Introduction
Modernity and Christianity

This book is an exploration of modern Christian thought since the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. We begin with the Enlightenment because our understanding of Christianity, in its relationship with Western culture since the eighteenth century, has undergone a revolutionary-though often unperceived-development. Christianity has been powerfully influenced by our culture's secular explorations of the world, society, and the self. This may be neither an obvious nor an undisputed judgment, and so more must be said briefly about it here. It is a conspicuous, though implicit, theme in the chapters that follow.

When one uses terms such as "Modernity," "Modernism," or "the Modern Age," two or three fundamental questions immediately present themselves. One, of course, is the definitional question. In the last years of the twentieth century, a rather heated debate has occurred in intellectual circles concerning the nature of Modernity and what constitutes Modernity or Modernism. This has been prompted in large part by what appears to be the ever-increasing opinion that we now are living in a post-Modern age, one that has, in crucial respects, repudiated the leading convictions and values of Modernity. And, for those who maintain this position, it often implies a rejection of the guiding assumptions and the legacy of the Enlightenment.

This debate is complicated, however, by the fact that scholars in the fields of art and literature identify the emergence of Modernism with the cultural revolution that erupted at approximately the beginning of the twentieth century and which we associate in art with the revolt of Cubism, Picasso, the Dadaists, and Surrealists, and in literature with James Joyce's Ulysses and T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land. In this temporal framework Modernity or Modernism turns out to be a relatively short-lived movement, having given

way to a new post-Modern cultural sensibility in art, architecture, and literature-as well as in philosophy and religion.

Many historians, however, essentially reverse the temporal perspective and trace the concept of "Modern" back as far as the fifth century C.E., when the Latin word "modernus" was used to distinguish the new Christian era from the Roman and pagan past. The idea of "Modernity" is also associated in the minds of many historians with the Renaissance, primarily with its "discovery" of the "modern" individual consciousness, reflected for example in its portraiture and in Petrarch's Ascent ofMont Ventoux.

Moreover, historians long have traced the beginning of "the Modern Age" to the Protestant Reformation and the political and cultural hallmarks of the period: the emergence of the printing press, the birth of the middle class, incipient capi talism, the rise of the nation-state, and, of course, Luther's bold assertion of individual conscience against the claims of traditional authority. Now, all of these historical developments represent important elements of cultural change that have helped to shape "Modernity." History, after all, is a continuous process.

The fact remains that the word "modern" has been used again and again throughout Western history in periods when there was an acute consciousness of a contrast with the previous age, the sense of the emergence of a new epoch provoking a war between the "ancients" and the "moderns." The founders of German Romanticism, Friedrich Schlegel and others, spoke of the spirit of the new literature and sensibility as das eigentumliche Moderne, the peculiarly or properly Modern, in contrast to the Neo-Classical. That is, the use of the word "modern" simply has meant that which is new in contrast with what is ancient or traditional. This suggests, of course, that what is modern for one age may well be regarded as passe by the next. Used in this sense, the "modern" is a highly relative and fluid idea. And it is the case that the term "Modernism" generally has been used to identify a cultural movement or program that sees itself, or is viewed by others, as upholding what is perceived as "modern" in contrast to what is habitual, traditional, orthodox, or taken for granted. In Lionel Trilling's phrase, the Modernists represent an "adversary culture," such as the Cubists

in art and the Catholic Modernists in theology in their opposition to, respectively, conventional representation in painting or traditional Scholasticism in theology.

While not denying in the least that what we understand today as constituting "Modernity" can trace some of its features to the cultural innovations of the Renaissance and, especially, the changes in religious belief and sensibility occasioned by the Protestant Reformation, the premise of this text is that modern Christian thought can best be understood as beginning with the formidable changes in our world-view that were occasioned by the intellectual ferment unleashed in the scientific, philosophical, and historical challenges of the Enlightenment. I follow the historian Ernst Troeltsch and others in the contention that, while the Reformation included modern elements, it was essentially a modification of Medievalism. Troeltsch called the Reformation a "second blooming" of the Middle Ages, but what was genuinely modern about the Reformation only emerged after classical, orthodox Protestantism was profoundly challenged by the intellectual and social revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Christianity's responses to these profound revolutions were varied. One response was a complete, or at least substantial, capitulation to these secular currents in the form of an accommodation of Christian thought and institutions to "modern" ideas. In this book we will encounter instances of this kind of response. A second response was vigorous resistance to Modernity or Liberalism, which frequently involved either a retreat into a cultural and intellectual ghetto, a "fortress mentality," as we see in certain "fundamentalist" movements today, or highly sophisticated strategies of repristination or restoration of an older tradition of orthodoxy. In different ways and degrees, we see this latter response in such nineteenth-century efforts as the Oxford Movement, the Neo-Scholastic revival in Catholicism, and the Princeton Theology and its sequel in later evangelical movements within Protestantism. We have included these movements in this text because they specifically address what they see as the threats of Enlightenment Modernity to Christian thought and its institutions. A third and rather more pervasive response was the effort to preserve most of the

