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# The Religious Peace of Augsburg

By THEO. HOYER

**T**his year marks the 400th anniversary of the Religious Peace of Augsburg, an event regarded so highly and of such importance in the history of the Lutheran Reformation that the 100th, 200th, and 300th anniversaries were celebrated throughout the Lutheran Church in the respective years. Our fathers have regarded it as a special intervention of God to save the Reformation from total collapse. In an article sketching the history of this Diet of Augsburg one of the early leaders of the Missouri Synod, F. C. D. Wyneken, calls the adoption of this peace treaty "the end of the Reformation, when, after a long struggle, by God's grace, the most valuable treasure of the church was attained: freedom" (*Lutheraner*, September 25, 1855). Others, outside our circles, recognize the importance of this Diet and its resolutions; the noted Roman Catholic historian Karl Brandi speaks of it as "the most important Diet of the century after Worms," its resolutions "the most perfect expression of the dawn of a new time." Present-day church historians differ somewhat in their evaluation of the Augsburg Peace; they seem inclined to stress the mistakes made, the incompleteness, the indefiniteness of the provisions adopted. A brief examination of the "context"—the background, the needs, the problems confronting the responsible members of the Diet, and the possible solutions of them—should be of value.

The background, the events leading to the Treaty of Passau, 1552, was discussed in detail in an earlier article (*CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY*, XXIII, 401); hence a brief summary will here suffice to show the why and the wherefore of the Peace of Augsburg, 1555.

The first trial of Luther and his followers (Worms, 1521) had ended in a total condemnation of the Reformation movement; Luther, already excommunicated, was banned; all loyal citizens were admonished to help enforce the edict against Luther. That it was not actually enforced was due to the fact that the head of the Empire was kept busy outside Germany by wars against France and the pirates on the Mediterranean; and within Germany, while



only a few of the territorial princes had more or less adopted Luther's cause, all of them were greatly incensed against the enemies of Luther in Rome; most of them chronically jealous of each other; not one of them dared an attempt to carry out the Edict for fear of inciting civil war. Hence, while the Edict was on the program of the Diets of Nürnberg in 1522 and 1524, nothing was done about it.

To the first Diet of Speier, 1526, the Emperor had sent an ultimatum: The Edict of Worms was to be enforced; he himself was coming to lead the action. The Lutheran cause had by this time gained enough supporters that the discussion was prolonged; a deadlock resulted; but before the Diet adjourned, notice was brought that the Emperor was no longer so friendly toward Rome; the Pope had formed an alliance with France and both were now at war against him; instead of coming to Speier, Charles was on the way to Rome to sack it in 1527. The Diet realized that it was poor policy to encourage Roman supporters by prosecuting the reform element. Charles, in fact, sent a letter to that effect to the Diet, though it arrived too late. So the Diet left the matter of the Edict to the individual princes — the beginning of the famous, later legally established principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* — until a council could be convened to settle the religious controversies.

Three years of marvelous growth for the Lutherans (as they were now called) followed. By 1529, at the second Diet of Speier, the now thoroughly alarmed Roman majority of the estates voted to rescind the resolution of 1526 and to enforce the Edict of Worms; the Lutheran princes protested (hence the name Protestants) that a resolution adopted unanimously in 1526 could not legally be rescinded by a mere majority; but the protest sent to the Emperor was cast into the imperial wastebasket and the messengers carrying it into prison. The Emperor sacked Rome, dictated the terms of peace to France and the Pope, and prepared for the next Diet. The outlook was so dark that under the leadership of Philip of Hesse an attempt was made to unite the Lutherans and the Swiss reform party, the followers of Zwingli, who were now also threatened with war by a union of the Romanist cantons with the archenemy of Switzerland, Austria. But the Colloquy of Marburg failed in its purpose.



