

# REFORMATION TODAY

## 95 Theses on the Situation of the Church and Society in the Year of Luther 1996

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### Theses

#### **Call to Repentance**

1. If our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17), He wants the whole life of the believer to be one of repentance.
2. This repentance begins with a new consciousness and grief about the former wrong behavior not only as individuals but also the church as a whole.
3. If there is true repentance it leads to the individual and the church hating sin and departing from both it and wrong behavior - not through their own power but through the grace and power of Jesus Christ.
4. God promises the repentant forgiveness and a new beginning: "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:13,14).

#### **The Present Situation of Society**

5. People today indulge in many types of sins such as godlessness, pride, lovelessness, occultism, disobedience, abortion, immorality, adultery, homosexuality, drug abuse, lies, greed and robbery (Exodus 20:2-17; Romans 1:18-31; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:19-21).
6. Certainly such sins have always been committed, but today many of these are openly tolerated and are put on a pedestal. "They not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:32).
7. In many countries laws that forbid blasphemy, pornography, abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, drug abuse and the like have been slackened or annulled.
8. A society that tolerates or even openly encourages such activities that the Holy Scripture says are "sin" or "abominable" in God's eyes, digs its own grave. It is ready for judgment. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

9. Many nations today are in a similar situation to the Roman empire before its downfall: The internal cause of its downfall was the moral decay.

10. It is only a question of time before the national and social systems that reject God's commandments today, will collapse.

#### **The Failure of the Church**

11. In this situation the churches local and world wide should take their commission seriously to be "light" and "salt" and to oppose these developments (Matthew 5:13-16; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 5:11).

12. If they don't do this they stand under God's judgment concerning the unfaithful watchman: "When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood" (Ezekiel 3:18).

13. Individual people and groups within the church are fighting courageously against current trends, but together as a whole, churches in many nations are losing their sense of purpose and fail to preach the Gospel and to defend God's laws.

14. The church which succumbs to current trends and ideologies loses its sense of direction.

15. A church that has lost its sense of direction cannot give individuals any direction.

#### **The Abandoning of the Bible**

16. The loss of direction began with the abandoning of the Bible which is the foundation of all faith and knowledge.

17. Even if the Bible is still used superficially in the church, it is often subjected to autonomous, self glorifying reasoning, thus dividing its content and denying God's revelation.

18. Rightly did Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf pray: "If Your Word is invalid, on what should faith be based upon? I'm not concerned about a thousand worlds but about Your Word."

19. The Reformation defines the church as a "Creation of the Word of God". It ceases to be a church if it abandons the Word of God.

20. If the Word of God is abandoned, then no one should be surprised at the consequences: The abandonment of the Word of God is followed by the abandonment of the contents of the Word - and that means: the disintegration of Biblical teaching and Biblical lifestyle.

### **The Disintegration of Biblical Teaching About God**

21. The disintegration of Biblical teaching begins with the disintegration of the Biblical understanding of God. In contradiction to the clear witness of the Bible, many "theologians" deny or misinterpret the meaning of the Trinity. They deny or misinterpret God's omnipotence, holiness and righteousness.

22. Those who deny that the miracles and prophecies witnessed in the Bible came to pass or will come to pass, imagine God as a powerless principle - figuratively speaking: "without arms and legs". But such a "God" is only a self-made-idol, a God of rationalistic philosophy and not the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob", the Father of Jesus Christ (Blaise Pascal).

### **The Disintegration of Biblical Teaching about Jesus Christ**

23. Many "theologians" today declare that Jesus Christ was only a man, a social revolutionary, a preacher of peace, a liberator or something similar, but not God. They say that He was not born of a virgin nor raised bodily from the dead, did not ascend to heaven and will not come again bodily in power and majesty. They also say that His death on the cross couldn't redeem us from our sins. If what they say is true then the famous heretic Arius, who was condemned in the fourth century after Christ, had more insight and taught less falsehoods than many "modern theologians" today, because he at least defined Jesus as the "supernatural Logos (Word)" and not as a mere human being. But we learn from history, that all false teachings have the tendency to increase as time goes by.

