

## **Luther's Challenge to the Churches Today**

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*Dr D. Alphonse*

The evaluation of Martin Luther has slowly but significantly changed down the past five hundred years, and that mostly during the past one hundred years, since he launched the greatest reformation movement in the Western Church with the publication of his ninety five theses. Among the Protestants themselves the enthusiastic earlier estimation of him as the impeccable super-hero of faith has given way to a more sober view of him as a man who, despite his ardent convictions and unflagging courage, had his own fair share of varying emotional as well as shifting theological, or at least rhetorical, extremes which are attributable mostly to his “irascible temperament and his polemical ability.”<sup>1</sup> The Catholics also have moved from the earlier entirely hostile and polemical condemnation of him as the arch-heretic, if not a satanic agent, who divided western Christianity, to a more balanced and sympathetic understanding of him. He is more and more seen by them today as a well-intentioned, but “misguided reformer.”<sup>2</sup> And that his reform movement ended up in the tragic division of Western Christianity that has lasted till our own time was a development that can be attributed, though in part to the extreme positions he took on many issues, but equally if not more to the socio-cultural and political forces as well as the myopic and corrupt ecclesiastical leadership of his time. However, hardly anyone today deny the legitimacy and the urgent need of the reform he started though some may still focus on his foibles and faults and regard him as the wrong hero with the right cause.

However, it must be pointed out that perfect and flawless heroes belong only to the realm of myths. The great men and women of history were all wounded persons who became great precisely because of them and not without them. For, the wounds they bear in their very persons are none other than those of their own contemporary society and they achieve greatness by their struggle to overcome them in themselves and in their society. As Erik Erikson has pointed out that a hero is one who “is called upon ... to lift his own individual patienthood to the level of the universal one and try to solve for all what he could not solve for himself alone.”<sup>3</sup> This is all the more true in the case of Luther. He was not only a man from the socio-cultural and political margins of his society but also a victim of the fear of a patriarchal God, as represented by his overly demanding and punishing father, and a spirituality of the dread of being damned by him to eternal hell fire that were commonly preached and propagated by fervid preachers and ardent spiritual writers of his time. Such a victim became the voice of the margins in so far his spiritual *angst* to find the gracious God was none other than that of the majority of the population who had been fed on the spiritual diet of constant reminders of death, purgatory and hellfire and were encouraged to insure themselves against eternal damnation by increasing their devotional and ascetical practices, with also the easier option of buying up indulgences. His virulent criticism of the papacy and the hierarchy of the Church was not simply an expression of his personal anger towards the ecclesiastical leadership which he saw as having betrayed Christ and his saving work by substituting in their place empty ritualism, superstitious devotionism and faithless asceticism. It is also a voicing out of the deep resentment that most contemporary Christians in Germany and many other countries harbored against a decadent papacy, dissolute clergy and monastic communities which had grown opulently but scandalously rich and become disconnected to the masses of people who lived in ignorance and poverty under the prevalent

oppressive feudal system.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the condition of the Church was such that many concerned and anguished Christian men and women were hoping for someone to be raised up by God, as he did the prophets of the Old Testament, who would initiate the sorely needed reforms.

However, like the voice of the Old Testament prophets which has relevance for beyond their own times and situations including our own, the cry of Luther also still rings out even today as a powerful challenge to the Churches, and especially to the Catholic Church. For, its initial response to him made at the council of Trent, was not only 'too little too late', but also very defensive in tone and apologetic in content. It is arguably Vat. II which turned out to be a more positive, though much belated, response to Luther's multi pronged challenges. Anyway, reform is an ongoing and a never finished task. For, *ecclesia semper reformanda* was not only the cry of Luther but also the call of Vat. II.<sup>5</sup> Besides, some of the central issues raised by Luther are related to the perennial temptations the Churches face and are still relevant even today. Here are some such issues in which his insights could still prove very beneficial.

## **Faithfulness to the Word of God**

*Sola scriptura* was not only a main slogan of the reformation but also it served as the fundamental criterion on the basis of which current doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church were retained or rejected by the reformers. In the Catholic Church, on the other hand though theoretically the scripture was given priority to or at least parity with tradition, in practice however, it was more often the uncritiqued tradition which enjoyed precedence and was used frequently to legitimize the prevalent structures and practices some of which were far removed from or even contrary to the Gospel of Christ.

