CHAPTER 5

Patience, Utility and Revolution

In 1839, Richard Whately, the Archbishop of Dublin, grounded his warning against the evils of organized and erudite infidelity in the terrifyingly recent example of the French Revolution. Whately of course recognized that irreligious intellectual systems were not merely continental imports nor did they suddenly appear at the end of the eighteenth century. Britain had produced homegrown anti-Christian writers like Thomas Hobbes and David Hume. But Whately claimed that these “highly anti-democratical” men wrote almost exclusively for a select educated audience. The modern adversaries of religion sought to infect a much wider swath of public opinion. Living infidel philosophers like Jeremy Bentham, failing to learn the lessons of the French Revolution, catered to a “blind craving for novelty for its own sake, and a veneration for the ingenuity of one’s own inventions.”

As the shadow the guillotine spread from the Place de la Révolution across the face of Britain, virtue acquired apocalyptic importance. The cultivation of patience and humility became matters not just of individual salvation but of national survival.

Virtue and Talent in the Age of Revolution

In 1784 a supporter of Prime Minister William Pitt declared in Parliament that “the salvation of the country required virtue as well as talents.” Six years later, Samuel Horsley, Bishop of St. David’s, endorsed this outlook in his Charge to the clergy of his diocese. But by 1790 national salvation appeared more precarious than it had a few years earlier, and the prospect was darkening. These diocesan instructions appeared as France spiraled deeper into revolution. Horsley reacted with immediate alarm. He believed desperately that clergy of Britain must act as a bulwark against the degradation and anarchy radiating outward from Paris.

Although Horsley achieved his greatest renown as an indefatigable champion of Tory high church principles in the tumultuous years following the French Revolution, his national prominence dated from a dispute with Joseph Priestley in the early 1780s. Priestley’s two-volume *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* unleashed a series of insults to orthodox belief, including a Unitarian attack on the Trinity, the denial of Christ’s virgin birth and opposition to the doctrine of original sin. Horsley repudiated Priestley’s theology as a “gross...insult on the learning and discernment of the age.” Priestley responded aggressively and the two exchanged polemics laced with personal abuse over several years. Both man confidently claimed victory.

The dispute established Horsley’s reputation as a high churchman of learning, passion and ability. He took his seat on the bench of bishops with appointment to the see of St. David’s in May of 1788, just as political crisis deepened in France. He was translated to Rochester at the end of 1793, three months after the National Convention in Paris formally declared Terror to be the order of the day. His rousing and eloquent defense of authority and revelation helped to provide intellectual and emotional substance for the growing popular conservatism of Britain’s war years. His militant defense of Church and State earned him tremendous respect and influence, even among those who hotly disputed his theology.

Much of Horsley’s *Charge* of 1790 did not appear outwardly remarkable. He reminded his brethren, for example, that Christianity had more demanding requirements than irreproachable conduct.

Does the control of moral obligation reach the secret mediations of the mind, and the silent desires of the heart? does it impose restraint upon the sensuality of the imagination and the private prurience of appetite? Like Divine law, does it extend to every secret energy of the mind, the will, and the appetite; and require the obedience of the inner no less than of the outer man?

Horsley pressed this commonplace sentiment into service of a sharply partisan religious and political agenda. His *Charge* targeted Methodists in particular for

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