

# Reformation Now: Claims and Calls

*“But ‘tis the talent of our English nation,  
Still to be plotting some new reformation.”*

— John Dryden (1631-1700)

Like Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformation featured both breakthroughs and pitfalls. On the upside, who today would argue with its critique of clerical corruption, its repudiation of indulgences, its return to the Bible and its reminder of Paul’s gospel of God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ?

Everyone seems on board. Even Pope Francis is celebrating Luther’s anniversary with the Lutherans this year! Francis has said, “The intention of Martin Luther 500 years ago was to renew the church, not divide her.”

On the other hand, breaking from Rome’s control also initiated a great fragmentation, where each Reformer became a mini-pope or every Christian could be their own pope! Since Luther posted his 95 theses to the Wittenburg Church door, a new sect has formed, on average, twice per week—over 33,000 denominations by some accounts, not including all the self-styled “independent” churches.

As for Luther’s following, today some 70 million believers on five continents identify themselves with one of the many branches of the Lutheran Church.

Now, since 500 years makes for a prodigious landmark, it’s not so strange that calls for a new reformation are being raised by many voices.

Note: that’s in the plural—*many voices*. It seems like everyone has “a dog in this race.” An internet search of “new + reformation” offers browsers a staggering buffet of new (and used) reformations to choose from. You’ve got “last reformation” groups; “new apostolic reformation” charismatics; and there’s a full spectrum of liberal, progressive, emergent, conservative and fundamentalist claims and invitations to their own

patented “new reformation.”

We can excuse the “nones and dones” (*non*-affiliated and *done* with the institutional church) if they don’t jump at every religious “carnival barker” who offers the “one true way” back to New Testament faith (whatever that is). If they’re cynical and jaded by religious shenanigans, they came by it honestly. Yet even they are inclined to think that their exodus marks a sort of post-modern reformation.

Yet even while noting such claims with a dose of healthy skepticism, watchful Christ-followers surely see that something truly has shifted from a slow simmer to a rolling boil in recent decades.

Many have noticed that despite historical roots in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Great Reformation, a whole lot of Christ-less religiosity has come to infect its progeny with the very legalism, moralism and spiritual abuse that Martin Luther protested.

Nor did this arise spontaneously. Some of it was spawned directly by the first Reformers. Martin Luther, John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli (the big three)

never shook the influence of Augustine of Hippo, whose insistence on grace alone came with a heavy price: a notion of humanity that is utterly depraved and a God who loves and elects an exclusive few to salvation, leaving the rest to burn in eternal flames. *Grace alone—for the elite elect alone.*

But now it appears that the Holy Spirit is once again opening spiritual eyes to reform both our image of humanity—where

*everyone* is precious and beloved in God’s sight—and to heal our image of God—the selfless Lover who sets aside privilege to become human and heal humanity.

Through the ministry of CWR/PTM, we discuss this in depth in Greg Albrecht’s books (*A Taste of Grace*, for example) and in my latest, *A More Christlike God: A More Beautiful Gospel*. But these are just two whitecaps in a rising tide that might represent a bonafide revolution of living faith. We’re “singing this song” in unison with a choir of many other teachers, such as Paul Young, Richard Rohr and Brian McLaren, to name a few. Together, we hope to follow Christ faithfully through the next Great Reformation. □

—Brad Jersak



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