

Church History.

(From the Advent Herald, 1846.)

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION.

ABRIDGED FROM D'AUBIGNE.

(Continued.)

The legate of Rome had designed to stifle the Reformation, by having the question examined and decided against, by a committee in secret conclave. The Protestants believed they had nothing to fear from a public proclamation of their faith. The emperor consented to a public sitting. The Protestants appeared with the Confession and Apology for their faith. Chancellor Bruck arose and said:

"It is pretended that new doctrines not based on Scripture, that heresies and schisms are spread among the people by us. Considering that such accusations compromise not only our good name, but also the safety of our souls, we beg his majesty would have the goodness to hear what are the doctrines we profess."

The Papists objected to the reading, and contended that the Protestants should be satisfied with putting it in writing, and handing it to the emperor. The Protestants replied, "Our honor is at stake; our souls are endangered. We are accused publicly; publicly we ought to answer." Their request was complied with; but it was to be less public, and in the Palatine palace, on the 25th of June.

The day arrived. Only about two hundred of the principal men of the empire could gain admittance; but an immense multitude was assembled outside. Bayar read the Confession in German, in a voice so slow, clear, and distinct, that not a syllable was lost by the crowd outside. He began, says D'Aubigne:—

"Most serene, most mighty, and invincible emperor and most gracious lord, we who appear in your presence, declare ourselves ready to confer amicably with you on the fittest means of restoring one sole, true, and same faith, since it is for one sole and same Christ that we fight. And in case that these religious dissensions cannot be settled amicably, we then offer to your majesty to explain our cause in a general, free and christian council."

This prologue being ended, Bayar confessed the Holy Trinity, conformably with the Nicene Council, original and hereditary sin, "which bringeth eternal death to all who are not regenerated," and the incarnation of the Son, "very God and very man."

"We teach, moreover," continued he, "that we cannot be justified before God by our own strength, our merits, and our works; but that we are justified by Christ through grace, through the means of faith, when we believe that our sins are forgiven in virtue of Christ, who by his death has made satisfaction for our sins: this faith is the righteousness which God imputes to the sinner."

"But we teach, at the same time, that this faith ought to bear good fruits, and that we must do all the good works commanded by God, for the love of God, and not by their means to gain the grace of God."

The Protestants next declared their faith in the Christian Church, "which is," said they "the assembly of all true believers and all the saints," in the midst of whom there are, nevertheless, in this life, many false Christians, hypocrites, even, and manifest sinners; and they added, "that it was sufficient for the real unity of the Church that they were agreed on the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments, without the rites and ceremonies instituted by men being everywhere the same." They proclaimed the necessity of baptism, and declared "that the body and blood of Christ are really present and administered in the Lord's Supper to those who partake of it."

The Chancellor then successively confessed the faith of the Evangelical Christians, touching confession, penance, the nature of the sacraments, the government of the Church, ecclesiastical ordinances, political government, and the last judgment. "As regards Free-will," continued he, "we confess that man's will has a certain liberty of accomplishing civil justice, and of loving the things that reason comprehends; that man can do the good that it is within the sphere of nature—plough his fields, eat, drink, have a friend, put on a coat, build a house, take a wife, feed cattle, exercise a calling; as also he can, of his own movement, do evil, kneel before an idol, and commit murder. But

we maintain that without the Holy Ghost he cannot do what is righteous in the sight of God."

Then, returning to the grand doctrine of the Reformation, and recalling to mind that the doctors of the Pope "have never ceased impelling the faithful to puerile and useless words, as the custom of chaplets, invocation of saints, monastic vows, processions, fasts, feast-days, brotherhoods," the Protestants added, that as for themselves, while urging the practice of truly Christian works, of which little had been said before their time, "they taught that man is justified by faith alone; not by that faith which is a simple knowledge of the history, and which wicked men and even devils possess, but by a faith which believes not only the history, but also the effect of the history; which believes that through Christ we obtain grace; which sees that in Christ we have a merciful Father; which know this God; which calls upon him; in a word, which is not without God, as the heathen are."

"Such," said Bayar, "is a summary of the doctrine professed in our churches, by which it may be seen that this doctrine is by no means opposed to Scripture, to the universal Church, nor even to the Romish Church, such as the doctors describe it to us; and since it is so, to reject us as heretics is an offence against unity and charity."

Here terminated the first part of the Confession, the aim of which was to explain the Evangelical doctrine. The Chancellor read with so distinct a voice, that the crowd which was unable to enter the hall, and which filled the court and all the approaches of the episcopal palace, did not lose a word. This reading produced the most marvellous effect on the princes who thronged the chapel. Jonas watched every change in their countenances, and there beheld interest, astonishment, and even approbation depicted by turns. "The adversaries imagine they have done a wonderful thing, by forbidding the preaching of the Gospel," wrote Luther to the Elector; "and they do not see, poor creatures! that by the reading of the Confession in the presence of the diet, there has been more preaching than in the sermons of ten preachers. Exquisite subtlety! admirable expedient! Master Aricola and the other ministers are reduced to silence; but in their place appear the Elector of Saxony, and the other princes and lords, who preach before his imperial majesty, and the members of the whole Empire, freely, to their beard, and before their noses. Yes, Christ is in the diet, and he does not keep silence: the word of God cannot be bound. They forbid it in the pulpit, and are forced to hear it in the palace; poor ministers cannot announce it, and great princes proclaim it; the servants are forbidden to listen to it, and their masters are compelled to hear it; they will have nothing to do with it during the whole course of the diet, and they are forced to submit to hear more in one day than is heard ordinarily in a whole year. . . . When all else is silent, the very stones cry out, as says our Lord Jesus Christ."

