RELIGIOUS LIBERALISM IN ENGLAND IN THE EARLIER EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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by
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INTRODUCTION

> If our first precept should be to study our own history . . . , our second precept. . . should be to relegate economic and political history to a subordinate place and give religious history the primacy. For religion, after all, is the serious business of the human race.—Arnold J. Toynbee, Civilization on Trial.

Though not all historians might be willing to go as far as the distinguished one quoted above, his testimony may be introduced in behalf of the modest survey here attempted. If not primacy, religious history ought to be entitled at least to equality.

Religion was most notably the "serious business of the human race," or our portion of the race, during the Middle Ages and the Reformation; it has become far less so, most would agree, in modern times. In this study we deal with it in an important moment of transition. Perhaps, as a wise scholar with a sense of humor assures me, all ages may be called ages "of transition." Yet it is hard to resist the conclusion that the eighteenth century was peculiarly so, especially as concerns religion. Between 1670 and 1830, Paul Tillich believes,

> First among the educated classes, then increasingly in the mass of industrial workers, religion lost its "immediacy"; it ceased to offer an unquestioned sense of direction and relevance to human living.[1]

Doubtless this was less true of England, with which we are concerned herein, than with the Continent—even though England led the

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[1] Journal of the History of Ideas, V (January, 1944), 66. Paul Hazard, La pensée européene au XVIII^ème siècle (Paris, 1946), Tome I, preface, admirably states the thesis that "it is of the eighteenth century that we are the direct descendants." M. Hazard goes so far as to name 1715 the "critical year" of modern Western civilization.

way in "free thinking." Towards the end of the period we are to examine, the Wesleyan movement provided a Christian revival; and if at the end of the century Carlyle found "an age fallen languid, destitute of faith and terrified at scepticism,"[2] this did not mean that Christianity was finished as a vital force in English life. It is undoubtedly true, however, that the early eighteenth century produced the first great challenge to the supremacy of that "Christian epic" which had heretofore dominated Western civilization for more than a millenium.[3] It is a period in which thought and activity are increasingly secularized and rationalized.

England blazed the path in this process. Seen in proper perspective, the religious disputes of the earlier English eighteenth century become of considerable significance. It is well known that these disputes gave rise to an enormous literature. "England," a foreign visitor noted in 1727, "furnished sufficient books to supply two daily newspapers, of which one might be entitled Library of English Orthodoxy, and the other Library of English Heterodoxy."[4] Time was when few historians thought it worth while to take more than perfunctory note of this dull and unprofitable (and interminable) strife of theological controversialists. Most general histories still pass it by. Much of it was subsequently rendered obsolete, so far as concerned the approach

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[2] Scottish and Other Miscellanies (Everyman's Library, 1915), p. 32.

[3] John Herman Randall, Jr., The Making of the Modern Mind (Boston, 1940), Book I, contains a superb statement on the Christian outlook as shaped in the Middle Ages and transmitted as the Christian tradition.

[4] Quoted in Ernest C. Mossner, Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason (New York, 1936), p. 69.

to scriptural questions. Deism was perhaps dead long before Burke pronounced its epitaph in 1790, but orthodoxy in the old sense also was to perish not too many years later. However, the rise of interest in intellectual history has rescued the deistic period from oblivion and indeed placed it fairly high in the scale of interest. The task that seems important today is to synthesize an abundance of material rather than to mine a virgin field.[5]

The farther chronological boundaries of our period of "religious liberalism" are rather clearly marked off by the 1688 revolution, though quite certainly the roots lie much deeper in the seventeenth century. The nearer limits are less clear. It has been frequently argued that we are in another intellectual era in the age of Hume and Wesley—i.e., that about mid-century scepticism in one direction, and evangelicalism in another, supplanted the deistic controversy, as Reason gave ground. It may well be doubted that there was as much suddenness and finality to this transition as some have implied. Yet there are many landmarks too obvious to miss: Conyers Middleton brought the debate about the evidences of Christianity to a new path, and Joseph Butler revolutionised the methods of the orthodox. We must at least seek to close the epoch somewhere short of the period of the revolutions (1774-1790), but we ought not to omit some indication of the debate's permanent significance.

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[5] As recently as 1926 it was possible for J. M. Robertson to remark that "of the Deistic movement there is no quite adequate account in English; indeed, there is barely a mention of it in any English history. . . ." (The Dynamics of Religion, p. 61.) Robertson lists the more important studies, ibid., pp. 61-63. That portion of our bibliography, at end of book, devoted to secondary works may be consulted for a list of some of the scholarly works which are now available in this general field.

"The charge that England cared little about ideas begins to be possible only in the latter half of the century. In the first, she showed at least as much interest in ideas as any other nation."[6] The period is a stimulating one to the student of intellectual history. England was, in fact, pioneering in modes of thought which would spread later to France and to America, where they would exert a greater practical influence. Paine and Franklin and Jefferson, Voltaire and Rousseau and Robespierre—the ideas of these men may be traced to the English deists. Unitarianism flowered as an important intellectual movement in the United States nearly a century after its irruption in England. To trace the ramifications of ideas let loose in early eighteenth century England lies beyond the scope of this work. It is enough to find that here they were born.

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Our subject matter falls into several categories. Chapters I-III deal with preparations and background for the emergence of a rational approach to religion and a period of bold speculation. Chapters IV-VI take up the radical challenge to orthodoxy—unitarianism and deism. In the next two chapters we discuss the crises within the camp of Christian orthodoxy, a matter of considerable importance, for we shall find that orthodoxy's troubles were primarily of its own making. Chapters IX, X, and XI then make an effort to indicate the social and political implications of this religious controversy, a matter of some complexity which, however, we surely cannot afford to neglect. In the concluding chapter there are some remarks on the final significance of the eighteenth century's religious controversies.

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[6] J. M. Robertson, op. cit., p. 116.

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE CRISIS

> What we have to realize is that in those years God was on trial.—Carl L. Becker

1.

It is common to meet the opinion that religion fell into sad decay in England's Augustan age, the victim of complacency and materialism. There is indeed much evidence to support this view. Much of it, however, requires criticism and careful weighing; and when we are done, our judgment must be that this age was, in its own way, deeply concerned with religion. How, otherwise, are we to account for the vast body of religious literature produced, and for the great interest religious questions aroused? It will be our thesis that this spate of theological disputation, far from being wholly inconsequential, was actually interesting and important; that the years between 1690 and 1740 were in fact years of crisis in the religious foundations of Western civilization. They were not so much years of languid doubt as of critical tension.

To some who came later, this Augustan theological literature itself became a testimony to the absence of true religion; it was so dry and formalistic. But we must beware of accepting the Methodist indictment, which has helped shape our picture of this period as irreligious.[1] To

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[1] A typical opinion of this sort may be found in H. Piette (tr. by Rev. J. B. Howard), John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism (New York, 1937), pp. 100 ff. Such older histories of the Methodist movement as those by Tyerman, Workman and Abel Stevens are similar. Not only the Methodists but also the Anglo-Catholics of the next century reacted violently against the "latitudinarian" and rationalist age of the Church.

George Whitefield, the great evangelist, Archbishop Tillotson appeared to have been no more a Christian than Mahomet. The bias here is all too evident. From Tillotson[2] on, the eighteenth century era rejected "enthusiasm" as the plague; on this alone deist and Christian, orthodox and heretic alike, could agree. The era was not for that reason indifferent or sceptical. From Tillotson, Cudworth, Locke, and Newton to Watts, Doddridge, Law, and Butler, there was always fervent piety, though not ecstatic emotionalism.[3] And if some of the controversialists—the Sacheverells and the Leslies, for example, those furious High Church Tories—impress us less with their piety than with their bitter contentiousness, at least we cannot deny their earnestness.

Heretics there were in this age. But most of them were more than mere scoffers. William Whiston the Arian, even Thomas Chubb the deist, thought of themselves as purifying true religion, not destroying it. So staunch a foe of deism as Timothy Dwight, the American, conceded that the English "infidels" were less nihilistic than the later French assailants

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[2]John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury 1691-94, most famous of those Anglicans who were called Low Churchmen or Latitudinarians. Reacting equally against Puritan fanaticism and Prelatist intolerance, they preached "moderation in all things," tolerance, and a rational spirit in Christianity; but their search for sanity in religion must not be confused with indifference or heresy. Portraits of other outstanding Latitudinarians, including Edward Stillingfleet, Jeremy Taylor, and William Chillingworth, may be found in John Tulloch, Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century (Edinburgh and London, 1872); for a contemporary account see Edward Fowler, The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines Called Latitudinarians. . . . (1670).

[3]A good discussion of the very real if restrained piety of some Christians in this rationalist tradition may be found in Herbert McLachlan, The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke, and Newton (Manchester, 1941), pp. 209 ff.

of Christianity.[4] The volume of answers produced, as compared to the mere handful of anti-Christians, tells us how strenuous was the defense of Christianity. "The strongest intellectual forces of the Enlightenment," writes the foremost student of this period's philosophy, "do not lie in its rejection of belief but rather in the new form of faith which it proclaims, and in the new form of religion which it embodies."[5]

True, we must deal with more critics than the Methodists. Hardly a single devout man, indeed, neglected to charge the times with abandonment of religion, and relatively disinterested observers added the weight of their testimony. Daniel Defoe believed in 1722 that "no age, since the founding and forming of the Christian Church, was ever like, in open avowed atheism, blasphemies, and heresies, to the age we now live in."[6] William Whiston declared that anyone with "a right sense of religion" must be aware of its "decay and disesteem in the world."[7] Swift was fond of noting sardonically how little the principles of religion are pursued in the world.[8] Bishop Butler concluded that religion had fought a losing

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[4] Travels in New England and New York (New Haven, 1822; London, 1823), IV, 355. See also Norman L. Torrey, Voltaire and the English Deists (New Haven and London, 1930), passim.

[5] Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, tr. F. C. A. Koelln and J. P. Pettegrove (Princeton, 1951), pp. 135-136.

[6] Life and Recently Discovered Writings of Defoe, ed. William Lee (London, 1869), II, 500.

[7] Whiston, Memoirs (London, 1749), I, 61.

[8] "I suppose it will be granted that hardly one in a hundred among our people of quality or gentry appears to act by any principle of religion; that great numbers of them do entirely discard it, and are ready to own their disbelief of all revelation in ordinary discourse. Nor is the case much better among the vulgar, especially in great towns. . . ." "Project for the Advancement of Religion," Works (London, 1853), II, 175. For a number of other comments on religious indifference, see W. E. H. Lecky, History of England in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1892), III, 11 ff.

battle with unbelief. David Hume, who was perhaps an unwilling sceptic, agreed: England, he wrote, showed the most indifference to religious matters of all nations. This was a period of Robert Walpole and the South Sea Bubble, of many changes both political and social, leading to the conviction in some minds, especially Tory, that the world had "gone to the dogs." But much of this was petulance or hysteria.

The testimony of idealists, impassioned or disillusioned, is properly subject to some discounting. In what epoch was it not true that worthy men lamented failures to attain the Christian ideal? At least one contemporary divine (Dr. Gastrell, the Boyle Lecturer for 1697) was able to smile at the tendency of writers to think their own age the most vicious. The charge of atheism and scepticism, obviously, "included a great deal of what would now be reckoned healthy inquiry."[9] Indeed, the very bitterness of the self-reproaches about both immorality and scepticism indicates high standards: this age was very careful of both its morals and its beliefs. There were fewer complaints in Restoration times, and yet we know that in most respects the Augustan age was a far purer one than that. If one historian calls it a period when "religion was at low tide," another quite properly reminds us that it was also a very moral one, symbolized by Steele's "Christian Hero," by the Societies for the Reformation of Manners and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, by Jeremy Collier's assault on the immorality of the stage.[10] Matthew Tindal, the

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[9] John Hunt, Religious Thought in England from the Reformation (London, 1870-73), III, 74.

[10] H. N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry (New York, 1939), I, 3; F. G. Marcham, A History of England (New York, 1937), p. 617. For some defenses of the period against various calumnies, see the following: Basil Williams, The Whig Supremacy, 1714-60 (London, 1939), pp. 9-10; Norman Sykes, Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1930), pp. 273-274; Rosamond Bayne-Powell, English Country Life in the Eighteenth Century, pp. 75-111; G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History (London, 1942), p. 353; A. W. Hopkinson, About William Law, pp. 28-29.

deist, was near the mark when he denied that England was more dissolute: morality, he held, was vastly improved, and the only complaints came from "priests" stricken by wholesome examination of their pet dogmas.[11] Morality, to be sure, is not religion; and we are not at all concerned to deny that a vigorous, far-reaching search into the very foundations of religious belief went on. The point is that the debate was a serious one, conducted by people mainly devout and not dissolute, a people anxious about its religion.

It was not so long before, we need to bear in mind, that "discourse about Divinity" was "the frequentest table-talk in England."[12] If this was no longer quite so true—if politics and trade tended to supplant theology as the serious business of life—it still was somewhat true. England's daily newspaper to an extent remained the religious and religio-political pamphlets; and politics was still partly bound up with religion.

We need also to bear in mind that despite lamentations to the contrary there was not, after all, much real disbelief. "An atheist or a deist is a monstrous kind of creature, which in the country we only know by report," Philip Doddridge wrote in 1726, when deism was at its peak.[13] Perhaps, as Doddridge implied, they existed in the cities; but we need only read the fashionable literature of the day to sense the odium in

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[11] The Nation Vindicated from the Aspersions Cast on It. . . . (London, 1711), espec. pp. 16-19.

[12] Percy H. Osmond, Isaac Barrow (London, 1947), p. 147. 1673 was the date of this remark.

[13] The Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge (London, 1829), II, 213. There are abundant indications that the countryside remained far less touched by currents of freethought, and that indeed "discourse about Divinity" continued to be its table-talk throughout the century.

which "free thinking" was held.[14] For every heretical tract there were dozens of orthodox replies. Hysterical exaggerations of the amount of "atheism" sometimes reached the point of the ridiculous, as in the furor over the alleged "Hell-Fire Clubs" in the early 1720's. (Tales about scandalous "impious clubs" turned out to be largely fictional.)[15] This was a low-key faith, to be sure, this Augustan religion keyed to neo-classicism and rationalism, abjuring all "freakishness and enthusiasm."[16] But it was very real and firm, nevertheless. Blasphemy or radical free thought were the last things the Augustans wanted to hear.

2.

Why, then, did they hear them? There are several reasons why, despite an obvious desire for peace and concord, the age was one of controversy. As Carl Becker once put it, God was placed on trial in those years. But it was not because most Englishmen wanted such a scandalous affair. A document issued by the Church of England Convocation (before it was found convenient to suppress this too zealous body) attributed the "late excessive growth of infidelity, heresy, and profaneness" to two "evils": the freeing of the press and the end of the danger of

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[14] See Spectator, nos. 381, 389; Tatler, nos. 103, 111, 135; or the character Robinson in Fielding's Amelia.

[15] See the conclusions of Louis C. Jones, The Clubs of the Georgian Rakes (New York, 1942), pp. 37-55. Jones points out pertinently that it did after all scandalize the nation to suspect that such clubs existed. Defoe began by swallowing the tales and ended, amusingly enough, by suspecting a Whig hoax—see Lee (ed.), op. cit., II, 371-378.

[16] The phrase, common enough, is here the Archbishop of York's, quoted by the Rev. Sykes in A. S. Turberville (ed.), Johnson's England (Oxford, 1933), I, 15. A good statement on the Augustan view of religion may be found in no. 22 of the Free-thinker (1718)—a conservative paper, despite the title.

Popery.[17] As to the latter, a great many were inclined to look back wistfully on the latter days of James II, when for a time all Protestant factions made peace in a common cause and religious spirit was temporarily much improved.[18] It is instructive to recall that the great Latitudinarians of the seventeenth century, men such as Chillingworth, Tillotson, and the Cambridge Platonists, had based their hopes for Protestant unity not only on a broader spirit of toleration within Protestantism but also on a united front against Rome. But the fear of Catholicism, if not the distaste for it, faded rapidly after 1689. It would revive only for a brief moment in 1714-15. Daniel Defoe pointed out in 1724 that this particular dog was dead, and there was little point in beating it. That they no longer need band together against Papists meant, of course, that Protestants were free to explore their own differences. In point of fact, the first disturbances to agitate English opinion, as we shall see, were within the bodies of the old Christian churches—chiefly, the debate about the Trinity. Deists only poured in through a breach already opened by good Christians. Freedom of the press was doubtless more important. It may be dated from the last days of James II, for opposition to him centered in "a host of controversialists who scattered pamphlets and tracts from every printing press," with which that harried monarch was quite unable to cope.[19] The

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[17] A Representation of the Present State of Religion, Unanimously Agreed upon by a Joint Committee of Both Houses of Convocation of the Province of Canterbury. (London, 1711).

[18] See Edmund Calamy, An Historical Account of My Own Life, I, 194; William Whiston, Memoirs, I, 22; Charles D'Avenant, Essays on Peace at Home and War Abroad (London, 1704), pt. I, pp. 219-20. Calamy was a distinguished dissenter, Whiston the Arian (unitarian) apostate from the Church of England, while D'Avenant was a moderate lay Anglican, famed for political and economic writings.

[19] J.R.Green, A Short History of the English People (1895 ed.), IV,1456.

licensing system was allowed to expire between 1693 and 1695, never to be renewed despite some efforts in that direction; "henceforth the English press is free from censorship before publication and enjoys a liberty unique in Europe."[20] That did not mean freedom in the modern sense; there remained the danger of prosecution for seditious or blasphemous libel after publication.[21] But there was enough freedom, and it steadily expanded. By and large the deists were able to write undisturbed, so long as they exercised a degree of caution. They often disguised their real views somewhat, but this was as much a strategy as a necessity. The Oracles of Reason, early deistic tract written chiefly by Charles Blount, was condemned to be destroyed, which did not appear to prevent the circulation of numerous copies. Thomas Woolston in 1729, and, much later (1763), Peter Annet, passed beyond the limits and suffered penalties for blasphemy. Arthur Bury's The Naked Gospel, an important early anti-trinitarian tract, was publicly burned at Oxford in 1690, and the author deprived; Whiston later lost his high university post for his outspoken Arian views; but this did not stop the flow of unitarian pamphlets, nor prevent public debates on Socinianism in London. Defoe was pilloried for his famous Short Way With Dissenters, and John Tutchin of the Observator, prosecuted for libel in 1704, was subsequently assassinated by a Tory mob, during the Sacheverell excitement six years later. There were certainly limits to free speech (as there still evidently are in all

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[20] Laurence Hanson, Government and the Press, 1695-1763 (Oxford, 1936)—a thorough discussion of this aspect of the question.

