

Dear Friends,

In this quarter, particularly on 31 October, Christians around the world will be remembering the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. As Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, the teaching of the church focused on death and judgment. Sadly, corrupt or lazy clergy used people's fears to exploit them, not least through the sale of indulgences (which in common thought amounted to buying forgiveness).

In 1517, Martin Luther, a German monk, wrote a series of propositions for scholarly debate. Although he originally wrote these in Latin (the language of the academic world at the time), they were soon translated into German and are commonly known as the '95 Theses'. In those days, the relationship between the church and the state was much closer than it is today. Luther soon found himself involved in court cases for publicly questioning the church's authority.

Luther was not the only one to protest at the state of the church. Other 'Protestants' included Zwingli in Switzerland and Calvin in France. In England, reformers – including Thomas Cranmer, author of so much of the Book of Common Prayer – furthered the Protestant cause by taking advantage of King Henry VIII's desire to have his marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled so that he could marry Anne Boleyn.

The traditional Protestant understanding of Christian theology has been expressed in five statements. It is my conviction that these are still important in the church today. They commonly retain their Latin tags which is why I am using them here. *Sola Scriptura* is the principle that scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church's life. From this the church derives its integrity, its moral authority and direction. We remain committed to preaching and teaching the Bible.

*Solus Christus* is the principle of Christ-centred faith. Salvation (being right with God) is accomplished by the work of Christ alone. Through his perfect life, and his death in our place, the Lord Jesus Christ has done everything necessary for us to be at peace with God. *Sola Gratia* reminds us that only God's grace can save us. The Holy Spirit works in our lives to bring us to faith but even that faith is given to us by the grace of God.

Justification (being made right with God) is by grace alone, through faith alone because of Christ alone. This teaching is summed up under the heading *Sola Fide*. While we can learn from other disciplines (sociology, for example) and from marketing methods and research (which can guide us with good advertising and publicity), the content of the message (the faith once and for all delivered to the saints, Jude 3) cannot change and yet still remain the Christian gospel.

A good trend in the church in recent years has been to think more carefully about 'worship'. I am probably not the greatest champion of many modern hymns and songs when we compare these with the classical works of the eighteenth century. However, whether our preference is for worship songs (e.g. Songs of Fellowship), modern hymns (e.g. many recent compositions in Singing the Faith), Victorian and early twentieth century hymns (many of which are still popular) or classical hymns of Wesley and Watts, we must subject these and our prayers and preaching to the same test.

Does what we say and sing in worship and proclaim and hear in preaching reflect Biblical faith? Is it centred on God and all that he has done for us in Christ? Is it rightfully 'all about you, Jesus' or is too much of it about me/us? That's not to deny the need for personal faith or the opportunity to express it. However, Christian worship is not about feeling good about ourselves but offering praise, thanksgiving, confession, hope and assurance – all to the glory of God – *Soli Deo Gloria*.

God bless

*John Haley*