

1 The Church after the Thirty Years War

The sixteenth century was one of the most turbulent periods in the story of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church faced one of its biggest crises and challenges as the Protestant Reformation began in Germany and swept through the nations of Europe.¹ War broke out between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants in Germany. Rulers and political leaders saw the advantage of breaking the Roman Catholic Church's control over them and took sides. A treaty called the Peace of Augsburg was signed which finally brought an end to the war in 1555. This treaty granted recognition only to Lutheranism as a legal religion alongside Catholicism in the

"We come to know truth not only by reason, but still more so through our hearts."

Excerpt from 'Pensees' by Blaise Pascal

The Peace of Westphalia marked the end of the Roman Catholic - Protestant wars



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▲ St Peter's Basilica inside the Vatican City, an independent state within the city of Rome in Italy.

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Holy Roman Empire.² The ruler in each region could decide the faith of his people, Lutheran or Catholic. Calvinism was completely ignored.

Despite the setback, Calvinism continued to gain prominence in other parts of Europe. By the end of the century, a series of national Protestant state churches had begun to replace

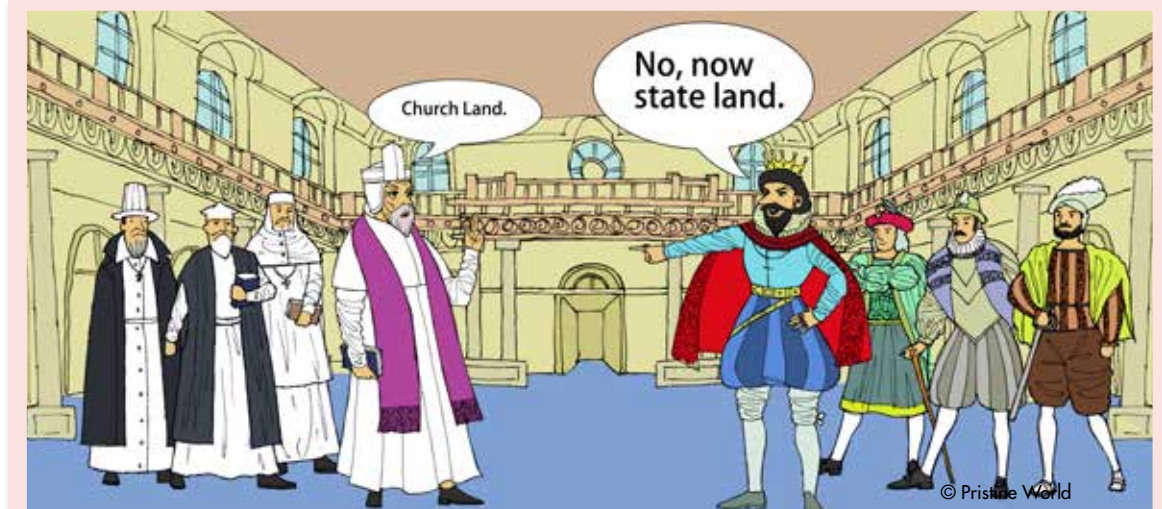
the Roman Catholic Church in the lands where Protestantism had gained ground. The Lutherans dominated the religious scene in Germany and Scandinavia. Calvinism had its followers in Switzerland, Scotland, Netherlands, France, Bohemia and Hungary. The English had set up their own Anglican state church.

Thirty Years War (1618-1648)

Unfortunately in 1618, a Protestant revolt broke out in Bohemia that turned into a full-scale war with the Catholics and spread across the European continent. This led to the last and most devastating of the so-called wars of religion. It has been named the 'Thirty Years War'³ because it lasted for thirty long years and was the culmination of the long struggle between Catholics and Protestants since the start of the Protestant

Reformation. It was one of the bloodiest and most destructive conflicts in the history of Europe. By 1648 when peace was finally achieved through the Peace of Westphalia, the religious and political landscape of Europe had been completely changed.

The Peace of Westphalia is a landmark in the story of the Church. It marked the close of the last great Roman Catholic-Protestant conflict



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² The Holy Roman Empire was a complex of many territories in central Europe that developed during the Middle Ages and continued till it was dissolved in 1806. The largest territory was the kingdom of Germany though it also included the kingdoms of Bohemia, Burgundy, Italy and numerous smaller territories. See Volume 2 of this 'Family Church History Series', Christianity the Middle Ages, Chapter 4 for the story of how it came about.

