

Blood upon the Dry Ground: Nineteenth-Century Europe, the Continent

We have spent a considerable amount of time looking at church history in America, England, and Scotland. Now, we come today to a survey of the continent of Europe in the nineteenth century. We are going to use a prayer from the Dutch Reformed tradition as we begin today from the Christian Reformed Church's Psalter hymnal. Let us pray.

May the world be filled with Thy knowledge. May those ignorant of Thy truth be converted and the weak strengthened. May everyone, by word and deed, magnify Thy holy name. To this end, send forth faithful servants into Thy harvest and qualify them in such a manner that they may faithfully perform their duties. Amen.

On the continent of Europe, the sixteenth century was the great century of the Reformation that led into the religious wars. So, for a good many decades and well into the next century, Europe was torn by religious warfare that did not end until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which was halfway through the seventeenth century. By the time we come to that date, we are well on our way into the Enlightenment in Europe. Descartes died in the year 1650. The religious and intellectual turmoil that those two centuries marked were followed by a century of political and social unrest that led up to the event of the French Revolution. Also, during the eighteenth century, there was a time of revival and renewal coming particularly from Germany in the work of the Pietists and the Moravians. By the nineteenth century on the continent of Europe, despite the eighteenth-century Pietistic revival, Orthodox Protestant Christianity had fallen to a very low ebb. In the lands of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and the Reformers, the Orthodox Christian Church was a small remnant of what it had once been—a kind of memory and hope for many people. But, during the nineteenth century, there was also a revival that brought religious zeal back into some of these dead state churches—Christian faith and Orthodox theology.

In this lesson I want to survey that movement as it touched various countries in Europe in different ways during the nineteenth century. We will start with the revival in the French-speaking part of Europe. We will focus especially on the Swiss Revival, and then I will say something about a similar revival that took place in France.

As we think of Geneva, we, of course, think of the city of John Calvin and the great Calvinist theologians who followed John Calvin. One of the greatest was Francis Turretin. Francis Turretin died in 1600 at 87 years old. He was succeeded by his son as professor of theology at Geneva. However, in that succession from father to son there was a great shift in the kind of theology that was being taught. Francis Turretin was an Orthodox Calvinist. His son, Jean Alphonse Turretin, moved away from Orthodoxy into a more accommodating type of theology. By the nineteenth century, students studying at Calvin's Academy subscribed to Socinian and Unitarian views of theology. One of the students studying at Geneva at that time wrote this: "Not one hour during the four-year course of theological study, not one hour, was consecrated to the study of holy Scriptures." It is amazing to think of that at Calvin's own school—that a person several hundred years later could study in that school for four years and not spend an hour studying the Bible. We wonder what they were studying. It is not hard to find the answer because Geneva had been impacted so heavily by the teaching of the philosophers and the Enlightenment that human philosophy had replaced divine Scripture as the main subject of study in that seminary.

There was a man from Scotland, whom I mentioned in the last lesson, named Robert Haldane. He was a layman who preached in the Highlands of Scotland and evangelized the remote areas of that country for

the Lord. He also traveled to the continent and went to Geneva in 1816. He stayed in a hotel there and invited some students whom he had met to come to his room to study the book of Romans. He was able to attract some young men who indeed did want to study the Bible. They came twice a week to study Romans. Haldane's commentary on Romans, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, is the fruit of that teaching and is still a very valuable commentary. That hotel room in Geneva is sometimes called the birthplace of the Second Swiss Reformation. It is interesting to think of the influence the First Swiss Reformation under John Calvin had on Scotland. John Knox spent some time there. He said it was the most perfect school of Christ on the face of the earth. Scotland, in a sense, repaid its debt to Geneva as Robert Haldane took the same message that Calvin preached back to the city of Calvin. Out of the ministry and teaching of Robert Haldane came a movement—a revival. These young men whom he taught were converted and inspired to follow Haldane in his example of believing and teaching the Word of God.

One of those men was Merle d'Aubigne, a church historian. D'Aubigne wrote numerous volumes on the history of the Reformation. As the church historian, he combined two elements to his study: the work of God in history and how people have responded to the work of God in history—how they had felt, thought, and responded to God's divine activity. For most people back then (and even historians today and sometimes even church historians today), d'Aubigne is not highly respected as an historian because he was too theological in his history. He always brought in theological themes. He tended to preach too much in his lectures. D'Aubigne, by the way, is one of my models in the teaching of church history. Even though he is not respected in the academy in general, he is an accurate historian, and he brought in a lot of spiritual life, theology, and piety into his teaching.

