

Cyril Loukaris, his life, work, and his significance to his time and subsequent

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Introduction

Cyril Loukaris (1572-1638) is one of the most enigmatic of men to be crowned Patriarch during the Turkokratia. This unique individual was in 1601 crowned Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria which he gave up upon ascending to the throne of Constantinople. History records that Loukaris' time as Patriarch of Constantinople was most turbulent and that during his life he demonstrated remarkable qualities. He visited various countries, promoted education and vernacular learning and sought to protect the Rum Millet from powerful foreign forces whilst walking a tightrope in appeasing his Turkish masters. He did all this whilst also seeking to nourish and protect his subjugated flock.

In order to appreciate the man and his significance, it is vital to gain an appreciation of the socio-political milieu that the Church lived in subsequent to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. It is only after this is done that one can properly assess the impact that this unique person had upon his time and subsequent.

The Millett System

The Ottoman Empire as a Theocracy drew no distinction between the temporal or secular. The Ottomans, through the Koran, saw the world comprising of Moslems or non-Moslems, with the obligation to engage in holy warfare to convert the non-believers. As they conquered, and their empire grew in diversity and territory they adopted and developed the Millet System¹ of administration whereby the spiritual leader was directly responsible to the Sultan for his people. Thus, the patriarch of Constantinople as ethnarch held both the secular responsibility for all orthodox in Turkish territory and the religious responsibility for his flock outside Turkish control. Hence the Patriarchate was under varying pressures of proselytism from the Venetian Catholics in the Greek Islands as well as claims of control from Moscow that it was the legitimate successor of Constantinople and thus the third Rome.

Moslems were obliged by the Koran to treat these subjugated people or Dhimmis with contempt, for the people of the Dhimma were, in accordance with the Koran, never to be elevated above true believers and were to pay the Jizra (poll tax) out of hand and be utterly subdued.² Hence Dhimmis were limited socially, legally, civilly and religiously in comparison to their Moslem neighbours and were obliged to pay the Devshirme to muster Janissary

troops.³ Thus Christians and Jews were seen as inferiors to be exploited and tolerated under sufferance. Further, as the Koran laid structures on usury and debt repayment⁴ it was more expedient to allow trade and commerce to be undertaken by Jews and especially the orthodox, and collect taxes from them, or if appropriate, their life or wealth and on occasion capriciously so.⁵

The Historical Inheritance of Orthodoxy from the West

Orthodoxy historically viewed the west with mistrust. They had witnessed the indignation of the fourth Crusade in 1204, ostensibly against the Turks, turn into Latin treachery. It was not until 1261 that Constantinople was recaptured from its last Latin ruler Baldwin II by Michael VII Paleologos. Similarly, reunion at the councils in 1274 (Lyons) and 1438-1439 (Ferrara-Florence) failed as the Church saw the State desperately attempting to obtain material provisions to defend itself against the Turks by compromising the faith, and the West encouraging this. It is thus little wonder that Loukas Notaras, the last Chief Mega Doux of the Byzantine Empire, was reported to have bitterly commented "that he would sooner see the Sultan's turban than the cardinal's hat"⁶ in the streets of Constantinople at the time of its capitulation.

The Problems of the Churches of the West

The winds of change were also blowing through Western Europe. The Renaissance that found expression in individual rational thought saw Papal practices such as simony, indulgences and moral turpitude questioned. Recognizing the groundswell, Rome convened the Council of Trent (1548 - 1563) to address discipline, doctrine and Church reform. Unfortunately, it proved too late and subsequent to 1517 when Luther posted his 95 Theses at Wittenburg, the Lutherans, Anabaptists, Anglicans and Calvinist/Presbyterians ruptured with Rome.

In response, in 1622 the Congregation de Propaganda Fide was established as a means, in part of working towards the conversions of Christians under Turkish domination. The Jesuits (established in 1534 with their focus on diplomacy, mission, and education) were the instrument that could best be utilized for this purpose. The Jesuits began to appear in Greek speaking lands in about 1583 and in short order established a seminary in Galata, the Italian quarter of Constantinople, which provided an education with a Roman Catholic bent to many Greek students. Hence the Orthodox under the Ottomans became the object of Roman Catholic proselytism from within by the Catholics who were themselves in confrontation with the reforming Protestants whenever they encountered each other.

The Impact of the World Powers

The Christian World had to co-exist in uneasy tension with the Divine Porte which ruled from Constantinople. The Ottoman Empire controlled through its subjugated people strategic trade routes, resources and means of commerce. Hence it was necessary for Europe to engage the Ottoman Empire diplomatically. Venice in 1503 was the first to secure permission for a diplomatic representative. In 1536 France secured trading rights as well as protectorship of the Latin Christians in the Turkish Empire. In 1580 and 1612 England and Holland respectively signed treaties which conferred commercial privileges akin to France. In 1629 and 1632 Austria and Sweden respectively established diplomatic missions. Hence the Diplomatic Corps in Constantinople were at the time of Loukaris divided into two camps. The Roman Catholics led by the French Ambassador Cezy and later the Austrian Schind, and the Protestants led by the Dutch and English. In that context trade as well as the souls of the Orthodox were fought over by the various powers who were constantly intriguing to gain ascendancy with the Divine Porte.

