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## **The Impact of Christian Reformation - 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

(notes to accompany video update of November 5, 2017)

On October 31<sup>st</sup> Christians celebrated the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther nailing the famous 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517. Luther strongly opposed the use of indulgences on the part of the Roman Catholic Church.

**What was the Christian Reformation** - In a nutshell it was the return to the authority of the Bible as God's Word and revelation to humankind. The key doctrine of justification by faith was the kernel of essential truth, that by grace, produced a massive transformation of hearts and minds that inevitably spilled over into all of life.

### **Key Impacts of the Reformation**

#### **1. Value of Human Life**

- **Human Rights.** The concept of universal human rights and equality comes exclusively from the biblical teaching that all people are created in the image of God.
- **Women.** To be treated with equal dignity and value to a man. Despite different roles in society women are equal to men in human value. In most cultures, this is not the case, including secular humanistic cultures. In reality, women are treated as the property of men within virtually all the major non-Christian religions. Aristotle said that a woman was somewhere between a free man and a slave. In the Greco-Roman world, similar to today, baby girls are murdered under the guise of gender selection. This is antithetical to Christian values. The Reformation and countries influenced by it, place a heightened importance on the protection of women, widows and orphans. This includes legal protection in wills and estates. This is not the case in most countries around the world. Finally, Christians do not believe in cohabitation. If a Christian man wants to live with a woman he has to marry her. This provides women far greater security. In addition, the pagan double standard of allowing married men to have extramarital sex and mistresses was forbidden. In all these ways, Christian women enjoyed far greater security and equality than did women in the surrounding cultures. I am not even going to mention the barbaric practices that were outlawed throughout Africa, India and South America as the influence of Christianity spread through missionaries.

- **Children.** In the ancient world, for example in classical Rome or Greece, infanticide was not only legal, it was applauded. Killing a Roman was murder, but it was commonly held in Rome that killing one's own children could be an act of beauty. It was the early Christian church that ultimately brought an end to infanticide. The modern pro-life movement is largely Christian. Age of consent laws, abolition of incest and sexual relations with children are thoroughly Christian teachings and up until recently were completely rejected as wicked and evil acts.
- **Slavery.** While it is true that Christians have owned slaves in history, it is clear that this was a distortion of biblical teaching. Early Christianity elevated the roles of those oppressed in society, by for example, accepting women and slaves as full members in the church. Slaves participated equally in worship and the community and were afforded contract and property rights. Christians were the first people in history to oppose slavery systematically. Early Christians purchased slaves in the markets simply to set them free. It is also true that slavery was ended in great measure by Christian activists. For example, historians credit the British evangelical William Wilberforce as the primary force behind the ending of the international slave trade (which happened prior to the American Civil War). Two-thirds of the members of the American abolition society in 1835 were Christian ministers. Unfortunately, in countries with little Christian influence slavery today is now a reality.
- **Cannibalism.** Christian missionaries are credited with halting the awful practice of cannibalism in many primitive societies dominated by false religions and paganism. Other wicked practices include, child sacrifices, female mutilation, burning of widows, binding of women's feet, sadomasochism, animistic and occult practices ....

## 2. Marriage and the Family

- Christianity and the Reformation promoted as the norm, heterosexual monogamous love. History has clearly shown that this is the only basis for a lasting and exclusive relationship between a man and a woman. It is also by far the best relationship to raise productive and healthy children. Up until recently those living in Western countries have taken the Christian family for granted!
- Biblical family remains the most powerful structure for the elimination of poverty and cultivating a virtuous and productive people that are not

dependent on the State. Christian marriage is created by God, and is a reflection of His character, it is not an arbitrary arrangement created by the State. Societies with strong healthy marriages, evidenced by low divorce rates and the will to reproduce are by far, the wealthiest and most productive. All cultures that undermine Christian marriage are poor, violent, thoroughly corrupt, drug invested and dependent on an oppressive State. Just a quick look at inner city life in most of our major cities in the world will shine a clear light on this tragic situation.

