

The Reformation and Its Implication for Today's Church

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ABSTRACT

The Roman Church in the 13th- 15th century suffered a severe deviation from the truth in both the ecclesiastical life and in the dogma. Corruption crept into the Church and the clergy forgot their pastoral responsibilities. Instead, they looked after their own personal pleasures. The leadership and the church administration was not in the way it should be. People during the Middle Ages in Europe had a very real dread of the period of punishment in purgatory and hell, which were graphically portrayed in the Church. This research materials is taken from the textbooks, journals and other written materials. The issues which were dealt with by the reformer are still very much prevalent; today in the church, universally and locally. Likewise, the present churches today as a whole is plagued with internal issues such as corruption, fight for leadership, interest for own benefits by the leaders, moral degradation of the members as was cited in the research paper.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Roman Church in the 13th- 15th century suffered a severe deviation from the truth in both the ecclesiastical life and in the dogma. Corruption crept into the Church and the clergy forgot their pastoral responsibilities. Instead, they looked after their own personal pleasures. The leadership and the church administration was not in the way it should be. People during the Middle Ages in Europe had a very real dread of the period of punishment in purgatory and hell, which were graphically portrayed in the Church. Based on the teachings of the indulgence of the Catholic Church, the church controlled both destinations. Unfortunately, facing all the fears of both, the Church offered selling indulgences, instead of offering Christ as the Savior. These

indulgences were hard to pay by the poor and a source of distress for the rich. As a result, when Reformation started, people hurried to join it to get rid of the nightmare of both purgatory and hell. In this paper, the researcher will try to bring out some of the causes and reasons that brought Reformation in the Church. The researcher will also deal with the forerunner of reformation and Martin Luther in a larger scope which will be concluded with an implication for today's churches.

II. METHODS

In the process of doing research, of course, a writing method is needed with the aim of being able to obtain answers and new paradigms for the problems studied. The method used in writing this journal is a qualitative research method, namely research sourced from

text books, journals and other written materials.¹ This research was conducted based on library research. Case study research examines a particular case or phenomenon that exists in society which is carried out in depth to study the background, circumstances, and interactions that occur. Case studies are carried out on a unified system which can be in the form of a program, activity, event, or group of individuals that exist in certain circumstances or conditions. The reformer's emphasis on the centrality, significance, and power of the local congregations needs to be reclaimed. Re-Reformation would positively lead to providing guidelines and principles for the mission of the church. Reformation needs to become a spiritual and theological struggle, a liberating and justice experience, and the faith journey of the churches as much as it was to the Reformers. It is hope that the Reformation theme would continue to linger in the minds of the Churches to reform and re-reform itself as a continuous process in order to make its presence more relevant, credible, meaningful, and creative.

III. DISCUSSION

1. The Protestant Reformation

Philip Schaff said, "The Reformation of the sixteenth century is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history. It marks the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. Starting from religion, it gave, directly or indirectly, a mighty

impulse to every forward movement, and made Protestantism the chief propelling force in the history of modern civilization."² The Reformation was a complex, multifaceted response to the Church experience of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Many Christians realized that the Church was simply not serving the spiritual needs of the people. It had become corrupt, and abuses were widespread. At the same time, Christians were becoming more literate and articulate, so they expected more from the Church.³

Protestantism comes from the word *protest*, as the movement began when Luther protested the clear abuses that had been going on for centuries.⁴ Protestants are the members of the original group that "protested" against the Roman Catholic Church and actually separated from it, and any member of that group of Churches or their modern descendants. The term was first used in 1529 when a group of German noblemen "protested" at the Diet of Speyer.⁵

2. Romanism and Protestantism

Protestantism represents the most enlightened and active of modern Church history, but not the whole of it. Catholicism and Protestantism represent two distinct types of Christianity that sprang from the same root but

²Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol.VII (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1882), 3.

³Paul R. Spickard and Kevin M.Cragg, *A Global History of Christians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 171.