The situation has changed slowly during the past century and even dramatically after Vat. II. The Protestant Churches have, of course, consistently upheld the primacy of the Bible in their liturgy, preaching, devotional life and theological enterprise despite the shocking conclusions of the critical study of the Bible by the pioneering protestant scholars right from the eighteenth century. But in the Catholic Church the Bible slowly gained greater importance in both magisterial teaching and in theology as well as growing interest among all sections of the Catholic population primarily due to the Biblical movement which was a converging stream steadily gathering force due to the publications, both scholarly and popular, of the findings of the Catholic researchers only from the end of the nineteenth century. Both the laity as well as the clergy became increasingly aware of the riches that the Bible has to offer to their life of faith and became convinced that the prevalent proof text use of the Bible was grossly inadequate to rightly benefit from them. However, it is in the teachings of Vat. II that this realization reached its climax resulting in its directives to accord a much greater role to it in the Church's liturgy, life and theology as well as to a revised understanding of its relationship to tradition.

According to the teachings of Vat. II, in and through the Bible the heavenly Father "comes lovingly to meet his children and talks with them" and therefore, the Church venerates it as it does "the Body of the Lord" and partakes "of the bread of life ... from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ."<sup>6</sup> In order to open up more lavishly the treasures of the Bible, the Council decrees that "a more representative part of the scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years."<sup>7</sup> Also the preachers and teachers of the faith "ought to be sharing the boundless riches of the Divine Word."<sup>8</sup> And in order to make the Bible widely available to all the faithful the Council directs that its translations be made in various vernaculars including also ecumenical translations. The Council also

abandoned the traditional theory of 'two sources of revelation' in favor of an unified understanding of one stream of living tradition whose cream or crystallization the Bible is and which in turn is "more thoroughly understood and constantly actualized"<sup>9</sup> constituting the continued tradition. The *magisterium* of the Church is recognized as "not superior to the word of God, but is its servant."<sup>10</sup>

Impelled by the teachings of Vat. II, the Bible has come to be accorded prime place in all areas of the Catholic Church's life: liturgy, preaching, prayer and devotions as well as theology. It has also, at least in some areas where Christians live in most deprived conditions, an inspiration for liberative action including struggles for socio-political and cultural transformation.<sup>11</sup> However, there is also an increasing tendency towards a fundamentalist approach to the Bible which tends to identify the Word of God with it and to regard the uncritical and literal reading of it as the sole authentic one. This is the case in almost all the Churches and the more so with the groups in them with neo-pentacostal leanings. It is in this context that Vat. II's theology of the "signs of the times" provides a much needed corrective as well as a complementary perspective.

According to Vat. II, the Bible is not the last Word that God has spoken to the human beings in history, though it has a unique and normative character with regard to any earlier or subsequent revelations. Rather, the Word of God continues to ring out ever new in the continuing movements of history both of the Church and the world. This is evident from Jesus' own promise to his disciples, "I shall be with you till the end of days" (Mt 28:20) and his assurance to them on the eve of his death, "I still have many things to say to you ... When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth ... and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (Jn 16:12-14). He has also so identified himself with the poor and needy that their cry becomes the prime and privileged locus of hearing and acting on his call (Mt

25:40, 45). Thus, listening to God's Word is no more simply a devotional or contemplative reading of the Bible or hearing it being proclaimed. And the right and relevant understanding of it is more than interpreting it in the light of the signs of the times. It is first and foremost the listening to his Word resounding in the 'signs of the times' and especially the call of the poor, cry of the victimized and the struggles of the oppressed. The most authentic understanding of the Word of God takes place when these signs of the times are interpreted in the light of the Bible as Vat. II calls for: "At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel."<sup>12</sup>

It is in this task that most of the Churches today have seriously failed. For instance, pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Verbum Domini* does not have even a single reference to 'the signs of the times,' not even in the footnotes. Thus, Luther's call for being faithful to the Word of God, though he himself identified it only with the Bible in contrast to tradition, rings still relevant. All the Churches can be faulted for not being faithful to the Word of God and the call of Luther for reform and renewal giving primacy to the Word of God is still very relevant.

