

Message from the Editor: The Five *Solas* of the Reformation

Michael Parker (mike.parker@etsc.org)
Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo

At noon on October 31, 1517, the Eve of All Saints' Day, Martin Luther posted Ninety-five Theses on the Castle Church door at Wittenberg. The faculty and students at the University of Wittenberg used the door as a bulletin board, and the theses Luther posted there were printed in Latin on a single folio sheet. Luther, therefore, was simply trying to initiate a debate among academics on a subject he titled "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences." The result, however, was not an erudite squabble between theologians on arcane aspects of the doctrine of penance. Luther's theses mark the outset of the Protestant Reformation.

The specific debate on indulgences that Luther had sought never actually occurred. Rather the conflict between Luther and the Roman Catholic Church quickly escalated to issues involving the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. How is one saved? What authority does the Church possess for its theology? What is the purpose of our existence? The Protestants reformers of the sixteenth-century Reformation argued that the Church over the course of the Middle Ages had elaborated its tradition in ways that were no longer consistent with the teachings of the Bible or of the best insights of the Church Fathers. Therefore, they called for a return to biblical principles. Roman Catholic leaders at this time slowly came to realize the far-reaching nature of the challenge that Luther had posed, but rather than accommodate or compromise, they dug in their heels and stood their ground. At the Council of Trent, held in three sessions between 1545 and 1563, the Catholic Church clarified and affirmed the theology it had elaborated over the previous thousand years.

Protestant reformers, for their part, were far from unified. They agreed on much that they considered wrong with Catholic doctrine and practice, but they did not agree on what the Bible taught, the place of tradition within the church, or even how to organize the church. Soon the new-born Protestant movement splintered into four main parts: Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Anabaptist. One weakness of the Protestant movement in the sixteenth century and ever since has been its lack of unity. The Protestant churches have divided over nationality, interpretations of the Bible, church polity, theology, social issues, and much more.

In the year preceding October 31, 2017, when Protestants will celebrate their five-hundredth birthday, ETSC has held a series of presentations on five principles of the Reformation that Protestants have all traditionally embraced. They are known as the five *solas*. There is no single document in the sixteenth century that mentions all five by name, but these doctrines nonetheless have come to be seen as the first principles of the Protestant movement. They are the family resemblance that all Protestants share. *Sola* is a Latin word that means "alone" or "only." The five *solas*, then, are five slogans that sum up Protestant thought. They are *Sola Fide* (by faith alone), *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *Solus Christus* (through Christ alone), *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone).

This edition contains three of the presentations on the *solas* that were presented recently at ETSC. The first is by Dr. Darren Kennedy on *Sola Gratia*, which was presented on February 22, 2017; the second is one that I presented on *Solus Christus* on November 24, 2016; and the third is by Dr. Tharwat Waheed, which as presented on April 25, 2017. It is my hope that the other presentations on the *solas* will be published at a later time. Since these presentations were not originally intended to be published, the footnotes contained in the texts are partial.

On a completely unrelated topic, CJT is also pleased to include in this issue an article on the icon controversy in the Eastern Orthodox Church that occurred in the eighth and ninth centuries. This was written by Iakovos Menelaou, a PhD candidate, Greek Cypriot, and member of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The author does not engage Protestant thought, preferring to present the issue as it developed in its own time. Readers, however, will no doubt find the views of John of Damascus, Theodore the Studite, and others insightful and challenging.