

UNIT 1C: CHURCH HISTORY

28: Nationalism and Modernity (1800-1900)

Modernity and the Christian West

In Europe, Protestant Germany set the agenda for new religious ideas in the 19th century, the French being too preoccupied by the Revolution and its aftermath, the British too conservative in aspect to respond to the new challenges of this century's idealism until economic and political reform forced the pace of reconstruction and re-awakened the Christian conscience. How then did Protestant Christianity in Germany develop beyond the pietism of the 18th Century?

German Protestant Empiricism and Rationalism

The German theologian who completely changed the Protestant theological landscape was Friederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). As a young man with a family background in German pietism he rejected the deprecation of intellectual endeavour in that tradition and soon abandoned any recognisable Protestant orthodoxy. His significance lies in his presentation of Christianity as an experience of the divine, a God-consciousness, uniquely mediated by Jesus Christ and characterised by absolute dependence on God. He accepted Immanuel Kant's insistence on experience but rejected his denial of the possibility of encountering God-in-Himself. It might be thought, therefore, that his new systematic theology represented a return to a more conservative and vivid form of Christianity, not too distant perhaps from his pietistic roots - but that would be incorrect. He rejected creedal religion and had little or no time for doctrines of the incarnation, atonement, and life after death or the Trinity. In this he conformed to his early agnosticism, but in place of the usual orthodoxies he substituted an interior, transformative encounter with God. The only mooring to Jesus is that in Him this God-consciousness was perfect. However, this is not God-in-the-flesh but rather God-in-Jesus. In this way therefore Schleiermacher is the first liberal Protestant theologian who is

both an empiricist and a rationalist. He himself acknowledged his debt to German Romanticism as a movement. 19th century German theology after Schleiermacher can rightly be said to embrace idealism, an approach that was to distance the Protestant tradition yet further from its classical Reformation expression. That this liberal approach should run alongside and be informed by sceptical trends in biblical criticism should not surprise us. The two currents of mind and heart are but two sides of one coin, a refashioning of Christianity in both a spiritualising and sceptical direction.

Another expression of idealism in German religious thought in this period is represented by a yet more radical thinker, Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel. This man influenced strongly the young Karl Marx so clearly his teaching is very important in understanding this crucial shift in western religious philosophy. Hegel was, arguably, not a Christian believer, even of the conventional Protestant heterodox sort, (although he claimed to be), but his thinking had a profound influence on western European philosophy and political science both theistic and atheistic. He rejected Schleiermacher's teaching of absolute dependence upon God, comparing this to a dog's unthinking obedience to its master. Hegel's thought was, by his own acknowledgement, indebted to Jakob Böhme, a 16th Century Christian mystic. Böhme taught that the Fall was a necessary stage in the evolution of the universe. Hegel is not interested in the Fall as such but his fascination with Aristotle generated a similar dialectical approach within history between thesis, antithesis and synthesis as the World Soul or Spirit forms itself from disparate even opposed elements onto a higher plane. "God" for Hegel was a pantheistic emergence of Spirit-in-history, not the Sovereign Uncreated Lord of all.

Marx was initially attracted by Hegel's thought but later used an exclusively materialist economic account of the dialectic to suppose a driven process of human development towards a communist utopia. In this he was influenced by another atheistic variant of Hegel's schema proposed by Feuerbach (who may be considered an intermediate thinker). Feuerbach maintained that humankind's sense of God was nothing more than a projection

of his own social nature. Hegel's thought was also subsequently adopted in modified form by more explicitly Christian and Protestant so-called "process" theologians.

