GERMANY AFTER THE WARS OF RELIGION

Prayer
Scripture:  Jeremiah 4:18-28
Hymn:  559 "Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow"

The Thirty Years' War left Germany impoverished, demoralized, and terribly divided. It would be more accurate to speak of "the Germanies." There was a loose federation within the forms of the Holy Roman Empire. The two most significant kingdoms were Austria-Hungary, the traditional seat of the emperor, and Brandenburg-Prussia, a rising power that among the Germanies had been almost the only part of Germany to gain territory and power as a result of the long wars. Besides these two, the Germanies consisted of the realms of nine Electoral princes, about one hundred spiritual and lay principalities, about a hundred duchies, some fifty free cities, about fifty minor church territories, and some two to three thousand virtually autonomous petty nobles and their estates. In a time when absolutism dominated European thinking and France, England, and Spain had developed centralized monarchies, the host of German rulers sought to be absolute in their own little realms. Their selfish ambitions and tyranny added to the suffering of the German people.

The long wars had left the whole of Germany in economic ruin. The rival armies had marched back and forth across Germany, plundering and pillaging. The population of Germany had fallen from some sixteen millions to less than six millions. Besides those killed in battle there were those murdered by lawless raiders and those who died of starvation and disease. Many homes were destroyed. Much of the cultivated land lay waste. The cattle were killed or stolen. Commerce and manufacturing had been largely destroyed. As Spain, Portugal, England, France and Holland colonized the New World, and sought wealth in oceanic trade routes, Germany had been reduced to a landlocked back-country. Towns and cities that had been wealthy in the sixteenth century (Augsburg and Nurnberg) decayed and the Hanseatic League lost its importance in Baltic trade. The petty political subdivisions of Germany with their tolls and tariffs, with rigid guilds and medieval land tenure fell farther and farther behind the more progressive sections of Europe held by the Catholics or the Reformed. The Lutheran world was characterized by economic backwardness. The despotic German rulers used gang press methods to draft mercenary soldiers to be sent abroad to fight to enhance the prestige of their tyrant. Thirty thousand "Hessians" were sent to fight in America. Only about half of them returned. For several years mercenaries were Germany's chief export.

The long wars brutalized both manners and morals. Cultural and moral degradation accompanied the economic ruin and political decay. Lawlessness prevailed for some time after the wars. Bands of thieves and raiders were only slowly repressed. Thousands of women were debauched. Wild children roamed in packs. Education almost disappeared. The intellectual life stagnated. Also Germany experienced a great decline in religion. Little evidence of the spiritual life survived such times.

PARTISAN ORTHODOXIES

One aspect of religion that survived the wars was the fiercely
fanatical partisan orthodoxies of Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed. The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 granted recognition to the three principal religions but there was no tolerance for any of the little new reform movements that continually appeared. The Peace of Augsburg of 1555 had granted recognition to Catholics and Lutherans. There was no tolerance for either the Reformed or the Anabaptists. The Peace of Westphalia granted recognition to the Reformed. The territorial boundaries established by the peace treaty fixed the boundaries of Catholic and Protestant territories as they were to remain with only rather minor changes down to the twentieth century. The terms were not entirely pleasing to Catholics, Lutherans or Reformed, but all were tired and exhausted by the long wars. The pope condemned the settlement but it proved a viable compromise. The Peace of Westphalia did away with the Edict of Restitution of 1629 in which the Catholics in a victorious moment had declared that all lands taken from the Catholics by the Protestants since 1552 must be restored. The Peace of Westphalia took 1624 as the date for drawing territorial lines. This date was more favorable to the Protestants.

