

# Christianity under the Ancien Régime, 1648–1789

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## 6 The Enlightenment and its precursors

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### **Public and private anxieties**

The Catholic missions and even Protestant revival touched very considerable numbers of people; elite movements, dependent on literacy or even scholarship, were mostly confined to universities, towns, and religious orders. Even in 1750 the Enlightenment is said to have affected less than ten per cent of the population. Nevertheless, the anxieties which underlay the great atheism controversy which kept dons and clergy scribbling furiously in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were visible also in a newly swelling genre of private literary creation, the journals and diaries, the family books and autobiographies, of a much wider circle of the literate. The fact that these were mostly written with no view to publication (and the bulk did not see the light of day till the present century) adds to their interest. Published work tended to be much influenced by established exemplars like Plutarch's *Lives*; unpublished diaries did not much influence each other. At all events the seventeenth century gave birth to a great quantity of such material, more Protestant than Catholic, though including plenty of both, earlier in Germany than England, though less city-based in England than in Germany. The whole corpus was deeply marked by painful anxieties as writers sought to impose some order on their perceptions of a disordered world.

The key to the enigma, it appeared, was to relate events to the end-time and to show their providential significance to individuals and social groups. There was a general belief in the seventeenth century in both Providence and special providences, and the latter encouraged a sort of 'scientific attitude' of their own as men planned comprehensive collections of their evidences with a view to delivering a knockout blow against the advocates of witchcraft and magic, atheism and sin. There ought, it seemed, to be not only a history of Providence but also a science of Providence in which irrefragable evidence would compel reasonable beings to acknowledge the hand of God. This view of Providence also helped in the Reformed world to counter the mystery involved in the less

Christologically-based doctrines of predestination by showing God's presence in the everyday life of both the individual and society. Before the end of the seventeenth century, however, the consensus about Providence began to break up. Those who had emphasised a general providence as distinct from special providences were attracted by the idea of a nature governed by immanent laws, and this shift in intellectual taste helped to take the psychological substance out of the doctrine of election. But it was the middle of the eighteenth century before history could be regarded as a seamless robe of immanent relationships rather than a set of episodes rendered meaningful by reference to a transcendent *Heilsgeschichte*. The attempts made (and finally given up) by John Wesley in his *Journal* to reduce his experiences in field preaching to an ordered sociology of religion, show how hard it was to break away from the old ways. And as long as they lasted scholars would need to calculate from whatever biblical evidence was available the date of the Last Judgment, when the just judgments of God would be made plain. Not till then would 'atheism' be put down by the ultimate and unmistakable demonstration of the divine Providence.

Meanwhile there was some comfort in the fact that if Providence seemed to need a little salvaging, things were rather worse with its traditional rivals, magic and witchcraft. And the professional theologians' controversy over atheism, like the diarists' treatment of Providence, began with a backward reference to the literature of the ancient world and ended in a new modernism, the Enlightenment.

### **Atheism**

Men of the seventeenth century might shed blood liberally to secure one or other Orthodoxy from its rivals, but scores upon scores of the titles of their works of scholarship incorporated the word 'atheism'; indeed a treatise of 1701 declared that although the word was derived from a Greek root, it had become so familiar among Germans that even 'many simple and unlettered people know what is meant by it'. The defence of the doctrine of Creation against the Aristotelian notion of the eternity of the world, the defence of the idea of the immortality of the soul or the resurrection of the body against 'atheists', had begun in the sixteenth century. However, the seventeenth century was not far gone before a general defence against atheism had been produced from the Catholic side in the form of a commentary on Genesis by Marin Mersenne (1623),<sup>1</sup> and in 1648 the Dutch Reformed theologian Voetius produced

<sup>1</sup> Mersenne was the pseudonym of the Sieur de Sermes (1588–1648).

the first Protestant monograph in the field in the shape of four *Disputations on Atheism*. The works of both these authors were part of the regular stock-in-trade of their successors, and Spener's friend, Gottlieb Spizel of Augsburg (1639–91), introduced with his *Root of Atheism* (1666) a veritable avalanche of anti-atheist literature which lasted for over half a century before petering out into routine polemics and the attempts of the unenterprising to obtain notice and preferment.

There are a number of very odd things about this literary onslaught. It is not clear why it was so prominent in an age committed to precision and Orthodoxy, though it is quite plain that the Orthodox themselves put the concept and literature of atheism before the reading public. Often they did this in pursuit of feuds of their own, Aristotelians rubbishing the Cartesian proofs of the existence of God, with the greater enthusiasm as their opponents were often anti-scholastics of Jansenist, Augustinian, Benedictine or Oratorian provenance looking for a return to Neoplatonist traditions of apologetic. Again Catholic writers were as prominent as Protestant in the early stages of the controversy; but their interest was in a good measure political. In the glory days of Louis XIV they left the fray to Lutheran and Reformed, and in the later stages to English, writers. And in the Protestant world the Swedes and the Swiss notably abstained from the controversy. Even in Germany not all the Lutheran faculties participated. The conspicuous presence of religious dissidence may have fuelled the fear of atheism; certainly, in their worst moments, both Catholics and Protestants were apt to regard the other as an invincible step on the downward path.

From the outset there was clearly more than one form of atheism. Had not the Psalmist twice affirmed that the fool had said in his heart that there was no God (and hence no ultimate sanction against wrong-doing)? And in the prolonged recession which followed the Thirty Years War the church courts everywhere were filled with cases of this kind of practical atheism. The polemicists, however, rarely ascribed their problem to that war, and the new vogue of histories of atheism was based on the fact that it went back to the ancient world, and had afflicted Christendom again since the Renaissance.

Moreover atheism had an alarming future. Mersenne referred to a prophecy that the Catholic church together with some mighty kingdoms would come to an end in 1661, and there were Lutherans convinced that after Luther's death the prophecy had been found in his study that it was no longer the Pope who was anti-Christ, but atheism. Voetius gave a comprehensive eleven-point specification of the atheist which carried conviction to his successors. The atheist was a man who (1) denied the supernatural, (2) suspected scripture and looked for contradictions in it,

(3) investigated it by the 'light of human history' and understanding, (4) dismissed theologians as other-worldly and partisan phantasists, (5) praised other atheists' utterances to the skies, however mediocre, (6) lived fearlessly by the principle 'Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die', (7) had nothing to do with the clergy, (8) zealously circulated the opinions of sympathisers, (9) simulated orthodoxy when necessary, (10) practised his religion sparingly, and (11) behaved badly to all who wrote against atheism. For the moment the big guns were turned backward upon the classical heathen culture which the churches had so often used for Christian purposes. But to the end of the atheist controversy it remained an unsettled question whether the 'atheist' philosophers of the ancient world simply made light of the superstition they knew or whether they really acknowledged no divinity at all.

### **Opponents of atheism**

The worst problem was posed by Aristotle, on whom the church had leaned so heavily. He had taught the eternity of the world, so disposing in advance of the Christian notion of Creation. Desperate straits called for desperate defence. Mersenne tried to convince the disciples of Campanella, Giordano Bruno and Galileo that Catholic theologians did not depend on Aristotle alone; Protestants held that he had been misinterpreted by a caucus of atheists, Arabs and Italians, or that he was a singular exception to the main body of ancient philosophy. But right into the eighteenth century there remained uncertainty whether Aristotle was the 'divine philosopher' or an atheist. 'The Italians', those Renaissance scholars who had brought unpalatable aspects of Greek thought back into circulation, men like Poliziano, Aretino and Pomponazzi, now found themselves on lists of 'guilty men' compiled by assailants of atheism, who had not always read their works, but who claimed to know which way the wind was blowing. Philosophy itself became suspect, and the chief comfort which spokesmen from the old German heartlands of Protestantism could draw from such equivocal characters as Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza, was that they were all foreigners. The one clear atheist produced at home, Mathias Knutzen, who in 1674 had set Jena alight by two works in which he maintained that there was neither God nor Devil, that the Bible was as fictitious as the Koran, and that men should be led by their conscience alone, was effectively put down, and was not in any case of the calibre of the foreign prophets.

The anti-atheists felt absolutely secure because atheism seemed irrevocably excluded by their natural theology; what actually happened was that atheism was excluded from its premises. If, as the anti-atheists

assumed, there was a general divine revelation imparted at least in its rudiments to everyone, there could not concurrently be any possibility of atheism. To this natural theology, atheism must appear as unnatural, even impossible, and an irresponsible menace to church, state and morality. As there evidently were atheists against whom to write, then either atheism must be defined so that it was conceivable within the framework of this natural theology, or else normal humanity, including the use of reason, must be denied to the atheist. Both these lines of argument were heavily worked.

There were two supporting arguments which seemed to the orthodox to clinch their case. One was the 'consensus omnium', the other the witness of conscience in every individual. Many of the anti-atheist writers had recourse to Cicero's assertion that there was no people which did not worship gods of some kind, the more readily as it seemed to be confirmed by Paul in Romans 1: 19ff. The fact that there was a general revelation which underlay even heathen religious practice seemed to afford an impregnable starting-point for the anti-atheist crusade. The consensus of all nations and all ages was encompassed by the consensus of the whole creation, visible and invisible. The attempt to prove by evidence the negative proposition that there was no people without religion, was, however, unlikely to succeed. Jesuits and others, being unable to find in China and among the Indians of North and South America forms of religious practice that they could recognise, concluded that here atheism ruled; both Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) and John Locke (1632–1704) applied a critical intelligence to evaluating reports relating to the supposed irrefragable consensus.

One of the universal ordinances among men had been supposed to be the state, no land being without its prince any more than any family was without its paternal head. Hobbes (according to Christian Kortholt one of the 'three great liars') took all the comfort from this view with his analysis of political organisation as an artificial device to escape a state of nature conceived as a war of everyman against everyman. And in sober fact natural law began to look as contested a battlefield as natural religion. Conscience too began to tremble when Knutzen, the German atheist, declared himself ready to accept it as the highest authority, to which even the Bible and the magistrate should yield. It began to look as though God would have to be rescued by some much more metaphysical subtleties; yet here too the omens were unpalatable. Descartes, 'the dictator of the new philosophy', claimed to prove the existence of God, but for him God was a problem in philosophy not theology, and the only thinker to take him up in the anti-atheist cause was the Dutch philosopher, Burcher de Volder. Leibniz did better. He did not close his eyes to the evil in the

world, but argued that God had created the world, and must therefore have realised the best of all possibilities; the evidence or proof of God's existence was the basis of his theodicy and not the reverse as was the case with the physico-theologians. Yet the theologians were cagey even about Leibniz, and their principal new contribution to the debate was the physico-theology, and this pointed the way to the new fashions of the eighteenth century.

### **Physico-theology**

The original hope indeed was that metaphysical principles could be established upon a physical basis. This proved to be impossible and the atheists took most of the rounds. For the working of a divine creator was only to be conceived if the world was not eternal, and to demonstrate this from a point in time was extraordinarily difficult. If the limits of the world could not be established in a metaphysical sense, the theologians could enthuse over the laws of physical creation, and slip into talking of their 'end' and 'purpose'. This change in their frame of mind helped many of them in the eighteenth century to reverse their perspective, and instead of seeking to confute an atheism derived from sources in antiquity, to develop an apologetic based on modern understanding of the laws of nature. Newton proved an admirable antidote to the headaches bequeathed by Lucretius.

Samuel Parker, the time-serving bishop of Oxford (1640–88), set the tone in a treatise of 1678 in which he attacked Epicurus and Descartes, and called his readers away from Aristotle and the scholastics to the observation of nature itself. The splendid design of nature was ground for certainty of the existence of God; it was not now the fact of creation, but its manner and functioning according to law which impressed. This change of stance had the advantage that scientific research need not be left to the critics of orthodoxy, but could be made a bulwark of the defence. This physico-theology grew out of the old natural theology, but it was basically a different thing; the classical natural theology had been interested not in the detail of nature but in the fact of creation as a whole; the physico-theologians proved almost embarrassingly keen to see the evidence of design not just in the systematic motion of the stellar universe, but even in the practical convenience of being able to spot dark coloured fleas upon a white skin. The first writer to make the birds, bees and blossoms into a functioning argument for their Creator was a Jesuit of the early seventeenth century, Leonard Lessius, but by the early eighteenth century this type of apologetic was universal, and had by that time much more scientific material to work on. Fascination with the skills of spiders



and ants gave way to awe inspired by gravity. Richard Bentley on the authority of Newton explained that the principle of gravity was insufficient to explain the movements of the stars; but it looked uncommonly like a physicist's shorthand for the omnipresence of God. The marvellous clockwork of the universe implied a celestial clockmaker at the outset; gravity suggested that the original creative principle was continuously at work.

### Physico-theology tested

The physico-theologians, however, not only carried anthropocentric inferences of design to absurd lengths, they exposed themselves to criticisms based on alleged imperfections in creation, some of which were very ancient, many being supplied by Lucretius himself. Spizel indeed referred to a certain Franciscus Humblotus who assembled no less than eighty objections to belief in Providence. The physico-theologians found themselves caught in a similar minefield to that encountered by the metaphysicians or representatives of natural theology before them. They 'proved' the providence and existence of God by demonstrating the order of creation; the atheists 'proved' the non-providence and non-existence of God by digging up as much disorder, destruction and evil in the world as they could. The anti-atheists had therefore to go a step further, and argue that the apparently evil was good, and the apparently meaningless was very significant. To Lucretius's argument that nothing was so useless as mountains, forests, wildernesses and swamps, Wesley, following Buddeus of Jena, was prepared to argue that (much as he personally loathed mountains) they were providentially ordained so as to pour the surface water of the world down on to the plains where it was needed. To Lucretius's repugnance for wild beasts it might be replied 'Quid elephantis, rhinocerotibus mirabilius?'

Lucretius's swamps and wildernesses were not, however, the crucial difficulty of the physico-theologians; this was posed by sin and suffering in the life of men. Here the physico-theologians could not escape the law they had attempted to demonstrate. One favourite resort was the Old Testament which was full of examples of judgment upon sin and rewards for righteousness, a symmetry to be observed in history generally. Why, asked the Lutheran Johann Lassenius in 1693, did lightning strike churches, castles, towers, town-halls and private houses? It was not by chance, it was because of the sin practised in them. If the atheist inquired why there were so many shipwrecks, the Reformed theologian de la Serre inquired in turn whether the shipwrecked had not been Godless. The orthodox could not close their eyes to the ostensible facts that the godless

often flourished while the godly suffered; but they had a touching faith that the former would not evade judgment for ever, while the latter were being educated by God into a piety yet more profound, a preparation for more apparent justice in the Beyond.

