

Andrew Cook:

We concluded the previous part of the series about the Reformation with a discussion about the Protestant Work Ethic, one of the effects of the Reformation. By this principle, the reformers saw that all types of work had value and that no occupation was less spiritual than others.

Well, with more on this point, here are Derek French and Philip Parsons.

Philip Parsons:

One of the great values of a truly Christian work force is that things such as honesty, integrity and conscientiousness are displayed in the lives of God's people and have a real impact upon a company's prosperity and a nation's economy.

The problem which we have today in many places is that these principles have been seriously eroded and that this is undermining the very fabric of our society. Just think of the huge amount of money which has to be raised in taxes to cover the breaking of the ten commandments. Think of all the dishonesty that goes on at all levels. Think of all the money that is spent because of wholesale disregard for the seventh commandment which means that extra housing for broken homes and treating sexually transmitted diseases has to be funded, let alone the money which has to be spent on policing and security and our legal system because of the breaking of the sixth and eighth commandments. In all these things we are squandering the wealth which previous generations have gained for us.

Derek French:

Yes, that's quite powerful, actually, isn't it. You see the far reaching effects of when God's Word is being honoured and when it isn't.

Philip:

It's not to say that we've ever had a perfect time.

Derek:

Oh no, no, no.

Philip:

But I think it's certainly true in modern times. The Communist government has had to sit up and take notice of some Christian employers, manufacturers who are basically Christians running these firms, producing goods, because their productivity is higher than the general average and so they've had to take notice of them.

Derek:

Sure. And the integrity of both men and women in that situation is something which you don't always find in the world at large.

Philip:

No.

Derek:

You know, we live in a world where there's a lot of corruption and bribery, but in Christian circles then that would not be tolerated and not needed, even.

Philip:

No.

Derek:

No. Philip, in what way did the Reformation influence what I would call 'humanitarian' and other enterprises?

Philip:

Well I think it's true to say it's no accident that many of the founding fathers of modern science and technology were Christians or had the influence of godly principles still persisting in their lives. Maybe some of these names that I'll mention are not so well known but certainly in the field of physics and

electrical engineering there are names like Lord Kelvin, who is responsible for the absolute zero temperature. And then there's Michael Faraday whose work underlies all of our electricity and electronics. And then James Clark Maxwell whose work in analysing electro-magnetic radiation has enabled us to design aerials and have radio signals and microwave signals transmitted all the way round the world.

Derek:

And these men were Christians.

Philip:

They were basically Christians, yes. And they did their work conscientiously and pursued their subject. It's not saying that you, you know, great discoveries can't be made by people who aren't Christians.

Derek:

No, no.

Philip:

But it's very interesting that many of them were. And then there's the great social reformers of the late 18th and early 19th century. William Wilberforce is a notable example, and his work in the abolition of slavery, and in many other fields as well. He had a lot to do with education.

Then there's Lord Shaftesbury who was very concerned about conditions in the mines and in the factories and put a lot of legislation through parliament which made life for workers in the factories and mines much easier.

I think it would be wrong to say that there could be no progress in science or in the caring professions without a strong evangelical influence, but the fact of the matter is that a great impetus was given to these areas by the efforts of dedicated evangelicals who put the glory of God and the welfare of their fellow human beings above the desire for personal gain or recognition.

Derek:

Yes, I think that's really very important, actually. And a challenge to us to truly live for Christ today in our world.

Philip:

It is.

Derek:

Well Philip, how are we going to bring this study on the Reformation to a close?

Philip:

Well we have to say that we have a great heritage in both church and national life which is being attacked, in some cases quite openly. And the wholesale undermining of Christian principles, which have been the basis of the greatness of many nations, is alarming, and if allowed to continue could well push us back into a kind of medieval night, dominated by false religions of all kinds. If the moral and spiritual decline continues, then we are in for dark days ahead.

Let us pray that God will act in mighty power to turn the tide and at the same time let us aim to be faithful to the principles of the Reformation in every area of our lives, and do all within our power to halt the appalling decline, whether in our churches or in society at large.

Andrew:

Thanks to Derek and Philip for this overview of the origins and effects of the Reformation. Over the next few programmes we'll hear about some of the key characters who were used by God at this important moment in the history of the church.