Acceptance of the right of the Reformed to exist was not easy for Lutherans to accept. The death of Luther and the Peace of Augsburg had been followed by the bitter Philippist controversy among Lutherans in which Melanchthon and his followers were accused of being crypto-Calvinists. The motto of scholastic Lutheranism was "Rather be a papist than a Calvinist." The strict Lutherans produced and rallied around the Formula of Concord of 1577 and the Book of Concord of 1580. Most of Protestant Germany followed the two Saxonies in accepting the anathemas of the Concord against the Melanchthonians. Only the Palatinate was Melanchthonian territory. The German universities were divided in loyalty. Wittenberg, Leipzig and Jena sided with the extreme Lutherans. Helmstedt, in Brunswick, Heidelberg in the Palatinate, and Marburg in Hesse were more tolerant and irenic. The controversy over pure Lutheran doctrine before the Wars of Religion was exceedingly bitter. In spite of the bitter opposition from the Lutherans and Catholics Calvinism or the Reformed Movement continued to grow in Germany. When the Thirty Years' War came the Lutherans were willing to see the Catholics crush the Palatinate and replace it with Bavaria as an Electorate. During the wars the Lutherans were willing to see the Catholics destroy Reformed Protestantism in Bohemia. When Gustavus Adolphus came from Sweden to rescue the Protestants he was unable to bring peace between Lutherans and the Reformed. At the end of the war Saxony led the attempt to deny any legal rights to the Reformed. The Great Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick William, forced Saxony to yield and to grant the Reformed recognition in the Peace of Westphalia. Bitterness and intolerance continued among the Lutherans and the Great Elector forbade any of his subjects to study at Wittenberg which he considered the school of intolerance. The Great Elector welcomed the Huguenot refugees fleeing from the prosecution of Louis XIV in France and who had been banned by Lutheran Württemberg. After the peace Germans in the Germanies could find a church that held their beliefs as long as they held to one of the three recognized religions. In the period after the Thirty Years' War the old principle, "cuius regio eius religio", still prevailed. There would be no tolerance for mystics, spiritualists, chiliasts and other new groups until English Deism
and French Naturalism spread over Germany resulting in rulers who had no deep personal religious convictions.

RIGID SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The Thirty Years' War heightened and hardened the lines between social classes in Germany until it was the most rigidly segregated society in all Europe. The petty rulers and their courts in Germany slavishly imitated the court of Louis XIV of France, the great king. The Germans adopted the moral code, the customs and even the language of the French. French Naturalism spread. Latin and religion were abandoned in imitation of the French. French dress and manners were imitated and French recreations became popular—fencing, riding, dancing, shooting. The Germans took great pride in periods of time spent in the French court. The Germans became the laughing stock of Europe. They were considered ignorant boors and sots for whom life was a round of gambling, card playing, hunting, drinking, and womanizing. The German aristocracy played almost no role in the cultural life of the times. The nobles considered it beneath their dignity to seek an education. It was bad form to be virtuous.

Before the war there had been in Germany a rising prosperous merchant class. The war destroyed German trade and industry and left all power in the hands of the nobility. Even church records reflected the unbridgeable caste barriers: the nobility were recorded as "der gnadige Herr" and "die gnadige Frau;" the names of upper middle class officials and professional men were recorded as "Herr" and "Frau;" artisans, farmers and the rest had no title.

THE ETHICS OF THE PETTY GERMAN DESPOTS

The petty German rulers considered themselves absolute in their realm. Each had his own standing army and developed his own bureaucracy. The Lutheran preachers in these realms were expected to teach unquestioning submission to authority. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers gave way to the doctrine of the God-given orders of society. Johann Gerhard, one of the patriarchs of Lutheran scholasticism, found no fault with his Elector who was drunk daily. Lutheran court preachers were expected to give servile adulation. Calov, one of these court preachers, compared his Elector to Josiah and Constantine. Jablonski, the Prussian court preacher declared that God is the heavenly king and the king is a mortal God; both Gods and both kings were to be feared and honored. The jurist Thomasius of the law faculty of Halle that took the lead in training court ministers in the eighteenth century, recommended that two Brunswick court preachers be imprisoned and banished for criticising their ruler's plans for his daughter to become a Catholic as part of a marriage agreement. The law faculty at Halle declared that princes are responsible only to God. The grossest of sins of princes and their mistresses could not be criticised or judged by the preachers. Any preacher who tried to administer church discipline on his prince should be removed from office for disloyalty and disobedience. The mistresses of princes were beyond reproach because they shared in the glories of their noble lovers.
THE PRINCE BISHOPS

The Lutheran state church system grew out of the emergency system of Luther in the early years of the Reformation. Luther had made the civil ruler responsible for the care of the church in his territory. The rulers after the Wars of Religion considered themselves as replacing and enjoying all the rights of the bishops of the Catholic church. The theologians Calov and Quenstedt taught the purely spiritual character of the church and that all practical decisions were to be made by the civil ruler. The German princes appointed superintendents and consistories through whom the prince ruled the church.

One of the prince bishops in the first half of the eighteenth century was Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia. With all his pre-occupation with military affairs he took his episcopal functions seriously. He was rough, vulgar, and anti-intellectual. He prescribed the style of preaching to be followed by his preachers. He fined those who preached over one hour. He forbade the use of candles, priestly robes, Latin hymns and the sign of the cross. He decreed that any preacher who objected and tried to make the forbidden things a matter of conscience was to be dismissed from his parish. Friedrich Wilhelm I was a Reformed but his people were Lutheran. He ordered that there would be no more discussion of doctrinal differences. He ordered all Lutheran preachers to sign an agreement to recognize the Reformed. When Paul Gerhardt, the greatest of the Lutheran hymnists and a very popular preacher in Berlin, rallied the Lutheran clergy of Berlin around his sick bed and urged them to resist the ruler's order, he was removed from his office.

THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH AND THE CLERGY

The orthodox theologians in Lutheran Germany held a form of caesaropapism—the territorial despot was Lutheran pope. The church was an affair of the state and the state appointed clergy. The people had no say. The idea that the congregation could call or dismiss the preacher, or veto any directive was considered crypto-Calvinism. Lutheran congregations were passive and had almost no rights. Württemberg was an exception. There the church was viewed as resting on voluntary adherence and a voluntary covenant. The Landtag was a representative assembly that maintained its rights against the duke.

The Lutheran clergy came mostly from the lower classes. As French naturalism spread most courtiers despised the clergy. In the universities the one faculty open to the sons of the poor was that of theology. Most of the clergy had at least two years of university training. Often village pastors had to supplement their income by tutoring, serving as grooms, farming, keeping bees, taking in boarders. Sometimes after serving for a time as a tutor he could become a pastor by marrying his predecessor's widow.

City pastors ranked higher. Court preachers were at the top but a change in ruler could mean great changes in religion.

Lutherans tended to hold university professors in high honor.
but there was a growing contempt among the ruling class for the disputes of theologians.

The Lutheran ministers had security as long as they pleased their ruler but they had little spiritual freedom. The temptation was to politic for promotions by the state. Church attendance declined as the clergy had a growing reputation for spending more time in the drinking and gaming houses than in pastoral work. The minister kept the registry of vital statistics and the recruiting office for the military, he served as superintendent of the schools, he supervised poor relief, from his pulpit he made the announcements handed down by his superiors--announcements about taxes, public health, and road work. He was often a secret agent for the police. In the eyes of the people the clergy were notoriously lacking in spirituality.

FREDERICK THE GREAT

Brandenburg-Prussia was the strongest Lutheran state. Under Frederick II (Frederick the Great) the church was a cog in the bureaucracy of the state. This pattern was followed in most of the Germanies. Under Frederick William I, Thomasius and Boehmer had argued that the civil sovereign had absolute power over religion. The church had no rights. The clergy were responsible to the sovereign and not to the church. This system reached its highest expression under Frederick II. He considered all religions equally bogus and granted equal toleration to all. He gave asylum to Mennonites, Huguenots, Schwackfelders, and Eastern Orthodox. He even gave great liberty to Catholics and built schools for the children of Catholic soldiers. He considered importing Moslems and building a mosque for them. He declared all religions equally good and that every one must be saved after his own fashion. He condemned false religious zeal and punished controversial preachers. When the pope dissolved the Jesuit Order, Frederick II welcomed Jesuits to Prussia. He considered that religion was necessary for the masses and that Skepticism was for the elite only. He declared that no persecution would be tolerated. Preachers had to allow tolerance. Anti-Christian writings were forbidden. He announced that the clergy could do as they pleased and that everyone was free to use any hymn book he wished and sing any nonsense that he pleased.

FREDERICK WILLIAM II

The jurists codified the contemptuous freedom allowed by Fredrich the Great and it was published as the Landrecht by his nephew and successor, Frederick William II in 1794. Churches were allowed some freedom in calling preachers and in liturgy. But all officers and all changes had to be approved by the government. Buying and selling church property and building new buildings had to be approved by the government. Church discipline could not touch person or property, or honor of the subject. No one could be excluded for deviating from the confession of faith. The church was state supported.

Frederick William II was notoriously immoral but he became concerned at the spread of rationalism and deism. He appointed
a worthless court favorite, Wöllner, as premier to enforce orthodoxy. All Biblical criticism such as was developing in the universities was declared heretical. Deism, natural religion and Socinianism were condemned and anyone found teaching them was to be dismissed. Censorship of the press was instituted. All ecclesiastical and academic appointments were carefully screened. A commission was established to draw up lists of suspected clergy and professors. When the commission arrived at the University of Halle the students rioted and drove the commission out of town. Thomasius refused to continue to lecture in the academic gown and lectured in German instead of in Latin. Halle adopted a new utilitarian curriculum of mathematics, natural sciences, modern languages, geography and history, giving a lesser place to Latin and theology. Göttingen turned from theology to humanistic literary studies.

By the end of the eighteenth century the German universities more and more held religion and theology in disdain. As French Naturalism and English Deism spread in Germany religion came to be regarded as an anachronism and a mark of stupidity and backwardness. There was developing in Germany what would be called "The Enlightenment" that with a sense of superiority rejected theology for philosophy.