

Formation, Deformation, Reformation

I) Formation (God in Christ by the Spirit forms a perfect creation)

In the beginning, before the first thought formed by man or angel, there was Formation. Before there was space, before there was time, when all there was was the Great I Am, the Father through the Son by their Spirit created all that is and was and will ever be: the countless stars and galaxies and nebulas, the planets, and this planet of earth and water. Then with loving care and grace the Great I Am formed the trees that would paint the world with greens and yellows and reds. He formed the animals of the sea and land and air. At last He said, the Father through the Son by the Spirit, “Let us make man in our own image.” He formed a man from the dust, and a woman from the man, and throughout the earth, through the galaxy, throughout the universe, everything shouted the glory and goodness and grace of God: the God of Formation.

There was perfect harmony. The lion frolicked with the lamb and the caribou, elk and gazelles laughed to see it. The moose grazed lazily next to the grizzly, and all was at peace in the world. The man and woman delighted in each other, and delighted in their Lord and God. There were no fights, no bickering, no bitter words that would linger in the air like thick and choking smog. There was only joy.

II) Deformation (Man and woman twist the perfect creation)

Soon after the beginning, though, a new word was spoken, a word that for the first time brought doubt and fear and anxiety into this perfectly formed world. “Did God Really Say?” “Did God Really Say?” Perhaps man could...improve things. Add a splash of color here, tear down that wall, rearrange things somewhat. What God formed could not be, well, absolutely *perfect*, could it? Isn't there always room for improvement?

So the man and the woman said, “Let us remake the world in our image, after our desires and passions.” There was Deformation. A twisting, a yanking out of alignment, a shift out of true. The plumb line didn't hang straight anymore. The level was always off. The straight was crooked, the perfect not quite right anymore. The grizzly looked at the moose, and if you looked closely you would see the beginnings of a snarl and a show of teeth. The elk and caribou distanced themselves from the lion, and the lamb didn't stand a chance. The man swatted at something odd sticking something into his arm. It hurt. It...stung. The man looked accusingly at his wife – had she caused this? It must have been her fault. It couldn't have been his. Perhaps it was God's? Yes, that was the answer. God had caused this. He was responsible for this Deformation. The fault was purely and solely His! What a mean, cruel and spiteful God, for bringing this Deformation into the world.

So it was, that the God of grace and mercy and love became the God of wrath and vengeance and hatred. The Father who through his Son and by their Spirit had formed

nothing but goodness, was blamed by his own creation for the Deformation they themselves had birthed into the world. The angels wept and wept, for it was their own fallen brother who had deceived the man and woman. It was their own brother who had become the Chief Deformer, who had covered the eyes of Adam and Eve, and convinced them to steal paradise away from themselves and away from all creation.

III. Reformation (Christ Bring New Creation by the Father's Will and the Spirit's Work)

Then the Father spoke the Son by their Spirit: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." "The government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6, Matt 1:21)

Yeshua, Hay-sus, Jesus – the Messiah, the Promised One, the very Son of the Father. This son was born and the angels sang – "Let there be Re-formation!" Let what man has Deformed be Reformed by the Work of the Son! The Son lived among men, but they didn't receive him, on the whole. For men loved Deformation rather than Reformation. It has always been so, and will always be so, except for those whom the Spirit of the Son's Father has caused to be born again. They are the Reformation, the new creation, that will from the inside out restore what man and fallen angel have Deformed. This world of sin and evil and famine and war and death and misery is undone, freed from the Deformation we have brought, by the death and resurrection of Jesus, who Formed the world in the beginning.

