

# **VAIHARAI**

**(The Dawn)**

**A Theological Half-Yearly**

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# VAIHARAI

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## Reformation and Renewal in the church

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### *From Editor's Desk*

As the Protestant Church celebrates the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther, it would be nice to revisit the Reformation and identify the Renewal in the Church.

Martin Luther was born at Eisleben to Hans Luther and Margaret on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1483. His father was a copper miner and a very strict disciplinarian. After his school studies in Mansfield, he entered the University at Erfurt and got his B.A degree in 1502; M.A in 1505. His father wanted him to be a lawyer. He started his studies in law but on 2 July 1505 he was caught in an electric storm and made a vow to St. Anne to become a monk if he survived. He miraculously escaped death and he entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt and within a year of novitiate made his final vows and nine months later was ordained a priest on 3 April 1507. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Theology in the University of Wittenberg in 1508. In 1511 he began to concentrate on the study of St. Augustine and the Scriptures. In 1512, he obtained doctorate in Theology. From 1515 he started lecturing on St. Paul's letter to the Romans and it was this that made a profound change in him. He abandoned fashionable allegorical interpretation and looked for the literal-historical interpretation.

In 1511, he went on a short visit to Rome. He was shocked to find the luxurious life led by the clergy and the popes were like Italian princes. He questioned the authority of the pope and the wealth and corruption of the

Church. To make matters worse, Johann Tetzel, a Dominican monk came to Wittenberg to sell 'indulgences' and raise money for rebuilding St. Peter's Basilica at Rome. An indulgence was a promise held out to a sinner for the remission of his punishment after death if he repented and confessed his sins to a priest. In practice the indulgences were sold to enrich the treasury of the popes. Martin Luther felt that sins could be washed away not by paying money but only by repenting for the sins. Luther taught that salvation is a gift of God's grace received by faith and trust in God's promise to forgive sins for the sake of Christ's death on the cross. God freely forgives we cannot do anything to earn forgiveness.

Luther was led on to question many of the Churches' practices and ceremonies and claimed they had no basis in the Bible. He attacked the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Luther wrote his conclusions in 95 theses in Latin and nailed them to the door at Wittenberg Cathedral on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1517. Through the new medium of printing, 95 theses with many pamphlets and books rapidly circulated throughout Europe. On 15 June 1520 the Pope issued *Exurge Domine* enumerating 41 errors of Luther who was threatened with excommunication. In November 1520, Luther wrote a pamphlet, "Against the Bull of Anti-Christ". In December 1520 he burnt the Papal Bull. On 03 January, 1521 he was formally excommunicated by Pope Leo X. The Reformation Movement started by Luther protested against the pope.

Here I would like to raise a question: Was Martin Luther's reform movement necessary? The condition of the church certainly called for a reform but was it necessary for Luther to go out of the Church to reform it? Could he not have done it by remaining inside and working towards it? Luther, however, felt that open revolt and a mass movement was needed otherwise nothing would be effected. So Lutheranism was a blessing in disguise. But times have changed. Both Catholics and Protestants have moved from the hostile attitude of Division to the friendly attitude of Renewal.

On January 19, 2017, Pope Francis received an ecumenical delegation from Finland led by the Lutheran Archbishop Karimainen of Turku and said that the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant reformation is for Catholics and Lutherans a privileged occasion to live the faith more authentically, in order to rediscover the Gospel together, and bear witness to Christ with a renewed vigor. Pope Francis said that Martin Luther wanted “to renew the Church, not divide her.”

We present here in this issue four articles on the theme of Reformation and Renewal. Dr. Dhaynchand Carr, the author of the article, “From Conflict to Communion” clearly brings out the excommunication of Luther from the Church on 3rd January 1521 for burning the Papal Bull and the Church Law. By this the Church got divided. Luther was asked to recant his mispronouncement. Luther refused.

The author develops the attempt of several dignitaries to bring back the unity of the Church. After Vatican II the Church has given ample opportunities for ecumenical ventures. The author develops five points to make the dialogue fruitful in leading to real unity:

1. The dialogue between Roman Catholic and Lutherans should begin with the perspective of unity.
2. Both must be continuously transformed by mutual encounter from each other’s understanding of faith.
3. Both must commit themselves to seek visible unity.
4. Both should jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time.
5. Both must witness together to the Church to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to God.

The author also develops the factors that continue to divide us. However the author says that we must come forward to strike a note of unity in the

Church by a 'give and take policy', of course not at the risk of faith, scripture and tradition.

Dr. V.Raphael in his article on "Biblical Interpretation in Catholic and Protestant Churches" makes a detailed study on the impact of reformation on the interpretation of the Bible. The Catholics have Bible, Tradition and Magisterium, the Protestants have only Bible as binding authority. They speak of *Sola Scriptura*. This is largely due to the reformation brought by Martin Luther and others. While allegorical interpretation was a common feature during the middle ages the Reformation brought in a drastic changes. There were efforts to go to the literal sense of the Bible. The Catholics interpret several passages of the Bible according to their dogmas and the protestants interpret the same suiting to their theology. The author also notes how there is a coming together as the protestants feel that *Sola Scriptura* is not enough. Now there are common efforts with regard to the understanding of the Bible. Hence the author brings out the later development in the field of interpreting the Bible.

Dr. D. Alphonse comes out with an article in this issue on "Luther's Challenges to the Church Today". Luther's criticism of 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, doctrinalism and faithless asceticism. The cry of Luther still rings out even today as a powerful challenge to the Catholic Church. Based on Luther's reaction the Vatican II turned out be a routine response to Luther's challenges.

The author says that reform is an ongoing task. For the Church to be always reformed is not only the cry of Luther but also of Vatican II.

Luther's faithfulness to the "Word of God, being authentically local and becoming the people's Church, equal opportunities to women's ministry

and prophetic dissent” are the most important propositions of Luther. The Church is not averse to these propositions. The Church is on the process of deep study and reflection. 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 word today, meaningfully proclaim its message and carry out its evangelizing mission.

Dr. Michael Amaladoss deals with the topic on “Ecumenism a New Paradigm”. The Ecumenical movement was inspired by the prayer of Jesus after the Last Supper: “That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (Jn 17:21).

A movement was started not only to pray for unity, but also to start discussion to reach doctrinal agreements in the first place. The Catholic Church started doctrinal dialogues and controversial issues with the comparatively bigger Churches like the Lutherans, the Anglicans and the Baptist Churches.

The Catholic Church also started interreligious dialogues. The prayer of Jesus has been interpreted by all those involved in the Ecumenical movement as Jesus wanting One Church. The author says that common action towards the building of the Kingdom community of freedom, fellowship, love and justice, is possible. This idea of openness is required in one’s interreligious relationships.

**Dr A. Albert**

*Editor*