classical tradition of Christian thought but to reinterpret it in constructive new ways so as to ensure its congruence and coherence with the received knowledge of modern science, history, and social experience. Many of the programs and movements discussed in this text will exemplify this type of response.

What is it that Troeltsch and other historians of Christian thought see as constituting "the Modern World"? There was, first, the emergence of the secular state. In its struggles with the Church, the modern state became acutely aware of its own power and the necessity of establishing its own constitutions, laws, and judicial and administrative functions on a secular basis-that is, to free itself from ecclesiastical domination. This was initiated in the American and French revolutions and carried forward in the subsequent political struggles of the nineteenth century. During this period the Church was divestedslowly but steadily-of its political power and influence. Allied with the growth of the secular state was a fast-accelerating secular economic capitalism, enhanced by a secular natural science that, with technological advance, transformed every dimension of our being. These lent confidence to the belief that our world is intelligible and open to progressive advancement.

Most significant, however, is the fact that modern politics, economy, art, and science all assume an autonomous individualism, the freedom of individual persons and groups to choose, analyze, test, and question. Both institutionally and morally, medieval culture was largely under the dominion of ecclesiastical authority. Modern culture opposes the dominance of Church authority or, more importantly, any purely externally imposed, divinely given standards of belief and behavior. As Troeltsch writes:

> Even where new authorities are in principle established, or in practice followed, the respect accorded to them arises from purely independent and rational conviction; and even where the older religious convictions hold their ground, their truth and their binding force are ... primarily based on inner personal conviction, not on submission to authority as such.I

This growth of individual autonomy and its corollary, the spirit of critical inquiry, has brought about a further characteristic of Modernity: the growing

and increasingly pervasive constriction of human interests to matters that bear on life in this present world. "In consequence," as Troeltsch observes, "all the factors of the present life acquire an enhanced value and a higher impressiveness, and the ends of life fall more and more within the realm of the present world and its ideal transformation."2 This is not to claim that "Modernity" implies the triumph of a thoroughly secular consciousness and cultural ethos. We are far from it in many contexts. It does, however, advance the claim that the Christianity that has emerged within and in response to the Modern Age is, in significant ways, very different from Christianity in its origins and through the seventeenth century. It is the burden of this text to show how this has become so by highlighting those intellectual movements and challenges that have played such a critical role in the shaping of a distinctive modern Christian thought.

One last matter requires comment. All too often, "Modernity" has been identified with the Enlightenment-or, more candidly, with a caricature of the Enlightenment-resulting from selective attention to those thinkers and writings that represent the most egregious excesses of eighteenthcentury rationalism, abstraction, materialism, or belief in an inevitable historical progress. The Enlightenment was, of course, a far more complex and variegated phenomenon. Just as there were various Romanticisms, so there were Enlightenments sharing certain crucial ideals but also reflecting distinctive thought processes. But, more to my point, "Modernity" has not been shaped exclusively by the Enlightenment. The Modern Age also is deeply infused with the spirit, feelings, and values of various Romanticisms, with the ideas and sensibility we find in Wordsworth and Coleridge, in Hamann and Hegel, in Lamennais and Newman, in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, or in the divided psyche of Chateaubriand.

The case can still be made that we are living today in the "Modern" world that came into being in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jacques Barzun has shown that early Romanticism helped to bring into being later adumbrations of Romanticism in literary Naturalism and Realism and beyond. So, I believe, can we see in manifestations of contemporary post-Modernism-its critique of metaphysics and the claim to possess incorrigible foundations of knowledge and belief, its attention to how rationality and

knowledge are embedded in distinctive languages and cultures, and its critique of liberal individualismthat all these have their roots in the fertile soil of both the Enlightenment and Romanticism, which, respectively, have shaped our complex and pluralistic modern world. Only the passage of time and historical distance will, of course, enable us to judge decisively whether post-Modernism is a late representation of Modernity, or whether it will be seen as a genuine turning point in Western consciousness.

