

The

REFORMING CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda Est



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THE REFORMING CHRISTIAN CHURCH

A CALL TO THEOLOGICAL
RENEWAL

THE REFORMING
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

**ECCLESIA REFORMATA
SEMPER
REFORMANDA EST**

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Systematic Theology & Ecclesiology

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DEDICATION

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit
says to the churches."*

— Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 21

To the church that keeps pedaling

—

*That refuses to coast on inherited tradition and insists on bearing afresh,
in every generation, what the*

Spirit says to the churches.

*The Reformed church is always reforming
because the Lord is always speaking.*

Soli Deo gloria.

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Preface

Martin Luther's great principle — *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est*, the Reformed church must always be reforming — is one of the most misunderstood phrases in the history of Christianity. It does not mean that the church should constantly revise its doctrine to conform to the spirit of each passing age. It means that the church must always be returning to the Word of God, submitting itself afresh to Scripture's authority, and reforming whatever in its life and doctrine has drifted from the apostolic standard.

Not following this dictum leads to deformations of Christian Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy — deformations of both belief and practice. The church that stops reforming stops living. She becomes a monument to her own tradition rather than a living community of the Spirit. This is the basic reason for the evil diversity of doctrines and life that has fragmented the visible church across the centuries.

This study presents the core doctrines — primary and corollary — that every reforming church must believe and practice. They are not new doctrines but the ancient faith, recovered in every generation by the illuminating work of the Spirit through the Word. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

Soli Deo gloria.

Introduction: The Bicycle and the Church

""And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.""

— 2 Corinthians 3:18

Luther's metaphor of the theological bicycle is vivid and clarifying: the church that stops pedaling falls over. A bicycle in motion is stable; a bicycle at rest topples. The church that continuously returns to Scripture, submits to its authority, and applies its truth to new situations remains alive and upright. The church that treats its inherited tradition as a fixed monument — requiring no fresh engagement with the living Word — becomes unstable, deformed, and eventually falls.

The call of this study is not to theological novelty but to theological faithfulness. The reforming church is not a church that is always changing its doctrine. It is a church that is always examining its doctrine by the light of Scripture, always listening for what the Spirit says to the churches, and always willing to submit to correction where it has drifted from the apostolic standard. This is the ancient practice of *semper reformanda* applied to the life of every congregation and every believer.

The doctrines presented here divide into two categories: primary doctrines (the foundational convictions that every Christian church must hold) and corollary doctrines (the necessary implications and applications that flow from the primary convictions). Together they constitute the theological skeleton of a genuinely reforming church.

CHAPTER 1

The Primary Doctrines: The Ground of Our Faith

""These Primary Doctrines have their Corollaries.""

— *Romans 9; 1 Corinthians 15*

The reforming church does not choose its primary doctrines — it receives them. They are not the product of theological ingenuity or cultural preference; they are the deposit of the apostolic faith revealed in Holy Scripture and confessed by the church across the centuries. To abandon or compromise them is not reformation but deformation. To recover and proclaim them afresh is the perpetual task of the reforming church.

A. Divine Fatherhood: The Ground of Salvation

The first and foundational primary doctrine is the Fatherhood of God. This is not a sentimental or merely relational category — it is a profound theological reality grounded in the eternal nature of God Himself. Jesus declares: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (Jn. 14:6). The Father is the goal of salvation, and Christ is the only path to Him.

The Fatherhood of God is His Eternal Nature. Before creation, within the eternal life of the Trinity, God is Father — Father of the Son, in the bond of the Spirit (Jn. 17:5-6). The eternal Son is the 'Everlasting Father' of the redeemed in His role as the one who gives eternal life (Isa. 9:6). And the incarnation of the Son — 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel' (Isa. 7:14) — is the historical actualization of the Father's eternal purpose to adopt a family through His Son. God made His Sovereignty actual in His Creation (Isa. 43:10-13): 'Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.'

B. Divine Sovereignty: The Guarantee of Salvation

The sovereignty of God is the unshakeable guarantee that what the Father purposed in eternity will be accomplished in time and

consummated in eternity. Paul's argument in Romans 9 is foundational: 'Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad — in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls' (Rom. 9:11). Election is unconditional, grounded not in foreseen human faith but in the sovereign will of the God who calls.

