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"HISTORICAL NECESSITY OF THE THIRD ANGEL'S MESSAGE." (Page 386) – Part 2

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OUT of the debate about things *indifferent* grew several others, from which arose yet others, and so on indefinitely. While Melancthon and his colleagues were at Leipsic discussing the "interim," among other things they had said, "The necessity of good works in order to the attainment of eternal salvation, might be held and taught, conformably to the truth of the gospel." This declaration was severely censured by the rigid Lutherans, as being contrary to the doctrine and sentiments of Luther. George Major maintained the doctrine of good works, and Amsdorf the contrary. In this dispute Amsdorf was so far carried away by his zeal for the doctrine of Luther, as to maintain that good works are an *impediment* to salvation. This added new fuel to the flame, and on it raged.

Out of this debate grew the one known as the "Synergistical" controversy, from a Greek word signifying *co-operation*. The disciples of Melancthon, led by Strigelius, held from him that man *co-operates* with divine grace in the work of conversion. The Lutherans, led by Flacius, head of the university of Saxe-Weimar, held that God is the *only* agent in the conversion of man. The dispute led to yet another, concerning the natural powers of the human mind. On this subject a public debate was held at Weimar in 1560, between Flacius and Strigelius. Flacius maintained that "the fall of man extinguished in the human mind every virtuous tendency, every noble faculty, and left nothing but universal darkness and corruption." Strigelius held that this degradation of the powers of the mind was by no means universal. And, hoping to defeat his opponent by puzzling him, put this question: "Should original sin, or the corrupt habit which the human soul contracted by the fall, be classed with substances or accidents?" Flacius replied that "original sin is the very substance of human nature." This bold assertion opened another controversy on the nature and extent of original sin.

In 1560 Melancthon died, glad, as he said on his death-bed, to be freed from the contentions of theologians. After his death, many who wished to see these divisions and animosities healed, hoped to bring the contests to an end. After many vain attempts, in 1568 the elector of Saxony and the duke of Saxe-Weimar summoned the most eminent men of each party to meet at Altenburg, and there, in an amicable spirit, sought to reconcile their differences. But this effort came to naught. Then the dukes of Wirtemberg and Brunswick joined in the scheme, and James Andreas, professor at Tubingen, under their patronage traveled through all parts of Germany working in the interests of concord. At last, they were so far successful as to gather, after several conferences, a company of leading divines at Torgaw in 1576, where a treatise, composed by Andreas, was examined, discussed, and corrected; and finally proposed to the deliberations of a select number, who met at Berg, near Magdeburg. There all points were fully and carefully weighed, and discussed anew; and as the result of all there was adopted the "Form of Concord." And now that the "Form of Concord" is adopted, discord is fully assured; for it was only a source of new tumults, and furnished matter for dissensions and contests as violent as any that had gone before. Besides this, the field is now widened, so that the Calvinists and Zwinglians are all included in the whirl of controversy.

Now that Calvin appears upon the scene, the field is not only enlarged, but new material is supplied; for he differed from both Lutherans and Zwinglians, not only on the Lord's Supper, but his essential tenet of absolute decrees of God, in the salvation of men, differed from these churches, as well as its being an entirely new element in the strife; and which from the very nature of the case propagated a multitude of new disputes. It is not necessary to enlarge upon them, nor to draw them out in their full members. It will be sufficient to merely name the leading subjects. Differing from both Lutherans and Zwinglians on the presence of Christ in the Supper, of course the controversy on that subject was re-opened, and again canvassed through all its forms: First, what is the nature of the institutions called sacraments? Secondly, What are the fruits of the same? Thirdly, How great is the majesty and glory of Christ's human nature? Fourthly, How are the divine perfections communicated to the human nature of Christ? Fifthly, What is the inward frame of spirit that is required in the worship addressed to the Saviour?

On the divine decrees: 1. What is the nature of the divine attributes? 2. Particularly those of justice and goodness? 3. Fate and necessity. 4. What is the connection between human liberty and divine prescience? 5. What is the extent of God's love to mankind? 6. What are the benefits that arise from the merits of Christ as mediator? 7. What are the operations of the divine Spirit, in rectifying the will, and sanctifying the affections of men? 8. The final perseverance of the elect.

Other subjects: (1) What is the extent of external ceremonies in religious worship? (2) What are the special characteristics of things indifferent? (3) How far is it lawful to comply with the demands of an adversary in discussing things indifferent? (4) What is the extent of Christian liberty? (5) Is it lawful to retain, out of respect to the prejudices of the people, ancient rites and ceremonies which have a superstitious aspect, yet may be susceptible of a favorable and rational interpretation? Bear in mind that these are only the leading subjects that lay between Calvinism on the one hand, and Lutheranism and the Zwinglians on the other. Calvin had yet other controversies to conduct on his own account. Among these were, 1st. The Immortality of the Soul. 2nd, The Trinity. 3rd. Predestination (against his opponents in Geneva). And above all, 4th. In acquiring and maintaining his own absolute supremacy in Geneva.