NOTES

1. Ernst Troeltsch, Protestantism and Progress: The Significance of Protestantism for the Rise of the Modern World [1912] (Minneapolis, 1986), p. 24. On the theme of "Modernity," also see Troeltsch's essay "The Essence of the Modern Spirit" [1907], in Religion in History (Minneapolis, 1991), Chap. 15.

2. Troeltsch, Protestantism and Progress, p. 26.

Chapter 1
The Enlightenment and Modern Christianity

Immanuel Kant

"Enlightenment," wrote Immanuel Kant, "is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another.... Sapere aude! ('Dare to know.') `Have courage to use your own reason!'-that is the motto of the enlightenment."1

The term "Enlightenment" signifies that period of European history from the close of the Thirty Years War (1648) to the French Revolution. In the realm of ideas, it is often designated as that era of modern thought from Francis Bacon's Novum Organum (1620) to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (1781). It is the age which brought together the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance and the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and thereby ushered in what we call "the modern world." It was this period of roughly a century and a half that witnessed a general change in world-view of the most wide-ranging and deepest significance.

This study begins with the contention that the modern history of Christian thought begins not with the Reformation of the sixteenth century but rather with that movement of the eighteenth century known as the Enlightenment. All history is continuous, and the periodization of history into discrete epochs or world-views is never completely successful. Nevertheless, it is correct to say that there is more in common between the world-views of the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries than between those of the sixteenth and nineteenth. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries a revolution occurred in our understanding of ourselves and our world that caused a sharp break with medieval civilization and ushered in the modern epoch.

A. C. McGiffert has expressed this change in the following way:

> The whole world of thought and culture was transformed. . . . the dependence upon supernatural powers, the submission to external authority, the subordination of time to eternity, and of fact to symbol ... the somber sense of the sin of man and the evil of the world, the static interpretation of reality... the belief that amelioration can come only in another world beyond the grave-all of which characterize the Middle Ages-were widely overcome and men faced life with a new confidence in themselves, with a new recognition of human power and achievement, with a new appreciation of present values.2

What happened between the Reformation and the French Revolution were two revolutions of farreaching importance. The first was the scientific transformation that came as a result of the work of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. What it did was to deprive humanity of its traditional place and

value in the world, making individuals aware of both their "grandeur and misery" in a vast, mechanical universe. The second revolution was that of Descartes. What Descartes did was to make doubting the first principle of philosophy and the model for all the sciences. Together these movements brought about a significant shift in humanity's understanding of itself and its situation in the world.

What occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the development, imperceptible and yet pervasive, of a world-view strikingly different from either classical or medieval culture. From the point of view of Christianity, this new modern epoch can be characterized as a culture emancipating itself from ecclesiastical and theological authority. The Enlightenment represents the loosening of the state and society from ecclesiastical control and the emergence of a culture increasingly secular in character. The theories and sanctions of modern social and political life no longer are derived from biblical revelation or Church authority but independently arrived at by natural reason and social experience. An essential feature of the Enlightenment and of our modern culture since the eighteenth century is the growing separation of Western civilization from the authority of the Church and theological dogma.

Underlying this whole movement is a renewed awareness and trust in humanity's own capacities or initiative and appreciation of, interest in, and hope for human life on this earth. Reason largely supersedes revelation as the supreme court of appeal. As a result, theology faced a choice of either adjusting itself to the advances in modern science and philosophy and, in so doing, risking accommodation to secularization, or resisting all influences from culture and becoming largely reactionary and ineffectual in meeting the challenges of life in the modern world. The history of modern Christianity is thus frequently viewed as the history of the secularization of the West.3

The historian Carl Becker advises us that if we are to understand the inner spirit of any age, we should look "for certain unobtrusive words." A brief look at some of the "unobtrusive" words common to the Enlightenment can give us a clearer picture of that age as well as a keener awareness of the

heritage of the Enlightenment which, despite the recent attack and scorn of some critics, remains a vital part of our own contemporary experience.

AUTONOMY

More than anything else the Enlightenment marks a revolt against authoritarianism and the emergence of individual reason and conscience as the primary arbiters of truth and action. While every age has produced remarkable individuals who have challenged the accepted authorities of their day by appeal to individual conscience, the Enlightenment is characterized by the spread of the spirit of autonomous reason far beyond the confines of the intellectual salons, especially among the burgeoning middle class.

