

The Great Controversy Series

16 The Reform in Holland and Scandinavia

Seven hundred years before Martin Luther appeared, that is, in the 9th century, two bishops were sent to Rome from Holland. What they saw there shocked them. They wrote the following concerning the pope:

God "has made His queen and spouse, the church, a noble and everlasting provision for her family, with a dowry that is neither fading nor corruptible, and given her an eternal crown and scepter; . . . all which benefits you like a thief intercept. You set up yourself in the temple of God; instead of a pastor, you are become a wolf to the sheep; . . . you would make us believe you are a supreme bishop, but you rather behave like a tyrant. . . . Whereas you ought to be a servant of servants, as you call yourself, you endeavor to become a lord of lords. . . . You bring the commands of God into contempt. . . . The Holy Ghost is the builder of all churches as far as the earth extends. . . . The city of our God, of which we are the citizens, reaches to all the regions of the heavens; and it is greater than the city, by the holy prophets named Babylon, which pretends to be divine, wins herself to heaven, and brags that her wisdom is immortal; and finally, though without reason, that she never did err, nor ever can."--Gerard Brandt, History of the Reformation in and About the Low Countries, b. 1, p. 6.

These two priest understood the character of the papacy. I want to remind you of something. Not every member of the Catholic Church is bad. There were many people in the church who loved God and wanted to reform the church. So when I point out the errors of the papacy I am certainly not implying that all Catholics are bad people. The accusation that I just read came from Catholic priests.

When I was reading the accusation of the bishops, did you recognize their references from the Bible. Let's look at them.

The bishops took up this phrase: "has made His queen and spouse, the church." Where does this concept come from?

2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ.

The bishops said, "You set up yourself in the temple of God." Where did they get that idea?

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Seven hundred years before Martin Luther, two Catholic priests said that “the man of sin” was the pope.

The bishops said, “instead of a pastor, you are become a wolf to the sheep.” Let’s look at the Bible. Jesus said to His disciples:

Matthew 7:15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

The bishops said, “you would make us believe you are a supreme bishop, but you rather behave like a tyrant. . . . Whereas you ought to be a servant of servants, as you call yourself, you endeavor to become a lord of lords.”

Mark 10:42-45 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ "And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The bishops said, “The Holy Ghost is the builder of all churches as far as the earth extends. . . . The city of our God, of which we are the citizens, reaches to all the regions of the heavens; and it is greater than the city, by the holy prophets named Babylon, which pretends to be divine, wins herself to heaven, and brags that her wisdom is immortal; and finally, though without reason, that she never did err, nor ever can." Why did they call Rome Babylon?

In the Old Testament, after the flood, in Babylon, a great tower was built in rebellion against God. Along with this, the destroyer of Jerusalem and one of Israel’s biggest enemies was Babylon. In the New Testament Jerusalem is the city of God.

Revelation 21:10-11 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

In the New Testament, the enemy of Jerusalem is Babylon.

Revelation 17:3-6 So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. ⁵ And on her forehead a name *was* written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. ⁶ I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the

saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

Thus the two bishops were showing the papacy as the Babylon of the book of Revelation.

Peter also perhaps referred to Rome as Babylon.

1 Peter 5:13 She who is in Babylon, elect together with *you*, greets you; and *so does* Mark my son.

There was no Babylon in Peter's time. Therefore the probability that he was referring to Rome is high.

The idea that first pagan Rome, then papal Rome is Babylon is not a new one. Even in the 9th century people understood the Bible that way.

Another honest priest appeared in Holland. In Luther's time, that is the 16th century, a Catholic priest named Menno Simons didn't know the Bible and would not read it for fear of being swept into heresy. When a doubt arose regarding the doctrine of transubstantiation his conscience forced him to read the Bible. Together with reading the writings of Martin Luther, he accepted the reform faith. A short time after this, in a nearby village he witnessed the beheading of a man who had been condemned for being re-baptized.

What did the verse say that we just read? "I saw the woman, [that is the papacy] drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." That is it. Why was a person who was baptized as an adult beheaded?

