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OF COUNCILS

DXVI.

The pope styles himself a bishop of the catholic church, which title he never dared to take upon him before; for at the time when the council of Nicea was held, then there was no pope at all. The church at that time was divided into three parts; first, of Ethiopia; second, of Syria, to which Antioch belonged; third, of Rome, with her appertaining sects. In this manner they swarmed soon after the Apostles time, and instituted three sorts of councils: first, a general; second, a provincial; third, an Episcopal, - a council being to be held in every bishopric.

DXVII.

Since the time of the apostles, threescore general and provincial councils have been held, among which only four are especially worthy of praise; two, those of Nicea and Constantinople, maintained and defended the Trinity and the godhead of Christ; the other two, those of Ephesus and Chalcedon, maintained Christ's humanity. In the council of Nicea nothing is written or mentioned of any pope or bishop of Rome, as being there; only one bishop from the west, Ozius, bishop of Cordova, was present. The other bishops came from the churches in the east, Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, Africa, etc.

Ah, Lord God! what are councils and conventions but grasping and vanity, wherein men dispute about titles, honours, precedence, and other fopperies? Let us consider what has been done by these councils in three hundred years; nothing but what concerns externals and ceremonies; nothing at all touching true divine doctrine, the upright worshipping of God, or faith.

DXVIII.

In January, 1539, a book was sent to Luther, entituled, *Liber Conciliorum*, a large and carefully arranged collection. After reading it he said: this book will maintain and defend the pope, whereas in his own decrees, innumerable canons are against him and this book. And besides, councils have no power to make and ordain laws and ordinances in the church, what is to be taught and to be believed, or concerning good works, for all this has been already taught and confirmed. Councils have power to make ordinances only concerning external things, customs, and ceremonies; and this no further than as concerns persons, places, and times. When these cease, such ordinances also cease.

The Romish laws are now dead and gone, by reason Rome is dead and gone: it is now another place. In like manner, the decrees and ordinances of councils are now no longer valid, because their days have gone by. As St Paul says: "Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances? (touch not, taste not, handle not, which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments of men? which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility, and neglecting of the body, not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh."

Did not decrees and statutes, like persons, times, and places, change and cease, the doctrine would of a mortal creature make an immortal; and, indeed, they name the pope an earthly god, fitly enough, for all his laws, decrees, and ordinances, savour of terrestrial, not of celestial things.

DXIX.

When God's Word is by the Fathers expounded, construed, and glossed, then, in my judgment, it is even as when one strains milk through a coal-sack, which must needs spoil and make the milk black; God's Word of itself is pure, clean, bright and clear; but, through the doctrines, books, and writings of the Fathers, it is darkened, falsified, and spoiled.

DXX.

The council of Nicea, held after the apostles time, was the very best and purest; but, by and bye, in the time of the emperor Constantine, it was weakened by the Arians; for at that time, out of dissembling hearts, they craftily subscribed that they concurred in one opinion with the true and upright catholic teachers, which in truth was not so; whereof ensued a great dissension.

DXXI.

The papists go craftily about endeavouring to suppress us; they intend such a reformation should be made, as will in no way suit us to adopt; if, for the sake of outward peace, we enter into accord with the papists, we should make the pure doctrine of our church suspected. Oh no; no such agreements for me. If the emperor Charles would appoint a national council, then there were some hope; but he will not go on; the papists will not yield, but will sit alone therein, and have full power to determine and conclude. By my advice, if it so fall out, we will all arise and leave them sitting alone; for the pope shall have no authority or power over us and our doctrine. We need no council for the sake of God's Word, for that is sure enough. We can well appoint and order fastings and such like things without a council, and without ensnaring the consciences, which shall be at liberty, and not troubled or tied therewith. Christ did not institute and command fastings with laws, but says: "When the bridegroom shall be taken from them, then they shall fast." Also he says: "Go, sell all that thou hast." Fasting will follow thereupon.

The Italians are so stiff-necked and proud, they will not be reformed by the Germans, no, not though they be convinced with the clear truth of God's Word. I have often thought with myself, how we might by a council, in some measure, come to an agreement between us, but I see no means can be found. For if the pope should acknowledge he had failed but in the least article, and should admit, in a council, his gross errors, then he would lose his authority and power; for he brags that he is the Church's head, to whom all the members must yield obedience; hence the complaint in the council at Constance, and hence that council's setting itself over and above the pope, and deposing him. If the papists should give place to us, and yield in the least article, then the hoops in the garland were quite broken asunder, and all the world would cry out: Has it not been constantly affirmed that the pope is the head of the Church and cannot err? How then comes he now to acknowledge his errors?