⁴Christopher Catherwood, *Church History* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007), 96.

⁵Robert Hastings Nichols, *The Growth of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1941), 194.

¹ Sukmadinata Nana Syaodih, *Metode Penelitian* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2009).

differ in the branches. Catholicism is legal Christianity that served to the barbarian nations of the Middle Ages as a necessary school of discipline; Protestantism is evangelical Christianity which answers the age of independent manhood. Catholicism is traditional, hierarchical, ritualistic, and conservative; Protestantism is biblical, democratic, spiritual, and progressive.⁶

3. Criticisms on Catholic Church

Critics of the Church claimed that its leaders were corrupt. The Popes who ruled during the Renaissance patronized the arts spent extravagantly on personal pleasure and fought wars. Pope Alexander VI, for example, admitted that he had fathered several children.⁷ Many Popes were too busy pursuing worldly affairs to have much time for spiritual duties. The lower clergy had problems as well. Many priests and monks were so poorly educated that they could scarcely read, let alone teach people. Others broke their priestly vows by marrying, and some drank to excess or gambled.

4. Rome's Theology⁸

The roman church was fallen down and far away from the teaching of the Bible. The power of Pope was in its esteem point and it was equivalent with God. The Pope has the

authority of forgiving sins and the power to sending people to heaven. So, it was in this context several reformers came up against the teaching of the Church.

Infallibility of the Pope

The infallibility of the Pope was not an officially declared dogma of the Roman Church (it became official dogma in 1870), but it was an assumed fact. Gregory and Hildebrand or Gregory VII were known as the servant of the Servant Lord and Vicar of Christ. Everyone from the lowest peasant to the highest ruler was to recognize him as Christ's representative on earth and supreme ruler over all religious and political matters.⁹

Salvation in the Roman Church Only

The Roman Catholic Church, which numbers about half of the world's Christians, believes itself as one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church founded by Christ himself. The Church holds that the divine revelation as contained in the Bible has been safeguarded and made authentic in each generation by the Roman Catholic Church teaching authority. This authority is especially exercised by the bishops of the local Churches which are known as the dioceses, all in communion with the bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter. Roman Church taught that all who did not acknowledge the Pope as God's representative on earth and the Roman Catholic Church as the

⁶John Hunt, *Concise Church History* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2008), 278.

⁷Luther Leads the Reformation. www.class.zone.com

⁸Jack L. Arnold, *The Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages Reformation*, 'Men and Theology, Lesson 1 of 11' (np:np,nd), 3-4. http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/jac_arnold/CH.Arnold.RMT.2.html. Accessed on May 23, 2022, 1:30 am.

⁹As early as 590, Gregory the Great called himself "the servant of servants," believing that he was supreme among all bishops. Another Pope, Hildebrand or Gregory VII (11th century), held that, as Vicar of Christ and representative of Peter, he could give or take empires. See in Arnold, *The Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages Reformation...*, 5.

only true Church were damned. Salvation was confined within the teachings of the Roman Church. Every person who disagreed with the Roman Church was in line for a heresy trial and perhaps ex-communication. Excommunication meant the loss of one's soul.

Salvation by Works

By the 14th century, Augustinian theology was lost or badly neglected. Rome had accepted almost in totality the freewill teaching of Pelagius (5th century) that it had formerly repudiated. Salvation was not caused by God's grace through a supernatural new birth, but by assent to Roman Catholic dogma and practice. Faith was not trusting in Christ for salvation, but submission to the Church. Salvation was not by grace through faith in Christ alone but by faith in the Church and good works prescribed by the Church. Practically speaking, "good works" consisted of mere external obedience to the Church and did not necessarily flow from a life of faith in Christ. The Roman Catholic Church stressed external actions, legal observance, and penitential works. The man actually gained heaven by his works.¹⁰ The Church wanted the people to have total trust in the Church and depending on everything upon them. By sacrificing their lives, beliefs, and so on.

