



REFLECTIONS ON THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION AFTER FIVE HUNDRED YEARS

Kuusaana, Mariama Marciana

Institutional Affiliation: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, West Africa.

Corresponding author: *Kuusaana, Mariama Marciana
Email : mmkuusaana.cass@knust.edu.gh

ABSTRACT

The basic principle underlying the Protestant Reformation was the “evils inherent in the Roman Catholic Church”. Some of these included the corrupt papacy or the authority of the Pope, infallibility of the Pope, veneration of the Virgin Mary and other Saints, the use of sacred objects, celibacy of consecrated men/women, general Church Councils, the sale of indulgences, among several others. Meanwhile, Luther and those after him, such as Huldreich Zwingli and John Calvin believed in ‘Justification by Faith’ alone. The counter-reformation could not beat down the tide with the result that the former Roman Catholic Church segregated into Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists just to mention a few. Five Hundred years on, the Catholic Church still commands the largest in numbers, papal authority though limited still remains a force to reckon with, the Vatican’s status as a country is recognized by the world body- the UN, veneration of the Virgin Mary and saints still remains strong with many more people being canonized. Meanwhile, the schism continues and many more denominations or Churches come into being. Reforms in the Catholic Church like the Council of Trent and Vatican II have not done away with many of the things that brought about the Reformation. There is also evidence of increased persecution of Christians. Yet a sort of ecumenism seems to be taking place not only between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestants but also Muslims. What have been some of the critical issues arising since the Reformation?

KEYWORDS

Christianity, Reformation, Protestant, Church, Ecumenism, Muslim.

METHOD

This paper is compiled using mainly secondary sources and a qualitative approach to digest an issue which started over five hundred years ago, with impacts which are enduring, and still seems to be on-going.



INTRODUCTION

By October 1917, a year that marked the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, universal response to it had become as explosive as the event itself. From scholarly, theological, devotional and other circles, the response has been massive. It is perhaps, for this reason that Marek Jan Chodakiewicz prefers to call it a Revolution rather than a Reformation.¹ According to him, Luther set out as a reformer, but the events which followed his attempt at reform, transformed it into a world-wide revolution. He traces the use of the word Reformation to Germany, where German protestant scholars pioneered in using the word because they were in the lead when history became professionalized in the nineteenth century. The British picked up the word from them, the Americans followed, and the term became a universal. The overarching multiplication of Protestant denominations across the world since the Reformation supports Chodakiewicz's view.

On a similar note, 'Rock of Ages' has observed that, it was the Reformation that enshrined the doctrine of 'Justification by Faith' in the Church.² By this, the paper postulates the belief that the Holy Spirit has come back to be a vital part of the Church after the Spirit had been missing from about the fifth to the fifteenth centuries. Whether one agrees with this view or not, is not the crux of the matter, but the fact that Luther's reform has been positive.

Commenting on the Reformation in an Anglican Journal, Wayne Holst also notes that for the five hundred years that Luther took action, he is still acknowledged by the majority of people as a man who found himself at the right place and at the right time, and managed to change the course of history.³ He considers Luther as an instrument for human cultural and political development, standing up in opposition to a most supreme authority of his time: the Pope or the papacy, calling it a kind of David and Goliath battle. Indeed, Wayne's stand on the Reformation is not all praise, for he has acknowledged that before he better appreciated Luther, he had held some earlier grievances against him, based on information from some Christian sources and secular historians. Some Christian sources had depicted Luther as being badly temperamental, while from some secular historians, he gathered the reformer was anti-Semitic. However, Wayne pointed out that his visits to some Lutheran sites in Germany, Wittenberg and Wartburg in particular, reoriented his stance on Luther.

Like Wayne, Steven Timmermans believes the Protestant Reformation was both necessary and unfortunate.⁴ It was necessary because at the time that it occurred, some biblical correctives needed to be injected into the Church, and the unfortunate side was that separation could not be prevented because the Church had strayed way off. He concludes that whether as Protestants, Catholics or Orthodox, Christians should remember it with sadness as well with gratitude.

Writing from a Catholic perspective, Mathew Levering examines the major concerns of the Reformation.⁵ Though he agrees that the 1517 Church was in need of a spiritual and theological

¹Chodakiewicz, M. J., 'Reflections on the Protestant Reformation.'

crises magazine.com/2020/reflections-on-the-protestant-revolution. <https://www.crisismagazine.com/reflections-on-the-pr>

²Rock of Ages, 'Reflecting on the Protestant Reformation.' <https://www.rockofages.org.sg/2017/10/26/reflections>

Rockofages.org.sg/pastoral-reflections/2017/10/26/reflections-on-the-protestant-reformation.

³ Anglican Journal (Wayne Holst) ,Reformation: A Personal Reflection – <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/reformation-persona...>

⁴ Steven Timmermans, 'Reformation Reflections, The Network- CRCNA – Christian. <https://network.crcna.org/Synod/reformation-reflections>

⁵ Mathew Levering, *Was the Reformation a Mistake? Why Catholic Doctrine is not Unbiblical* (USA: Zondervan Academic, 2017)

reform, he maintains that Catholic doctrine is biblical. By this, he attempts to bridge the gap between the ideals of the Reformation and Catholic doctrine which seem irreconcilable anyway.