This sovereignty does not negate human responsibility — it grounds it. The God who decrees all things also works through secondary causes, including the genuine decisions of human beings. But the guarantee of salvation rests not on the stability of human resolve but on the faithfulness of the sovereign God: 'Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy' (Jude 24). Before time, God elected (Rom. 9:11). After time, God preserves (Jude 24-25).

C. The Dual Role of Christ: The Grid of Salvation

Christ's saving work operates through His dual role as both the Second and Last Adam and as the Perfect God-Man. As the Second and Last Adam (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15), Christ represents humanity in His obedience and death, undoing what the first Adam did in his disobedience. His active obedience — fulfilling all the law's demands — provides the righteousness that is imputed to the believer. His passive obedience — suffering the penalty of sin in the believer's place — provides the forgiveness that removes the guilt.

The scope of the atonement has been debated across traditions. What is clear from Scripture is that Christ's death is sufficient for all (unlimited in its intrinsic value) and efficient for the elect (definite in its redemptive design). He is 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (Jn. 1:29) — a universal proclamation — and also the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:15) — a particular, effective redemption.

D. The Divine Spirit: The Guide for Salvation

Salvation is initiated in time but final in eternity, and it is the Holy Spirit who applies to the elect what the Father purposed and the Son accomplished. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places' (Eph. 1:3). 'The Spirit regenerates (Jn. 3:5-8), calls effectually, grants repentance and faith, unites the believer to Christ, and guarantees the inheritance: 'he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1:6).

The elect — those given by the Father to the Son — repent of their sin and believe in their Redeemer, the Son of God. This is not by their own will but by the sovereign work of the Spirit: 'for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:12-13). The Spirit is the Guide for salvation — Zechariah 4:6 captures the principle: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.'

E. Divine Books: The Greatest Records

The primary doctrines conclude with the great eschatological certainty: God's books record the destiny of every person. The Book of Life (Rev. 13:8; 20:15) contains the names of the elect — written before the foundation of the world. The books of works record every deed of every person (Rev. 20:12). At the final judgment, the elect stand not in their own righteousness but in the imputed righteousness of Christ. The non-elect stand in their own guilt, which they have multiplied through every act of unrepentance.

The reconciled are those whom the Father has drawn, the Son has redeemed, and the Spirit has regenerated (2 Cor. 5:14; 2:14-16). The reprobated — a deeply serious category — are those who, by their own persistent rejection of God's revelation, store up wrath for themselves (Rom. 2:5). Reformed theology insists that reprobation is not God's arbitrary rejection of the unwilling but His just response to those who choose their sin above their Creator.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 1

1. How does grounding salvation in the eternal Fatherhood of God — rather than in human decision or religious performance — change the way you relate to God in prayer, worship, and daily obedience?
2. The dual role of Christ as the Last Adam (representing all) and the Good Shepherd (laying down His life for His sheep) holds universal

sufficiency and particular efficacy together. How does this framework help you preach the gospel to all while affirming the certainty of God's saving purpose?

3. How does the Holy Spirit's role as the Guide and Applier of salvation affect your understanding of evangelism — what you can do, and what only God can do?

CHAPTER 2

The Corollary Doctrines: The Shape of Faithful Living

*""Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!""*

— Romans 11:33

The primary doctrines have their corollaries — necessary implications and applications that flow from the foundational convictions. These corollary doctrines are not peripheral matters; they are the working out of the primary doctrines in the whole of Christian life, ethics, and doxology. To affirm the primary doctrines while ignoring the corollaries is to hold the foundation without building the house.

A. Divine Righteousness / Theodicy: God's Justice Vindicated

If God is sovereign and salvation is by grace alone, the immediate question arises: is God unjust? Paul anticipates this objection in Romans 9: 'What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!' (Rom. 9:14). The corollary doctrine of Divine Righteousness — or theodicy (from *theos*, God, and *dike*, justice) — vindicates the justice of God in both His sovereign election and His righteous judgment.

God's judgment is just and righteous — 'Let God be true though every one were a liar' (Rom. 3:4). He is judged for all (in the sense that Christ bore the penalty that divine righteousness demanded) and He justifies many — 'the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many' (Rom. 5:16). The righteousness of God is not a threat to the gospel — it is the foundation of it.