Two Christian thinkers who took Hegel's thought in these different directions were David Strauss (1808 – 1874) and Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792 – 1860). Both men worked within the enormously influential Tübingen School of the University of the same name. Strauss' synthesis in his seminal "Life of Jesus" proposed a universal mythic expression of the divine of which the historical Jesus was an outstanding example. He wasn't much interested, however, in the person and work of the historical Jesus whereas Baur, the better historian and slightly more conventional thinker was. Baur used the Hegelian framework to characterise the Church as the synthetic locus of the resolution of two opposed tendencies, particular and Jewish, universal and catholic. He prepared the ground for generations of subsequent German theologians traced the synthesis back in time to search for an alleged authentic historical Jesus buried beneath layers of subsequent development and interpretation. In many ways he is father of so-called higher criticism ... an approach to the Bible which seeks to unearth through critical research, literary analysis and archaeological data the "true" Jesus. Later exegetes would consciously break this synthesis and pass on a legacy of radical scepticism to 20th century western theology. Eventually, this would even have an impact on the Roman Catholic Church. What we are seeing here is the consolidation in the 19th century of a liberal Protestant tradition that will eventually become a "global brand."

Not everyone in the schools of Lutheran theology in and outside Germany went along with this new expression of Christianity. The first major figure to respond negatively in Germany was Albrecht Ritschl (1822 – 1889). Ritschl rejected all attempts to blend Christianity and philosophy or even use philosophy as language for theology. He certainly denied the possibility of any Christian metaphysical speculation. A more conservative believer, Ritschl emphasised the claim that Jesus Christ lays on the life of a believer. However, there was more than a little of the liberal Christian in Ritschl, for he was interested in Jesus the ethical

teacher rather than God's eschatological agent of the Kingdom. It was after all, Adolf von Harnack (1851 – 1930), a Ritschlian, who pushed this theme to its logical conclusion with his rejection of the Fourth Gospel and his presentation of Jesus as a social reformer. One other dissenting voice should be mentioned if only because his theology, decidedly unsystematic, challenged the basic premise of the Lutheran theology of his day that Jesus Christ can be domesticated to a narrative, an historical process or an ethical ideal. That man was the Dane, sometimes called "gloomy," Soren Kirkegaard (1813 – 1855) who, for all of his conservatism, arguably kick started the European existentialist movement, which like Hegel had its theistic and atheistic proponents.

Kirkegaard rejected the whole liberal Protestant enterprise, rationalising or pietistic. He had no systematic doctrine of his own for he abhorred all attempts to express the complexities and dissonances of human experience and suffering and sin in such tidy schemas. He was, like Ritschl, an anti-Hegelian, but unlike the Ritschlians he was sharper in his appreciation of the human tragedy and perhaps this reflected his own troubled childhood and relationships. He stood resolutely for the individual believer's self-authenticating experience before God in all life's brokenness. He understood the need for paradoxical thinking and the language required to express that. Many see him as introducing existentialism to the western European mind. The existentialist knows no other integrity than the self, with or without God. Whatever Kirkegaard was, he was no liberal Protestant Christian. He impacted 20th century Christian thinking perhaps more than in his own era. He was a man before his time.

Although 19th Century Protestant theology was seriously deficient from an Orthodox Christian point of view at least it was vital, creative and intellectually serious. The same cannot be said for French Catholic theology or the disparate Anglican religious movements of the same period.

France – The Aftermath of Revolution

The French Church had been seriously wounded by the Revolution and it could never quite make up its mind whether it was to be accommodating to the new political order whilst defending its independence and therefore, Gallican, or whether it should be papally orientated “beyond the mountains” (ie., the Alps) and ultramontane. These two traditions, persisting through and beyond the Revolution originally had common cause – the independence of the Church. Napoleon’s concordat with the papacy restored something of the Church’s status in society but the tortuous path of political reform and imperial and colonial ambition made of this something of an impasse rather than an enduring solution. Rome itself often did not know how to respond; sometimes accommodating to the shifting French political landscape, sometimes more resistant. From time to time the ultramontanes were frustrated in their ambitions, as Lammennais found to his cost when he retired from Christian ministry and the Church disillusioned. Eventually an ecclesiastical civil war broke out between the Gallicans and Ultramontanes thus weakening the French Church further and arguably this unhappy state of affairs has persisted to this day. France may be privately Catholic but religious practice has ebbed for a long, long time within a determinedly secular public domain. The roots of this malaise are within the Revolution itself and have not as yet fully played themselves out.