In his book, *Reforming Reformation Theology for the 21st Century*, Mark Ellingson attributes the current woes of the Church in the West to the imposition of modern ways of thinking about faith, which has made theology more academic, making it irrelevant for daily life.⁶ He underscores the need to revisit Martin Luther in order to reform current interpretation of him, since Luther's theological approach could change some modern ways of thinking about the Bible to make them relevant for humankind.

While Theologian Benjamin Wiker writes to dispel misconceptions and untruths about the Reformation, which emanates from Catholic, Protestant, Marxist, Freudian and secular perspectives, Reformation historian Peter Marshall, argues that Luther's posting of the 95 Theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg probably did not happen.⁷ It is not only so surprising, but also so strange that, for something that has been overwhelmingly impacting as to be termed a revolution rather than a mere reform by some, can be described by another as a 'non-event'.⁸ Indeed, writing under the title 'Flurry of Titles Mark 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation,' Anne Bylecame out with a collection of works on the Reformation in October 1917 to commemorate the historical event, and these reiterate the significance of the Reformation.

Since 2017, scholarly and religious entities across the world have rekindled and reawakened the passion associated with the Reformation, and it's quite interesting to note that while wars and conflicts of a catastrophic nature emerged at the instance of it, cooperation and ecumenism seem to characterize relations between the Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations in contemporary times.

Background to the Reformation

Before 1517, the year Martin Luther started his reformation, the Church founded by Jesus Christ was already divided between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, sometimes called the Latin Church associated with Western Europe.⁹ Therefore, while the first schism separated the Church along Eastern and Western lines, this second phase associated largely with Martin Luther separated the Church in the West along Roman Catholic and Protestant lines. In both cases, denunciation of the supremacy of the Pope was an underlying factor.

But what prompted Luther's objection to the Church? By 1517, worldliness or materialism had epitomized Church activity.¹⁰ Secondly, Martin Luther had by this time discovered what he called 'Justification by Faith'.¹¹ According to him, only inner faith in God alone was needed for God's grace, good works and elaborate rituals were not prerequisites in gaining God's grace. Luther and others like him, therefore considered certain beliefs and practices in the Catholic Church to be unnecessary. These included among other things priestly celibacy, holy pilgrimage, veneration of saints and the Virgin Mary in particular, as well as sacred images, doctrine of infallibility of the Pope and general Church Councils. However, the immediate issue leading to the reformation was concerned with the sale of indulgences.¹² An indulgence is the 'remission before God of the temporal punishment due to

⁶ Mark Ellingson, *Reforming Reformation Theology for the 21st Century* (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁷ BenjamiWiker, *The Reformation 500 Years Later: 12 Things you need to know* (USA: Regnery, 2017)

⁸ Peter Marshall, *1517: Martin Luther and the Reinvention of the Reformation* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017)

⁹ Mounir, Farah and Andrea BerensKarls, *World History: The Human Experience*, New York: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 1994, 1994. P 160.

¹⁰ Rao, B. V., *History of Europe (1450-1815)*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1991. Pp 48-49.

¹¹ Farah and Karls, 1994. P 376.

¹² Farah and Karl, 1994. P 376.

sin whose guilt has already been forgiven.¹³The various ways through which an indulgence can be obtained include a good deed done, offering Mass on behalf of someone, prayer, abstinence, giving to the poor, or performing some other meritorious act as may be set by the highest ecclesiastical authority in whose jurisdiction an individual resides.¹⁴Though it had been a long time practice in the Church, Pope Leo X in an attempt to raise more funds to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, introduced a certain twist to it that made it highly unacceptable to many people and attracted criticism. Pope Leo X issued certificates for sale and those who bought them were made to understand that buying them either reduced or cancelled one's sins.¹⁵This then became part of what was contained in Luther's 95 theses as a collection of the differences he held against the Roman Catholic Church. Luther's outright refusal to recant resulted in his excommunication from the Church, the beginning of Lutheranism and the other separatist Churches in Europe.

It needs to be understood that Luther's 'rebellion' was a sequel to other earlier attempts at reform in the Church. The Albigenses and Waldenses were two notable anti-Church movements in France which criticized the Church but their activities were suppressed.¹⁶ John Wycliffe, a priest and a professor also led the Lollard Movement in England against the Church but the Church proved stronger than him. In the Netherlands Gerhard Grote founded the 'Brethren of the Common Life' as an anti-Church movement and in Bohemia, John Hus gathered a following against the Church but he was burnt at the stake.¹⁷ If Luther is therefore seen to be more associated with the Reformation, the simple reason could be that he was a successful reformer who popularised and spread beyond bounds, that which others before him were unable to accomplish.

