

B. Christianity | Sample Answer

Assess the extent to which re-discovering the message of Jesus is central to the mission of one of the following - Céli Dé, Luther's Reforms (2014 Section B [b])

The Founding vision of the Christian Church is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Céli Dé and Martin Luther attempted to return to this founding vision by initiating reform in the Catholic Church. These reform movements paved the way for the reformation in the Christian Church.

Returning to the founding vision of Christianity was central to the purpose of Céli Dé. In the Mid-8th Century a reform movement began in Ireland. The leaders were called Maelruian and Dudlittir and they were people who felt a strong calling to put God first in their lives and make themselves true servants of God. They called themselves Céli Dé, meaning 'servants of God'. They emerged from dissatisfaction with monastic life and reflected a disenchantment with the general practice of Christians at this time. The focus was on the renewal of the monastic tradition. It emphasised the importance of study and the hermetic life. The Céli Dé set to work to reform the monastic movement from within. They proposed that monastic reform would come about by re-emphasising the importance of prayer, labour and study. Vows of poverty and perpetual chastity were taken. Sunday was respected as a day of rest and prayer. Tallaght and Finglas were the "Two eyes of Ireland". All of the monks there were part of Céli Dé. However, the Céli Dé movement was not sustainable since it was never highly structured and did not develop uniformly. This was its central weakness. They brought a new spirit rather than new structures to the monastic life. Although critical of the laxity and secularisation they saw in the monasteries around them, they didn't establish new monasteries.

The Céli Dé underlined the importance of following the guidance of one's 'Anam Chara' or soul friend. It was through the context of soul friendship that private confession took root in the Irish Church and later spread throughout.

The work of the Céili Dé is considered to be very important in the development of the Monastic Systems in Ireland through time. E.g. the monastic community at Sceilig Micil off the coast of Kerry set up by Céili Dé. It reflects the key values of Christianity's founding vision, as the members proved that by challenging the church and seeing things in a new light, it could lead to a successful change in an aspect of the Faith.

Martin Luther is associated with the word "reform" in the Church. Born in Eisleben, Germany and educated at Erfurt and Magdeburg. He became an Augustinian monk after an event in a storm where he prayed to St Anne to protect him. He taught the bible at the University of Wittenberg and lectured on the Psalms and St. Paul's letters to Romans and Galatians and also the Letter to the Hebrews. He struggled with the issue of his own salvation. This was a dark period in his life where he was acutely aware of his sinfulness. He asked how he could find a merciful God. Nobody could overcome the contradiction alone. He saw that instead of doing the good only out of love and with absolute selflessness, even when we do good there is ultimately always a secret tendency in us to do what we're doing for our own good".

His liberating discovery was that God bends down' towards our weakness and nothingness and recreates us that we believe in/abandons ourselves to him with complete trust. "God's love does not find (in the world) what he loves but he creates it". That makes God's love different from ours. For him, it was scripture, not Church teaching, that mattered. Hence, we get three famous principles associated with Luther, scripture, faith and grace alone. He reacted against practices which he considered had no foundation in scripture and were merely manmade: indulgences, some sacraments, praying for the dead, the position of the Pope. He promoted the priesthood of all believers. His desire was to reform, not to split the Church. He outlined the foundations of his new theology in five treatises published between May and November 1520: Treatise of Good works; the Papacy at Rome; Address to the German Nobility, Babylonian Captivity of the Church; Freedom of a Christian Man. He saw the printing press as "God's latest and best work to spread the true religion". Pope John Paul 11 spoke of the need for Catholics to seek a new evaluation of the many issues raised by Luther and his message.