24. Contrary to what Arius and many "modern theologians" are saying Jesus Christ is not an ordinary man, nor was He created by God. He is true man and true God at the same time, the eternal Son of God. This means that He is God Himself in the second person of the trinity. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). (See 1 John 2:22; also 1 John 4:2-3)

### **The Disintegration of Biblical Teaching About Sin and Redemption**

25. Where the Biblical teaching of Christ is absent, the Biblical teaching of sin and redemption becomes meaningless. For a "powerless" Christ doesn't have any power to redeem us from sin, death and the devil.

26. The result of this will either be that sin will be played down and the validity of the commandments of God will be denied - or redemption will be partially or totally put in the hands of the people themselves (self redemption or synergism).

27. The playing down or the denial of sin in the Biblical sense appears today in different forms in society and in the church. This is seen in the assertion that the practise of homosexuality is neither sinful nor sick, that pornography, abortion

and euthanasia are not to be judged and that the legalization of drugs would be helpful in decreasing criminal activities. But "woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20).

28. The propaganda of self redemption is obvious or hidden in different "fashionable theologies". For example in a feminist "blood theology" which expects the salvation from the power of women and their menstrual blood rather than from the blood of Jesus. Also in a "theology of liberation and revolution" which puts its hope in the force of social groups and their armed struggle. And also in a psycho-"theology" where healing strength is drawn from oneself by using certain techniques which serve the purpose of self-realization.

29. But "salvation is found in no one else" than Jesus Christ "for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This is as valid today as it was when it was written.

### **The Invasion of Evil Spirits Into the Church**

30. The more a church conforms to the spirit of the times (current trends), the greater the danger that the Spirit of God will be driven from its centre and evil spirits will come in through the back door.

31. These evil spirits rule in the ideologies and religions of this world (Ephesians 6:12).

32. If it is declared that these evil spirits are identical to the Spirit of God, it shows the great darkness of our times (cf. Romans 1:19-23). For the Bible says: "The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God" (1 Corinthians 10:20).

33. If at inter-faith "prayer meetings" there are entreaties to the "spirit of Assisi" (referring to the "prayer of peace of the religions" in Assisi in 1986), then those leading the meetings should pay attention to the First Commandment which is foundational to Christianity: "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2-3).

### **The Secularization of the Church**

34. Many people, including politicians, wait for a clear word from the Church based upon the Bible.

35. But the more "up-to-date" and "open-minded" a church desires to be, the greater the danger that it will forget the specific message that it owes to a largely atheistic and unstable society.

36. A church that conforms to the trends and current political slogans from the right or left cannot positively influence the world but will be drawn away by the world. The church decays through secularization and becomes useless.

37. The only way out is to repent, to listen anew to the Word of God which is given to us in the form of the Bible and to declare it to the world through word and deed.

### **The Behaviour of Believers in the Light of Present Judgment**

38. The fact that the church today does not have the power and clarity for Biblically anchored manifestations of teaching and lifestyle is already a judgment of God (1 Peter 4:17) and a result of the falling away from saving faith in the end times (Matthew 24:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

39. A church which increasingly becomes a harlot, becomes more and more like the world, mingling heathen gods with the God of the Bible. It seeks material

wealth, power and worldly acknowledgment. It pays little attention to God's commandments and to the salvation through Jesus Christ. It brings the true believers increasingly more distress (Revelations 17-18).

40. Nevertheless, believers are called to be steadfast in their faith, to love and to hope. They are also called to pray for their enemies, for those who slander and persecute them, so that even these can come to repentance (Matthew 5:44).

41. Above all else believers are called to remain loyal to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to resist all tendencies of conforming to worldliness. They are to call as many people as possible to become disciples of Jesus: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

#### **Holding Fast to the Great Commission**

42. Temptation and the Great Commission run parallel. The Great Commission will not end until Jesus Christ comes again in power and majesty (Matthew 24:14). Mission work (in the sense of turning unbelievers to Jesus Christ) is the positive answer of the believer to the many temptations.

