

1 Peace and conflict: church and state in central and north-western Europe

Christian and non-Christian belief

In the middle of the seventeenth century religious belief and practice, by no means all of it Christian or confessionally organised, was interwoven with most aspects of life and was very difficult to escape. There were no doubt few who had Luther's vivid sense of the immediate and terrifying presence of God, but the time when a fine mystical soul like Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769), a slightly older contemporary of Wesley, could devote much of his ministry to assisting his fellows to 'realize the presence of God' (his most famous hymn in Wesley's translation begins 'Lo! God is here, let us adore') had not yet arrived. Many agricultural routines could be made to fit to the church calendar; many guilds were in one aspect religious associations with their own saints, banners, altars and processions; and if life could hardly be lived without some practice of religious rituals, formal or informal, death, which God had in store for everyone, was the crown and test of all that had gone before. Like matrimony, death, the great reaper, was not to be undertaken lightly or wantonly.

Between birth and death, the European peoples, Catholic and Protestant, found authority driving the parish harder, and seeking to break up the congenial mixture of religion and magic which had sufficed in the later Middle Ages. To get rid, in the one case, of superstition, and in the other of Catholicism and superstition, required a continual clerical pressure which was something new. In each case church furnishings were exposed to the new broom. One of the objects of Catholic pressure was to secure individual confessions, and the confessional box became the norm. On the Protestant side there was a determined attempt to concentrate the devotions of the people on the preaching service, and, by purging the churches of the familiar Catholic appeals to the senses, to exalt the Word of God read and preached. Over much of Protestant Europe this required almost three generations to complete, and was then often undone and recommenced as parishes changed hands during the wars. What was never completed was the effort to turn the family into an *ecclesiola* (a miniature church); much of what English Puritans called 'visiting' was

2 Church and state in central and north-western Europe

devoted to this, even to the reintroduction of confession by the back door. The Protestants, especially in Lutheran lands, reinforced their congregational solidarity with hymn-singing; but it illustrates the limits of our knowledge of the realities of popular worship, that congregations are known to have substituted their own less edifying lyrics for those in the hymn-books, a practice now impossible to assess. And if parish worship, slowly subsiding into a Protestant rut, became less of an entertainment than of yore, the rival entertainments of drinking, dancing, swearing, profligacy and rowdyism flourished invincibly.

There was less immediate change on the Catholic side, though besides the Council of Trent, zealous local reforming authorities were continually leaving their mark, and weeding out customary scenes which were now held to be damaging to the church. The Mass continued to be the centre of Catholic worship, though those who communicated more than three times a year were considered religious virtuosi. But just as the Catholic system depended less on the parish than the Protestant, so more of it went on outside the church than the Protestant. The veneration of saints was a Catholic characteristic at every level from the household to the nation, and in France the cult of relics reached extraordinary proportions. The church became more cautious in recognising the sanctity of individuals, but new religious orders were noteworthy for pushing hard in the corridors of canonisation. Pilgrimages also united all social classes and were great corporate celebrations. They had their Catholic critics, but limitation rather than abolition was the watchword. Places of grace were especially dear to the Catholic people. But all the time Catholic devotional practices were being subjected to clerical control, and Roman influences were supplanting regional peculiarities. And whether the institutionalisation of approved channels of grace, a process on the whole congenial to the modern state, would in the long run strengthen or weaken the faith of the flock remained to be seen.

Confessionalism and politics

Religious belonging, however, could never be solely a matter of the faithful and the parish. Israel had bequeathed to Christian Europe notions of corporate, covenantal, fidelity to God in which the symbolic role of the temple at Jerusalem had passed very fully to the various local religious establishments. Hardly any of these were efficient, but even the tiniest, like some of the minute establishments of Protestant Germany or of small Swiss cantons, were public statements of the relation of the community to God, and, as such, might at any time become a political issue. There was less difference on this point between Catholic and

