



A MONUMENTAL

DATE IN HISTORY

by PASTOR STEPHEN BOHR

1517 was a monumental year in church history. On All-Saints Day, October 31, the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, nailed his 95 *Theses* on the cathedral door in Wittenberg, an act that many church historians consider the official beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

Although Luther's politically incorrect message spearheaded the Refor-

mation, there were others before him that softened the soil, some of them losing their lives in the process. Before Luther, there was John Wycliffe, the Morning Star of the Reformation, who escaped the papacy's death sentence. The papacy, not being able to kill him, excommunicated him *post-mortem*, had his body exhumed and burned and his ashes were thrown into the River Swift, which flows through Butterworth, England.

Others were not so fortunate. The papacy tried John Huss in Constance, convicted him and burned him at the stake. The papacy mercilessly persecuted the Waldensians and many of them paid the price for their faithfulness to the Truth with the sacrifice of their lives. Those who stood for Truth during this dark period of church history did not 'love their lives unto the death' (Revelation 12:11). They loved the Truth and above all, He who is the 'way, the truth and the life.' (John 14:6).

God called these Reformers to restore truths that were lost during the dark ages. Like someone coming out of a dark dungeon, God only gave these heroes the light that their

spiritual eyes could bear at the time. However, there was so much more to do! God expected the Reformation to grow and thrive until the full restoration of 'every divine institution.'

So where is Protestantism today on the 500th anniversary of the reformation? Has contemporary Protestantism grown in its knowledge of and its faithfulness to Scripture or has it degenerated into a Babylonian complacency beyond repair?

The Protestant Reformation is famous for its five 'alone' (SOLA) statements:

- **Scripture Alone**
- **Christ Alone**
- **Grace Alone**
- **Faith Alone**
- **God's Glory Alone**



The question is what motivated these five SOLAS? The only way to answer this question is to consider the historical context in which they surfaced. Karl Barth, one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, once stated that the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism can be described with one simple three letter word, the word 'and'.

PROTESTANTS

Scripture Alone
Christ Alone
Grace Alone
Faith Alone
God's Glory Alone

ROMAN CATHOLICS

The Bible **and** tradition
Christ **and** Mary
Grace **and** our own efforts
Faith **and** our good works
God's glory **and** man's

Protestantism today has not only failed to advance in truth, it has become powerless because it is so much like Catholicism. It has regressed from the times of Luther and is no longer protesting anything. God gave the papal harlot ‘time to repent’ during the 1,260 years but ‘she would not’ (Revelation 2:21) so her door of mercy closed in 1798 when she received the deadly wound. God also gave Protestantism time to fulfill her divine commission, however, when the churches expelled the Millerites from their communion leading up to 1844 and rejected the message of Christ’s soon return, their door of mercy closed. Since then, Protestantism has embraced further heresies and has fallen deeper and deeper into what Ellen White called ‘infidel hardihood’. Several factors have gagged Protestantism and muted its voice. Here are some:

First, the prevalence of a **Prosperity Gospel**. The idea of those who preach this kind of ‘gospel’ is that God wants all Christians to be equally rich and prosperous in this world. This false gospel has led the celebrity preachers of the land to focus on temporal prosperity in the here and now rather than eternal treasures in the sweet by and by. Like the prosperous man who built ever-bigger barns for ‘his’ goods, they feel comfortable here, thinking that the Lord has delayed

His coming and therefore they must gather as much of this world as they can while they wait.

*“Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully, and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, since I have no room to store **my** crops? So he said, I will do this: I will pull down **my** barns and build greater, and there I will store all **my** crops and **my** goods. And I will say to **my** soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up **for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.** But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure **for himself**, and is not rich toward God.”* (Luke 12:16-21)

This focus on the here and now rather than the sweet by and by has led these ‘commercial preachers’ to a lifestyle of corporate jets, lavish mansions, gaudy attire and worldly fame and fortune. It is a proven fact that worldly prosperity tends to destroy the desire for the coming of Jesus because we are quite comfortable here, that is, until we are on our deathbed! Ellen White wrote:

*“Many have urged with great enthusiasm that all men should have an **equal share** in the temporal blessings of God; but **this was not the purpose** of the Creator. Christ has said that we shall have the poor always with us. The poor, as well as the rich, are the purchase of His blood;*