The term "autonomy" (autosself+nomoslaw) means self-governed. It involves "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage"-from the inability to reason and to will without sanctions imposed from outside the self. John Locke describes the ideal of autonomy in his portrayal of the genuine lover of truth. Of such persons there is, remarks Locke, "one unerring mark, viz., the not entertaining of any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant. Whoever goes beyond this measure of assent, it is plain ... loves not truth for truth's sake, but for some other end."4

The ideal of the Enlightenment is, then, the duty of not entertaining any belief that is not warranted by rational evidence, which means by the assent of autonomous reason rather than biblical or ecclesiastical authority. Autonomy, therefore, is that faculty which the reason and the will possess of being their own lawgiver. Opposed to autonomy is heteronomy (heteros = other) or the imposition of sanctions or authority on oneself from outside, which one would not impose on oneself if one were free, i.e., truly rational. Thus autonomy is the foundation of all true liberty. But autonomy does not mean freedom "to do as one pleases," for that could mean subjection of the will to what is merely particular and immediate. Rather, autonomy-and thus true liberty-is achieved only when the individual reason and will are in accord with universal laws of reason. One prominent form of heteronomy, or slavery, is evident in obedience to divine commands simply because some external authority, i.e., the Bible or the Church, demands obedience to such

laws-laws which appear to the autonomous reason to be arbitrarily imposed. For the Enlightenment, the will or law of God can only be followed autonomously-only when the divine commands can be transformed into general laws which can become universal, rational axioms of behavior. No longer, then, is authority simply imposed arbitrarily from without; authority now depends on its inherent ability to produce rational conviction.

REASON

The eighteenth century is rightly known as the Age of Reason. But the age was dominated by a peculiar kind of reason. It was not the abstract reason of classical rationalism. The philosopher, it is true, looked to the rationalist Descartes as the one who had liberated the mind from blind authority. But Descartes's reason was too speculative and abstract. The model of reason in the Enlightenment was the empirical, experimental reason of Francis Bacon and John Locke. What was required was an examination of the facts of experience. Reason was now called upon to serve a critical function according to the model of contemporary natural science. As Cassirer points out, in the eighteenth century philosophic method came to be patterned after Newton's "Rules of Philosophizing" rather than Descartes's Discourse on Method-on analysis rather than on pure deduction.5 Thus Voltaire exhorted his contemporaries: "We must never make hypotheses; we must never say: Let us begin by inventing principles according to which we attempt to explain everything. We should say rather: Let us make an exact analysis of things...." 6 Equipped with this new instrument of analysis, humanity could examine, weigh, sift, and compare the facts again and again until it could discern the true from the false, the contingent and particular from the necessary and universal.

Reason was no longer a given heritage, an intellectual treasury. It now was conceived of as a vital, progressive force. Reason was no longer defined by its effects, a distinct body of truth, but by its function, by its ability to bind and loose, to separate fact from opinion. Ideas, beliefs, even our understanding of what constitutes facts change, but reason as a function is what remains immutable and universal. This was the great discovery and the source of the excitement and optimism of the age. Because misfortune and

suffering arise very largely from ignorance, it was believed reason could cast its light into the darkness of superstition and deceit and bring humanity its long-anticipated enlightenment and happiness.

NATURE

For the philosophers of the Enlightenment, what was "reasonable" was also "natural," grounded somehow in the very nature of things. The equation of the reasonable and the natural can be traced very largely to the new science of Newton. For Newton the laws of nature were orderly and uniform, always and everywhere the same. Likewise, what is reasonable in human affairs is what is natural, i.e., what is universal beneath the divergences of culture and outward appearance. What was called for, then, was the excision of all the beliefs and practices that had taken hold as a result of humanity's deviation from nature. Society had become artificial, the victim of all kinds of heteronomous influences-the monarch, the church, the conventions of societywhich had destroyed freedom and corrupted natural integrity. The philosophes felt like Alceste in Moliere's The Misanthrope. They itched to "unmask" the hypocrisy and artificiality of the times and yearned to flee to what they believed to be the simplicities of nature-that state in which humans existed before they were corrupted. This "state of nature" was very largely a cherished figment of the eighteenth-century imagination. Some thought they discerned it in earlier times, in a more rustic age when humans had simple needs that could easily be satisfied. Locke, Diderot, and others thought they perceived this natural state in far-off places such as China, America, and Tahiti. The belief spread that in these distant lands there lived a society of "noble savages" who were superior to the Europeans because they lived in accordance with Nature. Even the skeptical Voltaire thought of Confucius as exemplifying the simplicities of the natural individual guided by reason. Little did he know what a bourgeois gentilhomme Confucius really was!