A manifestation of the worldliness of the Church was the involvement of the papacy in the politics of Western Europe. Jesus Christ distinguished himself entirely from the politics of his day. His direct successor, St. Peter is not also known to have concerned himself with the leadership of the world. However, as Europe embraced Christianity, and religion then being a strong foundation of society, compelled the European kings to turn to the Pope with their political and other issues.¹⁸ With time, the Popes came to be so much involved with the European kings, making religion and politics bedfellows, a combination contrary to the dictates, teachings and life style of the founder of Christianity. Acquisition of land and other material comforts by the clergy and the immoral life style of some of the Popes, the most notorious being Pope Alexander VI brought the Church to question.

A measure of Luther's Success

Luther did not set out to break a Church apart. What he advocated was a reform within it. But the following he garnered after the 'rebellion' implied that many people shared in his sentiments. In Germany, Lutheranism separated the rulers of the German principalities into Protestant and Catholic princes and there begun a series of religious wars. The protest spread to other European countries such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and England. In 1555, the Holy Roman Emperor recognized Lutheranism as a separatist religious movement.¹⁹

¹³ What are indulgences and plenary indulgences and is the concept biblical? <https://www.gotquestions.org/plenary-indulgences.html>. Retrieved on 4th September, 2017.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Farah and Karl, 1994. P 376.

¹⁶ Rao, B. V., 1991. P 48.

¹⁷ Ibid. Pp 48-49.

¹⁸ In 1493, the Pope drew an imaginary line which divided the world into two with Spain having control over all lands to the west of the line and Portugal to the east of it, in a bid to avoid conflict and possible clash. See Farah and Karls, 1994. P 398.

¹⁹ Rao, 991. P 55.

In Switzerland, Huldreich Zwingli, a Catholic priest like Luther followed suit, broke his vow of celibacy and got married.²⁰ His influence on his countrymen to declare their independence from Catholic dominion resulted in a civil war leading to his death, with the lasting impact of separating the Swiss into the two broad categories of Catholics and Protestants. Though a French man John, Calvin's embrace of Protestantism could not be groomed in France. Francis I's refusal to tolerate religious dissent compelled him to seek refuge in Switzerland.²¹ While in Switzerland, he continued to propagate what Zwingli had started.

For religious reasons rather than political, King Henry VIII broke up links with papal authority and started the Church of England in 1534.²²

From these beginnings, other protestant groups came into being and included John Knox' Presbyterian Church in Scotland, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Puritan Churches in Britain and USA, and the French Huguenots. What Luther started as a mere reform had come to mark an important phase in world history. Christianity has come to be characterized by such divisions since then, and from institutionalization, some separatist churches have now become individual properties.

Catholic Immediate response to the Separation (Addressing Issues that caused the Separation)

The realization of the need for reform by the Catholic Church came too late. Yet, an attempt was made for a kind of reunion and this became the counter-reformation. The Council of Trent was convened from 1545-1563.²³ The immediate cause of the reformation, the sale of indulgences was removed. Among other things, seminaries were to be established to train priests, other languages other than Latin to be used in church services, sacraments to be granted without charges, ceasing of sale of church offices and the abandonment of worldly pursuits by the clergy. Dogmatically however, many doctrines of the Catholic Church were rather reasserted and confirmed. This aspect of the Council's rulings ruled out any form of a reunion of the Church. In not responding to the expectations of the Protestants they could not be expected to return, and that has been it, but after a good five hundred years on, what has been the turn of events? Has the Roman Catholic Church perished? What have been the relations between Protestants and Catholics? Has the schism ceased or it is ongoing? What is the state of the religion that Jesus Christ founded 2017 years ago?

Some Impacts of the Reformation on the spread of Christianity

By the beginning of the 1500s, Christianity was still very much a European religion. The founding of Islam within the same geographical zone as Christianity impeded its spread across Asia, the continent of its origin. Europe therefore inherited the destiny to send the religion across the globe. The success of the reformation facilitated this process. First of all, European exploration of Africa south of the Sahara up to about the beginning of the seventeenth century (1600) was important for economic reasons.²⁴ The Portuguese Prince, Henry the Navigator described as a Christian Prince obligated the Portuguese explorers to bring Christianity to Africa. However, competition for trade with the Spanish and the other European nations which arrived later shielded the religious motive. Back in Europe, the breakup of the Church introduced competition for expansion among the various Christian sects, not

²⁰ Farah and Karls, 1994. P 379.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid. 380-381.

²³ Rao, 1991. Pp 60-61.

