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052155361X - Christianity Under the Ancien Régime, 1648-1789 - W. R. Ward

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Christianity under the Ancien Régime, 1648–1789

In the middle of the seventeenth century religious belief and practice were intrinsic parts of everyday life and very difficult to escape. Professor Ward offers a brief, but comprehensible, account of Christianity in Europe between the Westphalia settlements 1648 and the French Revolution in 1789. The focus of the book, however, is not on the religious institutions themselves, but on policy, that is to say those things which conservatives and reformers, revivalists and missionaries, statesmen and peasants sought to change or preserve in their religious heritage. The book is organised around large European regions, for instance, central and north-western Europe (including Britain), southern Europe, and northern and eastern Europe, and within each chapter the political, social and intellectual events and influences of the times are discussed, thus allowing the reader to understand changes in policy in context. With its maps, glossary and guide to further reading, this will be a major aid to students of Christianity under the *Ancien Régime*.

W. R. WARD is Emeritus Professor of Modern History at the University of Durham. He has contributed to several journals and has written a large number of books including *Faith and Faction* (1993) and *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (1992).

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Preface

To outline the religious history even of Christianity alone among religions in Europe in the century and a half between the Westphalia settlements and the French Revolution in a volume of modest compass, and to provide at the same time the basic introductions to the politics and the religious technicalities of the period which modern students need, involve a great exercise in leaving important things out and carry the risk of a somewhat importunate virtuosity in general judgments; the reader is entitled to know what the author thinks, though (within the limits of space) not always to the grounds on which opinions are based. It is well therefore to come clean at the outset as to strategy adopted. A history of Christianity in this period ought in my view to be primarily a history of religious belief and experience, and, while not neglecting the history of the churches, has less to do with a history of the churches than those bodies commonly claim. Thus a major institution like the papacy appears here as an engine of policy rather than as an institution; and the same is true of the principal feature of its institutional growth, Propaganda Fide. Religious belief and experience are, however, deeply affected by the churches' political involvement. It would be nice to feature an *Alltagsgeschichte* of popular religious observance and its significance, but for huge areas of Europe nothing of this kind is available; and where a good deal of work has been done its value has been diminished by the rashness of historians in adopting a rather amateur anthropology for the occasion. Nevertheless where the evidence permits *mentalités* make their appearance. At the other end of the social scale eighteenth-century writers raised many important questions about the grounds of Christian belief, and some of these are approached in the longest chapter of the book. It would here be an advantage to have found more space for the history of biblical studies but this has not proved possible. Overseas missions, already altering the European churches, perforce appear only by implication or by side-winds. Nor has it been possible in this study to remedy the great neglect by historians of doctrine of eighteenth-century theology except as slanted towards questions thrown up by the Enlightenment.

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x Preface

There would be little virtue in attempting a study of this kind as a collection of encyclopaedia-style articles by nation or denomination (which are in any case available elsewhere). It is possible to treat the history of ideas from a single point of view; but on broader themes it has seemed best to work with large regional blocks, which have in the main to be politically defined. Even so a God's-eye view or even a pan-continental perspective is out of reach, and the book is largely written round an axis from Britain to central Europe. This is due partly but not mainly to the bias of the author's studies. It has the pragmatic justification that one distinguished contribution to this theme has been made by Sir Owen Chadwick from an Italian base, that the well-worn series produced by Fliche and Martin are written from a French viewpoint, and that a major history of the French church is expected from Professor McManners soon after this book is due to go to the publishers. Moreover the Cambridge University Press itself is contemplating a volume by another hand devoted to the French Revolution and the Church. Another angle therefore seems advantageous. The drawback with the standpoint adopted is that it is more suitable for the study of Protestantism than of Catholicism (then as now the majority party); but I think it is also true that in this period, as the Counter-Reformation ran into the sands, more new things were happening on a local basis in the Protestant world than the Catholic, and that many of the new Catholic developments can be profitably observed from a German standpoint.

