

Steel 91

Chapter 91: Council of Constance I

Nearly a month had passed since Ludolf made his public denunciation of the Church, and by then, thousands of copies of his manifesto had spread across the German-speaking regions, priests, bishops, and noblemen alike flocked to his cause sharing their support for his claims. What started as a localized Heresy as it was deemed by the church quickly consumed the German world and caught on like wildfire. The Catholic Church was in a crisis; both the Papacy in Avignon and the Vatican publically declared Ludolf's Reformation as an extension of the Berengar Heresy, which the Vatican had long since been trying to combat the growing influence.

Having the support of Berengar the Accursed as the Church referred to him actually helped Ludolf's cause considering many of the German noblemen privately sympathized with his plight. However, now that a properly ordained priest had publically endorsed his ideas which had already begun to spread around Austria, they quickly became openly accepted by many seeking to end the Church's influence over secular affairs.

It did not take long for the Church to convene a council over this issue, and several of the other issues which plagued the Catholic church at the moment, such as the reconciliation of the Papacy and the affairs of the Teutonic Order now that they had thoroughly provoked the Orthodox church with their Crusade of the Rus.

A group of Cardinals, Bishops, and two men, both declaring themselves the one true Pope sat in a chapel located within the Bisophric of Constance, a region within the Holy Roman Empire, and what would be considered part of the Kingdom of Germany. The large group of men was currently in a heated debate, firstly over the issue of the Berengar Heresy, which was now spreading rapidly across the German world, if something were not done soon, then even if they successfully managed to route out and destroy Berengar the Accursed and his regency, they would still not be able to squash this Heresy thoroughly.

Pope Simeon II, who was the officially recognized Pope of the Vatican, was in an argument with his counterpart from Avignon, who was known by the name of Pope Avilius III. Simeon was the first to speak up about the Berengar

Heresy, which was beginning to become a serious issue for everyone in the room.

"If we do not put an end to this heresy while it is still within its infancy, it might fracture the Church as a whole! Clearly, we must get not only the crusading orders, but the pious noblemen from every Christian kingdom to march into the regions most affected by this blasphemy, and put every one of these heretics to the sword!"

Avilius, on the other hand, could not help but scoff at this notion; it was utterly ludicrous to think that they could get the entirety of Christendom to invade Germany; the German lords would not simply allow an army of foreigners into their lands to butcher their people. If anything, it would unify the German states and prevent the upcoming civil war, which the Church desperately wanted to happen to take advantage of the Chaos and gain more power and influence. As such, the other so-called Pope in the room could not refrain from refuting the first one.

"Tell me, Simeon, how do you plan to tell differentiate the believers from the heretics?"

Simeon did not hesitate to offer his opinion and boldly declared for the whole room to hear.

"God will know!"

The implication being that they would kill everyone in the affected areas and leave it up to God to judge their souls. After all, it would not be the first time the Church had done something like this. Several of the high-ranking members of the ecclesiarchy nodded their heads in approval of this suggestion. In contrast, many others looked in horror at the suggestion of doing such a thing.

Ultimately the voice of reason came down to a particularly charismatic Cardinal who suggested to all of them a more diplomatic approach.

"Have either of you actually tried reasoning with the man we call Berengar the Accursed? Clearly, the man is an educated individual with a vast knowledge of scripture. Seeing as how before Ludolf even made his accusations against

us, Berengar had accurately translated the bible into German and began distributing it, along with his own interpretations in a series of pamphlets."

Both Simeon and Avilius shook their heads; in fact, if anything, Simeon was guilty of constantly escalating the conflict; by now, he was familiar with how Berengar reacted to anyone who tried to exert their authority upon him, and clearly, it had negative results. As such, the cardinal continued his speech and laid part of the blame on the Pope of the Vatican.

"Simeon, if you took a second to reflect on this matter, you would realize that if you had not endorsed Lambert's attempt to eliminate his older brother and steal the inheritance, which is rightfully Berengar's, then none of this would have happened! Every time you try to force your way upon a lawfully appointed regent, it blows up in your face! A mere youth has outwitted you in every matter you have conspired against him in! Who's to say he is not going to outwit and defeat you once more when you invade his lands with the Teutonic Order?"

After being lambasted and accurately so by a Cardinal under his command, Pope Simeon II lowered his head in disgrace for all of the bishops and cardinals to see. What the Cardinal had said was true. However, he would be damned if he did not have Berengar pay for the constant humiliation he had suffered, including the one that had just transpired here in the Council of Constance.

As such, Simeon could not help himself but protest the very notion that the almighty Church should be negotiating with a lowly Regent of a Viscounty.

"I refuse, as God's representative here on Earth, I will not bow my head to some lowly Viscount or his accursed son acts as Regent in his stead! I will have satisfaction for the indignant actions of this heretical youth!"

With that, the Council of Constance was divided on how to proceed on the matter of the Berengar Heresy; some wanted to invade the lands in which were affected by it and slaughter every living person within them. Some wanted to Negotiate with Berengar to see if he would cease his anti-church propaganda and some secretly sided with Berengar and the points he and Ludolf had made. If anything, Simeon's reaction to the whole thing, proved that Berengar was right. However, they were too afraid to voice their concerns

and, as such, stayed silent. These Bishops and Cardinals who agreed with Berengar and Ludolf would become the backbone of the German Reformation. For now, the Council continued, there were plenty of topics to talk about, and they had yet to conclude how to proceed with Berengar and his views.