²⁴ Beverly J. Armento, Christopher L. Salter, Gary B. Nash and Karen K. Wixson, *Across the Centuries*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991. P 374-375.

only within Europe, but across the world. Africa and the Americas readily became fertile grounds. This was more evident in America from the beginning of the 1600s following the successful planting of colonies there by Europeans. Indeed, some of the first colonies like Massachusetts, Maryland and Pennsylvania were established for religious reasons emanating from the reformation. People migrated from Europe to America to avoid religious persecution following the reformation. The abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the opening up of the interior of Africa also prepared Africa adequately for European and American Christian missionaries from about the middle of the eighteenth century. Perceiving Africa as a 'dark continent', many Europeans considered it their duty to introduce Western civilization, Christianity being an important aspect of it to the Continent.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Protestant missions were actively involved in missionary work along the Guinea coast, South Africa, Zanzibar and its adjoining areas. Between 1840 and 1870, the Scottish missionary David Livingstone travelled widely within the continent and became the first European to discover the famous Victoria Falls. Others were the German Lutherans, Johannes Ludwig Krapf, Johannes Rebmann and Johannes Jacob Erhardt, working for the Church Missionary Society (CMS) explored the East African coast and the immediate hinterland.²⁵

Some European missionaries also carried the religion to some parts of Asia like the Far East, Central and South East Asia. In the early years of the Reformation, Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and with its original aim to engage in missionary work abroad, many Jesuits travelled to evangelise in faraway places, such as Eastern Europe, Asia and Spanish America.²⁶ Jesuits like Saint Francis Xavier traversed many places in South and East Asia and Alfonso Salmeron in Eastern Europe (Vilnius, Poland, Lithuania) to evangelise natives of these places.

In Africa and America in particular, clash of cultures, nationalism and racism would introduce new dynamics into the Christian enterprise which would cause the separatist Churches to in turn experience their own kind of schism or reformation. White discrimination against blacks in America resulted in the formation of Churches by people of black descent. These became known as the African-American Churches. The movement started in the Methodist Church when Richard Allen, a former slave and deacon-elder of the Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Richard Allen organized the Free African Society in 1787. In 1791, he broke away from the Church to form the all-black Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.²⁷ Other blacks followed his example and in 1816, representatives of these various congregations came together to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E. Church) with Allen as their first bishop. In 1813, Peter Spencer founded the Spencer Churches (the Union Churches) in Delaware.²⁸

In Africa, the situation also brought into being the African independent Churches (AICs) of which the first types broke away from the European Churches, and a second type founded by indigenous Africans and supported financially from within. Discrimination against blacks by the White minority clergy was seen as the religious counterpart of political nationalism. In 1888, Moses Ladejo Stone founded the Native Baptist Church in Nigeria when he was dismissed from the American Baptist Missionary Society, being the first Nigerian Baptist pastor. In Ghana for instance, such differences led

²⁵ Gray, J. R. 'The Missionary Factor in East Africa,' Joseph, A. C. and Godfred, B (eds), *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Ibadan; Ibadan University Press, 1966.

²⁶ Judith, Coffin, G. and Robert Stacey C., *Western Civilizations: Their History and their Culture* (15th edition), New York, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc. 2005. Pp 492-494.

²⁷ The African-American Church in America I Grace Communion Inte...<https://www.gci.org/history/African>. Retrieved on 27th January, 2017.

²⁸ Spencer Churches – Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spencer_Churches. Retrieved on 27th January 2017.

to the introduction of the AME Zion Church from America in the late 1890s. Indeed, Dr. Eduard Wilmot Blyden, a West Indian of African descent from St. Thomas while in Liberia as a professor, advocated for the establishment of a West African Church to curtail white domination of the Church and what some people believed to be 'European brand of Christianity'.²⁹

The Protestants (Separatists) and the Catholic Church since 1517

Dissent and separation did not mature into long lasting enmity and conflict. After the religion spread to other parts of the world and further splinter groups usually of native origins emerged, and rivalry and misunderstandings ensued, the need for ecumenism became critical. Therefore in 1910, the very first International Missionary Conference was held in Edinburgh, Scotland and brought together representatives of both Anglo-Saxon and Continental Protestant missionary societies like the Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, interdenominational societies and Quakers.³⁰ This was followed up with an International Conference on African Missions at Le Zoute in Belgium in 1926. Following this were 'Life and Work' Conference in 1925 and World Conference of 'Faith and Order' in 1927 respectively.³¹ Eventually, the 'life and work' and the 'faith and order' bodies amalgamated to form the World Council of Churches in 1948 in Amsterdam. At this first Assembly, membership stood at 147 member churches and rose to 345 in 2013.³² It includes most Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Churches but not the Roman Catholic Church, but cordial relations exist between the two.³³

Since Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church has been charting a course of ecumenism because of the emphasis it placed on it.³⁴ Described as the Protestant's Pope, Pope John Paul II carried this new spirit of ecumenism to the level of public apologies which he rendered to individuals, groups and humanity in general for the past misdeeds of the Catholic Church.³⁵ Among individuals he publicly apologised to include the renowned Italian scientist and philosopher, Galileo Galilei, (October, 1992) and John Hus of Bohemia (December, 1999). Groups which are recipients of the Pope's apology include victims of the Holocaust for the inactivity and silence of many Catholics during the period, as well as women for the injustices committed against them, violation of their rights and for the historical denigration of the female species (May 1995). Other apologies to humanity in the series include the Catholic Church's involvement in the following: African slave trade (August, 1993), burnings at the stake and the religious wars that followed the Protestant Reformation (May, 1995), sins of Catholics throughout the ages for violating the rights of ethnic groups and peoples and for contempt for their cultures and religious traditions (March 2000), and also for the actions of the Crusader attack on Constantinople 1204.³⁶ In November 2001, his first e-mail apologies to the world from a laptop in the Vatican included those for Church sex abuse, Catholic-backed 'Stolen Generations' of Aboriginal children in Australia, and an apology to China for the behavior of Catholic missionaries in colonial times.³⁷

²⁹Debrunner, H. W. *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967. Pp 236-240.