DXXII.

In a council ought to be two manner of voices; the first, the *Vox consultiva vel deliberativa*, that is, when they consult and discourse concerning affairs, open to kings, princes, and doctors, for each one to deliver his opinion. The second they call *decisiva vox*, a deciding voice, when they conclude what is to be believed and done; which voice the pope and his cardinals have usurped; for they decide and conclude what they will and please.

A council should be a purgatory, to purge, cleanse, and reform the Church; and when new errors and heresies break and press in, to confirm, strengthen, and preserve pure doctrine, and resist, hinder, and quench new fires, and condemn false doctrine. But the pope would have a council to be one assembly, wherein he daily might make new decrees, orders and statutes, touching good works.

DXXIV.

The imperial diet held at Augsburg, 1530, is worthy of all praise; for then and thence came the gospel among the people in other countries, contrary to the will and expectation both of emperor and pope. God appointed the imperial diet at Augsburg, for the papists openly approved there of our doctrine. Before that diet was held, the papists had made the emperor believe, that our doctrine was altogether frivolous; and that when he came to the diet, he should see them put us all to silence, so that none of us should be able to speak a word in the defence of our religion; but it fell out far otherwise; for we openly and freely confessed the Gospel before the emperor and the whole empire, and confounded our adversaries in the highest degree. The emperor discriminated understandingly and discreetly, and carried himself princely in this cause of religion; he found us far otherwise than the papists had informed him; and that we were not ungodly people, leading most wicked and detestable lives, and teaching against the first and second tables of the ten commandments of God. For this cause the emperor sent out confession and apology to all the universities; his council also delivered their opinions, and said: "If the doctrines of these men be against the holy Christian faith, then his imperial majesty should suppress it with all his power. But if it be

only against ceremonies and abuses, as it appears to be, then it should be referred to the consideration and judgment of learned people, or good and wise counsel."

O! God's word is powerful; the more it is persecuted, the more and further it spreads itself abroad. I would fain the papist confutation might appear to the world; for I would set upon that old torn and tattered skin, and so baste it, that the stitches thereof should fly about; but they shun the light. This time twelve month no man would have given a farthing for the protestants, so sure the ungodly papists were of us. For when my most gracious lord and master, the prince elector of Saxony, came before other princes to the diet, the papists marvelled much thereat, for they verily believed he would not have appeared, because, as they imagined, his cause was too bad and foul to be brought before the light. But what fell out? even this, that in their greatest security they were overwhelmed with the utmost fear and affright, because the prince elector, like an upright prince, appeared so early at Augsburg. The popish princes swiftly posted away to Innsbruck, where they held serious council with prince George, and the marquis of Baden, all of them wondering what the prince elector's so early approach to the diet should mean, and the emperor himself was astonished, and doubted whether he could come and go in safety; whereupon the princes were constrained to promise that they would stand, body, goods, and blood by the emperor, one offering to maintain six thousand horse, another so many thousands of foot soldiers, etc., to the end his majesty might be the better secured. Then was a wonder among wonders to be seen, in that God struck with fear and cowardliness the enemies of the truth. And although at that time the prince elector of Saxony was alone, and but only the hundredth sheep, the others being ninety and nine, yet it so fell out, that they all trembled and were afraid. When they came to the point, and began to take the business in hand, there appeared but a very small heap that stood by God's Word. But, that small heap, brought with us a strong and mighty King, a King above all emperors and kings, namely Christ Jesus, the powerful Word of God. Then all the papists cried out, and said: Oh, it is insufferable, that so small and mean a heap should set themselves against the imperial power. But the Lord of Hosts frustrates the councils of princes. Pilate had power to put our blessed Saviour to death, but willingly he would not. Annas and Caiaphas willingly would have done it, but could not.

The emperor, for his own part, is good and honest; but the popish bishops and cardinals are undoubted knaves. And forasmuch as the emperor now refuses to bathe his hands in innocent blood, the frantic princes bestir themselves, and scorn and condemn the good emperor in the highest degree. The pope also for anger is ready to burst in pieces, because the diet should be dissolved without shedding of blood; therefore he sends the sword to the duke of Bavaria, intending to take the crown from the emperor's head, and set it upon the head of Bavaria; but he shall not accomplish it. In this manner ordered God the business, that kings, princes, yea, and the pope himself, fell from the emperor, and we joined him, which was a great wonder of God's providence, in that he whom the devil intended to use against us, God takes, and uses for us. O wonder above all wonders!