

# PASTOR SCOTT'S

## MONTHLY MESSAGE



### The Coming Reformation

Church historians point out that since the time of Christ, about every 500 years there has been an upheaval, a reimagining, of the church. The last of these was the Protestant Reformation, a major 16th century movement. They further note that living in the 21st century, we are ripe for the next reformation. However, there seems to be little cognizance or clarity about the shape of this anticipated reimagining.

Winds are blowing that may give some hint of the change that is coming, and in many cases these winds swirl around the young. Compared to my college days, younger people today seem more intent upon finding meaningful occupations than ones with high pay. And, while virtually every young America has a mobile phone, at the same time there seems to be a lesser embrace by many of the young (and some of the not-so-young) of materialism.

Coming into the 2020 elections I am certain there will be winds of discussions (and misrepresentations) around basic governing philosophies such as capitalism and socialism. Interestingly, a 2018 Gallup poll found 51% of Americans 18 to 29 hold a positive view of socialism, and only 45% of that group have a positive view of capitalism.

I'm not promoting any economic philosophy. My interest is in the potential undercurrents from these trends that may manifest as this 500 year revitalization of the church.

As Christians, and secondarily as citizens, I think the fact that we live in a society of immense affluence and desperate poverty is something we cannot be at peace with. Like you, I grew up with the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have done to you." This rule, which emanates from the corollary teachings of Christ, morally bind us to strive for the same essentials of life for others that we desire for ourselves: health care, education, decent housing, nutrition, a living wage, and security in old age. Living into Christ's teachings and the Golden Rule requires change from the current.

Back in the Protestant Reformation there was a "Radical Reformation" movement, espousing the *Twelve Articles* - essentially Europe's first human rights document. In summation, this movement had the conviction that there is a common life that overcomes economic exploitation, a life that is thoroughly practical and independent of the state. The Radical Reformation movement was at the heart of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, echoed throughout the New Testament, and proclaimed in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. It was exemplified in the communal life of the first church in Jerusalem. Is this part of the reformation wind that is stirring?

Much good came out of the Protestant Reformation, but the Christianity that arose has also gone to virtually comical lengths to avoid some of Christ's "hard teachings" on divorce, nonviolence, and about riches and private property. These teachings have been sidelined and explained away as "historically specific" or rhetorical exaggerations. As Peter Mommsen writes, "Jesus' economic teachings are just as integral to the life he taught as any of his other commands: love of neighbors and enemies, hatred of hypocrisy, truthfulness, sexual purity, or the works of mercy." Dietrich Bonhoeffer on our interpreting Christ's teachings: "Humanly speaking, we could understand and interpret the Sermon on the Mount in a thousand different ways. Jesus knows only on possibility: simple surrender and obedience, not interpreting it or applying it, but doing and obeying it."

Maybe this is the burgeoning essence of the "new/emerging reformation" which church historians speak of, that as Christians we will grasp onto Christ's economic teachings as boldly as his other teachings. 42% of Christ's parables are about money and its management, more than any other topic. This was clearly important in his teachings; possibly our "reformed, and always reforming" proclivity is leading the church to pursue a vision of the *common good*. Maybe we'll hear again the voices of Basil the Great and Ambrose of Milan that the goods of creation belong to all.

Possibly this 21st century reimagining will center on the fact that Jesus is truly Lord of all (all people, all things), and we are his stewards. That the light of his kingdom that he bequeathed to his followers has truly broken upon this world - not as something that slowly emerges over the course of a long historical development, but as an invasion - a new *reformation!*

Peace,

*Pastor Scott*