Rome’s Retreat from Modernity

Many of those issues of the relationship between the Church and State, the phenomenon of resurgent nationalism and the place of freedom within a democratic society that were so sharply focussed in France from the Revolution onwards affected the rest of the Catholic Europe as well, but a little later in the century. The revolutionary fervour of 1848 kindled radical and nationalist sentiments in Italy. Initially Pope Pius IX sided with the liberals but when he had to flee Rome, he realised that Catholicism and such radicalism could not co-exist. Over the following 13 years he saw all the Papal States lost and Victor Immanuel

proclaimed King of Italy. Pope Pius changed from being the darling of the liberals to being their scourge. In this he harnessed ultramontane religious sentiments of a more conservative Catholicism. A reaction set in against all those forces that were deemed to be inimical to the Church and these were listed in the 1864 Encyclical – “Quanta Cura” – and the Syllabus of Errors ... namely, “rationalism, indifferentism, socialism, communism, naturalism, freemasonry, separation of Church and State, liberty of the press, liberty of religion,” culminating in the famous denial “that the Roman pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself and reach agreement with progress, liberalism and modern civilisation.” In 1854 he had promulgated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. In the First Vatican Council that he convened later in 1870 he added the definition of Papal Infallibility. With a few swift strokes of the pen engendered by apprehensions of widening chaos in Europe, Rome had set its face firmly against the rest of the Christian world and even Europe itself. This was a logjam that was not to be broken until the Second Vatican Council nearly a century later.

Britain – Religious Pluralism and Idealism

In Britain, until 1830, the evangelical revival predominated with its luminary Charles Simeon leading the way. This was a cautious and conservative period in which the Establishment sought by all means possible to avoid the import of revolution from France. Nonetheless this movement inspired a raft of social reforms including the abolition of the slave trade led by William Wilberforce. His son, the Anglican bishop, Samuel Wilberforce was not so enlightened, however, in his resolute opposition to the work of Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution. Modernism, seemingly, was just as much unwelcome in Protestant England as it was in Roman Catholic France. More enlightened attitudes, however, were developing towards Catholics and Protestant Non-Conformists of the realm. By 1830 it was clear that their religious and civic disabilities were anachronistic and unjust. There followed the repeal of the discriminatory Test Acts and the enactment of Catholic Emancipation. When, however, Parliament started interfering in the reform of Irish bishoprics, the High

Church Anglican party, for whom the independence of the Church was non-negotiable, reacted with vehemence and determination. Keble's National Apostasy sermon and Newman's Tract 90 set the tone for the revolution that became known as the Oxford Movement. Initially non-ritualistic and academic it metamorphosed into a movement of catholic renewal within the Church of England and inspired liturgical renewal, aesthetic and cultural regeneration, home and international missions, and radical social reform. There were losses to the Roman Catholic Church, notably John Henry Newman who became a Cardinal. However, even Newman influenced Rome toward a more open position by insisting on the reality and the necessity of the development of doctrine.

For all the vitality of reforming movements in 19th century Anglicanism there nonetheless existed concealed weaknesses in that party interest polarised promoting internal conflict and distrust. Even the mission societies were defined by constituent churchmanship. Victorian Christianity was also in many ways a moralising creed based on Empire, self-improvement and good works. Anglicanism's diverse religious profiles from Low Church to High and all shades in between at the popular level often merely reflected matters of taste rather than true religious conviction. It could hardly be said to be a time when the Anglican Church repositioned itself at the heart of British culture. Indeed new, secular, even post Christian voices were being heard ... notably that of Matthew Arnold who (correctly as it transpired) prophesied the log slow ebbing away of the sea of faith. That the Victorians didn't see this coming perhaps reflects an over-confidence in British society sustained by imperial expansion.

