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Timeline of Topics.

- Quote
- Philip Jacob Spener (d. 1705)
- Reformation
- Spener: *The Father of Pietism (and you might be one)*
- World Christianity
- How Orthodoxy helped cause the war in Ukraine

***Read this first,
then the article to the right.***

First, we need to discuss a bit about the Orthodox Church, since 75% of Ukrainians and Russians claim to be Orthodox, and Ukraine has three different Orthodox churches. This is all you need to know to make sense of this article: Think of Orthodoxy as in the middle between Roman Catholics and Protestants: There is one Roman Catholic Church but many different Protestant denominations. Orthodox does not have one central church, but is similar to Protestant churches in this regard: Orthodoxy is divided up along national borders; thus, you have the Greek Orthodox church, the Russian Orthodox church, the Ethiopian Orthodox church, etc. The “problem” is something I mentioned above: while this is true of most countries that practice Orthodoxy, Ukraine has three separate Orthodox churches.

Finally, in Eastern Orthodoxy, even though they do not have a pope, all the national Orthodox churches look to the Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul) as their main guide.

More about the war in Ukraine? Yes, because no one has told you how Christianity played a part in the decision by Russia to attack Ukraine

Let's start in the year 900. In that year, the Russia of today did not exist but, instead, the kingdom of Rus consisted of western Russia (where Moscow is located), Belarus, and Ukraine. And, this is the fascinating part, Kiev was its capital. That alone should give you more insight into why Putin wanted to conquer Ukraine.

Now to the year 988: The Prince of Rus decided that his country would convert from pagan to Orthodox. Even as the kingdom of Rus shrank and enlarged in size over the centuries, it remained Orthodox, meaning Russian Orthodox. Even when Ukraine became an independent country in 1917, its Orthodox church was part of the Russian Orthodox Church.

A small group of Orthodox did split off and form a separate Ukrainian Orthodox church, but we can ignore them for the purpose of this article: Most Ukrainians belonged to the Orthodox church that was basically the Russian Orthodox Church. Now we are in 2012, when Russia took over the Crimea territory from Ukraine. As you can imagine, many Ukrainians were very upset about this move. Now, imagine those Orthodox who belonged to the Russian-led Ukrainian Orthodox church attending a church that had a Russian leadership. You can see the stage of future separation being slowly set.

Finally, in 2018, many members of the Russian-led Ukrainian Orthodox church had had enough. They asked the Patriarch of Constantinople to create a Ukrainian Orthodox Church that was separate from Russia, which he did on January 5, 2019. The Russian Orthodox Church immediately cut ties with the Patriarch of Constantinople (after 1031 years!). The Russian leadership understood this as being another step away from Russia for Ukraine. It was no surprise, then, to many people who watch Orthodoxy, when Russia decided to attack Ukraine, no doubt, in part due to the Orthodox connection.

[Related to the article to the right.]

--First: "The more at home the Word of God is among us, the more we shall bring about faith and its fruits."

--Second: "Every Christian is bound not only to offer himself and what he has . . . (but) to chastise, exhort, convert, and edify (others), to observe their life, pray for all, and insofar as possible be concerned about their salvation."

--Third: "It is by no means enough to have knowledge of the Christian faith, for Christianity consists rather of practice."

--Fourth: "We must beware how we conduct ourselves in religious controversies." 150 years before Spener's time, Catholics killed Protestants, Protestants killed Catholics, and Protestants killed each other. He knew the reality of unchecked religious anger, which we should learn from.

Philip Jacob Spener (d. 1705)

"Pious Desires"

Philip Jacob Spener:

The Father of Pietism

(You might be a Pietist but don't know it, yet)

Have you heard something like this? "The culture is changing and many are leaving or not coming to churches because they are finding answers elsewhere." If so, you might be living in 2023, or in 1675. In the mid-1600s, Christianity was in dire straits in Germany. But one man introduced a Christian movement that partly reversed this trend and lives on today: Philip Jacob Spener and Pietism.

Martin Luther ignited the Protestant Reformation (in the early 1500s), yet a century-and-a-half later much of the spiritual enthusiasm had left German churches. Into this situation, Spener (1635-1705) was born. It turns out that Luther's reforming movement was mainly theological, meaning that he countered many Catholic ideas with ideas that he believed were more biblical, such as "faith only" to please God instead of relying on actions. Many people accepted his ideas, but did not follow through with the proper loved-based actions that Luther assumed people would understand. Therefore, 150 years later, Lutheranism had turned Christianity into more of an academic exercise than a way to live one's life in holiness.

This is really human nature: when we are introduced to a new idea, we tend to embrace it wholeheartedly, to swing too far to the side of the new idea or practice, until we swing back a little and do not exist at the extremes. That is what happened once Spener came along, the extreme theological focus of Lutheranism was pulled back to a better mixture of doctrine and living a Christian lifestyle.

He was raised in Germany and was a Lutheran pastor. But he realized that the joy of the faith was absent from many Christians and had been replaced with a more analytical understanding of God. He began to hold weekly Bible studies in his home and to concentrate his efforts on Christians living both doctrinally and practical pure Christian lives, instead of solely focusing on the mental. In 1675, he published his most popular book: "Pia Desideria (Pious Desires)." In it, he laid out the basic ideas of Pietism, a movement designed to focus Christians on their inner lives and, subsequently, to both stimulate Christian action and to revitalize churches. The main thrust of his book is a chapter entitled "Proposals to Correct Conditions in the Church." You can read four suggestions he gives there in the quotes to the left.

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