The book therefore attempts to illustrate the balance between lethargy and vitality in eighteenth-century Christianity by sampling various aspects of religious life and attempting to sketch the main outlines of its history on a regional basis. One unwritten aspect of its history which might well prove to be an indicator of a much wider field is the fate of mysticism in the eighteenth century; grounds of space have compelled its abandonment here, but I hope to return to it later.

A book of this kind profits from the labours of many scholars, and the suggestions of friends and colleagues; it is proper here to thank the anonymous readers of the Cambridge University Press, who would doubtless have written a very different kind of book themselves, for much valiant assistance in remedying the limitations of the author's knowledge. To the Bishop Bell Foundation are due best thanks for encouragement and for financial assistance to a student excluded by retirement from many of the usual sources of research subvention. My wife, as always, has put up with the entire project with exemplary patience.

Glossary

Almost all the technical terms used in the text are explained on the first occasion they appear; a few which are explained on a later occasion may be traced through the index. The following terms, many of them referring to topics which it has not been possible to discuss in the text, fall outside both categories.

Apocalypse, apocalyptic A vision of the future, like that of the Revelation of John in the New Testament; a genre of prophetic writings, including the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament, but not confined to the Bible.

Armageddon The site of the last decisive battle on the Day of Judgment (Rev. 16: 16); hence a final contest on a great scale.

cabbalism The cabbala was the oral tradition handed down from Moses to the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud; here it is the most important school of Jewish mysticism which flourished in Christian Europe from the late twelfth to the nineteenth century.

Cartesianism The mathematical and metaphysical doctrines of René Descartes (1596–1650).

chiliasm The view that Christ will reign with his saints for 1000 years before the end of world history.

curia The papal court and government; hence curialism and anti-curialism.

diocese The sphere of jurisdiction of a bishop.

eschatology The doctrine of the four last things – death, judgment, heaven and hell, first treated on a substantial scale in the Lutheran tradition by Abraham Calov (1612–86). Whereas apocalyptic reflects on the way to the New Age, eschatology is concerned with the end of the Old Age.

Laodicea According to Rev. 3: 15 the Church at Laodicea was neither cold nor hot; it became the archetype of lukewarm religion.

neo-stoicism The influence of Roman writers such as Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, came in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to exceed that of all ancient philosophers with the exception of

Aristotle. Neo-stoicism was given academic shape by Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) and his pupils, and continued to be important right through to the Enlightenment.

Paracelsianism Doctrines derived from the Swiss physician, chemist and natural philosopher, Philippus Aureolus Paracelsus (1490–1521). His view of the universe as a complex of sympathetic relationships long attracted alchemists, mystics, Pietists and Quietists who resisted mechanical views of human nature.

Remonstrants Members of the Arminian party in the Dutch church whose views opposing absolute predestination were condemned at the Synod of Dort (1618–19). Stripped of their offices and banished, they formed a Remonstrant Brotherhood which still exists.

Rosicrucian A member of a society alleged to have been founded by Christian Rosenkreuz in 1484, but actually appearing in 1614 in the circle of Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654), a court chaplain and General Superintendent of Württemberg. Members claimed secret and magical knowledge; more substantially they looked for a renewal of church, state and society on a Paracelsian basis. In a later phase in which the English alchemist and astrologer, Elias Ashmole (1617–92), was prominent, the movement became an influence upon freemasonry.

Socinianism A sixteenth-century anti-Trinitarian doctrine propounded by Laelius and Faustus Socinus (or Sozzini), Italian theologians, uncle and nephew. They denied the divinity of Christ, his atonement and the doctrine of original sin. Socinians were numerous in Poland and Transylvania in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and were voluble in England from the 1690s.

Theosophy Any speculative system which bases a knowledge of nature on that of the divine nature. Apparently anticipated in 1 Cor. 2: 10, it is used in this period mostly with reference to Böhme and the complex of Paracelsian, Rosicrucian and cabbalistic ideas which attracted many opponents of Protestant Orthodoxy.