Another man who came out of the Swiss Revival was Lewis Gaussen. He wrote a book back in 1841 called *Theonoostia*, which is the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Forty years before Warfield and Hodge wrote their book on inspiration, Lewis Gaussen had written a similar book in which he affirmed the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. By 1849, d'Aubigne and some of the others, having tried to reform the state church in Geneva, felt that it was not going to happen, so they left the state church to form a Free Reformed Church in Geneva. Similar movements took place in the Canton of Beau in 1845 and later in Neuchatel under Alexander Bonet. (Bonet is sometimes considered the most important French-speaking Reformed theologian since Calvin.) Other movements took place under Frederick Godet, a Bible commentator who is well known in the English-speaking world for his New Testament commentary, which is still valuable and useful even in the present. So, that was a movement within the Swiss Reformed community. It did not overwhelm the country. It was a small but important movement of spiritual life and Reformed Orthodoxy in the state church and it was beginning a new church in Switzerland.

At the same time as the Swiss Revival, there was new life in France. Let me review, just for a moment, the history of Protestantism in France, going back to the Edict of Nantes in 1598 when Protestants were allowed to legally exist in France for the first time. Gradually, the Protestant strongholds fell. La Rochelle, the last Huguenot stronghold, fell in 1628. Then in 1685, there was the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. So, that period of almost 100 years of tolerance came to an end, and Protestants were persecuted again. The immigration of over half a million Huguenots took place at that time. Many went to England, some went to America, and the rest went to other places. According to John T. McNeal, these Huguenots carried with them much of the soul of France. It is interesting to think that when the persecution of Puritans and Presbyterians ended in England and Scotland in 1688, that persecution of Huguenots was beginning again in 1685. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the French Reformed Church that remained in France—the Huguenots who stayed in France—comprised what is called the Church of the Desert. They met in secret in out-of-the-way places. That church revived and

was organized despite terrible persecution. It was organized by Antoine Court. Court met Christians and theological students in secret in the Church in the Desert. He wrote, "I have often pitched my professor's chair in the open air. The sky was our roof; the leafy branches thrown out from the crevices overhead, our canopy. There, I and my students would remain for about eight days. It was our hall, our lecture room, and our study." Then, after that time of study, those students would go back to serve the Lord in different places in France, and Antoine Court would move on to another place to meet another group of students in secret. By the nineteenth century, the year 1802, the Reformed churches were once again legally recognized in France.

That brings us to Frederick and Adolphe Monod. Adolphe Monod was born in 1802. They were two brothers who were leaders of a revival that took place in France. They were also leaders of the movement that in 1849 led an Orthodox Reformed congregation into a Free Reformed Church. Adolphe Monod is famous for his *Farewell*. It is a devotional classic. As this man was dying, he invited friends to come to his room in Paris. For about six months, they came every Sabbath to his room during the year 1855 and into 1856. They celebrated the Lord's Supper together in that room every Sunday afternoon. Adolphe prepared short meditations for his friends. He spoke, as he put it, "as a dying man to dying men." I would commend that book, Adolphe Monod's *Farewell*, to you. From the work of Monod and the much-traveled Robert Haldane, who spent some time in France as well, the revival began to move through some of the churches in the French Reformed movement.

