

Extracts from “Why Christianity Must Change or Die” Bishop John Spong

“The [Protestant] Reformation was not an attempt to reformulate the Christian faith for a new era. It was rather a battle over issues of Church order. The time had not arrived in which Christians would be required to rethink the basic and identifying marks of Christianity itself.”

Then he goes on to present his call for a Reformation of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity:

“It is my conviction that such a moment is facing the Christian world today. The very heart and soul of Christianity will be the content of this reformation. The debate which has been building for centuries has now erupted into public view. All the past ecclesiastical efforts to keep it at bay or deny its reality have surely failed and will continue to do so. The need for a new theological reformation began when Copernicus and Galileo removed this planet from its previous supposed location at the centre of the universe, where human life was thought to bask under the constant attention of a humanly defined parental deity. That revolution in thought produced an angle of vision radically different from the one in which the Bible was written and through which the primary theological tenets of the Christian faith were formed...”

“My sense is that history has come to a point where only one thing will save this venerable faith tradition at this critical time in Christian history, and that is a new Reformation far more radical than Christianity has ever before known and that this Reformation must deal with the very substance of that faith. This Reformation will recognize that the pre-modern concepts in which Christianity has traditionally been carried will never again speak to the post-modern world we now inhabit. This Reformation will be about the very life and death of Christianity. Because it goes to the heart of how Christianity is to be understood, it will dwarf in intensity the Reformation of the 16th century. It will not be concerned about authority, ecclesiastical polity, valid ordinations and valid sacraments. It will be rather a Reformation that will examine the very nature of the Christian faith itself. It will ask whether or not this ancient religious system can be refocused and re-articulated so as to continue living in this increasingly non-religious world...”

“I will publish this challenge to Christianity in The Voice. I will post my theses on the Internet and send copies with invitations to debate them to the recognized Christian leaders of the world. My theses are far smaller in number than were those of Martin Luther, but they are far more threatening theologically. The issues to which I now call the Christians of the world to debate are these:

1. Theism, as a way of defining God, is dead. So most theological God-talk is today meaningless. A new way to speak of God must be found.

2. Since God can no longer be conceived in theistic terms, it becomes nonsensical to seek to understand Jesus as the incarnation of the theistic deity. So the Christology of the ages is bankrupt.
3. The biblical story of the perfect and finished creation from which human beings fell into sin is pre-Darwinian mythology and post-Darwinian nonsense.
4. The virgin birth, understood as literal biology, makes Christ's divinity, as traditionally understood, impossible.
5. The miracle stories of the New Testament can no longer be interpreted in a post-Newtonian world as supernatural events performed by an incarnate deity.
6. The view of the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is a barbarian idea based on primitive concepts of God and must be dismissed.
7. Resurrection is an action of God. Jesus was raised into the meaning of God. It therefore cannot be a physical resuscitation [from death] occurring inside human history.
8. The story of the Ascension assumed a three-tiered universe and is therefore not capable of being translated into the concepts of a post-Copernican space age.
9. There is no external, objective, revealed standard writ in scripture or on tablets of stone that will govern our ethical behavior for all time.
10. Prayer cannot be a request made to a theistic deity to act in human history in a particular way.
11. The hope for life after death must be separated forever from the behavior control mentality of reward and punishment. The Church must abandon, therefore, its reliance on guilt as a motivator of behavior.
12. All human beings bear God's image and must be respected for what each person is. Therefore, no external description of one's being, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, can properly be used as the basis for either rejection or discrimination."