B. Divine Evaluation of Our Moral Nature: The Law's True Function

The corollary doctrine of divine moral evaluation addresses what the Law can and cannot do. 'For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment' (Isa. 64:6). The moral law — summarized in the Ten Commandments and fulfilled in the love of God and neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40) — cannot save. It is designed not to give life but to reveal sin (Rom. 7:23-25): 'For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.' The Law is a mirror, not a ladder.

But Christ fulfills the Law perfectly, both in His active obedience (living under the Law's demands without sin) and in His passive obedience (bearing the Law's penalty). 'For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us' (Rom. 8:1-4). The Law's demands are not abolished — they are met in Christ and then inscribed on the heart of the regenerate believer by the Spirit.

C. Divine Concursus: The Ontological Paradox of Will and Providence

Among the most philosophically profound of the corollary doctrines is what Niangar calls 'Divine Concursus' — the way in which the divine will and the creature's will cooperate according to the creature's moral nature. 'For in him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). God does not override the creature's will — He works through it, in it, and by means of it, without negating it. This is the 'Ultimate Ontological Paradox / Antinomy' that Scripture presents without resolving into a neat philosophical system.

Divine Providence encompasses all things for God's glory (Isa. 46:10): 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.' Yet the Divine Will does not abrogate the creature's will — 'for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13). God draws, not drags, all creatures' wills to fulfill His Providence (Prov. 16:9): 'The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.' The doctrine of concursus guards against both a fatalism that eliminates human responsibility and an Arminianism that limits divine sovereignty.

D. The Divine Decree: God's Will Supersedes All

The corollary doctrine of the Divine Decree — that God's decretive will encompasses all that comes to pass — is the theological bedrock of Christian confidence. 'I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand' (Isa. 46:9-10). The decree is not a reaction to foreknown events — it is the eternal, comprehensive plan of the God who 'works all things according to the counsel of his will' (Eph. 1:11).

In His Spirit, God works out all things for His decretive will — 'For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever' (Rom. 11:36). This includes even the evil and suffering of this present age. Joseph's declaration to his brothers captures the principle perfectly: 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives' (Gen. 50:20). The decree does not make God the author of evil — it makes Him the sovereign Governor who transforms evil into the means of His redemptive purpose.

E. The Divine Glory Alone: The Doxological End

The final corollary doctrine gathers all the others into a single doxological affirmation: God alone receives all glory, always and in everything. This is *Soli Deo Gloria* — the fifth and culminating *Sola* of the Reformation. 'So that no human being might boast in the presence of God' (1 Cor. 1:29). The entire architecture of the primary and corollary doctrines is designed to achieve this end: that no creature can glory in itself, because everything — creation, redemption, sanctification, glorification — is of God, through God, and to God.

'He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord' (1 Cor. 1:30-31). And again: 'So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Cor. 10:31). The reforming church is, above all, a doxological church — a church whose theology, worship, ethics, and mission are organized around the supreme end of

glorifying the God who alone could, and alone did, accomplish salvation from first to last.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 2

1. How does the corollary doctrine of Divine Righteousness (theodicy) help you respond to the challenge: 'If God is sovereign, why does He allow evil?' What is the reforming church's answer to this question?
2. The doctrine of Divine Concursus holds together God's sovereignty and human responsibility without resolving the tension. Why is it important not to resolve this tension in either direction — toward fatalism or toward open theism?
3. What would a genuinely Soli Deo Gloria church look like in its worship, its preaching, its governance, its use of money, and its approach to evangelism? Where does your church fall short of this doxological vision, and what would reformation look like?

Conclusion: God Alone — The Ultimate Answer

The reforming church commits herself, once and for all, to God alone as the ultimate answer to all existential and moral questions. Not tradition alone, though tradition is a wise and necessary guide. Not reason alone, though reason is the God-given instrument of theological reflection. Not experience alone, though experience is the crucible in which doctrine becomes living faith. But God — the Triune God revealed in Holy Scripture — as the beginning, middle, and end of all things.