[21] For later struggles to complete the freeing of the press, see W. H. Wickwar, The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press, 1819-32, and A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press, c.1780-1850. But it should be remembered that England went backwards after 1789; speech and thought were freer in 1750 than in 1800.

countries), but deists, Socinians and other religious dissidents were safe enough as long as they refrained from open blasphemy or extremely immoderate expressions.

It was the persecutors who were more often disappointed. In vain did the more rabid orthodox protest that "impudent deniers of our Saviour's divinity" were suffered "unreproved and unpunished, to the infinite regret of all good Christians."[22] They secured, in 1698, passage of an act reaffirming the principle that denial of Christianity is an offense punishable by imprisonment.[23] "Christianity," Sir Matthew Hale had held in a significant decision of 1673, "is a parcel of the law of England, and therefore to speak in reproach of the Christian religion is to speak in subversion of the law." The principle stood; but the law of 1698 was laxly enforced.[24]

The law of libel, said the Tory Rehearsal, is "a wise and good law."[25] The Tories, and some Whigs as well, often clamored for repression of "dangerous" religious writings. The Whigs for their part undertook to chastise Dr. Sacheverell, and after 1715 conducted a mild terror against

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[22] Memorial to the House of Commons, 1701.

[23] Act for Suppression of Blasphemy and Profaneness, Acts 9 and 10 William III. Cf. J. M. Robertson, Dynamics of Religion, pp. 111-113. Robertson exaggerates the perils of free thought, and completely misunderstands the position of Locke and Newton, who were certainly not terrorized into orthodoxy.

[24] See H. McLachlan, The Story of a Nonconformist Library (London, 1923), for instances of repression against the Socinians. But it is generally agreed that free thought and heterodoxy met little real persecution.

[25] Vol. I, no. 191, March 15, 1707. See also Bishop Berkeley's Essay towards Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain, 1721, which enquires "why blasphemy against God should not be inquired into and punished with the same rigour as treason against the king."

the Jacobites.[26] But this was politics, and those persecuted were in this case conservative Christians, not radical freethinkers. In their brief period of power between 1711 and 1714 the Tories attempted to prosecute Whiston, but proceedings were dropped after 1714.[27] In 1721, a bill to suppress anti-trinitarian writing and preaching was rejected. Matthew Tindal, the deist, was able to keep his fellowship at All Soul's until his death. Poor Woolston alone had cause for complaint, and he, it must be confessed, lacked all discretion. As a martyr (he died in prison), Woolston helped advance the cause of free speech: all England seemed secretly ashamed of what had happened.

So Henry Dodwell was reasonably close to the mark in vaunting "the freedom and liberty, so peculiar to the country wherein we live, of examining the grounds and reasons of prevailing opinions."[28] The time would come when an Englishman would look back to this era as a golden age of freedom.[29] David Hume was aware of "a land of toleration and of liberty" as his intellectual environment.

The Act of Toleration, inconclusive and imperfect as it was, had its influence also. The sects that had multiplied under persecution now declined under toleration. It was notorious that the Dissenters began to lose their zeal immediately after the long fight for toleration was won.[30]

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[26] Good accounts may be found in James Sutherland, Background for Queen Anne (London, 1939), pp. 182 ff.; David H. Stephens, Party Politics and English Journalism, 1702-42 (Chicago, 1916); Calamy, Own Life, II, 357-58; Sir Charles Petrie, The Jacobite Movement—the Last Phase, 1716-1807 (London, 1950).

[27] See State Trials (Cobbett), XV, 703-716.

[28] Samuel Clarke, Works (1738), III, 764.

[29] See William Hazlitt, Political Essays (1819), preface.

[30] Henry W. Clark, History of English Nonconformity (London, 1913), II, 124-202.

England gradually learned the lesson of toleration, and it is instructive to hear Dr. Calamy reflect on a case of religious "enthusiasm" treated by the new method of ignoring it: "Being let alone, they by degrees dwindled away, and came to nothing."[31] "Toleration is the most successful stratagem," a popular journal announced, to prevent foolish heresies, adding the somewhat more enlightened statement that "truth does not stand in need of being supported by violence."[32] Even Tory champions of religious uniformity began to disclaim any intention of persecution for conscience's sake.[33]

3.

Freedom, then, explains much. Charles D'Avenant complained that while there may have been "atheism" in the seventeenth century, it then "did not walk bare-faced, it had no open advocates. . . ."[34] It was open now because of a freer climate of opinion. Men could write boldly on what had long been forbidden save in secrecy. For denying the Trinity, people had been executed but a century before. They were now free to follow where speculation might lead them.

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[31] Calamy, op. cit., II, 109-110. He referred to the "new prophets," who came to England from France in 1706. See a note on them in Thomas Chubb, Posthumous Works (London, 1748), I, 360-65; and James Sutherland, op. cit., "John Lacy and the Modern Prophets." It is not true that they entirely escaped persecution, but as compared with the treatment of Quakers a few decades before the contrast is great. Worth noting is the fact that "enthusiasm" was more apt to be persecuted than rationalistic scepticism in these years.

[32] Freethinker, no. 79, December 22, 1718.

[33] See, for example, the language of the first bill against Occasional Conformity, a Tory measure aimed at permitting privileges to Dissenters.

[34] Essays on Peace at Home and War Abroad, Pt. I, p. 219.

Nevertheless, this was not all. We have still to account for the Age of Reason—to explain, that is, the emergence of the remarkable faith that the world is a rational one and man a rational creature, from which among other things it followed that man had a rational religion. Let us defer the effort to outline such an explanation until the chapter following.

To find the source of religious truth in some blindly accepted principle of authority was repugnant to about everyone in those years, from deist to Anglican. "It is certainly the duty of every rational creature," Philip Doddridge, the distinguished Dissenter, remarked, "to bring his religion to the strictest test, and to retain or reject the faith in which he has been educated, as he finds it capable or incapable of rational defence."[35] This from a clergyman of irreproachable orthodoxy. It was the keynote of the age. There might emerge grievous disagreements and confusions as to the nature of "rational defence," but all accepted the idea that rational defence of some sort there must be. On the extreme Right, one finds the non-juring Anglican, Charles Leslie, conceding that "God never required any man to believe anything that did contradict any of his outward senses."[36] Francis Atterbury, foremost of the High Church-Jacobite element, affirmed that the Church of England "desires nothing more than to be tried at the bar of unbiased reason, and to be concluded by its sentence."[37] "There can be nothing in Chris-

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[35] Correspondence and Diary, II, 423.

[36] Leslie, Theological Works (Oxford, 1832), II, "The Socinian Controversy Dismissed."

[37] Atterbury, Sermons (1734), III, 29.

tian Religion which contradicts the clear and evident principles of natural reason," a popular religious handbook summed it up.[38]

Socinian or deist would press the claims of "reason" farther than most Christians wished to go; and yet the latter met the former on the grounds of "rational defence." "Fideism," that "desperate form of faith" which holds that one must believe blindly or not at all, was most uncongenial to Englishmen of this age. They were at length, no doubt, driven to something like it, but only with great reluctance. Our era of intellectual history has perhaps ended when Hume announces that Christianity cannot rest upon reason, when John Wesley and William Law imply that reason is irrelevant to religion or its less important part, and when Butler, seconded by Berkeley, indicates that religious truths cannot really be "proved." However, people continued to believe in the rational demonstrability of Christianity long after this. At any rate, nothing shows the faith in reason better than the outraged reception which, in 1743, greeted the scepticism of Henry Dodwell, Jr., who wrote a book called Christianity Not Founded on Argument. Christianity to the vast majority emphatically was founded on argument—i.e., on the rational and positive demonstration of its historical truth and logical consistency.

Men were willing to submit to "reason" because there was on all hands a sublime confidence that reason and religion were in harmony. It is impossible for a sincere man to be other than a Christian, argued Isaac Watts, the eminent Nonconformist minister; the truth of the gospel is perfectly evident to all whose minds are not closed.[39] Charles

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[38] Edward Synge, A Gentleman's Religion (1800; first published 1710), p. 74.

[39] See his Caveat against Infidelity, 1729.

Leslie's "Short and Easy Method with the Deists," a well-known work, was short and easy indeed: "so sifted and attested" are the facts on which Christianity rests, he thought, that we cannot reasonably doubt them, unless we are prepared to doubt everything.[40] Such was the temper of the age, shared by deist and orthodox alike. Belief in the rationality of the Christian religion was in part traditional, in part newly inspired by the Newtonian world outlook.

A rare flash of humor in the long debate came when the deist Anthony Collins remarked that nobody doubted the existence of God until Dr. Clarke strove to prove it. He might have added in the same vein that nobody doubted the Trinity until William Sherlock tried to demonstrate it mathematically. The point is that the Clarkes and the Sherlocks, men of the gravest respectability, started out serenely certain that their religion would be strengthened, not weakened, by rational examination. We must understand what a series of jolts orthodoxy had received before it could rest with Joseph Butler on the uneasy grounds that Christianity may as well be as true as anything else, since all things are in doubt.

Postponing for the moment any examination of this optimistic rationalism, we can here merely mention what is no secret—that the most obvious influence was the new science, and the support it seemed to give to religion, as expressed in the views of such impressive figures

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[40] Cf. Samuel Clarke, 1705 Boyle Lecture: "A constant and sincere observance of all the laws of reason . . . will unavoidably lead a man to Christianity." (Works, II, 600). Thus rational Christianity had the support of the period's foremost metaphysician. For other quotations illustrating the contemporary faith in reason, see Mark Pattison, Essays (Oxford, 1889), II, 55-57.

as Newton, Boyle, and Locke. Doddridge would give it away when, in his vindication of Christian evidences, he crowned the whole argument by pointing out that the above man had been convinced by these proofs.[41] The spectacle of Newton's science controverting the unbelievers, testifying, as Addison's famed hymn put it, that

> The Hand that made us is Divine,

quite over-mastered this generation. Isaac Watts was similarly moved to sing, inspired by Newton's piety:

> Reason at length submits to wear
> The wings of faith. . . .

It occurred to few that there might be no necessary connection between the great scientist's piety and his physics. The connection seemed established. When Richard Bentley presented the scientific argument against atheism in the first Boyle Lecture (1692), atheism became indefensible. Some years later a youth named Franklin on the far side of the Atlantic would read these lectures and become converted not to Christianity but to deism; and at the time a voice (Whiston's) might have been heard wondering, "What is this to the fable of Jesus Christ?" To prove the existence of God from the laws of Nature, to insist that such an amazing universe must have had a Maker, was a glorious thing, sufficient to silence Hobbeans and Epicureans; only, as it happened, it was as useful to deists as to Christians, and it really did not have much to do with the Bible. But we need only note that at first it produced a supreme

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[41] Philip Doddridge, Three Sermons on the Evidences of Christianity (1736).

confidence that from science, philosophy and reason Christianity had nothing to fear. Newton, "the glory of his country and his race," and "the great Mr. Locke" as well, had made it plain that they considered the new science and the new philosophy buttresses of religion. It was not known to their contemporaries that these worthy men were themselves not exactly orthodox, though pious enough.[42] It is not until more than forty years after 1687 that we find a leading clergyman complaining that "the men of science (a conceited generation) are the greatest sticklers against revealed religion. . . ."[43]

Orthodox Christianity, then, gambled on reason. The task of our period was the exploration of the limits of rationalism, in full confidence, at first, that reason and religion are compatible. The sense in which God was on trial may be a little clearer: Christianity was to be subjected to the critique of reason, under relative freedom of discussion, in a more disinterested climate of opinion. As it happened, the Christian God was to be forced into serious straits, though at the start everyone looked for a triumphant vindication. The accuracy of Carl Becker's imagery is attested by the number of tracts which actually did present the controversy as some sort of a trial. There was, for instance, Thomas Sherlock's, whose trial was made to issue in a glorious acquittal of Christianity and the Bible. But in Thomas Gordon's "trial" the priestly defenders of the Trinity are convicted of deceit and hypocrisy.[44]

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[42] H. McLachlan, The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke, and Newton, pp. 117-172.

[43] N. Sykes, Bishop Gibson (London, 1926), p. 243. The opinion that science would lead to atheism and deism was held by Bossuet and Pascal, the discerning French Christians, earlier, but there is no evidence that such views were entertained in England before about 1730.

[44] Thomas Sherlock, The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ (1729); Thomas Gordon, The Trial of William Whiston (1739).

Deists, Arians and Erastians will try the priesthood on charges of monumental fraud and trickery; the Bible will be judged as authentic or fraudulent by a horde of scholars and pseudo-scholars; and God himself will be asked to show credentials satisfactory to reason. As a matter of fact, no one will deny the existence of a God; there is no atheism in this age. But Christianity's traditional God is to be subjected to an impudent cross-examination.

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CHAPTER II

PREPARATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERALISM

> The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants. —William Chillingworth.
>
> The denial of reason in religion hath been the principal engine, that heretics and enthusiasts have used against the Faith.—Joseph Glanvill.
>
> Knowledge of the works of God proportions our admiration of them . . . and our utmost science can but give us a juster veneration of His omniscience. . . .—Robert Boyle.

1.

It has seemed to some students that we enter another world between 1680 and 1700.[1] It is probably necessary, however, to make this transition less abrupt. The trend towards rationalism goes back farther. It had sources other than Newton and Locke, whose influence, great as it was, is sometimes exaggerated. Reason in religion was primarily a reaction against the social consequences of "enthusiasm" in the age of the sectaries, that period culminating in the 1650's when the allegedly prosaic Englishmen "had their great mystical period."[2] The "witness of the spirit" so stressed by Reformation theology was highly suspect in Restoration England. The spirit that dwells within being discredited, men

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[1] Edward Dowden, Puritan and Anglican: Studies in Literature (London, 1900), Chapter X.

[2] Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches (New York, 1931; tr. Olive Wyon), II, 771. A striking interpretation of the origins of rational Anglicanism may be found in Robert M. Krapp, Liberal Anglicanism, 1636-1647 (Ridgefield, Conn., 1944), where it is clearly demonstrated that it was an aristocratic reaction against popular Calvinistic (Antinomian) enthusiasm.

turned towards the external evidences of Christianity's truth. They took refuge on what Gladstone was to call (just before it finally crumbled) the "impregnable rock" of Holy Scripture, as an alternative to both the slavish authoritarianism of Papacy and the weird anarchy of private enthusiasm.

As for the former, it is doubtless unnecessary to demonstrate that Roman Catholicism remained, all through this period, as repugnant to the overwhelming majority of Englishmen as it had been ever since the sixteenth century; if anything, more so. "Popery" remained "a monstrous and most audacious corruption" of Christianity; "an impious and impudent combination against the sense and rights of mankind."[3] As for individualistic "enthusiasm," the proliferation of the "petulant capricious sects" in the seventeenth century had ended by making them all ridiculous, and Hudibras in assailing them with bitter satire became the most popular book of its day. There were to be no more Ranters and Muggletonians, and the Quakers, still under suspicion, quickly grew quiet and respectable.[4] The Antinomian strain in Dissent flickered and all but died, as the Puritans passed out of their period of militance to become the respectable and decorous Dissenters of the next age. Nonconformism in religion was at low ebb after 1660. It was not so much that there wandered the sons of Belial "flown with insolence and wine"[5] as that an

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[3]John Taylor, in A Collection of Theological Tracts, ed. Richard Watson (London, 1735), III, 312; William Warburton, in Chatham Correspondence (London, 1838), II, 189. Edward Carpenter, Thomas Tenison (London, 1948), Chapter II, deals with the extensive anti-Catholic feeling prevalent during the years around 1688.

[4]Charles E. Whiting, Studies in English Puritanism, 1660-1688 (New York, 1931), Chapter VI.

[5]Paradise Lost, lines 497-502.

era of theology had left people weary of such squabbling; and, more important still, dissent was equated with rebellion and civil strife.[6]

For a time after the Restoration the spirit of revenge and counter-persecution prevailed; but the tone that was to dominate the next century was set when Glanvill advised clergymen to cultivate plainness, as opposed to "deep and mysterious notions . . . rhetorications . . . phantastical phrases."[7] Along with this went the wish which the martyred Russell might have seen fulfilled had he lived a few years longer: "That Churchmen might be less severe, and Dissenters less scrupulous."[8] To the rule of reason both Dissenter and moderate Churchman were eager to return; and the events of 1688-89 registered their victory over the "high-flying" clergy. It is true that at its inception the Toleration Act was more like a weary pis aller than a positive good, to most. A truce had been called, but William Penn's radical claim that "a man may be a very good Englishman, but a very indifferent Churchman," was not yet generally accepted.[9] But as a matter of fact toleration rested on unshakable ground. This ground was partly the deep spiritual belief in toleration of the Cambridge Platonists, partly a more utilitarian out-

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[6]Enthusiasm was "regarded as dangerous to society, chiefly because of its tendency to social anarchy." T. G. Steffan, "The Social Argument against Enthusiasm, 1650-60," University of Texas Studies in English, 1941; George Williamson, "The Restoration Revolt against Enthusiasm," Studies in Philology, XXX (1933), 570-603.

[7]From The Vanity of Dogmatising, quoted by George Sherburn in A. C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), p. 702. See also Ferris Greenslet, Joseph Glanvill

[8]Gilbert Burnet, History of His Own Time (ed. O. Airy, 1900), II, 383.

[9]Penn, England's Present Interest Discovered, 1675; see the conclusions of W. K. Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England (London, 1940), pp. 466-488.

look. There was Halifax, the genial "trimmer," whose moderation was eminently practical. "Circumstances must come in, and are to be made a part of the matter of which we are to judge; positive decisions are always dangerous, more especially in politics."[10]

William III was also a "trimmer" so far as concerned religious disputes in England. Fatal to all brands of dogmatism, the approach may be seen in the erstwhile Tory Charles D'Avenant's essays (1704). He returns consciously to the spirit of Elizabeth: wise princes "make the established religion their principle concern, and yet are indulgent to the weakness of those who cannot comply with it." He cites Machiavelli: the prince will take care to preserve religion, for "in the whole world there is not a greater sign of imminent ruin than when God and his worship are despised." Religion is a very important thing, but more for practical political reasons than otherwise. Religious unity is desirable, and the Established Church needs to be sustained; but narrowness and persecution ought to be avoided. The enemy may be found on either Right of Left: it is fanaticism or enthusiasm whether of Papist or left-wing Puritan.[11] Moderation, as D'Avenant titled another of his books, is a virtue.

