UNIT 1C: CHURCH HISTORY

27: Reason and Revolution (1650 - 1800)

In the West

Disarray and Hope

At the beginning of the 17th century the Protestant churches started to fragment and radicalise. The political fallout from the rise of Puritanism in England first severely challenged and then disrupted the ancient synergy of monarchy and Church for the first time. Some of these dissenting Calvinists (mostly) and later, more radical Quakers and Anabaptist elements found in the American colonies a space where their religious lives could be practised largely untroubled by a distant motherland. And so the great American Protestant experiment was begun, not only in religion but also and correspondingly in economics and politics.

Back in Europe, the diversifying and often conflicting religious temper of dissenters combined with the forlorn attempts of Rome and other newly established national churches to reign them in led to conflicts between states and within states. The resulting stalemates and the impatient weariness of those who longed for more stability and less passion and bloodshed in the name of Christ pushed the European powers into a settlement that ended a 30 year religious war in 1648. This settlement, the Treaty of Westphalia, put an end to the Wars of Religion as an ongoing feature of the political scene in Europe. Before, nations had waged war over which religion might prevail. Now nations largely ceased to interfere in such matters, regarding them as strictly internal concerns for each State to resolve. Pope Innocent X protested against this settlement but it is a mark of the change in mood in this era that his objections were largely ignored. Louis X1V fought a rearguard action against heresy in France but the fires of religious persecution had died down by the second half of the 17th Century, even if the social, educational and political disadvantages of marginal religious groups endured into the 19th Century.

The Age of Reason

As nation states consolidated their local autonomies and expanded their empires, Europe in the west developed the idea of a civic rather than a theocratic political order. The economic theories of Adam Smith, (lubricating the Industrial Revolution), the pioneering science of Newton, the rationalist epistemology of Locke; all these and more besides in both politics and philosophy ushered in the so called Age of Reason or the Enlightenment.

Theology in the west morphed to suit the temper of this new era. In Continental Europe a number of Christian theologians attempted to forge a new synthesis between Christianity and reason which incorporated doubt in the process of cognition, most notably Descartes whose famously mentalist ontology *cogito ergo sum*, ("I think, therefore I am") provoked the scorn of Pascal who insisted on the necessity of grace and faith. Similar reactions emerged in the Catholic fringe where Jansenists and Quietists taught a more or less passive fideism which was condemned by the Roman Church as an abnegation of Christian responsibility.

Kings and Dissenters

In Britain, a regicidal Republican experiment, inspired by Puritans and led by Oliver Cromwell, had come to nothing in the 17th century and the monarchy had been restored under Charles II. Unfortunately for the Protestant establishment, the Jacobite line was to produce a Roman Catholic monarch in the person of James II, this being before the Act of Settlement (1701) made such an eventuality illegal. Parliament invited William of Orange to invade and ascend the throne in 1688 forcing James to flee into exile.

Not all the Anglican clergy accepted such a Protestant convenience believing rather in the existing monarch's right of title to the throne irrespective of his religion. They refused to swear an oath of allegiance to William and were promptly deprived of their livings. The Archbishop of Canterbury himself, William Sancroft, 8 other bishops and over 400 priests were expelled. In the process a number of fine churchmen including Bishop Thomas Ken were sent into the shadows and poverty in the face of the new cuckoo regime ... or Glorious Revolution depending on one’s point of view. The exit of these Non-Jurors (refusing to swear the oath to the usurping – as they saw it – monarch) presented a challenge to the Orthodox Churches as they immediately attempted to make contact and establish intercommunion.

In 1677 Joseph, the metropolitan of Samos and Ikaria, had received permission to establish an Orthodox Church in Soho, London, to serve the Greek community. Following accusations of 'Popery' the church was pointedly handed over to French Huguenots. In 1712 Patriarch Samuel of Alexandria sent a delegation to England lead by Arsenios, Metropolitan of Thebais, to seek the support of Queen Anne. The Orthodox were well received by Henry Compton, Bishop of London (1675-1714) but were refused permission to re-open the church. Nevertheless, the delegation met with the Non-Jurors (1716) and interested Anglicans and it is recorded that a number of people (initially 30) were received into the Orthodox Church.

