

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION AND
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest criticisms of the church in recent times is that Christians are becoming inconsistent, hypocritical and worldly. Too many Christians, the clergy and laity alike, preach one thing and do the opposite. The rate at which both the clergy and the laity are being involved in unwholesome practices is never to the credit of the Christian faith. Vices of various descriptions are rising at such an alarming rate among Christians that it won't be long before the Saints are rivaling the world's expertise at sin. This has been cause for serious concern among well-meaning stakeholders of the church. Such was the position of the church in the medieval period. Consequently, it is the assertion in some quarters that the apostasy of the medieval church is with us once again and that the church is in need of another Evangelical Awakening. Historically speaking however, the Protestant Reformation appears to have brought certain decorum to the church of the time. It is in this regard that this study examines the Protestant Reformation with the aim of drawing certain lessons which could serve to correct the anomalies of worldliness and like vices, which are presently ravaging the church. This work employed principally library and archival research. The researcher made use of on materials on Protestant Reformation using on-line libraries, journal articles archives, books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, magazines etc. The resources at J.C. Pool Library of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso were of immense assistance for this work. The Bible was also a great resource alongside all the above. The approaches are definitive, descriptive, analytical and mostly comparative. The study reveals that the Protestant Reformation has series of lessons which the contemporary Christians can learn from. These include the increased spirituality among the laity. Practices such as a renewed interest in the study of the Bible characterized this period of time. The research thus establishes the relevance of the Protestant Reformation to our contemporary time in the following recommendations among others. Readiness on the part of the few who will not only dare to publicly denounce all corrupt practices but also provide a way out, Bibles in languages people understand, sound theological education for all intending religious leaders, the birth of new denominations should not be seen as solution to these menaces in Christendom, rather the awakening and sanitizing of the existing ones.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Why was there a Reformation? First, there was a Reformation because there was a Gospel that had to be rediscovered in all its fullness. When it was rediscovered, all kinds of reorientation had to take place. Second, there was a Reformation because the church had run into all kinds of problems, and someone had to sort them out. We can rediscover that Gospel today in any perspective it has or is still losing its purity. The Reformation is about that process of rediscovering, and bringing the gospel to life. Also we are looking at a church today that very often has many of the same problems we find in the late Middle Ages. There is a need for all adherents of Christianity to think through what we can do about these problems. The Reformation gives us some bearings, some landmarks, some ideas about how to address today's issues, using the resources, the methods, and above all, the inspiration that comes from the past.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the effects and implications of the Protestant reformation discussed above, the writer recommends the following to the Christendom a whole:

1. The Bible is now available in indigenous languages unlike it used to be with the Reformation era when the main initial struggle was to make the Bible "open" for every member of the church world. The Church should however encourage the study of these scriptures in our respective languages with the emphasis on comprehensive study of biblical foundations to a number of the tenets of our faith. Since most people, in almost all places, understand the native languages more in-depth than the lingual franca of that region, more positive responses to the teaching of the Bible would be guaranteed. In the same vein, more versions and study aids should be produced in

various vernaculars as this helps adherents to be more grounded in the course they have given themselves to in the same way the reformers were.

2. With myriad of corruption common in Christendom today, there is need for preacher like Luther who will pioneer the movement to reform the decadence in our faith. It is the opinion of the writer that no one will be able to do what we saw in the reformers as examined in this project who is not prepared to be step on toes either directly or indirectly. Reforms never come cheaply.

3. For a needed "reformation" in Christendom to take place in this twenty-first century, sound theological understanding is necessary. This is in contrast to the erroneous opinion of some that theological education can be dispensed with. The few reformers considered were men of high and thorough learning. Luther for example was doctor in theology as far back as sixteenth century when universities were just springing up in the world. It took learned men to advance and reform the then church, and I think not so much can be done by anyone with a lesser qualifications either from organized institutions or any other way.

4. In the attempt to reform the Christendom, the birth of another denomination will not solve the problem. These had been the trend though not the original intention as examined in this work. Any reform that must come to the church of Christ today must be completely divested of secret ambition or tendency to become another church group that will later metamorphose into a denomination. It is clear that many of the most distinguished historical Christian leaders were not denominationalists; these men of God seemed to share a dislike for denominational sectarianism and a love for Jesus Christ's Gospel. Most importantly the Bible itself provides no room for denominationism; the teachings of the New Testament point us rather towards non-denominational unity, oneness of mind, a single united church. If you are in a

denomination then be sure to follow the Bible above any denominational bias or pattern of doing things. Remember, the true church is not necessarily made up of those people you see on a Sunday. Rather, it comprises of those who by faith in Jesus Christ, are your brothers and sisters in the one true church of God.

5. With recent negative attitudes of ministers to the study of the original languages with which the scriptures were written, to get servant of God to correct the anomalies in Christendom will be difficult. Many believe that it is almost unnecessary studying these languages simply because many other aids to study such as scores of versions of the Bible, Bible Commentaries, Bible dictionaries, Bible Concordances are now available. It should be remembered that all of the "accurate" or "reliable" versions were got from scholars who understood these languages very well. Most of the vanguards of the reformation era were also scholars of great reputation with unparalleled understanding of these languages.

6. As has ever been true in the history of the church, it is true today that "the purity of the churches, unity among brethren, and ultimate victory over the world" rests upon the attitude of the members toward the word of God and the pattern of the church revealed therein. The church must not adapt itself to the changing conditions of the times if it means a departure from the divine pattern.

7. The cry that the church is not doing its duty along some lines of truth is no justification for man-made schemes for the work of the church. The church operated in all phases of its mission on full scale in the first church in the book of Acts of the Apostles. This can be done today. Those who detect failure on the part of the church in any phase of its work should not attempt to "reform" conditions as they are but they should get about to restore the pristine purity of the church in practice as well as doctrine.