

Celebrating the Reformation

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RIDLEY COMMUNITY / MISSION & MINISTRY COLLEGE

Ideas that Changed the World

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation faculty member and church historian **Rhys Bezzant** summarises the key ideas.

CHURCH HISTORY

1

You won't be able to avoid it this year: having an opinion about what the Reformation of the sixteenth century was all about. In the midst of political pressures, philosophical debates, and personal crises, pastors and theologians steered the church towards a new future and reengineered society while they were at it. Despite sometimes unforeseen consequences, their extraordinarily valuable insights still steer our lives and ministries today. Here are my top three Reformation impacts:



Wittenberg Castle / Image by Rachael Lopez

1 / The Reformation highlighted an eschatological vision

Luther was forced to critique the leadership of the pope, an easy target in the days of the Borgia papacy with its corruption and nepotism. Distinctively, his attacks aligned the pope with the antichrist, for he read the book of Revelation as a tract describing the progress of history. In doing so he reintroduced eschatology into debates in the church. No longer was the church understood as something static, subject only to the pope's authority without other checks and balances. Now the church could be imagined as something able to be reformed under the authority of the scriptures alone. Neither the church (and its councils) nor the pope were infallible. The church was a dynamic organism, subject to the pressures of this age but more and more conformed to the life of the age to come.

2 / The Reformation represented a missiological heart

As a way of encouraging the holiness of the church medieval theology made a clear distinction between the clergy and the laity. In fact, the church was understood as being comprised of those who were ordained, while everyone else watched the life of the church without participating. The laity would just compromise purity if they got too close to the holy things and the holy ones! Lay people only

took communion, for example, three times a year and never received the wine. The reformers, on the other hand, set themselves the task of reevangelising the laity, making sure that the people heard the gospel in their mother tongue, sang about the gospel alongside others in the congregation, and took the bread and the wine at communion as a sign of their full inclusion. You could be truly spiritual and Christian even if you were a cobbler or a chandler. Though the reformers did not send missionaries overseas, their Bible translation and scriptural preaching demonstrated their missiological heart.

3 / The Reformation encouraged an experiential faith

Buying indulgences was a heinous way of securing divine forgiveness. Luther protested with 95 Theses on October 31, 1517. But more than protesting about a practice, Luther went on to make sure that Christians understood that righteousness is not just a demand that God makes of us, but a gift that God gives to us. In the medieval world it was assumed that we can only enjoy secure union with Christ at the end of the Christian life when we see the Lord face to face. The reformers flipped this idea and argued that we can be assured of our relationship with the Lord right from its outset. By analogy, we are married to our spouse from our wedding day onward, not just at the end of married life! Christ's death and resurrection relativised the role of the church in providing grace. The Holy Spirit would provide an inner witness to give us confidence and joy.

The Reformation created a new vision for the church in the world, and for the believer within the church. These shifts were not merely managerial but built on powerful theological reasoning. The least we can learn from the reforms of the sixteenth century is that ideas matter. Even when we don't immediately see their impact, ideas do change the world.

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For The 2017 Calendar**April 8**

Graduation and Commissioning

May 12

Faith & Work Award Dinner

Hosted by the Marketplace Institute & Ethos

May 19 – 20

'Martin Luther, Pastoral Theologian'

Ridley Theology Conference

with Ron Rittgers (Valparaiso University, USA)

June 16 – 29

Reformation Study Tour

June 28 – July 11

Reformation Friends' Tour

July 21

Leon Morris Lecture given by Lynn Cohick

July 22

'Evangelical Women in Academia'

Day Seminar with Lynn Cohick

July 25

'A Theology of the Family of God'

Public lecture given by Amy Peeler

August 22 – 24

'By Faith Alone: Preaching Romans'

Annual Preachers' Conference

with keynote speakers Ray Galea & Mike Bird

September 4

Marketplace Institute Lecture

given by Mark Stephens

October 6

Annual Dinner

Held at Melbourne Zoo

October 26 – 27

Life @ Work Conference

co-hosted by the Ridley Marketplace Institute

November 8

Gospel Coalition Lectures

by Brian Rosner and Rhys Bezzant

at Cross Culture Church, Melbourne

December 9 – 21

Israel Study Tour

Check the Ridley website for times & locations:

www.ridley.edu.au/events or join our eventsmailing list: j.daw@ridley.edu.au

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From the Principal

The Reformation anniversary is cause for celebration. At Ridley College we will be celebrating all year!

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE REFORMATION

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Two things are essential when it comes to anniversaries: first, not forgetting them, and second, celebrating them appropriately. Forgetting your wedding anniversary, for example, is not a good look, to say the least. And there are even traditional guidelines for finding the perfect gift: wood for five years, crystal for fifteen, through to silver for twenty-five and gold at the fifty-year mark. As the years go by, more elaborate gifts are deemed suitable to celebrate such life-changing events as the day of your wedding.