The Non-Jurors had previously sought contact with the Orthodox and now entered into negotiations with the delegation from Alexandria. They wanted to establish intercommunion with the Eastern Orthodox and to link up with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.[1] Letters were exchanged between the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchates and the Non-Jurors between 1716-1725. During this correspondence a number of misunderstandings arose; the Orthodox were unable to accept the novelty of intercommunion with an independent group; the Non-Jurors were uncomfortable with reverencing icons (although they were happy to have these in their churches), invocation of the Saints, teachings regarding the Theotokos and Eucharist and obedience to Patriarch Chrysanthos of Jerusalem.

Metropolitan Arsenios had involved the Russians in discussions and Tsar Peter the Great was clearly interested in closer links. It is argued that his early death in

---

[1] The history of these initiatives is chronicled here:- http://anglicanhistory.org/nonjurors/langford1.html

1725 brought correspondence to an end. The direct intervention of the Anglican Archbishop Wake in 1724 discouraged the Orthodox Patriarchs from pursuing the matter as the Non-Jurors had been depicted as a small, eccentric and schismatic group. This tactic was to be repeated in subsequent times, trying to shut the door on people who had either been forced out or having left on their own accord. Thus, an important opportunity for the development of a western Orthodox Church was sacrificed to ecclesiastical politics but in any case this venture was also compromised by the failure of Orthodoxy to understand the western Christian mind, even when it drew very close to having an Orthodox phronema.

The Triumph of Deism and Scepticism

After the Restoration of the monarchy and more especially following the end of the Jacobite dynasty in 1688, the Anglican Church entered a period of domestication in which reason, practical morality and a cooling of religious ardour became the defining characteristics of its life. In matters of State the Church assumed a subordinate Erastian position and in matters of faith many of its prominent clergy were drawn to a safe deist god who politely refrained from intervening in the affairs of men. If the 18th century experienced a period of relative stability it was at the expense, initially at least, of much of its religious vitality. Religious zeal became a highly suspect thing, an unfitting suitor for reason. In England these religious sensibilities were described as Latitudinarian. As Browning later opined, “God’s in His heaven and all’s right with the world”; so no need to trouble him then overmuch about miracles, unsettling prophecies and the like. For Luther “deus absconditus” was problematic; for the deist and moralist alike in this age it was almost an article of faith.

It must not be thought, however, that the Enlightenment was only about reason and conventional morality. It was also about radical scepticism and its prophet was the enormously influential Scottish philosopher, David Hume (1711 – 1776). Hume understood reason to be compromised by the passions but rather than revert to a spiritual cognition he proposed that knowledge be based solely on the evidence of the senses. His frame of reference for knowing, therefore, was not founded upon God but rather on what could be tested by experience and an innate ability of humans to make sense of the world. As such he is regarded by many as the father of empiricism and of metaphysical scepticism generally. Certainly all those who followed him embraced a functional agnosticism. Whereas earlier theologians of the Enlightenment had broadly supported the grounding of morality in God, for Hume the philosopher no such necessary connection could be made. Indeed he challenged all arguments for the existence of God as ambiguous and circular.

What happened though when people turned their attention to their perception of this world was sometimes more than ambiguity in terms of faith, but rather a scandal to the conscience, prompted by the brute facts of the presence of evil in a Cosmos supposedly designed and created by a good God. Such matters cease to be intellectual curiosities when occasioned by actual suffering especially on a mass scale. Such was the terrible earthquake that devastated the city of Lisbon in 1755. After this tragedy which traumatised Europe spiritually the rather shallow rationalist faith of the Enlightenment thinkers could not stand. Hume's sceptical empiricism found a ready target in the innocent suffering occasioned by this natural disaster. Perhaps only the senseless butchery of the First World War came close in shaking the foundations of faith. After Lisbon, sceptical, even atheistic thought became much more common in the west. Moralists and preachers had little to offer. Western Christianity seemed intellectually and morally bankrupt. What could save her?