The danger to Protestantism was again averted by the westward progress of the Turk; the Emperor needed the support of the princes and cities who had adopted the "new faith" against the common enemy. This accounts for the friendly invitation extended to the Protestants to present their confession at the Diet of Augsburg, 1530 — an attitude that was changed, however, when the Emperor decreed (no doubt under the advice of the Papal Legate Campeggio, whom he met on the way to Augsburg): Six months of grace for the Lutherans; if they did not return to the "old church" by that time, force was to be used. But the Turk advanced too rapidly, and that decree was postponed until a council could decide.

It was evident what the intention of both ecclesiastical and secular authorities was: The Protestants must be brought back to the "old church," by persuasion, by pressure, if possible; by force, if necessary. This is corroborated by the correspondence of Charles V. To his brother he wrote, as early as 1529, that he meant to use every persuasion possible to make what compromises his conscience permitted, to effect a peaceful settlement; but if these failed, he was determined to crush the Reformation by force. The anti-Protestant edicts remained law; only the execution was delayed as circumstances made it necessary. From 1521 to 1546 Protestantism was illegal and existed only because the law could not be enforced. In addition, at the papal legate Campeggio's instigation, the Romanist princes of South Germany met in June, 1524, and formed the League of Regensburg; the princes of North Germany formed the League of Dessau in 1525, both Leagues in their constitutions making it their object to enforce the Edict of Worms, to eradicate Lutheranism. All of this was no secret; Protestants knew what was coming; hence the protective and defensive leagues of Torgau, 1526, and of Schmalkalden, 1531.

To the credit of Charles it should be emphasized that he aimed at a peaceful reunion of the church by mutual compromise of both parties; therefore his insistence throughout these years on a church council where all parties should meet and iron out their differences. To be sure, his object was largely political: A united church to prop up a united empire — an empire that was tottering and needed powerful support. A typical Hapsburg, he seems to have had no doubt that he would succeed. But by 1545 he became convinced



that all peaceful measures had failed and that the use of force was indicated. The Pope had finally called a council to meet in Trent; but by secret intrigues he had nullified the usefulness of the council for the purpose Charles had in mind; the program of the council published by the Pope made it impossible for Protestants to attend. Charles realized that all his endeavors to secure unity in church and empire by peaceable means had failed; it could only be accomplished by force. But it was impossible to use force unless the power of the Schmalkaldic League, which had by this time become an international organization, could be broken.

How this was done by a skillful, though not very creditable use of Philip of Hesse's bigamy and appeal to the selfish ambition of Maurice of Saxony; how the Schmalkaldic League was defeated; how the Emperor then tried to force his compromise confession, the Interim, on the Protestants of Germany and not only failed, but was so definitely defeated that in disgust he withdrew from Germany and, in a somewhat limited manner, left the management of German affairs and especially the settlement of the religious difficulties to his brother Ferdinand — all this has been sketched previously (CTM, loc. cit.). The German princes then gathered at Passau in August, 1552, to discuss the situation and to decide what was to be done. They wanted a permanent settlement of the religious question, not by a council — a council called by the Pope and directed by him would never do justice to the Protestants — nor by the Diet, because too many Roman ecclesiastics had a seat in the Diet — but at a meeting of princes fairly representative of both sides. To the latter stipulation the Emperor would not give his consent; he insisted that the Diet should decide; he still counted on divisions among the Protestants. But the Protestant princes finally consented. What they wanted was peace — *beständiger, beharrlicher, unbedingter, für und für ewig wählender Friede*, so they described it — a permanent peace. With this demand, then, they came before the Diet summoned to Augsburg for November 13, 1554, but not opened until February 5, 1555 — old medieval custom, this! Also medieval precedent for this, that relatively few members attended the early sessions of the Diet; none of the Electors came; only two of the great ecclesiastical princes, one of them, the Cardinal Bishop of Augsburg, the only member of the



Diet who consistently protested against the demand for permanent peace. While the Diet dragged on aimlessly, all the Protestant princes met at Naumburg and there decided that they would stand firmly by the Augsburg Confession of 1530; and so prepared, they came to Augsburg.