³ Ibid., pp. 241-242

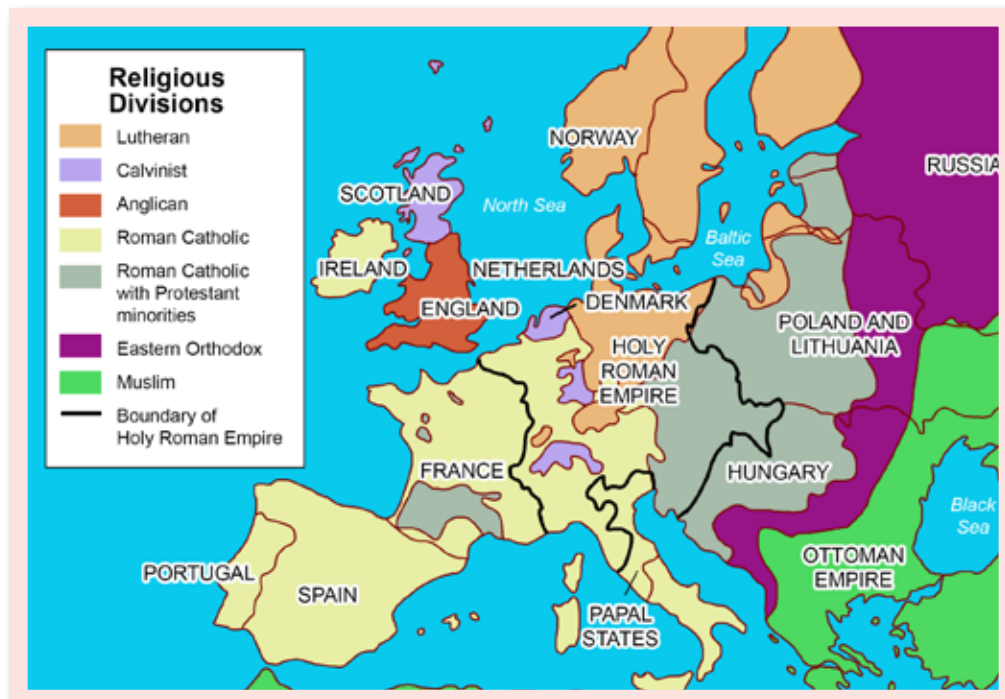
on the European continent. By the terms of the treaty, Lutherans, Calvinists (or Reformed) and Roman Catholics were recognised as entitled equally to civil and religious rights. It ushered in a new age where the sovereignty of individual nations was recognised. In religious matters, all rulers and their subjects would be free to follow their own religion as long as they were Catholic, Lutheran or Reformed. The papacy was excluded from any interference in the religious affairs of the new emerging European nations. There was no longer a united Christian kingdom or 'Christendom' under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Despite the protest of Rome, church land was released from the control of the Roman Catholic Church and distributed among the several nations that participated in the war.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, there was a 'single' Christian Church in Europe, the

Roman Catholic Church, with the pope as its head. Now by mid-seventeenth century, there were four major traditions or divisions: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican. Northern Europe had become Protestant (except for Ireland): Lutherans dominated Germany and Scandinavia; and the Reformed churches dominated Switzerland, Netherlands and Scotland. Southern Europe had returned to Catholicism, including Spain, Italy and most of France. In England, the Anglican Church remained the only legal Church in the nation.

What happened to the Church as it moved into the next phase of its story? In this chapter we will take a look at the state of the different traditions of the faith that had emerged from the Reformation and the religious wars. In passing we will also look at what is happening with the Orthodox tradition and the Church in Russia.

Map of the Religious Division in Europe by Mid 17th Century



The Roman Catholic Church in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) that had met in the previous century in response to the challenges posed by the Protestant Reformation had determined what would be Catholic orthodoxy⁴ for the next four centuries. It had also put forth an entire programme of reformation that was based on a centralisation of power in the papacy. By the end of its sessions, the papacy had gained in prestige and was entrusted with greater power over the entire Catholic Church. But this decision on the council's part was not well received in many European courts or within the Catholic ranks. The religious wars had shown that nothing had been resolved by persecution and force of arms. Political leaders and rulers began to be convinced that their decisions should be guided not by the Church but rather

by the interests of their nation and subjects.

Relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the various nations of Europe became increasingly tense during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was a time of growing nationalism and the rise of monarchs, and both kings and nationalism opposed the idea of a centralised Church under papal authority. There were therefore strong political and religious forces at work against the centralisation of Church power. This gave rise to various movements within the Catholic Church which challenged the authority of the popes. The opposition to papal power would eventually weaken the Catholic Church and make it more ineffective in responding to the challenges in the centuries to come.

Opposition Movements within the Catholic Church

Gallicanism

During the late Middle Ages when the papacy was under the domination of the French kings,⁵ the popes had granted a number of concessions to the French monarchy, mostly allowing the French Church a measure of autonomy. Since then French theologians had maintained that the

French king held a special position within the Catholic Church. The French responded to the centralising edicts of the Council of Trent by insisting on this ancient 'freedom of the Gallican Church' (the term comes from 'Gaul', the name for ancient France). French theologians from the University of Paris wrote the four 'Gallican Articles', also known as the 'Gallican Liberties', to make their position clear. In 1682, King Louis XIV assembled the French clergy who adopted these articles.

⁴ 'Orthodox' comes from two words, 'ortho' meaning 'right', and 'doxa' meaning 'belief'. Catholic orthodoxy thus refers to what the Roman Catholic Church holds onto as their right and true belief and teachings.

⁵ See Family Church History Series, 'Christianity in the Middle Ages', pp. 150-154

According to these articles, the kings were not subject to the Church in political matters and the special rights of the French Church could not be changed. They claimed that the French Church councils were superior to the pope and the judgment of the pope was final only if affirmed by a council. These were very extreme ideas within the Catholic Church and was adopted at a time when Louis XIV was quarrelling with the pope over the appointment of some bishops.

The Gallicans also rejected a prevailing view from a group known as Ultramontanes.⁶

Ultramontanism placed emphasis on papal authority and centralisation of the Church and viewed the pope as having supreme authority over the Church throughout the world. The Gallicans did not doubt the pope's spiritual authority. Their disagreement concerned his supreme authority over the administration of political and church affairs in their nation. The Catholic Church was a large landowner and had great political power in the nation. The pope appointed archbishops and bishops but the Gallicans did not believe that this gave him the right to decide what they should do in their own country.

Jansenism



Cornelius Jansen

Source: By Jean Morin [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Another group arose that became a threat to the Roman Catholic Church, and in particular to the very prominent and powerful Jesuit movement. The Jesuits, priests of a religious order founded by Ignatius of Loyola during the sixteenth century, were the Roman Catholic Church's greatest single force who helped to stop the spread of Protestantism after the Reformation and win people back to the Catholic faith. They were also teachers and confessors of the wealthy and powerful. By the seventeenth century, however, they had come to be seen by some as lax when it came to their views on sin and grace. The most aggressive opposition to the Jesuits came from a movement called Jansenism.

Cornelius Jansen was a Dutch theologian who had adopted Augustine's views on sin and grace. Jansen came to believe that the best way to defend Catholicism against the Protestant challenge was to return to the doctrines of

the great bishop Augustine. He contended that there was a need to establish a rigorous moral code for the Catholic clergy that would combat the supposed compromising ethics of the Jesuits. After his death in 1638, Jansen's followers published his major piece of work *Augustinus* and his teachings soon spread all over France. That became the start of the Jansenist movement.

Catholic leaders began attacking Jansenists from an early date. They resented both its teachings and the stubbornness and independence of its leaders. Naturally the Jesuits did their best to get Jansen's work condemned by the pope. Pope Alexander VII and King Louis XIV joined forces to get the Jansenists to conform. The Jansenists were persecuted for over half a

century before they were finally forced to flee and take refuge in the Netherlands.



DID YOU KNOW...

that Cornelius Jansen read the complete works of Augustine ten times before he wrote his own treatise?

In order to construct a strong theology which would effectively silence the Protestants, Jansen read the complete works of Augustine ten times and his writings against Pelagians (considered a heretical group) thirty times. After this preparation, he wrote his own theological book in Latin called 'Augustinus'.

Other Counter Movements

There were similar counter movements in other parts of Europe within Roman Catholicism. **Febronianism** was named after a Catholic bishop Justin Febronius⁷ who argued that the Church is the community of the faithful and that the bishops as their representatives are to rule the Church, not the pope. Pope Clement XIII condemned Febronius' teachings as heretical but the latter's ideas continued circulating and gaining popularity.