Complete Sanctification

Rome taught sinless perfectionism. They confused justification and sanctification, teaching that men were justified by God's work in their own hearts and experience. Justification

became subjective rather than objective. God was said to infuse grace and transform sinful nature. By this transforming change within him, the believer was said to be made just in God's sight. As the Christian received more grace, he was said to become less sinful and therefore more just in God's sight.¹¹ Roman Church held out to men the possibility of becoming pure and sinless saints (ontological perfection), and those who attained this perfection reached sainthood and were qualified to enter heaven at the hour of death. Those who did not become perfect and sinless in the flesh would need to go to purgatory after death and thus be made completely just and qualified to enter heaven.

Saints Worship

The more a person practiced external works, the more saint-like he became and closer he came to heaven. Some men and women, who were good enough to be called saints, lived advanced in holiness beyond what was required of them. They were made saints by the Church. Many of these saints were worshiped by the Roman Catholic Church and became mediators between God and man. When Pelagianism laid down the doctrine that man could attain a state of perfect sanctification, it affirmed also that the merits of saints and martyrs might be applied to the Church. A peculiar power was attributed to their intercession. Prayers were made to them; their aid was invoked in all the sorrows of life, and real idolatry thus supplanted the adoration of the living and true God.

¹⁰Arnold, *The Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages Reformation...*, 5.

¹¹Arnold, *The Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages Reformation...*, 5.

5. Rome's Scandals

Here in this section, the researcher will mainly focus on the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church in which mislead the people, the ignorance of the clergy, the worldly pleasure life of the clergy, and etc.

Immorality of the Clergy

Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) had numerous affairs and children out of wedlock. 20% of all priests in the diocese of Trent kept concubines during the early 16th century. Basking in the luxury of wealth and power, the Popes soon degenerated to so low a degree of morality that the people finally revolted against them and their vileness. The Popes were cursed by greed and were entangled in scheming politics and intrigue.¹² Violence was commonly used.¹³ The abodes of the clergy were often dens of corruption. Celibacy for clergy became Roman Church law in 1079. This mandate tempted all kinds of immorality. It was a common sight to see priests frequenting the taverns, gambling, and having orgies with quarrels and blasphemy. Many of the clergies kept mistresses, and convents became houses of ill fame. In many places, the people were delighted at seeing a priest keep a mistress, that the married women might be safe from his

¹²Frederick J. Gielow, *Popular Outline of Church History* (Cincinnati, U.S.A: The Standard Publishing Company, 1926), 62.

¹³In 882 Pope John VIII. was assassinated because of his wickedness. Another Pope (John X), who ruled from 914 to 928 A.D., put on the armor of a soldier and went forth upon the battlefield with his troops as a military general. In 904 A.D., Pope Sergius III secured his position as Pope by resorting to the use of the sword. See in Gielow, *Popular Outline of Church History...*, 62.

seductions. In many places, the priest paid the bishop a regular tax for the women with whom he lived, and for each child, he had by her.

Ignorance of Clergy

No wonder that many cardinals and priests followed the scandalous example of the Popes, and weakened the respect of the laity for the clergy. The writings of contemporary scholars, preachers, and satirists are full of complaints and exposures of the ignorance, vulgarity, and immorality of priests and monks.¹⁴ Many of the clergies had come to their offices through political maneuvering. In a country parish one person called the clergy "miserable wretches . . . previously raised from beggary, and who had been cooks, musicians, huntsmen, stable boys and even worse." Clergy no longer had to learn and teach the Scriptures, for the Church told them what to do. Even the superior clergymen were sunk in great ignorance in spiritual matters. They had secular learning but knew very little of the Bible.¹⁵ Although the Church had established standards of education for parish priests, bishops rarely enforced them. As a rule, parish priests were less educated than the educated laity. Many priests could not read or write, and frequently mumbled Latin words that they did not themselves understand.¹⁶

Inquisition

¹⁴Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. VII...*, 8.