³⁰ Ibid. 281

³¹ www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1901-2000/formation-of-world-council-of-churches. Retrieved on 6th September, 2017.

³² History – World Council of Churches <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/wwc-history>. Retrieved on 6th September, 2017.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Vatican II on ecumenism and the Eastern Orthodox Church. – Free Online Library <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Vatican+II+and+the+easter+Orthodox+Church..> Retrieved on 27th January, 2017.

³⁵ Pope John Paul II: The Protestant's Pope. http://parablemania.ektopos.com/archives/2005/04/pope_john_paul.html. Retrieved on 14th September, 2017.

³⁶ List of apologies made by Pope John Paul II. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_List_of_apologies_made_by_pope_john_paul... Retrieved on 14th September, 2017.

³⁷ Ibid.

On 24th March 1966, Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, His Grace Dr. Michael Ramsey met and made a common declaration to develop fraternal relations, remove the causes of conflict and re-establish unity.³⁸ In September 2010, Pope Benedict XVI visited the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Douglas during which the two jointly held an evening prayer service in London's Westminster Abbey.³⁹ A visit to the Vatican by another Archbishop of Canterbury was on 14th June 2013 by Archbishop Justin Welby. Pope Francis described their meeting as 'a beautiful sign of fraternity' and the director of the Anglican centre in Rome, Archbishop David Moxon referred to the meeting as 'the writing of a new chapter in the history of the Christian Church'.⁴⁰

In preparation towards the 500 years anniversary years of the Reformation, the Lutheran Church which spearheaded the split in 1517, and the Roman Catholic Church have been engaged in a dialogue called 'From Conflict to Communion' with the view to harmonizing relations among the Churches. To this effect, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) with headquarters in Geneva and The Vatican Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) in cooperation with a group of distinguished theologians jointly developed a common prayer to mark the anniversary.⁴¹ In 2015 the head of the Lutheran Church of Sweden (Antje Jackelen) paid a visit to the Vatican, and in the following year 2016, Pope Francis was in Sweden where he met with her to deliberate on a joint Catholic-Lutheran commemoration of the Reformation.⁴² In early 2017, a high-ranking Protestant delegation from Germany (home of the reformation) called on Pope Francis at the Vatican. Led by the Chair of the Council of the Protestant in Germany, Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, the group was accompanied by Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Chairman of the German Bishop's Conference. During their meeting, the Pope stressed the need for both Catholics and Protestants to bridge the gap of all remaining differences and seize the 500th anniversary as opportunity for ecumenism.⁴³ All these preparations culminated at the climax of the anniversary in October where Pope Francis gave a homily at the ecumenical prayer service at Lund, Sweden. In the USA, Catholics and Protestants have in the course of the anniversary year, held joint church services to commemorate the occasion. In Wisconsin, New Jersey and Massachusetts, such celebrations have already taken place and many more are expected in the year.⁴⁴ Indeed, American commitment to good Catholic-Protestant relations had earlier been expressed in two documents namely, 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together: the Christian Mission in the Third Millennium' (1994) and 'The Gift of Salvation' (1998). Both documents decry the Catholic-Protestant divide and call for united action to deal with it. Both documents gained quite a wide evangelical support and were acknowledged at the 1998 CS Lewis centenary celebrations in Cambridge.⁴⁵

³⁸ Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey http://www.vatican.va/roman_councils/chrstuni/ang... Retrieved on 27th January, 2017.

³⁹ Five Centuries After Reformation, Catholic-Protestant Divide in Western Europe has faded. <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/08/31/five-centuries-after-reformation>. Retrieved on 14th September 2017.

⁴⁰ Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury celebrate closer ties – BBC News <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37572590>. Retrieved on 27th January, 2017.

⁴¹ Lutheran Church and Vatican Announce 'Common Liturgical Material' Partnership. <http://www.nowtheendbegins.com/lutheran-church-vatican-announce-common-liturgical-material...> Retrieved on 27th January, 2017.

⁴² Pope Francis welcomes head of Lutheran Church of Sweden – Vatican Radio. http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/05/04/pope_pope_welcomes_head_of_lutheran_church_o... Retrieved on 27th January 2017.

⁴³ Pope Francis praises German Protestants and Catholics for cooperation | News | DW. <http://www.com/en/pope-francis-praises-german-protestants-and-c..>

⁴⁴ Michael J. Loughlin, Following Pope Francis, Catholics and Protestants in the U. S. mark the Reformation. <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/09/following-pope-francis...> Retrieved on 14th September, 2017.