The Lutheran demands were vehemently opposed by the Romanist members of the Diet. But they all, except the Cardinal Bishop of Augsburg, wanted peace. So, finally, the terms of the Religious Peace of Augsburg were drafted and adopted; the terms were these (Lindsay's account):

"It was agreed that the Lutheran religion should be legalized within the Empire, and that all Lutheran princes should have full security for the practice of their faith; that the medieval episcopal jurisdiction should cease within their lands; and that they were to retain all ecclesiastical possessions which had been secularized before the passing of the Treaty of Passau (1552). Future changes of faith were to be determined by the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* [though this term was not used in the Peace]. The secular territorial ruler might choose between the Romanist or the Lutheran faith, and his decision was to bind all his subjects. If a subject professed another religion from his prince, he was to be allowed to emigrate without molestation. These provisions were agreed upon by all and embodied in the recess. Two very important matters remained unsettled. The Romanists demanded that any ecclesiastical prince who changed his faith should thereby forfeit lands and dignities—the ecclesiastical reservation! This was embodied in the 'recess,' but the Protestants declared that they would not be bound by it. On the other hand, the Protestants demanded toleration for all Lutherans living within the territories of Romanist princes. This was not embodied in the 'recess,' though Ferdinand promised that he would see it carried out in practice. Such was the famous Peace of Augsburg."

It was a compromise; that is generally stated, and deplored by some. Was it wrong? It was not a religious, a confessional compromise, but political. The question before the Diet of Augsburg was not primarily unity of church and religion. Of course, all wanted unity; but by this time everybody also knew that Rome would allow only *their* brand of unity. There were certain things



that Protestants *could* not sacrifice, and certain things that Rome *would* not concede. That was evident before the Diet convened. The question before the Diet, therefore, was not how to establish unity of confession, to unite the two factions; they were beyond that. Grimm rightly says: "The destruction of medieval Christian unity during the first half of the sixteenth century was recognized by the Peace of Augsburg. . . . But one cannot lay the blame for this loss upon the princes at Augsburg, for the break had become so complete by 1555 that it is difficult to conceive of any force strong enough to restore unity." The question before the Diet was one of subsistence, of continued existence; should they continue to slaughter one another? Their object was not to influence any man's convictions. Brandi speaks of "dem unverkennbaren Willen der Beteiligten, fortan miteinander in Frieden zu leben. Aber freilich dieser Wille war ein erzwungener, zustandegekommen durch beiderseitige Ermüdung". And Droysen: "Nicht nur um einen 'Religionsfrieden' handelte es sich, sondern . . . um eine Gestaltung Deutschlands, welche es den Ständen alter und neuer Konfession . . . möglich machte, miteinander weiter zu existieren." It was a political agreement "to live and let live." Lortz cites the text of the pact stating the purpose of the agreement: "Der Religionsfriede wurde vereinbart, um die im Reich durch die 'spaltige Religion' entstandene 'nachdenkliche Unsicherheit aufzuheben, der Stände und Untertanen Gemüter wiederum in Ruhe und Vertrauen gegeneinander zu stellen, die Teutsch Nation, unser geliebt Vaterland vor endlicher Zertrennung und bevorstehendem Untergang zu verhüten'. . . . So erreichten die Augsburger Konfessionsverwandten und die Katholiken was zu diesen Zeiten möglich war: einen Kompromiss." It was the best thing the princes could do; it was right to do it.

One result of Augsburg, which especially German writers deplore, is this: It put the finishing touch to a definite change in the Empire; national unity was a thing of the past, even in theory; the Holy Roman Empire had become a loose federation of territorial princes. Droysen, e. g., says: "Aller Vorteil fiel den Ständen zu. Die Summe der Neuordnung von 1555 bedeutet den vollen Sieg der reichsfürstlichen Aristokratie. . . . Sie triumphierte über das nationale wie über das monarchische Interesse. Das Reich als



