of others too;
Some of them poor and humble.
Yet each one bearing a part
In that grand Reformation
Which reached old England's heart;
Driving away her darkness,
Opening her eyes to see
The errors that had bound her,
And the way to liberty.

Thank God for an open Bible!
Shall we not firmly hold
The precious truths they stood for,
Those martyr-saints of old?
Though dead they yet are speaking,
My friends, to you and me -
"We died to disperse the darkness,
We died to make men free.
Hold fast the truths we bought you,
Through flood and flame and sword;
Use well your open Bible,
The LIVING WORD OF GOD".

Author unknown

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*Preaching
From The
Past*

THIS SAME JESUS
(Acts 1 verse 11)

The Ark, when set in the holiest of all, had still the staves beside it (Chronicles 5 verse 9). By these it was known and marked to be the very same ark that wandered with Israel in the desert. The same ark that Moses approached, and over whose mercy seat he heard the voice of the Lord. The same ark at which the priest was wont to find acceptance on the great Day of Atonement.

Corresponding to this type, the Lord Jesus, now in the presence of God for us, is spoken of as if he still had the mark of his death; the Lamb "as it had been slain" (Revelations 5 verse 6). He has we are sure, the selfsame body that wandered and was weary here, and that hung upon the cross. By this he is known to be the same Saviour still. The very same to whom "the woman that was a sinner" came; on whose bosom John leant in such happy confidence; who forgave Peter so graciously. Yet, even as the ark was that before which Dagon fell, and in prying lightly into which the men of Bethshemesh perished; so this same Jesus is one for whom a man must deny himself, and take up the cross daily; and one whom they who handle his awful atonement with levity, will wail to look upon at his glorious coming. And never will he lose his tender feeling for his own; they glory round him will never alter it.

At his ascension he spared them the pang of a farewell, leaving them ere they were aware, while pronouncing blessing, and while the pronounced blessing was falling upon them like evening dew.

It will be thus at his coming again. Ever the same in tender and considerate feeling, he will prevent the possibility of a rising fear by catching them up to meet him in the air, ere ever they are well aware that he is come. And then shall he who kindly asked in the garden, "Woman, why weepest thou?", wipe away the last tear from their eyes, and forthwith conduct them into the joy of their Lord, in the Kingdom of his Father.

Andrew Bonar.

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BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Well Boys and Girls,

I recently made a mistake in an article I wrote when I said that it was Isaac Watts who wrote the hymn "Rock of Ages"; in fact, it was Augustus Toplady who wrote that hymn. The hymn I meant to mention that Isaac Watts wrote was "When I survey the Wondrous Cross"; but I made a mistake!

You know, we all make mistakes from time to time. Sometimes we make big mistakes and sometimes little ones. Let me tell you about a big mistake that a king once made.

The name of this king was Herod, and he reigned in the land of Judea at the time when Jesus was born. One day, wise men from the east come to visit Herod and they asked him this question; "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" When Herod heard this he was very worried indeed. What if this new born king should take away his throne? Secretly he called the wise men and told them to go to Bethlehem and search for the young child. "When you have found him", he told them, "come and tell me so that I too can go and worship him". But, boys and girls, this is not what he really wanted to do. He only wanted to find Jesus to kill him so that there would be no threat to his throne.

This was King Herod's BIG mistake! He thought that Jesus was a king who wanted an earthly throne like the throne of Judea that Herod himself sat on. But, Jesus hadn't come to be king of Judea, or any other country; He came to be the King of men and women and boys and girls - to make their hearts His throne. This is what the Bible teaches us, boys and girls, that Jesus came to be our Saviour. **"Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins"**. He came to be our Saviour AND our King. Is Jesus YOUR King?

Mrs Seaton

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Gleanings In the Psalms

(Psalm 9)

Here is David's song of praise to God...

FIRST - For his own experience of God's goodness towards himself, and God's righteous judgement against his enemies. (Verses 1-4)
SECOND - For the Lord's readiness to do the like work for ALL the godly. (Verses 5-10)
THIRD - he exhorteth the godly to praise God with him. (Verses 11-12)
FORTH - he prayeth for his own delivery out of his present distress. (Verses 13-14)
FIFTH - he hath assurance of the overthrow of all his enemies. (Verses 15-18)
LASTLY - for the execution of this overthrow he heartily prayeth. (Verses 19-20)

David Dickson

Verse 1. " I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will SHEW FORTH ALL THY MARVELLOUS WORKS".

When we have received any special good thing from the Lord, it is well, according as we have opportunities, to tell others of it. When the woman who had lost one of her ten pieces of silver found the missing portion of her money, she gathered her neighbours and her friends, together, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece that I had lost". We may do the same; we may tell friends and relations that we have received such-and-such a blessing, and that we trace it directly to the hand of God. Why have we not already done this? Is there a lurking unbelief as to whether it really came from God; or are we ashamed to own it before those who are accustomed to laugh at such things? Who knows so much of the marvellous works of God as His own people; if they be silent, how can we expect the world to see what he has done?

P. B. Power

Verse 5. "Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou has destroyed the wicked..."

Augustine applieth all this MYSTICALLY: "I will speak", saith he, "of all thy wonderful works;" and what so wonderful as the turning of the spiritual enemy backward, whether

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the devil, as when he said "Get thee behind me Satan"; or the old man, which is turned backward when his is put off, and the new man put on?

John Mayer

Verse 10. "And they that KNOW thy name will put their trust in thee..."

Though there can be knowledge without faith, yet there can be no faith without knowledge. Knowledge must carry the torch before faith. 2nd Timothy 1 verse 12. "For I KNOW whom I have believed". As in Paul's conversion a light from heaven "Shined round about him", so before faith be wrought, God shines in with a light upon the understanding. A blind faith is as bad as a dead faith. Devout ignorance damns; which condemns the Church of Rome that thinks it is a piece of their religion to be kept in ignorance; these set up an altar to an unknown God. They say ignorance is the mother of devotion; but where the sun is set in the understanding, it must needs be night in the affections.

Thomas Watson

Verse 12. "When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: HE FORGETTENT NOT THE CRY OF THE HUMBLE".

Prayer is a haven to the shipwrecked man; an anchor to them that are sinking in the waves; a staff to the limbs that totter; a mine of jewels to the poor; a healer of diseases, and a guardian of health.

Chrysostom

Verse 14. "That I may show forth ALL thy praise..."

To show forth All God's praise is to enter largely into the work. An occasional "GOD I THANK THEE" is no fit return for a perpetual stream of rich benefits.

William Plumer

Verse 15. "The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made..."

Whilst they are digging pits for others, there is a pit a-digging and a grave a-making for themselves. Alas! They are but plotting their own ruin, and building a Babel which will fall upon their own heads. And usually the deliverance of God's children is joined with the destruction of His enemies; Saul's death and David's deliverance; the Israelites' deliverance, and the Egyptians' drowning. The Church and her opposites are like the scales of a balance; when one goes up the other goes down.

Richard Sibbes

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Verse 16. "...The wicked is snared in the work of his own hand".

The wages that sin offers the sinner are life, pleasure, and profit; but the wages it pays him with are death, torment and destruction. He that would understand the falsehood and deceit of sin must compare its promises and payments together.

Robert South

Verse 17. "The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God".

That person is here spoken of as a "wicked" person that "forgets God". And, therefore, though you cannot say of such a one, he will be drunk, or he will swear, or he will oppress, yet, if you can say he will forget God, you say enough to speak him under wrath, and to turn him into hell without remedy.

John Howe

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