*and among His professed followers, in most cases, the former serve Him with singleness of purpose, while the latter are constantly fastening their affections on their earthly treasures, and **Christ is forgotten.** The cares of this life and the greed for riches **eclipse the glory of the eternal world.** It would be the greatest misfortune that has ever befallen mankind if all were to be placed upon an equality in worldly possessions.”* Counsels on Health, p. 230

Are the majority of those who are comfortable in this world willing to give up all, even life itself, for the cause of truth? Hardly. Jesus was certainly correct when He stated that it is ‘easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ (Matthew 19:23)

2 A second factor in the demise of Protestantism is the de-emphasis on the importance

of **sound doctrine** and a dependence on feelings and emotions as the definitive source of truth. Post-modern thinking and the Emerging Church Movement have been foremost in destroying the idea that there is such a thing as absolute doctrinal truth. As we know, this diminishing of doctrinal truth will lead Protestants to unite with Catholics on common points of doctrine while setting aside those points that they consider less essential and inconsequential:

*“The wide **diversity of belief** in the Protestant churches is regarded by many as decisive proof that no effort to secure a forced uniformity can ever be made. However, there has been for years, in churches of the Protestant faith, a strong and growing sentiment in favor of a union based upon **common points of doctrine.** To secure such a union, the discussion of subjects upon which **all were not agreed**—however impor-*

tant they might be from a Bible standpoint—must necessarily **be waived**.” GC, p. 444

Paul had already predicted that in the last days, Christians would not endure **sound doctrine** but would pile up teachers to scratch their itching ears, teaching them that they can have their cake and eat it too, that is to say, that they can be saved while they hang on to their own sinful desires (2 Timothy 4:3).

3 A third factor in the fall of Protestantism is **political activism** with Roman Catholics to influence the government to implement their agenda. The Christian right desires to make Christ the ruler of this world and its political systems. For example, Christian conservatives applauded Donald Trump for weakening the force of the Johnson Amendment by instructing the IRS to go easy on non-profits that support specific political parties. Ellen White described the aspirations of the National Reform Movement in the late 1800’s (aspirations that will recur vigorously in the future):

“They desire to make our Lord the ruler of the kingdoms of this world, the ruler in its courts and camps, its legislative halls, its palaces and market places. They expect Him to rule through legal enactments, enforced by human authority. Since Christ is not now here in person, they themselves will undertake to act in His stead, to execute the laws of His king-

dom.” The Desire of Ages, p. 509

4 A fourth factor in the muting of Protestantism is its obsessive desire to be **politically correct**. The tendency in today’s culture is not to say anything that will offend anyone. This tendency has infiltrated the church to the point that members are not willing to speak up for fear of offending someone who is of a different opinion. I remember when the White House was lighted with rainbow colors after the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage and when Loretta



Lynch, the attorney general mandated transgender public restrooms. A handful of pastors spoke up but the preponderance of the Christian churches remained silent.

Elijah is a type of the final generation. When King Ahab accused him of troubling Israel Elijah boldly exclaimed: “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals.” (1 Kings 18:18)

Moreover, when he confronted

the false prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, he told it like it is: “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” (1 Kings 18:21)

The tragic part of the story was the tepid response of those who claimed to be God’s people. They remained neutral and ‘answered him not a word’. Regarding this episode, Ellen White explains:

“If God abhors one sin above another, of which His people are guilty, it is **doing nothing** in case of an emergency. **Indifference and neutrality** in a religious crisis is regarded of God as a grievous crime and equal to the **very worst type of hostility** against God.” Testimonies for the Church, volume 3, p. 280

Objective Truth has paid a very high price at the altar of political correctness. Ellen White explained that ‘false charity’ (her term for political correctness) has blinded the eyes of Protestants and will eventually lead them to believe evil and condemn good:

“As the Protestant churches have been seeking the favor of the world, **false charity** has blinded their eyes. They do not see but that it is right to believe good of all evil, and as the inevitable result they will finally believe evil of all good. Instead of standing in defense of the faith once delivered to the saints, they are now, as it were, apologizing to Rome for their uncharitable opinion of her, begging pardon for their bigotry.” The

Great Controversy, pp. 571, 572

5 A fifth factor in the death of Protestantism is the **encroachments of culture** that has led the churches to embrace liberal ideas. The media has bombarded society with ideas that clearly contradict Scripture and these ideas have flooded the churches. Among many Protestants, there is no longer any objection to things such as gay marriage, LGBTQ, evolution and crass materialism. Sin has ceased to be sinful! Ellen White predicted that liberal ideas would eventually lead to a union of Protestants with Catholics:

“This union will not, however, be effected by a change in Catholicism, for Rome never changes. She claims infallibility. It is Protestantism that will change. The adoption of **liberal ideas** on its part will bring it where it can clasp the hand of Catholicism.” The Review and Herald, June 1, 1886.