43. Mission work is the life of the church. Without missions, the church will die. There are only two choices, "mission work or death" (Otto Riecker).

44. If a church as a whole cannot or does not desire to take the Great Commission seriously, then individual Bible-believing Christians are called to do this mission work. They are called to establish or support Bible-believing mission organizations.

45. New churches might be established through Bible-based mission agencies to eventually replace those churches which have fallen away from the Christian faith.

#### **The Question of Believers Leaving the Church**

46. The individual believer is called to test according to the Bible for himself to what extent his fellowship and church are founded upon the Word of God or not.

47. Where he recognizes deviations and dishonour he should make these known openly to the church. If it concerns serious dishonour and if it persists even when reprimanded repeatedly, then he has the choice to suffer or to leave his church. But as long as it is possible, he should not leave but stay and stand.

48. The disgrace could grow to such proportions that it is impossible for a believer to avoid leaving a church because of reasons of conscience and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. This happens when a church as a whole adopts laws that approve false teachings and sin and make them compulsory.

49. If a believer leaves a church that has a doctrinal statement and manifestations in its lifestyle that are far from the teachings of the Bible, he can be assured that he is not leaving the Church of Jesus Christ but only leaving an institution that unjustly calls itself a "church".

50. The true Church, which also is not perfect, but is made up of members who seek to live through the power of Christ and according to the teachings found in the Bible, continues to exist outside of this institution and finds new forms to build up its fellowship. Only for this Church is the Scripture true: "The gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18).

#### **The Basis for Reformation in the Church**

51. In whatever church a believer finds himself - each church needs a reformation in the sense of a spiritual renewal. This can only start with individuals: through the acknowledgement of personal guilt and inability and trust in the grace and sovereign power of Jesus Christ.

52. Only Jesus Christ is to be Lord, none other. Not founders of religions or ideologies.

53. Only the Word of God that is recorded in the Bible is valid. No other words, sources of revelation and ideologies.

54. Only by grace and through faith are we saved. Not through self redeeming techniques, reincarnation ideologies and sinful attempts to anticipate the coming Kingdom of God by a New World Order created by human power.

55. "Jesus Christ, who is attested to in the Holy Scriptures, is the only Word of God that we need to listen to, we need to trust in life and death and the One that we need to obey. We reject the false teaching that the church can and should acknowledge, besides the one true Word of God, other events and powers, persons and truths as God's revelation" (Article 1 of the Barmen Theological Statement of 1934).

#### **True and False Unity**

56. A true reformation in the sense of spiritual renewal begins with the repentance and changing of many individuals to form a new fellowship in the Spirit, which is invisible at first, but in time becomes more and more visible.

57. The dividing of the believers in many groups and tiny groups opposing each other is disobedience to God. It is also a shameful thing before the world and a detriment to the Great Commission (John 17:20-21). It doesn't have to be an insurmountable hurdle if the believers remember the central truth of the Gospel, the justification of sinners by grace alone, and discover their unity in foundational matters: in essential matters unity, in unimportant matters liberty, above all love.

58. The unity of Christians that results from repentance cannot and will not be built at the cost of Biblical truth, but upon the truth of Christ (John 14:6; 17:11,17; Ephesians 2:14).

59. True unity encompasses only those who believe in Jesus Christ and keep His Word as "the Truth". Those who are in the world but not of the world and are hated by the world (John 17). False unity on the other hand encompasses all mankind, mixing with all ideologies and religions and persecuting with discrimination, intimidation and finally violence those who remain loyal to Jesus as their only Lord, Savior and Prince of Peace.

60. True unity is a gift from God through the evangelization of all nations, through the clear call to saving faith and to giving one's life over to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; John 17, 20-21). False unity avoids this call to repentance by putting political problems and human attempts of self-redemption in the foreground. Mankind living without God has not accepted "the love of truth for its salvation." It finds its culmination in the lawless one who "even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4,10).

61. True unity doesn't tolerate false teachings (Galatians 1:6-10; 2 John 9-11; Jude 3-4). False unity tolerates false teachings and even promotes them because of the mixing of ideologies.