Leibniz at least did not try to prove the existence of God from a demonstrably best possible world; he simply affirmed that if the present world, with its apparent drawbacks, were not the best world possible, God would not have created it. This was not a line which the theologians favoured. The atheists and their critics seemed to have reached much the same point; the existence of God or his non-existence seemed incapable of proof by the methods lately in vogue, and at least Franz Cuper, a Dutch Socinian (1629–92), was prepared to admit the fact. Pascal put the matter the other way up: ‘It is incomprehensible that God is, and incomprehensible that he is not’; and expressed his astonishment that theologians should wish to prove God from nature. Only those who already believed would find weight in the arguments of natural theology; those who did not believe would find them trivial. The God of scripture was a hidden God, not to be laid bare by inferences from the detail of his creation. In any case faith was a fundamentally different thing from proof; proof was human, faith a gift of God.

### **Christianity rational**

Still, by the end of the seventeenth century, it appeared, especially to British commentators, that the case for Christianity must be based on what was called ‘reason’. It was only too clear to Protestant establishmentarians that ‘reason’ offered the only effective middle way between the tyranny of external authority represented by the papacy, and the anarchy of the ‘inner light’ represented by sects of the Quakerish kind. Moreover the more modern apologetic came to rely on evidences produced by the natural sciences the more ‘reason’ came into its own. When Christian, and especially Protestant, apologetic came to this point its interest shifted from a backward-looking controversy with antiquity, to a forward-looking grappling with new knowledge. When this happened Christian thinkers became involved not merely with the attempts of Enlightenment in the broadest sense to dispute old authority, but with applying its methods to their own business.

Writing from the standpoint of the late eighteenth century, the best contemporary historian of the church, Johann Rudolph Schlegel, laid very heavy emphasis on the unique importance of this period, and also upon ‘alterations in states and in the realm of knowledge’. In the late seventeenth century Britain and the Dutch Republic had been gradually

asserting a primacy in both; and by the time the Grand Alliance had established limits to the territorial ambitions of Louis XIV by the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, changes in the constitutional standing of the churches were modifying the ways in which they might present their teachings. Absolutism had threatened the cosmopolitanism and the independence of the churches, while the churches themselves as antique vested interests had tended to get in the way of those already looking to the more rational ordering of political life with a view to squeezing more resources for the conduct of war or other ends. Thus the church in France was one of a complex of privileged bodies, able once again after the death of Louis XIV on occasion to supply the chief minister of state, neither fully under temporal control nor fully free of it.

In the United Provinces and Britain by contrast, commercial powers par excellence, a different political and intellectual balance was struck; both were in the forefront of intellectual developments, both achieved a limited degree of religious toleration, both had to experiment with new methods of managing the clergy, and the principal lay restriction upon both consisted in an informal commercial veto upon the forcible proselytisation of native peoples overseas. In England Newton's impressive account of the motions of the stars, with its capacity to predict, owed nothing to his personal faith; and although Locke set out in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690; 4 edns. before 1700, 20 before 1800) and his *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) to define men's indispensable obligations towards God, David Hume (1711–76), the sceptical star of the Scottish Enlightenment, later declared that 'he had never entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke'. Locke himself managed to hold together a good deal of scepticism with a belief in things which were not demonstrable; but what he thought was demonstrable was a very small portion of the traditional field of religion, and though his efforts to harmonise faith and reason comforted Christians, they also inspired numerous atheists and deists. The church was a voluntary society, and the state (which also rested on a contract) had no business to compel people to join it. Locke, indeed, could be used both to justify the rather beggarly concessions made to religious toleration and a free press after the Revolution of 1688, and to justify demands for much more of the same kind.

Limited, however, as was the liberty of the press in England, it permitted the production of religious shockers by the score, and exalted the prestige of British theology, philosophy and ethics in Protestant Europe to a level never previously (or subsequently) attained. The Dutch, who formed the great European centre for the gathering and dissemination of news and opinion, transmitted a good deal and pirated not a little. Protestant Switzerland put a good deal of English work into German for

the advantage of both Lutheran and Reformed in the Empire. The Germans exposed themselves to an immense bombardment of British literature, the bulk of it theological or devotional, and much of it, and especially the rather durable Puritan literature, rather outdated at home, but increasingly reflecting the new ways. Thus the German *Aufklärung* had a substantial British input, but it was the Dutch who harboured the two most acute of the early critics.

### Spinoza

One of them was the first to attempt a world view including a philosophy of religion without clearly affirming any of the ecclesiastical standpoints of the day, a man who pointed the way to the Enlightenment without breaking free from the systematic habits of thought of a Descartes, and whose own life history exemplified the intolerance to which increasing toleration might lead. Benedictus de Spinoza (1632–77) was born to a Portuguese Jewish family which had settled in Amsterdam, taking advantage of the commercial opportunities and the limited degree of religious toleration available there. That toleration owed much to Jan de Witt, Grand Pensionary from 1653, to whose circle of friends Spinoza later belonged. He fought to maintain Dutch overseas commerce and maritime power, and to strengthen the home base by governing in a republican and liberal spirit. Still for Jews the situation remained precarious.

Like his parents, Spinoza belonged to the Portuguese synagogue, and attended its school from the age of seven. The amazing breadth of his studies, which beside the Talmud and Hebrew included Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, Latin and Greek, together with biblical exegesis, philological and historical analysis, and medieval Jewish philosophy including Maimonides and the cabbala, suggest that he may have been intended as a rabbi; but he worked in his father's business till the latter's death in 1654. Spinoza then expanded his studies to include mathematics and natural sciences, and to do so built up a circle of friends of non-Jewish origin, some of them free spirits, many others deviant Christians, including Mennonites, Remonstrants, Socinians, Collegiants. These connections appeared to the Jewish community to involve clear violations of the Mosaic law, and after repeated warnings Spinoza was expelled from the synagogue in 1656. This disciplinary action was paradoxically related to the spread of religious liberty. In Portugal the threat of forcible baptism had cemented the Jewish community together; now in a context of relatively free and chaotic Protestantism they must maintain their own cohesion, and Spinoza became a victim of that necessity. De Witt was murdered in 1672; the Orange family was always moving in a monar-

chical direction with the support of anti-patrician sentiments of stricter religious elements from lower down the social scale; religious toleration therefore began to diminish, a double-edged concern to Amsterdam's Jewish community.

Spinoza subsequently experienced the limits of toleration elsewhere; in 1673 he declined a call to the university of Heidelberg, suspecting that he would not enjoy full freedom to teach, and in the following year pressure from the religious establishment and other quarters put a stop to the printing and circulation of his anonymous *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Thus Spinoza encountered authority in its religious, ecclesiastical and political forms.

He tackled the question in seventeenth-century style. In politics he started from the standpoint of Hobbes, that the state of nature was a war of everyman against everyman. Reason must bring men to a mutual contract to establish a supreme power, capable of enforcing a peaceful civil existence. The state of nature, however, persists in civil society in that men obey only so far as they have to, and the state's title to obedience extends only so far as it is able to enforce it. Subordination to the law is sustained by rational self-interest. On its side the state must maintain itself with whatever weapons are to hand, these necessarily including the management of superior church affairs. But reason will again indicate to the state that it will maintain itself only so long as its subjects appreciate that the advantages of the peace it confers are greater than those offered by revolution. It is in its rational interest to govern in a constitutional, even liberal, manner.

Rational freedom required defence against religious tradition as well as against the state. 'The end of philosophy is truth alone, that of faith is simply and solely obedience and piety.' Here Spinoza turned biblical critic. The Bible was a valid account of popular religion, but not a valid source of doctrine. The authority of the prophets rested not on a speculative knowledge of God and nature, but on their exemplary life. The Bible was not a book inspired by God, but written by various hands for men of particular times and political situations. The Pentateuch was not written by Moses, and the Mosaic law was a legal code valid for the Hebrew state, but not for any other time or state. Nor was there any biblical proof for the belief that human understanding was naturally corrupted by original sin, and hence needed direction by religious authority. Belief in miracles was contrary to the essence of God, and also to the Bible, which taught nothing contrary to reason. Spinoza was not in the metaphysical sense an atheist, but as an outsider he recognised that the Christian concept of God as creator and ruler of the universe differed from the metaphysical concept of an absolute, infinite, perfect, eternal and necessarily existing

being. The relationship of an infinite Godhead to things could not be determined after the manner of a finite Godhead in terms of plan, purpose and need. Indeed the meaning of the world, if it had one, was not to be determined in human and personal terms. This view of course produced outraged accusations of atheism against him. If, as far as Spinoza was concerned, the Old Testament was a long story of God's accommodation to human weakness, it was a different case with Christ and the apostles. Here it was a question of the foundation of a religion of humanity which had no essential connection with that of Moses and the prophets. From the outset the conventional Christian apologetic was based on the fulfilment of prophecy. Christ was in effect the perfect philosopher who lived in the spiritual knowledge and love of God; to Christ God revealed himself without accommodation. The apostles united the old kind of authority enjoyed by the prophets with that of the doctrine they had received from Christ himself. Their epistles were human creations which, unlike the prophetic words, were not based on some special divine revelation.

Taken as a whole, however, the scriptures did afford seven simple principles by which to live. These began with the proposition that God or the Supreme Being is, with his mercy and justice, the archetype of true life and continued through the proposition that obedience shown in justice and love towards the neighbour is the true service of God, to the promise that God forgives the penitent. It is in the doctrine of Christ that these principles, which are actually the Word of God engraved on the heart of every man, find their fullest expression. Did these principles, reminiscent of those of Herbert of Cherbury, constitute Spinoza a convert to Christianity? The Protestant Orthodoxies of the day were clear they did not. His complete separation of religious faith from the knowledge of the truth was menacing to a religious tradition in which Christianity and the scholarship of the ancient world had cohabited happily for so long; there was no sign of the Christian hope of eternal life. The idea of God as the judge of the world, with Christ seated at his right hand, was disposed of with all the other biblical anthropomorphisms; his view of the Bible as a historical source for popular piety but not a standard of doctrine, could not be redeemed by his touching emphasis on the forgiving grace of God. His deductive metaphysics in the manner of Descartes endeared him to no one, and exposed him to condemnation alternately as an atheist or as a pantheist. Only the humanists of the late eighteenth century with their new understanding of God and nature – Lessing, Mendelssohn, Herder, Goethe and others – and the founders of German idealism – Fichte, Schelling and Hegel – who took possession of his metaphysics, really brought Spinoza back into vogue.

### Pierre Bayle

Spinoza was characteristic of his generation to the extent that he proposed a rational metaphysical system into which religious belief could be fitted. To Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) the systems themselves were preposterously overblown demonstrations of what reason could not achieve. The son of a Reformed pastor in the Midi, Bayle was briefly converted to Catholicism in 1669, before taking the dangerous step of abjuring that faith in 1670. He then fled to Geneva where his studies began, never to see his family again. In due course he turned from theology to philosophy, and in 1675 was appointed professor of philosophy at the Reformed academy at Sedan. Here one of his colleagues on the theology side was Pierre Jurieu (1637–1713), whom we have already encountered. When Louis XIV closed the Sedan academy, Bayle obtained employment in Rotterdam for them both, but it came in the end to a complete breach between the two, and to Bayle's dismissal from his appointment in 1693. Jurieu's prophetic conviction of the imminent downfall of the French church and monarchy, and the rise on their ruins of the Reformed church, was the epitome of what the eighteenth century understood by enthusiasm, viz. the pursuit of ends without consideration of means, and it doubtless coloured Bayle's views on the relation of faith and reason. His loss of employment had the advantage to posterity of enabling him to complete his four-volume *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697–1702). In this work, while remaining an active member of the Reformed church, Bayle managed to distance himself from virtually all the parties in the field.

Bayle had learned, partly from a world full of competing certainties and partly from Locke, that human reason must be exercised and developed upon experience, and at every stage in its education had only a limited efficiency. The rules of evidence helped, but did not suffice to settle various differences of deep personal conviction, including religious faith. Religion and theology were areas where personal conviction and rational doubt coexisted, or even contradicted one another. He could not find rational grounds for the Christian belief in Providence, or even monotheism, for the principles of good and evil seemed very evenly balanced in the world. It was possible to hold the contrary and to live on grounds of faith, but it was hopeless to support the fact by rational theological explanations. Every religious attitude, his own included, was conditioned by a personal history, which could not establish grounds for general validity.

By thus escaping into the realm of doubt Bayle escaped the standard theological school-questions, sidestepped the clash of religious parties

and of Christianity and non-Christian religions, even the war against atheism, and embarked on the first European scientific criticism of religion. He had also provided new grounds for religious toleration, which was from beginning to end one of the great themes of the Enlightenment. Unlike others he did not proceed from the nature of the state. In his view the conscience which followed the true religion and the erring conscience which followed the false could not be distinguished by any rational yardstick. It was therefore an immoral and unnatural use of force for the state to drive men out of one faith and into another. Doubt, in short, went with toleration as well as with religion. This argument was predictably unpalatable to all parties. It gave a civic validity to religious relativism; it extended the right of toleration even to Muslims and heathen; it conceded that there was as good a rational case for atheism as for belief in God, and therefore that there should be toleration even for atheists. Still worse, it separated religion and morality. Moral consciousness depended on rules of conduct derived from natural reason, not faith; this was why religious parties often behaved so much worse than atheists. The great argument in favour of maintaining unity of faith, that religious differences led to uproar, was contradicted by the evidence of the United Provinces, Siebenbürgen and Prussia. It was persecution which led to civil war. This was a doctrine which neither states nor churches were yet ready to receive.

### The deists

One of the main sources of knowledge of Spinoza in both the United Provinces and England was the article in Bayle's *Dictionary*, very hostile, and growing longer with every edition. It is indeed an interesting measure of the change of atmosphere in England that Spinoza, who was denounced out of hand by the Cambridge Platonists, savagely opposed by Baxter, and attacked by Stillingfleet and a long list of Bayle lecturers who came to represent the liberal English establishment, had by 1720, when his *Life* by the Dutch Lutheran Colerus was published in English with a commendatory preface, come to be accepted as a hero by a small section of the English literary public, the deists. The deists shared one major presupposition of all the parties to the religious debate at the end of the seventeenth century, that Christianity (or religion more generally) must be, in Locke's phrase, 'reasonable', and that the canons of reasonableness must also be Lockean, that is clear and simple. The deists were dissatisfied with both the political settlement of 1688–89, and its adaptation to the rational canons.

