

What Happened on Halloween 500 Years Ago That Challenged Religion and Compels Repetition?

I'm a lover of history, celebrate it unashamedly, and try to infect others with my passion. I believe what civil rights activist Marcus Garvey said, "People without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots."

Vladimir Lenin, Communist leader who launched the Russian Revolution exactly 100 years ago this month, taught: "If you can separate people from their history, they are easily persuaded."

Recently my wife and I took our vacation and drove to Montgomery, Alabama. We spent almost a week in this city because it is brimming with historical events that shaped social justice in our nation. What a week, and apart from our inexpensive motel, almost everything was free!

God is a lover of history, as evidenced by His meticulous attention to genealogies in Scripture. Consider also His directives to commemorate significant events from the past so as not to forget what happened.

Unfortunately, scores in America are shamefully ignorant of history, as are children who are not taught it, or taught it inaccurately in school. Man-on-the-street interviews regarding this reality may be humorous, but they're often embarrassingly painful for me to watch.

Philosopher George Santayana told us, "Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them."

Apart from the birth of Jesus Christ, what happened on Oct. 31, 1517 was arguably one of the most monumental, revolutionary moments in human history. It was a defining, watershed event that left a brontosaurus-like imprint. Do you know what it is?

If you have children and grandchildren, take time to impart this valuable history lesson to them. Challenge them with the wisdom of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who told us, "We are not makers of history. We are made by history."

Oct. 31, 1517

It's hard to believe that in a matter of days we will commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. A religious zealot and provocateur ignited a firestorm that changed the entire world!

Martin Luther was a 21-year-old German Catholic studying to be a lawyer when he faced a violent thunderstorm threatening his life. "I was besieged by the terror and agony of sudden death!" he later wrote. He made a vow on the spot to join a religious order if he was spared, which he was.

Martin joined an Augustinian monastery and was obsessive in observing what he thought was Christian duty necessary to find and maintain a right standing with God. Becoming a monk, he taught at the newly founded University of Wittenberg and later made a pilgrimage to Rome.

Climbing the steps of the Basilica on his knees, he pondered the corruption he saw in the Roman Catholic Church surrounding him. Due to Renaissance influence, reconstruction of Saint Peter's Basilica and other edifices required money, so unscrupulous spiritual leaders used Masses and indulgences (believed to reduce sin's punishment and release people from afterlife suffering), as manipulative fundraising tactics.

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Proclaim Truth and Pay the Price

Unable to withstand the grievous and widespread practices anymore, Martin Luther composed a "Disputation on the Power of Indulgences" (95 Theses) and nailed it to the door of All Saints Church. The date was Oct. 31, 1517.

His arguments were incendiary. He punctuated his declarations by proclaiming the true basis of salvation was faith in Christ alone and not the good works being emphasized to seduce the gullible masses.

This courageous reformer stood up to the evils of his day and regularly engaged in public debate on religious reforms. Some of his biblical and revolutionary ideas were: the church did not rest on papal foundations but Christ; everyone was a priest onto God; all Christians could interpret Scripture by the Holy Spirit's guidance.

In 1521 a papal decree declared him a heretic and excommunicated him. He was called before an assembly (Imperial Diet), withdrew for a night of reflection, then boldly declared his positions based on Scripture and conscience: "Here I stand, I can do no other!"

The fuse was lit, and a Reformation calling for a return to authentic biblical Christianity exploded on the scene. The new technology of the printing press spread his teachings like wildfire. And while he was branded an outlaw and his writings were burned, God providentially provided for his escape to the sanctuary of a castle in Wartburg, where he translated Scripture into the vernacular of the people.

While Martin Luther condemned insurrections and the rebellion that surfaced, his reform movement triggered Catholic and Protestant tensions that later launched the Pilgrims from England on the Mayflower pilgrimage to America. And, as they

say, the rest is history.

Obeying the Call to be Salt and Light

Luther, like Knox, Zwingli, Wilberforce, Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Chuck Colson and others, set an example for us by not remaining silent in the face of evil but being salt and light as Jesus taught. They exposed corruption, deception and apostasy with courage and an informed, biblical worldview.

As we commemorate this Oct. 31st monumental event in history, may we draw inspiration from the life of Martin Luther. It's time for Christians across this nation, especially leaders, to take a stand against all religious and political compromise, the LGBTQ agenda, dismemberment of innocent unborn babies and the other social injustices in our generation.

Who could have fathomed 20 years ago that today, even euthanasia would be starting to gain a foothold in America and countries worldwide. Even Belgium, with a Catholic majority population, has legalized "mercy killing" of the handicapped, sick or terminally ill. Recently, the Brothers of Charity, Belgium's largest Catholic hospital chain, founded in 1807, defied the Vatican on euthanasia in a tweet from a board member: "The time of 'Rome has spoken, the case is closed' is long passed" (*Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 28, 2017).

Recently, Harry Weinstein and other Hollywood moguls and actors have been called out for their unconscionable sexual abuse of women. People knew about it for decades yet remained silent. How many lives were destroyed?

Likewise, many Christians and especially spiritual leaders across America knew about 59 million babies being aborted along with the promotion of homosexual marriage yet remained silent. How many lives were also destroyed?

'Call Me Martin, not Michael!'

Martin Luther King, Jr. is one of my heroes. He entered college at 15, took up the torch for civil rights, was jailed 29 times and eventually was assassinated for this righteous cause. George Washington is the only other American to have his birthday observed as a national holiday.

What most people don't know was that this champion was born Michael King Jr. with the same name as his father, a pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. King Sr. then went to Germany and was so impacted by the example of Martin Luther that he returned home and changed his name to Martin.

He taught his 5-year-old son, Michael, about the brave exploits of the Protestant reformer. In time he asked him if he would like to emulate this mighty man of God and also change his name to Martin. And the rest is history.

Here's the deal: Turbulent times, like those in which we live, require Christians to be on the frontline to pray, proclaim truth and participate in the political process. This October 31, let's remember Martin Luther and receive the baton he's passing on to us from 500 years ago. His courageous actions challenged religion and compel repetition. {eoa}