Protestant states than appeared at first sight. The Catholic churches all acknowledged the universal headship of the Pope, and included religious orders with an international constituency; but all had conceded considerable rights to kings and princes, and city and cantonal governments, as the senior lay members of the congregation, while the popes themselves exercised secular authority over territories in central Italy. This inevitably embroiled them in the struggles of Habsburg and Bourbon for supremacy in the peninsula. And within the Catholic pantheon, different states adopted different celestial patrons, Poland the Virgin, Bohemia St John of Nepomuk and so forth. It was, moreover, Catholic states which had borne the brunt of the armed defence of Christendom against its external enemies, Spain against the Moors and Moriscos, Spain and the Republic of Venice against the Barbary pirates, Poland-Lithuania and the Holy Roman Empire against the Ottoman Turks; Poland against a Christian enemy external to western Christianity, Russian Orthodoxy. And, surmounting the cathedrals in the Kremlin fortress, the cross standing above the crescent still testifies to the ancient mission of Muscovy to put down Islam in the interests of Orthodoxy and Russian power. Nor were these conflicts, in which political interests and ideology could hardly be separated, a matter of the past. The Turks laid siege to Vienna in 1683; a fifteen-year struggle to force them back enabled the Habsburgs to lay the foundations of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and the final triumph of Prince Eugene over the Turks, sealed by the Peace of Passarowitz in 1718, had deep implications for the religious situation right through the Holy Roman Empire; the Habsburgs could not only continue a bitter struggle for the recatholicisation of Hungary with very little distraction from the south, they had enormously increased their political patronage and their ability to provide settlements for German peasantry, Protestant and Catholic. Moreover a great release of energies was accompanied by a powerful if covert temptation to turn away from the confessional divisions of the Holy Roman Empire to the creation of a dynastic empire in the Balkans. At the same time the power of Lutheran Sweden, which had reached its apogee in a great rescue operation on behalf of German Protestantism in the Thirty Years War (1618–48), was finally broken in a desperate attempt to supplant a nerveless Poland as a barrier against Russian expansion, an expansion short-sightedly assisted by the very Protestant states in north Germany Sweden had helped to save.

Confessionalism and coexistence

Thus politics and religion in the confessional sense could be mixed in very various proportions; but, whatever the proportions, it was very difficult

4 Church and state in central and north-western Europe

for any state to tolerate religious dissidence at home, and, when full-scale confessional conflict occurred, as it had in the Empire in the Thirty Years War, the prospects of restoring peace were undermined by the fact that the interests of *raison d'état* and confessional survival were frequently at odds. In the Westphalia settlement (the treaties of Münster and Osnabrück) in 1648 a pacification was painfully achieved, the pain of the achievement being fully matched by the discord among posterity as to its worth. In particular the initial relief at the conclusion of a disastrous conflict rapidly gave way to a cacophony of mutual accusations that the terms of the settlement were being abused in confessional interests.

Two factors made a religious agreement hard to reach. The Lutherans stood out for the principle of equality, that is, equal status not for individuals but for the estates of both confessions in the Empire; this the Catholic party were determined not to grant, and the Lutherans had not only to swallow their disappointment, but to allow the recognition of the Reformed faith as one of the three religions of the Empire. The chief representatives of this last were the Elector Palatine, who had precipitated the outbreak of the Thirty Years War by his disastrous attempt to seize the crown of Bohemia from the Habsburgs, and the Elector of Brandenburg the Reformed ruler of an overwhelmingly Lutheran state. The second problem in getting a settlement arose from the extraordinary fluctuation in the fortunes of war. After the Protestant debacle at the battle of the White Mountain in 1620 a decade of disasters followed which, but for Swedish and French intervention, seemed certain to lead to the downfall of the whole Protestant interest, and led in fact to the recatholicisation of many territories. The diplomatic device of the peace settlement was to select a 'normal' year and guarantee that the religious profession of every territory should be for the future as it had been in that year. After immense wrangling the year 1624 was agreed, a date on the whole favourable to the Catholics, and it was possible to bring a fearful and destructive conflict to an end. This agreement has been described as 'the establishment of Protestantism', and it undoubtedly meant that if the armed might of the Counter-Reformation had been unable to dislodge the Protestants hitherto, it would be unable to do so again.