The ground was prepared for the deists by the impossibility of making



the doctrine of the Trinity satisfy the current requirements of clarity and simplicity. Nor could the defenders of trinitarian orthodoxy refrain from disputing with each other; this made it harder to insist that the doctrine belonged to the central and indispensable core of Christian doctrine, and created problems with the Toleration Act which conceded nothing to non-trinitarians. A rowdy dissenting synod at Salter's Hall, London, in 1719 voted by the narrowest of margins against requiring subscription to the trinitarian article. Many of the majority were not anti-Trinitarians but Presbyterians hoping to remove a contentious obstacle to comprehension in a national church; and there were others who thought that a disputed article could not be part of the central deposit of faith. Whatever the rationale of the voting, the doctrine of the Trinity was visibly beginning that slow progress towards the periphery of belief which took the bulk of English (as distinct from Scottish) Presbyterians into anti-Trinitarian positions before the eighteenth century was out.

Nor did the Church of England escape the Trinitarian controversy. James Peirce of Exeter, who led the majority at Salter's Hall, had been converted to anti-trinitarianism by Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), who became chaplain to Queen Anne, and was presented by her to the fashionable rectory of St James's, Westminster. After the death of Locke in 1704, Clarke was generally regarded as the country's foremost metaphysician; and he was undone not by metaphysics but by the simple doctrine that the Bible was the religion of Protestants. In his *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) Clarke set himself to examine the 1,215 New Testament texts which might have any bearing on the matter, and came to the conclusion which has never been successfully controverted that the doctrine of the Trinity was not a New Testament doctrine. Since none of the parties to this controversy had the historical sense to argue that the doctrine might nevertheless be adequately rooted in scripture, and since to justify the doctrine on grounds of tradition was, on the premises of the day, popery, it appeared that the doctrine must be untrue. At any rate the big guns of Anglican theology (and especially those of Daniel Waterland (1683–1740)) turned against Clarke, and a rabidly Tory Lower House of Convocation indicted him before the Upper House for substituting his 'private conceits . . . in the room of those Catholic doctrines which the Church professes and maintains as warranted both by Scripture and Antiquity', a charge which made no contact with his arguments. In the end Clarke was brought to make an apology of sorts, and refrained from accepting any further appointment which would involve fresh subscription. The Church of England managed to stave off major agitation on the subject till the 1770s, but the doctrine of the Trinity would not be safe as long as it had to satisfy rational criteria basically derived from arithmetic.

The early deists were more than anti-Trinitarians. Like all the other parties to the controversy they believed that sound politics and sound religion went together, and that sound religion must satisfy the canons of sound reason. They were among those who passed on to the eighteenth century the political thought of the Commonwealth mingled with radical notions from continental sources. Matthew Tindal (1657–1733) and John Toland (1670–1722) indeed stretched radical Whiggery as far as it would go and were destined for ineffective opposition once Walpole had established a degree of political stability on a conservative basis. Such men needed to be careful about their pedigree in order to avoid being dismissed as atheists; the temperate Lord Herbert of Cherbury would do very well, and so would Spinoza, who wasted no time in personal wrangling. The latter affiliation, and a resolute determination to find God exclusively in the processes of nature, gained them a reputation as pantheists (a word said to have been invented by Toland) and, repudiating the latitudinarian Christian *Weltanschauung* along with the religious establishment in which it found a home, they took their place in an alternative Broad Church of their own adoption, freemasonry, and formed close links with freemasons in the United Provinces, especially among French Protestants. The general mood of deism may be sufficiently indicated in the cases of John Toland, Matthew Tindal and Anthony Collins (1676–1729). The group found it prudent to describe themselves as Christians, but let loose a generation of rambling controversy. One of Collins's works provoked thirty-five replies in two years, Tindal's chief work no less than 115. On the deist side the number of petty scribblers was immense, and the variety of views at least as great as the confusion in the official Christian camp.

Toland was the most emphatically political of the group. An Irish ex-Catholic, he became one of the regular pamphleteers on behalf of William III, made a diplomatic journey in north Germany in 1701, and subsequently published a glowing account of it, grossly exaggerating both the amount of toleration and the prosperity of organised religion in Hanover and Prussia. His reputation was made by his *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696). Here he asserted that '*what is evidently repugnant to clear and distinct Ideas or to our common notions, is contrary to reason which is something the doctrines of the Gospel, if they be the Word of God, cannot be*'; nor had God any right to require the assent of his creatures to what they could not comprehend. To demand the adoration of what is above reason was '*the undoubted Source of all the Absurdities that ever were seriously vented among Christians*'. Reason thus had the office of testing what was offered as revelation, an office altogether more important than could be allowed by the orthodox, who claimed that while there

was nothing in Christianity contrary to reason there were important things in it above reason. To those whose sensibilities came to be programmed by deism, it seemed infinitely ridiculous that God should lay bare his secrets to an uncivilised Chosen People. Moreover, when scripture was read in the light of Spinoza, it did not look like revelation. Scripture was manifestly the work of many hands over a long period, with the inconsistencies inevitable in such a compilation. Finally, the orthodox were fairly delivered into the hands of their critics by the pragmatic argument for religious establishment. This had always been based on the alleged excellence of the officially approved version of the faith in promoting virtue among the people; some defenders of the faith were bound to use this argument against deism. Deists, however, had two compelling replies. On the one hand it became known that Spinoza was a virtuous man; not all 'atheists' were libertines impatient of restraint. And on the other hand Mandeville and Shaftesbury stoutly maintained that Christian morality was not all it was cracked up to be. Toland meanwhile had shot his main philosophical bolt, and, apart from writing copiously for a living, established a political pedigree by editing Milton and Harrington.

Anthony Collins (1676–1729) was an entirely different character, not specially interested in politics, and philosophising from the comfort of a gentlemanly library. He had a strongly Spinozian hostility to the role of free will in conventional religious apologetic. Free will could not explain evil, for evil like everything else must proceed from the omnipotent deity, and its place in the scheme of things must be elucidated by reason. Most devastating was his *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724). Here Collins displayed a genuine skill in the dating of scripture to discredit the crucial argument that the Messiahship of Jesus could be proved from the fulfilment of prophecy. William Whiston (1667–1752), an honest defender of Christianity, had here played into Collins's hands. In 1707 he had admitted that the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament must be literally fulfilled if the conventional argument was to work; that they did not work proved (in his view) that scripture as it stood was defective, and that canon and text must be reconstructed accordingly. Collins was able to show that to insist on literal fulfilment was 'most destructive of Christianity', while to argue for the allegorical fulfilment was to open the way to entirely arbitrary exegesis.

The deist Bible was, however, yet to come. In *Christianity as Old as the Creation, or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730) Matthew Tindal's title said it all. The son of a clergyman and himself a fellow of All Souls, Tindal argued that so-called revelation could gain no more authority than its moral and religious content warranted, and that

New Testament religion gained its force from the fact that it embodied the substance of what reason could infer from nature. Tindal could thus present himself as being not anti-Christian, but as resolutely anti-clerical; it was the hierarchy which filled the Christian world with hatred and ruin by refusing to accept things as they are and must be.

Natural religion was easy first and plain;  
 Tales made it mystery, offerings made it gain.  
 Sacrifices and shews were at length prepar'd,  
 The priests eat roast meat and the people star'd.

After Tindal the tempo of the deist controversy eased, in part because of political changes. The great threat to established religion had come from Walpole's unscrupulous manipulation of church patronage and his disdain for the church's material welfare, but it proved possible to get him out of office in 1742 by a parliamentary revolt, and the new Leicester House opposition to the court attracted the hopes of a (quite different) Methodist coalition which gathered round the Countess of Huntingdon and George Whitefield. The political prospects of 'true', 'independent' or radical Whigs seemed more remote than ever.

### **Anti-deism (1) Bishop Butler**

Deism also suffered severe intellectual blows from the side of orthodoxy and from within the tradition of radical criticism. Joseph Butler (1692–1752) who became bishop of Durham in 1750 shifted the grounds of debate in his *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736) which (slowly) became one of the most celebrated works of English apologetic and ethics. The burden of his song, not immediately comfortable to either side, was that 'from analogical reasoning, *Origen* has with singular sagacity observed, that *he who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from Him who is the Author of Nature, may well expect to find the same sort of Difficulties in it, as are found in the Constitution of Nature.* And in a like way of Reflexion it may be added, that he who denies the Scripture to have been from God upon account of these difficulties, may for the very same Reason, deny the world to have been formed by Him.' To the deists' shrill protests that God could not possibly expect men to believe more than their reason would accept, Butler argued that there were difficulties everywhere, and both Christians and their opponents must be satisfied with something short of a demonstration. He chose not to argue with the difficulties created by the progress of historical knowledge, simply, like the deists, directing his fire at his enemies' most vulnerable points.

### Anti-deism (2) David Hume

The crushing blow to the deists came, however, from within the sceptical tradition, the tradition of Bayle, rather than of Tindal and Collins, from the hand of David Hume (1711–76). Hume was not merely the greatest of all the British contributors to this debate, he is a landmark to a change of atmosphere. If the reception of Spinoza was a measure of the change between 1670 and 1720, the emergence of Hume in the mid-eighteenth century was the measure of another. Not merely did Hume think deism every bit as incredible as revelation, he clearly thought that the political stirrers of the ‘true’, ‘independent’, ‘radical’ Whig tradition among whom deists had often been numbered, had had their day. With the defeat of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, Britain had obtained a high degree of political stability, and there was nothing to be done about it. He wrote a Toryish *History of Great Britain* (1754–62). It is the radical note of scepticism, and the introduction of a small element of history which enabled Hume to change the course of the debate. Hume did not believe Pope’s famous epigram that

Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid in night,  
God said ‘Let Newton be!’ and all was light.

‘While Newton seemed to draw off the veil from some of the mysteries of nature [averred Hume], he showed at the same time the imperfections of the mechanical philosophy; and thereby restored her ultimate secrets to that obscurity in which they ever did and ever will remain.’ History was even darker than nature, but there was enough light to put paid to the deists. Hume believed firmly enough ‘that the whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author’, but history revealed anything but the universal religion of the deist. Religious belief was not universal, ‘and no two nations and scarce any two men have ever agreed precisely in the same sentiments’. This situation, which a century later led Newman to search for an authoritarian church to settle disputes, led Hume to abandon the explanation of particular substantive religions to the historian, and to point out that early men were not primitive deists, they were polytheists.

Hume’s conclusions were equally bleak for revelation. God might be the Author of Nature, but as an explanation of certain facts He cannot go beyond the facts. Nothing is forthcoming from this hypothesis about the nature of God or the conduct required of men. Hume held that claims to revelation had always been proved by miracles. But the evidence in favour of a miracle could never be equal to the evidence in favour of the natural law it violates. This proposition might not be beyond challenge, but the

essence of what Hume was contending was exactly the opposite of what Protestant propagandists had often maintained. To the latter the credibility of a testimony had been proportioned to the credibility of the witness; no promises could be more credible than the promises of God in scripture. But to Hume the credibility of testimony depended on the plausibility of what it asserted, and that was a totally different thing.

### **The Enlightenment in France**

Hume might have been expected to consort easily with the spokesmen for the radical Enlightenment in France. That he did not was indicated by a frequently reported literary legend. The first time Hume attended one of the Baron d'Holbach's dinner-parties, he asserted that he did not believe atheists existed, and that he had never met one; d'Holbach replied that he had been unfortunate, but that he was now surrounded by seventeen. There was indeed a difference between Hume and his companions; the Scot did not care for the self-confident atheism of the French, which was no more warranted than the self-confident theology of the churches. Nor did he care for their mechanistic explanation of the universe, which went beyond anything which could be justified by the present state of knowledge. Equally the main content of such religion as Hume possessed was the acceptance of life as it is without presumptuous attempts to go behind it and explain it. But Voltaire and his friends, like the Independent Whigs of an earlier generation in England, felt so injured by the power of antiquated opinions, especially in the church, that they could not accept things as they were. And like the deists they struck first at religion.

Religion was in some ways a greater target in France than in England. The force of public authority behind the religious establishments in England and Scotland had been exercised under the later Stuarts with much greater ambiguity than in France, where Protestants, Jansenists, Quietists and papacy had all felt the violent edge of Louis XIV's understanding of orthodoxy. Moreover, in Britain the established churches and some of the dissenters had shown a prudent willingness to come to terms with 'reason' as currently understood. In France by contrast the Jansenists, who formed the chief force of internal criticism in the church, were locked into an antique battle of their own; so concerned to emphasise the role of grace in conversion, they would not conceive of the possibility of natural law, let alone natural religion. And when progressive intellect was thinking of reasons why miracles could not happen, lower-order (as distinct from scholarly) Jansenists produced them by the wholesale in the cemetery of Saint-Médard in Paris. More persecuted than anyone in eighteenth-century France, the Jansenists were the last to ask for toler-

ation in principle. If, in the jargon of the day, there were fanatics anywhere, they were the Jansenists. And behind their bitter feuds with the Jesuits lay the general Catholic belief that lurking somewhere in the church was the principle of infallibility.

The first phase of the Enlightenment in France was preoccupied, as in the United Provinces and England, with the criticism of revealed religion, and the campaign for tolerance. In the 1740s, when the lead began to swing in France to the group of intellectuals who were to write the *Encyclopédie*, interest began gradually to turn to political, economic and social concerns, and to recruiting rulers and administrators who might implement enlightened policies.

### Voltaire

The man who left his personal stamp on this first phase was François Marie Arouet, who adopted the name Voltaire (1694–1778). A successful journalist, Voltaire brought to religious controversy a delicacy of touch and a skilled handling of ridicule calculated to create the impression that he was on the side of light against darkness, of the men of progress against dinosaurs, even if logic was not always his forte. An involuntary stay in England brought him under the spell of Newton, Locke, Shaftesbury and the English deists, not to mention Bayle and Swift. In 1734 he published his *Lettres philosophiques ou Lettres écrites de Londres sur les Anglais*, and in 1738 his *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton*. These works, the first of which was burned by the Paris hangman, marked the beginning of the English liberal impact in France, and signalled that Voltaire's hatred for despotism, Christianity and the church had received a powerful philosophical underpinning. His literary eminence led to his receiving an invitation to Berlin from Frederick the Great (1750–53), which in turn marked him out from his French contemporaries for world repute. Berlin, however, did not confer independence; this Voltaire sought in a country house of his own at Ferney, near Geneva and the Franco-Swiss frontier. Here he resumed his attacks on Christianity and the church prolifically and in every format, only returning to Paris in 1778, too famous to molest, to die shortly afterwards.

