

Judgments On the "Anabaptists"

On the 7th August, 1536, a diet was held at Homburg, in the dominions of Philip, Landgrave of Hesse Cassel. There were present eight of the nobility, seven delegates of cities, and ten preachers and learned men, when the opinions of several jurists, reformers, and Lutheran divines were laid before them on the question of punishing capitally the so called heresy of anabaptism. The following summary embraces the conclusions of these various parties.

1. The judgment of Melancthon: That the anabaptists may, and ought to be restrained by the sword. That those who have been sent into exile, and do not abide by the conditions, are to be punished by the sword.
2. The judgment of the Luneburgers: That the magistrate ought to punish heresies with the sword; that subjects ought to be compelled to hear the word of God; that heretics are guilty of sedition, and are therefore to be put to death; that they cannot be restrained by words alone; that the magistrate cannot discharge his duty without using the sword.
3. The judgment of the divines of Ulm: That none ought to be punished on account of religion, but that on account of heresy a man may be punished. That those who seduce others, should be beaten with rods.
4. The judgment of the Augsburg divines: That they had not put any of the anabaptists to death, but had branded them on the cheek, and used other severities.
5. The judgment of the divines of Tubingen: That anabaptists who secure others should be punished by the sword; that others should be imprisoned, and, if they do not recant after receiving instruction from the pastors, should be punished.
6. The decision of the chancellor: That there should be a common jail, in which the anabaptists should be imprisoned; that they should be treated severely; that they should be instructed: that if foreigners should return after being banished, they should be put to death. Werner of Waldenstein is of the same opinion.
7. Doctor Isermann: That it is lawful to punish anabaptists with death. That the more simple should, however, first be instructed. That those who are now in confinement at Marburg should be examined, and should be punished as a warning to the rest.
8. Otto Hundius: That the anabaptists ought to be severely punished, as guilty of sedition. That they should first be instructed. That public prayer should be offered to God for their conversion. That if they remain obstinate, their leaders should be punished with exile. That a fixed plan should be adhered to everywhere.
9. M. Adam: That the cause of the increase of anabaptism is, that good laws and constitutions are not maintained, nor those who transgress them punished. That adulteries, revellings, and such like things, are committed with impunity. That by this the anabaptists are strengthened.

10. Hartmann Schleger: that they should be instructed by the ministers: if they remain obstinate, they should be punished with exile. That those who return should be punished [with death.]

11. D. Tilemann: That they are unwilling to be taught by any man, and that if faithfully instructed and convicted of error, they do not yield. That they ought to be punished. That in Prussia men of this kind are condemned to perpetual hard labour. That that ought to be the case here.

12. Fontius: That they should be kindly instructed by the pastors. That if obstinate they should be punished. That a careful distinction, however, should be made, for they are not all alike in sentiment.

13. Dionysius: That earnest and public prayer should be offered to God, that he would avert the impending pest. That errors should be everywhere refuted from the pulpit. That the wicked should be everywhere refuted from the pulpit. That the wicked should be everywhere severely punished, lest scandal should arise. That the obstinate must be beheaded.

14.: That the magistrate may compel his subjects to hear the word of God. That the pastors ought to deal kindly with them, in order that they may feel that neither their blood nor wealth is sought. That they ought either to be banished, or to be confined with hard labour.

15. The pastor of Allendorf: That they are not to be tolerated, because they seek the destruction of Christianity; and that more eagerly than do the Turks. That they ought to be banished, and their leaders punished with death.

16. The pastor of Milsungen: That public prayer should be made to God, that the lives of all of them may be changed for the better. That all expedients must be tried, up to death by the sword. That there ought to be, however, a distinction in the punishments.

17. The delegates of the cities: That the states were prepared to carry out whatever was determined, while that pestilence might yet be averted. That they wished the laws about that matter should be amended.

18. The vicars of the Prince conclude: That the laws concerning this matter ought to be amended. For this purpose the chancellor, Dr. Walther, Fontius, M. Adam, R. Schenk, Sigismund von Bainauburg, Cassel, and Marburg are deputed. That public prayer ought to be offered, and the wicked persons severely punished.

19. The summary of the law that was passed: That the ministers ought before every sermon to exhort the people to pray for the anabaptists. That wicked persons, adulterers, drunkards, gamblers, and such like, should be severely punished, that there may be no scandal. That perjurers should be noted, brought to trial, and punished. That those that strive who can drink the most, ought to be punished according to former custom. That the hosts should be fined ten florins, & c. What follows is simply designed for the removal of abuses which seemed to give the anabaptists a pretext for schism.

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