

With the Same Heart

An overview of the Book of Concord

Session 7 - The Treatise [Against]
the Power and Primacy of the Pope



Warm up question

What do you know about the papacy?



Appendix

The Treatise on (or “Against”) the Power and Primacy of the Pope is often thought of as an appendix to Luther’s Smalcald Articles. It was written in the same year as the Smalcald Articles, just a few months later. While it was written by Philip Melanchthon instead of Luther, it was still written at the behest of the rulers gathering to be a part of the Schmalkaldic League, and discusses issues central to the Lutheran reformation and its disagreements with Rome.

The Treatise was also placed just behind the Smalcald Articles in the publication of the Book of Concord in 1580.

The Treatise was written because the members of the Schmalkaldic league did not feel that there was adequate clarity around the feelings of Lutherans about the papacy since it was treated only briefly in the Apology (Defense) of the Augsburg Confession.

• *Question:*

- *Why do you think the Reformers felt it was important to clarify beliefs about the Pope and the papacy?*



Major Points of the Treatise

Not a long document in comparison to some of the other Lutheran confessional writings, the Treatise would still take about an hour to read out loud. The basic points of the Treatise are:

- The Pope is not “by divine right” superior to all other church leaders (e.g. bishops within the Roman Catholic system, other Christian leaders). This is the “primacy” mentioned in the title.
- The Pope (and by extension, his bishops) do not hold civil authority by divine right.
- A strong disagreement with the Papal Bull of 1382 named “Unam Sanctum” in which a claim is made that it “is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”

- *Question:*
- *What do you think it means to claim something as a “divine right”?*



Style

Unlike the Smalcald Articles (and much of Luther's writing), the Treatise at least holds out ostensible hope for papal repentance. It can be argued that this hope is a rhetorical device, but Melanchthon's writing holds out at least the possibility at various points that the papacy will see the error of their ways and recant.

Also unlike Luther, who was more likely to write in German, Melanchthon writes the Treatise originally in Latin - giving his writing a more academic and proper feel. That said, Melanchthon still accuses the papacy of being "a pernicious evil" to the Church at large and accuses the office of the papacy of bearing the Scriptural marks of the Antichrist.

- *Question:*
- *Do you think Melanchthon thought the Pope would recant?*



Concerning Papal Primacy

“Such superiority is impossible. For it is impossible for one bishop to be the overseer of the churches of the whole world, or for churches situated in the most distant lands to seek ordination [for all their ministers] from one. For it is manifest that the kingdom of Christ is scattered throughout the whole world; and to-day there are many churches in the East which do not seek ordination or confirmation from the Roman bishop [which have ministers ordained neither by the Pope nor his bishops]. Therefore, since such superiority [which the Pope, contrary to all Scripture, arrogates to himself] is impossible, and the churches in the greater part of the world have not acknowledged [nor made use of] it, it is sufficiently apparent that it was not instituted [by Christ, and does not spring from divine law].”

- *Question:*
- *What is the argument made against Papal primacy here?*



Concerning Worldly Power

The second article is still clearer, that Christ gave to the apostles only spiritual power, i.e., the command to teach the Gospel, to announce the forgiveness of sins, to administer the Sacraments, to excommunicate the godless without bodily force [by the Word], and that He did not give the power of the sword, or the right to establish, occupy or confer kingdoms of the world [to set up or depose kings]...Now, it is manifest that Christ was not sent to bear the sword or possess a worldly kingdom [rule in a worldly fashion], as He Himself says, John 18:36: My kingdom is not of this world. And Paul says, 2 Cor. 1:24: Not for that we have dominion over your faith; and 2 Cor. 10:4: The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, etc.

“Accordingly, that Christ in His passion is crowned with thorns and led forth to be derided in royal purple, this signified that in the future, after His spiritual kingdom was despised, i.e., the Gospel was suppressed, another kingdom of a worldly kind would be set up [in its place] with the pretext of ecclesiastical power. Therefore the Constitution of Boniface VIII ..., and similar opinions which contend that the Pope is by divine right the ruler of the kingdoms of the world, are [utterly] false and godless. From this persuasion horrible darkness has been brought into the Church, ... the ministry of the Gospel was neglected, the knowledge of faith and the spiritual kingdom became extinct, Christian righteousness was supposed to be that external government which the Pope had established.”

- *Question:*
- *What is the argument here against worldly power for the Pope?*



A Word to the Bishops

The Treatise ends with a call to the bishops under the Pope. Essentially Melanchthon appeals to them to make right what has been wrong, seemingly appealing for them to overrule the Pope by calling a Council (which, in theory, could change all of these things). Melanchthon's call is very clearly an "either or". Either the bishops address the issues brought out in the Treatise, or they are to be condemned as being implicit in the work of the antichrist.

- *Question:*
- *Who would you appeal to if you wanted to make a big change in Christianity today?*



Next Time - The Catechisms

We will be looking at the Catechisms - large and small - written by Martin Luther next week.