There were three great targets for Voltaire's venom. The first was the traditional belief in Providence. In so far as this belief was supported by miracles, he treated it with contempt, drawing mechanistic consequences from the new science much more relentlessly than the scientific pioneers themselves. Life was a meaningless cycle of good and ill fortune; nothing illustrated this more cogently than the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, which supplied Voltaire with the text of a poem, and the most successful novel

he ever wrote, *Candide* (1759). This blow to optimism, whether of the Enlightenment or the conventional Christian variety, clearly found a resonance in a wide public. Voltaire's second great campaign was for toleration. It was not that the French *philosophes* suffered anything very dreadful, but toleration would clearly relativise the claims on which religious establishments built their privilege. His *Essai sur la Tolérance* (1763) was acclaimed throughout Europe. His crusade against Christianity and the churches made little distinction as to denomination, though he was particularly virulent against Rome, believing it to be more superstitious than the rest. The historical tradition about Jesus was far too weak to bear the weight the churches put upon it. Jesus was a simple moral teacher, but even his ethical teachings were not preserved unfalsified in the gospels. In any case Jesus was not the founder of the church, which arose through a series of chances, beginning with the lie his first followers told about the resurrection to gain revenge on his Jewish executioners. These early followers took advantage of the ignorance of ordinary people in a way that Socrates and Confucius had refused to do. The work of the original liars and enthusiasts was only compounded by that of others over the years. At the end Christian doctrine is such a tissue of contradictions that faith in it cannot be rational, can only be suppressed unbelief. Small wonder that Voltaire, not himself an atheist, could think it better to be an atheist than to believe in a barbaric god but also tied himself in knots arguing for the social usefulness of religious beliefs which he did not share.

The new science and philosophy which Voltaire had put to such striking anti-religious use were incorporated in a grand map of knowledge, the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (28 volumes 1751–72 with 7 supplementary volumes to 1780), a bible to set against the scriptures of any revealed faith whatever. This great work, edited up to 1757 by Jean d'Alembert (1717–83) and Denis Diderot (1713–83) and afterwards by Diderot alone, inevitably reflected the views of a considerable variety of authors; it embodied in its earlier volumes Voltaire's scepticism towards all supposed knowledge not based on experience, but in the later ones gave greater weight to atheism and materialism. By this were meant two things: that even spiritual and intellectual phenomena were derived from movements of matter according to its own laws, a mechanical necessity of nature then to be explained, and that the concept of God whether natural or revealed, was now superfluous, since there could be no first cause standing outside the material world. This programme set problems both for the orthodox and for those wishing in some sense to continue in the critical tradition.



## The Jesuits

The Jesuits, past masters at the urbane treatment of problems of civilised living, welcomed the first volume of the *Encyclopaedia*, indicating with some relish that more than 100 articles and parts of articles in the first volume had been taken almost verbatim from earlier works, including their own *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* and the philosophical writings of the Jesuit Buffier. The aggressive intention of the Encyclopaedists to replace one religion with another was ultimately too much for Jesuit urbanity, but it remained the case that the temper of the *philosophes* (who demanded toleration) was that of intolerant evangelists, while that of the orthodox defenders of a notoriously intolerant position was comparatively suave. They were in any case in a difficulty. The *philosophes* disbelieved in the supernatural with a zeal which was proof against any amount of evidence, while the continuous multiplication of evidence, whether scientific or historical (and the Jesuit Bollandists were themselves undermining the uncritical acceptance of traditional hagiology by historical investigation), created the impression that the future was with those who challenged the authority of tradition rather than those who accepted it. Two Jesuits, Hardouin and Berryer, attempted the desperate argument that the only ground for Catholic belief was faith in the Catholic Church itself; most apologists attempted another gamble by holding that the revelation which the church claimed to possess was a fact of history to be confirmed by the most rigorous historical inquiry. At the very least, most of the facts in the Bible were possible, though some were only possible by the special action of the Almighty. What history made clear, however, was that even the concept of miracle had evolved, and could not mean the same in biblical times when men who lacked the eighteenth-century sense of the regularity of physical phenomena could have no clear idea of the exceptional and the miraculous. The Catholic apologists of the third quarter of the eighteenth century were in short an unmemorable group; it was Hume and Berkeley who drilled holes in the sensationalist theory of knowledge on which the *philosophes* depended, and Pope Benedict XIV was warranted in his complaint in 1752 that such controversial talent as the church possessed was devoted to less important issues than those raised in the age of the *Lumières*. Perhaps the Jesuit educational system itself had fossilised into an antique pattern.

## Rousseau

More striking was a protest (it would be fanciful to call it a revolt despite some bruised personal relationships) from within the camp of the French

Enlightenment. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) sprang from a French family long settled in Geneva, but at the age of sixteen he ran away to Savoy and converted to Roman Catholicism. He first visited Paris in 1741 and settled there permanently in 1744, associating closely with Diderot and the Encyclopaedists. From them Rousseau absorbed a great deal, but, particularly after a sort of conversion experience in 1749, became dissatisfied with their mechanistic outlook. This seemed to him to do no justice to the proper status of feelings in perception, nor to the kind of distinctions properly made in the name of moral obligation. ‘For us, to exist is to feel; our sense of feeling is most certainly prior to our understanding and we have feelings before we have ideas . . . Conscience! Conscience! divine instinct, immortal and heavenly voice; sure guide of a being who though ignorant and limited is yet intelligent and a free agent; . . . it is you who make the excellence of man’s nature and the moral quality of his deeds,’ the thing which raises him above the animals. In this cause Rousseau was reconciled to the Reformed Church in Geneva in 1754. It is not surprising that Rousseau fell out with the Encyclopaedists, fell out with the Church of Geneva, fell out with the villagers of Motiers where he had been living under the protection of Frederick the Great in 1765, and, having received the protection of David Hume in England 1766–7, fell out with that sceptical philosopher, and ended his days after 1770 in impoverished obscurity in Paris. While much is elusive about Rousseau, it is clear that in his cultivation of sensibility he spoke for an extensive public, Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* in England for example, or the literary movement in Germany known as *Sturm und Drang* (‘storm and stress’). This movement of sensibility was altogether wider than Rousseau, and left an unmistakable mark on one genre of religious literature, the autobiographical notices of its members collected by the Moravian community by the tens of thousands. In the 1770s and 1780s, particularly among the sisters of the community, there was a release from a rigid form of conversion narrative, and dramatic contrasts were drawn between the unworthiness of the narrator and the faithfulness of Jesus; here they were clearly responding to the rage for sensibility in the outside world.

What Rousseau could not accept in orthodox Christianity was the doctrine of original sin. Men must have been created good, because they were God’s creation; if they now left much to be desired this must be because of bad social arrangements defying the terms of the social contract. Rousseau accepted the Bible, though he also accepted the supremacy of reason. He believed that a civil religion was indispensable if the social contract and the laws were to be obeyed. That civil religion boiled down to five principles: (1) the existence of a mighty, intelligent, kindly providential God, (2) the future life, (3) the happiness of the righteous

and the punishment of the wicked, (4) the sanctity of the social contract and the laws, and (5) the only negative – a condemnation of ‘intolerance’, by which Rousseau meant the Roman Catholic doctrine *extra ecclesiam nulla spes salutis*. The first three principles, on which all Christians and also Jews and Muslims could agree, were meant to ensure the carrying out of the fourth, and the fifth to put a brake on priesthood. By providing a distilled essence of religion, Rousseau opened the way for men to accept the locally established forms of worship, as he accepted that of Geneva. Here he anticipated something of the mood of the liberal *Kulturprotestantismus* of the late nineteenth century. And like that religious movement he ran into a difficulty he could not solve. There is a difference between a religion believed to be true, and one adopted (as in his case) for its presumed social usefulness. Moreover, if (as began to appear probable at the beginning of the twentieth century to rational historical investigation) the religion of Jesus was of a markedly utopian or chiliastic character, might not this be more socially useful to a would-be revolutionary like Rousseau, than the lowest common denominator of religious belief at which he arrived?

### The *Aufklärung*

The Enlightenment in Germany was a different, somewhat more timorous, but from the standpoint of Christian (or even Jewish) faith and practice, ultimately more useful enterprise than that in France. Even Kant, uttering the swan-song of the *Aufklärung*, calling on men to escape from the immaturity of always being led: ‘*Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding’, ended on a shaky note in praise of the basic law of Frederician Prussia: ‘Reason as much as you wish on whatever you wish; but obey!’ The result was that although the *Aufklärung* had a broad impact in philosophy and literature, its political and economic ramifications were less than those of the French Enlightenment until very late in the eighteenth century, and it devoted itself to improving Christianity and the church rather than to disposing of them. In this respect it was like those movements for practical reform which came to constitute Enlightenment all over Europe. Religion was a means and a way to a better life, though only if the religion could be got right. The confidence with which they thought they had succeeded may be well illustrated by the tone of the excellent J. R. Schlegel in 1784:

Enlightened rulers and their equally enlightened advisers have through newly introduced or newly increased freedom of conscience and tolerance of deviant individuals and parties, through permitting liberty of the press and wise institu-

tions, and new ordinances for churches and schools, given a new impulse to the understanding of their pupils. From this arose the enlightenment of a great part of the nation in religious concepts, alienation from superstition, the separation of the essentials of religion from inessential and human additions.

This self-confidence is the more striking when it is compared with the low morale of German Protestantism a century earlier; Protestants felt that they had at last put the Catholic Church on the defensive, and had harnessed progressive forces which would steadily increase the distance between them to their own advantage.

### **Physico-theology in Germany**

This self-confidence is, nevertheless, hardly to be perceived, politically or religiously, in the first quarter of the eighteenth century which German scholars now discuss in terms of early Enlightenment. Not only were the Orthodox battling furiously with Pietism within and a rather antique 'atheism' without, but the newer style of physico-theological apologetic, multiplied by the translation of every grade of English accomplishment in the genre, ran to quite astonishing excess. There was bird-theology, fish-theology, a theology of frogs and tadpoles; there was a theology of European and oriental locusts, of grasshoppers, mussels and snails, of insects, silkworms, bees, mice and caterpillars. Reimarus, better known for radical biblical criticism, wrote physico-theology on the basis of the instincts of animals. Of course there were also plant theologies, flower theologies, grass theology, to prove the existence of God. In the inanimate world there were theologies of mountains, stones and earthquakes, petrification, water, fire and snow. The harmony, proportion and movement of heavenly bodies not merely declared but proved the glory of God; even storms did not come amiss. And since the atheists were apt to say that man was a chance collection of atoms, his status as the crown of creation had to be established by treatises on the origin of gender, the structure and statistics of the body, the brain as the hammer of the atheist, the backbone and its elements. Even population statistics and epidemics could be made to prove the existence and attributes of God. By a slight transposition into psycho-theology, the miracle of mental gifts and forces, the affections, love, hate and shame, the relations of body and soul could be pressed into the same cause. And if a century of sermons, catechisms and schoolbooks were not vehicles enough for all this demonstration, Barthold Hinrichs Brockes produced a dozen volumes of physico-theological poems, and there were other poetasters only less fertile. After all this stupendous attempt to coerce consent to the hand and nature of God in the detail of

creation,<sup>2</sup> it is no wonder that Tersteegen made it his life's work to assist the faithful to realise the presence of God rather than deduce it.

### Christian Wolff

Against the insistent clamour of the physico-theologians, however, 'reason' was steadily being amplified as a concept, and employed more profitably for the benefit of religion. The two great names in this process, those of Christian Wolff (1679–1754) and Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791), illustrate the increasing role of reason in comparison with revelation.

Wolff was born in Breslau, under the shadow of Silesian religious conflict. It became his hope to establish certainty in theology by applying mathematical methods. In this Wolff can hardly be said to have succeeded; but his addiction to an unconfessional mathematical model proved extraordinarily profitable in career terms, and clearly met a demand among the influential. He was early drawn to the attention of Leibniz, who in 1706 obtained him a chair of mathematics at Halle. Here Wolff's publications ranged far beyond mathematics, and included a long series of *Rational Thoughts* on almost everything, including the ambitiously entitled *Rational Thoughts on God, the World and the Soul of Man, and all things generally* (1720). Wolff was in fact promoting a reform of philosophy comparable with the reform of theological education being pioneered in another faculty by Francke; but the pertness of his pupils towards the theologians, and a lecture he gave as pro-Rektor praising Confucius for developing an ethic from pure reason, led to his being expelled by the king of Prussia at a few hours' notice in 1723.

Wolff, however, was instantly received at the Reformed university of Marburg, where he laboured with great *éclat* till 1740, when he received an offer he could not refuse to come back to Halle. Meanwhile he had received distinctions from the great all over Europe and had become an intellectual cult figure. The tactics of the alliance of Pietist and Orthodox which got Wolff out of Halle rebounded on them in the most painful way; Wolff was a one-man unconfessional encyclopaedia and great was his reward. His follower Gottsched, writing of Wolff's *Logic* (1712), emphasised that it did not break completely with the past: '[It] holds the mean

<sup>2</sup> As late as 1824 Heine could genially caricature this story in connection with a chance encounter in the Harz. 'He drew my attention to the rationality and usefulness in nature. The trees are green because green is good for the eyes. I agreed and added that God created cattle because meat soups are good for men, that he created the ass to serve men as a comparison, and that he created Man himself to eat meat soups and not be an ass. My companion was delighted to have found a man of like mind, [and] his face shone yet more joyfully.'

between Aristotelic subtleties, and the loose unconnected manner of Ramus, Descartes and other modern logicians.' Hegel praised him for being the first to naturalise philosophy in Germany, and his pupils ultimately monopolised the higher teaching of the subject.

