

Reformation or Desecration

– How a Hallowed Eve became Halloween –

Christians in many lands will celebrate Reformation Day on the 31st of this month. 2007 marks the 490th Anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther nailing his “95 Theses against Indulgences” to the door of the Schloss Kirsche (Castle Church) in the university city of Wittenberg, Germany. The hammer blows were felt all the way to Rome. The theological fire thus ignited spread across Europe.

History is important because it is His story. We ignore or forget it at our peril. We need to remember on October 31 that the Protestant Reformation changed forever the history of Western civilization and quite possibly led to the establishment of the United States of America.

Why did Luther choose October 31 to initiate his attack on indulgences? Possibly because it was a Hallowed Eve in the Church calendar. From the 8th Century the church celebrated All Hallows (All Saints) Day on November 1st to remember its martyrs who had died for their faith in Jesus Christ. It was like a Christian “Memorial Day.”

The night before All Saints Day became a ‘Hallowed Eve’ – a night to prepare for the coming Holy Day. The celebration of All Saints Day signified the triumph of faith over death, and thus gave the people hope for the time when Death, the *last enemy*, would be destroyed.

During the Dark Ages in Europe, Ireland, Scotland and England, pagan Druids honored their dead on October 31st. Celtic settlers held festivals and ceremonies designed to drive off oppressive evil spirits. Autumn, the time of falling leaves and prelude to winter, symbolized the death of nature. Bonfires were lighted to fend off the coming winter spirits. Treats were given to appease their wicked tricks.

By the beginning of the 16th Century true Christianity was virtually unrecognizable. The Church had moved away from its original message of salvation by grace through faith as the gift of God. Our Lord Jesus, Who promised to build His Church and not allow the gates of hell, or Rome, to prevail against it, raised up a succession of godly men to bring the ship of faith back onto God’s intended course.

In 1517 an intenerate Dominican monk, Johann Tetzel, toured Europe selling “indulgences,” to pay for the Pope’s extravagant living and to build St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. The indulgences allowed the buyer to break Church rules concerning fasts, marriage and adultery. This papal salesman *extraordinaire* prompted Luther to protest the unethical fund-raising tactics of an apostate Church.

Luther’s love for the Word of God and his dedication to truth led him to challenge the entire religious and political authority of the Holy Roman Empire. Rejecting the notion of papal infallibility and ecclesiastical totalitarianism, he championed the principle of *Sola Scriptura* – the Bible

alone is our ultimate authority.

When summoned to Worms in April 1521 by the recently crowned 21-year old Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Luther stood before a stunning array of political and ecclesiastical big wigs. There was no opportunity for debate or to defend his doctrines. He was asked two questions: (1) to confirm that the publications on the table were his and (2) whether he would recant and declare them heretical. He acknowledged that the writings were his. When pressed by the court, in Latin, to recant, Luther responded in German: “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. [] Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. So help me God. Amen.**” The rest is His Story.

Dr. Peter Hammond notes: “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.” These were the basic building blocks put in place by our Founding Fathers years later at the birth of our Nation, the United States of America.

Sola Scriptura eroded the foundations of ecclesiastical and political totalitarianism. 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 King of kings and Lord of lords. The Protestant emphasis on the Priesthood of all Believers led to the concept of representative republics and democratic forms of government. It fostered freedom of religion and freedom of conscience which led to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of association and all the other out-workings of political and social freedom.

The social implications of the Reformation were enormous. It’s easy to forget how much we owe to the courageous Reformers of 500 years ago, who risked their lives and laid their liberty on the line that we might have the Bible in our own language, our freedom to worship God plus our educational opportunities which have led to extraordinary scientific achievements. That is the real significance of October 31. Don’t be tricked into forgetting this magnificent treat.

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