It will be seen at the first glance that this last list is almost nothing in comparison with that which agitated the Lutheran church, or with that which lay between the Calvinists and Lutherans. But there is an excellent reason for this; and that is, None but the most intrepid dared to question the doctrines of Calvin in Geneva: All opposers of Calvin there had to fairly take their lives in their hands. And some did not escape even that way. I am making no attack upon Calvin. I simply state facts as they come in the course of controversy. To give a proper view of affairs in Geneva, I will quote a passage of the highest authority :—

"His system of church polity was essentially theocratic; it assumed that every member of the State was also under the discipline of the Church; and he asserted that the right of exercising this discipline was vested exclusively in the consistory, or body of preachers and elders. His attempts to carry out these views brought him into collision both with the authorities and with the populace,—the latter being enraged at the restraints imposed upon the disorderly by the exercise of church discipline, and the former being inclined to retain in their own hands a portion of that power in things spiritual which Calvin was bent on placing exclusively in the hands of the church rulers. His dauntless courage, his perseverance, and his earnestness at length prevailed. . . . His work, as has been justly said, 'embraced everything;' he was consulted on every affair, great and small, that came before the council."-*Encyclopedia Britannica*, ninth edition, art. Calvin, which was written by W. L. Alexander, D. D., one of the Bible revisers, and which is *prima facie* favorable to him.

It is plain, therefore, that where "every member of the State" "was subject to the discipline of the Church," and where this discipline was exercised "exclusively by the body of preachers and elders," with Calvin the head of that body, his power was practically unlimited; and that opposition to his doctrines could have no chance at all to

spread, if he should choose to exert his power; and that he did choose to exert it, needs no argument. I proceed to the controversies that arose in Geneva.

One of the first of his opponents was Gruet, who attacked him vigorously on his supremacy, and called him "bishop of Asculum," and "the new pope." Amongst a good many other things he denied the immortality of the soul. He may have been an infidel; but, at any rate he was brought before the council, and punished with death. Another opponent was Castilio, master of the public schools of Geneva, who attacked the doctrine of unconditional predestination. He was deposed from his office, and banished. Another was Jerome Balsec, a monk who had been converted to Protestantism. He, too, attacked the doctrine of absolute decrees. He was thrown into prison, and after a two days debate with Calvin before the council, was banished.

Out of this grew still another. Jacques de-Bourgogne, a lineal descendant of the dukes of Burgundy, and an intimate friend and patron of Calvin, had settled at Geneva solely to have the pleasure of his company. Bourgogne had employed Balsec as his physician, and when Balsec became involved in his difficulty with Calvin, Bourgogne came to his support, and tried to prevent his ruin. This so incensed Calvin that he turned his force against the nobleman (a noble man, too), who was obliged to leave Geneva, lest a worse thing should befall him.

Another, and the most notable opponent, was Servetus, who had opposed the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity, and also infant baptism and had published a book entitled "Christianity Restored," in which he declared his sentiments. He had been condemned to death by the Catholics for heresy, but he escaped from their prison in Dauphiné, in France, and in making his way to Italy, passed through Geneva, and there remained a few days. He was just about to start for Zurich, when at the instigation of Calvin he was seized, and out of the book before mentioned, was accused of blasphemy. The result, as everybody knows, was that he was burned to death. Dr. Alexander says further, "The heresy of Servetus was not extirpated by his death; but none of his followers were visited with severer penalties than banishment from Geneva. The trials of several of these, with the conferences and controversies connected with them, occupied much of Calvin's time for several years."

From the foregoing it is very easy to see why the Calvinistical body was so much more exempt from divisions and tumults than was the Lutheran.

But, however bitter the opposition between Lutherans and Calvinists, and amongst the Lutherans themselves, and again, between all of these on one hand and the Catholics on the other, they could call a truce upon all their differences, and unite, all, Catholics, Lutherans, Zwinglians, and Calvinists, in one common onset against Anabaptists.

The name Anabaptists, signifies re-baptizers, and was applied indiscriminately to all who denied the validity of sprinkling for baptism, and especially of infant baptism, or sprinkling, rather. Before the period of the Reformation, there were, scattered throughout almost all the countries of Europe, and persecuted everywhere, lineal descendants, in point of doctrine, of the Albigenses and the Waldenses, who did not practice infant baptism (sprinkling) but held to the genuine doctrines of baptism, the sleep of the dead, and some to the true Sabbath. Of course, these doctrines caused them to be considered then abominable heretics; but, when, unfortunately, in the early days of the Reformation, some of the name ran into the most fearful fanaticism, all of the name were classed together in it and the severest of penal laws of those severe times, were enacted against all who could be classed as Anabaptists.