This year marks 500 years since Martin Luther kick started the Reformation by nailing his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. How should we celebrate something as world-changing as Luther's brave action and the movement that resulted from it? In 2017 Ridley College is taking every opportunity to celebrate and the party will be going on throughout the year!

At the end of February members of the faculty preached on the precious 'solos' in the Ridley Chapel, reaffirming our commitment to the vital truths that we are saved by Christ alone and grace alone, through faith alone, as taught through scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

In early March we hosted the Anglican Institute Lecture where former Ridley Principal, Peter Adam, spoke on *'Celebrating the Reformation: Evangelising the Nation'*. Peter is a first-class church historian, and his lecturers are always engaging and peppered with wit and insight.

In May the Ridley Theology Conference will be looking at Martin Luther as a pastor. Luther is known as a church leader, radical thinker,

hymn writer and Bible translator. But many who read his commentaries and other writings today are pastors, including Ridley students and graduates. Luther has much to teach us on a host of issues of keen relevance to pastors, including questions of suffering, evil, greed, worship, mentoring and prayer. The conference promises to be of great value to those charged with the care of God's people.

In July we are sending a group of friends off on a Reformation Tour of key sites in Europe with Rhys Bezzant and Richard Trist – a trip of a lifetime with unique opportunities to ponder the deep truths of the gospel of God's grace as taught in those tumultuous times. Two other special lectures that I am looking forward to in July are by Wheaton College professors Lynn Cohick and Amy Peeler, addressing topics of interest in New Testament studies. Lynn is also headlining a day conference on evangelical women in academia, an exciting prospect.

In August the Ridley Preachers' Conference will provide invaluable training in how to preach justification by faith alone from the book of Romans with Ray Galea and Mike Bird.

And in November Rhys Bezzant and I will be giving lectures on justification at a Gospel Coalition event in Melbourne.

Ridley does its best to provide opportunities to graduates and friends of the College to stay sharp and think deeply about important subjects. It would be great if you joined us as we celebrate 500 years of a movement for which we are deeply grateful to God.

Brian Rosner, Principal

In the Land of the Reformation

Ridley graduate, **Rachael Lopez** reflects on her experience on the Reformation Tour.

STUDY TOUR

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The Reformation tour brings history alive. We visited towns and churches in Germany, France and Switzerland where Reformation greats like Luther, Zwingli and Calvin preached and taught. We experienced castles and museums where the Bible was translated and published, where Emperors were challenged and religion transformed, and where the Protestant faith was born. These are the greatest gifts I gained:

+ Learning

Interpreting the Reformation is not just found in discussing theology, as fun as that can be. It's crucial to understand the political, social and geographical perspectives, and exploring the sights of the Reformation truly brought this to life. Any move of God happens within time and space, and just as Ridley taught me to read the Bible in context, so it is for church history. Studying the past accurately, and not glossing over sin (which is easy to do with heroes of faith!) also helped me to know that God can use all of us despite our weaknesses.

+ Community

I found that travelling together accelerates the building of friendships and community. We enjoyed hours of bus chats, eating meals together, shared experiences and raucous laughter. The Reformation tour profoundly influenced my experience of community life at Ridley and my ministry since graduation. I made lifelong friends and found mentors and partners in gospel ministry.

+ Unity

Approaching the 500th anniversary of the Reformation I have noticed two trends. The first is to glamorise the Reformation with stirring rhetoric, and the second is to underplay its importance for the sake of unity.

The Reformation highlighted that biblical interpretation is not limited to the elite. Alistair McGrath coined the term 'Christianity's dangerous idea' to describe it. It's an idea worth celebrating, but also to hold in tension with grief for the divisions amongst Christians. One cannot help but be saddened when reading about Christians persecuting Christians throughout history and the fact that the church today is still greatly divided. The grief though was overshadowed by hope, as we sat on a bus driving through Europe. We were Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Pentecostals and Presbyterians all praying, singing and fellowshiping together in Christian unity.

Ridley Reformation Tours

16–29 June

Tour for Students

28 June–11 July

Tour for Supporters and Friends

Below: Wittenberg, Germany / Image by Rachael Lopez



Justification by Faith Alone

Brian Rosner explains Martin Luther – the man, and his discovery.

STUDY TOUR

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Luther (1483–1546) was a German monk, theologian and dissident whose impact on the world can be felt up to the present day. His rediscovery of the truth of justification by faith alone, the doctrine that God declares believers righteous solely on the basis of Christ's death for our sins, sparked the Protestant Reformation.

In 1505, when Luther was a law student, a brush with death during a thunderstorm led him to make a vow to become a monk. He then sought to secure his own salvation through careful observance of the monastic rule, constant confession and voluntary self-punishment in order to atone for his sins. In his own words, during this time of intense spiritual struggle, he 'raged with a fierce and troubled conscience'. Despite his many prayers, vigils and fasting, Luther remained uncertain of his standing before a holy and righteous God.