Let us go next to the Netherlands. I think of renewal in the Netherlands. Enlightenment thought had been particularly ripe in the Netherlands. There, Enlightenment thought was often called "revolutionary thought." People realized that the kind of Enlightenment thought that sparked the French Revolution was something that was prevalent. Some people realized it was very antagonistic toward the Gospel, but it affected Dutch culture and the Dutch Reformed Church. The Swiss Revival also touched the Netherlands, producing groups of people called "Christian friends." It also led to the conversion of several prominent leaders, including Groen Van Prinsterer, who began what he called an anti-revolutionary movement, which simply means the anti-Enlightenment movement. This was an intellectual movement attempting to return to traditional values as opposed to the revolutionary Enlightenment ideas. Eventually, small groups of people began to meet for prayer and Bible study in different parts of the Netherlands. Then, in 1834, in a church in Groningen in the far north of Holland, a secession took place and a new church was formed. A small, conservative, Reformed denomination came into existence and spread to other churches. This was called the Secession of 1834 or "the return," meaning a return to Orthodoxy or a return to the older Calvinistic values, which the State Reformed Church was rapidly removing. This movement was limited in size. It was a small group. It was actually limited in breadth, too. It did not have the vision that it should have had. However, the Secession Church did lift up again the standards of Christ, the Scriptures, and the Confessions when so many Reformed people in the Netherlands were willing to quietly ignore all of this. In 1886, there was another secession this time called "De Doleantie" or "the weeping." The word "doleantie" was chosen because it indicated the people who left the state church in 1886 did not do it with great joy. It was a sorrowful movement. They wept as they left because they realized that they could no longer stay in what had been a great church but had now lost its theological moorings. In 1892, this second secession merged with most of the churches from the 1834 secession to form a new and significant church in the Netherlands called the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The leader of this movement was, of course, Abraham Kuyper.

As we come to Abraham Kuyper, we come to an important figure in modern church history. It is hard to sum up Kuyper's life in a sentence or two, which I am going to be forced to do. You can talk about Kuyper in so many different ways. He was a pastor and a newspaper editor who, for years, published two newspapers: a Christian paper and a general newspaper. He was an educator. He began the Free

University of Amsterdam. He was a theologian. He is known in the United States particularly for his “Stone Lectures” given at Princeton in 1898 but for many other writings as well, including *Principles of Sacred Theology* and his great work on the Holy Spirit. He was also a statesman and a politician, and in 1801 he became prime minister of the Netherlands.

Recently I was doing an interview with a man who is producing a video for the 25th celebration of the Presbyterian Church in American (PCA) General Assembly this summer. One of the videos will feature Covenant Seminary. In the interview he asked me, “Who are your three heroes in church history in the twentieth century?” I did not know that question was coming, but I thought quickly, and the first name on my list was Abraham Kuyper. I have been thinking since if I would revise that, but I do not think I would. Abraham Kuyper would still be one of my three heroes in the twentieth century.

When B. B. Warfield wrote his review of Abraham Kuyper’s book on the Holy Spirit, he said, “One of the chief claims to our attention, which Dr. Kuyper makes therefore, is rooted in the fact that it is a product of a great religious movement in the Dutch churches. This is not the place to give a history of that movement. I have just sketched that history very briefly. We have all watched it with the most intense interest from the rise of the Free Churches to the union with them of the new element for the Doleantie. We have lacked no proof that it was a movement of exceptional spiritual depth, but had there lacked any such proof, it would be supplied by the appearance of this book out of its heart.”

So, Kuyper’s book on the Holy Spirit is a good book to read not only for our understanding of the Holy Spirit, but also to see the spiritual life of the movements in the nineteenth century, which led to the formation of this new church. Abraham Kuyper’s movement is sometimes described as “Neo-Calvinism.” It is really just Calvinism, but it is Calvinism brought back into a country that once knew it well but had largely lost sight of it. We also use the expression “Neo-Calvinism” to emphasize something very important in Kuyper’s teaching, and that is the Reformed world and life view. One of the great collections of Kuyper’s writings in English is called *To Be Near Unto God*, which is a book of devotional readings. In that book, he says, “God’s greatness and almightiness do not limit and bind themselves to the narrower domain of salvation of souls but permeate our whole human life. And with every one of us, according to our talents and calling, love for God must express itself in every department of life with equal zeal and power.” It sounds like Abraham Kuyper, and that is a Christian world and life view, which he emphasized so wonderfully, particularly in his “Stone Lectures,” but also in many of his other writings as well.

Let us go now to Germany. There was new light there. By the nineteenth century, the state of Christianity and theological study in Germany was not hopeful. The Pietist revival and the Moravian renewal had brought some life in the eighteenth century, but the safe Lutheran church and the Reformed churches in Germany had drifted away into a kind of dead rationalism. Unbelief, skepticism, and Enlightenment thought prevailed even in Holland, the great center of Pietist thought, which by the nineteenth century had become a hotbed of rationalism. Orthodoxy was like a city under siege. But in the land of Germany, there was also a nineteenth-century awakening based on Bible study, Bible scholarship, spiritual life, and confessional Orthodoxy in both the Lutheran and Reformed camps. I have time just to highlight a few names of the leaders of this awakening.