The Pressure within Orthodoxy

The Ecumenical Patriarch, as leader of the Rum Millet, was the guarantor and enforcer of law and order amongst his people throughout the territory of the Ottoman Empire. To do so the organization of the Church had to be centralized, and the Patriarchates of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem became marginalised as the Porte only dealt with the patriarch of Constantinople. In administration, the Patriarch was assisted by the Holy Synod to determine policy and the Ecclesiastical Council responsible for execution of that policy. To carry out this policy the laity was afforded an increased opportunity to participate, hence "the decline in the piety was "even more marked."⁷ Further In 1576, St Athanasius, a school "especially intended for Greek Students,"⁸ was founded in Rome. Greeks who were obliged to travel overseas to be educated thus fell either under the influence of Catholicism or Protestantism. Hence there developed two broad groups within the Patriarchate struggling for ascendancy, namely the Latinizers who saw their interests laying with Rome, and the Protestantizers who saw their interests promoted and protected by the Reformation Countries who were in constant dispute with each other.

This then was the world of Cyril Loukaris. He was part of a second-class subjugated nation whose fate depended on the whim of the Turk and upon whether there was peace or war. Moreover, Constantinople was the battle ground of foreign powers and their ecclesiastical representatives. Within Orthodoxy there was a need to align with powerful friends who were either Roman Catholic or Protestant and these factions were sustained, supported and surrounded by these powerful friends who saw Orthodoxy as a worthy prize to court. Hence

the Orthodox were subjected to problems and pressures from within and without which left it sensitive to its precarious existence.

Cyril Loukaris

Loukaris (born Constantine) was born in Crete in 1572 then part of the Venetian Empire and at a time when "encounters between Orthodox and Roman Catholics were often extraordinary cordial".⁹ Loukaris was educated initially at Crete under the Monk Meletios Vlastos and then in Venice for a period of four years under the tuition of Maximos Margounios who was a strong advocate of union between the Orthodox and Roman Churches who would have, no doubt, used his views to influence him. Under his tutelage he became acquainted with Western philosophies. He then entered the University of Padua in 1588 where he studied Latin, Greek, the Classics, Philosophy and Theology, and was still under the supervision of Margounios. Thus, Loukaris developed a great love and appreciation for education as well as coming into critical contact with the Roman Catholic faith, albeit presented sympathetically by his mentor.

In 1592, he completed his education and he returned to Crete and in 1593 he was summonsed to Alexandria and ordained by his uncle Pope Meletios Pegas, who had "informally adopted his nephew",¹⁰ and assumed the name of Loukaris.

The Union Problem

In 1595 the Ecumenical Patriarchate caught wind of a plan to bring the Orthodox to union with the Papacy in Poland. There King Sigismund III Vasa, with the aid of the Jesuits, persuaded Michael the Metropolitan of Vilna and Ignatius Bishop of Kiev to convene a Council of Orthodox Bishops under the control of Poland. This Council convened at Brest-Litovsk in 1595 "to discuss their submission to Rome along the lines agreed at the Union of Florence."¹¹ This was duly passed and accepted by Rome who resubmitted the agreement for ratification.

At this point, Loukaris, together with Nikephoros Kantakouzenos, were sent to Poland to dissuade the Orthodox Churches from consummating union with Rome. Not only did they fail but Nikephoros was jailed and executed, whilst Loukaris who played a lesser role went free. However, from this failed trip, Loukaris appreciated significant lessons, including the needs for an educated clergy, to have friends in high places, and have an effective means to disseminate information. He also developed a hatred at the operations of the Jesuits and a mistrust of Rome. Realizing the need to have a bulwark against Rome for survival, Loukaris for the first time entered into a working relationship with Protestants in Poland as a means of countering Latin influence that he now saw as being ruthless in seeking to advance its interests. In Poland

Loukaris founded schools, as well as establishing a printing house in Vilna to provide authentic texts to counter Jesuit misinformation, before it became too dangerous and he returned East.

Patriarch of Alexandria

In September 1601 Loukaris was enthroned Kyrillos III Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. Neale claims that "the first ten years of Loukaris' Patriarchate are almost entirely unknown to us."¹² What is known is that in Alexandria he struggled to maintain his Church. By letter to Rome dated the 28th October 1608 Loukaris appeared to acknowledge Papal supremacy. Whatever the motive, it had the effect of calming the activities of the Jesuits in Egypt. Meanwhile, Latinizers and crypto-Papists were on the ascendancy in Constantinople with Patriarch Raphael II in 1603 and Neophytus II in 1607 demonstrating a desire for union with Rome.

