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"HISTORICAL NECESSITY OF THE THIRD ANGEL'S MESSAGE." (Page 370) – Part 1

By ELD. A.T.JONES

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I PROPOSE to sketch the course of controversy from the Reformation onward; tracing the successive steps of truth in her progress from the deep obscurity into which she had been plunged by the papal supremacy, to the clear shining of this period of the nineteenth century. Although the reformation actually began in France by Farel, and in Switzerland by Zwingli, before Luther began his great work, yet as Luther's work was more positively aggressive than any other, and as he was singled out by the papacy as the one object of its direct attack, any view of the reformation, to be just, must be taken from the point of Luther's appearance upon the scene. Besides, any attempt to strike a balance, or draw a comparison, between the degrees of merit attaching to these great men would be unjust. D'Aubigne has well expressed the truth on this point, in these words: "The Reformation existed not in Luther only; it was the offspring of his age."--*Hist. Ref, book 3, chap. 4.* And as it was the offspring of the age, so it existed in no man; and any attempt to institute a comparison between men is to detract from the dignity of the work, and to imply that it was the work of men instead of the work of God. At the same time we would not, in the slightest, attempt to rob any of these men of the tribute that is justly their due. Noble heroes they were, and all honor to them as such; yet the Reformation was the work of God, and these men were only his instruments.

Now, reader, I ask your thoughtful attention throughout; because I shall make no comment, nor application of any point, until the close: but then it will be summed up in few words, and you want to have the points well in your mind.

As the Reformation was "the offspring of the age," so the leading doctrine of the Reformation, i.e., Justification by Faith, was the logical deduction from the premises laid down by the age. And in view of the times and the events, it is difficult to conceive any other doctrine that might properly have been the leading one.

At the date of the Reformation, the beginning of the sixteenth century, the papacy had, from Gregory the Great, through Zacharias and Stephen III., Hildebrand and Innocent III., Alexander VI., and Leo X., reached that pinnacle of abusive power where she held the sway over this world and the world to come, and over the eternal destinies of the human race; and where she could traffic in immortal bliss, selling it for money,—where, in the energetic words of another, "The church was omnipotent, and Leo was the church."

In the exercise of that omnipotency, Leo proceeds to the sale of indulgences, covering both worlds for the past, present, and future. And now begins the Reformation. Luther resists the sale of indulgences, and the claims upon which they are sold. It is plain that if both sides stand firmly to their principles, nothing else can come out of it but renunciation of the church of Rome, on the part of Luther, the adoption of Christ as Head of the church instead of the pope, and justification by faith instead of by money in the purchase of indulgences. For (1) if the pope cannot grant remission of sin by an indulgence, can he grant remission at all? (2) If he cannot grant remission at all, can he bestow upon another the power to remit sin? (3) If he has not the authority, and those who receive

authority from him have it not, then is such authority possessed by any one on earth? (4) If it stand thus with the pope, is he head of the church? (5) If he be not the head of the church, is not Christ alone the head of the church on earth as well as in heaven? (6) If Christ alone be the head of the church and the one alone through whose intercession and merits forgiveness of sin can be obtained, and if this forgiveness is to be obtained from God alone, through Christ alone, without the intervention of priest, bishop, or pope, must not every one go to Christ himself, for himself, for justification? And therefore the logical consequence is justification by faith.

And such was the course through which Luther was led. Not that Luther saw or realized it all when he began. Not at all. Had he realized even the half of it, doubtless he would have stood aghast. When he opposed the indulgences, he saw only the wickedness of the indulgences as ministered by their venders, and of the manner in which Tetzel conducted the traffic. And as the pope persisted in this course, and Luther persisted in his opposition, this first step carried him logically to the second, and, as events shaped the course, finally to the logical consequence of all, justification by faith, and *therefore* the Reformation.

It was a natural and an easy step to the next point, the Lord's Supper instead of the papal mass. And here opens a new scene of controversy. Opposition is not confined between the reformers and the papacy; on this subject it opens between the reformers themselves. And the zeal that ought to have been exerted unitedly in maintaining a solid front in attacking the papacy, was in a great measure spent in opposing one another. The contending parties on this subject were Luther on one side, and Carlstadt and Zwingli on the other. The papal doctrine of the mass is, that the bread and the wine in the sacrament are veritably the actual *flesh and blood* of the Lord; and that either is as much so as both together; and that therefore it is superfluous to administer both to the laity; and so the bread *alone* is given instead of bread and wine. This is *Tran*-substantiation; i.e., change of substance. Luther renounced this, and held that although the bread and wine are not the *real* body and blood of the Lord, yet Christ is really present *with* the bread and wine. This is *Con*-substantiation; i.e., *with* the substance. Carlstadt and Zwingli denied both, and held, as is now held by Protestants almost everywhere, that the bread and wine are only memorials of the broken body and shed blood of the Lord Christ. But Carlstadt was impetuous, and while Luther was a captive in the Wartburg, Carlstadt, being deprived of his counsels, went too far for that present time, and in a measure endangered the Reformation.