The word ‘liberal’ here is not primarily descriptive of theological liberalism but rather being open to unity in diversity and inclusiveness without regard to Bible principles:

“Sinners are continually crying, ‘You are narrow, so narrow.’ **Liberalism**, cry the lawless; bring not your claims of law upon us.’ ‘The religion of Christ,’ says another, ‘is too hard. I cannot be a Christian; it involves too much.’” Manuscript Releases, volume 20, p.71

6 A sixth factor that has led to the eclipsing of Protestantism is **historical amnesia**. These days few students are interested in the humanities, particularly history. After all, history is simply all about boring names, dates and places right? Not at all! Historical amnesia can be deadly. The philosopher Santayana wrote some wise words, ‘those who fail to learn from the mistakes of history are bound to repeat them’. Protestants in the United States suffer from an amazing historical ignorance when it comes to the papacy’s past, yet inspiration tells us that:

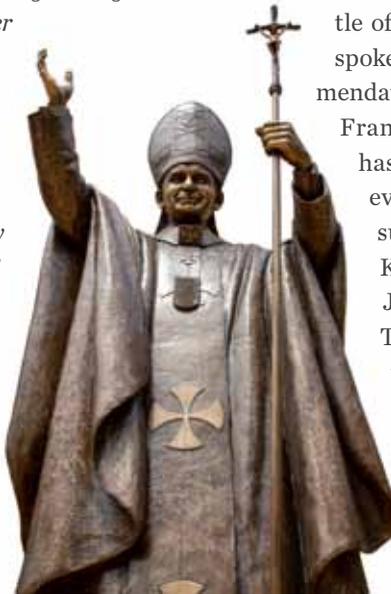
“Stealthily and unsuspectedly she [the papacy] is strengthening her forces to further her own ends when the time shall come for her to strike. All that she desires is vantage ground, and this is already being given her.” The Great Controversy, p. 581

The papacy has hoodwinked most contemporary Protestants into thinking that it has changed and is

now an ally rather than an enemy. They see the papacy as a harmless organization that fights for human rights, for the poor, for the environment, for family values and for the rights of immigrants. They perceive that the papal persecutions are a relic from the ancient past. They pay heed to their eyes and ears rather than what Bible prophecy teaches about the papacy.

In the recent past, notable evangelicals and Catholics signed an ecumenical document titled ‘Evangelicals and Catholics Together’ and Lutherans and Catholics signed a ‘Joint Declaration on Righteousness by Faith’. Rick Warren, upon

whom has fallen the mantle of Billy Graham, has spoken words of commendation about Pope Francis I, and the pope has invited notable evangelical leaders such as Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copland, James Robison and Tony Palmer to visit the Vatican. Moreover, the Waldensians—of all people—invited Pope Francis to Torre Pellice where he



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received a warm welcome. In addition, the pope and Lutherans will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation together in Malmo, Sweden at the end of October. It is obvious that Protestantism no longer fears the papacy!

7 The final factor that has led Protestantism to die is the **loss of its prophetic vision**.

Proverbs 19:28 tells us that ‘where there is no vision, the people perish.’ A more accurate translation would be ‘where there is no prophetic vision the people lose restraint’. Protestantism has lost its bearings because it has embraced preterism and futurism as its method of interpreting Bible prophecy.