solches war vernichtet, aus einem kaiserlichen Reich deutscher Nation war es ein ständisches Gemeinwesen deutscher Nation geworden, eine 'Republik' mit dem Namen des Königs oder Kaisers an der Spitze." As far as the control of religion was concerned, the *cuius regio, eius religio* was an evil thing; one is tempted to say with Lortz: "Ein heidnischer Grundsatz war anerkannt. Es konnte nichts anderes das Ergebnis sein, als dass er das Christentum gewaltig belastete." "The peace," says Lucas, "in subjecting religion to state control, created the idea of state-established religion which was to remain practically unquestioned until the outbreak of the French Revolution." However, Grimm points out: "In most respects the Peace of Augsburg merely recognized a *fait accompli* in the Empire, namely, the emergence of territorialism." The beginning and large development of this antedates by far the Peace of Augsburg. Lortz rightly calls it "*die Besiegelung* der deutschen politischen Zerstückelung." But Lortz, despite his enormous admissions justifying the Reformation, remains a good son of the Church! He says: "Am Ende der Regierung Karls V ist der Territorialismus zum Sieg über das Reich gekommen. Aber es ist unzutreffend, zu sagen, dass dies durch Karl geschehen sei. Es geschah vielmehr vorherrschend durch jene Kraft, die das schon im Aufstieg begriffene Territorialfürstentum wesentlich in sich selbständig machte . . . durch Luthers Reformation. . . . In diesem Sinne ist Luther, im Gegensatz zu der von ihm geweckten nationalen Energie, durch den Ablauf der von ihm inaugurierten Situationen Zerstörer der deutschen Reichs-Nation geworden." Lortz is, however, honest enough to add: "Es geschah aber *nicht nur* durch sie [die Reformation]."

Lindsay, on the contrary, and rightly, makes Charles V directly responsible for the loss of German national unity. "There was no reason why it (the Peace) should not have come years earlier and without the wild war-storm which preceded it, save the fact that, in an unfortunate fit of enthusiasm, the Germans had elected the young King of Spain to be their Emperor. They had chosen the grandson of the genial Maximilian, believing him to be a real German, and they got a man whose attitude to religion 'was half-way between the genial orthodoxy of his grandfather Maximilian and the gloomy fanaticism of his son Philip II' and whose 'mind was



always traveling away from the former and towards the latter position' (Pollard). The longer he lived, the more Spanish he became, and the less capable of understanding Germany, either on its secular or religious side. His whole public life, so far as that country was concerned, was one disastrous failure. He succeeded only when he used his imperial position to increase and consolidate the territorial possessions of the House of Hapsburg; for the charge of dismembering the Empire can be brought home to Charles as effectually as to the most selfish of the princes of Germany." He points out that the Peace of Augsburg was contained in the decisions of Speier in 1526 and repeated in every one of the truces which the Emperor made with his Lutheran subjects from 1530 to 1544. "Had any one of these been made permanent, the religious war, with its outcome in wild anarchy, in embittered religious antagonism, and its seed of internecine strife, to be reaped in the Thirty Years' War, would never have occurred. But Charles, whose mission, he fancied, was to preserve the unity 'of the seamless robe of Christ,' as he phrased it, could only make the attempt by drenching the fields of Germany with blood, and perpetuating and accentuating the religious antagonisms of the country which had chosen him for its Protector."

It should not be overlooked that, without this developing territorialism, humanly speaking, there would have been no Reformation. Mackinnon notes: "It must be remembered that without their [the Protestant princes'] support the Reformation could hardly have succeeded in maintaining itself against the Catholic opposition and the reactionary policy of Charles V. . . . Would there have been any Reformation at all without their alliance? The fate of Hus would seem to decide this question. . . . Even Luther would have been crushed had there been no Elector to hide him in the Wartburg and no League of Schmalkald to intervene between him and the Emperor. As it was, the final treaty saved the work which Luther had achieved in co-operation with his princely patrons."