Another movement started from the imperial court of Vienna. The Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II was a learned and liberal-minded ruler who started a number of reforms in his territories because he considered the Catholic Church intolerant. He

took over the education of the clergy, closed down those monasteries which he considered too traditional and opened up new churches. Other rulers followed suit and the Church of Rome which had condemned Febronianism in 1764, also condemned **Josephism** in 1794. However, it was not papal condemnation but the French Revolution that put an end to this and other such movements.

Another counter movement called **Quietism** took place within the Catholic Church during the seventeenth century. Founded by a Spaniard Miguel de Molinos, it had parallels with certain streams of Protestant spirituality as we shall see in the next chapter. Quietists taught that total passivity before God was the best means of devotion and Christian discipline.

14 ⁶ This comes from the Latin word 'ultramontanus' meaning 'beyond the mountains', the mountains referring to the Alps which separate France from Italy, the land of the pope. Ultramontanes looked beyond the Alps to the pope for guidance.

⁷ Justin Febronius was a pseudonym used by Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim, a bishop in Trier or Treves, a Roman Catholic diocese in Germany. 15

Unlike the much more academic Jansenist movement which attracted the more educated, the Quietist movement had a very large following among the common people. Its doctrines were much less complicated and seemed to speak to the deep longings of both peasants and nobility alike. Molinos' teachings provoked great opposition and they were repeatedly condemned by the Roman Catholic authorities.



DID YOU KNOW...

that the main figure in the famous book 'Les Miserables' by Victor Hugo was probably based on the Life of a Quietist?

Francois Fenelon, a young bishop, was won over to the Quietist teachings of Madame Guyon though he did not take them to her extremes. He was a man of great humility and known for his piety. Apparently he led such an admirable life that scholars believe that Victor Hugo used him as his model for his saintly leading character Monseigneur Myriel in Hugo's famous book 'Les Miserables'.



True Tales

Blaise Pascal's Encounter with God

Blaise Pascal, the famous physicist who discovered the principles of atmospheric and hydraulic pressures, was a Jansenist who had a spiritual encounter with God. A few days after the death of Pascal, a servant noticed a strange bulge in the scientist's jacket. He found a sheet of paper on which Pascal had written his experience of his encounter with God on Monday November 23, 1654. For two hours from 10.30 pm to 12.30 am, he was in God's presence, experiencing as he wrote "... certainty, feeling, joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ ..." It was his personal secret that he had kept to himself for eight years, sewing and removing it from his jacket each time he needed to remind himself of his precious experience.



Fact File

Excerpts from Pascal's 'Pensees'

- ◆ *Man is the greatest mystery in this ambiguous universe and even reason is no sure guide. God and the meaning of life must be felt by the heart rather than by reason. The heart has its reasons which reason does not know.*
- ◆ *What a vast distance there is between knowing God and loving Him!*
- ◆ *We come to know truth not only by reason, but still more so through our hearts.*
- ◆ *There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.*

Roman Catholic Figures

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)



Blaise Pascal

Source: [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Blaise Pascal, the most profound Catholic thinker of his time, was a Jansenist. He was also a well-known mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and philosopher. From an early age, Pascal had shown his genius, particularly in Physics and Mathematics. Before he reached the age of 27, he had gained the admiration of mathematicians in Paris. He had also discovered the basic principles of atmospheric and hydraulic pressures and invented the calculating machine to help his father who was working as a tax collector.

Pascal converted to Jansenism at the age of 31, eight years before his death. He wrote eighteen 'Provincial Letters' against the Jesuits' theology and practices which the pope condemned but were widely acclaimed and read by all educated France.

In 1662, Pascal was seized with a violent illness and after two months died at the age of 39. Friends found portions of his writing on faith and reason and later published his notes under the title 'Thoughts' or 'Pensees'.

Madame Guyon (1648-1717)



Madame Guyon

By Frankreich. Stahlstich. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Motte, better known as Madame Guyon, was the most influential advocate of Quietism. She was forced at the age of 16 to marry a man twenty-two years her elder. The marriage was an unhappy one. It led her to withdraw on a regular basis into silent prayer and contemplation during the twelve years that her husband lived. After his death, she left her two surviving sons with family members and with her daughter went to live near Geneva. There she gathered around her a community of Huguenots (French Protestants). Later with several supporters, she moved on to Paris.

