

CHAPTER X

RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSIES AND WARS

1. The Peace of Augsburg

Under the providence of God, Luther was allowed to close his eyes in death without having to witness a religious war as a result of his teaching, but hardly was he dead, when such a war broke out in Germany. In 1547 the wars began and lasted intermittently until the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. The Peace of Augsburg, however, did not settle matters, because it did not take into account the Reformed group in Germany. It stated that henceforth two religions would be legal within the empire, Catholicism and Lutheranism, and that whatever should be the religion of the prince should determine the religion of the state. For instance as long as the Duke of Saxony was a Lutheran, Lutheranism should be the legal religion in Saxony, and as long as the Duke of Bavaria remained Catholic, Catholicism should remain the legal religion of Bavaria. The territories ruled over by archbishops instead of secular princes were to remain Catholic even though the archbishop turned Lutheran, for if he became a Lutheran he automatically lost his position. If persons did not like the religion of their prince, they were free to move into a state where the prince's religion coincided with their own. The Reformed faith had no legal existence. The whole thing was contrary to the Lutheran teaching of the freedom of conscience and the responsibility of the individual to his God. People's consciences would be bound under this arrangement not by the Word of God, but by the decision of their prince.

2. Controversies and Adiaphora

There were controversies not only of a military and political nature but also of a doctrinal nature. The Lutheran Church became divided on various matters of doctrine. There was the controversy over "adiaphora." An adiaphoron is a practice not decided by Scripture, and therefore not an essential matter of faith or practice. Melancthon had taken the view that since many Catholic ceremonies were adiaphora, they could be reintroduced in order to please the Catholics, and he not only reintroduced them, but made them obligatory. Flacius attacked Melancthon and asserted that under certain circumstances, even adiaphora may become matters of faith, and to change them by force just to please those who regard them as essential is a denial of Lutheranism. To use a modern example: The mode of Baptism is an adiaphoron; a baptism is legitimate whether it be by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, but for the Lutheran Church to insist that her people be immersed just to please the Baptists who insist that immersion is the only legitimate mode, is to deny the Lutheran doctrine of the mode of Baptism and to encourage the Baptists in their erroneous position.

Good Works

There arose a controversy over the position of good works. A certain theologian by the name of Major asserted that good works were necessary to salvation, and was immediately attacked by Flacius who said that the Lutheran position must ever be that good works, do not in any degree enter into the doctrine of salvation; we are saved by grace not works. Melancthon straightened out the matter by saying that good works were necessary as evidences of faith, but

that they did not in any way merit salvation, but others even asserted that good works were detrimental to salvation. A theologian by the name of Agricola stated that the law had no part in conversion, but that man was converted entirely by the Gospel.

Original Sin

Another theologian, Pfeffinger claimed that man cooperated with the Holy Spirit in his conversion; he even expressly denied the doctrine of the complete depravity of mankind. In refuting this error of Pfeffinger, Flacius went too far in the other direction and asserted that sin had become a part of the essence of man. If this were true, Adam, before his fall and Jesus Christ would not have been true men. Osiander claimed that in justification God does not simply impute the righteousness of Christ unto us, but that he infuses righteousness into us, and by this infused righteousness we are justified.

The Lord's Supper

Still others in the Lutheran Church were teaching the Calvin doctrine of the Lord's Supper under the guise of Lutheranism. They denied the doctrine of the "real presence" and instead pushed the Reformed idea of mere spiritual reception.

3. Andreus Leads the Way—The Formula of Concord

The cause of Lutheranism seemed hopeless, but there were those who did not despair. Two men stand out as leaders in an effort to bring peace and concord to the Lutheran fold. They are Jacob Andreus and Martin Chemnitz. By means of conferences, theses, and sermons Andreus finally succeeded in reaching an agreement in 1580 in a document known as the Formula of Concord which has become one of the official confessions of faith of the Lutheran Church.

4. Doctrines of the Formula of Concord

So far as the adiaphora were concerned, the view of Flacius was upheld, that at times even adiaphora become matters of confession and cannot be conceded. So far as good works are concerned, the Formula of Concord agrees with Melancthon that good works do not merit salvation but are necessary only as the true fruits of faith. With respect to the law and the gospel, the Formula asserts that when the term gospel is used simply in the sense of the Word of God, then the gospel alone converts, but that when the term gospel is used to denote only that part of Scripture which tells us what God has done for us, and the law as that part which tells us what God wants us to do and not to do, both are necessary to conversion: the law to work contrition or sorrow for sin, and the gospel to kindle faith. As regards conversion, it is stated by the Formula of Concord that man does not cooperate with God in conversion but conversion is entirely God's work in man. The doctrine of the total depravity of men is upheld; sin is, however, not to be considered a part of the essence of men but rather a corruption inherited from Adam. Justification is declared to be a legal term and signifies God's imputing of Christ's righteousness unto us and not infusing righteousness in us. There is a righteousness which begins in us at the time of justification and continues to grow but that is sanctification not

justification. Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is rejected and the Calvinists were unmasked and left the Lutheran Church.