That part of the Confession destined to point out errors and abuses still remained. Bayar continued: he explained and demonstrated the doctrine of the two kinds; he attacked the compulsory celibacy of priests, maintained that the Lord's Supper had been changed into a regular fair, in which it was merely a question of buying and selling, and that it had been re-established in its primitive purity for the Reformation, and was celebrated in the Evangelical churches with entirely new devotion and gravity. He declared that the Sacrament was administered to no one who had not first made confession of his faults, and he quoted this expression of Chrysostom: "Confess thyself to God the Lord, thy real Judge; tell thy sin, not with the tongue, but in thy conscience and in thy heart."

Bayar next came to the precepts on the distinction of meats and other Roman usages. "Celebrate such a festival," said he; "repeat such a prayer, or keep such a fast; be dressed in such a manner, and so many other ordinances of men—this is what is now styled christian life; while the good works prescribed by God, as those of a father of a family who toils to support his wife, his sons, and his daughters—of a member who brings children into the world, and takes care of them—of a prince or a magistrate who governs his subjects, are looked upon as secular things, and of an important nature." As for monastic vows in particular, he represented that, as the Pope gives a dispensation from them, those vows ought therefore to be abolished.

The last article of the Confession treated of the authority of the bishops; powerful princes crowned with the episcopal mitre were there; the Archbishops of Mentz, Cologne, Salzburg, and Bremen; the Bishops of Bamberg, Wurzburg, Eichstadt, Worms, Spire, Strasburg, Augsburg, Constance, Coire, Passau, Liege, Trent, Brixen, and of Lebus and Ratxburg, fixed their eyes on the humble confessor. He fearlessly continued, and energetically protesting against that confusion of Church and State which had characterized the Middle Ages, he called for the distinction and independence of the two societies."

"Many," said he, "have unskillfully confounded the episcopal and the temporal power; and from this confusion have resulted great wars, revolts, and seditions. It is for this reason, and to reassure men's consciences, that we find ourselves constrained to establish the difference which exists between the power of the Church and the power of the sword."

"We therefore teach that the power of the keys or of the bishops is, conformably with the Word of the Lord, a commandment emanating from God, to preach the Gospel, to remit or retain sins, and to administer the Sacraments. This power has reference only to eternal goods, is exercised only by the minister of the Word, and does not trouble itself with political administration. The political administration, on the other hand, is busied with everything else but the Gospel. The magistrate protects, not souls, but bodies and temporal possessions. He defends them against all attacks from without, and, by making use of the sword and of punishment, compels men to observe civil justice and peace."

"For this reason we must take particular care not to mingle the power of the Church with the power of the State. The power of the Church ought never to invade an office that is foreign to it; for Christ himself said: 'My kingdom is not of this world.' And again: 'Who made me a judge over you?' St. Paul said to the Philippians: 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' And to the Corinthians: 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God.'"

"It is thus that we distinguish the two governments and the two powers, and that we honor both as the most excellent gifts that God has given here on earth."

"The duty of the bishops is therefore to preach the Gospel, to forgive sins, to exclude from the Christian Church all who rebel against the Lord, but without human power, and solely by the Word of God. If the bishops act thus, the churches ought to be obedient to them according to this declaration of Christ: 'Whoever heareth you, heareth me.'"

"But if the bishops teach anything that is contrary to the Gospel, then the churches have an order from God which forbids them to obey (Matt. 7:15; Gal. 1:8; 2 Cor. 13:8, 10). And St. Augustin himself, in his letter against Pertilian, writes: 'We must not obey Catholic bishops, if they go astray, and teach anything contrary to the canonical Scriptures of God.'"

After some remarks on the ordinances and traditions of the Church, Bayar came to the epilogue of the Confession.

"It is not from hatred that we have spoken," added he, "nor to insult any one; but we have explained the doctrines that we maintain to be essential, in order that it may be understood that we admit of neither dogma nor ceremony which is contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and to the universal Church."

Bayar then ceased to read. He had spoken for two hours: the silence and serious attention of the assembly were not once disturbed.

The Confession of Augsburg will ever remain one of the masterpieces of the human mind, enlightened by the Spirit of God.

The language that had been adopted, while it was perfectly natural, was the result of a profound study of character. These princes, these warriors, these politicians, who were sitting in the Palatine Palace, entirely ignorant as they were of divinity, easily understood the Protestant doctrine; for it was not explained to them in the style of the schools, but in that of every-day life, and with simplicity and clearness that rendered all misunderstanding impossible.

At the same time the power of argumentation was so much more remarkable, as it was the more concealed. At one time Melancthon (for