The Catholic "German Nation": Michael Anisius (1599)

Abstract

Michael Anisius was a Franciscan monk. In his "seven Catholic sermons" from the late sixteenth century, Anisius described the expansion of the Ottoman Empire as a threat to Christendom and the "German nation." He viewed the victorious advance of the Ottoman Empire as a divine punishment for the Reformation and the loss of Christian unity in Germany.

Source

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[The German nation in great danger.]

To begin, all of our Christian provinces and kingdoms, our Germania, our German nation are greatly threatened. The German nation, I say, that most beautiful, most populous, most expansive, yes, the empress and queen of all empires, the noblest of all dominions, in bygone days the most valiant of them all, is now the most splintered, fractured, ruptured, weakened, and cowed, and the closest to the Turkish yoke. This enemy threatens the German nation more than anyone, and he thanks his bride most of all, not unknowingly. He brought Germany under his power; the other kingdoms hardly stay until breakfast. What a strong key to the German Empire the tyrant now has in the fortress of Raab [Győr]! O Raab, Raab, how desolate you are!

Cespitat, actenui pendet Germania filo,
Quam seruare, Deus tu nisi, nemo potest,
Germany is hanging by a frayed thread,
Without God's help, its imminent end we dread.

But what, O Germania, has wrestled you to the ground such? What put you in such danger? What paved the way for the Mohammedan tyrants, what gave them an inroad for invasion? I want to say openly: these three things are to blame: your apostasy, your disobedience, your disunity both in terms of religion as well as the empire. You have abandoned the ancient religion, which God originally gave to you in the birth and incarnation of Jesus Christ, and have disobeyed him, have become fractured in new sects and false doctrines. And if that were not the case, the following has come to pass, as well: The Roman Empire which was entrusted to you, which was your great honor and accolade—you have been unfaithful, you do not honor it, but are disobedient and obstreperous: you wield and govern with the imperial crown and scepter without peace or unity. You are working against yourself: scattered, torn, depressed, confused, and wrecked on the spiritual and political levels alike. I ask you my dear audience, to lend me your ears, for I want to examine this matter and explain it in greater depth.

Before the birth of Christ, our Lord, there were two churches in the world. One was the Hebrew people, the other the heathen; one of the Devil, the other of the Lord God; one preordained, the other predestined. Those who were not believers of the former were richly compensated from the other. Christ was the cornerstone that fused these two walls and brought these peoples together and made them one. From these two peoples, he made one Christendom. In the early days of this Christendom, the Apostles and martyrs lived. [There were then] four main churches: in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Alexandria, and in Rome. To which the church in Constantinople was the

last which could be counted (after the Roman Emperor converted to Christianity and commended the Imperial throne to it). And among these churches, the Roman one, by Divine Providence, with the silent consent of all peoples, rose to and maintained the preeminent and paramount position: and while the others slowly weakened and even disappeared over time, the Roman church remained as a mother, as the central vine, as the mistress of the Christian religion and the beatifying faith. The faith and religion of this church was proclaimed around the world, and so many kingdoms and people became acquainted with it, and chose to convert steadfastly and unanimously, that this church was considered universal. Non enim (inquit D. Hieronymus) altera Romanæ Vrbis Ecclesia, altera totius existimāda est Ecclesia. For no one should think (as St. Jerome says) or hold that the Roman church is other than that which has spread around the entire world.

It was this Roman church that converted our Germany along with all the other kingdoms of the Occident. Saint Peter, the Prince of the Apostles and first Bishop of Rome, sent Saints Maternus, Eucharius, Valerius, and Crecentius from Rome along the currents of the Rhine to Mainz, Cologne, and Trier to preach the Gospel and sow the seeds of the Christian faith with its indescribable fruits. Pope Cuno send St. Killian to Germany around the year 700 AD; it was his teaching and preaching that revealed Christ to many cities, especially Würzburg. In the year 716, Pope Gregory II send Saints Boniface, Burchard, and Willibald to the Germans, through whom the name of Christ spread and grew in many places, particularly in this region. Pope Leo III, at Emperor Charlemagne's request, sent loyal bishops and teachers to the Saxons and the Swiss, who in turn incorporated these peoples into God's church. Then all of Bavaria was illuminated by the light of the Roman Catholic faith by Saints Rupert and Vergilius. Now consider and ponder in your hearts how great our German fatherland is thus indebted to the Roman church on this account. If we Germans do not acknowledge this, it suggests that we think little of this awareness of Jesus Christ, our very Savior and Redeemer, that it means little to us, [indeed,] that it means as little to us as if we had never received it.