### **Being Authentically Local**

Luther lived in an epoch when the Holy Roman Empire had long disintegrated and the sway of the super powers that had eventually emerged such as the Austrian, French and Spanish kingdoms over the adjacent regions had become tenuous. As a result the rulers of the city states and feudal lords had become assertive. Regional consciousness coupled with local cultural pride, democratic aspirations and critical spirit were also becoming slowly ascendant along with nascent nationalism.<sup>13</sup> However, there still remained one super power which not only claimed but also exercised imperial control,

although mostly a spiritual one. That was none other than the papacy which already had asserted with pope Boniface VIII that even kings were subject to its authority also in civil matters.<sup>14</sup> Though such a political power it could not always wield it did control most areas of Christian life and ecclesiastical administration. Most decisions, from the appointment of bishops to that of who should preach indulgences were made by the Roman curia, often with monetary payments made to it or collections shared with it.<sup>15</sup> The Roman liturgy that was imposed in the ninth century by emperor Charlemagne all over his empire consisting most of Western Europe was still followed with hardly any change despite the fact that socio-political and cultural conditions had become significantly altered. It was conducted in Latin which only very few elite and educated understood, and with pomp and solemnity that befitted the lavish life of feudal lords, some of whom were also bishops, but was to a large extent alienated from the lives and hopes of the ordinary people. Thus, the reformation movement launched by Luther was not only a critique of the corruption that had infected the papacy and the functioning of the central leadership of the Church as well as the majority of the local bishops and the clergy but also a call for the Church to be authentically local in culture as well as in its concerns. With this in mind Luther himself translated the New Testament into popular German, arranged the liturgical books to be composed in the local languages, vernacular songs to be sung in it and empowered the local communities to elect their own ministers.

Luther's call for the Churches to be authentically local is still very valid today. For, the condition of the Roman curia today, though not as deplorable as in the times of Luther, bears quite a few semblances to it. It is beset with financial scandals, careerism, inefficiency and lack of awareness and sensitivity to the diverse local contexts and cultural sensibilities, all of which have been repeatedly and unsparingly criticized by the present pope Francis himself.<sup>16</sup> Many of the powers and functions which have accrued to

it or it has arrogated to itself, made possible by the conditions and compulsions of a bygone era, have also become obsolete and outdated. Its autocratic way which neither calls for adequate input from the local churches nor takes seriously their feedback, certainly runs counter to the legitimate autonomy of the local Churches. Such a highly centralized ecclesiastical structure and style of administration is certainly out of line with the nature of the Church that historical Jesus founded and the apostles expanded geographically by building up autonomous local Churches with improvised new ministries and structures as needed but suited to the local traditions and condition. For, what historical Jesus founded was the people's movement of the reign of God whose mainstay were the communities of his followers in the different villages and towns of Palestine. Though he conferred on Peter the task of confirming his brothers in faith, he did not envisage a highly centralized leadership in the model of the Roman empire which came about later due to the vicissitudes of history. The missionary outreach in the succeeding centuries, spearheaded by Rome, ended up establishing Churches in different continents which were not only replicas of the Roman Church in their liturgy, laws of governance, catechesis, ministerial formation etc. but also depended on it for every major decision and in many cases even minor ones.

Unfortunately such a mode of functioning still continues today as evidenced by the recent imposition by Vatican of the *New Roman Missal*, including even some words and phrases in the vernacular translations, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, uniform mode of seminary formation which hardly respects the exigencies of the diverse cultures and contexts in which presbyteral ministry is to be carried out today, appointment of bishops in which the participation of the local community is minimal and the entire process hardly transparent. The inefficiency of this highly centralized governance of the Churches by Vatican is clearly proven by the long delays in the appointment of bishops to many dioceses, the mediocre leadership