¹⁵Jack L. Arnold, *The Roman Catholic Church of The Middle Ages*, "Reformation Men and Theology, Lesson 1 of 11".

¹⁶http://www.historydoctor.net/History/Notes/lutheran_reformation.htm. Accessed on 23 May 2022, 11 pm.

The Inquisition or ‘Holy Office’ was the court of the Roman Church for the detection and punishment of those whose opinions differ from the doctrine of the Church.¹⁷ In addition, this organization was designed to inquire into the spread of heresy and to call before its tribunal Catholics suspected of heresy with a view to securing their repentance. The accused were sometimes tortured and even put to death. The Inquisition was a disgrace to men who called themselves followers of God. Anybody suspected of heresy was brought before the tribunal conducted by Dominican Friars.

Corruption in the Catholic Church

1. Definition of Corruption

The term ‘corruption’ comes from the Latin word *corruption* which means “moral decay, wicked behavior, putridity or rotteness”.¹⁸ It can be understood from the definition that corruption is “the destruction or spoiling of anything, especially by disintegration or by decomposition with its attendant unwholesomeness and loathsomeness; putrefaction”.¹⁹ In addition, it has moral significance, in that it is regarded as “moral deterioration or decay, perversion or destruction of integrity in the discharge of public duties by bribery or favor.”²⁰ Corruption is a human violation of the citizen’s rights, especially the

denial of the rights of the powerless.²¹ Corruption broadly covers “fraud (theft through misrepresentation), embezzlement (misappropriation of corporate or public funds) and bribery (payments made in order to gain an advantage or to avoid a disadvantage)”.²²

2. Simony

One of the worst abuses was simony, the buying, and selling of Church offices. As the financial needs of the Papacy grew, simony came to be increasingly resorted to as a revenue-raising device. According to Robert A. Baker, simony is one of the methods or means for increasing papacy revenue. Simony also refers to the sale of a Church office. It takes its name from Simon Magus (Acts 8:9ff), who tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit with money.²³ According to B.K. Kuiper, simony was started by Benedict IX who when he was tired of being pontificate brazenly sold the office of Pope for one thousand pounds of silver to a man who is known as Gregory VI.²⁴

3. Pluralism²⁵ and Absenteeism²⁶

The plurality of office and absence from the diocese were common. Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz was at the same time Archbishop of Magdeburg and bishop of Halberstadt. Cardinal Wolsey was Archbishop of York while

²¹M. Stephen, *Contextual Issues* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2011), 128.

²²Bryan R Evans. *The Cost of Corruption: A Discussion Paper on Corruption, Development and the Poor*, 3 Accessed on 20 June 2021, 10 pm.

²³Robert A. Baker, *A Summary of Christian History* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), 147-149.

²⁴Kuiper, *The Church in History...*, 85.

²⁵An official holding more than one office at a time

²⁶An official not participating in benefices but receiving payment and privileges. Being absent from place of responsibility i.e. diocese.

¹⁷Morris Bishop, *The Middle Ages* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1970), 340-342.

¹⁸Transparency International, (2009) *Corruption and Human Rights: Making the Connection. International Council on Human Rights Policy*.15. Accessed on 23 May 2022, 11 pm.

¹⁹Transparency International.

²⁰Transparency International.

chancellor of England received stipends from the kings of France and Spain and the doge of Venice, and had a train of five hundred servants. James V. of Scotland (1528–1542) provided for his illegitimate children by making them abbots of Holyrood House, Kelso, Melrose, Cold Ingham, and St. Andrews, and entrusted royal favorites with bishoprics.²⁷

The Popes also took for themselves the money that had previously been paid to bishops' expenses when they visited their dioceses, so many ceased to inspect their clergy—with dire results for clerical discipline. Monastic houses, too, had insufficient direction and many lost their self-sacrificing spirituality. The prestige of the papacy sank so low that papal attempts to discipline the Church were largely ignored.²⁸

