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Editorial

Graeme Perry
graeme.perry@mm.net.au

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EDITORIAL

Graeme Perry

Martin Luther, on 31 October 1517 nailed 95 theses to the door of a church in Wittenberg (D’Aubigné, 1849, p. 243). His plan was to initiate an academic discussion on the next day, in the town university. The action itself was motivated by Martin’s judgement that Tetzel’s entrepreneurial use of the sale of indulgences to finance the rebuilding of St Peter’s Basilica, was unethical. He was convinced that forgiveness and justification were acts of God based on faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on Calvary and expressed this in the Smalcald Articles, Part I, Articles 1-4 (cited in Henkel, Henkel, Krauth & Müller, 1854, p. 366). He defended his concepts against Tetzel’s claims including “The very instant that the money chinks at the bottom of the strong box, the soul escapes from purgatory and soars to heaven” (D’Aubigné, 1849, p. 217).

Surrounding the historical event however there is some uncertainty. Nailed to a door? Which church? Erwin Iserloh (1961, cited in Treu, n. d., para. 1) after reviewing Luther’s documents, notes no explicit reference to this act. However, Treu (n.d., para. 2) found in 2006 that George Rörer (Luther’s secretary) had written a note in November 1544 on a revision of the 1540 New Testament, that “On the evening before All Saint’s Day in the year of our Lord 1517, theses about letters of indulgence were nailed to the doors of the Wittenberg churches by Doctor Martin Luther.” This broader circulation, fits with the idea of a widely informed and inclusive discussion of a high interest church difference of opinion, a dialogue that Luther sought. The only prior known reference to this event, was by Luther’s friend Melancthon, in an preface to Luther’s Collected Works in (1546).

Five hundred years later, do we celebrate the historicity and scholarship surrounding the event? No, but historicity assures celebration. We celebrate.

Martin Luther initiated the reformation by flagging before all: an uninformed, corrupted, unrepentant populace; a religious-power-linked politic; and a sectored hierarchy of conniving, indulgent, profiteering priests - that scripture alone is the secure foundation of truth, and that justification for sinners is through faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on Calvary alone. The spread of these truths, revalidated in religious thought, emerging as the Protestant reformation of Christianity, empowered all the subsequent reformers and the gospel mission leading Christianity “to teach all nations” Matt 28:19. This is our celebrated Christian heritage.

Articles in this issue draw on our historic Christian heritage. Establishing and modelling ethical

practice is informed by Green. Rieger provides Christian leaders a values-virtue lens through which perspectives can inform, support reflection and structure review of practice. Kilgour and Christian assert White’s advantageous century-old educational principles are aligned with elements of current best practice. Pope suggests teachers consider socioscientific issues within a guided framework to support resolution in the minds of students, of the ethical conflicts emerging from social and technological change.

Responding to human need, a virtue aligned to Luther’s 45th thesis, is advocated by: Shields and Lennox in relating appropriately to the Deaf, Arnold’s guiding of second language learners and Hinze and Morton’s ‘Wellbeing’ initiative for educators.

Luther began the reformation but did not completely reform himself (expressing anti-Semitism); his humanity captured by it’s contexts. Yet God used him - in his incompleteness – to create opportunity and accomplish the sharing of His translated word.

Christian teachers too, conscious of personal sinful failings, choose to accept “you have been saved through faith, and that not of your selves; it is the gift of God” Eph 2:8 KJV, and overcome inadequacy by responding in the Spirit, living “this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” Col 1:27 NIV. This we all celebrate too!

References

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“
... in the year
of our Lord
1517, theses
about letters
of indulgence
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to the
doors of the
Wittenberg
churches ...
”



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