So Machiavelli and Plato each had something to do with the new spirit; and weariness with old quarrels as well as a new *zeitgeist* induced by the new science. One should not overlook the extent to which

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[10] H. C. Foxcroft, ed., *Life and Works of the First Marquis of Halifax*, (London, 1898), II, 193, 178.

[11] *Essays on Peace at Home and War Abroad*, pp. 179-181, 199, 217-231. Cf. the trimming views of Sir William Temple, in his *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands* (5th ed.; Amsterdam, 1696); Homer C. Woodbridge, *Sir William Temple* (London, 1940).

contentiousness was channeled into politics after 1689, rather than into religion. Whig and Tory, Observator and Rehearsal, exhibited the most violent animosities, and to a degree these were still tinged with religious overtones, but the quarrel had really been transposed to a more purely political field. A combination of causes had paved the way for a period in which religion, still regarded as of vital importance, was to rest on reason not enthusiasm, to be safeguarded by the pen and not by the sword.

2.

If both papal authority and inner light were firmly rejected as foundations of religion, so also was tradition. Because that idea subsequently became associated with Anglicanism, there has been a mistaken tendency to assume that seventeenth century Anglicanism, if not eighteenth, embraced it.[12] But it was not merely a few "latitudinarians" who rejected tradition as an authority. Almost all of the clergy shared the view, expressed in a popular religious handbook written by an Anglican bishop, that reason must not be impeded by tradition, for an error may be perpetuated as well as a truth, and "though the general tradition or testimony of the Church may be a good help, yet it may not always be

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[12]See the introduction to Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England Illustrated from the Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century, ed. Paul Elmer More and Frank L. Cross (Milwaukee, 1935), p. lxxii. Numerous selections from this very anthology contradict the claim of traditionalism. Archbishop Ussher, in 1625, categorically denies that "traditions of men" should be accepted as religious truths (pp. 135 ff.); he quotes Athanasius, "The Holy Scriptures given by inspiration of God are of themselves sufficient to the discovery of truth." P. 117, Whitby: the tradition of the Church "gives no unquestionable assurance of the truth or derivation of these customs from our Lord and his Apostles. . . ." etc.

a certain rule, to lead men to the entire and unadulterated doctrine of Jesus."[13] William Sherlock indicated clearly what a conservative Anglican thought of the authority of "church guides": "the Church of Rome will have men believe their guides without reason or understanding; we have guides, not merely to dictate to us, but to teach us to understand . . . to inform our judgment, that we may be able to understand for ourselves." Thus tradition was interpreted to mean only a source of education, an aid to greater aptitude in understanding the Bible, which is alone the source of truth and salvation.[14] The "entire and unadulterated doctrine of Jesus" could be found in only one place, the Bible.

That what was found there was indeed the Divine Revelation was proved by a variety of external evidences too certain to admit of doubt—mainly by the miracles and the fulfillment of prophecies. It was already realized that there were certain difficulties in discovering precisely what Scripture said, yet there was a firm faith that "a sober and honest enquirer cannot easily be mistaken in the interpretation of those places of the New Testament, which do contain any necessary part of Religion." It was a part of the Latitudinarian outlook to hold that these "necessary parts" of religion were "few and plain," and that abstrusities might well be left to the theologians. "There are no real contradictions" in the Bible; and while some things

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[13] Synge, A Gentleman's Religion, pp. 36-40. Cf. Dryden's lament ("The Hind and the Panther," lines 470-471):

> No help from fathers or traditions train,
> These ancient guides she taught us to disdain.

[14] William Sherlock, A Short Summary of the Principal Controversies between the Church of England and the Church of Rome (London, 1687), pp. 10-11.

in the revelation are certainly beyond our reason, yet nothing is contrary to reason.[15] This last distinction, held by all the orthodox, was to prove troublesome when explored by the deists.

The right of unlimited private judgment implied in this was recognized and warned against: men had a duty to make up their minds only after consulting all the best opinions. Yet private judgment must in the end prevail, for no one should submit blindly to authority. God will not punish for an honest mistake in judgment. Here was another dangerous doctrine, for the deists could all plead sincerity. But it was simply denied that any honest man could possibly doubt the proofs of Christianity. "All the arguments against Christianity," it was asserted, "are so weak and insignificant, that they rather make for it."[16]

If we ask why such great confidence, and also what was meant by "reason," we come upon the influence of Locke and Newton. Reason meant lucidity and common sense, not Scholastic abstrusities. The latter were somehow associated with that tangled wilderness of sects which had been rejected in disgust. Reason was Locke's "clear and distinct ideas." In this tendency, Bishop Stillingfleet perceived, there might lie danger, for Lockean philosophy was impelled to discard all "mysteries." Yet when Locke debated with Bishop Stillingfleet on this point, public opinion awarded Locke the verdict.[17] Locke's philosophy led logically to

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[15] Synge, op. cit., pp. 4, 47, 56.

[16] Robert Jenkin, A Brief Confutation of the Pretences against Natural and Revealed Religion (London, 1702), p. xliii.

[17] Hunt, Religious Thought in England, II, 248-250. It seems to have been a common belief that Stillingfleet died of his mortification in failing to meet Locke's argument.

scepticism, to the acceptance of large areas where certainty was impossible—not least, as Shaftesbury realized, the area of moral truth. But the first fruit of Locke for most people was not the scepticism latent in his epistemology; it was his own faith in a rational religion, his common sense revolt against "mysteries" accompanied, however, by his belief that Christianity could be both simple and clear.

Locke's initial impulse to write his memorable Essay concerning Human Understanding came from the desire to know how far men are able to grasp religious truths.[18] His caution, his unwillingness to believe except on the basis of solid proof, his contempt for metaphysical "fiddling," his disparagement of idle and bootless speculation, of the abstract without tangible content—all this was the new spirit, the fruit of Bacon and Descartes, tempered in the crucible of wars inspired by rival fanaticisms.[19] But it did not exclude religion. Locke clung to the belief that we can know ethical and religious truths (to know meant, for Locke, to be certain). It was his basic trait to scorn the "vanity" and "pride" of men who could not be content with a little real knowledge such as was suitable to their limited capacities, but must needs invent fantastic explanations of the whole universe. Yet with all the fervency

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[18] A. C. Fraser, introduction to 1894 edition of An Essay concerning Human Understanding (Oxford), I, xvii.

[19] See Norman Kemp Smith, John Locke, 1632-1704 (Manchester, 1933); Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York, 1945), pp. 604-617. What Locke meant to men is discernible more than a century later in a belated defense by an American disciple: "In the 'Essay on the Human Understanding' intellectual science appeared for the first time in a clear and intelligible shape, unmingled with the vain and visionary fancies which had previously disfigured it, and accessible to the plain good sense of every cultivated mind." Alexander H. Everett, 1829, quoted in Perry Miller, ed., The Transcendentalists (Cambridge, Mass., 1950).

at his command he felt that this modest stint of solid knowledge did not exclude knowledge about God and His revelation to man. He was willing to simplify this knowledge, but to his "common sense" outlook a basic minimum of it was possible and necessary.

Doubtless Locke was glib and inconsistent. "Had Locke's mind been more profound, it might have been less influential."[20] The philosopher spoke for his age. It wanted both solid truth and rational religion, and told itself that the two were identical.

For "grounding all he taught on the phenomena of nature," Locke received the praise of deists. "He appealed to the experience and conscious knowledge of every one, and rendered all he advanced intelligible."[21] Very soon the deists will take Locke's principles to mean that much of traditional Christianity, being "mysterious," should be abandoned. But the great man himself clung closely to revealed religion, and not from either fear or blindness. It was the most pleasant intellectual experience of his day to contemplate the perfect harmony of Reason and Faith.

Many years later it seemed to many in retrospect that John Locke had been the seed-sower for all the "harvest of rationalist theology."[22] It is true that Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity was a signal for the deists. (John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious, which it had

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[20]George Santayana, Some Turns of Thought in Modern Philosophy (Cambridge, 1933), p. 3.

[21]Bolingbroke, Works (Philadelphia, 1841), III, 52, 405-406.

[22]John J. Taylor, Retrospect of Religious Life in England (London, 1845), p. 372. Also Joseph Milner, Gibbon's Account of Christianity Considered. . . . (London, 1731), p. 154. Milner also (pp. 250-251) reproached the Platonists for the same sin of introducing a fatal amount of reasoning.

directly inspired, followed it immediately—a work which, as Leslie Stephen wrote, was the signal-gun for the whole deistic controversy.) Anyone concerned to judge of Locke's responsibility for deism must consult this book as well as Book IV, Chapters X and XIX of the 1700 edition of the Essay. There was the same ex post facto criticism of the Cambridge Platonists. In neither case is the criticism justified. Both the Platonists and Locke sought to save religion. To the former, the innate ideas implanted within the human mind, the "candle of the Lord" as they liked to call it, the structure of universal reason, was a weapon against infidelity, a proof of divinity—the stamp of our Creator on us, as Descartes said, and a bulwark too against the fanaticisms which threatened to bring religion to chaos.[23] As for Locke's sensationalism, it could as readily be used to defend Christianity as to attack it.[24]

The Cambridge group more than Locke were pioneers in rationalism, abjuring both "enthusiasm" and "superstition," opposed to dogmatism, their basic mood well expressed in Whichcot's aphorism, "Be rational in your religion." They contributed the most to a spirit which, in Restoration times, produced a strong tendency to think of religion as "exalted reason."[25] The Platonist belief in a structure of abstract, ideal

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[23] Sterling P. Lamprecht, "Innate Ideas in the Cambridge Platonists," Philosophical Review, XXXV (1926), 553-573.

[24] Carré, Phases of Thought in England, pp. 296, 331, points out that anti-deists sometimes used Locke's philosophy against the deists' use of innate ideas, or to deprecate rationalistic proofs of God—the latter rather daring strategy being Peter Browne's, whose "analogical" method and desire to limit the rational approach to religion are related to Butler and Berkeley.

[25] Complete Works of George Savile, First Marquess of Halifax, ed. Walter Raleigh (Oxford, 1912), pp. 2-7; see also Matthew Clifford, A Treatise of Human Reason, (London, 1674). On the Cambridge group, among

reason, governing or even limiting God, was in fact opposed to Locke's empiricism in some ways, and was a factor independently influencing eighteenth century deism. Samuel Clarke and Lord Shaftesbury owed more to this tradition than to Locke,[26] The innate moral sense, the structure of eternal reason, the rationalism implanted within man—those were philosophically somewhat opposed to Locke's empiricism.[27] But Locke and the Platonists held in common towards religion a spirit of cool rationality, an anti-dogmatism, an opposition to enthusiasm and to blind traditionalism as well; and also the desire to preserve Christianity while adjusting it to the rational, scientific temper. Thus it is that systems which philosophers find so different were in harmony where religion was concerned. Historically, both reflected a religious rationalism induced by the social and political environment, beginning as early as 1650.

In the case of Newton as well as Locke we find that the respect in which science was held, and its assumed harmony with religion, antedated

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many writings see good brief discussions in N. Sykes, Church and State in Eighteenth Century England (Cambridge, 1934); L. I. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1934); and E. C. Mossner, Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason (New York, 1936); also Chapter X of Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (Oxford, 1945); longer studies include Tulloch, op. cit., and works by F. J. Powicke (1926) and W. C. De Pauley (1937).

[26]See Ernest Tuveson, "The Origins of the Moral Sense," Huntington Library Quarterly, XI (May, 1948), 241 ff. Another article in the same journal by Robert Hoopes, "Voluntarism in Jeremy Taylor and the Platonic Tradition," XIII (August, 1950), is helpful in pointing out aspects of the Platonism of this period. Alfred O. Aldridge, Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto, discusses Shaftesbury's hostility to Locke owing to Locke's failure to provide a foundation for moral truth sturdier than mere "opinion."

[27]But Locke certainly held that an "internal sense" exists which provides the source from which moral law is deduced. His belief that there is nothing at all in the mind to begin with did not keep him from believing that men quite generally act rationally, which means morally. Considera-

his great discoveries. The biographer of Robert Boyle, "devout naturalist," has written that "in his devotion to the laboratory and his loyalty to the altar" Boyle was "the child of his age."[28] The soil had been well prepared for Newton's apparent demonstration that when we penetrate nature's secrets we find clear evidence of a Deity. It was not merely that the orderliness of Newton's universe implied a Designer, for Newton's laws seemed to show not only the omnipotent but also the omnipresent God. It was not a naturalism that left God nothing to do once the machine was created. John Toland, deist and (later) pantheist, sought to intrude such a naturalism when he urged that gravitation must be something inherently in matter; but almost no one agreed with him. The "force" of gravitation, left unexplained, was evidently something sustained by God; thus the very imperfection of Newtonian physics left a convenient function for the Deity.[29] To the vast majority, at any rate, Newtonianism indicated, exultantly, the proof of a Grand Designer and Regulator of the orderly universe disclosed by Sir Isaac's experiments. "Physico-theology" carried the day.[30]

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tions of prudence and the desire for pleasure insure moral behavior; men know certainly that God exists.

[28]Mitchell S. Fisher, Robert Boyle, Devout Naturalist: A Study in Science and Religion in the Seventeenth Century (Philadelphia, 1945), p. 23.

[29]Bentley, directly authorized by Newton himself, argued that "the principle of gravity is inadequate by itself to explain the systematic motion of the stellar universe."—Alfred O. Aldridge, Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 41, part 2, 1951), p. 300. In the same place Professor Aldridge discusses Samuel Clarke's argument that motion must be caused by God.

[30]See the discussion in Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), pp. 133-138; also Meyrick H. Carré, Phases of Thought in England (Oxford, 1949), pp. 322-327.

Those earnest searchers after the via media, the Cambridge Platonists, had been deeply suspicious of Descartes because his system appeared to exclude God from a mechanistic world order. On the other hand there was the wholly shocking Spinoza, whose system provided no place for a deity outside of the natural order. Newtonianism seemed ideally to avoid both errors, though a handful accused it of pantheism.[31] Therefore when Newton urged the complete harmony of his science with his religion all were convinced. Perhaps had Newton been a Pascal the course of intellectual history might have been changed. But the qualms the latter felt about "proving divinity by the works of nature" were not felt in England for half a century. By 1721, Cotton Mather had accepted the new science as Christianity's handmaiden on behalf of what was surely the Western world's most conservative religious body.[32]

3.

The inference was that "reason" is the ally, not the enemy, of religion. What was Reason's role in religious matters? Reason is necessary, in the first place, it was commonly said, to learn whether or not Scripture is truly the word of God: "My reason must prove to me that it is revealed."[33] This was evident to all. Reason, wrote Dr. South,

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[31]Herbert Drennon, "Newtonianism: Its Method, Theology, and Metaphysics," in Englische Studien, 68 (1933-34), 397-409, is an excellent summary. The great Leibniz challenged Newton for leading to pantheism, a charge which Samuel Clarke sought to refute, Englishmen assuming that he had done so. Samuel Miller, A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1803), I, 14-17, 438, refers to the followers of John Hutchinson, who thought Newtonianism subversive in ascribing inherent activity to matter. Plainly this group was an oddity to Augustans, who were quite convinced that Newton meant no such thing.

[32]See Mather's Christian Philosopher; discussed by Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (1949), p. 83.

[33]Robert South, Sermons (London, 1870), I, 368. Locke in his

"proves the revelation of it by God; but then, having done this, here it stops, and pretends not to understand and fathom the nature of the thing revealed." Nevertheless, reason has to test the Bible and is a guide in interpreting it. Another representative churchman agreed that reason must know whether Scripture is revelation and also exactly what truths are revealed there; but it cannot reject what is told there merely because this may be beyond our comprehension.[34]

Socinians and deists will argue that there should be no "mysteries," for once a thing is revealed it ought to be clear. Orthodox opinion insisted that our reason is too weak for this; God is, after all, wiser than men, and some things remain incomprehensible to the latter. Nothing should be contrary to reason, but some things may be beyond it. The distinction here left some room for argument.[35]

Having passed judgment on the historical authenticity of the divine revelation, on the "objective evidence, or rational proof, in which truth is proposed to and assented to by the understanding"[36]—a judgment which orthodox opinion had a sublime confidence must be favorable[37]—

Essay concerning Human Understanding agrees that reason must judge of the origin and evidences of revelation, though not of its content; see also Joseph Butler, Works (1897), I, 193.

[34]Joseph Pyke, An Impartial View of the Principal Difficulties . . . (London, 1721), pp. xii ff. See Also Luke Milbourne, Mysteries in Religion Vindicated (London, 1692), pp. 51 ff.

[35]The bolder freethinkers would claim a right to analyse and reject on the basis of internal inconsistency of ideas, refusing all "mysteries" which the pious could never allow. For a deistic definition of reason, see Thomas Morgan, A Collection of Tracts . . . (London, 1726), p. 157.

[36]Ibid.

[37]"There is no book in the world," remarked Josiah King (Mr. Blount's Oracles of Reason Examined and Answered [London, 1698], p. 31), "whose author can be more plainly demonstrated than that of the Pentateuch." Such complacent confidence was ubiquitous.

reason had one more religious task, and this was to search out and determine the exact meaning of that revelation, a task in which wit was wanted was not Platonic or Scholastic mystifications, but the plain sense of the matter. We have spoken of the naive faith, so widely held, that there could be no contradiction between reason and religion. By this was meant: (a) That the evidence in favor of the divine authorship of the Christian Holy Scripture could scarcely be doubted by a reasonable man, the Bible in its entirety being meant ordinarily. (b) That within this body of revealed truth there are no internal contradictions and nothing contrary to reason, though there are some things above human reason.[38] (c) That the meanings in this body of revealed truth are sufficiently clear and unambiguous, at least on all the essentials of religion, to enable all reasonable men to arrive at substantially the same interpretation. The last proposition involved the assumption that there are essentials, the "few and plain" things absolutely necessary to salvation, not often very carefully defined—the assumption being also that there are a number of more difficult points, again not too clearly indicated, which are not really vital.

With the advantages of hindsight it is not difficult to see pitfalls lurking in these assumptions. Still, what answer was there, then if ever, to the proposition that, unless these things be true, there can be no real Christianity? Was the Englishman of Newton's age to be told

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[38]One orthodox writer attempted to illuminate this vexed question by the analogy of a blind man, who could never gain an understanding of light, color and vision by his own unaided reason, but who could, with the aid of others, satisfy himself beyond doubt that these things do exist. The analogy was hardly perfect, for it surely left the implication that the truths revealed to us ought to be absolutely clear, and rationally demonstrable, a position soon to be associated with deists and Socinians.

to stifle his reason lest he mar his faith? Was he to be directed back to the Infallible Chair? Or referred again to an infallible inner light not responsible to reason?[39] These things were quite impossible. If there was a great gamble in the reliance on reason, it was an inevitable one: the other games were all closed out.

