

Friday 31 October is the birthday of the Evangelical churches. On 31 October 1517 Dr Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation with his bold stand at the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

Western civilisation has been blessed with the greatest freedoms, productivity and prosperity ever known in history. The liberty, standards of justice and creativity enjoyed in Western civilisation is a direct result of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught: **But seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.** Matthew 6:33

It was Martin Luther's earnest quest for peace with God, and his intensive study of the Scriptures, which led him to challenge the unethical fund-raising tactics of the papacy and launch the Protestant Reformation. Luther's love for the Word of God and his dedication to truth led him to challenge the entire ecclesiastical and political authority of the Roman Catholic church and the Holy Roman Empire.

Unless I am convinced by Scripture, or by clear reasoning, that I am in error for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves I cannot recant, for I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one's conscience. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. So help me God. Amen.

In this incredibly courageous stand against the assembled political and religious might of Europe, Luther argued for freedom of conscience based upon the authority of Scripture. Until that time the prevailing practice was authoritarianism, both in church and state. All religions and cultures supported a monarchy, aristocracy and authoritarianism. However Martin Luther and the Reformers maintained that, because of the depravity of man, no human authority could be trusted as absolute. He rejected ecclesiastical totalitarianism and championed the principle of **Sola Scriptura** the Bible alone is our ultimate authority.

By translating the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew into the common tongue, and making it widely available to both nobles and peasants, Luther championed universal education and literacy, the Priesthood of all Believers, freedom of conscience and religious liberty.

The Protestant doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers became the foundation for modern representative republics. The equality of all men before God and the Law underlined the absolutism of monarchs and popes who set themselves above the Law.

Instead of the prevailing **Rex Lex** (the king is the law), the Reformers championed **Lex Rex** (the Law is king!) No one is above God's Law. Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Everyone is under God's Law. **Sola Scriptura** eroded the foundations of ecclesiastical and political totalitarianism. The Protestant emphasis on the Priesthood of all Believers and the supreme authority of Scripture led to the concept of representative government and constitutional authority as the supreme law of the land.

By emphasising the Biblical doctrine of Faith as a gift of God, Luther undermined the Catholic Inquisition and provided the theological foundations for religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

The social implications of this religious Reformation were enormous. The doctrine of **Sola Scriptura** led to constitutionalism. The Priesthood of all Believers led to the concept of representative republics and democratic forms of government. Religious liberty and freedom of conscience led to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of association and all the other out-workings of political and social freedom.

Ideas have consequences. There is no doubt that the Reformation in Europe during the 16th Century has to be seen as one of the most important epochs in the history of

the world. The Reformation gave us the Bible ♦ now freely available in our own languages. Few people today realise that the first Bibles printed into English had to be printed in Germany and smuggled into England in bales of cotton from Holland. And that the first Bible translator, William Tyndale, was burned at the stake for the crime of translating the Bible into English. Seven mothers and fathers were burned alive at Coventry for teaching their own children The Ten Commandments, the Lord♦s Prayer, and the Apostles Creed - in English.</p> <p>The sacrifices made by the Reformers and the far-reaching impact of their courageous application of the Word of God to every area of life, needs to be rediscovered. The Christian Church has made more positive changes on earth than any other force or movement in History.</p> <p>Most of the languages of the world were first codified and put into writing by Christian missionaries. More schools and universities have been started by Christians than any other religion, nation or group. Christian Reformers and missionaries have succeeded in bringing about the abolition of slavery, cannibalism, child sacrifice and widow burning. Those countries which enjoy the most civil liberties, are those lands where the Gospel of Christ has penetrated the most.</p> <p>The Gospel of Jesus Christ is life-changing, history making and nation transforming. If it doesn♦t change your life and the lives of those around you, then it♦s not the Biblical Gospel.</p> <p>The Reformers emphasised God♦s Sovereignty, that Scripture alone is our final authority, that Christ alone is the Head of the Church, and that justification is by God♦s Grace alone, on the basis of the finished work of Christ, received by Faith alone. The Reformers♦ teaching on the depravity of man, the Covenant and church government have influenced positive political and social developments in liberty throughout the Western world and beyond, establishing checks and balances, the separation of powers and constitutional authority.</p> <p>All of us are beneficiaries of this tremendous movement for Faith and Freedom. If you love liberty, you need to re-examine the history and principles of the Reformation. Visit www.ReformationSA.org for inspirational character studies and articles on the doctrines and events which God has used to transform whole nations and bring about the greatest spiritual Revivals ever known.</p> <p>A wide variety of Reformation resources, including dynamic Reformation character studies, lectures, 12 CD box set and sermons on audio CD and MP3, and The Greatest Century of Reformation, The Power of Prayer Handbook and Reforming our Families books are available from The Reformation Society.</p> <p>Does your church, or school, plan to celebrate the Reformation this October? If you are in the Cape Town area, please join us for the Reformation and Revival Seminar Saturday 25 October in Cape Town; and Friday 31 October, Reformation Celebration Service at the Huguenot Monument in Franschoek at 1pm), or invite Reformation Society speakers to address your school or church.</p> <p>You can also organise for inspiring Reformation films to be shown at your cell group or college.</p> <p>If you want to transform your community, and if you are praying for Revival, then contact the Reformation Society for resources you can use to inspire your family, school and congregation with examples of excellence.</p> <p>♦Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?♦ Psalm 85:6</p>