So far as his ambitions to put theology upon an incontrovertible basis were concerned, Wolff's efforts fell into two very unequal parts. So far as revealed theology, based on the Bible, was concerned, he restricted himself to explanations necessary to rebut attacks on his orthodoxy. On the other hand, within the purview of philosophy he wrote thousands of pages on the doctrine of God, or natural theology. Here he attempted proofs of the existence of God and demonstrations of his characteristics of an abstract and highly unbiblical kind. Returning from the obsessions of the physico-theologians with the details of creation to the Leibnizian style, Wolff affirmed the necessity of an unconditioned basis to the contingency of the world, the argument *a posteriori*; but the existence and characteristics of God could also be deduced *a priori* from the concept of a perfect being. What Wolff thus conceived in no way threatened the necessity of revealed religion; reason and revelation were coordinates, and often identical in content. His rational demonstrations were often supported by biblical texts. This foreshadowed a future Kantian 'religion within the limits of pure reason' in which the texts were pushed to a periphery inaccessible to reason. For the concept of revelation was itself subject to rational definition; a revelation might be beyond the limits of reason, but must contradict no necessary rational truth.

The title page of the second volume of Wolff's *Natural Theology* announced that he would controvert the errors of atheism, deism, fatalism, naturalism and Spinozism. In Germany as in England, reason seemed no more capable of settling the disputes of those who would dispute than revelation. Wolff had learned at Halle the expediency of not pushing his arguments to their limits; the result was that even in his lifetime his followers divided into two camps, the Right-Wolffians who used his logic to defend Christianity, and Left-Wolffians like Reimarus who used it to confute Christianity.

### Semler

What might happen when the principles of Enlightenment were applied to the documents of revelation itself, albeit in what Hirsch characterised as the worst German ever perpetrated by a scholar of real intellectual stature, was abundantly illustrated in the career of Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91), doubtless the most important Protestant theologian of the eighteenth century; his 171 publications extended to exegesis, church

history, the history of dogma and literature, dogmatics and neighbouring disciplines, and a substantial autobiography. The intellectual transition marked by Semler's work was foreshadowed by both his upbringing and his education. Born at Saalfeld in Thuringia the son of an archdeacon, Semler experienced at school the effects of the conversion of the ducal court from orthodoxy to a Pietism which required of every Christian a personal conversion experience. His father's pressure in this direction he resisted and found narrowing. Orthodoxy was impossible and equally narrowing. When he entered the university at Halle in 1743, he found the place in a similar state of transition. The attempt to secure the dominance of Pietism had failed; Christian Wolff had returned; government patronage was in the hands of Frederick the Great. More immediately to the point Semler came under the influence of the historicising Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten. Baumgarten's early experiences in Halle encouraged him to keep his head down in matters of doctrine, and while he contributed enormously to the impact of British historiography in Germany by setting up a translation factory, his contribution to applying this expertise to theological studies was limited. This was to be the life's work of Semler; and he began appropriately with a dissertation on the English textual critic William Whiston. In 1753 he accepted a call back to Halle, determined to bring theology at home up to the level it had attained in Britain, France and Holland.

Semler perceived that Christian doctrine had always had a history, and that therefore neither the Fathers nor the resolutions of church councils had a simple authority to settle disputed questions. More controversially he concluded that both the Scripture and the canon of scripture had a history, a theme to which he devoted the four volumes of his *Treatise on a free inquiry into the canon* (1771–76). In this work he showed that the Christian faith had first spread by oral transmission before the scriptures were written, and long before the canon of scripture was established. Indeed individual church provinces had their own canon of differing scope and authority. The Word of God which describes the order of salvation and effects it in individuals, is indeed contained in the Scripture, but is not identical with it. In the primitive church of the Scripture is to be observed a process which has gone on ever since, that Jesus and the apostles accommodated themselves to the religious ideas of the congregation. In this way Jewish and Gentile ideas had left their mark on the Christian gospel. By the same token the Christian scholar required liberty for his intercourse with scripture, whether on an academic or personal level. The exegetical and historical work on which such conclusions rested threatened the foundations of Orthodox theology. For if the New Testament canon arose relatively late, and was itself historically condi-

tioned, the legal understanding of the canon and the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of scripture were both untenable. And if so, what would happen politically to the establishment of the confessional order? At any rate Semler's enemies laid charges against him before the Corpus Evangelicorum, the Protestant body in the Imperial Diet at Regensburg, which mercifully took no further action.

These conflicts nevertheless strengthened Semler in the conviction that theology and religion were distinct concepts. Theology was the variable and progressive outcome of scholarly work, a labour impossible to require of ordinary Christians; while religion signified the conviction of faith, the piety and love of the neighbour to be proved by all Christians in ordinary life. By the same token Semler broke with his Pietist past. The Halle school had seen the plan of salvation and its purpose, the union of man with God, as the great themes of theology; according to Semler edification was not the business of academic theology. Equally, if academic theology was to be free, it forfeited any claim for the acceptance of its current results to be made obligatory. Semler defended himself against the charge that he was draining popular religion of any dogmatic content by returning to the patristic distinction between Kerygma and Dogma (preaching and doctrine). Preaching included those truths which could be preached in a generally comprehensible form, and which were needed to keep the Christian faith alive. Here Semler and Wesley, two utterly dissimilar characters, came close together; Methodist doctrines were not doctrines invented by Methodists, but doctrines which Methodists found preached effectively. And, like Wesley, Semler was conservative in his estimate of what these were: God the creator, the crucified and risen Christ as our redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as the renewer of the Christian life. Small wonder that when Lessing published (anonymously) *Fragments* of Reimarus's biblical criticism Semler wrote against them (1779), and when Wöllner, the Prussian minister for public worship tried, in his Religious Edict of 1788 to tie the clergy and their preaching more closely to the authoritative church confessions, Semler supported him against many of his liberal friends. Yet it was the greatest of all religious liberals, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), like Semler of Pietist origin, and trained in the Halle faculty Semler reconstructed, who held together the two sides of Semler's teaching, and created a vast free reconstruction of Christian doctrine built upon a definition of religious experience.

### Lessing

It is impossible within the limits of this chapter to do justice to the fertility of the third stage of the *Aufklärung*, to Goethe's revival of pantheism,



Herder's venture into history and anthropology, to Lessing's plea for toleration and radical biblical criticism, to Kant's attempt to bring together the rationalist and the empirical streams of European philosophy. The latter two, however, well illustrate the progress of reason on the narrowly religious front; while Lessing became a literary icon whose theological views were chewed over by the artisans of Vienna at the time of the French Revolution, Kant had to face the political and religious reaction which the Revolution called forth.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81) was something of a dissenter from the beginning, a man who chose to fail in education for the ministry and for medicine and drifted into theatrical circles. During a stay in Berlin in 1748–55, he found a vocation as a literary critic in the newspapers, and out of this his own creative literary career developed. Precarious it might be, but at least it offered some kind of independence. Not till 1770, when at a time of great financial need he accepted the offer by the heir-apparent of the duchy of Brunswick of the librarianship of the famous Bibliotheca Augusta in Wolfenbüttel, did he become a paid man; and this appointment proved to open at least one door to liberty – the library publications were not subject to the censorship. By this time Lessing had not only acquired a formidable knowledge of the German Protestant tradition and established himself as a dramatist and critic, but had become a striking example to aspiring men of letters of independence and integrity. Moreover about a sixth of his total output was devoted to religious and theological reflection, and the last seven years of his life were largely devoted to the struggle for religious liberty as he understood it. What he wrote then had more enduring interest into the twentieth century than any fruit of the *Aufklärung* apart from the works of Kant.

At the end of his life Lessing made a famous plea for toleration in *Nathan the Wise* (1779), taking up one of the continuous themes of the Enlightenment and admitting that Nathan's 'hostile attitude towards all positive religion was mine all along'; his other two major contributions to the field came in the controversy over the *Fragments* in the later 1770s, and in his *Education of the Human Race* (1777–80). The *Fragments* controversy illustrates perfectly how little toleration there still was in Germany. Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) was a member of the important Enlightenment group in Hamburg, a gymnasium professor of oriental studies at the Johanneum, an adherent of Christian Wolff, and a defender of natural religion against materialists and atheists. Reimarus was, however, also a disciple of the English deists, accepting no need for revelation to crown the religion of nature; he also accepted the limits of what could be said in public in Germany, and kept secret an

'Apology or defence for rational worshippers of God' in which he applied his linguistic expertise to undermine belief in the biblical revelation and its miracles, and to explain Christian origins in natural terms. Lessing received a preliminary draft of this work from Reimarus's children, and between 1774 and 1778 published seven substantial fragments (equivalent in size to a 300-page book) ostensibly from anonymous manuscripts discovered in the library, and therefore free of the censorship. The nature of the work is sufficiently indicated by titles such as *The Impossibility of a revelation which all men might believe on adequate evidence*, or *That the books of the Old Testament were not written to reveal a religion*, or *On the resurrection story*, or *The Objects of Jesus and his disciples*. Reimarus set out to produce a compendium of radical criticism of the Bible, and did not spare the inconsistencies, the impossibilities, the allegations of lies. The Reimarus family did not own up to the authorship till 1814, and the work was not published unabridged until 1972; but this did not blunt the effect of what Lessing let out. In the nineteenth century David Friedrich Strauss (the hero of George Eliot) looked on Reimarus as a precursor, and in the twentieth Albert Schweitzer began his *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (German edn. 1906; Eng trans. under this title 1913) with him.

The publication of the *Fragments* involved Lessing in protracted and violent controversy, and it was this controversy which gave the *Education of the Human Race* and *Nathan* their especial resonance. Lessing's immediate object was to put down the old Protestant belief in the Bible. He began by posing as an impartial observer, arguing that the objections to the historical bases of the Christian faith raised in the *Fragments* deserved impartial examination from every side. This examination need not necessarily be damaging to Christianity, for religion depended on its spiritual force and not on the letter of a New Testament which arose by a series of chances after the spread of Christianity had begun. This type of argument had been better put by Semler, whom Lessing regarded as a compromiser; the sting came in his famous assertion that 'the contingent truths of history can never prove the necessary truths of reason'. Thus arguments from miracle and the fulfilment of prophecy were inadmissible, not to mention the resurrection and the inspiration of the Bible. Yet history was not entirely to be put down. Both reason and religion have a history, and history is able to establish what the immediate perceptions of the past were. History may show how the early Christians came to accept the miracles and resurrection of Jesus, and how the Christian religion and church was built upon them. Similarly the power of the Bible was a historical fact though not a proof of its inspiration. The education of the human race had taken place through such

stages,<sup>3</sup> and only now was it about to enter upon a period when the educational device of a belief in revelation was no longer necessary. The Bible was rescued from Reimarus's allegations of mendacity at the expense of relativising it and other positive religions.

Lessing's final position is indicated in the parable of the three rings in *Nathan*. The Sultan Saladin asks Nathan on what grounds he adheres to Judaism rather than to Christianity or Islam. Nathan, wishing to appear neither fanatical nor indifferent to the faith of his fathers, tells his story. Three brothers appear before a judge, each claiming to have received from their father the ring entitling them to the inheritance. The rings are so similar and the testimonies of the brothers so credible that the judge cannot decide among them. He reminds the brothers of their claim that the genuine ring has the power to make its owner acceptable to God and man. Therefore each must try through unprejudiced love to men, charity and devotion to God to prove that he has the genuine ring. After many thousands of years a wiser judge will pronounce the true judgment on the rings.

### Kant

If Lessing was a man of broad general culture, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) spent his whole life in Königsberg ploughing his own furrow, a devoted slave to the categorical imperative. Kant's work on the theory of knowledge in effect wound up one set of eighteenth-century debates, and let loose another set which are not yet concluded; these discussions would in any case have affected the way Christian belief and practice were approached. But it was only right at the end of his life when political and religious reaction to the French Revolution set in, and was mobilised in Prussia by Wöllner, that Kant fought his corner with *Religion within the limits of reason alone* (1793). This work could not get past the Prussian censorship, was published in Jena and brought on him a rebuke from the king. But for the deterioration in the political situation, Kant might perhaps not have written this work, which is regarded as somewhat below par by even his legion of German admirers; but it reveals very clearly the dilemma of Protestant or post-Protestant Enlightenment, even in the hands of its most acute exponent.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Kant had set out to heal the

<sup>3</sup> 'Education gives a man nothing which he might not have had out of himself; it gives him that which he might have had out of himself, only more quickly and easily. Revelation too gives the human race nothing to which human reason, left to itself, would not come, but it gave and gives it the most important of these things sooner.' *Der Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, §4.

age-old rift between the rationalists and the empiricists. The rationalists had maintained, for example in the case of cause and effect, that when we think according to the rules of logic we draw consequences from antecedents; the connection in our mind between antecedent and consequent reveals to us the nature of the connection between cause and effect in the physical world outside our mind. The empiricists on the other hand maintained that the nexus of cause and effect could only be known by direct observation of the outside world; this amounted to the perception of a repetitive pattern which looked as if it were cause and effect. Kant maintained with the rationalists that the mind was constituted in such a way that it connected successive phenomena through a pattern of cause and effect, but (with the empiricists) that this potentiality was only realised in observing the external world. This relationship between the human mind and its relation to reality, the study of the limits of knowledge, was in Kant's view the business of philosophy. Within those limits 'practical reason' must enable us to chart our course. This process was partly assisted, partly complicated, by the fact that there were three great ideas for which there was evidence, but not enough for the mind to grasp or prove, namely God, Freedom and Immortality.

Kant's labours as a moral philosopher in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) consisted in providing practical content for the forms in which the mind operated. The difference between the mind and the external world (where things happened as they had to happen) was the mind's innate sense of moral obligation and the freedom in which it was exercised. 'Ought' and 'is' were two different things. It was the categorical imperative which insisted on the absolute primacy of obligation, and to put some substance into this form of mental activity, Kant arrived at the formula 'Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law'. What worried Kant about the religious and political reaction of the 1790s was that forms of moral and religious action were being pressed for the convenience of their results, not because they were consistent with the categorical imperative. This was the worse for Kant, because for him ethics formed a basis for religion and not vice versa; it was '*what man himself must do in order to become worthy*' of divine assistance. Ethics led to religion in so far as the realisation of the highest good required a God to help harmonise and realise the ultimate purposes of man and the world. But this religion was natural, rational religion, not the positive religion offered by Christian churches and confessions. These offered no new insights into the requirements of the moral law, simply encouragement to pursue them. Thus positive religion cannot be required by ethics or law, and unlike science and art is not an autonomous realm, simply a branch of ethics.