Some few were dubious.[40] John Dryden retreated to Catholicism, after suggesting that to rely on reason is "to take away the pillars from our faith, and to prop it only with a twig." Without a principle of authority, Christianity would soon become chaos; for reason is

> Dim as the borrow'd beams of moon and stars
> To lonely, weary, wandering travellers.

But Dryden was called a "monster" for his apostasy to Rome. Richard Baxter, the great Nonconformist, expressed some disquietude in the spirit of that older Puritanism which was little apt to trust the wisdom of men. But the great majority went forth with a great trust in the Bible and right reason, splendidly unaware that these might go wrong. They were not indifferent to religion; they were enchanted by its apparent agreement with all that human reason might discover.

Even if reason was as feeble as Dryden said, the Augustans saw no other support. Deists would press home the point that, if we cannot

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[39]The tendency to associate the enthusiasts with the Romanists, which at first glance may seem curious to us, is to be explained by their common reliance on a principle beyond reason. Thus, the Quakers and later the Methodists were called "papists in disguise." The Inner Light and the Infallible Chair might be very different in some respects but they agreed in their supra-rationalism, and it was this ingredient which impressed, because it seemed most dangerous to, the Englishmen of the eighteenth century.

[40]Louis I. Bredvold, in The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1934), ably discusses this group. See ca. pp. 64-71.

trust reason, there is no escape from Rome: we must have either a Pope, or complete liberty of judgment.[41] This was not exclusively an "infidel" position, but one the logic of which deists knew no Protestant could resist. Anthony Collins could quote the distinguished Anglican Daniel Whitby to the effect that "we should call no man guide or master upon earth, no Fathers, no Church, no Council."[42] To this faith in free enquiry many within the Church steadily remained true. Religion, wrote Samuel Clarke, "will not long subsist in the belief of understanding persons," if ever it be separated from its foundation in "Reason and uncorrupted Nature."[43] In the author's opinion, this statement is certainly true. If so, the goal of adjusting Christianity to science and reason was nothing less than the project of saving religion for the modern world. The great Catholic apologist Bossuet had long since predicted that Protestantism must fail because it leads to incessant schism. Rational Christians of this age hoped to demonstrate that the right reason of sober men is a stronger fortress for religion than the surrender of the mind to authority.

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[41]Thomas Chubb, Posthumous Works, I, 58-59.

[42]Anthony Collins, A Discourse of Freethinking (London, 1713), pp. 45-46.

[43]Samuel Clarke, Works, I, v.

CHAPTER III

THE LIMITS OF THE DEBATE

We must carefully distinguish betwixt what the Scripture itself says, and what is only said in the Scripture.—Robert Boyle.

1.

Platonic rationalism, Lockean empiricism, and the prestige of scientific investigation tended to make old theological quarrels obsolete and wearisome. It has been well observed that the Platonists' "elevation of reason as the divinely implanted governor of the life of man, and the arbiter also in the interpretation of Holy Scripture," undercut both Calvinist predestination and Laudian reliance on ecclesiastical tradition.[1] It is true that Dissenters remained, and also that within the Church of England, after 1688, the High Church group differed violently from the "men of latitude."[2] But in reality this quarrel was not so much theological as political.[3] Tory churchmen, as well as Whig, ordinarily claimed to trust reason.

Reason was confidently trusted because as yet there had been no

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[1]Norman Sykes, Church and State in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge, 1934), p. 21.

[2]For a typical reproach, see "A Letter out of the Country to the Clergy in and about the City of London," in A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts (London, 1712), pp. 213-222.

[3]The essentially political basis of the High Church quarrel with the Whiggish churchmen is well developed by Sykes, Church and State . . . pp. 285-290. See also below, chap. IX.

serious challenge to religion from science, or any other field of inquiry. No conflict between science and religion will occur in the first half of the eighteenth century. Geology offered almost as little opposition to theology as did physics. Later in the century, the poet Cowper will be heard murmuring about the impudence of those who "drill and bore the solid earth" in order to prove God a liar. But this was not until 1760, at about which time modern geology was born.[4] Not until mid-century was the diluvian theory of the fossils seriously challenged, a theory which so comfortably adjusted Scripture to paleontology that Voltaire chose to regard fossils as an argument for Christianity.[5] Theories as to the origin of the earth were numerous and fanciful, but, until the Frenchmen (Buffon, Le Cat, Maillet) later in the century, they struggled to vindicate Genesis, and few suspected that this could not be accomplished. Approved by Locke and Newton was Whiston's New Theory of the Earth (1696), "wherein the creation of the world in six days, the universal deluge, and the general conflagration, as laid down in Holy Scripture, are shown to be perfectly agreeable to reason and philosophy." Thomas Burnet's earlier explanation was used by Charles Blount, the deist, to embarrass the defenders of Genesis.[6] Another "elegant romance"[7] which had a vogue but involved absurdities and en-

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[4]See H. H. Thomas, "The Rise of Geology and Its Influence on Contemporary Thought," Annals of Science, V (July 15, 1947), p. 332; 1760 is given as a key date.

[5]Andrew D. White, History of the Warfare between Science and Theology in Christendom, (New York, 1897), I, 222 and passim.

[6]Charles Blount, The Oracles of Reason (London, 1693); Thomas Burnet, The Theory of the Earth (2 vols., London, 1684-1690).

[7]Burnet, Whiston, and Woodward are discussed in Samuel Miller, Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century, I, 157 ff., along with other theories that followed. Perry Miller, "The End of the World," William and Mary Quarterly, April, 1951, discusses them engagingly, from a slightly different angle.

tailed a controversy was (1695) Dr. John Woodward's Essay toward a Natural History of the Earth; it argued that all geological strata and fossils were the consequence of the Flood. Woodward's hypothesis did not satisfy John Arbuthnot;[8] and it would seem that the more discriminating minds always entertained a certain uneasiness about the fossils.[9] But few suspected any real conflict with the Bible; it was assumed that a correct interpretation of nature and of the books of the Pentateuch would reconcile all differences, and meanwhile there were various ingenious "hypotheses" available to this end. These scientific theories squared very conveniently with Christian theology.[10]

This trial of Christianity, then, differed materially from later ordeals with which we are more familiar. Science was no great enemy. It seemed, indeed, a very great friend to religion. There had been a few doubts about the new universe. The disturbing notion was, of course, the plurality of worlds, which an orthodox clergyman in 1698 pronounced "impious, prophane, and unbecoming a Christian," though he was not prepared to say heretical.[11] The vastness and non-geocentric character of the new universe led sometimes to pessimism, but more often and increasingly to optimism, the latter rising to a triumphant crest in Newtonian

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[8]Lester M. Beattie, John Arbuthnot, Mathematician and Satirist (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), pp. 190 ff. Erasmus Warren and John Keill also entered the argument about Woodward's book.

[9]John Toland, the deist, endeavored to turn the fossils against Christianity; see his Pantheisticon.

[10]A striking example of a minister's use of science to prove original sin is in Isaac Watts' The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind (London, 1740). The earth was originally smooth, of uniform and equable climate, etc.; the Flood, a consequence of the Fall, brought such examples of divine displeasure as mountains, deserts, devouring animals, insects, etc.

[11]Josiah King, op. cit., pp. 191-193.

times.[12] The vastness of the universe did not trouble such men as Ralph Cudworth and Richard Bentley; they gloried in it.[13] And the question of size was overwhelmed by that of orderly design. True, the confutation of atheists by the appeal to Newton's universe soon became less exhilarating; for there were no atheists, and the argument was no good against the deists, who suggested that it eliminated the need for revealed religion—they accepted God willingly enough, but not Christianity's God. Newtonianism can be said to have established that frame of mind which began to doubt all miracles, all instances of special Providence. But it was not taken to be in conflict with Christianity, and remained in common use in Christian apologetics against whatever atheists there might be. . . . In biology, the fixity of species was, of course, assumed throughout the period, Linnaeus fortifying it in the second half of the century; evolution lay a good distance in the future.[14]

What were the areas within which the great debate took place? The religious radicals did not possess the weapons of "higher criticism," for the day of historical criticism was not yet. Biblical scholarship was indeed formidable within its limits, and something may well be said about it. The years from 1600 to 1660 had seen an extraordinary growth

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[12] See Douglas Bush, op. cit., Chap. IX, espec. pp. 275 ff.

[13] Grant McCulley, "The Seventeenth Century Doctrine of a Plurality of Worlds," Annals of Science, I (October 15, 1936), pp. 385-430. Also discussed in Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Mass., 1936).

[14] L. Cohen Rosenfield, "Un chapitre de l'histoire de l'animal-machine," Revue de littérature comparée, July-Sept., 1937, points out (p. 463) that Newtonianism reacted against a mechanistic tendency in Cartesianism on the vital as well as the material level; a spiritual force was at the bottom of all life.

of scholarship, stimulated by the rivalry of Calvinist and Jesuit.[15] From Geneva, from France, from Holland and Belgium there came into England the fruits of an international scholarly competition: the works of Scaliger, Heinsius, Grotius, Casaubon and many others were familiar to English students. England had already by 1690 produced scholars of the caliber of George Bull, Robert South, and John Fell, to name only a sampling, and in the next years was to develop many more, including the world-famed philologist Richard Bentley. John Mill produced in 1707 his notable new edition of the New Testament in Greek.[16] There were extremely learned commentators too numerous to mention: Whitby, Hickes, Allix, Clarke, Dodwell, Whiston, etc. Meanwhile works continued to flow in from abroad.[17] Important new advances were being made in textual criticism. These may be dated from the epochal works of the French Catholic, Richard Simon, "the father of Biblical criticism." The brilliant Oratorian, who quarreled with Bossuet over this strategy of confounding the Protestants by casting doubt on Scriptural certainty, was well known in England for his critical histories of the sacred writings.[18]

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[15]See Cambridge History of English Literature (London, 1911), VII, 345-346, where Foster Watson remarks that this scholarship was pursued "with an intensity of application unequalled before or since."

[16]F. H. A. Scrivener, A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament (London, 1894), II, 196 ff.

[17]Joseph Coppens, The Old Testament and the Critics (tr. E. A. Ryan and E. W. Tribbe; Paterson, 1942), pp. 5-8, lists continental influences before and at this time.

[18]A Critical History of the Old Testament, translated London, 1682; Critical Enquiries into the Various Editions of the Bible, 1684; A Critical History of the Text of the New Testament, 1689. Simon took the position that while the doctrinal parts of the Bible were divine, the historical parts were not—a most destructive doctrine. See Bolingbroke, Works, II, 203, for a deist's favorable opinion of Simon's thesis. Aldridge, op. cit., p. 363, deals with Shaftesbury's use of such ideas.

Here were the beginnings of modern Biblical criticism, and the deist debate would advance them a bit farther. English deism directly stimulated the great critical movement in Germany in the next century.[19] But as yet the weapons of scholarship were crude, and one may say that the whole furious controversy between deist and Christian about the "truth" or "falsity" of the Bible was based on premises now regarded as unscientific. Robert Boyle, as this chapter's epigraph indicates, knew very well that there was a textual problem, and so did other educated men. Textual criticism was beginning to advance. The significance of the famous Boyle-Bentley dispute over the Phalaris letters (1699) was that "historians thereafter began to raise for all the writings of antiquity the preliminary question of their origin."[20] But textual criticism must of course be distinguished from historical. For example, Newton's Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel . . . (published 1732) are bold in textual criticism, i.e. in suggesting that errors may have crept into the received version of the Bible; but the great scientist, a pious Christian, staunchly defended the literal fulfillment of prophecies, and it would have required more knowledge than even he possessed to discover that the Book of Daniel was actually written later than the events it "foretells."

Cheyne observes that in the eighteenth century only Warburton, Lowth and Geddes showed "any talent or inclination for a criticism of the Old

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[19]See August Tholuck, Vermischte Schriften (Hamburg, 1839), II, section 3; G. V. Lechler, Geschichte des englischen Deismus (Stuttgart, Tubingen, 1841), pp. 447-452; Andrew Brown, "John Locke and the Religious Aufklärung," Review of Religion, XIII (January, 1949), 126-154; Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Princeton, N.J., 1951), p. 175 and n.

[20]Coppens, op. cit., p. 6.

Testament which is not merely concerned with various readings of the text." And only Geddes, the Scotch Catholic who wrote near the end of the century, "can properly be called a founder of criticism."[21] Textual criticism of the New Testament advanced, but the approach remained textual, not historical. Of the old exegesis Coppens justly remarks that it looked upon the Sacred Books "much as upon documents fallen from heaven," and that it "virtually denied [better, failed to have any notion of] any process of development in Judeo-Christian revelation."[22] Not until Conyers Middleton, towards the end of our period, was the idea of relating the Bible to secular literature of the same period explored. The problem of scholarship, then, was almost purely one of ascertaining and expounding the meaning of the text, not of discovering the origin and date of it.

Roughly, then, these were the limits within which the debate took place. The deists were not ignorant men. Though few belonged in the highest ranks of creative scholarship (Bentley, Clarke and Warburton were not deists, though Conyers Middleton perhaps was), they were abreast of the learning of their time, and used it in order to embarrass orthodoxy. Richard Bentley, famous for his textual criticism, was the very pious author of the first Boyle Lecture (1692) on "The Folly of Atheism and . . . Deism" and later of a famous reply to the deist Collins. But Bentley was sceptical of many things in the Bible; and was he justified in complaining that "comparatively ignorant and unlearned writers, I

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[21] T. K. Cheyne, Founders of Old Testament Criticism (London, 1893), pp. 1-3.

[22] Coppens, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

men such as Collins, Tindal, Toland, Morgan, and Chubb" had gone on to "grosser degrees of infidelity"?[23] These deists were, it is true, the natural radicals and iconoclasts. Committed to a religion of nature, they suspected that the whole Christian revelation was no more than a tissue of lies and fables; but they had to prove it. They were prepared to seize upon any contradiction or inconsistency they could find in the Christian case. This might be in theology, in Scripture, in ethics or (more rarely) in science. The deist as scholar and as reasoner was essentially an opportunistic special pleader, looking for anything he could find to wound what he felt (largely on a priori grounds) to be a fraud. He did not have the weapons of modern scholarship, though he might make some shrewd guesses; nor did he have the modern critical outlook which seeks not to expose a conspiracy but to understand a growth. Orthodoxy, in any event, had to defend itself on those grounds, committed as it was to the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, their perfect correspondence to natural truth, and their complete conformity to "reason." "To see the hand of God as clearly in a long, providential development as in a sudden miracle"[24] might have been possible then if they had been able to think of it that way. But they were not, and neither were their adversaries.

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[23] Whiston, Memoirs, I, 109. On Bentley see the biography by J. H. Monk (2 vols., 1833) and M. L. W. Laistner, "Richard Bentley: 1742-1942," Studies in Philology, XXXIX, 510 ff.

[24] W. Robertson Smith, in the preface to the translation of J. Wellhausen's Prolegomena to the History of Israel (London, 1885). The words seem to sum up the faith of modern religious scholars, who have abandoned belief in the literal inspiration of the Old Testament books to discover a deeper miracle, the historical development of Israel from savagery to spiritual grandeur.

2.

No one would make the mistake of thinking that all the criticisms of Christianity brought forward in the eighteenth century were new. A few random examples will suffice: (a) Shaftesbury's ethical criticisms of Christianity are to be found in the Renaissance writer Pietro Pomponazzi. The latter clearly derived from Stoic and Epicurean sources; and those ideas, the relics of Christianity's first great debate, were well known to educated Englishmen.[25] (b) In the Middle Ages, Averroism was akin to deism in holding reason capable of full religious truth, revelation being unnecessary except as a crutch for weaker minds.[26] (c) The Encomium Moriae of Erasmus had been deistic in its rejection of any elaborate theology in favor of a simple, ethical religion. To seek the origins of deism is a precarious task; it has been well said that "deism of a kind may be said to have been alive since thought began."[27] Lord Herbert of Cherbury introduced such ideas early in the seventeenth century, at which time they were also known in France, but it is unwise to credit him with too much originality. One student has made a case for the influence of Montaigne.[28] Tides of infidelity had started flowing into France and England, to a degree, from Italy, during the latter six-

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[25]Aldridge, op. cit., points to the Stoic origins of Shaftesbury's leading ideas.

[26]See Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (London, 1948).

[27]Douglas Bush, op. cit., p. 322.

[28]Pierre Villey, "L'influence de Montaigne sur Charles Blount et sur les Déistes anglais," Revue de seizième siècle, I (1913).

teenth century.[29]

If anything was new in this eighteenth century controversy, it was provided by what real knowledge about the Bible scholarship had made available, and, second, by the Newtonian frame of reference. Mainly, the debate owed its origin to social and political factors: the reaction against fanaticism, the achievement of political stability and freedom, and England's commercial prosperity. The eighteenth century in English history is an age of repose, in which men had time to debate religious questions, but few reasons to fight over them. It was the "climate of opinion" and the social environment that became favorable after 1689 to the wide propagation of deism.

Professor Lovejoy long ago pointed out the close similarities between deism and the neo-classical spirit in art and literature.[30] At the root of both lay the conviction that nature is harmonious, orderly, rational—and man the same. The positive side of deism, lending strength and courage to its critique of Christianity, was a peculiar synthesis of the age.

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[29]George T. Buckley, Atheism in the English Renaissance (Chicago, 1932). It need hardly be added that Socinianism and Arminianism, which arose in the seventeenth century, were hardly more than new names for old heresies, if heresies they were. Arianism and Pelagianism were the older versions of very similar doctrines.

[30]"The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," Modern Philology, XXIX (February, 1932), 281-299.

CHAPTER IV

ARIANS AND SOCINIANS

Of the Trinity to reason
Leads to license or to treason.—Adam of St. Victor.

Faith is not built on disquisitions vain;
The things we must believe are few and plain.—Dryden.

1.

"The holy Scripture is to me, and always will be, the constant guide of my assent," wrote John Locke. "I shall presently condemn and quit any opinion of mine, as soon as I am shown that it is contrary to any revelation in the Holy Scripture."[1] But within these limits there was room for basic disagreement. There were some important points on which Scripture was all too vague. In the new atmosphere of reasonably free debate after 1638, the first challenge to orthodoxy came from those who could not find in the Bible, or Reason, sanction for the Trinitarian doctrine. In this controversy both sides claimed to stand on the Bible as interpreted by right reason.