"In almost all the countries of Europe, an unspeakable number, ... Preferred death in its worst forms to a retraction. Neither the view of the flames that were kindled to consume them, nor the ignominy of the gibbet, nor the terrors of the sword, could shake their invincible ... constancy, or make them abandon tenets that appeared dearer to them than life and all its enjoyments ... and it is much to be lamented that so little distinction was made between the members of this sect, when the sword was unsheathed against them. Why were the innocent and the guilty

involved in the same fate? Why were doctrines purely theological.... Punished with the same rigour that was shown to crimes inconsistent with the peace and welfare of civil society? Those who had no other marks of peculiarity than their administering baptism to *adult persons only*, and their excluding the unrighteous from the external communion of the church, ought undoubtedly to have met with milder treatment than that which was given to those seditious incendiaries, who were for unhinging all government and destroying all civil authority... It is true that many Anabaptists suffered death, not on account of their being considered rebellious subjects, but merely because they were judged to be incorrigible heretics; For in this century the era of limiting the administration of baptism to adult persons only, and the practise of rebaptising such as had received that sacrament in infancy, were looked upon as the most flagitious and intolerable of heresies.” – *Mosheim, Church History*, Cent. 16, sec. 3, part 2, paragraph 6.

As before remarked, the Anabaptists became the one object of the attack of all parties, civil and religious. Their opposition to infant baptism was what disconcerted Melancthon in the presence of the fanatics at Wittemberg. He owned that they had hit upon a “*weak point*,” and his doubts on this point led him to make the familiar statement, “Luther alone can decide” the question of their inspiration. It was the fear of being landed in Anabaptism that was the reason that “Luther did not face this question thoroughly.” The Protestant Council of Zurich ordered “that any one who administered Anabaptism should be “*drowned*,” and the order was actually executed upon Felix Mantz, “who had formerly been associated with Zwingli at the commencement of the Reformation.”

One of the very earliest of Calvin’s theological efforts, was the composition of a book entitled, “*Psychopamychia*,” on the immortality of the soul, in opposition to the Anabaptists in France. (For these points, see *Ency. Brit.*, arts. Melancthon, Baptism, Baptists, and Calvin.) And the claim of the true Sabbath was not the least of causes of Luther’s bitterness against Carlstadt. (For a full and fair discussion of this point, see *Andrew’s History of the Sabbath*, chap 23.)

England was not entirely exempt from these scenes; yet while exempt from some she was subject to others from which the continental nations were free. To escape the persecutions of “Bloody Mary,” many of the English Protestants fled to Germany. Worship while in exile was conducted by some of the rites of the Church of England as established under Edward VI.; while others preferred the Swiss or Calvinistic form of worship. This caused a division, and the former were called *Conformists*, the latter *Non-Conformists* or *Puritans*; and thus the Puritans appear upon the scene. After the death of Mary, at the accession of Elizabeth, these exiles returned to England, and carried their controversies with them; and England not only supplied a better field for their propogation; but there the Scotch Presbyterians, who had spread to a considerable extend in England, allied themselves with the Puritans. These controversies turned, as stated above, upon the *forms of worship*; whether the clergy should wear vestments; whether the church should be governed by bishops; about cathedral churches, and the archdeacons, deans, canons, and other officials of the same; about festivals and holy days; the signs of the cross; about godfathers, and godmothers, etc., etc.

There were, again, branch controversies from some of these. For instance; on the office of bishops, the question at first was whether bishops are allowable as they stand in the Church of England? But Bancroft, afterward archbishop of Canterbury, asserted that bishops are superior to all other offices in the church, by *divine right* of the appointment of God himself. To sustain this claim, they were compelled to hold, *not* the Bible alone as authority, but the Bible *and* the church of the first five centuries, especially as illustrated in the forms of church government. The Puritans and Presbyterians, in denying this, and asserting the sufficiency of the Bible alone, and charging all these other things to the account of Rome, as being “vain, superstitious, idolatrous, and diametrically opposite to the injunctions of the Gospel,” were involved in a serious dilemma. When they inveighed so heavily against the rites, ceremonies, and festival days of the Conformists, as being of Rome, and “superstitious, idolatrous,” etc., the

Episcopalians retorted upon them, that the *observance of Sunday was only an ordinance of the church*, and that therefore if they renounced the authority of the church, and held “the Bible and Bible alone,” they must give up the observance of Sunday. But the Non-Conformists, instead of facing this question boldly, and instituting an honest inquiry at the oracles of God, “What day is the Sabbath?” determined that they would keep Sunday anyhow, and if anything must yield, it should be the Scripture. And so Mr. Nicholas Bound, D.D. (?) invented the, to them, very pleasing doctrine, which is yet perpetuated by many who will not obey the commandment of God, that the fourth commandment requires only *one day in seven*. And such is the origin of the seventh-part-of-time-one-day-in-seven fraud. This was adopted by all the Puritans and Presbyterians with wonderful celerity. And so a *second* time the Sabbath of the Lord plead for release from condemnation at the hands of men, and was denied as was its Lord, “Not his man, but Barabbas.”

(To be continued)