In Paris her fame spread and she gained a considerable following including people of influence, many of whom were women. This gained her the suspicion of the king who had her arrested. She was held for several months until she published a retraction of her ideas. After her release, her writings continued to be widely read. She was imprisoned a second time for seven years. Finally in 1703, she was released into the custody of her eldest son with whom she quietly lived the final years of her life. Her works continue to be read to this day by many who find her spiritual teachings inspiring.

Miguel de Molinos (1628-1696)

Miguel de Molinos, the founder of the Quietist movement, studied under the Jesuits and was ordained at the age of 22. He quickly gained a reputation as a forceful and brilliant speaker. Many, including the future Pope Innocent XI, sought his advice and counsel. In 1675, he published a book known in English as 'Spiritual Guide' which instructed readers on practices of meditation and contemplation that would quiet the soul and allow God to speak to it. Originally published in Italian and Spanish, it was quickly translated into Latin, French and German. Even Queen Christina of Sweden read it.

His teaching provoked great hostility and he was accused of having relations with his female followers. In 1685, Molinos and his followers were arrested by papal order. Pope Innocent XI, not wishing to create a martyr for Quietism, had him imprisoned for the remaining eleven years of his life. In his trial he refused to defend himself even from the most absurd accusations. He quietly accepted the sentence and spent the last nine years of his life in quiet contemplation in prison.

Catholic Missions

On the positive side, Catholic missions continued its expansion to various parts of the world especially to Asia during this period of time. In 1622 Pope Gregory XV created the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith also known as *Propaganda*.⁸ It comprised a group of cardinals whose main role was to recruit and train missionaries as well as provide monetary and literary resources for missions. By the seventeenth century, France was beginning to replace Spain and Portugal as the main source of missionaries.

By the eighteenth century, the centres of gravity for Catholicism in Asia were South Vietnam and the Philippines. Under Spanish rule, the Philippines saw the conversion of most of its population to Catholicism by the end of the century. There were also strong communities present in India, Ceylon and China. The country that caused most problems for the Catholic Church was China. Controversy broke out between the Jesuits and other newly arrived orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans. As a result, the emperor forbade any more missionary activities. Almost all Catholic missionaries were expelled from China and many Christians were persecuted. One other main area of Catholic missions at



▲ Franciscan order of nuns made a big impact on the Catholic Church and schools in Southeast Asia
© Peter C.T.Lim

this time was western sub-Saharan Africa, in what is now Angola and the Congo. However, the European powers were carrying out a flourishing slave trade at the same time and that made it difficult for indigenous churches to become established.

⁸ Apparently the term 'propaganda' (meaning 'to spread or propagate') first came into common use in Europe as a result of the missionary activities of the Catholic Church. In its origins 'propaganda' is an ancient and honourable word. Religious activities which were associated with propaganda commanded the respectful attention of the people. It was only in later times that the word came to have a negative or subversive association.



▲ Trouble between Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominican orders in China.

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Although the general policy of *Propaganda* was to recruit indigenous clergy and to respect local customs wherever possible, in reality, the progress was slow. Nevertheless by the end of the eighteenth century, there might have been as many as sixty dioceses⁹ outside Europe stretching from Mexico to East Asia. However, the missionary endeavours of the Catholic Church was slowly losing out to Protestant

missions as its colonial powers, those of the Spanish and Portuguese, grew weaker. Travel by French missionaries grew more difficult as the English began to dominate the seas and the suppression of the Jesuits deprived the Catholic Church of its key missionary force. Catholic missions, however, would experience a dramatic resurgence in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Suppression of the Jesuits

The Jesuit order was probably the most influential party in the Roman Catholic Church after it was recognised by the pope in 1540.¹⁰ They were a new order and a powerful one. The sons of nobility were trained in their schools all over Europe. Kings and powerful noblemen sought them out as confessors. Their tightly-knit organisation and missionary zeal brought them many successes which, unfortunately, also made them many enemies from within. The Franciscans, Dominicans as well as the kings of Portugal

and Spain were angry about their missionary practices in China and India, accusing them of allowing the native converts to continue their religious practices. The Jansenists and Ultramontanes opposed them as well. Their chief enemies, however, were the theologians and rulers. Some accused them of teaching that a ruler who did not obey the pope might be assassinated.

In 1758, an assassination attempt on the king of Portugal was blamed on them. A

⁹ A diocese is a district that is under the pastoral care of a bishop.