J. A. W. Neander was the church historian. E. W. Hengstenberg was a theologian who taught at Berlin and led people into a truer and more biblical path. One of my favorite theologians of this time from the German side of things is Friedrich August Tholuck. He was a student in Berlin and had very much bought into the rationalistic attitudes until he was led to Christ by a Moravian. Then, he was inspired by toward missions and Christian involvement in social areas as well as Christian Orthodoxy. He became a

professor of theology at Halle in 1826. The school had 900 students then, and only five of those students professed to be Christians and to believe in the deity of Christ. Tholuck preached at Halle as well as taught there. Some of his sermons have been translated into English, and they appear in a volume called *Light from the Cross*. It contains 22 sermons that Tholuck preached to the students at Halle. They were sermons about the cross. It is a wonderful, spiritual exercise to read Tholuck's *Light from the Cross* leading up to Good Friday. I have done that on a number of occasions and would commend that to you as well. There is something else that is interesting to me about Tholuck. He was a good friend of Charles Hodge's. Charles Hodge studied in Germany for two years and met Tholuck there. They carried on correspondence for the rest of their lives. Tholuck was an example to Hodge of a man who was a scholar but who also loved the Lord and wanted to teach the Word to students of theology. Hodge could put this example into practice at Princeton.

One other figure from the German-speaking scene was Adolf Schlatter. Schlatter was just beginning to be known by English-speaking people largely through the efforts of Professor Yarborough and Andrew Southwell, who is now doing his doctoral dissertation on Schlatter at Oxford. Andrew is in Alabama now as a pastor, but he is still working on that dissertation, which should greatly contribute to our knowledge of this important man. Schlatter was born in Saint Gallen, Switzerland into a family with strong Pietistic and Reformed confessional roots. His life is very interesting from his early church work as pastor to his activity as a theological professor. He had a life motto and prayer, which was this: "Father, hallowed be Thy name." One of the great moments in Schlatter's career was his inaugural lecture at Tubingen in 1898. This Orthodox theologian came in to give his first lecture at a school that was given over to Enlightenment higher criticism. A student who was there that day and heard Schlatter lecture described the scene in this way: "Every seat in the large lecture hall was filled. Around us, we could see that many listeners were critical of Schlatter's views. So, the room was full of tension. Then, we heard a loud crash behind us. Schlatter had entered the room and forcefully flung the door closed behind him. The old building seemed to be shaken to its foundation as the new professor stepped quickly to the podium and began his lecture without a word of introduction. Some of us had the feeling that in this moment, the door of a past era of theological science had been closed. A new way into the holy land of God-taught scholarship was flung open." This is a dramatic description of that first lecture at Tubingen. God certainly used Schlatter to bring new life and Orthodoxy into many of the churches in Germany.

Now, we could spend time looking at Scandinavia. I suppose if this were a Lutheran seminary I would be doing that, and I would have skipped Switzerland and France. However, since I cannot do everything, we will take a brief look at one part of Scandinavia because it is important for everybody to know about Soren Kierkegaard. His was a lonely and strange voice in Denmark. Kierkegaard was "the melancholy Dane." He struggled with severe depression all of his life. If you read much about him, you will realize that he was indeed a very melancholy person. He was also a radical reformer. He was part of the Lutheran State Church in Denmark. In 1855, he wrote a sentence in a newspaper article that startled and angered his countrymen. He said, "The religious situation in our country is Christianity does not exist." People thought Kierkegaard was crazy, and they knew that he was now because there were Christian churches all over the place and everyone in Denmark was Christian. Who was this strange man to say that Christianity did not exist in Denmark? But that is exactly what Kierkegaard believed. Something existed under the name of Christianity in Denmark, but it was not, according to Kierkegaard, Christianity. So, he set out to reintroduce Christianity to a Christian country.

