

KNOW YOUR FAITH – XVII

RE-FORM-ATION

So much of who we are as individuals and as “like” some others comes from stating who we are not. “We are not like them.” “They” are less than us or not as good as us. If it seems as if “their” idea of God or gods or no gods is different, then we celebrate the greater the distance from “them.” “They” may even be “bad.”

For centuries the seeming chasm between the Church of Rome and the varied group called *Protestants* led initially to wars in the Old World and later to discrimination and persecution in the New World. Up to about fifty years ago, the Sunday nearest to October 31st was celebrated with large groups of Lutherans getting together with clergy and altars decorated in red (The color of the fire of the Holy Spirit or the blood of the martyrs, the seed of the church). With “A Mighty Fortress” as the Hymn of the Day and “The Church’s One Foundation” as backup, Lutherans proudly celebrated their cultural identity of not being Roman Catholic while 70% or more of Lutherans did not understand who they were in a positive sense per a 1970’s study. Most Lutherans believed they were saved by good works the same as the church of Rome. But at least we were not “them.” The reformation of the past is a good story but ancient history. A motto that survives is *semper ecclesia reformada est* or *the church is always reforming*. We are no longer a church of Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, etc. but a church of Africans, South Americans, Asians, and more. What is core is the reforming of the faith from works, penance, relics, saints, purgatory, male only priests, the authority of the church, etc., to the idea that “It is by grace through faith that we are made right with God and not by works.” Period. There are others with different labels who believe the same thing: Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Non-Denominationalists, and more and there are some with the same labels that get it wrong. What we look for are others for whom Christ is central. It is in Jesus Christ we seek our identity. And within that seeking we are always reforming within ourselves first.