Revivalism – the Methodists and German Pietists

The reaction, when it came, both in continental Europe and Britain, refashioned western Christianity after the heart rather than the mind. In many ways Pascal had anticipated this trend but it wasn't until a movement called pietism took hold in Germany and Methodism in Britain, pioneered by Charles and John Wesley, that a new more vital and more effective Christianity took root. Heartfelt Christianity rejected classical formalisms, both sceptical and believing. This was a sort of empiricism but of the religious kind. The Wesleys expected changes to take place in Spirit-filled lives. Manifestations of the Spirit's work and power, so despised by the rationalist Anglican Bishop Butler, were commonplace according to the literature of the period. Butler is said to have remonstrated with John Wesley thus:- *"Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing!"* A David Hume would still have remained sceptical but for the thousands of the urban poor who responded to this presentation of the gospel; pietism, holiness, and the immediacy of God in human life could not be contested. John Wesley and his brother Charles were greatly attached to the Fathers and their works, particularly the Macarian Homilies. Moreover when John Wesley had his little problem with the Anglican Church's reluctance to fund and equip missions in America, it has been claimed that to Orthodox bishops he turned. There are unsubstantiated claims that he was ordained to the episcopate for this purpose secretly by the Greek bishop Erasmus of Arcadia, (secretly because such an act was illegal at that time in England). However, whether or not Wesley was chrismated first and whether or not there were two other bishops present for the ordination to be canonical is seriously open to doubt.

Likewise in Germany, the 18th Century, saw a reaction set in against dry Protestant scholasticism. Led by Philipp Jakob Spener the pietist movement was to restore much of the transformative personal dimension of Christianity which had been lost in and through academic theology. In 1694 in Berlin he founded the University of Halle which at its height had 1200 students passing through its theology faculty each year. Pietism generated a new missionary movement in South India and America. In its later phase its most outstanding practitioner and teacher was Count von Zinzendorf. In 1722 Moravian refugees from persecution were settled on his estate and thereafter Herrnhut became a centre for Moravian missionary work across the world. German pietism, however, deprecated reason and the use of the mind. The naive fundamentalism of its adherents was to prove its undoing for it could not rise to the challenge presented by the German schools in their pioneering work of biblical criticism. Ultimately, and notwithstanding the blessings conferred on German Christianity and further afield, it did not outlive the 18th Century.

The Ancien Regime Falls – the birth of Revolution in Europe

Our study is largely confined here to Europe and to this point has mainly considered the fortunes of Protestant Christianity in the north of the continent. In countries, however, where Catholicism still predominated, notably France, the explosive pressure for reform was both delayed and frustrated by the deeply connected conservatism of both the French monarchy and the French clerical estate. The 18th Century was marked by a long running and debilitating struggle between Jansenism, Gallicanism and the Jesuits within the Church. Politically, however, little changed in the symphony between the rich higher clergy and Court. The lower clergy lived amidst the same abject poverty as the rural poor they served. The Enlightenment kindled in the educated middle class both a desire for reform and also an understanding of how that might be achieved in such an arthritic stratified society. Reason was to be served by Terror. The old regime had to be swept away entirely. Even the calendar was to be changed. The fear that the French Revolution sent rippling through the courts of Europe that “we could be next” was palpable.

1789 ushered in a new age of Revolution not only in France but across Europe in every place where monarchical absolutism and residual feudalism lingered. In the face of this onslaught Rome itself remained feeble and unequal to the task of leading Catholic Europe into a new more progressive era. Many would argue that this remained the case all the way through to the First Vatican Council a century later. It took yet another century for the impetus for reform truly to take root in the Second Vatican Council but by then Europe was arguably post-Christian. As far as Orthodoxy and the East was concerned Europe cared little and knew less; until perhaps the Ottoman Empire achieved its status as the “sick man of Europe” when the fate of Greece and the Middle East could no longer be ignored by the Great Powers. The Russian Bear remained an enigma to most save for those countries in Scandinavia and the Baltic states which lay within its sphere of influence. The western Christian world by the close of the 18th century looked more fragmented and disconnected than ever before. Spiritually weakened by the Enlightenment, it was not in great shape. Here and there were signs of hope but for the most part recoveries were short-lived and cyclical in nature. The world conducted its business largely oblivious to the Church. Reason, Revolution and Revival happily coexisted – by not connecting at all.

