**Throne and Altar – on the Necessary Space Between the Churches and The State**

Cosmo Gordon Lang was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1928 to 1942. He crowned King George VI and his consort, Queen Elizabeth. He baptized their daughters and was said to have such an exalted view of monarchy that he almost regarded the British monarch as the fourth person of the Trinity. I suspect the current Archbishop of Canterbury has a rather more grounded view of the Monarch though the Church of England remains established and is still the custodian of certain rituals of the British State.

The Reformation in England removed the Calvary from Rood Screens. Carvings of the Virgin Mary and St John keeping vigil at the Crucifixion and replaced it with the Royal crest. Not progress I think, Churches of the Reformation be they Anglicans in England or Lutherans in Scandinavia have maintained close association with their respective monarchies and national institutions.

Early British Methodists feared being seen as troublemaking dissenters and shared in loyalty to the British Crown. Here in this country where there has never been an established Church the Protestant Churches in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were fiercely loyal. We recall with shame their reaction to conscientious objectors in World War One. I once wrote a paper on the reaction of New Zealand Churches to the Easter Rising in Ireland and the subsequent creation of the Irish Free State. The Protestant Churches, including our own, thunderously denounced what they called treason. For fairly obvious reasons the largely Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy took a different view.

Looking back we see the dangerous and shameful excesses of Churches too aligned with State power be it in the denigration of other cultures and faiths in colonial expansion or in failing to speak out about the obscenity of war. We are uncomfortable when Church leaders to closely align themselves to political leaders. How do we view those Evangelical leaders who so whole heartedly supported Donald Trump? And how do we now feel about the blessing of Russia’s aggression in Ukraine by Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church. That Church has become as closely entwined with the Russian State as it was under the Tzars. Both Patriarch and president speak the same language, of *Russky Mir*, a Russian hegemony from Vladivistok to Dublin. A rejection of secularism, liberalism and democracy.

It is heartening to see brave voices of dissent in the Russian orthodox Church and the forthright condemnation of Russia’s actions by Orthodox scholars elsewhere.

“*it is impossible to remain silent and tolerate what the Russian Orthodox Church has unfortunately adopted as official discourse and its official attitude*,” said Volos Academy director Pantelis Kalitzidis said. Member of the Steering Committee for Theological Studies in Greece and the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue at the Pro Orient Foundation of Austria.

Kalatzidis was one of the main authors of “A Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ (Russky Mir) Teachings”, a statement signed by hundreds of Orthodox theologians and scholars condemning it as “*heresy*” Patriarch Kirill’s Russian power and its’ projection

“This is ethno-religious nationalism on steroids,” Brandon Gallaher, British Orthodox theologian who teaches theology at the University of Exeter i, told the Catholic News Service.

For the past 20 years, the declaration said, Putin and Patriarch Kirill have promoted the idea of ​​”an international Russian region or civilization, called Holy Russia or Holy Rus”, which includes Russia, Ukraine and Belarus – And sometimes Moldova and Kazakhstan – as well as ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking peoples around the world.”

The teaching “believes that this ‘Russian world’ consists of a common political centre (Moscow), a common spiritual centre (Kyiv as ‘the mother of all Russia’), a common language (Russian), a common church (Russian Orthodoxy). ) is the Church, Moscow Patriarchate), and a general patriarch (Patriarch of Moscow), who works in a ‘symphony’ with a common president/national leader (Putin) to rule this Russian world.

“*We strongly reject all forms of government that absorb the state – theocracy – and the Church, thereby denying the Church the freedom to make predictions against all injustice*,” the declaration said. “*We also rebuke all those who affirm ‘Caesaropapism’, their ultimate obedience to the crucified and resurrected God, enshrined in any leader with ruling powers and claim to be God’s anointed whether he is known by the titles of ‘Caesar’, ‘Emperor’, ‘Tsar’ or ‘President.*

We pray that in the unfolding human and moral catastrophe the Russian Church repents.

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