

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back

by Dan Trygg

“...it is necessary for us to hold even more closely to the things we have heard, lest we might drift away.” Hebrews 2:1

“A person should consider us in this way: as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. ² In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy... ⁶ Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.” 1 Corinthians 4:1-2,6

“...you, as living stones, are being built as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices well pleasing to God through Jesus Christ. ⁹ ...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...” 1 Peter 2:5,9

Because of the printing press, it took only two months for Luther's challenge to Rome's abuses to spread throughout Europe. The excesses and abuses of the Roman church were longstanding, and heavy upon the common people, and many people identified immediately with the issues raised by Luther. **This rapid dissemination of news and information meant that the Roman church could not control or quell the uproar that resulted. Other reformation leaders arose, and added fuel to the fire of debate, and the religious and political unrest that was growing as a consequence.** It is difficult for us to imagine the political, civic and social environment of the time. Our modern nation state, which we are familiar with, did not develop until later. **Feudalism was the dominant form of political and social hierarchy.** Serfs, craftsmen and other workers worked on the large estates of a local lord or noble. These, in turn, paid tribute and swore loyalty to regional monarchs, who granted them their lands. In 800 A.D. over 300 such European monarchical states and territories combined under a dynasty of emperors who worked in conjunction with Roman Catholic popes to form the Holy Roman Empire. **The church itself also owned or controlled extensive lands or properties. This system was quite stratified into classes, and was extremely oppressive on those who were common laborers.** The nobles and many of even the church leaders lived in luxury, while most people were on the edge of starvation and extreme poverty. **Aspects of the Reformation challenged the foundations of this entire system.**

Luther, and other reformers, based their convictions on five principles, which became identified as key to their understanding and defense of their teachings. These **Five Solae** or Five “Alone's” were **(1.) Scripture Alone** – that the Bible was the only authoritative source for faith and practice; **(2.) Faith Alone** – that we are saved through faith alone (not “faith *plus* works or rituals”); **(3.) Grace Alone** – that we are saved by God's grace alone, not by our merit; **(4.) Christ Alone** – Jesus Christ alone is our atoning sacrifice, our Savior, our Lord and our King; **(5.) God's Glory Alone** – that we are to live for God's glory only. **Another key teaching of the Reformation was the Priesthood of All Believers.** In the Dark Ages, the teaching of the Roman Church had been that Christians were divided into two classes of people: secular and sacred, or spiritual. The teaching of the church had been that salvation came from God through the church, meaning that God worked exclusively through a select class of priests to mediate the grace provided by Jesus Christ through the seven sacraments of the church: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, marriage, and holy orders. **What the priesthood of all believers meant was that all born-again believers can have a personal relationship with Christ directly.** There is no “mediated priesthood”; Christ is the only mediator between God and people (1 Tim. 2:5). **It also means that each Christian shares the responsibility of ministering to other Christians in the Body of Christ, and of representing Jesus before a watching world.** This had the effect of removing hierarchy in the church, and reintroducing an equal, democratic dynamic. We are a society of equals. None can “pull rank” on others; we all are answerable to Christ, the Word of God, and *agapē*-love.

New insight into truths and “paradigm shifts” can be powerful. And, in the case of the dysfunctional abusive world in which most people lived, these new ideas, and the conclusions people derived from them were *incendiary*, ...they were like setting a match to years of dry undergrowth. The world was set on fire! **These were truths about the church, ...about our relationships with God, ...but they had far reaching implications,** which were not lost on people who were oppressed and longing for change. **First, it started as disagreements between local princes, who were sympathetic to the Protestant ideals, and others sympathetic to the traditional Roman Catholic system.** It quickly escalated into legal challenges, armed confrontation and all-out war between groups. In addition, **the message of equality cut at the very foundations of feudal hierarchy, and some people took these ideals as a justification for social rebellion by force.** There were conflicts and wars fought over power shifts or talk of rebellion, both between Roman Catholic sympathizers and Protestant sympathizers, as well as uprisings of peasants against their overlords, demanding equality. **These truths, that were positive within an intimate home gathering of like-minded**

believers, who loved and valued each other, were seen as a danger to the whole of society as it was configured. The world and the church do not mix well! Wars were fought over the next 100 years, and in many places, a third to a half of the population was killed. **As Martin Luther, and other reformers, witnessed the disruption and carnage, they retreated from implementing the ideals described in the scriptures!** While they *taught* the priesthood of all believers, *there was no practical expression of that* in the way the church met. They did *not* return to the NT model of small, intimate, interactive home groups. *Instead, they pretty much adopted a Catholic liturgy, except they minimized the focus on the mass, and emphasized the preaching of the Word, in its place.*

In the midst of all this turmoil and upheaval, however, God was still at work, breaking up the soil of society and church tradition to bring about changes that would allow for a return to more biblical expressions of faith. God raised up several lights in the darkness of confusion, disruption and then the retrenchment of church formalism.