In the East

Excursus: The History of Religious Pluralism in Albania

The Norman invasions and the Fourth Crusade strengthened links between the northern Albanian peoples (Ghegs) and the Latin Church. The introduction of Roman Catholicism was less successful amongst other Albanian groups, although Byzantine-rite Catholics occasionally attracted certain communities elsewhere (amongst the Tosks). The arrival of the Ottomans in fourteenth century allowed the Muslims to exploit the Catholic-Orthodox divide, supplant certain heretical groups and establish a strong Muslim presence, initially in the Central Regions around Tirana. The Muslim communities in Albania were, and remain varied, from the mystical Bektashi, Alevi and Sufi sects to the officially promoted Sunni (Ottoman). The Albanians heroically resisted Ottoman advances, notably under Prince Scanderbeg (George Kastriota, 1405-1468). He returned to Christianity from Islam (1443), repelled Ottoman invasions from Kroia and sought to unite all Albanians under the 'imperial flag' and Byzantine rite Catholicism. Following his death the resistance collapsed and many Albanian communities sought refuge in Italy and Western Europe. Back home the Ghegs were almost entirely converted to Islam, Catholicism lingered in the north, the Tosks were divided in allegiance between Orthodox Christianity and Islam while Crypto-Christian communities were to be found wherever Albanians lived in the Ottoman Empire. In the Ottoman centuries ongoing migration from Albania saw large communities established across the Muslim world (notably Egypt, ruled by an Albanian dynasty), the Russian Empire (where the Tsars resettled Orthodox Albanians) and, eventually, America.

The Old Believers

In 1666 all liturgical books used in Russian Orthodox Churches were revised on orders of the reforming Patriarch Nikon (1605-81). The intention was to restore ancient traditions and conform to the uses and practices of the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire (with whom the Russians were establishing closer links, championing or hoping to 'liberate' and resettling within the Russian Empire). This move was discouraged by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and what actually happened was that the reformers imported contemporary, Venice licensed, Greek texts. Unsurprisingly, traditionalists repudiated the Greeks as tainted by Council of Florence (1439-45) and declared the reformed services to be implicitly heretical. Patriarch Nikon was initially prepared to tolerate the 'Old Rite' and accommodate the traditionalist movement but reacted when his position was threatened by fierce opposition.

Traditionalist Orthodox Christians who rejected or denounced the reforms were excommunicated in 1667 and persecuted as schismatics from then onward. Called 'Old Believers' or 'Old Ritualists' the Traditionalists left the Patriarchal Church in droves. The saintly Archpriest Avvakum Petrov (1621-82) emerged as the most articulate and outspoken Old Believer. He was persecuted and burnt. Thousands of Old Believers were killed or perished attempting to find safety in Siberia or beyond the Russian Empire. Communities immolated themselves when they were unable to escape the authorities. The most respected monastics of the time defected to Old Belief. The extraordinary autobiography of Archpriest Avvakum inspired converts from every level of society.

Scattered by the brutal and sustained persecution of the Patriarchists, the Old Believers were unable to establish a cohesive movement. They had no bishops to ordain clergy, no unified organisation and few surviving leaders. Some groups came to welcome clergy seceding from the Patriarchal Church. Other groups 'avoided' all Eastern Orthodox and relied on lay prayer leaders to preside over offices. Old Belief kept alive authentic, Byzantine/Slav traditions.

These included austere worship, ancient chant, prayer rugs, the veil for women and traditional hats and beards for men, a distinctive icon painting school, even clothing and diet.

Disgust at the westernising policies of Peter the Great (1682-1725) brought new adherents as traditionalists and monastics walked out of the state church. Major persecution continued, notably under Tsar Nicolas I (1825-55).

The Belokrinitsa jurisdiction emerged (1845) with the arrival of the deposed Bishop Amvrosy from Bosnia and the relaxing of repressive measures. This group was eventually recognised by the Eastern Orthodox Churches (1971). Another ‘Popovtsy’ or ‘priested’ jurisdiction had emerged (1923) following the Russian Revolution and this survives as the Old Believer Church of Ancient Orthodox Christians.