Most liberal mainline Protestant churches either have no interest in Bible prophecy or use a preterist method to interpret it. In the latter case, they teach that the antichrist prophecies found their fulfillment in the distant past with Antiochus Epiphanes and the Roman emperors and therefore have no relevance for us today. On the other hand, conservative evangelicals and charismatics employ a futurist method where the antichrist has not yet risen but will appear for a short period at the very end of time after the rapture of the church. Both of these methods fail to discern that the antichrist arose in the past, is **now present**, although wounded, and will rise to global power in the future! Ellen White warned about the dangers of

misplacing the time for the fulfillment of Bible prophecy:

“Some will take the truth applicable to their time, and place it in the future. Events in the train of prophecy that had their fulfillment away in the past are made future, and thus by these theories the faith of some is undermined.” Manuscript 31, 1896

So, if both Catholicism and Protestantism have lost their way, has God left Himself without a witness? Of course not! In the aftermath of 1844, God gathered the ‘remnant scattered abroad’ to finish the work that Protestantism has failed to accomplish (Revelation 12:17). To this Remnant church, God has given the awesome responsibility of restoring all things (Malachi 4:5, 6; Matthew 17:11) and they are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention:

“In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. God has entrusted them with the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. God has given them a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.” 9T, p. 19

The task that awaits that Remnant appears impossible and overwhelming. We live in a world that is approaching a population of 10 billion. How can we reach them

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all with God’s end time message? The answer is the Holy Spirit! This Remnant make a total surrender to Jesus and receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit without measure in latter rain power. The cleansed and obedient Remnant will then impart the message to the world in the midst of global opposition by Catholics, Protestants and worldlings—the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Commenting on the Loud Cry message of Revelation 18:1-5 Ellen White wrote:

“*This scripture points forward to a time when the announcement of the fall of Babylon, as made by the second angel of Revelation 14 (verse 8), is to be repeated, with the additional mention of the corruptions which have been entering the various organizations that constitute Babylon, since that message was first given, in the summer of 1844. A terrible condition of the religious world is here described. With every rejection of truth the minds of the people will become darker, their hearts more stubborn, until they are entrenched in an infidel hardihood.*” GC, pp. 603, 604

Is the Seventh-day Adventist church up to the task? Will she work to restore every divine institution or

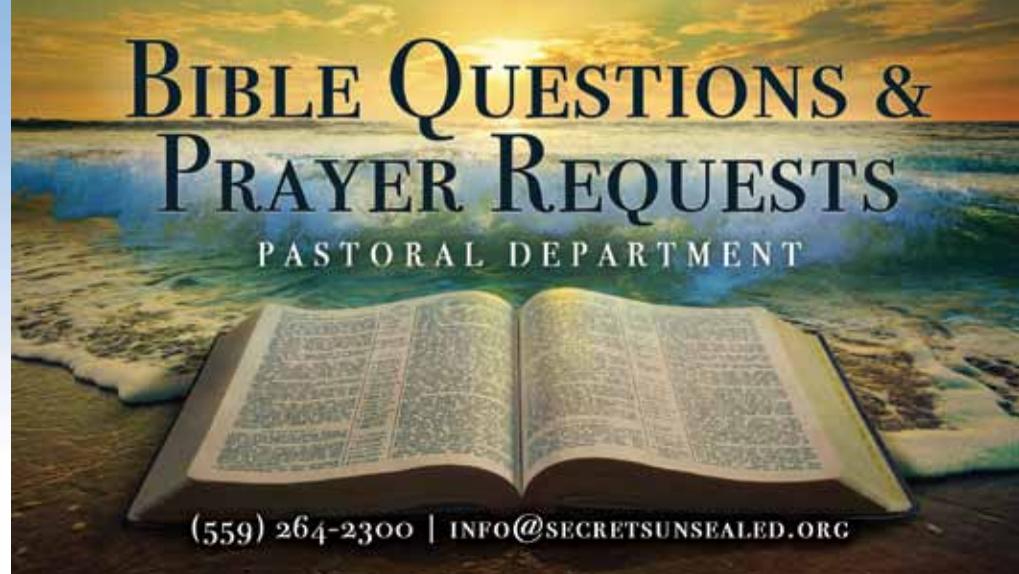
will she splinter into fragments? We pray that she will come together and present to the devil a united front! The Remnant’s God-given mission is to proclaim the three angels’ message to the world—that is the only reason for her existence! Will she live up to her divine calling and commission? May God have mercy upon our beloved church—that is, us—for which Jesus shed His precious blood!

“*In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence: ‘Found wanting.’ By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged.*” Testimonies for the Church, volume 8, p. 247

God forbid that she should be found wanting!



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