Limitations to the Protestant guarantees

There were, however, four very substantial limitations to this guarantee. In the century between the outbreak of the Reformation and the beginning of the Thirty Years War, events had on the whole gone the Protestants' way; in the century commencing with the White Mountain, the reverse was true, and to this the Westphalia settlement made little differ-

ence. The early successes of the Reformation had encouraged princes to climb on to a successful bandwagon; now they had every inducement to climb off. The chances of mortality brought to an end the Protestant line in the Palatinate in 1685, and the succession passed to a Catholic branch. Protestant princes unable to attain royal status within the Empire looked for crowns elsewhere; Brandenburg, Hesse and Hanover found them in East Prussia, Denmark and Great Britain without surrendering their Protestantism; but the head of the *Corpus Evangelicorum* (the Protestant fraction in the Imperial Diet), the Elector of Saxony, successfully pursued the crown of Poland, and, in order to get it was received into the Catholic Church in 1697 (retaining his headship of the Protestant body). The duchy of Württemberg passed to a Catholic in 1733. By the beginning of the eighteenth century almost every Protestant princely house in the Empire had one or two converts to Rome. The Protestant church establishments showed great tenacity in holding their ground when the princely house changed confession, and were assisted by the Westphalia provision about the 'normal' year; but the whole point of establishment was that the forces of authority should stand together, and an establishment without the head of state looked threadbare.

The second great limitation lay in the local implementation of the peace settlement. Even in an atmosphere of goodwill it would not have been easy to work legislation by reference to a date already a generation past when the peace treaties were signed. In fact the bitter Protestant experience was that, as at more exalted levels, the tide went pretty consistently against them, and even a century later, an enormous amount of the time and energy of the public authorities in Germany was still taken up with trying to implement what was supposed to be the fundamental law of the Empire. The constant disputes over petty local matters of status and convenience were among the things which generated a mentality of conservatism and pessimism in the German Protestant churches; they had sought security in an internationally guaranteed status, had hardly found what they hoped for, and could not see where to turn next. That their fears were not illusory was demonstrated in 1719. The scene (appropriately) was the Palatinate, now governed by a Catholic line. The great church of Heidelberg, the church of the Holy Spirit, was a mirror image of conditions in the Electorate as a whole. The choir was owned by the Electors who were buried there, and for forty years it had been used by the Catholics and separated from the rest of the building by a wall from top to bottom. This wall was now pulled down, and the Reformed were turned out, with specious promises designed to induce them to forego their internationally guaranteed status, and, prospectively, that large part of the ecclesiastical revenues of the Palatinate attached to the church.

6 Church and state in central and north-western Europe

Moreover, concluding that the glosses to the eightieth question of the Heidelberg catechism to the effect that the Mass was ‘abominable idolatry’ were not part of the original catechism that he was bound to maintain, the Elector seized all the copies he could find notwithstanding that his arms appeared on the title page. Politicians, especially in England and Hanover, were deeply convinced that the affair had been worked up by the papal curia to get the Emperor out of Italy and embroil him with England in Germany. This international dimension forced a local dispute to the very brink of war. At the brink the Elector yielded and the Palatine Protestants regained their rights. This retreat proved to be the end of the Catholic advance which had been going on for a century, unhaltingly in the Westphalia settlements. But this was more clearly perceived in the Chancelleries than among the faithful; among them the spectre of the ultimate Armageddon between Catholic and Protestant still struck fear to the end of the Seven Years War.

The third limitation upon Protestant satisfaction with the peace settlements was the confessional price which had to be paid. In effect the huge number of Protestants in the great triangle between Salzburg, Transylvania, and Poland were abandoned to the tender mercies of the Counter-Reformation. The Emperor was not prepared to make concessions in his family lands. In Silesia where there was a Protestant majority, Protestant worship was to be permitted in the duchies of Brieg, Liegnitz and Münsterberg-Oels, and the town of Breslau, three new ‘grace’ churches (i.e. churches built by special permission of the peace settlement) were to be built elsewhere, and the Protestant Silesian nobility of other duchies together with their subjects (and the remnant of the Protestant nobility of Lower Austria) were not to be required to emigrate on account of their adherence to the Augsburg Confession. They might attend services at frontier churches in neighbouring territories where the Protestant faith was established, hence the wearisome journeys in summer for communions abroad, and the line of frontier churches on the Saxon side of the Silesian border. These concessions proved to have an unexpected importance in the survival of Protestantism throughout the region, but they were all that were to be had. For Protestants in Salzburg, in Austria, and in Poland (once the land of liberty achieved) there was nothing. Nor was this simply a problem for those who had to endure it; in eighteenth-century New England Jonathan Edwards reckoned that the Protestant world as a whole had been reduced to half its peak strength. Why God should apparently desert his Zion was a mystery, and when ‘showers of blessings’ were finally encountered, not least in Edwards’s own parish, they were greeted with relief as well as joy.