The first was **Johann Arndt** (1555-1621), a German Lutheran theologian who wrote some very influential devotional books, *True Christianity* and *The Garden of Paradise*, and others. He claimed that it was not enough to simply believe orthodox doctrine and attend church. A person must pursue purification through righteous living and communion with God. He emphasized communing with the indwelling Christ within, abiding in Christ.

Next was **Philip Jacob Spener** (1635-1705), another German pastor and theologian. Through his book, *Pia Desideria*, and other writings, he became the father of the movement known as Pietism. He emphasized the need for personal growth and change through spiritual rebirth and renewal by means of the disciplines of personal Bible study, devotion and prayer. He encouraged church reform by (1.) encouraging personal and group Bible study, in addition to preaching; (2.) increasing the role and involvement of lay people in all functions of church life; (3.) encouraging believers to put their faith into practice in all areas of life; (4.) engaging in religious discussions with humility and love, and avoiding controversy and dissension; (5.) ensuring that pastors were *both* educated *and* devoted to God; and (6.) focusing preaching on the need to develop faith in everyday believers. He saw that the spiritual climate of the church was not something that just happened. It needed to be cultivated and developed through the devoted actions of the members of the congregation in their personal *and* corporate lives.

August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) studied Hebrew and Greek at Leipzig, where he was credentialed to teach. Coming under the influence of the pietists, and even spending an extended stay with Spener, Francke was forbidden to teach or preach at Leipzig. Eventually, he was offered a chair as a professor at the new university at Halle and also pastored a church nearby. He took an interest in the many orphaned and outcast children, and started a day school. In three year's time, he was caring for 100 orphans, and teaching 500 poor children in his day schools. Because of unusual provision, he was able to expand his enterprises to include a Latin school, a German school, and a seminary. He was later able to expand to include trade school, and a natural science school. He ran an apothecary's shop, started a Bible society and obtained a printing press for printing Bibles. God provided for needs in dramatic and timely answers to prayer. By the end of his life, his orphanage was supporting over 2,000 orphans. His ministry became a model for others who had a heart for ministering to the poor and disadvantaged, and to meet practical needs.

The next significant person in this list is **Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf**. Spener was a close associate of his parents and his grandmother, and he became Nicolaus' godfather. Furthermore, Nicolaus was educated at the Francke Foundations in Halle, where pietism was a central ingredient of example and instruction. Wanting to further his pietistic beliefs, Zinzendorf and some friends created a Christian association. The members sought to encourage renewal in the lifeless formalistic church by preaching, publishing and distributing tracts and books, and by demonstrating benevolence through acts of charity. Eventually, they even purchased a printing press to produce materials and print low-cost Bibles for distribution. He had inherited the estate of his father, and purchased the extensive land holdings of his grandmother. He began to give refuge to persecuted wanderers from Moravia and Bohemia, many of whom had been descendants of the Hussites who had been scattered after the martyrdom of Jan Hus by the Roman Catholic church. He allowed these vagrants to build the village of Herrnhut on a corner of his estate. After a time, there was some conflict in the group, over some questionable teachings, and Zinzendorf took it upon himself to visit every home, and invite the men to meet for a study of the scriptures. Their studies centered on how the early Christians lived together in love and community. They were led to form a Brotherly Agreement, a voluntary discipline for living together as a Christian community. Christ was at the center, and a vibrant religion of the heart, steeped and matured in pietistic practices, was the foundation for their community interactions. By God's providence, they came in contact with a freed slave from the West Indies, and some Inuit children from Greenland. The community began sending out teams of missionaries to these places, and elsewhere around the world. By the time of Zinzendorf's death in 1760, this community had sent out some 276 Moravian missionaries around the world.

Although the reformers stepped back from the truths they had discovered, God raised up others with fresh vision to move forward, to go deep in their relationship with Him, and to reach out in a many new ways to the world around them. **Their stories inspired others to work for change, ...for repentance, revival, renewal and outreach.**