¹⁰ See Family Church History Series, 'Christianity in the Middle Ages', pp. 238-240.

year later, they were expelled from Portugal and its colonies and the crown confiscated their property. Three years later, they were expelled from Spain and its colonies by Charles III. Finally in 1773, Pope Clement XIV, under heavy pressure from Spain and Portugal, had to order the dissolution of their order. In doing so, the papacy lost one of the most powerful instruments of its papal policy. This, however, was not their end. Independent Austria, Protestant Prussia and Orthodox Russia did not recognise the pope's decision. Neither did most of the Catholic clergy in the United

States, many of whom were Jesuits. In any case, the pope's decree was revoked in 1814.

But the effect at the time was still immense. Missions everywhere were disrupted as the order's activities came to an end. This was especially unfortunate for the Catholic Church. Through this step that it took, the Catholic Church lost its prestige and able leadership at a very crucial period of time when the Church was facing tremendous challenges as we shall see in the next chapter.

On the Protestant Side

Protestantism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had its own challenges as well. Although the various Protestant groups shared a common bond in that they saw a 'common enemy' in the Catholic Church, they were rarely able to unite. Because they had rejected the central authority of the papacy, they now had to turn to an alternate source. They found it in confessions, brief summaries of what were considered to be essential theological beliefs that the Church and its leaders agreed on and took to be authoritative and binding. Confessions were to protect the Church from doctrinal errors. Their defenders were concerned to get their ideas right and then to pass along the correct ideas to church leaders and through them to the laity who made up the congregation of the church. True doctrine was considered to be the key to an orthodox Christianity.

Every Protestant group became equally zealous to defend their teachings or orthodoxies

against one another and they each developed their own confessions of faith. Scholars have called this movement scholastic orthodoxy. Their styles became increasingly inflexible, cold and academic. Every detail of doctrine was of the greatest importance and therefore not even the least deviation from their orthodoxy was allowed. By getting the doctrines right, the Protestants believed that Christians would be able to live rightly. Right belief for them leads to right practice.

Soon it became clear that the theologians of each Protestant group (including the Catholics) were becoming increasingly entrenched in their positions to a point that only those who agreed with them on every point of doctrine properly deserved to be called Christians. Such dogmatism together with the religious wars only served to give rise to increasing reactions against and doubts about the truth of Christianity, or at least about the value of theology and doctrine. It also resulted in the

Church losing much of its spiritual vitality and life. People became more concerned about doctrine than living out the life of faith. Such strict orthodoxy and its obviously negative

consequences led to the rise of some significant movements which we shall look at in the next chapter.

Seventeenth and Eighteenth - Century Protestantism

Lutheranism

For many years Luther's main collaborator and closest friend, Philip Melanchthon, differed from him on many issues. After Luther's death, controversies erupted between the followers of Melanchthon and the strict Lutherans. These controversies finally led them to work out the *Book of Concord* in 1557 which took an intermediate position on most issues and became the doctrinal guide for all the Lutheran churches.

By 1600, the differences on many issues between the Lutherans and Calvinists had become more entrenched and they became bitter opponents of each other. To protect any leanings toward Calvinism on the one side and Roman Catholicism on the other especially in the light of the aggressive missionary work of the Jesuits, Lutheran theologians tried to define every detail of doctrine. No 'deviations' were permitted. Church leaders sought to ensure that pastors and lay people alike were properly informed regarding the dogmatic differences among them. By the end of the seventeenth century, this confessional movement that bore Luther's name was flourishing in most of Germany, Scandinavia, Hungary and Poland.

Calvinism and Reformed Orthodoxy

Churches that identified themselves as part of the Reformed movement that followed Calvin's teachings were established in the sixteenth century in Switzerland, southern Germany, parts of Bohemia, various parts of France, Netherlands and across England and Scotland. During the seventeenth century, the majority of European Protestants who were not Lutherans were Calvinists of some description. The Puritans over in England were greatly influenced by Calvinist thought. The Netherlands adopted it as the state religion in 1622.

This was also the period when Calvinism, like its Lutheran counterparts, also determined what would thereafter be its orthodoxy. In the early part of the seventeenth century, a Dutch theologian by the name of Jacobus Arminius began to challenge the Calvinist teaching that only those who are 'elected' by God will receive salvation. To settle the Arminian problem, an assembly known as the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) was called which resulted in the crystallising of the key doctrines of Calvinism and the theology of the Dutch Reformed Church. Those who did not accept the synod's decisions were declared heretical and expelled

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from the ranks of the 'truly reformed'. The synod ousted over 200 Arminian leaders from the country. However, Arminianism would go on to exert considerable influence on Christian thought including that of John Wesley who founded Methodism in the next century.