⁴⁵ Randal Macaulay, The Counter-Reformation of Pope John Paul II by Randal Macaulay. <http://www.jubille-centre.org/the-counter-reformation-of-pope-john-pa...> Retrieved on 14th September, 2017.

Effort by the Catholic Church to dialogue with the separatist churches is not limited to the Western Protestants alone. It has also been extended to the Eastern Orthodox Churches and even Muslims. In 2001, Pope John Paul II rendered an apology to Archbishop Christodoulos of Greece in response to a 'list of thirteen offenses' against Eastern Orthodox Christians.⁴⁶ Pope Francis also paid a visit to Turkey in November 2014 where he celebrated the Divine Liturgy with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I in Istanbul.⁴⁷ Since he was also there to show commitment to improving Christian-Muslim relations, he visited the famous Blue Mosque and reached out to moderate Muslims. Earlier in 2006, his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI had been to Turkey and visited the same Blue Mosque as partly a gesture to appease Muslims for a speech he had made in Germany in which he appeared to have associated Islam with violence.⁴⁸ Although the speech was not intended to be understood or interpreted as such, the misunderstanding of it caused outrage across the Muslim world creating the need for him to make atonement.⁴⁹ In February 2016, Pope Francis and the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill - held a historic meeting in Cuba. This was about 1000 years since the Eastern Orthodox Churches parted ways with the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁰ Some analysts have observed that the historic meeting was prompted by persecution of Christians in the Middle East, and which was indeed the main topic of the leaders' discussion.⁵¹ More recently in March 2021, Pope Francis visited Iran where he met with Iraq's top Shiite religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al- Sistani in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.⁵² The meeting was concerned with peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians.

However, in addition to the persecution of Christians, the magnitude and gravity of issues confronting the world today could be underlying factors of this new spirit of ecumenism. An increasingly secular and aggressive world has no other option to a united action. Outmigration from Africa and Asia to Europe and America, refugee crisis, climate change, human sexuality such as lesbian, gender, bisexual and trans-gender (LGBT) related issues, just to mention a few have rocked and shocked the human race. Dealing with such issues cannot be left in the domain of any single human entity.

Catholic Stance Today

Many of the things for which reason the Reformation occurred are still maintained in the Catholic Church. What has been done with regard to indulgences was to abolish the sale of them, but they still remain a core part of Catholic belief. Church councils are still important in the Church and indeed, the Council of Trent (1545) was convened to deal with the issues arising from the Reformation.⁵³ It was followed by the first Council of the Vatican in 1869 and the latest was Vatican II (1962-1965). Veneration of the Virgin Mary, angels, saints and the use of sacred objects are still relevant, and since the Reformation, there have been claims of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary with the most notable and highly patronized ones being those at Guadalupe in Mexico (1531), Lourdes in France (1858) and

⁴⁶ Eastern Orthodoxy and The Pope: A Brief History <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/billykangas/2015/01/eastern-orthodo...>

⁴⁷ Pope Francis: I seek communion with Orthodox Churches – Vatican Radio http://en.radiovaticana.va/2014/11/30/pope_francis_i_seek_communion_with_orthodox_chu...

⁴⁸ The First Casualty of the Pope's Islam Speech. content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1535432,00.html. Retrieved on 27th January 2017.

⁴⁹ Pope Benedict XVI Visits Turkey's Famous Blue Mosque. www.foxnews.com/story/2006/11/30/pope-benedict-xvi-visit-turkey-famous-blue-mosque.html. Retrieved on 27th January, 2017.

⁵⁰ Pope, patriarch meet in Cuba nearly 1000 years after split <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/pope-francis-russian-orthodox-patriarch-kirill-m...>

⁵¹ 'Finally!' : pope and Russian patriarch meet for first time in 1,000 years I World news I The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/pope-francis-russian-orthodox-patriarch-kirill-m...> Retrieved on 27th January, 2017.

⁵² Pope meets with Iraqi Ayatollah: Both call for 'Peaceful Coexistence.' voanews.com.

⁵³ Thomas, P. C. *General Councils of the Church, (A Compact History)*, Mumbai: The Bombay St. Paul Society, 1993.