By the close of the 19th century the Christian west had begun to see its influence wane within the civic order. Rome had accepted the *fait accompli* of the demise of its temporal power and had retreated into a fortress Catholicism. Protestant northern Europe was intellectually vigorous in Germany but moribund elsewhere. The First World War then shattered what remained of a united Christian vision in Europe in the 20th century.

Nationalism and the Christian East

The Ottoman Crisis

At the height of Ottoman power an uneasy balance was maintained between the conquering Muslims and the 'Rum Milet' managing its own affairs under the Ecumenical Patriarchate. As the Ottomans were driven back from the walls of Vienna and their advance was halted this 'historic compromise' looked ever more fragile.

The decadence of the Ottoman administration through the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries was balanced by the strengthening of conservative Islamic institutions and groups. Local Muslim rulers carved out new states –not least Ali Pasha of Tepeleni in Greece and Albania and, another Albanian, Mehmet Ali in north Africa. The local Muslim potentates, Muslim revival movements and new groups of Muslim settlers (Albanian, Tatar, Circassian) were united by anti-Christian sentiment. Ongoing conflict with a variety of European powers in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries coincided with the rise of nationalism and a sequence of revolutions.

The violent collisions between the Ottoman Empire and Russia destabilised inter-communal relations across many regions. Orthodox Christian communities sought refuge behind Russian lines and Muslim refugees brought a renewed hostility to everything Orthodox as they fled advancing Russian armies. Both Russian victories and defeats were marked by reprisals against the Orthodox under Ottoman rule; sometimes the destruction of monuments (like the Byzantine monastery of St Panteleimon outside Nicomedia) or sporadic massacres of Christians (in Syria or Bosnia).

The Patriarchate of Constantinople struggled to maintain Greek language, education and culture under Ottoman rule. The Orthodox Churches of the Ottoman Empire worked to establish ever closer links with the Russian Orthodox Church and with the Orthodox Christian

rulers of Russia, Romania and Georgia. These links were significant to both sides but were a life-line to the Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire. Connections with the Orthodox North represented status, political patronage, financial support and an 'open-door' for refuge in times of crisis. The more restless amongst the Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire looked to Russia for liberation, often encouraged by the reigning Tsars and their emissaries (most actively under Catherine the Great). Interestingly, the Russians also extended their patronage to the Armenians, Copts, the Assyrians and even non-Christian minorities in Ottoman territory (Yazidis). This occasionally represented a spirit of generosity but not always. There were sound political motives behind assisting any dissident group in neighbouring Ottoman territories. Most notable in these struggles for independence of newly emergent nations amidst the decaying edifice of the Ottoman Empire was perhaps the Greek, the Church consolidating her position in the national consciousness through her active support of the revolutionaries. Elsewhere, and particularly in Egypt, the Levant and Palestine, the colonial powers were to become more actively involved, carving up between themselves what remained of the Empire outside modern Turkey.

Ruthenia (part 2 – continued from Lecture 27)

Writers and poets in the Ruthenia returned to Orthodoxy in the 1850s and Archimandrite Vladimir Terletsky was the spokesman of a nation-wide 'back to Orthodoxy movement'. Even a Uniate priest, Fr John Rakovsky (d.1885) promoted the idea.

Although the movement was largely supported by the Serbian and Greek Orthodox Churches, the authorities of Austria-Hungary feared Russian political involvement and reacted harshly. When the village of Iza returned to Orthodoxy in 1903 the inhabitants were imprisoned and tortured and Joachim Vakarov was martyred. An ethnic Ruthenian Archimandrite, St Alexis Kabaliuk, was sent from Romania to rally the movement in 1910. He received thousands of faithful within months, travelling at night and teaching secretly. He was expelled to Serbia in

1913, worked amongst Ruthenian immigrants in the USA and voluntarily returned to face trial in Austria-Hungary when his followers were being killed.