The extent to which Nature and her rational laws were reverenced, even divinized, is evidenced in d'Holbach's paean, Systeme de la Nature: "0 thou," cries Nature to humanity,

> Dare to enfranchise yourself from the trammels of superstition.... denounce those empty theories which are usurpers of my privileges; return under the dominion of my laws.... It is in my empire alone that true liberty reigns.... Return, then, my child, to thy fostering mother's arms! Deserter, trace back thy wandering steps to Nature. She will console thee for thine evils; she will drive from thy heart those appalling fears which overwhelm thee. Return to nature, to humanity, to thyself.?

This could very well have served as a naturalistic surrogate for the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

MELIORISTIC OPTIMISM

Nature reflects not only great rational simplicity but also order and regularity. It was Newton who discerned the beautiful symmetry of nature-an order and harmony which is not always immediately apparent. Frequently what we regard as evil or out of joint from our immediate point of view is not so in the general order of things. What looks at a distance as indeed very gray may be a rosy pink on closer examination. Our vision is too limited to take in the complex whole. Alexander Pope thus reminded his age that

All are but parts of one stupendous Whole
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul . . .
All Nature is but Art unknown to thee;
All chance, direction, which thou canst not
see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good;
And spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right.[8]

For Pope the world is like a vast canvas of Rembrandt, filled with shadows and eerie blackness. Yet, if we concentrate not only on these large patches of darkness but on the whole, we see that the shadows are indispensable to Rembrandt's art. The seeming evil or darkness is a kind of good in that it is a necessary constituent of the whole. Perhaps this is not the most perfect world conceivable, but it is in Leibnitz's words "the best of all possible worlds."

Leibnitz's imposing argument for "all is well" was widely held, but not everyone in the eighteenth century was enamored of Leibnitz's optimism. Voltaire had been drawn to Leibnitz's theodicy, but news of the Lisbon earthquake in which thousands died on All Saints' Day, 1755, turned him against the cold abstractions of the German. In 1756 Voltaire composed a poem entitled, The Lisbon Earthquake: An Inquiry into the Maxim "Whatever Is, Is Right. "In the preface to the poem, Voltaire points out that, impressive as they are, views such as those of Leibnitz and Pope are a perverse justification of the status quo. Why, after all, should one seek to remove evil if this is actually the least evil of all possible worlds?

> If this world, such as it is, be the best of systems possible, we have no room to hope for a happy future state. If the various evils by which man is overwhelmed end in general good, all civilized nations have been wrong in endeavoring to trace out the origin of moral and physical evil.9

In Voltaire's opinion, Leibnitz and Pope are apostles of hopelessness because they feel no need to change the human situation. Voltaire's hope lay not in the present but in the future:

> All may be well; that hope can man sustain, All now is well; 'tis an illusion vain. 10

Voltaire's optimism is a melioristic optimism-a hope oriented, like that of most of the philosophes, to the future betterment of the human race.

Jean Jacques Rousseau was impressed by Voltaire's poem on the Lisbon disaster and had himself begun to approach the problem from a new perspective that has had far-reaching significance for Christian theology. Rousseau saw no need to explain away the present evil state of humanity; nor did he find it necessary to trace such an evil condition back to an original Fall of Adam. Rousseau introduced the distinction between "natural man" and "civilized man." The natural individual is in a state of innocency in that he or she has not yet been tempted to subject others to his or her will. Rousseau believed it is the compulsions of human society that cause us to become egotistical and acquisitive and that lie at the root of our misery and inhumanity to others. But for Rousseau, as later for Marx, such an

acquisitive, heteronomous society was not humanity's inevitable fate. In the Social Contract he envisioned a community in which the individual will and the "general will" are one: i.e., an autonomous society in which individual liberty is in perfect accord with the common good.