### 3. Education

- The phenomenon of education for the masses has its roots in the Protestant Reformation. In order to promote Bible literacy, Christians have been leaders in education. This trend was accelerated with the advent of the printing press at about the same time as the Protestant Reformation. Many of the world's languages were first set to writing by Christian missionaries in order for people to read the Bible.
- For the first 200 years in America, children's reading texts emphasized biblical literacy. The emphasis on literacy was so intense in colonial America, that John Quincy Adams said in the early 1800's that the illiteracy rate was only 4/10<sup>th</sup> of 1 percent. By comparison, it has been estimated that in America today, 40 million people are functionally illiterate. As Christianity wanes in influence the educational (ability to think and read) level of the broader population will continue to plummet.
- All but one of the first 123 colleges in colonial America were Christian institutions. While these universities have lost their Christian identities, it is interesting to read the founding statements of these schools. Harvard, for example, was founded on this statement: ***“Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life”***; John 17:3.

### 4. Structure of Government

- There is no doubt that the concept and system of constitutional checks and balances system is a direct result of the Reformation and the Biblical doctrine of sin. If mankind is sinful, then power should never be centralized in a few hands and checks and balances need to be in place

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to protect the masses from tyranny. Western democracies post the Reformation, understood the importance of this protection in order to maintain social order.

- The Western world's foundational idea concerning the "Rule of Law" rather than the authority of man and the king traces directly back to the Old Testament, beginning with the Ten Commandments. God and His law is supreme, not men and their arbitrary laws.
- The idea that all men are created equal as enshrined in the US Declaration of Independence is a thoroughly Biblical doctrine, this idea is ludicrous within a Darwinian world view.
- The existence and importance of moral absolutes is a thoroughly Biblical concept. You cannot have moral absolutes, without a personal and absolute God. Without moral absolutes, a culture and society will eventually collapse and the rights and freedoms of the population will be subjugated to the State as the arbiter of "truth."
- The modern idea of limited government emanated directly from Reformation teaching.

## **5. Law, Economics & Work Ethic**

- Democracy, constitutionalism, and religious liberty were not the only social consequences of the Reformation. They were the beginning of a revolution that had implications for the world, and are still felt 500 years later.
- Harold Berman of Emory University pointed out that "the key to the renewal of law in the West from the sixteenth century on was the Protestant concept of the power of the individual, by God's grace, to change nature and to create new social relations through the exercise of his will. The Protestant concept of the individual became central to the development of the modern law of property and contract...." This, along with Luther's idea that all callings--all labor, not just the labor of monks and nuns--could be done to the glory of God, led to the development of the free market economy. A free society and a free market were the political and economic expressions of the religious ideas of the Reformation. Capitalism was the economic practice of which Christianity was the theory.

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- One of Luther's most brilliant followers, John Calvin, systematized the theology of the Reformation. The seventeenth-century Calvinists laid the foundations for both English and American civil rights and liberties: freedom of speech, press, and religion, the privilege against self-incrimination, the independence of juries, and the right of habeas corpus, the right not to be imprisoned without cause. The nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke referred to Calvin as the "virtual founder of America."
- It is noteworthy that Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was written in 1776, the same year as the birth of America. But many historians credit theologian John Calvin from 200 years earlier as the person who is most responsible for putting together the principles that were always in the Bible into a system adapted by the American founders.
- Private property rights are traced directly to the Ten Commandments recorded for us in Exodus 20. "*Thou shalt not steal, and thou shalt not covet*", *assume the reality of private property!*
- The German sociologist Max Weber wrote a book in 1908 titled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in which he argued that capitalism historically emerged in Protestant countries because they inculcated those virtues that led to the development of capitalism: hard work, honesty, frugality, thrift, punctuality. These virtues, coupled with the idea of a calling, provided the impetus ending serfdom and establishing a free political and economic order. The theology and values of the Bible, rediscovered by the Protestant Reformers in the 16th century, have been the principal ideas creating what we know as Western civilization.
- For example, the biblical doctrines of *self-reliance* and *self-denial* are the foundation of the famous "Protestant work ethic." These doctrines are at the heart of our economic (and political) way of life. A distinction can be made between **biblical** capitalism and **evolutionary** capitalism. The emphasis on biblical capitalism is on the importance of **servanthood**--a key teaching of Jesus. Evolutionary capitalism, on the other hand, relies solely on the **survival of the fittest**. Anyone who doubts the relationship of Biblical ideas to free enterprise need only to note the stark contrast with communism. Communism is specifically an **atheistic** system that relies on the non-biblical notion that all men are *good* (thus will work for the common good). Communism has been an economic, moral and social failure of epic proportions.