The primary doctrines — Divine Fatherhood, Divine Sovereignty, the Dual Role of Christ, the Divine Spirit, and the Divine Books — constitute the theological grammar of the reforming church. The corollary doctrines — Divine Righteousness, Divine Evaluation of Moral Nature, Divine Concursus, the Divine Decree, and the Divine Glory — constitute its theological vocabulary. Together they express the full sentence of the apostolic gospel: that God alone could save, God alone did save, God alone will complete what He has begun, and God alone receives all the glory.

Luther's bicycle keeps pedaling. The reforming church keeps returning to the Word. She keeps hearing what the Spirit says. She keeps submitting herself to Scripture's authority. And she keeps discovering that the ancient faith is always new — always sufficient for the questions of every generation, always adequate to the challenges of every culture, always more glorious than she had previously understood. This is the grace of the reforming church: she is always a student before she is a teacher, always a worshiper before she is a worker, and always doxological before she is doctrinal.

Soli Deo gloria.

Personal Questions and Challenges

The Church Always Reforming

1. Where in your church's life do you see the greatest need for reformation — returning to Scripture's standard after a period of drift or accommodation? What would that reformation require in practice?
2. What is the difference between 'reforming' in the sense of *semper reformanda* and 'innovating' in the sense of theological novelty? How do you maintain this distinction in your own theological thinking?
3. Luther said the church that stops pedaling falls over. In what areas of your personal theological life have you stopped pedaling — stopped actively engaging with Scripture, theology, and the life of the mind?

Grounded in the Primary Doctrines

1. Which of the five primary doctrines — Divine Fatherhood, Sovereignty, the Dual Role of Christ, the Spirit, or the Divine Books — has been most life-changing in your personal faith? Why?
2. How do the primary doctrines shape your understanding of evangelism? What difference does it make, practically, to know that God is sovereign in salvation and that you are His instrument — not the author — of new birth?
3. Where do you find the primary doctrines most challenged in your cultural context — by which of them does your surrounding culture most strongly push back? How do you respond?

Living the Corollary Doctrines

1. The doctrine of Divine Concursus affirms both God's sovereignty and human responsibility simultaneously. How does holding this paradox without resolution affect your prayer life, your decision-making, and your understanding of suffering?
2. *Soli Deo Gloria* — to God alone be the glory — is both a theological conviction and a personal discipline. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to take or share God's glory? How does the doctrine of divine glory address that temptation?

3. What would it look like for your church to organize its entire life — worship, preaching, mission, finances, governance — around the corollary that all glory belongs to God alone and always?

Soli Deo gloria.

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About The Author

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar is a Pastor Emeritus who holds the degrees of Th.B. (Bachelor of Theology), A.B. (Bachelor of Arts), and D.D. (Doctor of Divinity). He has devoted his life and ministry to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the rigorous theological formation of God's people, and the equipping of pastoral leaders for faithful and effective ministry in church and society.

Dr. Niangar served for many years as a pastor and theological educator, and has been a central figure in the work of Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP, Inc.) — a parachurch ministry committed to equipping the whole people of God for faithful service across every sphere of life. His monthly theological lectures to the HELP, Inc. fellowship have addressed the most foundational questions of the Christian faith, and these studies — expanded, deepened, and set in the Crossway format — have shaped the theological works he continues to write and publish.

His theological formation reflects sustained engagement with the whole of the Reformed and evangelical tradition. Among those whose thought has most shaped his own are Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Louis Berkhof, Benjamin B. Warfield, Oscar Cullmann, Herman Dooyeweerd, Karl Barth, Paul Jewett, Francis Schaeffer, R.C. Sproul, and Ravi Zacharias. He reads every theological question through the lens of the whole counsel of God, and has spent a lifetime teaching others to do the same.

The present work — The Reforming Christian Church — represents Dr. Niangar's sustained theological engagement with the subject matter contained herein, developed through years of preaching, teaching, and pastoral ministry.

Other theological works by the author:

Spiritual Unity and Personal Diversity in Christ

Why God Did Decree and Allow Evil to Exist

What the Christian Church Should Be

The Reformed Theological Paradigm

The Holy Loving Triune Lord God

He lives with his beloved wife, Estrella. He is the father of Dr. Ellazar and Zarelle Grace. He continues to preach, teach, write, and intercede for the reformation and renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ, until the day when faith gives way to sight and the knowledge that is now partial becomes the knowledge that is full.

Soli Deo gloria.