quality of many such persons appointed, the linguistic clumsiness and the outdated theological understanding prevalent in the *New Roman missal* and the excessive euro-centric theology which is presented as the theology of the universal Church in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The widespread discontent about and even the non acceptance by some local Churches of the many such measures imposed by the Vatican in the recent years clearly indicates that the local Churches cannot and need not be governed by Rome as it is done today. Rather, each local Church has to enjoy and exercise a legitimate autonomy by which the bishops are appointed by the local Synods (as done in the the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches in India), the local Churches compose their own missals and sacramentaries, their own codes of canon laws and catechisms, directories for ecumenical relationships and inter-religious dialogues etc. with, of course, the Vatican serving them by offering general directives and guidelines to ensure basic unity of faith and morals. After all, the leaders and scholars in the local Churches are not any less faithful to the Gospel or any less competent than those in the Vatican and they can certainly be trusted to do the job at least as efficiently as the Vatican curia, if not more relevantly due to their rootedness in the local contexts. Entrusting such responsibilities to the authorities of the local Churches, which anyway are rightfully theirs, would not only help to relieve much of the burden of the different departments of the Vatican curia as well as its nuntiatures in various countries but also to reduce their staff strength significantly. This is also the call of pope Francis, made repeatedly in some of his encyclicals and exhortations.<sup>17</sup> Such a call has unfortunately been hardly responded to adequately by the leaderships of most of the local Churches due either to the still prevalent excessive control of the Vatican curia which they are used to in the past or their own apathy. Barring a few exceptions, rarely have they waken up by themselves to their own people's needs and to the signs of the times and responded to them

assuming legitimate responsibility for their Churches and act in an adult fashion with due freedom and creative fidelity to the Gospel. This is, certainly, another situation in which the call of Luther for the Churches to be truly local has still a lot of relevance.

## **Becoming the People's Church**

Clericalism was one of the evils in the Church against which Luther battled with uncommon zeal and zest all through his career as a reformer.<sup>18</sup> It was for him one of the root causes for the rot that had set in the Catholic Church of his time. To eradicate this malaise he not only condemned the clergy's claim to higher status, holiness, monopoly of ministry and the attendant privileges but also rejected celibacy which was often used to legitimize such a claim. He also saw clericalism as the main cause because of which the laity had been marginalized in the Church and reduced to a passive group which had very little knowledge of the Bible, hardly any active participation in community worship, least involvement in the Church's mission and no role in its governance. This sad state of affairs in the medieval Church made him to take a fresh look at the scriptures where he found no basis for the hierarchical leadership structure of the Church nor for a separate class of ministers called priests. The only priesthood he found in the New Testament was none other than that of Jesus Christ in which all the baptized equally participate.<sup>19</sup> This led him to assert baptismal priesthood as the only valid one and so to reject holy orders as a sacrament, though he retained ordination as a meaningful rite whereby one is appointed by the community to preside over it, especially in its worship. Worship was seen as the action of the entire congregation and any one of its members can be called upon to play such a role if he has the aptitude for it and is called upon to do so by the community. The ordination is only a religious rite by which his aptitude is

recognized and he is authorized by the community to play such a role. It does not effect any ontological change in him.

Though the response of the council of Trent consisted in the reaffirmation of the traditional hierarchical leadership structure of the Church and that the sacrament of the Holy Orders was established by Jesus himself, it initiated many measures to reform the life and ministry of the clergy and to improve their quality by decreeing the establishment of seminaries. However, the clergy remained a superior class of Christians ontologically transformed by the sacramental character imprinted on their souls and endowing them with "sacred power" to consecrate the eucharist and to forgive sins. Vat. II, though it affirmed unequivocally baptismal priesthood of all the faithful by which they participated in the prophetic, priestly and leadership functions of Jesus Christ himself and their true equality with the clergy "with regard to the dignity and to the activity"<sup>20</sup> it failed to formulate a new theology of presbyteral ministry based on its own vision articulated in the foundational document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, and its mission in the world today as elaborated in its document on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*.

As a consequence, despite some post Vat. II magisterial documents which emphatically require the laity's equal participation and partnership in the mission of the Church and the participatory structures mandated or recommended by it, the Church at all levels still remains a predominantly a clerical institution in which most major offices, decision making processes, theological education and control of the financial resources rest with the clergy. In fact, they continue to remain an elitist and superior class, or a Christian brahmin caste, which enjoys a monopoly of power, special privileges and greater respect and prestige. Even the functions and offices which Canon Law has explicitly opened for the laity still remain in most dioceses in India

as the monopoly of the clergy. Pope Francis himself has recognized the pernicious effects of the prevalent clericalism which he sees as one of the greatest evils of the Church today.<sup>21</sup> It has not only denied the rightful place of the laity in the Church's life and mission but also made it an introverted community mostly engaged in cultic and devotional activities and neglectful of its evangelizing mission in and to the world.