Cassirer points out the significance of Rousseau's hope:

> When the compulsory form of society, which has hitherto prevailed, falls and is replaced by a new form of political and ethical community-a community in which every member, instead of being subjected to the

arbitrary will of others, obeys only the general will which he recognizes and acknowledges as his ownthen the hour of deliverance has arrived. But it is futile to expect this deliverance from without. No God can bring it about for us; man must rather become his own deliverer and in the ethical sense his own creator. Society heretofore has inflicted the deepest wounds on mankind; yet it is society too which through a transformation and reformation can and should heal these wounds.1

The kind of melioristic hope in the future of the human race, which we find in Voltaire and Rousseau, lies at the heart of the modern doctrines of development and progress.

PROGRESS

Chastened optimists like Voltaire and Rousseau held out a fervent hope for the advance of posterity to a condition in accord with nature and reason. Progress would not be easy, but for most of the philosophes it was inevitable.

> Self-interest, ambition, vainglory... inundate the earth with blood. Yet in the midst of their voyages manners are gradually softened, the human mind takes enlightenment, separate nations draw nearer to each other, commerce and policy connect at last all parts of the globe, and the total

> mass of the human race ... marches always, although slowly, towards still higher perfection....12

The feeling was widespread that the "new age" was in the imminent future, for signs indicated that the decisive battle in the age-old struggle between superstition and reason had been won. Signs of the victory were the advancements of science and the application of scientific method to politics and to social problems. There was, however, a tendency to join with a belief in inevitable progress the paradoxical idea that until the time of Bacon, Newton, and Locke people had lived for almost two thousand years in utter darkness. Many agreed with Condorcet who, in The Progress of the Human Mind, traced the persistence of superstition and error to the triumph of Christianity.

> Contempt of human sciences was one of the first features of Christianity. It had to avenge itself for the outrages of philosophy; it feared that spirit of investigation and doubt, that confidence of man in his own reason, the pest alike of all religious creeds.... The triumph of Christianity was thus the signal for the entire decline of both the sciences and of philosophy.13

According to Condorcet, the seventeenth century had turned the tide, and the stage was now set for the new age, which he called the "tenth epoque," in which the progress of the human mind was assured. With deep, religious feeling, Condorcet expressed his hopes in the inauguration of the "tenth epoque."

> How consoling for the philosopher ... is this view of the human race, emancipated from its shackles, released from the empire of fate and from that of the enemies of its progress, advancing with a firm and sure step along the path of truth, virtue, and happiness! It is the contemplation of this prospect that rewards him for all his efforts...."14

For writers like Condorcet, hope for posterity became a kind of eschatological substitute for the traditional Christian hope in the Kingdom of God. "Posterity," said Diderot, "is for the philosopher what the other world is for the religious." Just as Rousseau had offered a secular answer to the Christian doctrine of the Fall and Redemption, so did Diderot and Condorcet

provide a this-worldly hope in the future in place of an other-worldly expectation-in an earthly city in which there will be no more "mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things will have passed away." The end of human life now falls exclusively within the present world and its ideal transformation.15

TOLERATION

The concern for religious toleration in the eighteenth century was as much due to the exhaustion which set in after the religious wars of the two previous centuries and to the growing resentment and indifference to the dogmatic claims of revealed religion as to a sincere and broad-based interest in the establishment of civil liberties. Nevertheless, the late seventeenth century produced a number of treatises, including Roger Williams's Bloudy Tenent of Persecution (1644), Milton's Areopagitica (1644), Locke's Letters on Toleration (1689), and the writings of Pierre Bayle, all of which had considerable influence in shaping eighteenth-century sentiment.

For the writers of the Enlightenment, the great enemy was not religion but dogmatism and intolerance. Bayle had emphasized that "the obstacles to a good examination do not come so much from the fact that the mind is void of knowledge as it is full of prejudice." Following the model of science, in which "truth" is gradually discovered and everchanging, Bayle argued that there is no "truth" which is at any time so absolutely certain as to justify the suppression of contrary views by force. Even a belief that seems to be wrong must be tolerated because it might possibly prove to be right. Bayle's influence on the French Encyclopedists was considerable, and his views on toleration were frequently repeated by them. Following Bayle, Diderot writes:

> The mind can only acquiesce in what it accepts as true. The heart can only love what seems good to it. Violence will turn man into a hypocrite if he is weak, into a martyr if he is strong.... Teaching, persuasion, and prayer, these are the only legitimate means of spreading the faith.16

Locke argued similarly. Once you allow that civil governments can enforce religious uniformity among their citizens, you have conceded the same right

to London, Geneva, and Rome. But it is clear that these places hold different religions to be the true one, in which case it follows that you have conceded the right of forced uniformity to false religions as well as the true one. What makes such a position doubly ridiculous is that people's eternal fate is solely dependent upon the place of their birth or residence rather than on the intrinsic or proven truth of their religious allegiance. It follows, in Locke's argument, that religious toleration will, in the long run, give the true religion the best chance of capturing the minds and hearts of a people. It is only false religion that has anything to fear from the tests of reason and experience. Because the truth of religion cannot be absolutely determined by purely theoretical criteria, such as the appeal to proofs of historical fact or logical argument, but is dependent upon internal conviction and moral suasion, religious toleration is all the more imperative.