Luther found relief through his study of the scriptures. Seizing upon Paul's words in Romans 1:17, he learned that 'in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last'. Luther came to understand justification, our right standing before God, as being entirely the work of God, simply to be received by faith. Against the teaching of his day that the righteous acts of believers are intended to secure God's forgiveness, Luther asserted that Christians receive that righteousness entirely outside of themselves: 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Luther wrote that 'the first and chief article of religion is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification (Romans 3:24–25). He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Romans 3:23–25).'

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Luther found that the rest of the Bible confirmed his discovery. Jesus pitied the Pharisee who boasted to God of his piety against the tax collector who prayed for God's mercy and concluded that the latter 'went home justified' (Luke 18:11–14). Jesus assured the thief on the cross who put his faith in him that 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43). David prayed: 'Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered' (Psalm 32:1).

The truth of justification by grace through faith transformed Luther. 'Faith alone' as the means of our acceptance with God became the liberating message that spread like a bushfire across Europe.

This same message took me by surprise as a young man and continues to inspire me to this day. It's a message of hope for all. It's what makes the Christian faith unique. And it magnifies the generosity and kindness of God, without diluting his own righteous character and opposition to sin.

A common response to the message of justification by faith is that it appears to leave the door open for people to live sinful lives. If salvation is a gift, to quote Paul, 'why not continue in sin in order that grace may abound?' (Romans 6:1). Luther's answer to this question was that 'we are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.' Good works are to flow from faith as its fruit. Far from giving us permission to sin, justification by faith is the firm basis for our moral renewal.

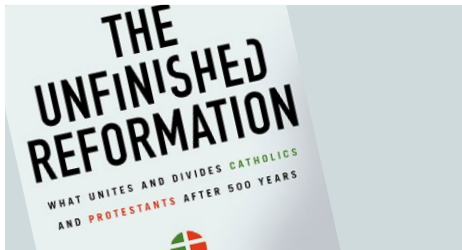
< The Augustinian monastery where Martin Luther served / Image by Rachael Lopez

The Reformation Continues

The Unfinished Reformation: What Unites and Divides Catholics and Protestants after 500 Years
by Gregg Allison and Chris Castaldo, Zondervan, 2016

BOOK REVIEW

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Isn't it time for the Reformation to be over? It's been 500 years since a young German monk first aired his grievances with the Catholic Church. And while we may want to celebrate the quincentenary of Luther's 95 Theses and our subsequent freedom from indulgences, saint worship and the dreaded purgatory, perhaps there has been sufficient change in the post-Vatican II Catholic Church to let bygones be bygones?

Many want it to be so. A number of high-profile Protestants have made their return to 'Rome Sweet Home', and there is an increase in what Timothy George, co-founder of *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, calls the ecumenism of the trenches—a newfound solidarity 'born of a common moral struggle to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in a culture of disarray.'¹ Then there is the universal appeal of Pope Francis, a servant leader whose attractive piety 'smells to many evangelicals like the aroma of Christ' (p.24).

Compelling though an end to the divide sounds, the authors of *The Unfinished Reformation*, Allison and Castaldo, don't think we're quite there yet.

Their short and highly readable book sketches the backdrop of the Reformation and offers some important commonalities among modern Catholics and Protestants today before launching into its main fare, an examination of four key areas of difference that remain. These areas are authority (scripture, tradition and interpretation), anthropology (image of God, sin and Mary), ecclesiology (church and sacraments) and salvation (soteriology).

The authors try to show even-handedness as they tackle these subjects and, though clearly Protestant in outlook, write with a pastoral heart as they navigate the space between pragmatic and sentimental ecumenism on the one hand and adversarial doctrinism on the other. Readers both Catholic and Protestant who want to understand the differences that lie beneath our shared language and rituals will benefit from these measured explanations.

While lauding the growth of respect and cooperation between Catholics and Protestants, this book asserts that divergent doctrines of salvation and revelation remain as stumbling blocks to full unity.

Due to this, the authors seem somewhat conflicted about whether Protestants and Catholics should view each other as squabbling siblings or estranged cousins. They urge Protestant readers to 'respect the Catholic Church as an essential part of the broader, historic Christian tradition' (p.139) but stop short of affirming it as orthodox (p.141).

Yet Allison and Castaldo clearly want to be generous. They are unequivocal in their view that Catholic believers are participants in salvation: 'Protestants would do well to remember that although the Bible teaches that one is justified by believing with faith alone, it does not require that one believe in faith alone as a point of doctrine' (p.140).

It's a challenging line to walk, and one all too familiar to me as someone who has turned from a Catholic upbringing to a full embrace of Protestantism: the longing to declare unity with Catholic friends and family, yet the equal desire to have them share in the freedom and joy found in the Protestant cry of 'faith alone'. The Reformation may not be over, and this book underscores the genuine reasons it cannot be so; but it does encourage Protestants to move beyond an adversarial stance, and allows that God's grace is already at work on both sides of this ruptured family.

¹cct.biola.edu/blog/ecumenism-trenches-evangelical-catholic-dialogue/

Reviewed by Gina Denholm, a graduate of Ridley, a book editor and a mum of three. Gina is also part of the Ridley Online team, where she helps edit and proofread course materials.