In every great religious movement, when the minds of men are unusually stirred, fanaticism is ever ready to break forth and bring reproach upon the truth. It was so in the first days of the Reformation, and there has been no exception from that time to the present. And in this way the Reformation was endangered by these premature movements under the leadership of Carlstadt. At that very time fanaticism was showing itself in Wittemberg; and when the Reformers spoke against images, with other errors of the Romish church, the slightest spark was soon blown by the fanatics into a most vehement flame; they rushed into the churches, tore down the images and crucifixes, broke them to pieces, and burned them. One excess led to another; the fanatics pretended to be illumined by the Spirit; despised the Supper, and held internal communion instead; claimed to have no need of the Bible nor of human learning; began to prophesy the destruction of all but the saints; and that when that should be accomplished, the kingdom of God would be established upon the earth, the chief fanatic would be put in supreme authority, and *he* would commit the government to the saints.—*D'Aubigne*, book 9, chap. 8.

Carlstadt was to a certain extent influenced for awhile by these enthusiasts; but only for awhile, and then only so far as to despise learning and advise his students at the College to return to their homes.—*Ibid.* Luther was informed of the state of affairs, and left his retreat, and returned to Wittemberg; and it fell upon him to quench this flame of enthusiasm, to put down this rule of fanaticism.

In these events lies the secret of the difference of opinion between the Reformers on the Lord's Supper. In the beginning Luther had inclined to the symbolical explanation of the Supper, and even at this time was not decidedly against it. But now that Carlstadt preached it, and the fanatics pushed the symbolism to the length of despising

the Supper entirely; and Carlstadt being in a measure, however slight, mixed up with them—Luther having to meet all this, rejected all idea of any symbolical meaning in the words, "This is my body," and adopted that view from which, to use his own words, he would not be moved by "reason, common sense, carnal arguments," nor "mathematical proofs."—*ibid*, book 13, chap. 7. In the way in which the subject was brought prominently before him, it appeared to him that, to hold the view of the bread and wine being symbols was akin to fanaticism, if not fanaticism itself. And when Carlstadt, after being banished from Saxony, went to Switzerland, and was admitted as pastor and professor of divinity at Bale; and when before this Zwingli's writings, maintaining the same views, had reached Luther, the whole company was held by Luther to be opponents of the truth; and he being as strenuous against this as against anything else that he deemed error, and his opponents in this holding the truth, and necessarily defending it, it could not but be that the result must be division.

It is true that in this controversy Luther was stubborn; but in view of all the circumstances amidst which it arose, surely our charity will not be unduly taxed in excusing it. If he had been less strenuous in defending what he held to be true, the world would not have had the Reformation then. But however worthily our charity be bestowed in this instance, it fails to be so, when the scenes and the actors have all passed from the stage, when the Reformation has escaped the breakers and rides securely, and his successors stubbornly resist the truth for no other reason than that "Luther believed thus, and so do we;" and so cease to be reformers, and become rigid *Lutherans*.

The death of Luther (Feb. 18, 1546) left Melancthon at the head of the Reformation in Germany; and his views on the Supper were almost, if not identical with, those of the Reformed, i.e. the Swiss as distinguished from Lutherans. His love of peace and his respect for Luther had caused him to hold his views in abeyance while Luther lived; but after Luther's death, this very love of peace led him into a war that lasted as long as he lived; for, holding views so favorable to those of the opposition, and believing besides that, even in the widest difference of opinion on this subject, there was nothing that justified any division, much less such bitter contention, between the friends of the Reformation, his desire for peace induced him to propose a union of Lutherans and Zwinglians. This immediately caused a division among the Lutherans, and developed what Mosheim calls the "*rigid* Lutherans" and the "*moderate* Lutherans,"—the moderate Lutherans favoring union, and the rigid Lutherans attacking with renewed vigor all together, and Melancthon in particular.