## 6. Scientific Inquiry

- Historians have rightly argued that modern science has its roots in Christianity. They point out that other world religions, for example those that express a worldview of *fatalism* (everything is fatalistically determined) or believe in a worldview of *illusion* (that is, the physical world is an illusion) never produce a vibrant scientific inquiry! Just travel around the world and visit most of the countries in the world and this is brutally obvious. Science does not arise from pagan worldviews. Animism, paganism and all other systems of thought rooted in superstition have no interest in studying a rational universe made by a personal-infinite Creator who has made human kind in His image to be stewards of the creation.
- Christianity on the other hand, is based on the notion that there exists a rational God who is the source of rational truth. Without a Creator, there cannot be any basis for scientific laws. How absurd is the concept of the uniformity of nature, without God upholding the universe according to His immutable nature?
- Evidence for this view is that nearly all the founders of modern science were Christians or operated in within the context of a Christian worldview. These include men such as Keppler, Boyle, Pascal, Pasteur, Newton, etc.

## 7. Summary

- It was not Luther's intention to create a new economic or political structure. Luther's focus was to proclaim the gospel or good news of the Bible, that sinful mankind can be made right with a Holy God through the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. Luther and the other leaders of the Reformation dedicated their lived to a far more important activity than building an earthly city. But when people change, when their hearts change, cultures, laws and governments must change. In fact, when hearts and minds are shaped by Truth everything changes!
- Western civilization was an unintended byproduct of Luther's faithfulness to the Bible and all those that came after him. The Reformation put the Kingdom of God first not the kingdom of man or the kingdom of false religion. The results were just as Christ said they would be:

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***"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: They neither toil nor spin. And yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6).***

- Justification by faith--the righteousness of God imputed to sinners--is the only foundation of eternal salvation and for earthly civilization. The Reformers sought first the Kingdom of God and all these other benefits and blessings followed. The blessing we call Western civilization was built completely on Reformation truths.
- An overarching theme given to the world by Christianity and the Reformation is the equality of human beings, and the preciousness and worth of every human life. If the West continues to turn its back on Christianity and the truths of the Reformation, it will also endanger the essential values that Christianity brought into the world.
- If secularism or false religions continue to gain in the hearts and minds of Canadians and those in the West we will inevitably witness increased abortion, a return to infanticide, the promotion of incest and pedophilia, growth in polyamory, abuse of women, slavery, even more radical redefinition of the family, drug use and abuse, violence from the home to the streets of our countries, the revival of eugenic theories of human superiority, transhumanism, the suppression of freedoms of religion and expression, and eventually political tyranny. In fact, look at the majority of countries in the world and these things are already very prevalent. Why is it that there are only a handful of countries in the world people want to immigrate to? Is there a desirable country to live in today that was not dramatically impacted by the Reformation 500 years ago?

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- Without Christianity and the impact of Reformation teaching permeating a society and culture, that culture will be one that is nothing more than a living hellhole! The history of nations provides us with conclusive evidence! The most vibrant, most prosperous and free countries today, 500 years after the Reformation are **all** countries that were graciously reformed by the Reformation!

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