

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

#### 1. Luther at the Wartburg

Luther left Worms on April 25, 1521, condemned, but with the understanding that only after he had reached Wittenberg, should he be dealt with as “the evil one in the person of a man under the assumed monk habit.” He did not reach Wittenberg, however, for while traveling through the Thuringian forest, he was taken captive not by his enemies, but by his friends. The Elector of Saxony, Frederick, had arranged that Luther be seized and put in a safe place of hiding. The place was to be kept secret even from the elector. Luther was taken to the Wartburg castle near the city of Eisenach, and here he remained for almost a year. He was known as Squire George. He allowed his beard to grow, exchanged his monastic robe for a knightly costume and carried a sword at his side. The whole charade was not to Luther’s liking; he would have preferred to return to Wittenberg and suffer death if necessary for a cause which he held sacred, but his friends insisted that he stay. “Wartburg” means literally “a fortress of waiting,” and such it was indeed for Martin Luther. But he did not spend his time in idleness, for it was here at the Wartburg that he translated the Greek New Testament into German. Incidentally, we can have a fair conception of what the Wartburg castle looked like if we are familiar with our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin, for it is modeled after Luther’s “fortress of waiting.”

#### 2. Trouble at Wittenberg

By 1522 affairs in Wittenberg were in great confusion. Karlstadt (see Appendix F), one of Luther’s colleagues at the University of Wittenberg, had been taking matters into his own hands and had been pushing all sorts of revolutionary changes. He had abolished the whole liturgy of the Communion service and was now engaged in smashing the images in the churches, asserting that they were contrary to the commandments of God. To add to the confusion certain so called “Zwickau prophets” had come to Wittenberg and had asserted that the public office of the administration of the Word and Sacraments was unnecessary, since the Holy Spirit influences the hearts of people without means. These Zwickau prophets also bitterly condemned the baptism of children, hence they were known also as “Anabaptists,” this name means “rebaptizers” since they baptized again those who had been baptized in infancy. These fanatics, or “Schwaermer” as Luther called them, seemed to have captivated Karlstadt, for though a university professor, he began to decry learning and look rather for direct revelations from the Spirit.

It was impossible for Luther to remain in hiding any longer; he returned to Wittenberg and began to straighten out these matters which were in confusion. It was not long until the Zwickau prophets left and Carlstadt rather grudgingly retracted his excesses. Gradually the conservative Lutheran spirit began to assert itself and law and order was restored in Wittenberg.

The Lutherans did not seek a revolution in the Church, and even such teachings and practices as were contrary to the Word of God they sought to correct, if at all possible, without violence. While they asserted that only those things expressly taught and commanded by the Word of God were essential, they nevertheless were not indifferent to the heritage of the past, but retained such things that were good and edifying, discarding only that which was unscriptural.

In 1523, Luther published a revised order of holy communion, built on the medieval mass, but omitting those parts which were contrary to God's Word. The Lutheran Church today does not despise such things as vestments, stained glass windows, altars, crucifixes, candles, the sign of the cross, beautiful liturgies and the like, yet she does not consider these things essential and holds that it is sufficient to agree on the doctrines of the Word of God.

### **3. The Organization of Lutheran Churches and Schools**

Beginning about 1523 Lutheran congregations were being organized in various parts of Germany where the teachings of the Reformation found acceptance. By 1524 there were Lutheran congregations in such cities as Magdeburg, Frankfurt, Halle, Nuremberg, Ulm, Strassburg, Breslau, and Bremen. Though Luther cherished the idea of pastors being called by the congregation, and though he even spoke of the possibility of groups of congregations electing a superintendent with the ultimate goal a Lutheran archbishop for all Germany, his ideals were never realized—Lutheran pastors were appointed for the most part by civil magistrates or by individual church patrons. The idea of the separation of the Church and State was expressed, but never actually practiced by the reformers.

Hand in hand with the organization of Lutheran congregations went the organization of Lutheran schools, elementary schools where laymen might acquire the rudiments of education and religion, and higher schools in which pastors and other leaders might be trained. There were usually three classes of Lutheran schools: first the elementary school with instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as singing and religion—all taught in the German language; second the intermediate or Latin schools where the more promising boys were instructed in Latin, mathematics and in the sixth or last year of the school, Greek; and third the schools of higher learning, known as the universities. In the area of education, the leading figure was Philip Melancthon (see Appendix F), the scholarly colleague of Luther who is remembered as the author of the Augsburg Confession and the author of the famous *Loci*, or first text book in dogmatics or Christian doctrine. It was Melancthon who wrote a plan of study for the Lutheran Latin schools and who, because of his superior scholarship and influence upon education won for himself the title "The Teacher of Germany."