Just here also another element of contention for the rigid Lutherans was introduced. Calvin appeared as a kind of mediator between the Lutherans and Zwinglians; and he proposed by modifying the opinions of both parties to effect a more perfect union: but instead of his efforts being acceptable, the rigid Lutherans accused all who in the least degree favored the union of being Crypto-Calvinists; i.e., *secret* Calvinists. By thus adding an epithet the prejudice was increased against any effort toward conciliation; and besides, a bitter controversy was opened between the Lutherans and Calvinists.

The bitterness of the opponents of Melancthon was increased by his connection with the "Interim," which was this: In 1547 a diet was held at Augsburg, and Charles V. required of the Protestants that they should submit the decision of religious contests to the council of Trent. The greater part of the members of the diet consented. But under the pretext of a plague raging in Trent, the Pope issued a bull transferring the council to Bologna. The legates and all the rest of the papal party obeyed the pope, but the emperor ordered all of the German bishops to remain at Trent. This virtually dissolved the council; and as the Pope refused to re-assemble the council at Trent, and the Emperor refused to allow his bishops to go to Bologna, plainly there could be no council to decide the religious contests, and the action of the diet was nullified. Now, to keep the matter under control until the difference between the pope and the emperor could be settled, and the council re-assembled, Charles ordered Julius Pflugius, bishop of Nuremburg, Michael Sidonius, a creature of the pope, and John Agricola, of Eisleben, to draw up a formulary which might serve as a rule of faith and worship for both Protestants and Catholics, until the council should be ready to act upon the question. This formulary, from its purpose of being only to cover the

interval that should elapse till the council should act, was called the "Interim." But instead of pacifying the contestants, it only led to new difficulties, and involved the whole empire in violence and bloodshed.

Maurice, elector of Saxony, affected to remain neutral in regard to the "Interim," neither accepting nor rejecting it; but finally in 1548 he assembled the Saxon nobility and clergy in several conferences, to take counsel about what was to be done. In all these conferences, Melancthon was accorded the chief place; and he finally gave it as his opinion "that the whole of the book of 'Interim' could not by any means be adopted by the friends of the Reformation; but declared at the same time that he saw no reason why it might not be adopted as authority in things that did not relate to the essential parts of religion, or in things which might be considered indifferent." This decision set his enemies all aflame again; and with Flacius at their head, the defenders of Lutheranism attacked Melancthon and the doctors of Wittemberg and Leipsic "with incredible bitterness and fury, and accused them of apostasy from the true religion."—*Mosheim*.

Melancthon and his friends, however, were able to defend themselves; and a warm debate followed upon these two points: "1. Whether the points that seemed in different to Melancthon were so in reality? 2. Whether in things of an indifferent nature, and in which the interests of religion are not essentially concerned, it be lawful to yield to the enemies of the truth?" And right here we are brought to the contemplation of the greatest hindrance that ever affected the Reformation—that is, scholasticism.

Luther and all the other reformers stood upon the platform of "The word of God, the whole word of God, and nothing but the word of God." They abandoned the sophistries of the schools, and rested solely upon this declaration, which must be the basis of every true reform in all ages. And just so far as that principle is abandoned, so much will the work be retarded. While this principle was adhered to, the Reformation succeeded gloriously; when the principle was abandoned, the Reformation suffered accordingly. In the *word* of God, lies the strength of the *work* of God. In this position there was another great advantage that the Reformers held over their papal antagonists. As long as they stood by the word of God alone, they occupied a field with which the papists were wholly unacquainted; and the more the Reformers studied and applied the word of God, the more easily they could defeat their adversaries. Their adversaries knew it, and therefore they employed every artifice to draw the Reformers into the scholastic field; for there the papists had every advantage which the Protestants had in the other. While the leaders of the Reformation lived, the papists were unsuccessful in every attempt in this direction, and so the Reformation was successful everywhere; but when these leaders were removed from the world, and their faith and zeal were not inherited by their successors, and when to the craftiness of the papists were added the zeal and artfulness of Loyola and his order, the Protestants were finally corrupted by the arts and stratagems of their opponents and induced to revive the subtleties of the schools in defending and illustrating religious truth. So it may be said with truth that, while the Protestants imbibed scholasticism from the Catholics, they allowed the Catholics to steal from them their zeal. All that will be needed to prove and illustrate it, will be simply to mention the subjects of controversy that engaged the Protestant disputants for more than a hundred years.

(To be continued.)