5. The Lutheran Church Is a Doctrinal Church

These controversies should not make us ashamed of our Lutheran church, but should lead us to thank God that our Lutheran fathers were deeply concerned about matters of doctrine. A church which ceases to be interested in doctrine soon loses its power. Moreover, the fact that these doctrinal controversies were settled should give encouragement toward the ironing out of differences which still separate the Lutheran Church today. It is possible that some who bear the Lutheran name but are not true Lutherans at heart may have to be unmasked as were the Calvinists, but where there is an earnest desire to unite on the basis of the Word of God, the cause is not hopeless. Surely, God who causes all that to work together for good to those that love Him has led the Lutheran church by means of these controversies to a deeper and richer understanding of His Word.

6. Beginning of Thirty Years War

As previously stated there were political matters which were not really settled at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. It took another bloody war to settle the issue. This war broke out in Reformed Bohemia in 1618 and lasted for thirty years. Bohemia under the rather weak Hapsburg emperors who followed Charles V had enjoyed a certain degree of religious liberty. When in 1617 the childless Matthias designated as his successor his cousin Ferdinand who was the leader of the fanatical Catholic party, the Bohemians were indignant, and early in 1618 when several envoys of the emperor arrived at Prague, the Bohemians proceeded to throw them out of the palace window "in good old Bohemian fashion." This marked the beginning of the Thirty Years War.

The Bohemians invited Frederick, the elector of the Palatinate to be their king. He accepted the offer and led the opposition against the Catholic emperor, but was defeated in Bohemia. The war was carried to the Palatinate where he was likewise defeated. Thus the two strongholds of Reformed Protestantism Bohemia and the Palatinate, came into Catholic hands.

7. Lutherans Threatened—Gustavus Adolphus Saves the Day

The emperor became bolder through victories and decided that perhaps he could now exterminate not only the Reformed faith, which really had no legal status, but also the Lutheran faith. Thus the war was carried to the Lutheran states of Germany. The Lutheran king of Denmark at first espoused the cause of his Lutheran brethren, but he was no match for the forces of the emperor and the cause of Protestantism in Germany. All western Europe looked dark indeed, when Gustavus Adolphus, the king of Sweden, espoused the cause of his Lutheran brethren and turned the tide of the battle. He defeated the Catholic general Tilley at Leipzig in 1631, and in 1632 faced the Catholic general Wallenstein at Luetzen. With a prayer and the singing of Luther's Battle Hymn together with Gustavus' own hymn, "O little flock be not afraid," the Lutherans set out against the enemy. At first the result of the battle was more or less uncertain, when suddenly the cry went up, "Wallenstein has fled." The cause of Protestantism

was saved in western Europe, but after the battle when the bodies of the dead were dragged off the field, it was found that among them was the body of Gustavus Adolphus.

8. Later Years of the War

The war continued and strangely enough what started out as a war of the Catholic emperor against the reformed Protestants ended up by being a war between the Catholic emperor of Austria against the Catholic king of France, since it was Catholic France which finally defeated the forces of the emperor. In the Peace of Westphalia which followed, the Reformed faith was recognized together with Lutheranism and Catholicism as legal in the empire. The religious situation in Germany was settled for a season. At least there were no more bloody wars of religion.

9. Religious Lineup in Europe

The religious complexion of Europe had been more or less fixed. The Latin countries, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and of course Italy remained Catholic. Austria and about one third of Germany remained Catholic as did Ireland. Most of the remaining two thirds of Germany became Lutheran, though the Reformed were in the majority in the Palatinate. Norway, Denmark, and Sweden became Lutheran. Bohemia, Palatinate, Holland, Protestant Switzerland, Scotland, and Wales became Reformed, while England developed its own brand of Protestantism known as the Church of England.

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Was the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 unsatisfactory?
2. Name some controversies which raged in the Lutheran Church of the sixteenth century and explain how they were finally decided.
3. What bearing do the controversies of the sixteenth century have on the problems of the Lutheran Church today?

4. The Formula of Concord was the last official statement of Lutheran faith to be adopted. Can you name the other ones? All these together constitute the Book of Concord.

5. What was the cause of the Thirty Years' War?

6. Why is the name of Gustavus Adolphus revered in Lutheran circles?

7. Why was the Peace of Westphalia significant in Protestant history?

8. How does the religious complexion of Europe in 1648 differ from that today?

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