We might use Kierkegaard as a kind of model. He would not be an example in everything, but he was a man who was a missionary to a Christian country. It takes a certain mindset and way of presenting the truth to people who think they are Christians. Kierkegaard had the tough job of getting people "unsaved"

so that he could try to get them saved. Luther, after all, said the first half of the Gospel is to get people “unsaved” so they do not think they are saved. They may think they are saved, depending on their good works or something else. Kierkegaard tried to get them “unsaved” as well as to save them. He emphasized against all this Enlightenment thought that had come into Europe with tremendous force. He was a man in Denmark trying to stand against that flood. Kierkegaard said, “It is all delusion. It is optimistic, humanistic rationalism and Enlightenment thought. It is not only not Christianity, but it is delusion because it fails to address the real issues of fear, suffering, and death.” Those were not popular themes among the Enlightenment thinkers, the Romantics, or the humanistic, rational theologians of the time. Kierkegaard said, “A person buying into this kind of thought is like someone who is looking out at a beautiful castle. All the time, the person is living in a decrepit huddle. It is falling down around us. We are living in this decrepit huddle, building these imaginary castles of optimistic, evolutionary humanism.”

According to Kierkegaard, one of the greatest delusions of modern thought was its view of God. God had become eminent, comfortable, and non-threatening in modern thought. Kierkegaard began to emphasize the otherness of God. God is separate, transcendent, and sovereign. God is not part of our European culture, but He rules over us and all things. Kierkegaard is sometimes called “the first existentialist,” and that is because of the particular way that he then tried to frame the Christian message. There is a radical separation between God and ourselves. We cannot do anything about that separation. Humanism said that we could bring God down to our level—that He comes down to us in some way. But Kierkegaard did not believe that. We cannot reach God. It is only God who can reach us, and God reaches us only in Christ—the impossible possibility of Christ. Kierkegaard liked to use phrases that were difficult to understand and that tantalize us, but that is the way he said it. The bridge, then, is from God’s side because He comes down through the incarnation. In the audacity of believing and in the leap of faith, we respond to what God has done. The leap of faith is a leap into the unknown, in a way.

Kierkegaard was intrigued by the biblical story of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac. There, God asked Abraham to do something that did not make any sense, and according to Kierkegaard, that is what God is asking us to do. He really could not get away from that story. He wrote about it over and over again. What did God mean by that, and how should we respond to that?

Some people have seen in Kierkegaard a wonderful intensity that goes against the casual Christianity of the nineteenth century. Other people have seen in Kierkegaard (certainly Francis Schaeffer) a kind of irrationality in which faith is not really faith in Christ but faith in faith. In other words, if I believe enough, it can be true. For some, then, Soren Kierkegaard has been a way to hold onto Christianity in a modern world where everything is upset. But to others, it has been a rather short step from Kierkegaardian existentialism in which God is fundamental but completely hidden to atheistic existentialism that does without God altogether.

You really need to study Kierkegaard in great detail. I have just tried to sketch a little picture here of how we can look at this melancholy Dane. He is important. He is important for many figures especially in the twentieth century. Kierkegaard was a lonely and lost voice in the nineteenth century because people did not pay that much attention to him in Denmark, and people in other places did not read Danish very well. So, Kierkegaard was not well known until the twentieth century when his works were translated into many languages.

Francis Schaeffer was very critical of Kierkegaard, but even Schaeffer appreciated the spiritual life that he found in Kierkegaard’s prayers. I think there is perhaps a kind of triumph of grace, hopefully a real triumph of grace, in the prayers of Kierkegaard. I would like to conclude this lesson with a few lines

from the close of one of his prayers. Here Kierkegaard was praying for different categories of people. He says in the last paragraph, "Yet no one is able to mention every individual. And who indeed can mention all the various classes of people? So, in conclusion, we mention only one class and that is ministers of the Gospel." As we conclude with this prayer of a European, think about the need of Europe today for another great revival. Pray that these countries, which have known the truth of God in the past, may once again have real, vital, living faith. One student is going to Amsterdam this summer as assistant pastor of a church there. Another student will go in a year or so to Hungary, which has a large Reformed community. It is one of the four or five largest Reformed communities in the world in terms of the percentage of Presbyterians to the population of the country. We can pray for them as well as other faithful ministers of the Gospel who are standing for the truth in France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Hungary, Denmark, Germany, and other places in Europe. Let us pray.

"We pray for them that are ministers of Your Word, whose work it is so far as a man is able to draw men to You, we pray that You will bless their work and at the same time, they themselves may be drawn to You. Do not let them, in their zeal to draw others to You, neglect You. Amen."