#### **The Renewal of Theology**

62. For a reformation that is a spiritual revival, a renewal of theology is necessary.

63. A renewal of theology can only take place if the Bible as the Word of God is taken seriously in theological education and human reasoning submits to God's Word with respect and reverence.

64. A Bible-based education means the development and recognition of institutions which provide genuine Biblical instruction (without 'higher criticism'). Such schools, Bible schools, Bible colleges and Theological Seminaries are a must.

### **Practicing Church Discipline**

65. Many problems in theology and churches are caused by the fact that in many places church discipline is no longer practiced.

66. Church discipline includes the punishment or the excommunication of persons who publicly introduce unbiblical teachings and lifestyles in the church (1 Corinthians 5; 2 John 9-11).

67. To be effective church discipline has to reach all levels of the church structure, including church elders, members of the synod and church leaders, if the seduction is caused or supported by them.

68. For "a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (1 Corinthians 5:6) - and it is even more serious when people in influential positions are included within this "batch of dough".

### **The Commission of the Individual Believer**

69. Every individual believer is called to practise the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). This means: to take to heart his mandate as a Christian to test teachings and life according to the Bible.

70. In addition to that is the command to withstand the spirit of the times and not to tolerate unbiblical developments. We should not fight "with violence, but with the Word" (Martin Luther).

71. Every individual believer is invited to stay in contact with God daily through Bible reading and prayer and thus receive strength and correction.

72. He is called to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ according to the Bible, without restrictions, taking away or adding on.

73. He is called to use the Bible as a standard for living even in the passages which are contrary to the spirit of the times.

74. He is called to work in an awakened, missionary minded body of believers.

75. He is called to stand behind church co-workers. For example, he should support pastors who, because they are true to the Bible and are preaching messages of revival, have problems with church leaders, are isolated or under threat of dismissal.

76. He is called to withdraw his financial support from organizations that are against the Gospel. For example: feminist organizations, gay groups, syncretistic meetings and others.

77. He is called to either work for or support Bible-based organizations, events, meetings, schools, academies, media etc.

### **The Commission of the Church**

78. The church is called to direct itself only according to the Bible, God's Word, rejecting every unbiblical teaching so that many individuals and fellowships can receive direction.

79. It is called to create more opportunities for missionary church growth than what has been achieved until now.

80. It is called to have faithful co-workers who are Bible-believing, and not to harass and threaten with excommunication those who remain faithful to Scripture.

81. It is called not to have forced collections for events that the Bible-believing Christians cannot support with a clear conscience.



82. It is called to give clear answers to ethical questions that are in accordance with and not against the Bible. For example about marriage, the family, abortion, euthanasia and homose~xuality.

### **The Commission of the State and Society**

83. The state is not identical to the Church (John 18:36). But the state can only be beneficial and blessed if it follows Bible-based standards.

84. Such Bible-based standards are laid out especially in the form of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17).

85. When such standards are no longer taken seriously, then chaos and anarchy are inevitable.

86. Some social groups and parties in many nations encourage chaos and anarchy by fighting against the fundamental Godly truths given in the Ten Commandments, either publicly or secretly.

87. The Holy Scriptures mark such people with the following words: "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - having a form of godliness but denying its power.... who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth" (2 Timothy 3:1-7).

88. In many nations such people are in control or are pursuing power. They are serving the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). These people are gaining momentum in politics, mass media, the realm of law and justice, colleges and churches.

89. Politicians, lawyers, journalists, teachers and church people as well as people from all walks of life are called to stop this "march through the institutions", this infiltration, through prayer and work in the Biblical Christian sense.

### **Looking ahead**

90. The current developments in the church and society are foretold in the Bible.

91. They mark the period when satan's antichrist world ruler will come.

92. Jesus Christ will return in power and majesty and overthrow and destroy the lawless one (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

93. Because no one knows when Jesus will come again, we must work while it is still day.

94. We are working for Jesus Christ and the establishment of His church in thankfulness for His sacrifice on the cross. Also in love for Him, knowing that in Him is victory.

95. "Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are His': and 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness'" (2 Timothy 2:19). Amen.

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