This was after a series of atrocities. The Orthodox were being persecuted throughout Ruthenia, the people of Lezhie had been killed and secret communities of nuns had been abused and tortured. St Alexis Kabaliuk was sentenced to heavy labour in 1914 and bayoneted and left for dead at the end of the WWI. In the Peace Treaty Ruthenia was denied independence but united to a democratic Czecho-Slovakia. Helped by ROCOR, St Alexis Kabaliuk worked to restore a thousand parishes to the Orthodox Church within a few years. During WWII the Nazis and battalions of Ukrainian collaborators pursued a genocidal policy against the Ruthenian people. When the war ended the situation worsened as the region was annexed to the USSR, denied either autonomy or a distinct identity and attached to Ukraine. Fr Gabriel Kostelnik was assassinated by extremists as late as 1948 –others were executed by the Soviet authorities. St Alexis Kabaliuk was also mistreated by the Soviets and died in 1947. He was glorified by the Orthodox Churches in 2001.

Orthodox Missions

The eighteenth century was the ‘golden age’ of Russian Orthodox missionary endeavours – across the vast provinces of Siberia and beyond to China. However, the nineteenth century provides us with a number of beloved missionary saints. ‘Among the most revered of the Russian missionaries was St Herman of Alaska (c.1758-1837), a devout and gentle Russian monk who in 1794 arrived on Kodiak Island –at that time a Russian possession with six other monks to establish the first Orthodox mission in the New World. Herman not only ministered to the native Aleuts and made a great many converts; he soon found himself obliged to act as an advocate for and protector of the native peoples against the abuse they suffered at the hands of the Russian colonists. In 1804, Herman created a hermit’s retreat for himself on Spruce Island, a little more than a mile away from Kodiak Island. He also had a school built

on the island, as well as a chapel, and devoted much of the remainder of his life to caring for orphans and for the ill.

Of the next generation of Russian missionaries to the Aleuts, St Innocent of Alaska (1797-1879) perhaps accomplished the most. He was a married priest who, in 1824, arrived with his wife and family on Unalaska Island, where he promptly built a church and began to study the native languages of his parishioners: the native inhabitants not only of Unalaska, but of the Pribilof and Fox Islands. As his mastery of the Aleutian dialects increased, he devised an Aleut alphabet and began translating the Bible into Unagan, the most important of them. In 1829 he undertook a mission to the coasts of the Bering Sea, and in 1834 moved to Sitka Island where he learned the language of the native Tlingit people.

Innocent lost his wife in 1838, and was persuaded in 1840 to take the vows of a monk. That same year he was made a bishop with a diocese comprising the Aleutian Islands, the Kamchatka peninsula and the Kurile Islands (northeast of Japan). He did not cease, though, to work as a travelling missionary, a scholar of native American tongues and a translator. He was elevated to the Moscow Synod in 1865, and became its head in 1868.

The 1870s saw the 'high-water mark' of the Russian Orthodox missionary movement when St Nicolas Kasatkin (1836-1912) established a mission in Japan. Originally from Smolensk, he had studied theology before becoming a monk (in 1860). Nicolas Kasatkin was ordained to serve as a chaplain to the Russian Consulate in Hokkaido (north Japan). He concentrated on mission work among the Japanese and in recognition for early successes was chosen to head the Russian Orthodox Mission in Tokyo (1870). Finally, Nicolas Kasatkin was consecrated bishop (1880) and after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) became archbishop of a virtually autonomous church.

The Balkan Revolutions

From the eighteenth century, alongside intellectuals, there also emerged church leaders who were committed to the struggle for independence. A Serbian uprising in 1804 led to a Russian protectorate in 1817 and independence in 1878. The Greek Revolution of 1821 brought independence to southern Greece and a number of islands in 1830. The Ottoman authorities reacted by executing two Ecumenical Patriarchs, St Gregory and Cyril, alongside countless other clerical and lay leaders –official actions were followed by massacres carried out by irregular forces. In 1833 the Church of Greece unilaterally proclaimed its independence -this was only reluctantly recognised by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1850. From 1852 the Archbishop of Athens presided over the Holy Synod of Greece as ‘first amongst equals’. In Greece the Church struggled to hold its own against an initially secular state (dominated by German Catholics then Danish Protestants –depending on the monarch), against the growing cult of the ‘classical’ coupled with a nostalgia for Greek paganism and the largely atheistic intellectuals.