Many high Churchmen, archbishops, cardinals, etc... often held several *benefices*, (Church offices) at the same time. Even Wycliffe was a priest in two parishes.²⁹ An example of absenteeism is Thomas Wolsey, later Henry VIII's chancellor, who was appointed Archbishop of York (England had only two Archbishoprics: Canterbury and York). Wolsey held the position for fifteen years before he ever set foot in his diocese. It is said that Antoine du Prat, who was appointed as an Archbishop of Sens in France, first entered his cathedral was at his own funeral.³⁰

²⁷Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol.VII...,8.

²⁸Michael Collins, *The Story of Christianity* (New York: DK Publishing Inc., 1999), 121.

²⁹Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christian Thought* (Oxford, England: Lion Hudson plc, 2003), 162.

³⁰http://www.historydoctor.net/History/Notes/luthera_n_reformation.htm. Accessed on 23 May 2022 , 1:30 am.

4. Sale of Indulgences³¹

In a process of time, a certain development took place in the system of penance i.e., indulgence. At first, it was a commutation of penance by the payment of money. The right to issue them had gradually become the exclusive prerogative of the Popes.³² It was believed that Christ and the saints had achieved so much merit during their earthly lives that the excess merit was laid up in the heavenly treasury of merit from which the Pope could draw on behalf of the living faithful.³³ This idea was first formulated by Alexander of Hales in the thirteenth century. Clement VI declared it to be dogma in 1343. A later papal Bull of Sixtus IV in 1476 extended this privilege to souls in purgatory, provided their living relatives purchased indulgences for them.³⁴

The main person behind the selling of indulgences was John Tetzel.³⁵ He was a German Dominican friar. While selling indulgences he used the catchy line, "As soon a coin in coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."³⁶ He even went as far as creating a

³¹Indulgences were grants by the Catholic Church that released a person from punishment for sins. . See in B.K. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: CSI publications, 1964), 158.

³²George Park Fisher, *History of The Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 292.

³³Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 182-183.

³⁴Earle Edwin Cairns, *Christianity Through The Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 276.

³⁵ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol.VII..., 103.

³⁶Hunt, *Concise Church History...*, 282.

chart that listed the price for each type of sin. In 1517, Tetzel was trying to raise money for the ongoing construction of St. Peter's Basilica and it is believed that Martin Luther was inspired to write his 95 Theses, in part, due to Tetzel's actions during that period of time.

5. Nepotism³⁷

It is nepotism that turned the attention of Popes from wider projects to the task of advancing their relatives in worldly power, honors, and riches. Nicolas III³⁸ (1277-1280) and Pope Paul III (1468-1549),³⁹ gave the conspicuous examples of this practice, whose overgrown excess in subsequent times was to be one of the most repellent features of the papacy.⁴⁰ It is said that never before was nepotism driven with such recklessness. It became the principle of the entire administration of Sixtus IV.⁴¹ It is dirty politics played by the leaders where they ensured that only their lineage are qualified and fit to be the successor of their present post. They failed to acknowledge the ability of the local people where they are more learned and more spiritual and in which they are qualified to be a leader.

6. Exaltation of the Clergy

The doctrine of sinless perfectionism strengthened the position of the Roman

hierarchy. The clergy were thought to be more holy than the average people. Being more holy, they were special channels of the grace of God. Thus, the clergy had the authority from God to dispense God's grace.⁴²

7. Church and Woman

In Roman Catholic areas, the celibate clerical caste, monastic vocations for women, as well as employment in making sacramental objects remained, but in both Catholic and Protestant areas of Europe, there was a renewal of Roman law that dictated stricter economic and legal subordination of women.⁴³ As a result, women were marginalized from skilled, paid work. They were removed from membership in guilds or craft unions in their own right. Single women who were not part of patriarchal households (or nunneries) were looked on with suspicion, and in Catholic areas, the subordination of nuns to the male Episcopal hierarchy was tightened up. Strict cloister and separation from the world were ensured.⁴⁴ The ability of women to be self-supporting householders was thus becoming more difficult.⁴⁵ Women's preaching or publishing material stood in direct opposition to St. Paul (1Timothy 2:11-15).