In such a context Luther's rediscovery and recognition of the baptismal priesthood can provide the needed corrective, though his rejection of Holy Orders as a separate sacrament and ministerial priesthood arising from it need not be accepted. Jesus' mission is that of establishing the reign of God on the earth which involves not only transforming the totality of individual persons and their relationships but also an effective presence in and penetration of all areas of societal life with Gospel values.

His call to his followers to be "the salt of the earth" and his parable of leaven that transforms the heap of flour are clearly indicative of the secular nature of the Church's mission. It is, of course, a spiritual, and not merely a religious, mission. But it is also secular in so far as it is primarily oriented to building up of the whole of humanity and all the earth as the abode of God among men, 'a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more tears or death' and not simply to saving souls. A clericalist Church, by its very nature, gets mostly oblivious of this secular and world transforming mission and preoccupied with 'Church building' activities, including multi-crore and grandiose Cathedrals, multi-lakh bronze flag masts, multi-storied shrine structures, conducting garishly ostentatious festivals and jubilees and celebrating routine worship and sentimental devotions which instead of empowering people for their world transforming missions make them look forward to the heaven to miraculously (magically?) solve their personal and societal problems. Their elitist status, reinforced by celibacy, tends to alienate

them from the problems of people all around them such as the poverty of the masses, hopelessness and cultural de-rootedness of a large number of youth, the condition of the dalits and women victimized by caste and patriarchal oppression etc..

Because of their every day presence in the world and effective involvement in its affairs it is the laity who have the primary and direct responsibility of carrying out Jesus mission of transforming the world into the reign of God, though by their baptismal call all Christians are entrusted with it. This is all the more so because they are the ones engaged in family life, the primary cell of society and the Church, and are professionally competent in various socio-economic-political and cultural fields. Vat. II has also recognized this and teaches that the laity's specific area of evangelical engagement is the affairs of the world. For this mission they are ordained by the Lord himself through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation through which they also equally, though in a different manner, share in his priestly, prophetic and leadership functions.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the baptismal priesthood is the primary one to serve which he has established the ministerial priesthood. As Thomas O'Meara points out, ministry has moved today from being the monopoly of the clergy and has become the call and task of all the baptized.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the call to any specific ministry in the Church or in society is based on competence and dedication and should not lead to class distinctions in the Church. Besides, offices and services within the Christian community should also become the training ground for ones mission to the world. Thus, the Church has to transform herself from a clericalized institution into a community of evangelizers, each taking up or called to ministry according to his or her charism, equal in dignity and responsibility, with the clergy serving primarily as catalysts and coordinators of the ministries of all.

## **Equal Opportunities to Women for Ministry**

Luther was not only son of a dominant father but also a member of a society and religion which were deeply patriarchal in their views and structures. So it is no wonder that many of his views on women sound very misogynist and he sees no leadership roles for them in the Church.<sup>24</sup> But his views on the baptismal priesthood which he sees as common to all believers have been used to demand leadership roles for women in the Lutheran churches. In fact, the Lutheran Churches have gone ahead and ordained women as ministers to preside over worship and the celebration of the sacraments. The Catholic Church, however, has not only consistently refused to ordain any woman as deacon or presbyter but also has prohibited it by its Canon Law. But, it is interesting to note that pope Francis who following his predecessor has held that the prohibition of presbyteral ordination of women is a closed issue has also constituted a commission to study the issue of ordaining women as deacons. The position of the popes in this matter is to be duly respected and followed, all the more so because of the psychological and the socio-cultural mindset of the majority of the Catholic population today which as of now may not be ready to accept women presbyters. However, due respect and regard for their position would also call for a critical analysis of the tenability of the arguments on the basis of which such a position has been often legitimized.