Romania became independent in 1878 and Bulgaria gained autonomy in 1879 (in the wake of the ‘Bulgarian Massacres’). As the movement for Bulgarian independence gathered momentum in the late nineteenth century demands were made for an autocephalous church. When Bulgaria achieved independence the Bulgarian Orthodox Church declared itself autocephalous under its own ‘Exarch’. The Ecumenical Patriarchate’s refusal to recognise the status of the Bulgarian Church resulted in a schism that was formally ended only in 1945. For the intervening period the Bulgarians found themselves isolated from most other Orthodox Churches and in an irregular position, similar to that of the ‘Macedonian’ Orthodox Church since WWII.

Phyletism

The Russian Orthodox Church suppressed the autonomy of the Church of Kiev, the Crimea and (in 1811) and revoked the ancient Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Georgia in the name of Orthodox unity. Nevertheless, in the territories of the Ottoman Empire the Russians came into conflict not only with the Muslim Turks but with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Russian chaplains in Constantinople and elsewhere encouraged Bulgarian Orthodox Christians to aspire towards an independent Church. Both Russians and Bulgarians argued that if this was not conceded then the Bulgarians would 'turn Uniate' or, 'worse yet', Protestant. Unsurprisingly, the Greeks opposed any division of the 'Rum Milet' or the Orthodox Christian block of the Ottoman Empire. Both Serbs and Romanians were worried that their brethren might be assigned to Bulgarian tutelage across the Ottoman frontiers. The Ottoman authorities immediately took to playing one side against another (divide and rule) and when a compromise allowing parishes to declare for one or another jurisdiction was suggested the stage was set for a bloody brawl. Rather late in the day, a Council in Constantinople pronounced against 'Phyletism' or Racism as it had been argued that national groups should manage independent jurisdictions. This was ignored and what followed was escalating violence between armed 'exarchists' and 'patriarchists' –for many decades to come. In the 1880s other groups joined the armed fray and campaigned for independent churches as a prelude to a new state and contributed to ongoing 'ethnic cleansing'.

Arab Christians

From the Crusades onwards, the Christian population of the Arab World steadily declined. By the nineteenth century the Christian minority was marginalised even in former heartlands (like Lebanon) and eclipsed by Islamic heresies (Druze, Alawis etc). In this period Christian communities forged a relationship with one or more of the great colonial powers. They hoped for a measure of protection, certain economic advantages and access to Western education,

culture and expertise. This neither protected them from the Muslim authorities in time of strife nor saved them from the aggressive proselytism of well-funded Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Western missionary activities brought further divisions to the Christians of the Middle East but also encouraged people to think 'outside the box' and reflect on what was held in common by all Christians and their non-Christian neighbours.

The idea of 'Arabism' was the result of this ferment and amongst the Orthodox it was actively promoted by Russian missionaries (working with the 'Palestine Society'). As in Bulgaria, both nationalist and progressive Russian Church emissaries were increasingly impatient with conservative, Greek oriented, leaders who enjoyed a comfortable understanding with the local Turks. The Russians worked for an Orthodox revival movement that would be strengthened by a clear focus on 'national identity' and both encompass all Christian groups and attract non-Christian nationalists. This was primarily endorsed by the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and then taken up amongst other Christians. It resulted in terrible reprisals taken against all Christians and Arabists, most harshly on the eve of the First World War. Nevertheless, it was largely Christian thinkers and writers who launched the Pan-Arab idea and the various Arab nationalist movements that came to dominate the Middle East in the second half of the twentieth century. This paved the way for a moderate renewal of Christian prospects as the colonial powers withdrew from the Near East in the middle of the 20th century.