The task now was to free the rational core of Christianity from the dross, and promote the triumph of this true Christianity in the churches. Jesus was the teacher of the pure rational Christianity written in the hearts of all men. The four things which took up much of positive religion – works of grace, miracles, mysteries and means of grace – had no place in rational religion, and those who tried to import them wrought havoc by introducing fanaticism, superstition, illumination and thaumaturgy (the hazardous attempt to operate upon the supernatural) respectively. This conclusion suggested that Kant, of all men the most dedicated to the good, had very little religious sense left. Fittingly he was buried at his own wish without religious ceremonial, since the religion of reason required no religious establishment or priesthood, its adherents receiving their ‘orders directly from the supreme legislator’. With equal fitness, Goethe and Schiller reckoned that he had conceded far too much to Christianity. But that is a later story.

### **Frederick the Great**

Not the least of the men of letters who employed his pen in the cause of Enlightenment was Frederick the Great, king of Prussia from 1740 to 1786; moreover his long reign enabled him to leave a deep mark on the churches of his domains. The adherent of Wolff, the patron of Voltaire, the correspondent of Diderot and the Encyclopaedists, the writer of innumerable quips against positive religion, the man who complained incessantly about ‘fanaticism’ and the fact that ‘a philosopher, who undertook to preach a simple religion, would . . . run the risk of being stoned by the people’, he is almost the caricature of the Enlightened Despot. If, however, Frederick is judged not so much by his posturings in private correspondence as by what he did, he appears much in line with the Calvinism and neo-Stoicism on which his family had prospered for a century and a half; and the problems arising from the fact that the Reformed church to which the Hohenzollerns adhered numbered only three per cent of their subjects at the time of Frederick’s accession, were identical with those of his forbears. Moreover, toleration of minority faiths during good behaviour had been an indispensable feature of Hohenzollern policy since their conversion from Lutheranism, and was now more than ever necessary for the recruitment of foreign Protestants for the economic development of the country, and for coping with the large Catholic populations acquired during the Silesian wars. Frederick’s intense emphasis on duty, though certainly a foretaste of Kant, was equally a family tradition. After all he had suffered from his father, it is astonishing but true that less than a year before his father’s death,

Frederick assured his sister that his relations with the king were as excellent as he could wish. In short Frederick's addiction to Enlightenment was tempered by an acute sense of the limitations of what it might achieve, by family traditions which were well adapted to what he had to do, by Jansenist reading and by other factors. In the war years, 1757–59, Frederick wrote an entirely serious sermon on the Last Judgment in Hallensian style.

Moreover Frederick's conviction that he was the chief bishop of the realm and his determined opposition to pulpit controversy which might lead to disorder implied a limitation of the role of the secular arm; matters of worship and doctrine were left to bishops and consistories. The religious organisation of the army exemplified what Frederick really wanted. As worked out by Military Provost Decker in 1750, the regiment was the superior unit, but provision was made not merely for the troops, but their families and servants of whatever confession. The daily hymn-singing, twice daily devotions, and twice monthly communions were not matched in armies elsewhere. The supremacy of the state was compatible with a high degree of free religious practice. As Otto Hintze pointed out long ago, Frederick's Political Testaments, while adamant against religious discord, Silesian-style, 'in no way conceived the church as an institution of state police, neither Protestant nor Catholic'. In the same way, while welcoming the return of Wolff to Halle, he did not surrender to rationalist influences, nor interfere in their disputes with the Pietists; Pietist influence in school reform continued. Frederick's last great service to the cause of religious toleration jointly sustained by the Enlightenment and by his family tradition came in the preparation of a general legal code (the *Allgemeine Landrecht*) for the Prussian states which was completed just after his death. This guaranteed complete freedom of belief and conscience to every citizen; no one was to be despised or disturbed by the state on account of his religious convictions. The price of this privilege was, of course, that 'every church-society [was] obliged to kindle in its members reverence towards God, obedience to the law, loyalty to the state, and good moral dispositions towards their fellow-citizens'. In eighteenth-century terms this was not a bad bargain. In short Frederick was in some ways a more characteristic example of the *Aufklärung* than were Lessing and Kant; he did a job on behalf of the church.

And his mark on the Prussian churches was profound, for it was in his time that rationalism became one of the hallmarks of the Prussian clergy. It is worth stressing this since Nicholas Hope's great survey of the Lutheran churches creates the impression that the bulk of them were locked into a rural stagnation which insulated them effectively from movements for change whether spiritual or intellectual. It is of course true that the

periodising of movements in the Lutheran churches is very variable; the peak of musical achievement in the Orthodox era came only with Handel and Bach when Orthodoxy was a spent force politically and theologically, though it is noteworthy that when Bach died in 1750 he was already considered (musically) old-fashioned and was about to go out of vogue altogether. It is also true that circumstances which affected the rate at which the clergy took up with the new criticism differed considerably in different parts of Germany. In Electoral Saxony, for example, clergy and teachers were bound by a strict oath to the symbolic books of the Lutheran tradition; in Saxe-Gotha by contrast this oath was eased by the amendment 'so far as they are in agreement with Holy Scripture', a concession dearly coveted by Anglican clergy of unitarian propensities. But the fact is that despite all the Enlightenment raving against clerical reaction, one reason why the new ways had a larger popular following than most philosophical fashions was that they were extensively taken up by the clergy, especially in Prussia. Here Frederick the Great came into his own; by various titles he had the patronage of about one-third of the churches in his domains, and there were special privileges for clergy who came up through the chaplaincy to the army, also largely in the king's gift. Again, the principal school of the clergy in Prussia was Halle, and, after the reconstruction by Semler, Halle was firmly in the camp of neology.

### **Enlightenment in the Protestant churches of Switzerland and Germany**

Moreover, as we shall see, there was a marked change in the spiritual atmosphere in Europe after the Seven Years War and the way in which educated people discussed religious issues. The great showdown between Catholic and Protestant now dropped out of diplomatic correspondence and polite conversation; and the intellectual challenge of the Enlightenment theology, whether reason could be made a source for the knowledge of God alongside, or even instead of, revelation, did not seem so compelling. And Enlightenment itself suggested that after such a large dose of imputed righteousness from the Protestant Orthodoxies, a bit more actual righteousness would not come amiss. Where this took the shape on the continent of Orphan Houses, or, in England, of hospitals for particular groups of residents or for the treatment of particular groups of diseases, it required a break with older traditions of endowing parish charities.

At any rate through one channel or another Enlightenment began to make its appearance even in unlikely German churches. In Mecklenburg, for example, it came in very late in the eighteenth century after the

reconstruction of the university of Rostock in 1789. In Württemberg, the Stift at Tübingen, where clergy for the Lutheran church in the duchy were trained, famed for its Pietist past, now produced a series of groups of men enlightened in spirit: first, in 1769–71 the historians Ludwig Timotheus Spittler (1752–1810) and Gottlob Jakob Planck (1751–1833), then in the 1780s poets such as Reinhardt, Bardili, Karl Friedrich Stäudlin (1761–1826) and Karl Philipp Conz (d.1827) who revived the spirit of classical Greece; and finally, 1790–93, the philosophical group of the most famous *Stiftler* of all, Hölderlin, Hegel and Schelling. To move further south again into the Reformed cantons of Switzerland, is to encounter an exciting story for which there is no space in a brief study. Protestant Switzerland, always in this period open to English influences, felt the entire canon from Newton to Hume and Gibbon; French Switzerland was subject to the impact of Voltaire and Rousseau; while the whole German *Aufklärung*, literary and philosophical, was received in German-speaking Switzerland. Here Zurich became a major European centre of Enlightenment, lay and ecclesiastical, comparable with Hamburg in the north, and the guardians of Reformed Orthodoxy, Bern, Basel and Schaffhausen, put up a stiff fight against the new ways with only limited success.

### **Catholic Enlightenment in Germany**

If the story of Protestant Enlightenment in Germany is complicated, that of German Catholic Enlightenment is still worse; like much of the Protestant Enlightenment it was not hostile to the church, but sought a better future for it, and mingled with other reforming movements, some of considerable pedigree. Three conclusions spring from the modern work, however, which give some shape to the story. The first is that despite the neglect encouraged by historians who assumed that in this period Austria and Prussia were the only states with a history of any consequence, and despite the doctrinally motivated denials of nineteenth-century integralists that there could be a Catholic Enlightenment, such a thing did exist, and was not simply a consequence of contamination by Protestant Germany, though such contamination also existed. The second is that the Catholic Enlightenment must be dated markedly later than the Protestant; indeed it was the misfortune of Catholic Germany that the new movement was barely under way when in the backwash of the French Revolution the spiritual states were secularised. The third is that the periodisation of the Catholic Enlightenment, which was never as much concerned with general ideas as its Protestant counterpart, was largely determined by important events outside the country. The first period has



a pre-history extending into the the seventeenth century, but the admixture of modern ideas provoked particularly lively criticism from the 1740s. The second period is ushered in by the suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773, which transformed a longstanding discussion about education into urgent action. And the third phase began in 1780 with the accession of Joseph II to sole authority in the Habsburg lands; the upheaval he contrived gave an impulse to Catholic rulers, lay and spiritual.

Catholic Enlightenment was prefaced by longstanding movements for reform which coalesced and made some use of new ideas. The basic movement in the history of the Church since the fifteenth century had been the triumph of the papacy over its clerical critics (and also over general councils) at the price of expensive concessions to temporal authorities. The temporal authorities, Catholic and Protestant, had used the opportunity to create national churches, or churches otherwise organised to match secular boundaries. The risk was that the worm might turn, and that the local authorities in the church might resist the process by which the papacy and the world had combined to reduce their significance; and that risk was greatest in the Holy Roman Empire where there were mighty prince-bishops who (like the Holy See) combined spiritual and temporal authority, and where the national church was furthest from realisation. And this risk was realised at the precise point when, after the end of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1748, the age-old hostility between Habsburg and Bourbon was put discreetly under wraps. Maria Theresa then knew that she might need French and Spanish assistance to contain the threat from Frederick the Great in Germany. Any *rapprochement* among the Catholic great powers implied peace and stability in Italy, but carried a potential threat to the papacy from the combined action of the very powers to whom it had delivered the local churches.

By this time there was a feeling that some of the policies of church renewal deriving from the Counter-Reformation needed to be more resolutely pursued, while others needed to be rethought. Thus, for example, Germany had been late in implementing the Tridentine policy of creating diocesan seminaries for priests, but caught up energetically in the eighteenth century. On the other hand the Tridentine ideal of episcopacy was ruled out of court in the Empire by the Electoral and princely status of the bishops. Again the Jesuits had been the great missionary force of the Counter-Reformation, and the moving spirit in German Catholicism. But Jesuit missions had probably made more Protestants than they had converted in Bohemia, and they failed to wipe out Protestant communities in Salzburg and the Habsburg family lands, let alone Hungary; thus rulers were beginning to look for alternatives to the Jesuits

at the very time when there was a growing chorus of complaints about the inadequacy of Jesuit education. Some of them derived from the intellectual modernisms which in Protestantism went into theology as well as education. Furthermore, as one solution to the pastoral ills of the church was to tighten up church discipline, surviving Jansenists could climb upon the bandwagon, the more easily as it became the habit to describe any one who was anti-Jesuit for any reason as a Jansenist.

By the latter part of the century it was a serious question whether Catholic Enlightenment was any different from Protestant. Certainly Catholic *Aufklärer*, educated in a Protestant university such as Göttingen, could rant against past times when 'the human understanding was not in the least formed' in quite the Protestant Enlightened style. Moreover the Enlightenment began to influence Catholic studies in theology and canon law. Göttingen, the new Hanoverian university built on a mixture of Pietism and Enlightenment, attracted increasing numbers of important Catholics by virtue of its academic reputation; and Christian Wolff proved to be an immensely influential export to Catholic Germany, received even in the Jesuit order. Between 1750 and 1780, long after his influence declined in Protestant Germany, he came to dominate the philosophical instruction in Catholic universities and gymnasia, and his works came to grace the monastic libraries. In the 1780s and 1790s his influence yielded to that of Immanuel Kant.

### **Episcopalism**

The specially unsettling element in central Europe was that Enlightenment entered into much older movements of reform. Episcopalism, a mood of championing the rights of local bishops against the claims of the Holy See, gained the name of Febronianism from the pseudonym, Justinus Febronius, under which Nikolaus von Hontheim, suffragan bishop of Trier (1701–90), published (in Latin) a striking book, *On the state of the Church and the lawful power of the Pope, written to reunite Christians who differ in Religion* (1763). In this work Febronius went beyond the old episcopalism to press for the repeal of decrees of the Council of Trent which were not compatible with the forms of German church life. Here he was digging his own grave, for among these forms were the special privileges of the nobility within the church of the Empire; reforms which did not touch these would not amount to much. More immediately Hontheim represented the episcopalist view that the pope and his nuncios exercised no jurisdiction which competed with that of the bishops. The bishops were not subjects of the pope, but, like the pope himself, were appointed by divine right as successors of the apostles. Here Hontheim

spoke for the resentments of a long past, and also offered the prescription for Germany's divided state in religion standard among the Catholic *Aufklärer*; the papal primacy had taken a form unpalatable to Catholics and unacceptable to Protestants. The pope was not infallible, and needed to be kept in check by general and national councils, by reforming churches, bishops and princes. For a time Hontheim looked almost like a second Luther, using the new historical knowledge to reform and unite the church on a national and anti-curial basis. By 1769 the book had acquired practical significance since it formed the basis of the *Gravamina* of the Koblenz congress, directed primarily against the nuncios.

These complaints were resumed in the Punctuation of Ems (1786), when the four great archbishops of Mainz, Trier, Cologne and Salzburg turned against all the nuncios in Germany. This quarrel was brought on by the fact that the Elector of Bavaria (like the Habsburgs on a bigger scale) had extensive domains but not a single bishop (Munich was situated in Freising, an independent prince-bishopric). In other words, to get a nuncio to Munich was a way for the Elector of Bavaria to get an archbishop of his own and begin to create a church system within his own boundaries. Appeals to the Emperor and the Diet were not likely to carry the day against a prince; but the bishops reinforced their case by all the other demands which had arisen during the Enlightenment: the improvement of pastoral care and clerical training, the relationship of regular and secular clergy in pastoral care, the simplification of the liturgy, the reduction of processions and pilgrimages, the limitation of popular veneration of saints, the reform of religious orders of both sexes, and the use of capitular clergy in parish and school. In these respects the Punctuation of Ems latched on to two of the striking things about the internal propaganda of the Catholic Enlightenment, the extraordinarily hostile criticism of the religious orders, and also the desire to improve education from wherever resources could be found. The ruinous thing about the episcopal effort at improvement from within was that it involved not only an outright contest with the curia, but also a competition with another form of internal Catholic reform, championed by princes hitherto favoured by the papacy, and interested in a state-church system, which might also involve a clash with the papacy. The two most dramatic examples of this were the two markers in the crescendo of Catholic Enlightenment, the suppression of the Jesuit order and the reforms of Joseph II.

