

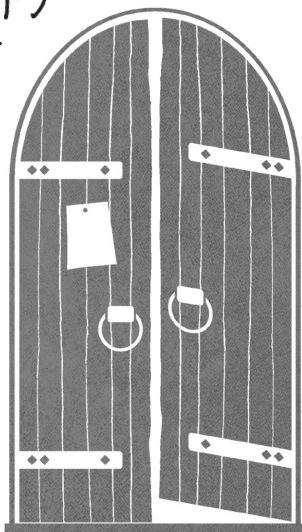
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By →

**KENNETH BROWNELL**

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# INTRODUCTION



On 31 October 1517 Martin Luther posted the now famous 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg and changed the world. Yet he didn't intend to change the world but only to begin a debate about what he considered a corrupt practice in the church. This book is first about how Luther reached the point of posting his 95 Theses and why his actions were so significant. In the opening two chapters I will give an overview of Luther's life before and after 1517. Second, I will then propose my own theses – 9.5 of them rather than Luther's 95 – for the recovery of Reformational Christianity today.<sup>1</sup> I use the expression Reformational Christianity

rather than Protestant or evangelical Christianity because the currency of the words ‘Protestant’ and ‘evangelical’ has sadly become so devalued. Reformational Christianity is simply orthodox Christianity as shaped by the great concerns of the Reformation. These concerns are summed up by the famous *solas* or ‘alones’ of the Reformation – salvation is by grace alone (*sola gratia* in Latin), through faith alone (*sola fide*), from Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*), in Christ alone (*solus Christus*) and to the glory of God alone (*soli deo gloria*).<sup>2</sup> Remembering what happened in Wittenberg in 1517 and its aftermath should stir up in us a desire for the recovery of the Christianity of the Reformation.

Such a recovery is desperately needed here in the United Kingdom, in Europe and around the world, where we are all too aware of the decline of Christianity. In some measure this has been because of what is called secularisation, as religion in general and Christianity in particular have been pushed out of the public square to the margins of society and into the sphere of private life. There is a lot of debate about the nature of secularisation and why it has happened, but

there is no doubt that in the UK and Europe the institutional church is very weak as a result. The old denominations, many of them with their origins in the Reformation, are declining.

Sadly, in addition to secularisation, another large part of the problem has been liberal theology, which has robbed churches in many older denominations of the biblical gospel. While happily inside and outside these denominations there are congregations in varying degrees of spiritual health which are faithful to the gospel, they are relatively few compared to the population at large. Equally it is true that the immigration of many people from countries with large numbers of evangelical Christians has led to many new churches and new life in old ones. However, many of these churches have been blighted with the prosperity gospel and its crass materialism.

Even in many evangelical churches unaffected by liberalism or the prosperity gospel, preaching and teaching from the Bible is in a poor state and often treated as a Cinderella compared to other things considered more important. Then, of course, there is the fact that the Roman Catholic

Church is still essentially the same today as it was in Luther's day, if not in some ways worse.

In short, while our circumstances are very different from those of Luther in the late 16th century, for the reasons above, and others, the need for the Christianity that emerged from the Reformation is still as great if not greater.