Fourthly and finally the Westphalia settlements did not preserve the

central European heartlands of the Protestant world from the depredations of even one of the contracting powers. Louis XIV, who assumed personal government in France in 1661, pursued a long course of aggression along his eastern frontier, inspired at least in part by a desire to balance the gains ultimately made by the Habsburgs in Hungary; these gains left him with a dreadful reputation in the Empire. In 1689 the French ran amok in the Palatinate, and remained till the peace settlement of Ryswick in 1697. Behind the French troops the building of Catholic churches in this Protestant state recommenced, and in places Catholics were permitted to use Protestant church buildings. This was to use duress to make a nonsense of the normal year of the Westphalia settlement, and was held by Protestants to be not binding in conscience; the Catholics replied menacingly that Westphalia itself was an act of force in which they had been pillaged by the Protestants with foreign assistance from France and Sweden. This bitter confrontation poisoned the atmosphere of the Empire for half a century, and the Catholics substantially got their way. Clause IV of the peace of Ryswick provided that in the places the French now gave up Catholicism should retain its present status.

Peace and the papacy

This episode drove home the fact that the principal player on the Catholic side, the papacy, had been as bitterly dissatisfied with the Westphalia settlements as any Protestant, and had consistently refused to recognise them. The papacy had been abandoned by the German Catholic powers and so cut out of the most important peace settlement of modern times. From a Protestant viewpoint the Pope could still be a thorough diplomatic nuisance. Pope Innocent XII gave total support to Clause IV of the Ryswick treaty, and his successor, Clement XI, determined to uphold it at any cost in the next great peace negotiations at Utrecht (1713). His agent, Passionei, was prepared to buy off British backing for the German Protestants by dropping demands for the relief of Irish Catholics, but the Pope, still protesting against the Westphalia treaties, would have no compromise. In 1715 the Pope held a consistory to inform his cardinals of the balance of advantage and disadvantage to the Church. He found especial pleasure in the maintenance of Clause IV and especial pain in the failure of the Stuarts to regain the British crown, the confirmation of Westphalia, the recognition of a ninth electoral dignity (in the choice of the Emperor) in favour of Protestant Hanover, and the royal title of Prussia to the Hohenzollerns; most of all he complained that the suzerainty of the Holy See over Naples and Sicily had been overridden. His rallying-cry for combined action against the Turks fell on deaf ears. The papacy was of course often less

8 Church and state in central and north-western Europe

aggressive in political practice than in diplomatic claim; but this consistory only confirmed the view of many hard-pressed Protestants that the Pope was indeed the Man of Sin who held the agreements which secured the peace of Europe as of small account beside the advantage of the church.

Confessional Armageddon?

The Catholic powers could not do without papal authority in the management of their churches, but continued to act independently of, or even against, the papacy. The paradox was that at a time when all the great churches offered a systematic theology guaranteed watertight against the attacks of opponents (what was known among continental Protestants as Orthodoxy), and, if possible, supported by the state, the course of events was inexorably undermining the absolute claims made by the confessional programmes. The Thirty Years War, an ostensibly confessional conflict, had shown innumerable examples of what was then known as 'indifferentism', as troops changed sides for pay, irrespective of their religious profession; and the peace treaties giving legal standing to the Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed churches, produced the situation, still characteristic of Germany, that it was possible to pass straight from a parish adorned with all the street furniture of Catholic devotion into one where no such thing was to be seen. Rulers continued to force or induce their subjects to change their religious profession; but as long as the Catholic world was riven by the rivalry of Habsburg and Bourbon, the nightmare of Protestant imagination, a fight to the finish between Protestant and Catholic, would remain a dream. Each side had to pick up allies from the other to meet the needs of the moment.

Protestants had indeed tied themselves in theological and metaphysical knots over this question at the Synod of Dort in 1617. The question there in debate, the issue between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism (an issue which even in the Reformed world was, before the end of the eighteenth century, being admitted to be incapable of resolution), obtained its urgency from the demands of foreign policy. Dutch independence was still at that date threatened by Spain; that threat might be eased by alliance with France, but the French monarchy was itself at loggerheads with its Reformed subjects whose toleration was always precarious. Was it right to save the Reformed cause in the United Provinces by alliance with a power which would dearly love to end the Reformed cause in France? The supralapsarians held that God's gracious decree of election had been made before the Fall, and, in a sense, in anticipation of human waywardness; if therefore the object of creation from the begin-