³⁷ <http://canonlawmadeeasy.com/is-nepotism-still-an-issue-in-the-Church/>. Accessed on 23 May 2022, 1am.

³⁸ https://www.princeton.edu/wiki/docs/Pope_Nicholas_III.html. Accessed on 23 May 2022, 1:30am.

³⁹ Pope Paul III made two of his grandson's cardinals.

⁴⁰ Henry C. Sheldon, *History of Christian Church*, Vol.II (New York: Hendrikson Publisher, 1999), 248.

⁴¹ http://oneevil.org/content/people_15c_sixtus_iv.html. Accessed on 23 May 2022, 1:30am

⁴² Jack L. Arnold, *The Roman Catholic Church of The Middle Ages*, "Reformation Men and Theology, Lesson 1 of 11". http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/jac_arnold/CH.Arnold.RMT.2.html. Accessed on 23 May 2022, 1:30am.

⁴³ Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 30-34;

⁴⁴ Ruth P. Liebowitz, "Virgins in the Service of Christ: The Dispute over the Active Apostolate for Women during the Counter-Reformation," in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary R. Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 131-52.

⁴⁵ Merry E. Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 168-85.

Fore-runners of Reformation

1. John Wycliffe(1328-1384) and His Contribution

He was one of the earliest opponents of papal authority over [secular](#) power. Wycliffe expounded three doctrines that the established church recognized as major threats. First was his emphasis upon an individual's interpretation of the Bible as the best guide to a moral life, as opposed to the Church's emphasis on receiving its sacraments as the only way to salvation. Second, he insisted that the holiness of an individual was more important than official office; that is, a truly pious person was morally superior to a wicked ordained cleric. Wycliffe challenged the privileged status of the clergy, which was central to their powerful role in England. Finally, he attacked the luxurious and exorbitant luxury and pomp of the churches and their ceremonies.

Wycliffe had spurned nominalist principles on the basis of his strict views of philosophical realism; his first concerted attack was on the clerical ownership of property and authority.⁴⁶ He argued that authority—secular and religious—is dependent on God's grace. He further said that someone in a state of sin has no right to any kind of authority even if he is the Pope. His most striking and influential point is about the scripture. He argued that since the Bible is the source of all truth, it should be available in the local language.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Curtis Bostick, "Wycliffe John" in Robert Benedetto, *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, Vol.I (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 686.

⁴⁷Hill, *The History of Christian Thought...*, 164.

He went further, on the subject of Church finance, and said that it was illegal as it was unscriptural for the Church and its ministers to possess great wealth. He became stronger in his denunciations of corruption in the Church and was particularly vehement against the begging friars with their hypocrisy and their impositions upon simple people. The more he considered the corruptions of the Church, the more he was led to the view that they had their root cause in the false claims of the Papacy. He further said that the priest is 'Clippers and purse-keepers' (highway robbers).⁴⁸ In a little book addressed to the clergy, he says "If thou art a priest, live a holy life; pass other men in holy prayer, holy desire, and holy speaking". Have both meat and drink and clothing; but the remnant give to the poor, to the aged, the feeble, and the sick.⁴⁹

2. John Huss and his Contribution

Jan Hus often referred to in English as John Hus or John Huss, was a [Czech](#) priest, philosopher, reformer, and master at [Charles University in Prague](#). After [John Wycliffe](#), the theorist of ecclesiastical Reformation, Hus is considered the first Church reformer, as he lived before [Luther](#), [Calvin](#), and [Zwingli](#).

