
Reformation Sunday

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October 29, 2017 is Reformation Sunday. It is the Sunday closest to the date Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Whittenburg Castle church. The document raised questions and propositions for debate. It was intended to lead to a meaningful discussion among Catholics, in the hope it would cause a reform to the institution.

The institution did not accept the invitation to meaningfully discuss the issues raised, and instead of reflecting on their own conduct, they condemned Martin Luther. Martin Luther was a devout Catholic. His questions were sincere. His loyalty to the institution was unaffected by the errors he saw in the scandalous selling of indulgences to finance projects in Rome.

Rome believed itself above criticism. They assumed their historic control was a right conferred by God. Therefore, the sincerity of Martin Luther and the legitimacy of his questions and propositions meant nothing to the institution. They branded Luther a heretic and threatened his life. This was the worst possible approach for Catholicism, and the best possible result for Christianity.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York has recently acknowledged that, the Catholic Church was plagued with generalized corruption at the time of Luther “which we cannot deny.” He described the effect Luther had, “It was the striking of a match, creating a bonfire—the flames of which are still burning.”

Luther’s flame burns still because it was grounded in Christian sincerity, founded on legitimate criticism of institutional corruption, and advocated by a man whose faith led him on a quest to find and acknowledge truth despite all opposition encountered. The result was a society divided into camps that vilified or praised, threatened or protected, believed or condemned him. The ideas he advocated have literally changed the world. Those he persuaded have grown in numbers over the past 500 years.

Reformation Sunday should not pass without reflecting on the changes Martin Luther brought about to the world today. Although a flawed man, he was nonetheless an instrument in God's hand to change our world for the better. If you own a Bible you can read in your native language, you owe a debt to Martin Luther. If you are either Catholic or Protestant, your church today is a result of changes caused by Martin Luther's flames. Catholicism was reformed and Protestant churches came into existence as the result of Martin Luther.