Numerous ‘Bespopovtsy’ or ‘priestless’ communities also survive. The Pomortsy Old Believers are to be found across Eastern Europe and elsewhere. The ‘Fedoseevtsy’ still ritually shun all contact with the Russian Orthodox. In the 18th century the ‘Edinovertsy’ united to Orthodox Church; other groups becoming Eastern Rite Catholics (notably in Austria-Hungary).

Russian Orthodox Church Reform

Patriarch Philaret of Moscow (1554-1634) had been imprisoned and tortured by the Poles for being opposed to Uniatism and, indeed, all western influence. He had adopted the title ‘Great Lord’ to stress the position of the Patriarchate as ‘Guardian’ of spiritual and cultural values and to imply the pre-eminence of the Church in the Church-State ‘symphony’ - thus virtually repudiating the Byzantine model of ‘symphony’. The reforming Patriarch Nikon was opposed by the Tsar, deposed (1659) and disgraced (1666). This, alongside the Old Believers ‘voting with their feet’ weakened the Church and compromised the role of the Patriarchate. When Patriarch Adrian died (1700) the office was consciously allowed to lapse.

Tsar Peter the Great hoped to westernise Russia and was impressed by the Protestant denominations (clearly sympathetic to the Lutherans). He worked closely with Russian Church leaders who favoured a Protestant model, at least where Church governance and discipline were concerned. These included the intellectual bishops Stephan Iavorskii (1658-1722) and Theophan Prokopovich (1681-1736). The latter inspired the ‘Ecclesiastical Regulations’ (promulgated in 1720) that claimed to return to the ancient conciliar tradition of the East. In fact, these and related rulings subjugated the Church to the state and remained unchanged to 1917. Peter the Great appointed an Oberprokurator to preside over the ‘Synod’ of the Church and to represent the Tsar and issue Tsarist directives. Unsurprisingly, the first was a German Lutheran, Leibnitz (1646-1716). The Church became a department of state, virtually overnight beards and traditional clothing were banned to drive this home.

This policy was continued by all the Tsars from Peter the Great onwards throughout the period of Russian imperial expansion and economic growth. In 1762-4, soon after Catherine the Great’s accession, all remaining Church assets were stripped. The Church lost privileges, lands, 2 million serfs and most monasteries were closed. Metropolitan St Arseny Matseevich of Rostov (1696-1776) was persecuted and imprisoned for speaking out against the ‘war against Orthodoxy’.

The Ukrainian Reform

The intellectual bishop Peter Mogila (1596-1647) was of Romanian extraction. He sought to strengthen the witness of the Orthodox Church and counter the growth of the Uniate movement by promoting education amongst the Orthodox clergy, monastics and laity. He redeployed Roman Catholic theological language and concepts to defend Orthodoxy, against Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. This is apparent in his ‘Orthodox Confession’ (1640) largely composed against the ‘Confession of Faith’ of the pro-Calvinist Patriarch Cyril Loukaris of Constantinople (1633). This was well received in the Ukraine and Peter Mogila was elected Metropolitan of Kiev in the same year it was issued.

In 1642 the Orthodox Synod of Jassy roundly condemned Cyril Loukaris and approved an amended version of Peter Mogila's 'manifesto. This policy turned the tide against Uniatism in the Ukraine, but, paradoxically, increased Western influence in the Orthodox North. This became entrenched following closer links with Russia (1685-7). When Kiev was separated from Constantinople and linked to Russia (1686) large numbers of Ukrainian clergy, usually highly educated, dominated the Russian Orthodox Church. Western style Theological Academies had been established in Kiev (in 1627- the Kiev Caves, in 1685 - the Helleno-Slav Academy, in 1701 - the Kiev Seminary). They outshone other Orthodox centres of learning in Imperial Russia for many decades.