There major arguments have been presented in support of the stand against the ordination of women are the following: Jesus was a male and only a male can properly represent him sacramentally; he did not include any women among the twelve and no woman was present at the last supper when he instituted the priesthood; for two thousand years the church has not ordained any woman.<sup>25</sup> Firstly, by Baptism every Christian, male or female, is incorporated to Jesus Christ sharing in his priestly, prophetic and leadership functions. And he or she is sent out to others to present him in one's

humanness as Jesus himself made God present by becoming human. To attribute an essential role to his maleness would end up giving a phallic character to his salvific work. Rather, what is true of the fundamental ordination received at baptism which enables a Christian to be representative of Jesus, irrespective of one's sex, applies all the more to all other specific forms of ministry including presbyterate. Secondly, though Jesus did not include any woman as a member of the twelve, he had women disciples who followed Jesus permanently as the twelve did (Lk 8:1- ; 2:40) and shared in his ministry. We may also conclude with reasonable certitude that they were also present at the last supper, because of their presence at Calvary the next day and the paschal meal was celebrated with family and friends, though the evangelists do not mention it. Anyway, presbyterate as such is a ministry explicitly instituted not by Jesus himself during his historical ministry but later by the apostles. And just because the apostles did not appoint women as presbyters nor the Church during the past two thousand years is not reason enough to continue to do so today when societies and cultures are moving away from patriarchy towards greater egalitarianism with increasing number of women taking up leadership roles in almost all fields. So the basis for any ministry in the Church today is one's charism and readiness for commitment and not one's sexuality. And it is very likely that not only Luther, but Jesus himself would not approve the refusal of any ministry to any one merely on the basis of his or her sex.

## **Prophetic Dissent**

“I remain subjugated by the scriptural passages I have cited and my conscience held captive by the word of God. Therefore, I neither can nor will recant anything. For, to act against conscience is difficult, noxious, and dangerous. May God help me! Amen”<sup>26</sup> were the resounding words of Luther with which he concluded his defense at the diet of Worms. Thereby Luther

took a courageous stand based on his understanding of the Scripture, despite the many allurements offered and the threat of condemnation as a heretic and the consequent excommunication and death. But subsequent history has proved that in many respects his stand was not only correct but also prophetic. In such prophetic dissent he is not, of course, the first hero in so far as he has so many men and women who have preceded him, starting from St. Paul who confronted St. Peter over his refusal to dine with the gentile Christians in Antioch (Gal 2:11-14) to the more recent heralds of reformation like the Florentine monk, Girolama Savonarola, who was burnt at the stake a few decades before Luther took his courageous stand at the diet of Worms.

However, he stands in sharp contrast to the vast majority of Christians, both the clergy and the laity alike, highly qualified in theological sciences as well as ordinary men and women, who preferred to remain silent despite their clear realization that the Church sorely needed reforms in many areas or muted their voices fearing disapproval or disciplinary action by the authorities. Since in many ways such a context still prevails in the Church today, Luther undoubtedly stands out even for those who may disagree with many of his views and ways as a model of prophetic courage and dissent. For, most members of the Churches today live in a culture of silence and passive obedience. They seem to fit perfectly into the model and mode of sheep who are more ready to take orders and directives from the authorities than to creatively think for and by themselves, take initiatives according to the needs of the local contexts and if need be constructively critical of the views and ways of the past as well as the policies and directives imposed from above without due regard for the Gospel or proper sensitivity to local cultures and contexts. Thus, most bishops remain meekly obedient to the pope, the clergy to the bishops, religious to their superiors and the laity to the clergy. Even the members of the participatory structures are more concerned

with maintaining and following the traditions and not displeasing the authorities rather than proactively and creatively responding to the contextual needs. Neither are they encouraged to think innovatively and speak out frankly. And unfortunately it is such stale conformity and sheepish behavior which often gets rewarded by appointments to the higher positions of responsibility and the very few who dare to dissent are either marginalized or punitively demoted. As a result, despite the repeated calls and the shining example of pope Francis in this regard, the Church continues to become increasingly irrelevant in a world beset with ever new and more complex problems instead of growing ever more into a wisdom community under the guidance of the Spirit offering life enhancing insights and perspectives like the teacher of the reign of God who brings what is new and what is old out of his treasure (Mt 1:52). What is needed today, may be more than ever before, are courageous men and women who while remaining deeply rooted in the Gospel are able to think anew the views and ways of the Church and speak out their convictions with courage as Luther did so that the Church can be effectively present to the world today, meaningfully proclaim its message and relevantly carry out its evangelizing mission.