In the first phase of the debate, the enemy was not considered formidable. The unitarians of the 1630's and 1690's were chiefly Socinians.[2] The heresy that took the form of unorthodox opinions about the Trinity

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[1] Letter to Stillingfleet, Works (1823), IV, 96.

[2] H. J. McLachlan, The Story of a Nonconformist Library (Manchester, 1923), pp. 53-67, points out minor differences between this group and the Polish Socinians, but concedes that they were "in the main Socinians." But Stephen Nye, perhaps the intellectual leader of this group, soon reached a position best described as Sabellian.

was almost as old as Christianity; older, neo-Arians like William Whiston would say, than orthodox Athanasian doctrine, which they considered a third-century perversion of "primitive" Christianity. Revival of interest in it accompanied the Reformation, though the great reformers early repudiated and condemned it (Servetus, burnt by Calvin, became the chief of unitarian martyrs.) It had been preached surreptitiously in England since the time of Elizabeth.[3] Although we must trace its open discussion in England from about 1675, it became a matter of prominent interest in the 1690's.[4] So scandalous did the contention become that the Blasphemy Act of 1698 attempted, unsuccessfully, to halt it. The Archbishop of Canterbury was forced to issue a directive against Anglican clerics of high renown quarreling over the Trinity.[5] The writings of a verysmall and obscure group of heretics had exposed a serious flaw in orthodoxy's defenses. These Socinian tracts did cease about 1703, but the heresy broke out anew shortly, in a slightly different form, reaching a climax by 1721, by which time the "Arian" movement seemed to have infected

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[3]Earl M. Wilbur, A History of Unitarianism (Cambridge, Mass., 1945), deals authoritatively with Continental unitarianism from the early Reformation to the latter seventeenth century. H. J. McLachlan's Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England (London, 1951) is by the leading student of early English unitarianism.

[4]John Biddle (1615-1662), imprisoned many times and banished once (by Cromwell) for his outspoken anti-trinitarian views, can claim to be the courageous founder of modern English unitarianism. In the main it was his disciples who carried on the movement, with contacts abroad. Suggestive of the links between Polish and English Socinianism is an article by McLachlan in Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society, VII, 255-268, "New Light on an Old Unitarian Circle." Francis Cheynell's Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianism was printed in 1643, but the author was an alarmist who was prepared to accuse even Laud of Socinianism; see Krapp, op. cit., pp. 89-93.

[5]Carpenter, Tenison, pp. 297 ff.

Anglican and Dissenter alike.[6]

The outburst of Socinian tracts in the 1690's came from an obscure and not very learned little group, who were nevertheless zealous and fairly shrewd in debate; they were aided by at least one wealthy patron.[7] They were sneered at for their ignorance and generally reviled as "a pestilent crew of subtile and insinuating heretics."[8] Yet orthodoxy did not ignore them, but rallied eagerly to confute them. An age whose favorite religious textbooks bore such titles as The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion (Robert Jenkin) was not likely to retreat from a trial by argument. It was also a fact that the writing of learned treatises contra infideles was a way of gaining attention and perhaps promotion, as the preface to more than one churchman's book makes clear; "the dissection of a deist was a recognized title to obtaining preferment."[9] So every heretical tract always called forth many answers, a thing frequently deplored by thoughtful Christians as only giving publicity to what otherwise might have passed unnoticed. These abundant

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[6]J. H. Colligan, The Arian Movement in England (Manchester, 1913). See also Robert Wallace, Anti-Trinitarian Biography (London, 1850), 3 vols., a useful compilation with pro-unitarian bias. John Hunt's Religious Thought in England deals with this topic in vol. II, chap. IX.

[7]This was the notable philanthropist Thomas Firmin, who had been influenced by Biddle. Luke Milbourne, Mysteries in Religion Vindicated (London, 1692), speaks of "men of mighty names and interests" behind the Socinians (p. 781) but probably meant only Firmin. Firmin's death was the chief reason for the stopping of the tracts. See Joseph Cornish, The Life of Thomas Firmin (London, 1780), pp. 121-130.

[8]Milbourne, op. cit., p. 1; for typical opinions of their ignorance see James Harrington, An Account of the Proceedings of the . . . Late Visitation of Exeter College in Oxford (London, 1690), pp. 22-23; Isaac Watts, Works (London, 1811), VI, 202.

[9]Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, (London, 1876), I, 86; cf. James Sutherland, op. cit., p. 113, for letter of Archbishop King to Swift, advising the latter to write on some theological subject as the best means of advancing himself in the Church.

answers, moreover, were apt to discover the defenders of the faith contradicting each other. That was what happened here in the trinitarian controversy. Honest men rejoice when thieves fall out—but also vice versa. Trinitarians rejoiced that their enemies were divided, between Arian and Socinian, and thus might cancel each other out.[10] But far greater was the advantage that accrued to heterodoxy when defenders of orthodoxy stumbled and contradicted each other. The Trinity undoubtedly suffered more from Bishop Sherlock's defense than from Stephen Nye's attack.

Before going any farther it may be well to indicate the difficulty and the importance of the question. The Trinity was to become the most perplexing problem of all that plagued the church in this era of rationalism. It was never settled, and it led honest Christians to despair. Arians and Socinians, wrote that usually confident assailer of heresies Charles Leslie, were "the most subtile and hardest to be detected, of any of the Christian heretics."[11] It is clear that not a few of the moderate, rational clergy of Restoration times had sailed close to the rocks of heresy on this question.[12] Bishop Sherlock, in trying to si-

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[10]Milbourne, op. cit., p. 541.

[11]Leslie, Theological Works, IV, 22. "I wish there had been no occasion of reviving this controversy," he wrote uneasily in 1708. The indefatigable Leslie was the Tory, High Church foe of all Dissenters (especially Quakers), Hanoverians, Latitudinarians, and heretics of every hue. Jacobite and Non-Juror though he was, his weapons were always those of rational persuasion, never the appeal to authority or blind faith. The author of the Rehearsal honestly considered the Church of England to be a bulwark against Popery, though his Whig opponents accused him of Romanism, falsely.

[12]Thus Edward Fowler wished in 1689 to revise the prayer book, making the Athanasian Creed optional, and was a friend of Thomas Firmin's, though he wrote against the Socinians.

lence these despised Socinians, slipped into one of the many pitfalls which beset one trying to "explain" the Trinity, and was himself rebuked and silenced by his own university.[13] The formidable William Whiston, whose sincerity and erudition none could dispute, created some consternation when he became converted to Arianism; but it was Samuel Clarke, in the Latitudinarian tradition, who wrote what was at once the mildest and the most devastating of attacks on the Athanasian formula.[14] As an example of a devout Christian and honest searcher after truth whom this question reduced to utter misery, we may take the eminent Nonconformist minister Isaac Watts. Watts puzzled over the Trinity for twenty years, writing book after book. But in the end he had to admit that he had only "learned more of my own ignorance"; and his posthumous Solemn Address to . . . God is a remarkable tract wherein the good clergyman is

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[13]William Sherlock, A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity (London, 1690). The sharp replies were by Robert South, especially Tritheism Charged upon Dr. Sherlock's New Notion of the Trinity (London, 1695). Both men were distinguished elder scholars and theologians of the Established Church. Sherlock was considered to have fallen into tritheism; in his explanation there are evidently three distinct beings, though sharing a common consciousness. The real position insisted upon by orthodoxy may be given in Daniel Waterland's definition: "Each divine person is an individual, intelligent agent; but as subsisting in one undivided substance, they are all together in that respect but one undivided intelligent agent." (A Defense of Some Queries . . . Cambridge, 1719 p. 350.)

[14]Both Cambridge scholars and disciples of Isaac Newton, these two foremost of the anti-trinitarians differed in temperament, and eventually Whiston reproached Clarke (unfairly) with cowardice. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) was generally regarded, after his Boyle Lectures of 1704-05, as the foremost English metaphysician, succeeding to Locke's mantle. Disliked by both High Churchmen and deists, his thorough-going rationalism in ethics and theology attempted to prove the existence of God and to derive morality from reason, and he made a sensation at Cambridge when he brilliantly defended the thesis, for his D.D., that "no article of the Christian faith is opposed to right reason." By nature mild and rational, he was yet deeply devout in the quiet way of Locke and Newton. On Whiston, see note 26.

driven to reproach his Maker bitterly for leaving him in such a quandary: "Surely I ought to know the God whom I worship, whether he be one pure and simple or whether thou art a threefold deity. . . ."[15] Such was the obscurity in which the Bible and reason had left the matter.

But however difficult the orthodox version of the Trinity might be to establish, it was felt to be indispensable. The dispute might be thought trivial, but much really was at stake, as Sherlock pointed out early in the debate. As he put it,

> The fundamental mystery of the Christian religion is the stupendous love of God in giving his own Son . . . for the redemption of mankind. If Socinianism be true, God did not give any son he had before, but made an excellent man, whom he was pleased to call his only begotten son.[16]

Socinianism, which frankly made of Christ a creature, subverted the whole Christian scheme of salvation.[17] Socinianism tended logically to slough off all dogma and stress only conduct: "a good life is of absolute necessity to salvation, but a right belief in those points that have always been controverted . . . is in no degree necessary."[18] Since almost all doctrines have been controverted by someone, Sherlock noted, heresy becomes entirely harmless to the extreme unitarian and only good

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[15]Arthur P. Davis, Isaac Watts (New York, 1943), pp. 120-121. See Watts' Works, vol. VI, for his writings on the Trinity between 1722 and 1746. "Sometimes I seem to have carried reason with me even to the camp of Socinus," he wrote in 1753. But he did not want to.

[16]William Sherlock, op. cit., p. 238.

[17]Socinian doctrine held that Christ was created by God in the womb of the Virgin and called his son; then raised and exalted. ("Adoptionism.") While Arians accepted the divinity of Christ but not his deity, Socinians did not believe in either. W. G. Scroggie, A Guide to the Gospels (London, 1948), pp. 525-531, gives a brief account of all the various heresies and confusions about the person of Christ.

[18]Sherlock, quoting the Socinian author of Brief Notes on the Creed of St. Athanasius (1689). This was one of the tracts printed by Firmin, authorship in doubt. There is a thorough textual discussion of the tracts in McLachlan, Story of a Nonconformist Library.

works matter. There is little doubt that this analysis is correct. Original sin must be rejected, along with predestination; God forgives man freely and rewards him for his own actions. The Atonement is not regarded as a satisfaction or payment to the justice of God but as "only an oblation to the mercy of God"; God could pardon without satisfaction, if he wished.[19] Socinians were entirely orthodox in accepting the Biblical narratives, e.g. the Resurrection and other miracles. But the making of Christ a creature displaces the vital emphasis from faith to works, from salvation by divine grace to salvation by worthy conduct.[20]

The orthodox were firmly convinced, and no doubt rightly so, that Arianism was only a subtler form of the same heresy, leading to the same results. (The older doctrine of Arius, revived chiefly by Whiston, granted that Christ is divine and existed prior to the Creation, but held that he had been created by God, out of nothing, in the beginning, and therefore the Father alone is God.) Dr. Clarke's solution, which was to leave the question open on the grounds that the Bible did not clearly define the relationship between Father and Son, was just as unacceptable. Arians and Socinians were regarded as the same thing virtually: they agreed "in that one impious error, in denying the Divinity of our Saviour, a heresy detestable to every sober and intelligent Christian."[21] Actually

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[19]McLachlan, Nonconformist Library, pp. 80-81; Wilbur, op. cit., pp. 414 ff. See also George B. Stevens, The Christian Doctrine of Salvation (New York, 1905), pp. 157 ff.

[20]Other passages on the significance of the question may be found in Joseph Pyke, op. cit., chap. X; Daniel Waterland, A Vindication of Christ's Divinity (Cambridge and London, 1719), pp. 206 ff. Also Samuel Worcester's classic statement later, in America, A Letter to the Rev. William E. Channing (Boston, 1805), quoted in Joseph Haroutunian, Piety Versus Moralism (New York, 1932), which lucidly explains the stakes here.

[21]Milbourne, op. cit., p. 780.

the Arians did not deny Christ's divinity, strictly speaking, but they did make him subordinate to and separate from the Father Deity, and orthodoxy always assumed that Arianism no less than Socinianism made of Christ a creature. Undoubtedly this view was well founded, in that Arianism could not find any middle ground between the extremes: to make of Christ anything less than a person consubstantial with God was to strike at the traditional Christian scheme of things.[22] Nor should Clarke have been surprised when he was denounced as a heretic, for to leave this important tenet in any doubt was obviously, for orthodoxy, as good as giving up the game.

The unitarian case was equally strong. One can easily understand Dr. Watts' confusion, which became very general as the controversy wore on. The case rested, first, on that couplet of Dryden's quoted as an epigraph for this chapter; on that, and on Chillingworth's famous reduction of Christianity to the Bible and the Bible only. The impulse to get rid of theological abstrusities was a fundamental one for this age, which Socinians and deists did not create but only exploited. It was a profound reaction against too much theology in Puritan times, and it expressed the neo-classic urge to lucidity. Get rid of the "metaphysics," this spirit demanded, and reduce that which we must believe to the "few and plain" basic truths, available to all whether learned or not. (Repeatedly we meet the argument that God scarcely intended salvation for the Doctors alone.) These truths are to be found in Scripture—where else?—clearly writ, and all the rest is irrelevant.

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[22]This argument is well presented by Daniel Waterland, Vindication, pp. 203 ff.

"Shall my faith depend on Plato's ideas, Aristotle's subtilities . . . and metaphysical abstractions more unintelligible to poor men than the tongue of angels?" asks an early Socinian.[23] He thrust here at the weakness of trinitarians. They could never satisfactorily prove that their doctrine was plainly scriptural; it was, on the face of it, contrary to logic, and they labored in vain to make it seem logical; and they were compelled to defend it by "metaphysical abstractions," if not by appealing irrationally to the authority of tradition. On the accepted grounds of the Bible and reason, they found themselves weak. Moreover the unitarians succeeded fairly well in putting the burden of proof on trinitarian shoulders. Waterland might argue that it was the other way: if these innovators could not make out a clear case, men had better remain on familiar ground.[24] But this was not as strong as the persistent unitarian argument that anything in serious doubt, anything not plainly scriptural, ought to be left optional. Bury's Naked Gospel, the work which really set off the controversy in the 1690's, brought forward this argument at the start: here is a "mischievous controversy" which we may silence by making it no test of Christian orthodoxy.[25] On these grounds, already stated long before by Chillingworth ("The doctrine of Arius is

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[23]McLachlan, Nonconformist Library, p. 79.

[24]Vindication, pp. 481 ff. Daniel Waterland (1683-1740) was recognized by 1720 as the successor to George Bull and Robert South as the leading Anglican expert on the Trinity. For a list of his writings see John Nichols, Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century (London, 1812), I, 214-215. His Critical History of the Athanasian Creed was the standard work for more than a century. No mystic, he always stuck to the objective evidences, despite his quarrels with what he regarded as the excessive rationalizing of Dr. Clarke, his great adversary not only on the Trinity but also on the ontological argument for God's existence.

[25]Arthur Bury, The Naked Gospel (London, 1690), pp. 56-57.

either a truth, or at least no damnable heresy"), unitarians always stood ready to make peace. Their opponents understandably insisted that this would not be a reasonable compromise but actually a unitarian victory. Whiston pronounced the orthodox doctrine to be "no better than the heretical notions" of "those ignorant and pernicious heretics, Marcellus and Athanasius, contrary to the sense of the body of the Christian Church in their times."[26] But even Whiston did not set up a church, though he did organise a Society for the Restoration of Primitive Christianity. It was reasonable, it seemed, to ask that so difficult and clouded a question be not included in those items of necessary belief "few and plain."

2.

The unitarians must be judged to have had the best of the argument, on the grounds as chosen. The Socinians of the 1690's and then the furious Arianism of Whiston did not do much more than arouse a sense of uneasiness; however, they prepared the ground for the formidable Dr. Clarke. His contribution was wholly a matter of Bible scholarship. He asked only one question: what does the Bible say? And he gave the definitive answer. The anti-trinitarian position became that of Clarke. Years later Bishop Watson will repeat the position:

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[26]Whiston, Memoirs, I, 173. William Whiston (1667-1752) was eccentric, unbalanced, uncompromising, and undoubtedly able. He sacrificed a brilliant scientific career as Newton's successor at Cambridge to pursue his theological heresies, which were numerous but centered in the effort to restore "primitive Christianity" (he soon became unorthodox on baptism also, joining the General Baptists.) He was a kind of Augustan Diogenes, known for his outspoken honesty and his fearless rebuking of all who strayed from the path of righteousness. Along with Clarke, he became a prime favorite of the philosophical Queen Caroline.

> We do not object to the doctrine of the Trinity because it is above our reason, and we cannot apprehend it; but we object to it because we cannot find that it is either literally contained in any passage of Holy Writ, or can by sound criticism be deduced from it.[27]

Socinianism convinced few on scriptural grounds. Such writers as Sherlock, Bull, and Whitby answered it effectively, and in fact Clarke's famous work showed the weakness of the Socinian case.[28] Socinianism did raise the question of reason and religion. The word Socinian came to be loosely used to mean an excessive rationaliser, generally. In Charles Leslie's dialogue the conclusion is that the Socinian will have no "mysteries," while Christianity, as Luke Milbourne had said, recognises that some things are above human understanding.[29] Socinians argued that after a thing had been revealed it should be clear; if not, what was the purpose of the revelation? Defenders of the Trinity answered that some things remain "mysteries." Socinians agreed that some things are unintelligible—the Resurrection, for example—but nothing should be contrary to reason, as they claimed the Trinity was, since it involved the preposterous proposition that three is one and one is three. Orthodoxy, agreeing that there is nothing in religion really contrary to reason, labored to explain the Trinity as a logical possibility. In

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[27]Quoted by Sykes, Church and State in England, p. 353.

[28]A number of passages in Clarke's Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity reject the Socinian view of Christ. Daniel Whitby, the noted Arminian and a famed commentator (Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament, 1703) assailed the Socinians, eventually accepted Clarke's view of the question (see his posthumous Last Thoughts, 1728.) A fairly able Socinian rejoinder is Observations on Dr. Sherlock's Answer to the Brief History of the Unitarians (London, 1691) (Stephen Nye?)