### **4. The Peasants' Revolt**

About the year 1525, there occurred an incident which has often been used to discredit Luther and brand him as the enemy of oppressed people and the tool and friend of the privileged nobility. The peasants of the sixteenth century did not have pleasant lives. They were subject to the feudal system of the middle ages and did not own the land on which they lived and worked, but held it as a fief from a lord to whom they were obligated to pay all sorts of feudal dues. These peasants longed for that freedom enjoyed by the townspeople of their day, and Luther's example seemed to give them courage. If Luther could revolt against authority, why could not they also? They did revolt, and while Luther sympathized with their sad situation, having come from peasant stock himself, he nevertheless denied them the right to revolt against the constituted authority. He called upon the princes to put down their revolt. He had defied the authorities because these authorities had sought to force him to act contrary to the Word of God, but these peasants were acting not in defense of God's Word, but in their own interest. Their situation was miserable, but it was not desperate, and Luther did not believe that it justified

violence. It must be pointed out that there were many social inequalities in the Roman Empire at the time of Christ, but he incited no violent revolution against them. Rather, he preached salvation of the individual. Neither did the apostle Paul incite Onesimus to defy his master. He urged this escaped slave to go back to his master in the hope that Philemon, moved by the love of Christ, would grant him freedom.

## **5. The Diets at Speyer**

The emperor Charles V might have done much more to stamp out Lutheranism in his empire, had he not been occupied with wars with the French king. In the providence of God, this Catholic French king kept the emperor busy during those years after the Diet at Worms in 1521. The result was that Lutheranism had gained such a foothold in Germany that it was impossible to destroy it. In the year 1526 at a Diet at Speyer, the newly organized Lutheran Church was given qualified recognition within the empire: it was decreed that in matters of faith, each prince was free to act as he “could answer to God and the emperor.” However in 1529, Charles had made peace with the French king and had come to good terms also with the pope; at a second Diet at Speyer held in that year, Lutheranism was outlawed. To this the followers of Luther “protested,” and at that time the name “Protestant” was coined.

## **6. The Augsburg Confession**

Early in 1530 the emperor decided that if possible, peace and concord ought to be established within the empire so far as religion was concerned. He therefore ordered both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics to prepare statements of their faith at a diet to be held in the city of Augsburg, hoping that on the basis of these two statements of faith, some path to unity might be found. The Lutherans complied, and presented the Augsburg Confession (in Latin, the Augustana), a document which was for the most part the work of Philip Melanchthon, one of Luther’s colleagues. Before this document was presented at Augsburg, it was adopted and signed by five Lutheran princes and the representatives of two Lutheran cities, thus becoming the official confession of the Lutheran faith. It was read in Augsburg in both German and Latin. The attentive audience even crowded around open windows since there was no more room inside. The Roman Catholics presented no statement of faith, but were determined to pick the Augsburg Confession to pieces. When after the reading, Duke William of Bavaria turned to Dr. John Eck and asked, “Can you refute this doctrine?” Dr. Eck replied, “With the church fathers I can, but not with the Scriptures.” Duke William then replied, “Then I see the Lutherans are in the Scriptures and we are outside.” This Augsburg Confession, together with the Apology to the Augsburg Confession which Melanchthon wrote the next year in answer to certain Roman Catholic attacks on the original document, have become two of the official creeds or confessions of the Lutheran Church today, to which Lutheran ministers and every Lutheran congregation subscribe. May we sing:

Faith of our fathers, handed down  
From Augsburg’s long remembered day;  
Of all our symbols you the crown,  
A creed that ne’er shall pass away;  
Faith of our fathers, Lutheran faith,  
We will be true to you till death.

## **FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Show how God's providence was in evidence in Luther's life during the years 1521 and 1522.
2. What is the true Lutheran attitude toward rites and ceremonies and what does the Augsburg Confession have to say about them?
3. What was wrong about the teachings of the Zwickau prophets? In what modern church groups do we see their errors perpetuated?
4. Account for the origin of the name "Protestant." What did it mean in 1529? What does it mean today?
5. What is the Lutheran attitude toward correcting the social ills?
6. What is the status of the Augsburg Confession in the Lutheran Church today? What do the letters U.A.C. on many Lutheran church cornerstones stand for? Why is the name Augustana Synod a fitting one for a Lutheran church group?

## **RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

Read *Luther, Biography of a Reformer*, Chapter 5, "A Wild Boar in the Roman Vineyard," pp. 75-90; Chapter 6, "God Help Me!" pp. 91-112.

\*\*\*\*\*