### **The suppression of the Jesuits**

The former event was full of surprises, for in south Germany there were Jesuits enlightened enough to favour even the reforms of Joseph II. The

fact that an event precipitated from far away marked a period in the Catholic Enlightenment in Germany illustrates the degree to which the Catholic church was shaken. The very prominence of the Jesuit order ensured that it had Catholic enemies, men prepared to believe that they were politically devious and commercially grasping to a quite unacceptable degree. Moreover there were responsible Catholics who shared the Protestant view that they had been left behind by the progress of knowledge, and wanted to break the Jesuit stranglehold on higher education with a view to introducing modern subjects. These animosities, however, would never have brought the Jesuit order down.

The ball was set rolling by one of the most reactionary governments, that of Portugal. From an early stage in the history of Latin American missions religious orders had taken the view that the natives needed protection from settlers by being organised in reservations, the most famous of which were the Jesuit *Reductions* in Paraguay. The day came when the pressure of settlers would not be denied, and when some settlers and home governments came to believe that the Jesuits were organising independent satrapies, in which native peoples toiled to produce wealth beyond dreams for the Society of Jesus. In 1750 the Portuguese and Spanish governments agreed a treaty defining the frontier in South America which involved moving seven of the thirty reductions across the River Uruguay. To cut a long story short, while everyone in authority in Europe (including two successive Jesuit generals) could see no difficulty in this, the local missionaries held that it was impossible, and when Spanish troops moved in, European governments believed that the Jesuits were causing an Indian rebellion. At this point power in Portugal fell into the hands of the (future) Marquis of Pombal (1689–1782) who made his name in coping with the effects of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. Determined to modernise an archaic state, he found himself, like other reformers, up against two pillars of the old order, the church and the nobility, and found it convenient that the ill odour of the Jesuits in Paraguay spilled over on to their colleagues at home. In March 1758 the Portuguese envoy in Rome called on Benedict XIV to reform the Jesuit order radically or abolish them and the Pope issued a brief to this effect. The Portuguese government seized the property of the order, dumped 1,000 members of it in the Papal States, and did everything in its power to blacken the reputation of the Jesuits by propaganda. Their campaign could not but strengthen governments in Turin, Milan and Vienna which wanted to reform education. Just at this moment the Jesuits in France were found guilty of commercial malpractice.

Lavalette became head of the Jesuits in the West Indies in 1754, in recognition of his work in turning an unprofitable group of estates in

Martinique and Dominica into a remunerative concern. Then everything went wrong. The French government, mindful of settler interests, forbade him to trade, and in 1756 his Paris agents went bankrupt, bringing him down with them. Creditors began to sue the Society, which speedily faced corporate ruin. The Paris Parlement sequestered all Jesuit properties in France, while the Jesuits themselves found Lavalette guilty of every conceivable malpractice. That got rid of him but did not otherwise help the Society. In 1762 various French Parlements ordered the expulsion of the Jesuits from France, their schools were closed and property taken over. Then Pope Clement XIII addressed a brief (1762) to the bishops of France denouncing the attack on the Jesuits, but they would not publish it. The number of homeless Jesuits was now nearly 3,000, the largest group of whom seem to have fetched up in Jesuit houses in Spain.

Spain now had every inducement to join in the campaign. She had the same interest in containing Jesuit power in America as the Portuguese, and the same interest as the French in getting hold of their property at home. The Spanish king, Charles III, apparently egged on by France, was against them, and in 1767 demanded the expulsion and expropriation of the Jesuits. Clement XIII pleaded with him not to visit the sins of individuals upon the Society as a whole, and told him that he could not admit the expelled Jesuits (even though the Spanish Jesuits were given a pension from the endowments of the Society) to the Papal States; already supporting Jesuits from Portugal and France, the Pope could not face the burden of becoming a general dumping-ground for the whole of Catholic Christendom. What the great Bourbon powers had done, Naples and Sicily now did, and the tiny dukedom of Parma compounded on 16 January 1768 in an edict banning appeals by the clergy to Rome without permission of the duke and declaring all bulls and briefs from Rome or anywhere else invalid unless they carried the duke's signature. A fortnight later Clement XIII issued the brief called the *Monitorium* proclaiming the Duke of Parma's edict to be null and excommunicating the officials responsible.

This clash between the Pope and the head of a Catholic state produced gloomy prognostications of the fall of the papacy from diplomatic insiders, but in fact it simplified the options all round. The Bourbon powers needed the destruction of the Society of Jesus to justify their anti-Jesuit policies and to modernise their states by reducing ecclesiastical immunities and endowments; the papacy could not take a high line with Catholic states and at the same time defend a Society convicted by inquiries (of a kind) of offending against royal government, commercial probity, and honest missionary method. Moreover if the Society were destroyed huge numbers of useless religious might find secular employment. There were

cardinals prepared to support the abolition. The person who would not yield was Pope Clement XIII. He died in 1769, a few days after receiving a formal application from France, Spain and Naples for the suppression of the order, and his death opened the way for the Bourbon powers to seek a more compliant pontiff through their influence in the college of cardinals.

That influence secured the election of a Franciscan, Ganganelli, who took the title of Clement XIV. He was not a pushover, but could not avoid concession. He made Pombal's brother a cardinal; he brought to an end the annual publication of the bull of general excommunication, *In coena Domini*, which let the government of Parma off the hook; after endless procrastination, he ascertained that Maria Theresa, the devout head of the Habsburg house, thought well of the Jesuits but would not oppose his decision if he thought that Catholic unity depended on the suppression of the order. (In that case she reserved the rights of her government to deal with their property.) That sealed the Jesuit fate. The Pope issued the most famous of all his decrees, *Dominus ac Redemptor*, suppressing the order in the summer of 1773. The deed was at last done which no one had contemplated at the outset. The Jesuit order perished without resistance, undone by its own oaths of obedience, and the use of church authority to put down attempts to write an account of the suppression from its point of view. Protestants made a hero of Clement XIV.

### **The ex-Jesuits**

The tactics of the Bourbon powers in expelling Jesuits first and negotiating afterwards, show, paradoxically, why the suppression was a landmark in the history of the German Catholic Enlightenment, for here the problem of informal Jesuit survival was most acute. The most favourable areas for survival were in Switzerland, Britain and in the missions of the British colonies in North America. Here the ex-Jesuits were able to live in community in their old buildings; what they could not do was to ensure the continuity of their tradition by recruiting. In Germany the provisions of the papal bull that the buildings and endowments of the Jesuits were to be used by the bishops for charitable purposes after the payment of pensions to ex-Jesuits in need were generally disregarded by governments in their own interests. Thus the Jesuit house in Vienna became the War Office, and the houses in Prague and Antwerp became barracks. The German Catholic states had now seriously to undertake educational reform; they could not do without the ex-Jesuits but employed them under a variety of restrictions. Some states (including Bavaria and the archbishopric of Mainz), avid for the wealth Jesuit houses might contain,

refused to allow their former owners to live in community, but allowed them under restrictions to teach or be parish priests. The government of the Austrian Netherlands, where Jansenism had long been strong, excluded most Jesuits from its schools and parishes. In Poland the Jesuits had been popular, and very many continued in education or parishes. But Poland was in a state of civil war and had just suffered its first partition, unpropitious circumstances for a suppressed order to stick to its property. The result was that the pensions were not always paid and Polish education suffered.

There were non-Catholic governments which regarded the ex-Jesuits as too valuable a resource to waste. Frederick the Great determined to maintain the Jesuit order for the education of the Catholic populations he had acquired in Silesia and western Poland. Here, however, general Catholic discipline proved (not for the last time) too tough for the Prussian state. The bishops regarded the condemned Jesuits as rebels and the faithful began to abandon their preaching and confessionals. The result was that within a couple of years Prussia had retreated to the position taken up at once by German Catholic powers. The ex-Jesuits might keep their schools and colleges, but must abandon their habit and their name. They might train future schoolmasters, but came under the Prussian government in matters of curriculum (which meant they must suffer an injection of history) and the government also managed their finances. Catherine the Great in Russia (who had annexed a large Polish Catholic population) went further. She refused to allow the bull of suppression to be published in Russia, and prevented its being known. The Jesuits continued an equivocal existence, the popes condoning what they could not appear to approve. Pius VII gave his approval in 1801. By that time the lesson taught by this dramatic act of papal power under pressure from Catholic governments had been absorbed by revolutionary governments with scant respect for the Holy See.

### **Catholic higher education**

The suppression of the Jesuit order compelled Catholic governments to make good what were now held to be the faults of Jesuit teaching, the imbalance between their cultivation of Latin and instruction in the vernacular, their inadequate incorporation of historical disciplines, their neglect of mathematics and the natural sciences. The movement was given an impetus and some uniformity by the gross predominance of the Schönborn family in the ecclesiastical politics of the Reich; their great preferments Mainz, Würzburg and Bamberg led the way. In this brief account it is worth concentrating on what happened at the top of the

educational pyramid, in the universities. Here some of the specifics of the German Catholic Enlightenment become apparent. The backwardness of the German churches in providing seminary training for priests had meant that clerical training took place in universities, and hence that all Catholic universities possessed theological faculties, which was not the case in France, Italy or Spain. Moreover many Catholic critics held that it was precisely at the university level that Protestant Germany had established a lead, especially in the new foundations at Halle and Göttingen. The characteristics of the changes now made were that universities were to serve the public welfare as focused in the state (even when the head of state was a prince of the church). This meant that although the Catholic Enlightenment was no more hostile to theology than the Protestant, theological faculties lost their old primacy, along with the deductive rationalism which had sustained the claim of theology to be the queen of sciences, and gradually lost also their old right of censorship except in cases of gross offence against religion or the law of the land. Dogmatics and polemics must be 'purified from that scholastic theology which shot up in the Dark Ages'.

The service of the state was promoted in both manner and substance. Universities should produce presentable men of the world, and here Catholic Germany took to its bosom the image projected in the early days of Halle by Christian Thomasius; he had created a sensation not merely by lecturing in German, but by appearing not in academic dress but in wig and sword. The running in the new university oriented to the service of the state was made by a faculty which had shrunk to negligible proportions in the English universities, that of jurisprudence. This included public law, *Jus Patrium*, feudal law, canon law along with modern practice, civil law and the law of nature; the arts faculty also became slanted in the direction of law. The main pattern for all this had been set in Protestant Germany at Göttingen, but there was one important difference. After all the criticism of the Jesuits for neglecting history, the dominance of Christian Wolff in Catholic universities left little room to do better; so the branch of Protestant legal studies with the largest historical element, which conditioned the growth of historical treatment in many other specialisms, Romano-German public law, did not appear in the reinvigorated Catholic law faculties. The spirit of the new law faculties was exemplified by the pious Maria Theresa, who held that in canon law nothing should be taught which was not in the interests of the state rationally understood. 'What would the rest of the enlightened world say [she asked] if we were again to defend the infallibility of the Pope and his supremacy over a general council, as the official line presents it?' Another testimony to the service of the state was cameralistics,



the study in the first instance of estate management in the public sector, and, by gradual extension, of public finance generally; there were chairs in this subject in Protestant Leipzig, Halle, Frankfurt-on-Oder and Erlangen, but they were so immensely outnumbered by chairs in Catholic universities as to make cameralistics almost a Catholic subject. Dedicated to the public usefulness rather than the confessional traditions of the Counter-Reformation, the German Catholic universities were ready to face the new world when they were altogether overtaken by the radical shake-up in the Habsburg lands inaugurated by Joseph II's accession to sole rule.

### Josephinism before Joseph II?

Joseph II succeeded as Holy Roman Emperor at the age of twenty-four in 1765. His importance for the Empire (for instance in marking the last period of the German Enlightenment) consisted not in any action as emperor, but in radicalism as ruler of the Habsburg family lands. Here he was only co-regent with his mother, Maria Theresa, until her death in 1780, when he became sole ruler for the last ten years of his life. There has been a long-running international controversy about whether there was 'a Josephinism before Joseph', whether in fact the striking policies of his last years were a personal response to ideas current in the Catholic Enlightenment, or whether they were the ultimate fruit of a longstanding Habsburg propensity to intervention in church matters, going back to Charles VI.

To strip the matter of the complexity and venom it has generated, the truth seems to be this. It was not the Counter-Reformation which saved Catholicism in the Habsburg lands, but Habsburg military prowess directed first against the Protestants and then against the Turks. The *Pietas Austriaca* which glorified Habsburg victories in the field would not have existed without the military triumph, and, in the nature of the case, by celebrating the services of the dynasty to the Church, it consecrated a role of active intervention. A degree of regaliamism which Charles VI shared with Louis XIV is not, however, part of the pre-history of Catholic reform. There was also longstanding friction between the Habsburgs and the papacy. During the War of the Spanish Succession Clement VII backed the Bourbon claims to Spain and allied with the enemies of Austria. When the Habsburg male line died out Benedict XIV recognised not Francis I, Maria Theresa's husband, but the Wittelsbach claimant, Charles VII. And the duke of Parma excommunicated by Clement XIII with such *éclat* in 1768 was Maria Theresa's son-in-law. Moreover the Habsburgs were a force in Italy too near home for the popes' preference. If Josephinism before Joseph existed anywhere it existed in the reor-

ganisation of Lombardy in the 1760s, and Lombardy was not merely a channel to Vienna of Italian reforming ideas of the sort nobly embodied in Muratori, it was chosen by Clement XIII as a theatre of conflict with Maria Theresa, he refusing to help her with clerical taxation and appointing Lombard bishops without consultation. Then there was Leopold, Maria Theresa's son who became Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1765 and who compounded the one felony of embarking on church reform on radical Enlightenment principles by the second of urging his mother to follow suit.

These frictions were, however, the small change of diplomatic existence; the pope was never going to excommunicate the emperor or the queen of Hungary as he had excommunicated the duke of Parma, and Maria Theresa was a devout representative of *Pietas Austriaca* who expended pains to get Papal approval wherever possible. If she declined to let bishops dispose of the property of the Jesuits, she had the justification that she had hardly any bishops of her own, and the literal fulfilment of the provisions of *Dominus ac Redemptor* would simply have enabled foreign bishops to take money out of the country. Moreover it is now clear that Maria Theresa was led into the idea of church reform as a last desperate device for exterminating Protestantism when all else had failed or become too expensive.