[29]Leslie, The Socinian Controversy Discussed; Milbourne, Mysteries in Religion Vindicated, pp. 51 ff.; cf. Observations on Dr. Sherlock's Answer . . . , p. 4.

this inconclusive debate a few things, at least, were clear: that this generation was hardly content to leave the question as the great Aquinas had done, for one thing;[30] and that Socinians, while failing to prove their own case, had set up some thorny problems for the orthodox.

Samuel Clarke's work had the merit of concentrating on a specific and vital point: is the orthodox version of the Trinity clearly given in the New Testament? Prior to this, orthodox efforts to rationalize the Trinity had proved unfortunate. The damage done by Sherlock's mistake is well known.[31] If even learned divines stumbled, this must indeed be a question too cloudy to make a requirement of faith, and so the unitarians had scored a point. But the vast majority of Christians, whether Anglican or Dissenting, rejected Socinianism. It was too radical and too dubiously supported to win support except among the fringe of "freethinkers" who were shortly to take up the more exciting idea of deism. Arianism was slightly different: somewhat more conservative and also better supported, as by the undoubtedly erudite Whiston. The earlier Socinian group apparently did not care for Arianism, and few Arians became deists.[32] Still, while Whiston's studies in Primitive Christianity commanded respect, his inferences were generally regarded

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[30] Summa Contra Gentiles, Book I Chap. III: "For certain things that are true about God wholly surpass the capability of human reason, for instance that God is three and one. . . ."

[31] The contemporary ballad, "The Battle Royal," has been often quoted; see Wallace, op. cit., I, 351. While the "fools" prated about the Trinity, religion "took her flight" and "ne'er was heard of since." The Letter to a Convocation Man (1697) says "You cannot imagine the mischievous effects, which these opinions and heresies of late published and vindicated have produced among the laisty. . . ."

[32] See McLachlan, Nonconformist Library, pp. 65, 68; Colligan, op. cit., pp. 137-140. Whiston (Memoirs, I, 276 ff.) disapproved of Socinianism and thought it led to deism. Stephen Nye, in 1715, attacked Clarke.

as too extreme. "The pious, learned, but unfortunate Mr. Whiston" he was called by one whom Clarke later persuaded, and this about summed up the consensus of balanced opinion.[33]

It remained for Clarke to show the question in a truer light—which was that the Bible unfortunately failed to support any of the theories about the Trinity. Clearly the Church wanted no more discussion of this embarrassing question, and Clarke was to be silenced as Sherlock had been. But he clearly and eloquently showed the need for a thorough discussion of it. There had been, he pointed out, a great uneasiness about the Athanasian Creed for some time, on the part of great and learned divines who could hardly be styled heretics: he could cite Tillotson, Cudworth, Taylor, Hammond, and other illustrious names among the seventeenth century clergy.[34] In the introduction to his famous work he pointed out that Protestantism demands that each individual Christian must "of necessity at last understand with his own understanding, and believe with his own, not another's, faith"; and that the only grounds of such faith must be the patient, intelligent scrutiny of Scripture.[35] "The peace and unity of the Church," he repeated later,

> can be assured but two ways: either by that of charity, and allowing learned men a liberty of examining things, which is the Protestant and Christian method; or by introducing with force an universal ignorance, which is the method of Popery.[36]

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[33]Clarke, Works, IV, 566. On the engaging but eccentric Whiston, see Hunt, op. cit., III, 13-20; Nichols, Anecdotes, I, 494-506. His Primitive Christianity Revived (4 vols., London, 1711) and such books as Athanasius Convicted of Forgery (London, 1712) indicate his stress on the beliefs of early Christians. They drew numerous answers.

[34]Works, IV, 205-209.

[35]The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity, first published in 1712, in vol. IV of Works (1738). This text is a later, revised one.

[36]Ibid., p. 339. See also Benjamin Hoadly's preface to this edition of Clarke's works, I, vii.

So, in the spirit of Chillingworth, he proposed to search and examine the Bible, "eschewing abstract and metaphysical reasonings."

This scholarly and non-dogmatic approach had a history before Clarke, whose main contribution was thoroughness. In this same spirit Locke and Newton had secretly dabbled in the question, aiming "to purge the truth of things spurious." Other scholars than Clarke made contributions; particularly, the Irish Presbyterian preacher Thomas Emlyn had by 1715 thoroughly examined the important question of the authenticity of I John 5:7, which Newton had secretly challenged.[37] How heavily orthodoxy leaned on that one support may be seen from a reading of Dr. South's sermon on the subject, and from later attempts to defend this text.[38]

But Clarke undertook an examination of every New Testament text (1251 in all) bearing in any way on the question. Although his opponents were able to turn up some minor errors, Clarke was undoubtedly right in claiming that none of these affected his major conclusions. The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity was easily "the most memorable work in the history of the Arian movement"[39]—except that Clarke was

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[37] A Full Inquiry into the Original Authority of the Text 1 John V, 7 (London, 1715). Accepted as decisive by Clarke (Works, IV, 121, 369.) Emlyn, persecuted in Ireland for his unorthodox views, was a notable figure in the anti-trinitarian movement.

[38] Robert South, Sermons, I, 366-367; cf. Joseph Pyke, An Impartial View . . . , pp. 107 ff. David Martin of Utrecht entered the lists against Emlyn in 1719, and Edmund Calamy defended the text in Thirteen Sermons concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity (London, 1721). Its spuriousness has long since been generally conceded.

[39] Called so by Colligan, op. cit. It has even been called "the theological work of the century," but this is a bold claim. Decisive and thorough as it was, the book lacked the scope and originality of Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses, or Middleton's Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, to say nothing of Jonathan Edwards' Freedom of the Will.

really no Arian, any more than he was a Socinian. He indicted the Athanasian Creed as un-scriptural, but he could find in Scripture no support for the Arian version either, much less the Socinian. He properly denied the accusation of Arianism, but he did wish to abandon those portions of the Anglican articles and liturgy that embraced the Athanasian Creed, and he wanted to return to the simpler creed of primitive Christianity. As against the Arians, he held Scripture to teach that Son and Spirit have existed since the beginning; on the other hand, he found nothing to substantiate the Nicene dogma that Son and Spirit are substantially one with God the Father:

> They are both therefore worthy of censure; both they who on the one hand presume to affirm that the Son was made out of nothing, and they who, on the other hand, affirm that he is the self-existent substance.

God the Father alone is underived, unoriginated; the Son and Holy Ghost derive their being and attributes from the Father and by an act of his will, somehow—but we are nowhere told exactly how.[40]

In effect Clarke had charged all orthodox (Athanasian) Christians with the error of Sabellianism, or allowing no separate identity to the three persons of the Trinity ("which is the same," he declared, turning the tables on orthodoxy, "with Socinianism."[41]) He had clearly supported the unitarian position that there is no Scriptural proof for making Christ consubstantial with the Father. He could not understand the orthodox position as Biblical; it was, he said, derived from Scholastic metaphysics, which he deplored. In the ensuing controversy he

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[40]Works, IV, 205-206; 328; 475; Part II, Proposition XIV.

[41]Ibid., Proposition XXIII.

continued to protest that his adversaries got their meaning not from simple Scripture but from "hypotheses" of the fourth and fifth centuries or from "Scholastic notions" of later times.[42] Clarke used the testimony of the early fathers much, but only as witnesses whose evidence had a good deal of value on Scriptural interpretations because they were close to the subject; Waterland, the Clarkites complained, used "metaphysical hypotheses or opinions of the Fathers" as sacrosanct authority.[43] Clarke, finding no definite Biblical statement to confirm the Athanasian theory, would leave the question open, a non-essential of faith on which each man might reach his own private conclusion. We may amplify our previous statement that the unitarians won this debate by saying that Clarke was unanswerable on the basis of the Bible as strictly interpreted. His foes, wishing to save the Nicene Creed, did not by any means concede this, yet they were forced in the end to appeal to the authority of tradition.[44]

To which the Clarkites made the obvious retort, this is Romanism.[45] The indictment against Clarke by the Lower House of the (Anglican) Convocation simply declared that Clarke's books tended "to substitute the author's private conceits, and arbitrary interpretations of Scripture, in the room of those Catholic doctrines, which the Church professes and maintains, as warranted both by Scripture and Antiquity."[46] The appeal

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[42] Ibid., p. 393. The writer here, as in the next quotation, is John Jackson, who was used by Clarke as his spokesman after 1714.

[43] Ibid., p. 453.

[44] Waterland, Vindication, Queries XXVIII and XXIX.

[45] John Jackson, A Reply to Dr. Waterland's Defense of His Queries (London, 1722), pp. 503, 520; Clarke, Works, IV, 525.

[46] Ibid., p. 547.

to antiquity left Clarke unimpressed, and in replies to Dr. Wells and Robert Nelson he repeated his defense of reason and free enquiry, while arguing forcefully that any other road leads to Hobbism, since authority will be determined by force or convenience.[47] But the more timid were now genuinely alarmed at the havoc Clarke's way might work.

The debate, indeed, "soon grew very warm," as Clarke's friend Benjamin Hoadly remarked, after Clarke's book. It was attacked vehemently. But Clarke found followers as neither the outcast Socinians nor the "unfortunate Mr. Whiston" had.[48] He himself, subjected to ecclesiastical discipline in the famous proceedings of 1714, submitted to the extent of stating that he intended to write no more on the subject. But this was not really a surrender, and did not satisfy the conservative clergy.[49] The debate went on, and Clarke kept in close touch with such defenders of his views as John Jackson.

3.

After the Established Church passed a crisis somewhat uneasily in 1714 with the equivocal disciplining of Clarke, there followed an out-

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[47] Ibid., pp. 240, 261-262.

[48] Whiston's disciples were prone to stray off towards deism, earning his denunciation. Thomas Chubb and Thomas Woolston both paused at the Primitive Christianity society on the road to deism. Whiston never reached the respectable, whereas Clarke did.

[49] See Ibid., pp. 540-557, for material on the proceedings. Clarke did not recant, but explained that he was content to rest on what he had written—which was enough. His disciple John Jackson, who carried on the debate and refused to subscribe to the Articles, lost his chance of promotion thereby. Jackson as well as Clarke always argued against the deists, while conceding their right to free speech and a fair answer. The Clarke school was notable at all times for fairness and moderation in debate. For a memoir of Jackson see Nichols, Anecdotes, II, 519-531.

burst among the less disciplined Dissenters of what Dr. Calamy was forced to record as "bitter animosity and contention," culminating in the famous struggle at Salter's Hall; writings "swarmed from the press."[50] With one side shouting against persecution and the other against heresy, the Dissenters voted by the narrowest of margins against requiring subscription to a trinitarian article. The key figure in this celebrated affair, James Peirce of Exeter, had been converted to anti-trinitarianism by Clarke, and the latter's book was undoubtedly the cause of setting off this outbreak of "Arianism," with "frightful consequences of it among our religious people."[51] The noise at the 1719 synod, and the innumerable pamphlets, added little to the clarification of the question. But the issue was a vital one for all Dissenters, completely committed to a rational (i.e. non-authoritarian) religion.

One result was to shatter the precarious "happy union" of Presbyterian and Independent. The Presbyterians were mostly on the anti-subscription side of the vote at Salter's Hall, along with some General (Arminian) Baptists, the latter having been the first to embrace formally a liberal position on the Trinity. The Presbyterians were influenced mainly by their traditional interest in "comprehension," which meant reducing dogmatic requirements to a minimum; at any rate they here took the liberal path. "By the middle of the eighteenth century most of the principal Presbyterian ministers and congregations had silently discarded

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[50]Calamy, Own Life, I, 407-419.

[51]Defoe, Writings (ed. Lee), II, 129-130. Peirce of Exeter was so eloquent and saintly a minister that he contributed no little to removing some of the obloquy from anti-trinitarianism within Dissenting circles. On the other side a leader was the intrepid Whig Calvinist Thomas Bradbury; see his Sermons (London, 1762).

the old doctrine of the Trinity."[52] The Independents, along with the Particular Baptists, were more loyal to the Trinity; but Arianism certainly had a strong foothold within Dissent.[53]

After 1720 the debate lost its heat. The coming of deism may be suggested as a reason. But opposition to the trinitarian articles did not die. Within the Established Church, the movement to revise the Articles after Clarke's suggestions carried momentum down nearly to the end of the century. It was strenuously debated in 1750-51 and again in 1772 at the time of the Feathers Tavern petition, rejected in Parliament by no very great majority. At that time the grounds for defeating the move related solely to expediency, Burke arguing simply that it is not convenient to disturb what has long existed.[54] A foreign visitor in 1754 observed that many Anglicans did not believe in the Trinity.[55]

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[52]Lecky, History of England in the Eighteenth Century, I, 360. More precisely, Duncan Coomer, in English Dissent under the Early Hanoverians (London, 1946), pp. 78-79, calculates that by 1770 only one-half of the Presbyterian congregations remained orthodox on the Trinity.

[53]Joseph Priestley, Memoirs (Northumberland, Pa., 1806), vol. I, passim, mentions friends who had to give up their places because of their Arianism; he also indicates that most of his fellow students at Warrington, the Dissenting academy, were Arians ca. 1750-60. Each individual congregation was free to name its own beliefs. To this absence of strong Church discipline American Presbyterians were wont to ascribe heresies; see Samuel J. Baird, The Socinian Apostasy of the English Presbyterian Churches (Philadelphia, 1857).

[54]See Sykes, Church and State, pp. 333-334, 380 ff. Also A. E. Peaston, The Prayer Book Reform Movement (Oxford, 1940). John White, Free and Impartial Considerations upon the Free and Candid Disquisitions Relating to the Church of England (London, 1751), an answer to a revisionist tract by John Jones, admits that a majority was satisfied with the existing liturgy for no very strong reason except custom—p. 6.

[55]Duc de la Rochefoucald, La vie en Angleterre au XVIII^ème siècle, ed. Jean Marchand (Paris, 1945), p. 118.

Joseph Priestley and his circle, who called themselves unitarians, breathed new fire into the old heresy after 1770, but this later phase of unitarian history lies beyond our scope.[56] It is the immediate consequences that concern us here. Clearly orthodoxy had been left in some confusion. Waterland for all his ingenuity and erudition had not answered Clarke, and the Bible alone was seen to have its defects as the sole support of Christianity. Orthodox defenders of the Trinity ended, as they had begun, in confusion and contradiction.[57]

In 1730, a clergyman attributed the decay of religion primarily to "the contempt which has for many years been cast on the Holy Spirit."[58] The Trinity was indeed openly ridiculed; the left-wing journalist Thomas Gordon published a satire in which fun is poked at churchmen who argue that "This is trinity in unity; three in one, and one in three; not three, but one; nor one, but three," etc.[59] It was about this time that Newton's views became known; and the confusion of the trinitarians may be said to have been just about complete by the 1730's. By that time, there were more scandalous heresies to combat.

The chief damage to religion lay in the spectacle of clergymen

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[56]Coleridge regarded Priestley as the founder of Unitarianism; the term was not unknown previously but "Socinian" and "Arian" are far commoner in the eighteenth century. Priestley began a new and distinctive phase, culminating in Channing.

[57]Calamy, in his sermons on the subject, exhibited confusion when he asserted that any subordination of Son to Father was dangerous and improper. The orthodox position had always held for such a subordination—not one of nature, but of order.

[58]Abraham Taylor, Lime Street Lectures; American edition (Boston, 1755) as The Insufficience of Natural Religion. These popular lectures by a Dissenting clergyman have a certain significance as a sign of the retreat from reason.

[59]Thomas Gordon, The Trial of William Whiston (London, 1739).

quarreling hopelessly about an important item of faith. A recent bishop has well remarked that "while priest struggles with priest for the mastery, the world outside looks on with contempt and passes by on the other side."[60] For this reason a basic tenet of Christianity had always been the avoidance of "doubtful disputations." Yet, as we have seen, a rational religion could not very well shun the test of reason. Bolingbroke, the deist, drew the moral in writing about this trinitarian controversy that "the scene of Christianity has been always a scene of dissension, of hatred, of persecution, and of blood."[61] This was extravagant enough: no blood was shed in this paper war of decorous divines. But of dissension there was plenty, and signs were not altogether lacking that some of the clergy wished to find a safer bulwark than reason. The bill of 1721 was a vain effort to silence criticism by fiat. The tenor of many Trinitarian books was a feeling that perhaps reason must not presume too far, and that the Bible should be taken not alone but in conjunction with church tradition. At the same time the freethinkers were emboldened. Some pressed onwards with reason to greater heights of infidelity. Others, like Berkeley and Butler, first began to doubt the adequacy of reason at this time.

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"Clearly distinct from the Deistic controversy, the Arian movement cannot be altogether separated from it," an authority writes.[62] As a matter of fact, Whiston and Clarke were far from deism. But Whiston

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[60]The Bishop of Chelmsford, quoted by C. E. M. Joad, The Present and Future of Religion (New York, 1930), p. 45.

[61]Bolingbroke, Works (Philadelphia, 1841), IV, 25.

[62]Colligan, op. cit., p. 92.

himself thought that Socinianism was a step towards deism, agreeing with an earlier writer who said he could hardly distinguish a deist from a Socinian.[63] Left-wing unitarianism, then, tended to merge into deism. Matthew Tindal wrote two Socinian tracts before becoming a notable deist; John Toland started from his friend Locke's rational unitarianism to reach deism very quickly; Thomas Woolston passed from Arianism to Socinianism to deism. Among the little band of Socinians of the 1690's, William Freke eventually showed himself an enthusiast by joining the "new prophets"; none of the others were prominently associated with any subsequent heresy. Locke, who was certainly a unitarian, is not accurately classified as a deist, but it can be argued that his methods—the methods of unitarianism generally—led towards deism.[64]

The question of the relationship between deism and unitarianism is perhaps an academic one. But, as a prelude to a discussion of deism, it is interesting to note similarities and differences in their outlook. Deists found the trinitarian idea pretty fantastic, and could not take it seriously.[65] They dismissed it not because it was un-scriptural, however, but simply because it was too inconceivable to a pure rationalist, and because they thought of God as almost impersonal. For this reason the whole controversy was relatively meaningless to them: Toland could not see that Socinianism or Arianism were any more "reasonable" than trinitarianism, and he sneered at their compromises.[66] The nature of

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[63]Milbourne, op. cit., p. 782; Whiston, Memoirs, I, 231-235, 276 ff.

[64]See S. G. Hefelblower, The Relation of John Locke to English Deism (Chicago, 1918).

