

Reformation
& Revival

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Information

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The conviction of the staff and editors of the *Reformation & Revival Journal* is that awakening, of the kind seen in the First Great Awakening in this country, wedded to the doctrinal concerns of the historic Protestant Reformation as expressed in the terms, *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia* and *sola fide* is needed in our generation.

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On the 31st day of October, in the year 1517, around 12:00 noon, a relatively unknown Augustinian monk nailed upon the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, *Ninety-Five Theses*. These theses, meant to stimulate debate and discussion concerning abuses in church practice, were not particularly revolutionary. The issues that would later be discussed, and concern the life of the church right down to the present time, were not even on the table yet! But this first move lit the candle that would not go out. Of his theses, Luther later stated, "I allowed them to stand, that by them it may appear how weak I was, and in what a fluctuating state of mind, when I began this business. I was then a monk and a mad papist, and so submersed in the dogmas of the Pope that I would have really murdered any person who denied obedience to the Pope."

In our day another great apostasy has taken place. A great departure from the gospel has plagued churches across almost every line. What is needed?

The answer now, as then, is a great recovery of the truth, a vital reformation joined with a genuine outpouring of God's Spirit upon the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, i.e. revival! God brings about reformation when His people return to the Word of God as their sole source of *doctrine* and *practice*. Revival attends the prayer and cry of a church, pleading for showers from heaven to fall again, as in better times. It is the sovereign work of God, given most often at the darkest times in the life of the church and society at large. The result is a renewed and powerful church and multitudes of converts born in a season. In a very real sense, one cannot separate these twin concerns. Men like Richard Baxter, who is looked at in some detail in this issue, saw these truths as virtually synonymous. Reformation undertaken without the power of the Spirit can lead to cold formal efforts at recovery, while revival without reformation can produce new forms of doctrinal confusion and

theological extremism.

Today we are confused about both of these truths. We associate reformation with a mere change in creed, or an adjustment in some moral area, both of which may be badly needed. We associate revival with an entirely different movement, known since the middle of the last century as "revivalism." This term "revivalism" refers more to human efforts at evangelism and church renewal than the sovereignly granted heaven-rending phenomenon of revival. Often in the Old Testament we see the people of God undertake, in prayer and renewal of covenantal loyalty to God, wide-scale reformation. We also see the "fire" fall as they wait before Jehovah and plead, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" (Psalm 85:6)

It is the conviction of the editors and staff of *Reformation & Revival Journal* that our generation of believers, especially in North America, needs to pursue the complete theological and ethical reformation of the church (and this always begins in the visible, local church). It is our conviction, further, that nothing would help us to more readily finish the final mandate of our Lord than a genuine God-sent revival! "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

In this first volume of our journal we will address the matter of reformation. In the second (i.e. Vol. I, No. 2) we propose to address the subject of revival. Following these two we will address biblical and contemporary issues in the light of concern for reformation and revival. In the spirit of the Protestant Reformation we are committed to the principle, "Reformed, yet always reforming!" Each generation must search the Scriptures afresh, apply the truth to its age, and stand faithful to God. We can learn from the greatest reformation in church history, which occurred 450 years ago, but we cannot stop there. The Protestant reformers are not our infallible guides; only the Word of God is final authority in any kind of evangelical Christianity worthy of

the name. We must heed the word from Jehovah which says, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn." (Isaiah 8:20)

The church in America is characterized by frenzy and confusion. Great denominations of the past have given in almost entirely to liberalism, which is, in reality, not Christian at all. Those who resisted liberalism in earlier days of this century are in a virtual methodological panic—attempting in every way possible to draw and keep the crowds of people they desire to win to Christ. Much of this kind of Christianity looks strikingly more like the practice of the church in an age when relics and indulgences were destroying the true piety of clergy and laity alike.

But why *reformation*? Isn't revival enough? I answer without hesitation, "No!"

Consider the church in its infancy in the Book of Acts. Revival showers fell frequently, but apostles, elders, and deacons all labored to preserve and protect the life of the church. They did this through application of the truth to such matters as hospitality, church discipline, the right use of the Lord's Supper, careful selection of elders and deacons in the local church, consistent moral life in the leaders of the church, and a host of similar concerns seen in the epistles of the New Testament.

Consider the history of the church since the close of the canon. Again and again, faithful leaders have labored to recover "the whole counsel of God" in order to be faithful to the Lord of the church. In so doing they have often been the very vanguard of revival and awakening.

No, we must labor for both reformation and revival. We must be "continually reforming...". We must turn back with renewed zeal to the Scriptures. We must study them, preach them, and obey them. We must pray that unction will be given to those who preach faithfully and that revival will be

granted to our local churches as well as on a world wide scale.

It is with this in view that this publication is launched, in faith and hope. With this in mind, we consider the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's, several important people and events from that era, and matters that flow out of it right down to our time. We do not believe they had it all right, but we believe they had much right, and that they had the most important truths right, something that seems dubious to us concerning the church of our time.

John H. Armstrong

Three Principles of Protestantism

James E. McGoldrick

The Protestant faith originated in a time of scandal when Johann Tetzel, a Dominican monk, appeared in Germany and went from place to place selling certificates of indulgence. It was in the fall of 1517 that the scandal began. Tetzel promised his listeners that they could obtain remission for their sins and for the sins of their loved ones who had died and gone to purgatory. Consequently, pious people collected their savings and rushed to Tetzel to purchase his documents, for that seemed to be the requirement of Christian charity—that loved ones might be released from the torments of purgatory and admitted to heaven itself. In fact, Tetzel led people to believe that they could obtain forgiveness merely by dropping their coins in his box and taking the certificates he offered. In order to popularize the sale, Tetzel recited a jingle: “So bald der Pfennig im Kasten klingt, die Seele aus dem Fegfeuer springt!” (“As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul out of purgatory springs.”) People seemed to come from everywhere, seeking to liberate loved ones from the flames of punishment. Purgatory, in the teaching of the medieval church, was portrayed as a place of temporal punishment for sin; the length of time a soul would spend there was determined by the number and severity of his offences. When one had been purged fully, he would be released to go to heaven.

Word of Tetzel's activities soon reached Wittenberg University where Dr. Martin Luther, Professor of Theology, received it with consternation. Rather than react with joyous hope that characterized the people who were purchasing Tetzel's documents, Luther became enraged. He spoke out vigorously and denounced the entire affair as a scandal of immense significance and contended that the church must be saved from the wretched traffic in indulgences. Luther went to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, a document in one hand, a hammer in the other, and fastened to that door a list of ninety-five protests against the