In 1612 after the death of Neophytus II, Loukaris was elected Locum Tenens of Constantinople. However, as he was not prepared to offer a higher peskesi, Timotheos of Patras, a Latinophile, was duly appointed by the sublime Porte and enthroned as Timotheos II. Having been identified as a Protestantizer, and fearing for his safety, Loukaris fled and returned to Alexandria to resume his Patriarchy. It was there that he was accused of being a Lutheran, which is vigorously denied.

In 1616, he exchanged correspondence with Archbishop Abbot of Canterbury to establish a scholarship for Greeks to be educated in England, and although the scheme had little success, it did educate Metrophanes Kritopoulos who in 1636 was elected Patriarch of Alexandria. Further in 1616 he also published two pamphlets entitled "Against the supremacy of the Pope" and "A friend of Truth and a Zealot". These anti-papal writings confirmed him as an enemy to the Latinizers, the Jesuits. and to the friends of Rome.

Patriarch of Constantinople

On the 4th November 1620,¹³ Loukaris, despite opposition of the Latin faction, was enthroned as Ecumenical Patriarch. He paid the peskesi required by the Sublime Porte for the issue of the Berat, exchanged the Patriarchal robes of Alexandria for those of Constantinople, and was enthroned. He was fortunate that he by then counted as a friend the English Ambassador Sir Thomas Rowe, who protected him as well as providing material assistance for a printing press to be established in Constantinople under the imprimatur of his ambassadorship. Further in 1625, he appointed Theophilos Corydalleus to reform the Patriarchal Academy by emancipating its curriculum from its connection to theology.

Loukaris was, however, warned off by Rome to accept union. When he did not do so, they openly condemned him as a Calvinist and sought to exert financial pressure upon Greek merchants to denounce him and tried to close down his printing press which arrived in June 1627. On the 8th January 1628, the Jesuits managed to destroy the press after they made false allegations against a publication of Loukaris', resulting in the Jesuits for a time being expelled from Constantinople.

The Confession of Loukaris

Loukaris is best known, however, for the publication of his confession of belief comprising of 18 chapters published in Geneva in March 1629. The confession caused great scandal to the Orthodox who saw their Patriarch as introducing innovation. This confession was highly problematic for him. He stated that "Holy Scripture is a higher authority than the Church"¹⁴ That God predestined those whom he has chosen without any regard for their works and having no cause for the election than his good pleasure.¹⁵ That there are only two sacraments.¹⁶ That the Church on earth is liable to err and chose falsehood instead of truth.¹⁷ Further, in a later published addendum, he answers the four questions that he posed including 'How ought we to think of icons?' to which he responded that he rejected the veneration of icons.¹⁸

Naturally, the Orthodox were outraged and the work denounced a forgery¹⁹, and he became an easy target for the Latinizers to label as protestant. However, in fairness he did not appear to confess "any form of Protestantism already set up but to bring about a reformation of the Orthodox Church just as Western Protestants had reformed the Catholic Church."²⁰

Due to his radical views for the times, Loukaris was running out of friends. Calvinistic influence was declining in England and Sir Peter Wych, who replaced Rowe, was less demonstrable of his support, due no doubt to the cooling of Calvinism in England. On the other hand, his enemies were growing stronger and more determined. According to Ware,²¹ Loukaris, who was deposed once in 1623, was deposed on five subsequent occasions with each occasion demanding a peskesi for his return. Finally, in 1638, the Latinizing faction led by Loukaris II Kontareus ultimately succeeded in dethroning Loukaris after he was falsely accused of sedition. On the 7th July 1638 Loukaris was strangled and in 1641 his remains were interred on the island of Halki and later removed to the Phanar where they are today.

An Assessment of Loukaris' Life

One needs only to look at Loukaris' life to form a view that he was tenacious, a fighter for his beliefs, and above all a complex man living in complex and difficult times. Loukaris was able

to form close friendships with a number of Protestants, including Cornelius Van Haga, the Dutch envoy at Constantinople, and fell so much under their influence that by the end of his life "there was little in his religious thought which can be considered Orthodox."²²

Clearly, Loukaris saw Rome as the "mother of errors, the corrupter of the Word of God and the nest of superstitions."¹³ He had experienced Rome first hand and understood the power of education as an uneducated clergy served superstition and not God. He witnessed the determination of Rome in Poland to proselytise the faithful to Rome and the dangers to personal safety if Rome was defied. He saw the power of disseminating ideas as vital to assist in spreading the faith. On the other hand, Loukaris was acutely aware that he lived in a society dominated by the Ottomans. The Church was in effect assumed as an instrument of the State in ensuring order and collection of taxes whilst always being under threat from the Turks. He saw the world as requiring powerful friends who were either Protestant or Papist and who fought for the souls of the populace wherever and through whatever means they could.