[65]Thomas Chubb, Posthumous Works, I, 169 ff.—a passage of obvious irony.

[66]Christianity Not Mysterious, p. 27.

Christ, wrote Chubb, whether God or only sent of God, does not matter, since we need only know that "the word of the Lord in his mouth was truth"; here speaks deism's view of Christianity as pure morality, and Jesus as only a wise man repeating moral truths which are ancient and universal.[67] In this, of course, deism pursued a unitarian tendency much farther. It might be added that the two could agree that Christianity had been corrupted since its Primitive era.[68] But deists made sweeping charges against all the "priesthood" of organized Christianity, while unitarians only protested the Athanasian usurpation. The unitarian of this period accepted the Bible's literal truth, and sought only to purge all subsequent accretions to it, in order to get back to the simplicity and clarity of early Christianity. But the deist took the Bible allegorically if at all, and certainly was not much interested in a return to the third century. Still, unitarianism had introduced the habit of "impertinently meddling" with time-honored versions of Christianity.

The deist's plea for absolute freedom of inquiry, and the right of individual judgment, would echo Clarke's.[69] Most of all, deism was nourished by that confusion among Christians on important questions, of which the Trinity was the chief. In an early anti-deist tract, remarkable for its fairness, the deist is made to say that he is little read

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[67] The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted (London, 1738), pp. 46-47.

[68] Toland, op. cit., p. 163: "Mystery prevailed very little in the first hundred or century of years after Christ. . . ." Bolingbroke admired early Christianity because it had not become an official state religion enforcing its beliefs; but he also showed the influence of Conyers Middleton (see further below) in thinking the early Christians to be extremely credulous. Works, III, 476 ff.; IV, 89, 237.

[69] Anthony Collins' A Discourse of Freethinking (London, 1713), followed Clarke's magnum opus by one year.

in such matters, "further than to observe how the gladiators in dispute murder the cause between them, while they so fiercely cut and wound one another."[70] The characterisation was apt. But in assailing Christianity nothing was more effective than to set one priest against another. The greater part of Anthony Collins' Discourse of Freethinking is given over to a devastating exposition of the extent to which the divines differed.[71] In one thing, if no other, the deist agreed with the Papist: both delighted in the confusions of liberal Protestantism struggling to build Christianity on reason and private judgment. One of them thought that this demonstrated the futility of Christianity except on the basis of established authority; and the other thought that it demonstrated just the futility of Christianity.

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[70]Robert Jenkin, A Brief Confutation . . . (London, 1702), p. 51.

[71]He lists, pp. 61 ff., all the conflicting versions of the Trinity.

CHAPTER V

THE DEFINITION OF DEISM

> [The deist's] religion is the most ancient and the most widespread: for the simple adoration of a God preceded all the systems of the world.—Voltaire, Dictionnaire philosophique.

1.

We are here concerned with English deism from about 1700 to 1750. Like unitarianism, deism had an earlier history, as well as a later one.[1] It can hardly be called important in seventeenth century England, however, unless we are to make Hobbes a deist. The author of the Leviathan was, of course, extremely influential if generally disliked, and in 1694 Bentley, aiming his Boyle Lecture at the grim realist of Malmesbury, thought that "not one English infidel in a hundred is any other than a Hobbist." But Hobbes had little in common with later deists; he was known in the eighteenth century as an atheist, along with Spinoza, and atheism was always distinguished from deism. The ancestry of eighteenth century deism is usually traced to Lord Herbert of Cherbury.[2] (But see the remarks above, p. 47.) Herbert's philosophy was quite obscure in his time. Charles Blount and the group that published The Oracles of Reason in 1693 echoed Herbert's ideas, and added some

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[1] See Mossner, Bishop Butler, pp. 46–51; John Orr, English Deism (Grand Rapids, 1934), chaps. I–III; Lechler, Geschichte englischen Deismus, Book I.

[2] Harold R. Hutcheson, ed., Lord Herbert of Cherbury's "De Religione Laici" (New Haven, 1944). For an example of French deism in 1622, see F. Lachèvre, Le procès du poète Théophile de Viau, II, 105.

bold if crude jibes at the truth of Scripture.[3]

It can be argued that subsequent deists added nothing of importance to the ideas and methods of these pioneers. True, Herbert based his theory of a universal religion, available to all without need of a special revelation, on the doctrine of innate ideas, one which went somewhat out of style with Locke. But Locke as well as Descartes, sensationalism as well as rationalism, could lead to the idea that all minds are alike and capable of natural religion.[4]

We begin our study of the deists when, in the free and rational climate of Augustan England, they first became widely known—with the English edition of John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious, in 1702, which Leslie Stephen termed the "signal gun" for the deistic controversy.[5] John Toland, political pamphleteer and amateur philosopher, was so much more the former than the latter that his character is discussed below, in a portion devoted to political aspects of religious liberalism. (Chap. XI.) Deistic ideas were then taken up and exploited by a very few men, who succeeded in making a noise out of all proportion to their

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[3]Some of Blount's other writings are listed in the bibliography at end of this book. His father, Sir Henry Blount, was a traveller famed for his reports on the Near East; see Boise Penrose, Urbane Travellers, 1591-1635 (London, Philadelphia, 1942). In at least one of his books Charles was supposed to have had his father's collaboration.

[4]Shaftesbury's "moral sense," and Clarke's rational Christianity as well, was certainly derived from the doctrine of innate ideas; Locke was not quite so ubiquitous and all-conquering as is generally assumed. But both doctrines led deists in the same direction: away from revealed religion and towards a universal religion of nature. There are some useful remarks on Locke's relation to deism in Andrew Brown's article, "John Locke and the Religious Aufklärung," Review of Religion, XIII (January, 1949).

[5]English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, I, 105. Toland, like Emlyn the unitarian, was first moved to iconoclasm in Ireland, where actual persecution was likely.

numbers and even their talents. It seems evident that this was more because of Christianity's weakness than because of deism's strength.

Anthony Collins (1676-1729) was probably the shrewdest of all the deists, a man of genuine philosophic talents (as his contribution to the free-will debate exhibited), but especially talented in preying upon the inconsistencies of the Christians. Born of "good estate," educated at Cambridge, like Toland a disciple of Locke, Collins was by profession a most amiable and esteemed public servant (justice of peace in Middlesex and then Essex) and a "philosopher" by avocation. He suffered, in 1714, a severe assault at the hands of Dr. Bentley, who riddled his pretensions to advanced scholarship—a famous example of literary mayhem, but hardly a philosophic answer to deism.[6] Collins recovered to write the most effective of all deistic critiques of Christianity in 1724 (The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion). It was about this time that deism reached its peak. Thomas Woolston's violent assaults on Christianity and the clergy were widely sold; so were Thomas Gordon's anti-clerical pamphlets and Independent Whig; a third "doubting Thomas" was Thomas Chubb, the self-taught journeyman glove-maker. Matthew Tindal sought to define deism as a positive creed, in addition to the usual attacks on Christianity, in his Christianity As Old As the Creation, 1730. Thomas Morgan, the self-styled Moral Philosopher, entered the debate, adding little to Collins and Tindal but reaching a wide audience. To the writings of all of these, and others, we shall refer in an effort to

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[6] Remarks upon a Late Discourse of Freethinking (8th edition, Cambridge, 1743). J. M. Robertson disputes the common view, presented among others by Leslie Stephen, that the great philologist thoroughly lacerated Collins. The truth would seem to be that while Bentley discovered hiss less scholarly opponent in some embarrassing errors of detail he did not exactly meet his major arguments.

define deism.

By about 1733 the cumulative effect of such deistic attacks on Christianity, abundantly aided by the confusions of the faithful, led to a real sense of despair among many of the latter.[7] We have not mentioned all the deistic influences: Lord Shaftesbury, for instance, who wrote no theological polemics but only a few polished essays, was regarded by many as the most subversive of all, thrusting as he did at the adequacy of Christian ethics. Boldest of all was the disciple of Bayle, Bernard Mandeville, who did not so much deny Christianity's truth as its relevance to contemporary society; he inquired, like Bayle, whether formal religious belief does after all have anything to do with the morality by which society functions.[8]

The result of all this was certainly a crisis in Christianity. Destructively, deism was a success, or rather orthodoxy was a failure, and Christianity began to beat a retreat from the field of reason. But deism was not a success on its constructive side, in seeking a firm basis for its alleged natural religion. The mid-century sceptics, David Hume and Conyers Middleton, are left without any real faith in either natural or revealed religion.

2.

In 1722 William Wollaston, a retired clergyman of independent means, wrote The Religion of Nature Delineated, a work widely designated since

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[7] See, for example, Weekly Miscellany, a conservative religious journal, 1733-34, which shows constant grave concern over the spread of deism. The decade of the 1730's produces an alarmed flight from reason, reflected in the notable books and works of William Law, Joseph Butler, George Berkeley, and John Wesley.

[8] See William Law, Remarks on the Fable of the Bees (ed. with intro. by F. D. Maurice, Cambridge, 1844).

as deistic, which was, however, a fairly orthodox effort to show how far reason and nature alone can discover true religion—an exercise which was neither new nor heretical. This, as Wollaston remarked, "is so far from undermining true revealed religion, that it rather paves the way for its reception."[9] The point is worth making as a step in clarifying some difficulties in the definition of deism. Orthodoxy no more rejected "natural religion" than it rejected reason, and it always used arguments from natural religion to refute atheism.[10] It liked especially well in this age to dwell on the purely rational or natural arguments for the truth of Christianity; but that did not mean that it thought revelation either spurious or unnecessary. What distinguished the deist was not an interest in natural religion, but the belief that natural religion alone was sufficient, without any need for any Christian revelation.[11]

Dr. Clarke's effort to define deism stands out from many such, then

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[9] Religion of Nature Delineated (1746 edition), pp. 382-383. Cf. Alan Richardson, Christian Apologetics (London, 1947), p. 112: the classic view was that "natural and revealed theology were complementary to each other, and together they comprised the sum total of our knowledge of God."

[10] See, e.g., Robert Jenkin, A Brief Confutation of the Pretences against Natural and Revealed Religion (London, 1702), espec. p. 44. The atheist is first confuted by arguments for natural religion; then the deist by arguments for revelation. This was standard apologetic method. Waterland in his Vindication of Scripture (against Tindal) was prepared to assert that a deist could be no real friend to natural religion—for revealed and natural religion are so bound up together that an enemy of one is bound to be an enemy of the other.

[11] Confusion on this score is found in some writers on deism. (See G. A. Koch, Republican Religion [New York, 1933], p. 16, for an example of misuse of the term deism.) The term is extended to embrace arguments for natural religion, or Newtonianism in any sense. Newton, Locke, Clarke and Bentley thus become deists, which is impossible to justify. Isabel St. John Bliss, "Young's Night Thoughts in Relation to Contemporary Christian Apologetics," PMLA, XLIX (1934), pp. 37-70, is shrewd in making the necessary distinctions here.

and later.[12] The "true deists" he thought to be those who believe rightly in every respect, "but profess to believe only so far as 'tis discoverable by the light of nature alone, without believing any Divine Revelation." He did not think this position tenable, and in fact there were certainly none who accepted all of Christianity on the basis of nature alone—though the deists claimed to accept the essentials. Clarke mentioned those who deny immortality and that God concerns himself with the governing of the world. He thought that these were logically atheists; his disciple John Jackson would argue the same later.[13] To say that God exists yet cannot interfere with the laws that govern the universe is really impossible, for a God so limited by a higher power would not be God at all in any real sense. So Clarke defined away deism—which, logically, may have been correct, for deism was never really successful, all will agree, in developing a stable and consistent position. But we do by usage classify as deists a group who thought, at least, that they occupied ground between traditional Christianity and atheism. They believed in some august First Cause, and in some sort of natural religion.

Clarke also noted that there was "no such thing as a consistent scheme of deism," a judgment generally approved. With this caveat in mind we may attempt to summarize the philosophy of deism. We might first essay a brief imaginative tour into the mind of a typical deist. He had been impressed by Newton's discoveries—too impressed.[14] This vast

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[12] A Discourse . . . of Natural Religion, in Works, II, 595 ff.

[13] John Jackson, An Address to the Deists (London, 1744).

[14] Professor Aldridge, op. cit., argues cogently that there should be a distinction between "scientific deism" and "humanistic deism," Shaftesbury being the best example of the latter. However, even Shaftesbury felt the Newtonian impact.

universe controlled by immutable laws, this wonderfully constructed machine, undoubtedly had a Maker. The deist was not an atheist. But would such a Being as headed this marvelous world-machine condescend to reveal himself to Moses, an obscure man of a benighted race on a petty planet? The deist could not see the majesty of this, always heretofore regarded as the greatest wonder; it was unworthy of God. We meet here an esthetic quarrel possibly at the root of the whole matter: what had once seemed infinitely pleasing and wonderful and inspiring now (to some) began to seem infinitely ridiculous and degrading. The deist could not reconcile Newton's master physicist with the Jehovah who had wrestled with Jacob—and it must be admitted he had a point. This last, he assumed, was all a tale made up by ignorant barbarians and then imposed upon mankind by priests, known to be a deceitful and mercenary class. (This inference of a conspiracy was perhaps not necessary, but it was plausible and indeed very nearly inevitable at a time when the historical sense of a development in human affairs was notably lacking.) Perhaps the Judaic sort of religion was necessary for the literal-minded mob, but no "philosopher" could believe it. God revealed himself to man, no doubt—but was not Nature enough of a revelation? Eagerly the physico-theologians had proved the existence of God by pointing to his masterful works; the deists now enquired why it was then necessary to go any farther.

Jesus, the alleged Messiah and self-styled Son of God, seemed to the deist an excellent moralist, but not a superhuman agent. That he was the Son of God was only another Hebraic myth. The excellent moral code taught by Jesus was not a divine revelation, but could be found in Nature, surely, if one searched. Just how and where, the deist was

never able to state clearly, but he believed strongly in the idea nevertheless. The moral rules, everywhere alike, could perhaps be found in universal reason, or perhaps in the heart of man, a divinely implanted instinct. In any event they were discernible independent of any special revelation. The proof of this was that all men had arrived at a similar code of morals, though theologies differed.[15] Christianity, had it not been corrupted by priests and metaphysicians, would have agreed perfectly with this natural religion.[16]

3.

All this was much too radical to say out at once, and so the deists spoke by indirection. They were often wholly unscrupulous and deceitful in their methods. Thinking that the priests and their preachings were fraudulent, they felt justified, it seems, in using fraud to fight fraud. Unable to proclaim all the truth, they would introduce it in small doses. They used mildly disguised sarcasm or satire, a method disconcerting to sober Christians. "When you expect an argument, they make a jest perhaps," it was noted early.[17] "Ridicule," Thomas Woolston

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[15]Much has been written on the influence of the new knowledge about various non-European peoples during this period: the Far East, the Near East, and the "noble savages" of North America and the Pacific Isles. R. W. Frantz, The English Traveller and the Movement of Ideas, 1660-1732 (Lincoln, Nebr., 1934), attempts to appraise the influence of the travellers on deism, in Chaps. IV and V. His evidence does not seem very conclusive. Chauncey B. Tinker, Nature's Simple Plan: A Phase of Radical Thought in the Mid-Eighteenth Century (Princeton and London, 1922), discusses the deistic idealization of the Noble Savage; he thinks the visit of Omai, the South Sea Islander, in 1774 marked the end of this illusion. Awareness of the Chinese and of Mohammedanism doubtless helped in the formulation of a universal religion of nature.

[16]Bolingbroke, Works, IV, 231.

[17]Jenkin, Brief Confutation, p. 40. This allusion in 1702 makes it plain that ridicule was a deist weapon before Lord Shaftesbury's writings were widely known; the latter made it more popular.

later stated bluntly enough, "will cut the pate of an ecclesiastical numbskull, which calm and sedate reasoning will make no impression on."[18] Above all, deists took a delight in interfering mischievously in any argument between Christians, in order to compound the damage done by such disputes. All this makes it a little difficult to interpret the deists. But it is usually not hard to discover when they are writing with tongue in cheek and when not.

They were sincere in believing in a God. Serious writers always distinguished atheism from deism; Spinoza and Hobbes were considered the only real atheists.[19] "The deists as a group either assert God's existence as an absolute certainty, or use the teleological argument to demonstrate it."[20] Atheism seemed untenable to the rationalists; in theism there are perhaps difficulties, but in atheism there are absurdities.[21] In such a statement as the following the deist spoke sincerely:

> That there is a Deity, or governing mind, who gave being to all things external to himself, and who exists by, or from, an absolute necessity, in the nature of things, is, to me, most evident and plain. . . . I think atheism, in point of argument, is insupportable.[22]

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[18]Mr. Woolston's Defence of His Discourses (London, 1729), p. 20. Cf. Anthony Collins, Discourse concerning Ridicule and Irony in Writing (London, 1729).

[19]Samuel Clarke, Works, II, 513 ff. John Toland became a Spinozist or panthaist in 1720, and exerted an influence on the materialist-atheist school of D'Holbach in France. But in England it was not usual for deism to develop into atheism.

[20]Walter M. Merrill, From Statesman to Philosopher: A Study in Bolingbroke's Deism (New York, 1949)—a valuable work on the philosophy of deism.

[21]Bolingbroke, Works, II, 465 ff; see also Hazard, op. cit., I, 153 and III, 66.

[22]Thomas Chubb, Posthumous Works, I, 157.

We had best remember that to conceive of a world without a creator, without a plan and without a purpose, was an incredible thing, until nineteenth century science made it more plausible. The deist was as a rule an optimist who believed in an orderly, rational universe. Order and reason implied an intelligent, purposeful creation.

It may be worth adding that there is some justification for the charge of atheism against the deists (we recall that Theodore Roosevelt called Tom Paine an atheist.) This has already been mentioned: later deists, such as Peter Annet, developed the impossibility of miracle so that God was evidently completely enthralled to natural laws which he was powerless to alter. As John Jackson, a reasonable enough man, wrote, it would seem that "God did not form them, nor is the author of nature, which is atheism."[23] However that may be, all deists of course paid tribute to a Supreme Being, remote or purely formal though he or it might tend to become. They thought him "eternal, immaterial,[24] infinitely perfect . . . wise, powerful, just and good," possessed of "the most perfect intelligence, goodness, and boundless power."[25] Yet they rejected any anthropomorphising of Him, and any "particular Providence," as superstitious. The notion that God "talks to all mankind from corners" was as absurd as the idea that he showed his back parts

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[23]John Jackson, Address to the Deists, p. 14.