ning had been the fine flower of the elect Reformed congregations of the saints, then it would be sacrilege of the worst kind to treat the French Reformed as a diplomatic pawn to be sacrificed for the greater good of the Dutch Reformed. The infralapsarians, holding that God's decree of election was made after the Fall of Man, took the view that even the plan of salvation exemplified how God himself had (so-to-speak) to make the best of a bad job when confronted by human sinfulness, and, if God, why not the United Provinces? Perhaps mercifully, the Bible offered no absolutely cogent evidence for either of these views; nor did Calvin, since he had never been pressed on the matter. The upshot was that the Dutch fought their own corner, including three wars against Protestant England, but at the same time kept up generous financial and other support to struggling Reformed congregations in the Rhineland, the American colonies and elsewhere far down the eighteenth century.

The reconstruction of the Church of England

The Dutch also had a hand in undermining the wilder claims of the one great Protestant success story of the late seventeenth century, the reconstruction of the Church of England. During the civil wars (1640–60) the head of the Church, Charles I, and Laud, the Primate, were both beheaded, and Presbyterianism was introduced under pressure from Scottish armies, themselves later routed by Cromwell's troops. Bishops, cathedral chapters, church courts and the Book of Common Prayer were all abolished by parliamentary action, and in a purge of 'scandalous' and 'malignant' clergy, between a quarter and a third of parish priests were replaced by men of Puritan convictions. The tone was set by Cromwell's ideas of reform and toleration, and the bishops who were left kept a low profile and allowed their line almost to die out. It was not at all clear when Charles II was restored in 1660 who could speak for the (very Protestant and Reformed) Church of England of pre-civil-war days.

The decisive group were clergy and lay advisers, prominent among them Edward Hyde, later Lord Clarendon (1609–74), who had gathered round Charles II in exile in the Netherlands. They would have nothing to do with foreign Protestants, constantly warned the king against alliance with Presbyterians, and sincerely believed that nothing which destroyed the mitre could save the crown. Their dominant influence at the Restoration led to the adoption of a narrow Act of Uniformity in 1662, and the ejection of 1,700 ministers. With the political backing of a high-Tory Cavalier Parliament an exclusive settlement was created and made to work, and life was hard for dissenters. But none of the props of

10 Church and state in central and north-western Europe

the new system was as secure as it looked. Some two-thirds of the clergy from the Interregnum continued to serve; they were not turncoats, but showed less initiative than either their predecessors or their successors in developing professional associations to further their work. This was serious at a time when the general public would attend church when there was a government drive to make them do so, and stayed away in droves when there was not. Lay magistrates in the counties would enforce the legislation against dissenters as long as they feared a sectarian uprising; but when they began to be alarmed at the international advance of Catholicism it was a different story. Moreover the Church had begun as a religious monopoly symbolised by the godly prince at its head. But Charles II left much to be desired as a godly prince, not least in his intention to secure indulgence for Roman Catholics and others, and the necessities of polemic against papists and Protestant dissenters began to edge the dominant party in the church towards the view which triumphed in the nineteenth century, that the bishop was the sacred symbol and that there was no reason why the boundaries of church and state should be coterminous. Moreover, although the Restoration had given rise to much imprudent veneration of the Divine Right of Kings, it had been an Erastian, parliamentary, settlement, and in 1689 Parliament was to exercise its own dispensing power in the Toleration Act. And when James II finally fathered an heir to the throne, the political parties, faced with the prospect of an indefinite Catholic succession, got rid of him in a remarkably slick operation; but only one bishop, Compton, signed the invitation to William of Orange to come to save the Protestant cause, while six bishops and 400 clergy were speedily ejected for refusing the oaths to the new government. There were snags with apostolic bishops as well as with kings by divine right.

The Protestant succession

But if in William III the Church of England now had a joint head (with Queen Mary) who was a Dutch Presbyterian, he vigorously put down a Catholic rebellion in Ireland and secured an exclusively Presbyterian establishment in Scotland. The position now was that the sovereign was an Anglican in England, and a Presbyterian in Scotland, and there was also a second-class establishment in England of those dissenters who were prepared to make the undertakings required under the Toleration Act. (For those who were not, such as Socinians and Roman Catholics, there was still no toleration.) But for the Church of England, with its apologetic awkwardly built on the Divine Right of Kings and episcopacy, there was