Above all, the Religious Peace of Augsburg marks the first step toward religious toleration and liberty. This is acknowledged by all, though deplored by some. Bainton, in his characteristic way, says: "Those who deplore any breach in unity as scandal and sin will bemoan the outcome. Those who prize liberty above univer-



sality will see here one step in the direction of freedom in religion." It should suffice to cite Lindsay's fine summary of the outcome: "This Religious Peace of Augsburg has been claimed, and rightly, as a victory for religious liberty. From one point of view the victory was not a great one. The only Confession tolerated was the Augsburg. The Swiss Reformation and its adherents were outside the scope of the religious peace. What grew to be the Reformed or Calvinistic Church was also outside. It was limited solely to the Lutheran, or, as it was called, the evangelical creed. Nor was there much gain to the personal liberty of conscience. It may be said with truth that there was less freedom of conscience under the Lutheran territorial system of churches, and also under the Roman Catholic Church reorganized under the canons and decrees of Trent, than there had been in the medieval Church. The victory lay in this, that the first blow had been struck to free mankind from the fetters of Romanist absolutism; that the first faltering step had been taken on the road to religious liberty; and the first is valuable not for what it is in itself, but for what it represents and for what comes after it. The Religious Peace of Augsburg did not concede much according to modern standards; but it contained the potency and promise of the future. It is always the first step which counts."

A word as to the exceptions made in the Peace. The Swiss Reformation and Calvinism "were outside the scope of religious peace." It is inexact to say: "They were excluded"; they simply were not included. We can surmise reasons for this. The Reformation of Zwingli was a Swiss, not a German movement, represented only in the south of Germany near the Swiss border. Moreover, the South German cities had joined the Lutherans in the Wittenberg Concord. As to Calvinism, Lindsay uses a significant expression: "What grew to be the Reformed or Calvinistic Church." There was at this time (1555) very little Calvinism in Germany (see the map of Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism in Grimm, *The Reformation Era*, p. 481). The extensive spread of Calvinism in Germany came later. For some of the things that happened later in the relationship between Lutherans and Calvinists all that should be said here is: Even Lutherans sometimes make mistakes! But that has nothing to do with the Religious Peace of Augsburg. In 1555, in Germany, Calvinism simply did not come into consideration.



As for the Anabaptists and related radicals, their treatment and very common persecution, an explanation (not an excuse) may be offered. The bulk of Anabaptists were quiet, inoffensive people; but they had too many loud-mouthed leaders who brought the whole sect into disrepute. They usually were Chiliasts who expected the immediate return of the Lord to establish His thousand-year kingdom on earth; and their divine obligation was to prepare a center for that millennium. That brought them into conflict with the secular governments. Think of the extravagances of Zwickau, Münster, Mühlhausen; the plots of Thomas Münzer, etc. The result was that in many quarters the sect was suspected of anarchism. In that time of general unrest and dissatisfaction, when government officials often felt that they were sitting on a powder keg, this suspicion was enough to make Anabaptists unwelcome and often led to persecution. An explanation, not an excuse!

The great result of the Peace of Augsburg was just that. It brought peace to Germany; sixty years of peace, while in the neighboring countries war raged and devastated land and people, e. g., in the Netherlands, in France. In its course the Peace brought other blessings: "It meant the overthrow of the papal power, of the medieval ecclesiastical domination over soul and conscience, as far as Lutheran Germany was concerned. It ensured for the persecuted Protestant, if not religious toleration in the modern sense, at least the possibility of escaping persecution by removing from the jurisdiction of a Roman Catholic prince to that of a Protestant one. It was thus an advance on the medieval alternative of absolute submission to a universal ecclesiastical authority, despotically exercised, or death for refusal. This alternative could be evaded by at least Luther's followers in the Catholic States, and this represented no small advance on the medieval spirit" (Mackinnon).

Yes, it was only a temporary peace; sixty-three years later it was broken by the Thirty Years' War. But that was not the fault of the Religious Peace of Augsburg! Parts of the peace treaty, especially omissions, are generally cited as furnishing an opening for renewed warfare, and rightly so; but does anyone in these war-torn times claim that any peace treaty can be formed that does not leave a loophole for renewed war? That war was renewed

was not the fault of the Augsburg Treaty, but of the Counter-reformation. Militant Romanism, with Jesuits as leaders, or rather as drivers, broke the treaty and renewed the war. But that again is another chapter.

Lutherans of 1555 hailed the Religious Peace of Augsburg as a great blessing and thanked God for it. And so should we!

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