The view that toleration is required by the very fact that the truth claims of the historical religions cannot at present be indubitably proved is the moral of Lessing's famous fable of the three rings in his drama, Nathan the Wise. According to the fable, it was the custom in an ancient Eastern family for the father to bequeath to his son a ring which "possessed the secret power to make the owner loved of God and man." At last the ring came to the father of three sons, all of whom he loved alike. And so to each of the three he gave the ring, two being perfect imitations. The father died, and each of the sons considered the other two deceivers.

But all in vain, the veritable ring
Was not distinguishable—
Almost as indistinguishable as to us
Is now—the true religion.

The sons brought their case before a judge who, about to throw out the difficult case, recollects:

But stop; I've just been told that the right ring
Contains the wondrous gift to make its wearer
loved,
Agreeable alike to God and man,
That must decide, for the false
Rings will not have this power.

The judge then gives the sons this sage advice:

But my advice is this:
You take the matter as it stands.
If each one had his ring straight from his
father,
So let each believe his ring the true one.
'Tis possible your father would not longer tolerate
The tyranny of this one ring in his family,
And surely loved you all—and all alike,
And that he would not two oppress
By favoring the third.
Now then, let each one emulate in affection
Untouched by prejudice. *Let each one strive*
To gain the prize of proving by results
The virtue of his ring, and aid its power
With gentleness and heartiest friendliness,
With benevolence and true devotedness to
God;
And if the virtue of the ring will then
Have proved itself among your children's
children,
I summon them to appear again
Before this judgment seat,
After a thousand thousand years.
Here then will sit a judge more wise than I,
Who will pronounce.[17] (Italics added.)

Lessing was reminding his readers that they must be tolerant in religious matters for two quite different reasons. God, in his compassion, could not suffer the tyranny of one dispensation which would give special favor to one son, for God loves all his sons-and all alike. Lessing is, nevertheless, advocating religious toleration for another reason. One of the rings (religions) is in fact the genuine one, but the decision as to which one it is must wait until some future time when its truth can be made clear by its fruits, by "the proof of the spirit and the power." Meanwhile the practitioners of each religion should assume their faith to be the true one and seek to commend its truth through virtuous conduct.

Such were some of the "unobtrusive" convictions that permeated the thinking of eighteenthcentury Europe-convictions very largely secular in origin and character. The appeal to autonomous reason and conscience, the melioristic optimism with its attendant discontent with existing conditions of political and economic injustice, the undogmatic temper with its appeal to what is natural and universal and to tolerance in matters of belief, all of this reflects a break with both medieval Catholic civilization and Protestant orthodoxy.

The Enlightenment was also to run its course; and its understanding of nature, humanity, and God required correction and supplementation. Today we are living in a quite different world, and yet the problems that Christianity continues to face in the realms of historical and philosophical theology can, by and large, trace their beginnings to the intellectual effervescence of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

NOTES

1. I. Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" trans. and ed. L. W. Beck (Chicago, 1955), p. 286.

2. The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas (New York, 1921).

3. See, for example, J. H. Nichols, History of Christianity, 1650-1950 (New York, 1950).

4. Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. A. S. Pringle-Pattison (Oxford, 1934), Bk. IV, Chap. 19.

5. E. Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Boston, 1960), p. 7.

6. Voltaire, TraitedeMetaphysigue, Chaps. 3, 5. Quoted in Cassirer, op. cit., p. 12.

7. Baron d'Holbach, Systeme de la Nature, Part II, Chap. 14.

8. "An Essay on Man," Epistle I, from Poetical Works, ed. H. F. Carey (London, 1872).

