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## Newsletter – November 2011 – Alfred Sawyer

### Eternal Truth

The last day of October was the 494th anniversary of a pivotal event in western history. On that day an obscure Roman Catholic monk by the name of Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther's bold act changed the face of Europe and later on much of the world.

Martin Luther was brought up like most in Western Europe as a faithful son of the Roman Church. He believed that in order to get to heaven one must lead a righteous life and receive the grace which came through the sacraments. Sacramental grace, of course, depended on the sacraments being valid. Valid sacraments required a valid priesthood, so salvation was inextricably linked to the institution of the Church. The Roman Church taught that outside the Church there was no salvation.

The Bible was a closed book to most people in 1517 for three reasons. First, most people were illiterate. Second, the translation of the Bible available at the time was in Latin, a long-dead language understood by only a few. Lastly, there weren't many copies of the Bible available even if people could read and understand Latin. The printing press had been invented only 65 years before.

Luther was not only literate, but had become a doctor of theology after his ordination. He could read the Bible in its original Hebrew and Greek. And it was through his own private study of scripture, particularly Paul's letter to the Romans, that Luther became convinced that the Church had corrupted the essential message of the New Testament. Salvation, he came to realize, is not based on what we do through our own religious exertion and effort, but on what Christ has done.

Jesus paid the price for our sins when He died in our place on the Cross. He secured eternal life for all who place their faith in Him through His resurrection from the dead. The means whereby a person is forgiven of his sins and given the assurance of eternal life is faith, not sacraments. The ultimate authority is not the Church, but the Bible.

"Faith alone and the Bible alone" became the rallying cry of a Reformation which swept across the face of Europe and changed the course of history. It is ironic that the Gospel fervor which engulfed northern Europe is but a dimly burning wick today, the torch having been passed to America and much of the Two-Thirds World.

*But the truth of Luther's affirmation is eternal. It is eternal because God's Word is eternal.  
The grass withers, the flower fades. But the word of our God stands forever. (Isaiah 40:8)*

*- Alfred Sawyer, Rector*