Anglicanism¹¹

The seventeenth century saw the rise of the Puritan movement within the Church of England. Many of the exiles who fled the country when they were persecuted under the reign of 'Bloody Mary', a staunch Catholic, returned to England. They had been greatly influenced by Calvinist teachings during their exile and wanted to implement a

full Calvinist Reformation within the Anglican Church. Those who were impatient for change left the Anglican Church to worship on their own. They became known as the Separatists because they believed that the Church should be separate from the state. It was the Separatists and other Puritans who were instrumental in the founding of the new colonies in North America. We shall turn to this key story in Chapter Three.

Back in England, clashes between the monarchs who were more inclined towards Catholicism and the Puritans eventually boiled over into the last major religious war, the English Civil War (1641-1646). The Puritans won the victory and for a short while ruled over England. During this period of time, a wide variety of Christian



Fact File

Predestination vs. Arminianism

Predestination – the doctrine that only the 'elect' will be saved while others are predestined to damnation was not originally a central feature of Calvin's thought. Under the influence of the theologian Theodore Beza (1519-1605) it assumed greater importance. This prompted opposition from some of Beza's former students. Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) sparked controversy in his native Netherlands when he argued against this teaching in the university and before the legal courts.

Arminianism – shortly after his death, Arminius' followers published a document called 'The Five Articles of Remonstrance' in 1610 which detailed their major divergence from Calvinism, namely that Christ died for all people and thus it is possible for all to be saved if they freely choose to believe. Theologically the debate struck at the heart of the doctrines of God and salvation.



Armenianism vs Calvinism Debate.

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groups, who were called nonconformists,¹² emerged on the religious landscape – Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Quakers and others. However, the English soon grew tired of Puritan rule.

The Church of England's move towards



Fact File

Arminius' Five Articles of Remonstrance

The Five Articles of the Remonstrance, theological propositions by the followers of Arminius which disagreed with the teachings of Calvinism, are summarized below:

1. Those who have faith in Christ are saved, and those who do not are damned; neither is the result of divine predestination.
2. Christ died for all people, not just the "elect."
3. Man receives enabling grace from God which enables faith and good works.
4. All good works are the result of the grace of God.
5. It is possible, through abuse of grace, to lose one's salvation.



True Tales

John Bunyan, Tinker and Preacher

John Bunyan's (1628-1688) family were tinkers in England. Their work involved repairing or making metallic utensils. In the mid-1640s, he became a soldier in the English Civil War, fighting on the Puritans' side. He later became a Baptist and went around preaching in houses, barns and simple meeting rooms. After 1660, such preaching was declared illegal and he was put in prison. While in prison he wrote 'The Pilgrim's Progress' (published in two parts, 1678 and 1684), an allegory of the Christian life that would go on to become one of the most widely read books in the history of Christianity.

In Bunyan's last years, whenever he was invited to give sermons in London, huge crowds would gather long before the doors of the building were opened to hear him. One particular Sunday, there were about 3000 people crammed into the building to hear him. Bunyan had to be lifted up and carried above the heads and shoulders of the crowd because they were

Calvinism was halted as the people welcomed back Charles II as king. However, when his brother James II took over from him in 1685 and tried to impose Roman Catholicism on the country, Parliament deposed him. William of Orange and his wife Mary, both Protestants, took over the throne and finally restored the Anglican Church back in England.



By John Bunyan (author of volume) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

unable to create even a tiny pathway for him to walk to the pulpit. Many who heard him speak felt an inner peace take hold of them. John Bunyan died in 1688 from a cold that he caught while riding through heavy rain on an act of mercy.

The Orthodox Church

When the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the entire Orthodox Church (Eastern or Greek Orthodox Church as it is also called) of the Balkans¹³ and the Near East became suddenly isolated from the West. The Russian Orthodox Church was the only part of the Orthodox communion of churches which remained outside the control of the Muslim Ottoman Empire. It is partly due to this geographical and intellectual isolation that the Eastern Orthodox churches remained apart and 'silent' when the Reformation took place in the sixteenth-century.