Was Loukaris Calvinistic in attitude? The answer, in the latter part of his life, is clearly in the affirmative, as correspondence between Loukaris and his friend Swiss Pastor Leger attests: "I hold in abomination the errors of the Papists and the superstitions of the Greeks. I approve and embrace the doctrine of the most excellent teacher John Calvin and all who agree with him."²⁴ Further, in 1636 he wrote that he "embraced Calvinist doctrine which he saw as Orthodox and Catholic and abhorring the doctrine of our adversaries as the false and corrupt Roman Doctrine."²⁵

One effect of Loukaris' Calvinist views was that Synods were held at Constantinople (1638), Kiev (1640), Jassy (1644), Jerusalem (1672), Constantinople (1672), and Constantinople (1691) to condemn the confession. In refutation of his heresies, Peter Moglia of Kiev and Dositheos of Jerusalem drew and published their Confessions which Meyendorff assessed as "being Latin in sentiment."²⁶ Indeed, Meyendorff saw the Orthodox writers being conditioned by their times to resort "to the expedient of using Protestant arguments against the Catholics and Catholic arguments against Protestants"²⁷ as explanations for such confessions.

The life of Loukaris is exemplar of the turbulent and dark days of Turkish rule. His life demonstrated how corruption, simony, intrigueness, plot and counterplot can degrade the faith and the Church. It is little wonder in the seventy-five years between 1625 and 1700 there were fifty patriarchs, with an average of 18 months each in office.²⁸ Hence, it is understandable that the great aim for the Church at that time according to Ware "was survival - to keep things going in the hope of better days to come."²⁹

Loukaris has never been considered as obtuse or theologically inept, hence it can be assumed that Loukaris was motivated by considerations of advancing the cause of his people and defending his nation with whatever weapons he had against the attacks of the Latins and the Moslem Turks. Loukaris has been considered a national hero. However, Orthodoxy proved its resilience by resisting the attempts of Loukaris to incorporate Calvinist logic as well as the Roman legalism of his adversaries.

Perhaps the life of Loukaris is best summed up by Sherrard who saw him on the one hand as protecting the Greek Church from Roman infiltration and on the other as reviving Hellenism whilst attempting to free the Greek nation from the Turks.³⁰ The tragedy of Loukaris ultimately was that as ethnarch he prioritized the secular interests of his people over the needs of his flock and the tradition of the Church. Further, he realized that the support of emerging Protestant powers were of greater benefit to his Church and people than the papists who were historically seen as the nemesis of the Great Church. Thus, by siding with the Calvinists he may have achieved material advantage to his people and protection for his Church. In the final analysis Loukaris failed on both counts. Subsequently, patriarchs continued their role as ethnarch, and their phanariot subjects who continued to have diverse loyalties expanded their influence in the Church to the resentment of the laity. For all that, Cyril formed a link and assisted the Great Church in its survival under the Turks.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Initially there were 4 Millets, the Armenian, Catholic, Jewish and Orthodox, with the Orthodox being the largest.
- 2 Surah 9:29, Koran.
- 3 The basis of this tax which was officially abolished in 1648 was Surah 8.4.
- 4 Surah 2.267 - 282.
- 5 Example of this is Michael Cantacuzenus who was put to death and his vast fortune confiscated (S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, p. 362).
- 6 S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, p. 111.
- 7 C. Bradow, *The Career and Confession of Cyril Loukaris*, p. 13.
- 8 T. Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, p. 7.
- 9 T. Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, p. 17.
- 10 C. Bradow, *The Career and Confession of Cyril Loukaris*, p. 52.
- 11 S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, p. 623.
- 12 J. Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church*, p. 364.
- 13 A. Pallis, *Loukaris Loukanis 1572-1638*, series 3, no. 3, p. 39.
- 14 *Creeds and Confessors of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, chapter 2, p. 551.
- 15 *Creeds and Confessors of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, chapter 3, p. 551.
- 16 *Creeds and Confessors of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, chapter 16, p. 554.
- 17 *Creeds and Confessors of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, chapter 12, p. 553.
- 18 *Creeds and Confessors of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, chapter 12, p. 557.
- 19 S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, p. 281.
- 20 A. Fortesque, *The Orthodox Eastern Church*, p. 265.
- 21 T. Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, p. 8.
- 22 T. Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, p. 8.
- 23 J. Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church*, p. 437.
- 24 T. Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, p. 10.
- 25 J. Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church*, p. 450.
- 26 Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 86.

27 Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 90.

28 T. Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, p. 7.

29 T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 91.

30 T. Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, p. 6.

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