John Huss achieved fame as a martyr to the cause of Church reform and Czech nationalism. On the walls of Bethlehem, Chapel paintings contrasted the behavior of the Popes and Christ; while the Pope rode a horse, Christ walked barefoot; as Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, the Pope had his feet kissed. Such

⁴⁸H.C. Lefever, *The History of the Reformation* (Mysore: CLS, 1971), 23.

⁴⁹Lefever, *History of the Reformation ...*, 23.

clerical worldliness offended Huss, and he preached and taught against it, while he also stressed the personal piety and purity of life.⁵⁰ He was very much indebted to the Wycliffe works. He stressed the role of Scripture as an authority in the Church and consequently lifted preaching to an important status in Church services.⁵¹ He stressed that **liturgy should** be in the languages of the people (i.e. Czech), having laypeople receive **communion** in both kinds (bread *and* wine - that is, in Latin, *communio sub utraque specie*), married priests, and eliminating **indulgences** and the idea of **Purgatory**. Hus rejected indulgences and adopted a doctrine of **justification by grace through faith alone**. The Roman Catholic Church officially concluded this debate at the **Council of Constance** (1414–1417). The conclave condemned Hus, was executed by burning in spite of a promise of safe conduct.

3. Martin Luther (1483-1546) and His Contribution

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483, in the town of Eisleben in Saxony, in Eastern Germany.⁵² He was the first child of Hans and Margaret Luther; he was named Martin because he was baptized on St. Martin's day.⁵³ He was the subject of strict discipline from both parents, but he was also the

beneficiary of their desire to see him properly educated and religiously trained.⁵⁴

a. The Problem of Indulgences and the Ninety-Five Theses

The Church was rife with corruption. Church offices were bought by wealthy nobles and used to gain more wealth and power. The sale of indulgences soon became an important source of revenue for the Church and a cesspool of corruption. So-called "pardoners" often peddled religious relics, etc... with all the zeal of a modern-day used car salesman, complete with a sales pitch. Everyone was happy-except for a number of devout Germans, among them Martin Luther. When he nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Church at Wittenberg on 31 October 1517 A.D, it is not that he declared war against the Roman Catholic Church but he merely issued a challenge to debate certain points in regard to the use of indulgences.⁵⁵ As Williston Walker said, "Luther had desired no quarrel with the papacy. He seems to have believed that the Pope might see the abuses of indulgences as he did, but the course of events was leading to no choice save the sturdy maintenance of his views or submission."⁵⁶

b. Treatise on Good works

Luther points to the fact that one can overcome the sins of the flesh, the world, and

⁵⁰Curtis, *The 100 Most Important Events in Christian History...*, 88.

⁵¹Caroline T. Marshall, "Jan Hus" in *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity*. Ed., Tim Dowley (Berks, Herts, England: Lion Publishing, 1977), 330.

⁵²Throughout this paper, the term, "Germany," refers to the geographic region in central Europe, rather than the nation of Germany, which did not exist in Luther's day. The German Empire was founded in 1871.

⁵³Jayakumar, *History of reformation Period*, 51.

⁵⁴ Scott Hendrix, "Martin Luther, Reformer" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. 6 Reform and Expansion 1500–1660... ed. R. PO-CHIA HSIA (Cambridge Histories Online: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.

⁵⁵Gielow, *Popular Outline of Church History ...*, 103.

⁵⁶Walker, *A History of The Christian Church...*, 306.

the wicked spirit by doing good works. According to Luther, God gives us enough occasions to do good works.⁵⁷ God expects the cooperation of Christians in establishing peace and justice in society. However, if people do not extend their help, God has the power to do it alone. Subsequently, all those who are unwilling to work together to carry out God's purpose will be condemned as unrighteous.⁵⁸

c. The Christian Nobility of the German Nation

Luther defends the role of the laity in actively participating in the reform of the Church. The three walls that the Church has erected are as follows. Firstly, the Church has declared that the spiritual power is above the temporal. Second, that only the Pope can interpret the Scripture. Finally, the Pope alone could call a council. Luther insists that the laity also has the same gospel and faith. Therefore, the laity too has a "proper and useful place in the Christian community."⁵⁹

d. Priesthood for all Believers

This meant that men went directly to God; they did not gain salvation through the Church, but became believers. The Roman Catholic Church used the name priest for a clergyman, which meant that they stood, as in Old Testament times, between people and God. The reformers spoke of all men as priests,

personally speaking to God, without the mediation of the Church.

