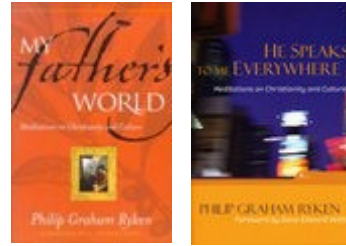


Window on the World

Window on the World is our weekly opportunity to examine our culture from the vantage point of biblical Christianity. Here you will find the text from Dr. Ryken's "Window on the World" talks from Tenth Presbyterian Church's evening service. If you missed one or wanted to send a copy to a friend, you will be able to find them here. Please note: there is no "Window on the World" on third Sundays, selected other Sundays, or in July and August. Windows on the World before September 2005 are available in an older format. [Click here](#). Many of these are now published in [My Father's World: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2002) and in [He Speaks to Me Everywhere: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2004) by Philip Graham Ryken.



It's Not Over

Dr. Philip Ryken



Series: Window on the World

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Is the Reformation over? That is the question asked and to some extent answered in a recent book by Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom [Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005)]. The authors document the many ways in which cooperation between Catholics and Evangelicals has been increasing in America and around the world.

Some of this cooperation occurs in evangelism, such as the welcome given to the participation of Roman Catholic clergy in Billy Graham's evangelistic crusades, or the showing of Campus Crusade's *Jesus* film at the Roman Catholic World Youth Day in 2000. Some of this cooperation occurs in social politics, where Catholics and Evangelicals have a common concern for the sanctity of human life and serve as cobelligerents against euthanasia, infanticide, and abortion. Then some of the cooperation occurs in systematic theology. Here the most notable examples are "The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" that Lutherans and Catholics signed in 1999 or the Evangelicals and Catholics Together documents that did so much to mobilize the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals in the 1990's. All of which leads some observers to wonder whether perhaps the Reformation might be over.

If you ask me, it's not over. No, for at least three important reasons, the Reformation is as necessary today as it was in the 16th century. It is necessary, first, because Catholicism is still badly in need of reform. It is hardly my place to tell the Roman Catholic Church what to do. But as an outsider observer, it seems painfully obvious that reform is needed among both Catholic clergy (especially with regard to gospel ministry and sexual purity) and Catholic laity (especially with regard to nominal Christianity and knowing the Scriptures). One needs only to attend a Mass conducted by the average Catholic priest or talk about spiritual things with the average Catholic parishioner to know that reform is needed and evangelism is appropriate.

The Reformation is necessary, second, because there remain irreconcilable theological differences

between orthodox Catholicism and confessional Protestantism. Many of these differences relate to the doctrine of church. Catholics believe, but Protestants deny, that the Roman Pontiff has “full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered” [*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), p. 254, par. 882]. Evangelicals and Catholics also remain divided by their views on authority. Whereas Evangelicals believe that Scripture alone is the only ultimate authority for faith and practice, Catholics give equal reverence and devotion to tradition as the authoritative interpretation of Scripture. Then there are the many obvious differences in worship, such as the prayers that are offered to Mary in the Catholic liturgy, or the so-called sacrifice of the Mass. Catholics and Protestants are not in communion. How, then, can the Reformation be over?

But perhaps the most crucial differences still concern the doctrine of salvation. Although Vatican II opened the door for Catholics to pay more serious attention to Scripture, it also opened the door to theological liberalism. Roman Catholic theology now teaches the liberal doctrine of Christian universalism—that people who try to live a good life may be saved without knowing the gospel or having saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Nor do any of the recent ecumenical statements on the doctrine of justification effectively resolve the issues raised by the Protestant Reformation nearly 500 years ago. They use common Christian language to express verbal agreement about certain aspects of justification, yet there remain fundamental and irreconcilable disagreements about what justification actually means. The Roman Catholic Church still denies that faith is the alone instrument of justification, or that God declares us righteous by the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. On these and many other issues Rome is unmoved.

This explains why Catholics still believe in baptismal justification and the doctrine of purgatory. Only a few months ago Pope Benedict XVI was handing out indulgences, of all things. On the 40th anniversary of Vatican II, and as a reward for venerating an image or performing some other religious act of devotion to the Virgin Mary, Catholics were promised full remission from the punishment of their sins [Carol Glatz, “Pope authorizes plenary indulgences marking Vatican II anniversary,” *Catholic News Service* (December, 2005)]. Meanwhile, all the anathemas from the Council of Trent remain in effect. How can the Reformation be over unless and until the Roman Catholic Church repudiates its rejection of *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *solus Christus*?

Then there is a third reason why the Reformation is far from over: even apart from any concerns about Catholicism, the Evangelical church itself is in need of reformation. We need reformation in our worship—a rediscovery of the supremacy of God. We need reformation in our theology. If there is any doubt about this, we need only to consider the lack of doctrinal discernment that makes Evangelicalism so indistinguishable from Catholicism that people are wondering whether the Reformation is over! And we need reformation in our practice, because the materialistic mindset of many Evangelical churches and the moral standards of many Evangelical Christians seem to be virtually the same as the surrounding culture. The Reformation is not over. And when the reforming work of the Spirit comes, we pray that it will transform the Roman Catholic Church according to Scripture. We pray that it will reveal the truth of the biblical gospel to Evangelicals and Catholics together. We pray that it will bring a more biblical pattern of church life to an Evangelical community that is increasingly captivated by post-modern culture. And we pray that we ourselves will be re-formed in doctrine, worship, and life.

Tenth Presbyterian Church is presently engaged in a church-wide Strategic Planning Initiative. In a few weeks’ time the session and congregation of Tenth Presbyterian Church will complete a Spiritual Health Inventory. Doubtless the results will reveal that we are in as much need of reformation as anyone. And that reformation, we pray, is not over.