Ruthenia (part 1 – continued in Lecture 28)

The Union of Brest (1595-1596) finally severed large regions and entire peoples of Central Europe from the Orthodox Church by transferring communion to Rome. In 1589 the bishop of Lvov, Gedeon Balaban, had 'petitioned' Rome and 'requested' the Union of the Church of Galicia (regions of Poland and Ukraine) to Rome. In theory the Orthodox of Poland-Lithuania and Austria-Hungary were already in Union with Rome following the Council of Florence. However, pressure had been building for a 'new union' as most of the faithful were firmly attached to Constantinople. These 'unions' were agreed to by some on the promise that Eastern Christian traditions would be respected – and violently opposed by others as it was feared that this was unlikely. Blood was shed on both sides, not least during the Cossack uprising against the Poles in 1648-1657 (under Hetman Khmelnitsky).

Adherence to Uniatism was solid in some areas, like Galicia, wavered in others, like Ruthenia, and was rejected east of Kiev. In Ruthenia, intellectuals opposed the Union long after Brest –

notably Mikhail Orosigovsky-Andrella (d.1710). The last Orthodox bishop was blinded and martyred in 1734 (St Dositheos).

Schism in Antioch

The Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch normally maintained friendly relations with the Church of Rome. It is documented that many Antiochian Hierarchs and clergy were often in communion with Rome. This was not as strange as it sounds and occurred elsewhere (in the Greek islands, Smyrna and even Constantinople).

In 1724 the popular and openly pro-Roman Serafim Tanas was elected Patriarch Cyril VI of Antioch. The Orthodox party appealed to Constantinople and an Athonite monk, Sylvester, was installed by the Greeks. This resulted in the so-called ‘Melkite’ schism that divided and weakened the Eastern Orthodox of the Near East. Initially, all the Eastern Orthodox of the Arab speaking countries had been called ‘Melkites’ but from 1724 this title is only used for the Uniate Patriarchate of Antioch. The schism added an extra patriarch to the 4 patriarchates claiming to represent the ancient Church of Antioch. Originally the larger group, following much trouble and bloodshed, Uniatism in the Near East lost much ground to both ‘straight’ Roman Catholicism and Protestant missions. Athonite monks and later Russian missionaries laboured to rally the Orthodox of Antioch.

The Kollyvades

The Kollyvades were an 18th century Orthodox revival movement, largely inspired by monks from Mount Athos. Followers derived the name from an insistence that memorial services at which Kollyva was blessed should be held on Saturdays not Sundays. This represented an opportunity for spiritual renewal as the Kollyvades placed particular emphasis on frequent communion, the guiding role of elders, the importance of ‘retreats’ and spiritual reading – and therefore of education.

St Nikodemos the Hagiorite (1749-1809) remains the best known thinker of this movement. He represented a renewed interest in Hesychasm, promoted veneration of the New Martyrs, published the largely forgotten works of Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas, introduced the Orthodox to Western Spiritual writers like Lorenzo Scupoli and edited the 'Rudder' and Modern Menaia. Following the example of the Ukrainian St Paissy Velichkovsky, he worked with St Makarios Notaras of Corinth (1731-1805) to compile the Greek 'Philokalia'. St Paissy Velichkovsky had earlier compiled an 'Old Slav' Philokalia (1793) and seems to have been associated with the Kollyvades.

The Kollyvades were critical of the Westernised Greek state (established in the 1830s), its secular institutions and the subjugation of Church to German state officials. Both Kosmas Phlamiatos (1786-1852) and Christopher Papoulakos (d.1861) died in Greek prisons following bitter persecution and fatal beatings. In many ways the Kollyvades prefigure the Old Calendarist movement of the 1920s in the Balkans and beyond.

Orthodox Mission

Even though facing bitter divisions and persecution and sometimes directly as a result of this, the Orthodox Churches continued in this period to focus on mission. In the Ottoman Empire this was normally 'internal mission' encouraging and educating the Orthodox faithful, helping Crypto-Christians return to open practice and arranging for other converts to move to Russia (like St Nicolas the Turk). In Russia the state authorities were ambivalent about mission, often fearing conflict (in the Baltic countries and Finland). Nevertheless, missions were sponsored in non-Russian territories linked to the Empire by conquest or trade, the 'near-abroad' and to non-Christian peoples within Russia. The missions to Alaska (from 1794), to Japan (from 1861) and the work of the 'Russian Palestine Society' were most notable. With Orthodoxy's development globally into the modern era, in the next lecture we shall look at the challenge of modernity in both east and west in the 19th century.