The Catholic Church teaches and practices infant baptism. But as Menno Simons examined the Scriptures he found that faith and repentance were conditions of receiving baptism.

Mark 16:16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Because a baby cannot understand faith and repentance, what meaning is there in the rite? O.K. but why did the Catholic Church have someone's head cut off for being baptized as an adult?

First of all, the Catholic Church, for Christians, did not and does not acknowledge any doctrine but her own. It was persecuting, plain and simple. There was no tolerance. They allowed Jews to

exist but they experienced persecution as well. Second of all, Satan's method is this: People in a large measure believe what their parents believe. They say, "My father was like that and my grandfather. I was born this way and that is how I will die" Satan uses this logic to hold people back from the truth generation after generation. The parent's belief becomes not just a part of the culture but their very identity.

What does Satan do? As a baby children become baptized as Catholic. The baby's identity from birth is Catholic. It is not easy to cast off this identity. Satan knows this. If someone is baptized as an adult, what message does it give? They are leaving Catholicism. That person is no longer under the authority of the Catholic Church. To leave the Catholic Church meant to deserve death.

What other religions utilize this method? That is, in what religions are executions performed when you leave the religion? O.K., in such a culture if the Creator of the Universe should send a message to them will they accept it? No. It will absolutely be rejected. Where did Jesus' teachings come from? They came from God. Did the Jews accept the message? In general, no. Those who accepted it were persecuted and executed. In general Satan destroys people using this method. The people don't accept the truth.

O.K., where did Menno Simons get a Bible to read? Hundreds of years earlier Waldensian missionaries came to Holland and their teachings spread rapidly. The Waldensian Bible was translated into the Dutch language.

Roman persecution started and many people were tortured and killed. But the number of believers multiplied. Menno Simons separated from the Catholic Church and together with his family for 25 years he shared the truth in both Germany and Holland. There were many believers but they were persecuted. They suffered a lot because they were confused with the fanatical Munsterites. Charles V prohibited the reform faith. To read the Bible, listen to it or preach it was forbidden. Thus Satan separated people from the truth.

In Denmark a youth named Tausen joined a cloister. He was sent to Cologne to receive an education. In a short time he became disgusted with the mysticism of the educators. About this time he obtained Luther's writings. He wanted to be Luther's student so he went to Wittenberg. When he returned to Denmark no one knew that that he was a Lutheran. He shared salvation in Jesus Christ and even two of the monks became believers. He was thrown out of the monastery and began to preach. The translation of the New Testament into the Danish language was widely published. In a short period of time Denmark became largely Protestant.

In Sweden, the two sons of a blacksmith, Olaf and Laurentius Petri, aggressively taught the truths they learned from Melancthon and Luther in Wittenberg. The papists opposed them and several times they barely escaped with their lives. But the king of Sweden protected them.

The people were sunken in poverty under the rule of the Roman Church and were generally oppressed. They didn't know the Bible. Their faith consisted of signs and ceremonies. They were

returning to the superstitious beliefs of their fathers and pagan practices. The nation was divided into factions and the skirmishes among them increased the misery of all. The king decided to make reform in both state and church.

Olaf Petri successfully defended the reform teaching against the Romanists in front of the king and the leaders of Sweden. He showed that the decrees of the church had no authority when they conflicted with the commands of God. Olaf Petri defended the great Protestant principle, "The Bible and the Bible only" as the only rule of faith and practice. The people who defended Protestant principles were not ignorant, radical, noisy polemicists. They were people who studied the word of God and knew the Bible well.

As a result of this debate the king of Sweden accepted the Protestant faith. In a short time the national assembly announced in its favor. Olaf Petri translated the New Testament into Swedish. At the king's request the two brothers began to translate the whole Bible. Thus the Swedish people had for the first time the Bible in their own language. The congress announced that the religious leaders in the whole kingdom must explain the Scriptures and in the schools the Bible should be required reading. Sweden became one of the bastions of Protestantism.

Slowly, the light of the gospel was scattering the darkness of ignorance and superstition.