But this is not the end: for in addition to and aside from the indescribable blessing of the beatifying Christian faith, other beneficial deeds followed in the wake and flowed out of this. If you read the chronicles you will find that Germany was overly rough, unrefined, and wild before its conversion. It had no cities, no written language, no alphabet. Indeed, it appeared resistant to any honorable, civilized, amiable discipline. However, after it had taken on the Christian faith, it gradually became quite refined, developing noble habits and flourishing as no province had ever done.

This majesty, the prowess of the empire, what was it, how was it, that Germany came to receive it? To whom does it owe this? This majesty, I say, the empire, on whose account the German name has become famous and renowned and the envy of all other nations—where did this prowess come from? Is it not derived from the Roman church? First of all, from Pope Leo III, who chose Charlemagne to be emperor and crowned him? And thereafter even more so by Gregory V under Emperor Otto of Saxony[1], for the seven electors had decreed this so that the Roman Empire should be the strengthened and steadied among the Germans, who were at that time a loyal, valiant, devout people, most deserving of the Catholic faith, steadfast, and reliable. Yes, truly, it was not in war that Germania captured such a high, honored rank. Can anyone show me two finer, grander treasures than the Christian religion and the suzerainty of the empire? Is there another nation under the sun more committed to protecting and defending the Roman church than Germania? Oh, how blessed Germany was then, to have received and maintained these two honors in steadfastness, obedience, and unity. How intimidating, how invincible would Germany appear to all peoples? The whole of Christendom depended in this former age on the German valor. All of Christendom was indebted to German fortitude. Which victory over their enemies have Christians ever celebrated in which the support of German soldiers played no part? Indeed, which triumph have they not achieved due to the help and steadfastness of the German infantry?

As the old cunning snake, the envious, devilish dragon noticed this and malevolently listened, for he has always been against Christ the Lord, he has frequently tested his luck and succeeded in weakening or dissolving the unified power of the Germans. He could not rest until he had gone through with his plan and ended his work. For he easily observed that if Germany was disordered and in a state of internal turmoil, it would easily cast a cloud over and ruin all of Christendom. Oh, what a miserable affair, we must mourn over this thing with bloody teeth. How abominable were Germany's vices, how pernicious its ungratefulness, that God abandoned it and allowed it by a divine undoing to fall for Satan's ruse, to be so shamefully led astray and deceived? First of all, it has deviated from obedience to the religion that it received and to which it belonged from the beginning; it even rejected this religion as being from the Antichrist. It adopted new, unheard of, and long condemned teachings; it left the unity of faith and splintered into several hundred sects and opinions. Those who it had made it Christian were now considered unworthy of being called Christian. The name of the pope, of the bishop, of the universal Catholic Church, was defiled and laughed at even by small children, ridiculed and mocked, for they name their dogs after the pope. Oh, you foolish Germany, who has beguiled you so that you ignore the truth and allow Christ to evaporate before your very eyes? So that that which you have heard proclaimed from the beginning no longer remains and that you do not hold to tenets that you have be taught, be it through Scripture or from the pulpit? That you are driven by every doctrinal wind, through the cunningness and depravity of mankind to allow yourselves to be cloaked with error? Under whose unfortunate spell are you, oh foolish Germany? Oh, oh, what a splendid comfort, what a strong defense, what a divine treasure you have lost in the religion?

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NOTES

[1] Gregory V crowned Otto III, who is not typically referred to as Duke of Saxony but rather King of Germany—trans.

Source: Michael Anisius, *Siben Catholische Predigen/ Bey gemeinen Processionen/ Kirch vnnd Bittfahrten wider deß Christlichen Namens Erbfeind dem T[ue]rcken/ gehalten zu Bamberg/ im 4. vnnd 95. Jar. Durch Franciscanum*. Munich: Adam Berg, 1599, p. 8–11. Available online at: http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC09658649

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