## **Conclusion**

The Church is a dynamic movement of the believers in Jesus Christ. It has to constantly move forward in history not only like a glowing lamp on a stand and a city perched atop a hill, but also has to transform history like salt in the soil and leaven in the dough. To carry out this mission effectively it has to constantly reform and renew itself so that in and through it the Gospel of Jesus Christ comes alive at every age and culture in a way relevant to the context and effectively responsive to its possibilities and problems. At every age the Spirit of Christ also ensures that prophetic voices cry out aloud pointing to its failures and exposing its wounds, the outmoded fashions

to be shed, emerging possibilities to be embraced and new paths to be taken. Such voices may not be always infallible and the paths they point may be beset with also deviations. It is the duty of the Church to listen to such voices, discern the call of the Spirit in them and dare to march forward leaving some of the boats behind. Failure to do so would spell not only the loss of so many opportunities to creatively and effectively carry out its mission but also stunting its growth and bringing upon itself divisions and deviations as proved time and again in history. Luther's reformation is one such major episodes and certainly it continues to hold out many lessons for the Churches today and in the future. The fifth centenary of the launch of his reformation has proven to be fruitful vocation for the Churches to come together to learn such lessons but we have, of course, miles to go in this venture so full of promises and hopes.

*D. Alphonse,  
Bishop's House, Nagercoil*

### **Endnotes**

1. Erwin Iserloh et al. (eds.), *Reformation and Counter Reformation*, vol. v of Hubert Jedin (ed.), *History of the Church*, London, Burns & Oates, 1960, p.12
2. Hartman Grisar, *Martin Luther: His Life and Work*, Westminster: The Newman Press, 1960, 52
3. Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1958, 67
4. "Depravity has become so taken for granted that those soiled by it no longer notice the stench of sin," is the explicit acknowledgment of pope Leo X himself of the corruption rampant in the Church in the late middle ages. As cited in Iserloh, *Reformation*, 7
5. Vat II. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6
6. Vat. II, *Dei Verbum*, 21
7. Vat. II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 51
8. Vat. II, *Dei Verbum*, 25
9. Vat. II, *Dei Verbum*, 8
10. Vat. II, *Dei Verbum*, 10
11. Clodovis Boff & George Pixley, *The Bible, the Church, and the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books), 1989, 89-91

12. Vat. II, Gaudium et Spes, 4
13. Iserloh, Reformation, 8-9
14. "It belongs to Spiritual power to establish the terrestrial power and to pass judgment if it has not been good... Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we decree that it is absolutely necessary for salvation of every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff." Pope Boniface VIII, Unam Sanctam (<https://www.ewtu.com/library/PAPALDOC/B7UNAM-HTML>)
15. Iserloh, Reformation, 8
16. <https://www.theguardian.com/.../pope-francis-scathing-criticism-vatican-officials-curia>
17. At the outset of his reign itself pope Francis states, "Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach" and he goes on to elaborate as follows: "The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion...episcopal conferences are in a position to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit, Yet this desire has not been fully realized..." *Evangelii Gaudium*, 32; Similar ideas are also expressed by him in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 3,298ff.
18. For more details see Iserloh, Reformation, 6
19. "We are all equally priests, that is to say, we have all the same power in respect to the Word and the Sacraments. However, no one may make use of the power except by the consent of the community or by the call of a superior (For what is common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself unless he is called) and therefore, this 'sacrament' of ordination, if it is anything at all, is nothing else than a certain rite whereby one is called to ministry in the Church." Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in Helmut Lehman (ed.), *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), vol. 36, 116
20. Vat II. *Lumen Gentium*, 2
21. <https://cruxnow.com/.../pope-blasts-clericalism-says-clock-has-stopped-on-hour-of-laity>; <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/in-stressing-error-of-clericalism-francis-calls>
22. Vat. II, *Lumen Gentium*, 33 -6
23. Thomas O'Meara, *Theology of Ministries*, New York: Paulist Press, 198 , 3
24. Mickey Mattox, "Luther on Eve, Women and the Church," *Lutheran Quarterly* 17:4 (Winter 200 ), 452-474
25. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Inter Insigniores: Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*, 1976; John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Apostolic Letter, 1988), 25-6
26. As cited in E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and his Times*, Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950, 505