Fatima in Portugal (1917).⁵⁴ Chaste celibacy of consecrated men and women (priests, brothers, nuns), though characterized by great controversy, with the Church currently grappling with issues of sexual scandals involving Catholic priests, still remains a prerequisite for priesthood. So serious has the case been to the extent that, Pope Francis convened a sexual abuse summit involving over a hundred Catholic Bishops in Rome, in February 2019 to find a solution to the problem.⁵⁵ This has never happened before. Papal authority though reduced is still recognized and the Vatican is a sovereign state on its own right, with the modern popes being more accountable, and openly and publicly commenting more on social injustice, immorality and related issues rather than seen to be indulging in them. Attempts have been made to explain some of the highly apparently misunderstood concepts such as papal infallibility to avoid misunderstanding based on the literal and somehow erroneous interpretation of it. According to the Archbishop Emeritus of the Kumasi Archdiocese (Ghana), Peter Kwasi Sarpong for example, papal infallibility does not necessarily mean that the pope as a human being cannot err.⁵⁶ It is a concept that involves the entirety of the Church—the pope, the bishops as a collective body, and the laity. In a nutshell, infallibility means that the pope and the bishops cannot err in matters of teaching Catholic dogma or doctrine (faith and morals) for these come by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and similarly, the laity or Catholic faithful cannot also err when they accept such which has been handed down to them by the hierarchy of the Church. It has nothing to do with the normal every day actions or thoughts of any Church official, be it the pope, cardinal, bishop or priest.⁵⁷

In addition to these, performing pilgrimage is encouraged and highly patronized. Indeed, Pope Francis has reiterated the need to establish national and international shrines because of their key role as places for evangelization.⁵⁸

Demographically too, the Catholic Church still leads in numbers and commands about 1.2 billion in population worldwide, as against an estimated 800 million protestants and 260 Orthodox Christians according to recent statistics.⁵⁹ The Pew Research Centre gave the 2010 estimation of global Catholic population as 1.1 billion and backed by the most recent statistics (2017), the trend suggests an increase.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Benedict Mary U. Chukwuma, *The Album of Our Lady, Feast Days, Explanations and Origin*, Nigeria: Samex Media Nigeria Limited, 2009. Pp 39-42 and 45.

⁵⁵ Pope calls for 'concrete measures' as summit on clergy sexual abuse begins. amp.cnn.com

⁵⁶ Peter Sarpong, Archbishop *Sarpong Explains Key Christian Topics*, Accra: Standard Newspapers and Magazines Ltd, 2016. Pp 71-92.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Pope Francis says Catholic shrines are a key place for evangelization: <http://www.ewtnnews.com/catholic-news/Vatican.php?id=1532>

⁵⁹ Number of Catholics in the World. www.thetablet.co.uk/news/6962/number-of-catholics-in-the-world-continues-upward-trend-thanks-africa.

Mary Fairchild, Christianity Statistics- General Statistics and Facts about Christianity Today. <https://www.thoughts.com/christianity-statistics-700533>

⁶⁰ The Global Catholic Population. www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/

CONCLUSION

What started off as a separation is gradually melting into a kind of unity that is directly opposed to coming back together as one Church, but as a sort of unity in diversity. Meanwhile, the schism is still ongoing in many parts of the world. The independent churches, popularly called one-man churches keep multiplying by the day in Africa. Commercialisation of faith and authoritarianism by leaders of these churches are deeply rooted, the same issues that rocked the very foundation of the Catholic Church in 1517. Indeed, it is right to conclude that the Reformation is still on-going.

References

- Anglican Journal (Wayne Holst), Reformation: A Personal Reflection – <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/reformation-persona...> Retrieved on 3rd March 2019.
- BenjamiWiker, *The Reformation 500 Years Later: 12 Things you need to know* (USA: Regnery, 2017).
- Armento, B. J., Salter, C. L. Nash, G. B. andWixson, K. K., *Across the Centuries*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991. P 374-375.
- Chodakiewicz, M. J., ‘Reflections on the Protestant Reformation.’ [crisismagazine.com/2020/reflections-on-the-protestant-revolution](https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/reflections-on-the-protestant-revolution). <https://www.crisismagazine.com/reflections-on-the-pr>. Retrieved on 2nd February, 2021.
- Chukwuma, B. M. U. *The Album of Our Lady, Feast Days, Explanations and Origin*, Nigeria: Samex Media Nigeria Limited, 2009. Pp 39-42 and 45.
- Coffin, J. G. and Robert S. C., *Western Civilizations: Their History and their Culture* (15th edition), New York, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc. 2005. Pp 492-494.
- Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey http://www.vatican.va/roman_councils/chrstuni/ang... Retrieved on 27thJanuary, 2017.
- Debrunner, H. W. *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967. Pp 236-240.
- Eastern Orthodoxy and The Pope: A Brief History <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/billykangas/2015/01/eastern-orthodo>. Retrieved on 27th January 2017.
- Fairchild, Mary, Christianity Statistics- General Statistics and Facts about Christianity Today. <https://www.thoughts.com/christianity-statistics-700533>. Retrieved on 25th September, 2017.
- Farah, M. andKarls, A. B. *World History: The Human Experience*, New York: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 1994, 1994. P 160.
- ‘Finally!’ : Pope and Russian patriarch meet for first time in 1,000 years I World news I The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/pope-francis-russian-orthodox-patriarch-kirill-m...> Retrieved on 27thJanuary, 2017.
- Five Centuries After Reformation, Catholic-Protestant Divide in Western Europe has faded. <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/08/31/five-centuries-after-reformation>. Retrieved on 14th September 2017.
- Gray, J. R. ‘The Missionary Factor in East Africa,’ Anene J. C. and Brown, G. (eds), *Africa intheNineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Ibadan; Ibadan University Press, 1966.
- History – World Council of Churches<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/wwc-history>. Retrieved on 6thSeptember, 2017.
- List of apologies made by Pope John Paul II. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_List_of_apologies_made_by_pope_john_paul... Retrieved on 14thSeptember, 2017.
- Loughlin, M. J., Following Pope Francis, Catholics and Protestants in the U. S. mark the Reformation. <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/09/following-pope-francis...> Retrieved on 14th September, 2017.
- Lutheran Church and Vatican Announce ‘Common Liturgical Material’ Partnership. <http://www.nowtheendbegins.com/lutheran-church -vatican-announce-common-liturgical-material...> Retrieved on 27thJanuary, 2017.