IV. CONCLUSION

By the time of the Reformation, Catholic Church believes that everyday devotion and Bible reading are for monks. It also believes that the approach to God is increasingly through saints, Mary, and the 'miracle' of the Mass. The Church also should be a large, wealthy, and worldwide institution, as powerful as an emperor.

By the time the fifteenth and sixteenth century rolled around, many Reformers had tried to correct the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, calling it back to obedience to God's Word.

Corruption was prevalent among the priesthood, especially at the top. The Church was torturing the people who were suspect of holding non-orthodox beliefs until they confessed or died. The Church also encouraged believers to pray to Mary and the saints. Those who were known as salesmen for the Church went around selling 'indulgences' letters which were written by the Pope supposedly forgiving people their sins. There are also no genuine leaders who were blameless and care for the Church and the people. The Church failed to provide for the needs of the people. The Church misused its authority and power. The Church and society became an aspect of dualism where the Church considered she is not a part of the society.

⁵⁷ Martin Luther, "Treatise on Good works", in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 49.

⁵⁸ Luther, "Treatise on Good works", in *Luther's Works*, 52.

⁵⁹ Roland H. Bainton's, *Here I Stand A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: New American Library, 1950), 116-120.

During the sixteenth century, however, reform could no longer be stemmed. Many people began to follow and support the Reformers. As result, the Roman Catholic Church could no longer silence the “Protestants.” As the people can access the Bible, they were able to judge for themselves whether the Church leaders were teaching them was actually true. The study of the scriptures by the whole Church and its interpretation raises justice issues in the community and the Church no longer pulls the congregations in the age-old interpretation and prosperity cult with any relevance to the things that bother them in their day-to-day living. As a result, the number of reformers follower increase, and many of them had a Roman Catholic Church background. Their main objective was to return to the real teaching of the Scripture and followed it.

The issues which were dealt with by the reformer are still very much prevalent; today in the church, universally and locally. Likewise, the present churches today as a whole is plagued with internal issues such as corruption, fight for leadership, interest for own benefits by the leaders, moral degradation of the members as was cited in the research paper. Many of the Church in India with special reference to my local church L. Khengjang Christian Church, people ought to think that there is no salvation outside the Church. Here, what the researcher want to express is that those who constantly absent from attending church are not a good believer’s. Like the church leaders of the reformation period, most of the leaders today, in

their effort to build their hierarchical position seem to forget or misunderstand their role in and outside the church. As mention earlier, leaders misusing the church’s money brought discontentment among the members. Church leaders use their power for their own interests and needs. Like the absolute Papal power of the Reformation period church leaders, even today exercise their religious power for their own interest and benefits. While accumulating for their own personal material wealth many of the leaders today seem to fail to focus on the needs of the common people who are within and outside the church. Therefore, looking at the church and its structures, the church is in need of constant Reformation in order to revitalize itself and also for its own renewal. It needs Reformation to set its structures which lay too much emphasis on power and also help to relate the church to the people as God’s people. The reformer’s emphasis on the centrality, significance, and power of the local congregations needs to be reclaimed. Re-Reformation would positively lead to providing guidelines and principles for the mission of the church. Reformation needs to become a spiritual and theological struggle, a liberating and justice experience, and the faith journey of the churches as much as it was to the Reformers. It is hope that the Reformation theme would continue to linger in the minds of the Churches to reform and re-reform itself as a continuous process in order to make its presence more relevant, credible, meaningful, and creative.

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