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IV) The Ongoing Reformation

That's what we are here to celebrate today. The Reformation of the world begun in Christ Jesus at his birth, accomplished at his cross, and begun in us whenever the Full Story of Formation, Deformation and Reformation is taught. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...baptizing them... and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20). For close to 2,000 years we have celebrated the Reformation. We celebrate it together every week, and will continue to celebrate it until the final Reformation of all things at the end of time. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a Reformed Creation – the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17)

Because, even though the Reformation began 2000 years ago, it is still ongoing. It is still ongoing because the same angel who asked our parents if "God really said" still speaks his lies into our ears. The battle between truth and lie, between the forces of Deformation and Reformation, is not over brothers and sisters. It was fought in the gathering of the Apostles in Acts 15. It was fought in the council chambers of Nicea. It was fought by Martin Luther. And it's still being waged today.

“Did God really say the Gentiles could become part of the covenant by faith alone?” Yes! shouted the Apostles. “Did the Father really say Jesus was God incarnate, come to save the world?” Yes! shouted the pastors at Nicea. “Did God really say that his Church was more than bishops and popes preserving an institution by man made regulations?” Yes! shouted Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Katerina Von Bora and the Lutheran Reformers. “Did God really say we are justified freely by grace, and not by inner and outer works of faith?” Yes! shouted the founders of the Missouri Synod.

Who shouts today? We might be bold to ask if we’re even permitted to shout. There are forces even within our own Synod who have fallen pray to the forces of Deformation. They offer up not the full Gospel of Jesus Christ, but only the question, “Did God really say?” When I joined the Synod 5 years ago I would never have believed that in this steadfast Synod there would be forces of Deformation rather than Reformation.

I would never have believed that a Synod official would silence a pastor for baptizing Muslims in a foreign country, because he did so without “official authorization.”

Or that a pastor in our Synod would be unable to answer when my wife him, “How can I be sure my sins are forgiven?”

Or that a Circuit Counselor in our Synod would tell me that communion with our Lord’s body and blood is such a “downer” for people after listening to his great sermon.

Or that a pastor in our Synod would allow a Catholic Priest and a Methodist Minister to preach from his pulpit and consider it “edifying” for his people.

Or that a Synodical President would urge us to “win the world for Jesus,” when our Lord himself said that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him, and that the world was already his?

Most hurtful and painful of all, I would never have believed that an official of this Synod would threaten me with removal if I continued to discuss the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ with my own family.

In the words of the Alabama band “The Drive-By Truckers,” “We ain’t ever gonna change – we ain’t doin’ nothin’ wrong. We ain’t ever gonna change- so shut your mouth and play along.” That, my friends, is the voice of Deformation, not Reformation. It’s just another way of saying, “Did God really say?”

My brothers and sisters, the Reformation did not end on October 31, 1517. That was merely a milestone in a Reformation that started with our Lord’s promise to save the world in Genesis 3:15, and will continue until the end of time. Today we’re not celebrating some historical event. We’re celebrating the ongoing work of the Lord Jesus Christ in our midst. We’re celebrating his presence among us in his Holy and Precious, Inerrant and Infallible Word, a bulwark never failing. We’re celebrating his ongoing work in sustaining us and remaking us by the power of his Spirit.

We're celebrating the Lord's call this day to Pastor Nischal, who will become one more worker in the fields of the Lord, preaching the full and complete life giving Gospel of Jesus Christ into the world. I give thanks for you, Pastor Nischal. May you be a blessing to us as God blesses you.

We're celebrating the faithful workers in the field of the Lord throughout Philadelphia – all the faithful pastors and Christians who've been a blessing to me in the Lord and who bless their congregations with God's word.

We're celebrating the Spirit that has been given to us: we are God's chosen people. We are the heirs of the new covenant. We are the priests of God's royal kingdom, called not because we are worthy but because God is gracious and faithful. May we be shining lights, reflecting not our own light but the light and life of Jesus Christ.

This world still bears the marks of Deformation. The Prince of this World will stop at nothing to make that Deformation grow and spread. But greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). You are the fruits of the Reformation. May Christ bless you and keep you always in his Forming and Reforming love, until the final Reformation of this world at the end of the age.

Amen.