9. The Works of Voltaire, Vol. X, Part 2, St. Hubert Guild ed. (1901), 5-7.

10. Ibid., p. 18.

11. Cassirer, op. cit., pp. 157-158.

12. A. R. J. Turgot, Discourse at the Sorbonne, The Life and Writings of Turgot, ed. W. Walker Stephens (London, 1895).

13. Quoted in C. Frankel, The Faith of Reason (New York, 1948), p. 134. Frankel should be read as a corrective to the views of C. Becker in his The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers. Without denying that many of the philosophes were naively optimistic about the future, Frankel points up, correctly, that their concern to apply scientific method to social problems was a valuable and enduring contribution. See especially his defense of the much-maligned Condorcet, Chap. 7.

14. Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Human Mind, trans. June Barroclough (London, 1955).

15. For an excellent statement of this changed perspective, see Becker, op. cit., Chap. 4, "The Uses of Posterity"; and R. R. Palmer, "Posterity and the Hereafter in Eighteenth Century French Thought," Journal of Modern History (June 1937).

16. Diderot, in the article "Intolerance," Encyclopedia: Selections, ed. T. Cassirer and N. Hoyt (New York, 1965), p. 148.

17. Trans. by Williams Jacks (Glasgow, 1894).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

I

For general accounts of ecclesiastical history andtheological movements in the Modern period, the following can be consulted:

Ahlstrom, Sydney E. A Religious History of the American People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972). The best one-volume work on the subject.

Cragg, Gerald R. The Church in the Age of Reason, 1648-1789 (New York: Penguin Viking, 1974). A brief but scholarly account of this critical period.

Jedin, Hubert, and John Dolan. History of the Church (New York: Crossroad, 1965-1981).

Vol. 7. The Church in the Age of Absolutism and Enlightenment

Vol. 8. The Church between Revolution and Restoration

Vol. 9. The Church in the Industrial Age

Vol. 10. The Church in the Modern Age

The fullest account in English of Roman Catholicism in the Modern period, but not strong on thought.

Vidler, Alec. The Church in an Age ofRevolution (New York: Penguin Viking, 1974). A brief, well-written account of major movements of the nineteenth century.

II

For general works on the history of ideas and Christian thought in particular:

Baumer, Franklin L. Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1600-1950 (New York: Macmillan, 1977).

Smart, Ninian, et al. Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Individual studies of thinkers and movements from Kant to Max Weber by experts on each subject.

On Protestant Thought:

Dillenberger, John, and Claude Welch. Protestant Christianity: Interpreted through Its Development, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1988). A brief, lucid account of major developments by two experts, with a concentration on thought.

Thielicke, Helmut. Modern Faith and Thought (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). An interesting study of Christian thought from Descartes to Ernst Troeltsch by a leading German Protestant theologian.

Welch, Claude. Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century. 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, 1985). The standard work in English that covers more than a single country from 1799 to 1914.

On British Thought:

Reardon, B. M. G. From Coleridge to Gore: A Century of Religious Thought in Britain (London: Longmans, 1971). The best up-to-date survey of British religious thought of the nineteenth century with major, but not exclusive, attention to Anglican developments.

On Roman Catholic Thought:

For Catholicism there is no work in English comparable to Welch's study of Protestant thought. For accounts of Catholic movements and thinkers, consult the following:

McCool, Gerald A. Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method (New York: Seabury, 1977).

O'Meara, Thomas E. Church and Culture: German Catholic Theology 1860-1914 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

Reardon, B. M. G. Liberalism and Tradition: Aspects of Catholic Thought in Nineteenth Century France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

These works are advanced, but they cover major figures.

III

Among the many books on the general history of ideas during the period of the Enlightenment, the following are highly recommended:

Becker, C. L. The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962). A delightful, controversial interpretation of eighteenth-century thought. For an appraisal of Becker's view, see Carl Becker's Heavenly City Revisited, ed. R. 0. Rockwood (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958).

Cassirer, E. The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960). Perhaps the profoundest philosophical interpretation of the Enlightenment. Very readable but requires some background knowledge.

Gay, Peter. The Enlightenment: An Interpretation (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1966). Written by one of the leading authorities on the thought of the eighteenth century.

Hazard, Paul. The European Mind, 1680-1715 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).

. European Thought in the Eighteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954). Hazard's studies are a literary achievement in addition to being authoritative and stimulating. Not for the beginner.

Manuel, Frank. The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959). A learned study that also covers figures of the CounterEnlightenment.

Schmidt, James, ed. What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Contains valuable documents on the eighteenth-century debate followed by seventeen studies by twentieth-century historians and philosophers.