Macaulay, R. The Counter-Reformation of Pope John Paul II by Randal Macaulay. <http://www.jubille-centre.org/the-couter-reformation-of-pope-john-pa...> Retrieved on 14thSeptember, 2017.

Mark Ellingson, *Reforming Reformation Theology for the 21st Century* (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Mathew Levering, *Was the Reformation a Mistake? Why Catholic Doctrine is not Unbiblical* (USA: Zondervan Academic, 2017).

Number of Catholics in the World. www.thetablet.co.uk/news/6962/number-of-catholics-in-the-world-continues-upward-trend-thanks-africa. Retrieved on 25th September, 2017.

Peter Marshall, *1517: Martin Luther and the Reinvention of the Reformation* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017)

Pope Benedict XVI Visits Turkey's Famous Blue Mosque. www.foxnews.com/story/2006/11/30/pope-benedict-xvi-visit-turkey-famous-blue-mosque.html. Retrieved on 27thJanuary, 2017.

Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury celebrate closer ties – BBC News <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37572590>. Retrieved on 27th January, 2017.

Pope calls for 'concrete measures' as summit on clergy sexual abuse begins. amp.cnn.com. Retrieved on 20th September 2019.

Pope Francis: I seek communion with Orthodox Churches – Vatican Radio http://en.radiovaticana.va/2014/11/30/pope_francis_i_seek_communion_with_orthodox_chu... Retrieved on 14th September, 2017.

Pope Francis praises German Protestants and Catholics for cooperation |News |DW. <http://www.com/en/pope-francis-praises-german-protestants-and-c>. Retrieved on 14th September, 2017.

Pope Francis says Catholic shrines are a key place for evangelization: <http://www.ewtnnews.com/catholic-news/Vatican.php?id=1532>. Retrieved on 15th May, 2017.

Pope Francis welcomes head of Lutheran Church of Sweden – Vatican Radio. http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/05/04/pope_welcomes_head_of_lutheran_church_o... Retrieved on 27th January 2017.

Pope John Paul II: The Protestant's Pope. http://parablemania.ektopos.com/archives/2005/04/pope_jo_Pope_patriarch_meet_in_Cuba_nearly_1000_years_after_split http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/pope-francis-russian-orthodox-patriarch-kirill-m...hn_paul.html. Retrieved on 14th September, 2017.

Pope meets with Iraqi Ayatollah: Both call for 'Peaceful Coexistence.' voanews.com.

Rao, B. V., *History of Europe (1450-1815)*, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1991).

Rock of Ages, 'Reflecting on the Protestant Reformation.' <https://www.rockofages.org.sg/2017/10/26/reflections>
<https://www.rockofages.org.sg/pastoral-reflections/2017/10/26/reflections-on-the-protestant-reformation>. Retrieved on 2nd September, 2019.

Sarpong, P. *Archbishop Sarpong Explains Key Christian Topics*, Accra: Standard Newspapers and Magazines Ltd, 2016. Pp 71-92.

Spencer Churches – Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spencer_Churches. Retrieved on 27th January 2017.

Steven Timmermans, 'Reformation Reflections, The Network- CRCNA – Christian.
<https://network.crcna.org/Synod/reformation-reflections>. Retrieved on 2nd January, 2020.

The African-American Church in America I Grace Communion Inte...<https://www.gci.org/history/African>.
Retrieved on 27th January, 2017. What are indulgences and plenary indulgences and is the concept biblical?
<https://www.gotquestions.org/plenary-indulgences.html>. Retrieved on 4th September, 2017.

The First Casualty of the Pope's Islam Speech.
content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1535432,00.html. Retrieved on 27th January 2017.

The Global Catholic Population. www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/. Retrieved on 25th September, 2017.

Thomas, P. C. *General Councils of the Church, (A Compact History)*, Mumbai: The Bombay St. Paul Society, 1993.

Vatican II on ecumenism and the Eastern Orthodox Church. – Free Online Library
<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Vatican+II+and+the+easter+Orthodox+Church...> Retrieved on 27th January, 2017.

www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1901-2000/formation-of-world-council-of-churches.
Retrieved on 6th September, 2017.