▲ Orthodox Church in Greece
Source: CCO Public Domain via Pixabay

At first the Ottoman regime granted a measure of freedom to the Orthodox Church. Mohammed II, conqueror of Constantinople, invited bishops to elect a new patriarch when the previous one fled to Rome. He allowed the Orthodox Church to exist and granted authority to the patriarch to be the religious and administrative ruler of the entire Christian Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire. However, Christians had to live under certain restrictions. The number of churches and monasteries was greatly reduced to make room for the building of new mosques. The majority of churches became mosques during Ottoman rule. Only some churches were given maintenance and, even more rarely, were new ones built.

There was a decline in theological creativity in the Orthodox Church. The low level of theological education did not help. Many parish clergy were illiterate and missionary activities came to a standstill. The death penalty was imposed on those who converted from Islam



A typical mural inside a Greek Orthodox Church ▶

¹³The Balkans is the geographic area in Southeastern Europe bordered on the Northwest by the Adriatic Sea and the Northeast and East by the Black Sea.

to Christianity and those deemed to have insulted the Prophet. Those put to death for such reasons were recognised by the Orthodox Church as 'New Martyrs' (the old ones being those who died during the persecution of the early centuries).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Orthodox churches were for the most part located in Eastern Europe, Western Asia and Northeast Africa. Although the Ottoman sultan's power was waning, the majority of Orthodox Christians in the eighteenth century

still lived under Muslim rule. Despite sporadic persecution of Christians under the Ottoman Empire, the patriarch of Constantinople worked under Ottoman permission and remained the nominal leader of the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox churches also found themselves facing the pressures of Catholic and Protestant missions from the West during this period. There was a great deal of effort expended by Roman Catholic missionaries and church leaders to bring the Orthodox under the authority of the papacy, a move which they firmly resisted.

Russian Orthodox Church

When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, Russia came to see its capital city Moscow as the 'third Rome', and itself as the new leader of the Orthodox tradition. The Eastern Churches, however, did not acknowledge Russia's claims and continued to assert their authority within the Orthodox Church.

The struggle for power and supremacy between the tsars and the Orthodox Church in Russia reached its height during the reign of Peter 'the Great' (1672-1725). In 1721 he proclaimed himself as Emperor of All the Russians and concentrated all the power of the Church under the tsar. He abolished the patriarchate and made himself head of the Church. Despite such circumstances, the Church still experienced deepening spirituality as faithful Christians



St Basil's Cathedral, a Russian Orthodox Church, in Moscow
Source: CCO Public Domain via Pixabay

continued to carry the gospel to many new areas. The patriarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church played an important part in leading the people through troubled times. A movement called the Old Believers emerged during the seventeenth century which resisted reforms by the patriarch to keep the Russian Orthodox Church aligned with the other Orthodox

churches. This movement was supported by thousands of peasants, townsfolk and priests who resisted the changes and were greatly persecuted. Despite that, the Old Believers continued to persist in various factions and remained a feature of the Russian religious landscape up till the twentieth century.

The Gathering Storm

The seventeenth century saw the Church no longer controlling a united Christendom in Europe. The spiritual life of the Church, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, was at a low point as it entered the seventeenth century. The religious vigour of the Reformation era had passed for the Protestant churches. Years of bitter religious conflicts and fighting over fine points of doctrine and truth had produced a general weariness of such religious prejudice and intolerance. The development of the strict orthodoxies within each Protestant group, whether Catholic, Lutheran or Reformed, did not do much for the spiritual life of

the Church. It comes as no surprise that there would be reactions to what was happening. Perhaps no one set of doctrines could be absolutely right. People started to question the foundational truths of the Christian faith and to look for new ways of looking at God and the world.



▲ Theologians argue while the poor go hungry

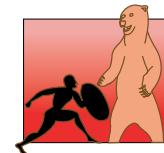
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Chat Corner

On Guarding the Truth ...

The Protestants during the seventeenth century were so intent on guarding the truths of what they believed that they failed to live out the most important truths of the faith – love and grace. How would you relate with a fellow Christian whom you believe has not got all his doctrines correct but is a person of influence in your church or fellowship?



Facing the Challenges



Guard against self-righteous pride, thinking that you are always in the right. That was the attitude of the different Protestant groups who thought that only their group had got the doctrines right and everyone else was in error.



Be gracious in how you treat those who disagree with you for Scripture tells us (1 Peter 3:15) to respond to such persons with gentleness and respect.



Don't focus only on the externals of the Christian life e.g., going to church regularly, actively serving in church, as a measure of your spirituality. It is your heart that God is concerned about, not how active you are in your Christian life.