Here indeed was one of the roots of religious change. The sudden expansion of the Habsburg dynastic empire in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had been lavishly supported by religious symbols in part triumphalist and in part oppressive, and long afterwards even Joseph II was as clear as to the need for them as any of his forbears. But the sheer cost of the new empire compelled the development of a new frame of mind based on calculation, and compelled the employment of servants like van Swieten from the Netherlands and the Italian Martini, who both had Jansenism in their background. Some strange worms had turned even under the stone of *Pietas Austriaca*. Prince Eugene's private theological library, to which his intimates were admitted, mirrored the decline of speculative, thomist and scholastic theology, and contained, without respect to the censorship, works relating to all the current movements in the churches. Then there was Maria Theresa's husband, the Emperor Francis I, who in his days as Duke of Lorraine had been a freemason and practised Jansenist devotional methods. He left behind an eclectic '*Instruction pour mes enfans*' based on his own rule of life and inculcating these principles. And while in public Francis observed the full court ceremonial on the lines of Charles VI, in private life it was a different story, with no veneration of the Virgin or saints and perhaps

freemasonry too. Nor is there any doubt that the state-church system as operated in Lorraine had an influence not only in Tuscany, but in Austria. If this was happening right at the top, the growth of an influential public to whom baroque piety no longer appealed, and who were willing to help execute policies characteristic of the Catholic Enlightenment, becomes easier to understand.

There were doubtless many whose minds moved faster in this field than that of Maria Theresa, but her evolution is important. As we have seen, every time the Habsburg government attacked its native Protestants with its familiar mixture of evangelism, bribery and brute force, it evoked resistance and even revival; moreover its methods were expensive and could not be sustained in time of war. It was time to try another tack. The frontiers of state and church in Austria matched ill; huge areas of the church were subject to the foreign prince-bishops of Passau and Salzburg, who needed to be nursed for political purposes in the Holy Roman Empire; more 'home' bishops were therefore required. Furthermore the parish system was archaic; parishes needed to be divided, and more clergy diverted to pastoral purposes. This required both money and manpower. Since it was difficult to get at the foreign prelates, it was clear that both money and men would have to come from monastic foundations; many of these had been the glory of *Pietas Austriaca*, and in Bohemia a device for fundamental social engineering by salting away Protestant acres into Catholic mortmain. If the scheme could be brought off, the church in the Habsburg lands could be made more efficient at the point of practical need, to the edification of the Catholic population, and, it was to be hoped, to the elimination of the Protestants.

At any rate one of Maria Theresa's favourite clergy, Fr Pius Manzador, Provincial of the Austrian Barnabites, whom she pushed on to become head of his order, and later a bishop first in Croatia and then in the Protestant stronghold of Hermannstadt (Siebenbürgen), proposed to tighten up existing anti-Protestant policies, and was despatched to Rome in 1753 to negotiate a grand plan for centralising and equalising ecclesiastical revenues for purposes of church reform. A papacy which had not yet got to grips with the Jesuits was not keen on encouraging enterprising governments to finance their ideas at the expense of regular clergy; the Seven Years War broke out in 1756, a war on which Frederick the Great had spent infinite pains to present as a confessional conflict between Catholic and Protestant; there were then members of the Vienna government who did not want to risk the reproach that they were financing the war effort by expropriating church property, and by 1757 the whole project had been dropped.

Here in a nutshell lies the solution to the conundrum about Josephinism before Joseph. Maria Theresa, under pressure from Frederick the Great, had to face bankruptcy – more than the normal pressure on rulers to find resources in men and money for modernisation. And in her case bold talk led to almost no action where the church was concerned outside Kaunitz's satrapy in Lombardy. From the moment when Joseph II became co-regent in 1765, however, the action began, and it began with a simplification of court worship described by a modern Austrian historian as 'the almost total destruction of *Pietas Austriaca*, of Habsburg piety, as it had developed since the beginning of the seventeenth century'. He proceeded with a memorandum on the oppressiveness of the censorship system; the disadvantages of religious intolerance; the weakness of education; and the excessive size, number and wealth of monasteries, many of which he considered useless. By 1769 the government was beginning to consider church reform throughout the Habsburg domains, and to establish a theoretical basis for its right to intervene in every aspect of church life. In the last decade of Maria Theresa's life quite serious attempts were made to check the flow of endowments to the church and to tap its wealth for the advantage of the state and for educational reform. All this was a preface to the dramatic action taken by Joseph II after he became sole ruler in 1780.

## Joseph II

Joseph set up a Church Affairs Commission to do quickly what had been talked of for so long. New sees were created to exclude the jurisdiction of Salzburg and Passau. A total of 255 new parishes were created in Lower Austria, 121 in Upper Austria, 180 in Styria, 83 in Carinthia. The new parishes were to have schools, and children were required to attend. The parish priests were to have adequate stipends. At one blow Joseph had ended the torpor of centuries and created the modern Austrian parish system which has given good service ever since. There were three problems with the upheaval. The first was to pay for it. The money could only come from monastic endowments, and the suppression of the Jesuit order by the Pope had by now set an unmistakable precedent. Joseph's commissioners were ordered to make lists of the monasteries and their property, and to abolish those which were contemplative and not following the useful vocations of nursing or teaching. In the event more than one-third of the religious houses in Austria were dissolved and the number of monks and nuns reduced by not far short of two-thirds. Many of the men went into parishes and schools; most of the women went back home. The mass sales of property were not all conducted advantageously, but were

sufficient to pension off the ex-religious and benefit Joseph's central religious fund by about 60,000,000 *gulden*. Major new medical foundations in Vienna benefited; 642 brotherhoods were abolished in Austria to the advantage of poor relief and elementary schools; there was no resistance anywhere.

So far Joseph's policies were generally acceptable. But he wanted to avoid training his clergy in diocesan seminaries which were often too small to be useful. He created general seminaries, one for each of his main domains, which should instil not just theological studies but natural science, agriculture, and the art of teaching. Instruction was often in the vernacular. These however did not survive him. They were in breach of the main seminary tradition since the Council of Trent. And, as so often, the students did not help. It was the ordinands of the general seminary at Louvain who set off the revolution which ended in the severance of Belgium from Habsburg rule. Moreover, anxious to slay superstition at one blow, the Emperor encouraged the Commission to interfere in details they could well have left alone. Joseph was in line with Catholic Enlightenment generally in wishing to cut processions and pilgrimages not approved by authority; unfortunately people liked them. They also liked clothes on statues of the Virgin, being buried in coffins rather than sacks, were fond of more relics than was their ruler, and were tenacious of a host of practices which in Joseph's view were at best quaint, at worst superstitions. Attempts to suppress these by law were quietly dropped after his death.

### **The Patent of Toleration**

On even the clearest act of policy Joseph himself was guilty of hesitation and fussiness. That Austria needed religious toleration had been obvious to Joseph for a long time. Toleration would put an end to the awkwardness of Protestant resistance and revival under pressure; it would deprive Prussia of an opportunity to fish in Habsburg troubled waters; it might even (and did in fact) attract Protestant emigrants to return. But Joseph had been prepared to justify toleration to his mother as an anti-Protestant measure, and his first instinct was quietly to suspend persecution without saying anything to undermine the prestige of the church. Enlightenment had become sufficiently politicised, however, for this to be impossible; and Joseph had therefore to issue his famous Patent of Toleration (1781) defining his new policy. Even then, however, he became alarmed at the number of his subjects who registered their adherence to one of the tolerated Protestant creeds, and tightened up the procedure to make registration more difficult. His enduring monument was a Habsburg

monarchy which combined toleration with a good deal of informal intolerance.

The third hazard which Joseph had to face was the disapproval of the Pope. As we have seen, the Pope's visit to Vienna in 1782 to persuade Joseph to modify his dash for Enlightenment was a diplomatic disaster but a popular triumph. It showed, as the French Revolution was shortly to show on a bigger scale, that Enlightenment had an Achilles' heel, its lack of popular penetration.

### **Reform in Tuscany**

This moral was further underlined by the last great adventure of Catholic reform, in Tuscany, a duchy long stuffed with reformers and from 1765 ruled by a Habsburg, Leopold, destined to succeed Joseph II in the Empire. He too believed in reform without tarrying for any, and quickly used his church patronage to create a party. His guide and agent was Scipione de' Ricci, vicar-general of the diocese of Florence, a Jansenist in touch with the surviving leaders of that party in France and from 1780 bishop of Pistoia and Prato. Ricci wanted a great deal more than a modernised diocesan and parochial system. He wanted to centre religious life on the parish and its liturgy, which meant getting rid of the competition of the chapels of religious orders, private shrines and the like. The service itself must be made congregational, for the liturgy was 'a common act of priest and people'. The reformers knew that they would not get a liturgy in the vernacular, but hoped to bring alive what they did by plain speaking and vernacular translations. But there would not be corporate participation until the distraction of private masses competing with the parish mass was ended, and until the very infrequent communion of the people was incorporated in the rite and not taken from the reserved sacrament after the rite was over. Financial difficulties could be met by reducing the number of clergy and pillaging the religious orders. Church furnishings should be purged of superstition in the now familiar ways. More advanced training should be provided for a more professional clergy. Edifying literature was provided free for the clergy, including a signal no one could miss, Quesnel's *Moral Reflexions on the New Testament*, the very book which had given rise to the Bull *Unigenitus* in 1713. Some of this could be done by state action, but in 1785 Leopold required all his bishops to hold a diocesan synod, and in 1786 presented them with the famous agenda of Fifty-Seven Points to get through. The slant of these points was clear: they were to consider how to purge the breviary of false legends, how to encourage reading of the Bible, how to defend the authority of the bishops from the encroachments of Rome, how to get St Augustine's teaching on grace into seminaries and

universities, and much more of the same. Bishop Ricci summoned his synod to meet at Pistoia in September 1786.

Most of the clergy there were prepared to support their bishop as they were used to proposals of a Jansenist colour, and a smoothness was imparted to the final resolutions by the fact that the principal expert present was the very Jansenist professor Pietro Tamburini of Pavia, who may even have arrived with the drafts in his pocket. The resolutions followed the familiar lines and also condemned exciting parish missions which 'seldom or never produce real conversion', and the wide extension of the prohibited degrees of marriage. In mountain villages where everyone was related to everyone else, this led either to fornication or an endless quest for dispensations. Religious orders should be united into a single order, based on the Benedictine rule and guided by the practice of Port-Royal. Infallibility rested with a general council, not the pope. This programme was so far-reaching as inevitably to stir up controversy. What frightened authority was the popular reaction to the revised liturgies and other changes, culminating in violent riots at Prato in response to the rumour that the bishop was about to demolish an altar dedicated to the girdle of the Virgin. Order was not restored till troops moved in. The duke continued for a time to act by decree, but he had seen the red light. In 1789 Belgium rose against the policies, including ecclesiastical policies, of his brother Joseph, and when Leopold moved off to Vienna to succeed him in 1790, riots broke out again. Leopold advised his successor that Ricci was a liability, that his resignation should be accepted, and rewarded with a good pension. The alliance of prince and prelate which afforded Catholic Enlightenment its best chance had gone; popular devotion ('superstition' in reforming parlance) had set a bound to what princes had been encouraged to think was in their grasp by the papal suppression of the Society of Jesus. The Habsburgs had been defeated by one kind of obstinacy on the part of the Protestants, and another on the part of the Catholics. The rights of man, soon to be proclaimed and trampled on in the French Revolution, were not altogether to be denied in the age of Enlightened Despotism.

### **Catholic Enlightenment in southern Europe**

The Tuscan crisis is a reminder that the Catholic Enlightenment was not solely a matter of the Empire and the Habsburg dynastic area, nor even of ecclesiastical preoccupations. If one of the great theorists of Catholic reform had been van Espen, the Louvain canonist (1646–1728) who had forged together Jansenism and opposition to curial power (episcopalism) and to the Society of Jesus, the other had been the learned and genial

Muratori. Muratori not only accomplished an immense literary work, he was an outspoken critic of excesses in the cult of saints and relics, an opponent of superstitious practices. Most of all he had ensured a proper place for historical criticism in Catholic theological studies. Moreover there were special problems in southern Europe. Portugal was the country in which the Counter-Reformation had penetrated deepest and the Society of Jesus was most powerful. But the papacy knew, the Jesuits knew, and the Portuguese government knew, that Portugal had not the resources to carry out the missionary undertakings it had made in the early days of its empire; and when disaster struck in the Lisbon earthquake in 1755, it did not take long for Carvalho (the future Marquis of Pombal) to create a scenario in which Jesuit resources became the key to the modernisation of the state, and the whole Catholic world was unsettled. The reforms of Charles III in Spain added to the uncertainty. Similarly, while the Italian states escaped the burden of the great European conflicts since the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, they fell victim to a series of severe famines in 1763–67. These exposed weaknesses of social arrangements which included the wealth and privileges of the church, and invigorated a reform movement in the church as well as in the state. The changes made under this pressure, if small, were sufficient to preserve Italy from famines of such severity again. In the church things were less happy. Benedict XIV had shown signs of coming to terms with his generation, and even spoke of reforming the Society of Jesus. But Clement XIII (1758–69) would face neither the administrative nor spiritual cost of adaptation. The result was that he ran into trouble with not only Portugal but the entire Bourbon caucus, and the excommunicate duchy of Parma became a favoured son of Catholic Europe.

From this crisis changes arose. In Naples, for a time, Jesuit property was even divided among the peasants. But although there was bold talk of carving up the Papal States, it was only in the immediate Habsburg sphere that there was a resolute drive for reform; Clement XIV's dissolution of the Jesuit order was enough to break up the international coalition against him which might have moved the Italian states to radical action. If real reform would have to wait, at least church reform became part of the movement of Enlightenment reform generally. Moreover even church conservatism, the curial opposition to church reform for most of the eighteenth century, began to change. Cardinal Giuseppe Garampi (1725–92) held all the right reforming views, but stuck at the dissolution of the Jesuits and the threat to Catholic cohesion posed by the development of national churches. A stout supporter of Clement XIV, he became nuncio in Vienna in 1776, and ran a regular spy organisation, infiltrating anti-Roman circles, and putting together the



basis of an ultramontane network. In the end he created a black international of those who stood for the rights of the papacy and opposed the creation of canon law on a national basis, Febronianism and the anti-religious element in the Enlightenment. More than one kind of future was casting its shadow before.