[24]Deism did not generally deny the immateriality of the soul and of God until the time of David Hartley and Joseph Priestley, after 1750. Collins' intervention in the debate on the soul between Clarke and Henry Dodwell seems to indicate that he was prepared to take up the idea, however, if the occasion was opportune.

[25]Clubb, Posthumous Works, I, 153; Anthony Collins, A Vindication of the Divine Attributes (London, 1710), a pamphlet in which Collins is concerned to deny, against the alleged views of Archbishop King, that human passions are properly attributed to God.

to Moses.[26] He was a remote deity, tending towards the impersonality of an abstract First Principle, though milder deists did not deny that he might occasionally, "to answer some great and good ends," interfere in the affairs of the world.[27]

Had this Deity inspired the Holy Scripture? Deists from the beginning denied that this was as evident as the orthodox insisted. Standing as it were on Locke's shoulders, they desired to push the claims of "reason" farther than orthodoxy found comfortable. Toland declared that he would believe only what he could clearly understand. There should be nothing either contrary to reason or above it in the Bible, the latter an addition orthodoxy could never allow. Revelation is "not a motive of assent, but a means of information"—i.e. we have a right to test revelation by reason and need not accept it untested.[28] These were bolder claims for reason than orthodoxy thought reasonable! They were, in fact, somewhat doubtful. One could hardly avoid accepting the revelation if it was attested as truly from God; and it seemed reasonable to most people that man had no right to suppose every truth to be available to his own weak reason, unassisted. Christians moved to meet this attack with great confidence, a confidence exhibited in all the answers to Christianity Not Mysterious. The very titles are proof of this, for Charles Leslie had a "Short and Easy Method" to confute the deists, and Robert Jenkin a "Brief Confutation of the Pretences" against revealed religion. "No man that truly and impartially considers things," the

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[26]Collins, Discourse of Freethinking, p. 38.

[27]Chubb, "A Short Dissertation on Providence," appended to 1738 edition of The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted, p. 202.

[28]Toland, Christianity Not Mysterious, passim.

latter announced, "can be either an atheist or a deist."[29] It was inherently reasonable, first, that God should declare the truth to man; and then it was quite certain, according to abundant evidence, that the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians were indeed that revelation. Finally, the Christian doctrine as thus divinely announced proved to be infinitely pleasing and rational. On these three legs the case for Christianity rested. But the deists began to hack away at each of them.

As for the first, deists found it repugnant to reason and morality to believe that one group of men had been singled out to receive the word of God. To suppose that God has "favorite nations" is a form of superstition.[30] God has doubtless spoken, as Voltaire would say, but to the universe. Why not simply through the reason he has given men, together with those miracles of nature with which he surrounds them? If there was a Prophet, deists implied, it was more apt to be Newton than Moses. . . . The unfairness and irrationality of a special revelation vouchsafed only to the Jews was something quite a few others had worried about, now and then, before the deists. There was the almost unavoidable inference that the heathen must be damned without even an opportunity to know the way to salvation—an orthodox view, but most embarrassing to orthodoxy; "off all objections," admitted Dryden,

> this indeed is chief
> To startle Reason, stagger frail Belief.[31]

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[29]Jenkin, op. cit., p. 40. Cf. Clarke, Works, II, 605-606.

[30]Bolingbroke, Works, IV, 310; Collins, Discourse of Freethinking, p. 33—examples of a general deist position.

[31]Religio Laici. See Chubb, Posthumous Works, I, 177 ff.; Jenkin, Brief Confutation, pp. 43-49, where considerable embarrassment is evident in the orthodox defense of this unpleasant corollary. The pious Cowper could not digest the "outrageous wrong" of

> Ten thousand sages lost in endless woe
> For ignorance of what they could not know.

So deists were exploiting here a Christian weakness. The theory of a universal, indirect revelation succeeded in discrediting the classic *a priori* argument for the Bible, that God must have revealed himself to man, and substituted for it an *a priori* argument for doubting the Christian revelation, namely, that God must have revealed himself to all men through His works.[32]

The real question, however, was the second. Was it really true that the evidences for the revelation could not be reasonably doubted? If so, all other objections become irrelevant. If God *did* reveal himself to the Hebraic prophets, and left unimpeachable proof of it, there is no need to go farther. However seemingly incomprehensible or unjust, the word of God must be accepted if it is indeed the word of God. However, deists were prepared to subject the credentials of Christianity to as searching an examination as was then possible. Here we come to the heart of the matter, and to its greatest length as well. We confront that mountain of literature (now largely obsolete) in which a few challenged, and many defended, the authenticity, consistency, and inherent probability of the Bible as the direct word of God. We shall for the moment postpone any summary of this long argument. It is enough to say that the deists doubted the divine inspiration of both the Old Testament and the New, in the Christian sense;[33] and that they gave as

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[32]The ramifications of this point are numerous throughout the deistic debate. As will appear again later on, deistic writers ordinarily disparaged Jewish civilization in order to point up the irrationality of awarding it the honor of being a favored nation.

[33]It was possible for a deist to claim that he accepted the divine inspiration of Scripture; see Thomas Woolston, *Mr. Woolston's Defence of His Discourses*, p. 27. But he could only have meant that he accepted it in the sense that he accepted any lofty thought or writing as of divine inspiration—not in the Christian sense as applied to the Bible.

good as they took in a debate bound to be inconclusive.

Certainly the deists, profiting heavily from the disputes within Christianity, gave some sharp shocks to orthodoxy. The deists asserted that the Bible is a work of many hands, uneven and contradictory, and by no means all divinely inspired. But they were not really alone in this. Great scholars were coming reluctantly to the same opinion. By 1740 the brilliant scholar Conyers Middleton took it upon himself to tell the pious bluntly that the game was up for the old view of Scripture. These were the years when, as Dr. Johnson recalled, the Apostles were tried once a year for forgery and acquitted. We may add that the litigation at least gradually damaged their reputation. By 1740 William Law and Joseph Butler had found ways of shifting the case for Christianity onto other grounds than those of external evidences. And David Hume had remarked that Christianity must rest "on faith, not on reason."

The final proof of Christianity was said to be its excellence. That it had, after all, won the civilized world; that it had survived for many centuries hence, and had equipped men with a most useful moral and political code, was a prime orthodox argument.[34] Along with the claim that Christianity had improved the world went the converse, that deism would worsen it morally. ("Why, if it be as you say," Swift imagined the common response to deism to be, "I may safely whore and drink on, and defy the parson.") Christianity, a religion "so suited to all the necessities of man," had succeeded as the basis of civilization; and the amazing success and utility of the Gospel was commonly listed as proof

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[34]The utilitarian argument is heavily stressed in so conservative an apologetic piece as Berkeley's Alciphron—see dialogues I and V. See also John Leland, A View of the Deistical Writers (1754), pp. 12-13.

of its divinity.[35] The "excellency of its doctrines and precepts," its tendency to provide a perfect morality and to promote "the well-being of man" above all other religions were said to be as good proofs of Christianity's truth as were the miracles.[36] Here we may note first that the deists were quick to take advantage of this utilitarian, moralistic argument for Christianity by declaring that the only true criterion of a religion is the production of virtue—sufficient social virtue.[37] If next they could show that morality was attainable without revealed religion, they might beat orthodoxy on its own ground. The suggestion presented first by Pierre Bayle, the great French sceptic, that even an atheist might be a good citizen, was bound to be pushed by the deists.

The boldest way to challenge Christianity's claim to moral excellence was to deny it altogether. Shaftesbury and Mandeville[38] in their different ways did so: both implied not only that morality is independent of Christianity but that the Christian ethic has serious flaws (to Mandeville, the flaw was evidently only this, that the ethic was too perfectionist for the secular world.) Bernard Mandeville, the most shocking writer since Hobbes, and Lord Shaftesbury, the elegant essayist

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[35] Isaac Watts, A Current against Infidelity, in Works, IV, 77.

[36] Ibid., p. 78.

[37] See, e.g., Thomas Morgan, A Collection of Tracts, preface.

[38] Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, scion of the noted Whig family, tutored by John Locke, famed as the author of the urbane essays titled Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (1711, 1713), died in 1713 but was assuredly the literary lion of the years preceding his death. Bernard de Mandeville, the Anglicised Dutch physician (1670-1733) whose apparent cynicism shocked a highly respectable age, assailed Shaftesbury as a sentimentalist. The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices Public Benefits (1714) was certainly read, though much deplored; and, like the Characteristics, its seminal idea endured. On both, see further below, passim.

whose ethics were as much deplored as his prose was admired, stand in a way somewhat outside the deist stream, in that they entered very little into the theological or evidential debate, yet they were very much a part of it insofar as they suggested a natural foundation for morality. As a rule, the deists chose not so much to quarrel with Christianity as a moral system as simply to deny that this morality was peculiarly Christian, that it had need of a special revelation to install it. The moral code of Jesus was splendid, and was the reason for such success as Christianity had had; but theological "mysteries" had been smuggled in by scheming priests, and were not merely dispensable but positively pernicious to the ethical truths at the heart of the religion. Priests, for selfish reasons, had corrupted a plain and simple creed. Paul, the deists' bête noire, had been the first.[39] Expel the mysteries, and Christianity, the deist was ordinarily prepared to agree, was quite pleasing, proper and rational. "No religion ever appeared in the world," wrote Lord Bolingbroke, "whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind."[40] But this gospel of Jesus had not been new or unique; it was only an effective statement of the "religion of nature": "that good old way which always was, and always

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[39] Almost all the deists were anti-clerical, making a villain of "priestcraft." (Chubb, Posthumous Works, I, 100-101; Woolston, Free Gifts to the Clergy, 1723-24; W. N. Merrill, Bolingbroke's Deism, Chap. VIII; Toland, Christianity Not Mysterious, pp. 163 ff.) See Peter Annet's Critical Examination of the Life of St. Paul (London, 1823). Deists' admiration for Mohammedanism, a characteristic often noted, was doubtless mainly because Islam gave a smaller role to church and clergy.

[40] Works (Philadelphia, 1841), III, 396, 500. To Bolingbroke, Plato and Platonism were chiefly the "mystifiers" who had corrupted simple Christianity, the equivalent of "natural religion."

will be the true way to life eternal. . . ."[41]

4.

Deism found it easier to criticise Christianity than to erect its own positive philosophy. What has been called constructive deism is commonly recognized to have been a failure, and indeed never advanced beyond the stage of a theory both inconsistent and absurd. What did man need that religion provided? That he needed emotional satisfaction, or an inward spiritual experience, was beyond the range of the deist's view; or he was content to get it in contemplating the marvels of Newton's universe, wonderfully run by natural law. But man clearly needed morality. If the Law had not been revealed to him immediately from God, whence came it? Sharing to the full the unhistorical character of this age's outlook, deists before Hume could scarcely imagine a gradual historical evolution of morals. Morality must be derived from the "light of nature." What was this light of nature? Deism never really knew.

The "true religion," every deist insisted, is something written clearly in reason and nature, so clearly that no man in the world could possibly mistake it. Only thus could it be independent of Revelation. "It is as bright as the heavenly light, and free from all ambiguities. . . . The common understanding inherent in man's nature is sufficient, without skill in books and languages, to lead him to the necessary knowledge of his faith and obedience."[42] Left vague were the key phrases

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[41]Chubb, The True Gospel, p. 30. Even in the stronger Posthumous Works (I, 136-140), Chubb exhibits the deist's profound respect for Jesus, the Jesus they saw, which was a simple, rational, moral Jesus, not the passionate mystic. The latter trait they attributed to Paul. But for an exception to the deistic detestation of Paul see Merrill, op. cit., p. 216, note 20, on Thomas Morgan.

[42]Peter Annet, The Resurrection of Jesus Considered . . . (1744).

"true religion," "common understanding inherent in man's nature," and "necessary knowledge." Deism never succeeded in defining them. The deist was committed as an article of faith to the claim that all mankind may read religious truth clearly: it "admits of no doubt," "no man who is able to read the plainest characters can mistake it."[43] But he never could precisely state what this universal religion was, or how it was so evident.

The confusions in deism came under effective Christian counter-attack. In general this happened later, after 1725. It is somewhat misleading to say, as is rather common, that deism suddenly entered upon its second or constructive phase about 1729, with Tindal's book Christianity As Old As the Creation. Lord Herbert had, after all, stated the principles of positive deism at the very beginning, a century before. Yet it is true that between 1700 and 1730 deism succeeded in keeping Christianity on the defensive, and was pretty successful in embarrassing the confident proponents of a rational Christianity. Matthew Tindal's effort to state the deist creed brought that creed into attention. Was the Gospel indeed, as his challenging title affirmed, no more than "a republication of the religion of nature"? There were effective replies. Tindal received a barrage of answers, and the verdict must be that he was fairly routed. From this time on, the battle approaches a stalemate. The critical or destructive sort of deism did not stop, though it soon ceased to arouse much interest. Constructive deism, however, no longer commanded the support of intelligent freethinkers. Hume and

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[43]Bolingbroke, quoted by John Leland in View of the Deistical Writers (London, 1807), II, 29.

Middleton cannot really believe either side.

Perhaps the basic fallacy in deism was pointed out by John Leland: it was the (unwarranted) assumption that because nature itself is clear and unalterable, man's moral inferences from nature must be equally so.[44] Bishop Butler would even declare that nature herself is not so clear, a claim that somewhat puzzled his contemporaries, however. In any event it was obvious that the Light of Nature did not lead deists to think alike, for they differed on many points when they came to construct a faith. In controversies with the pagan philosophers of the Roman world many centuries before, the Christians had employed the strategy of pointing to the variations and inconsistencies of their critics, and they now did the same to the deists, thus turning the tables. If the question is one of consistency, Christians are not apt to be worse off than their less disciplined adversaries, the philosophers. Some deists denied, for instance, that a future life is necessary to morality, but others thought it was. In what way the religion of nature was written clearly in every heart was another matter in dispute among deists: Shaftesbury's innate benevolence was ridiculed by Mandeville and Bolingbroke, who found the guiding principle in self-love; while both of these schools laughed at those who followed Wollaston and Clarke in supposing that morality was deducible by abstract reasoning.[45]

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[44]Leland, op. cit., II, 33. John Leland (1691-1766), Nonconformist minister and scholar (M.A. and D.D. University of Aberdeen), son of a Lancashire businessman, was an anti-deistic writer of some ability if somewhat eclectic principles. Almost every argument used against the deists may be found in his works, forcefully stated.

[45]Ibid., II, 271; cf. Hume's Treatise of Human Nature, Bk. III, pt. 1. Chubb, in whom the inconsistencies of deism may readily be studied, adopted each of these views at various times. It is notable that none of the really first-rate students of ethics in the eighteenth century was a deist, unless we so classify Hume.

For positive proof that all men can "naturally" know true religion, deists set forth the argument that Cicero and other pagans had reached the same moral truths as Christianity. It was not hard for Christians to show that this was false, and also beside the point—since Cicero was not, after all, a savage, "without skill in books and languages." And he himself had thought a rational religion attainable only by the few.[46] It remained for David Hume to show in his Natural History of Religion that savages are not enlightened deists.

Deism faltered under these attacks, as well it might. The myth of the "noble savage," the "uncorrupted man" of earliest times when "reason and benevolence" were law, was suitable for poets, perhaps, but hardly for philosophers.[47] Thomas Morgan (The Moral Philosopher, 1737) shows us deism in partial retreat, for he seems to repudiate the theory that the light of nature is planted in every heart, while still insisting that religious truths depend on eternal reason and must therefore "be always and everywhere the same."[48] It remained for David Hume and Conyers Middleton to dispose completely of this "constructive deism"; and the key to an understanding of their scepticism is their realization that both Christianity and deism had come up against a blank wall in searching for absolutely certain proof. If Christianity had been damaged as an objectively demonstrable proposition, constructive deism had

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[46]Isaac Watts, The Strength and Weakness of Human Reason, in Works, V, 399-401; also Leland, op. cit., II, 57 ff.

[47]A. D. McKillop, The Background of Thomson's 'Seasons' (London, 1942), is an able study of this sentimental poet's primitivism. See again Chauncey Tinker, op. cit. Analyses of inconsistencies in deism may be found in Merrill, Bolingbroke's Deism, passim, and Orr, English Deism, pp. 140-144 on Tindal.

[48]The Moral Philosopher, I, 393-394.

failed to set up a credible alternative. The "universal religion of nature" which "has always been the same, and must for ever be alike apprehended by the understandings of all mankind" had become, by mid-century, about as believable for advanced intellects as that God took Moses by the hand.

5.

Hume especially struck a blow at deism with his Natural History of Religion. Though many then and since have thought Hume an atheist, there does not seem to be any good reason to question his sincerity when he writes that "the whole frame of Nature bespeaks an Intelligent Author."[49] This was surely as self-evident for Hume as it had been for Boyle. Hume was certainly not a Christian, though we quite often suspect he would have liked to have been; in him we have reached the stage where the enlightened philosopher does not even think it worth while to bother refuting something so patently absurd as a special revelation. He even ridiculed Christian ethics. But to him the claims of constructive deism were equally foolish. So far from there being a single faith available to all men, "no two nations, and scarce any two men, have ever agreed precisely in the same sentiments." So far from there existing a natural state of enlightenment in man, the savage is always an idolator, and the majority of men even in contemporary Europe are incapable of arriving at a rational conception of Deity. That the "mind rises gradually, from inferior to superior," Hume had grasped.

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[49] David Hume, Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects (Edinburgh, 1817), II, 383. The ensuing summary and quotations are from this text, 383 ff. The Natural History of Religion was first published in 1757, as part of Four Dissertations.

Deism is false, since man is not a rational creature in the sense deists imagined. Hume was left with the conclusion that there will be one religion for the philosophers and another for the masses. The enlightened few will be deists, if anything; the masses never were, and perhaps never will be capable of such enlightenment.

By mid-century, then, deism had been deflated as a credo. Destructive criticism of Christianity would, of course, go on. David Hume and Conyers Middleton, as representing the most intelligent stratum, were left, for the moment, high and dry: they could believe neither in Christianity nor the "light of nature." Voltaire's "principes de morale communs au genre humain" were in a parlous state; and if deism be defined as such a belief in the common, universal light of nature making for a clear natural religion, it died almost as soon as it was born.

In a broader sense, deism never died. The critical spirit endured; so did the search for a moral order independent of any special or miraculous revelation. But the idea, broached by Hume, of what Lessing called "the education of the human race"—the idea of moral evolution, of a <u>progressive</u> revelation—moved the frame of reference away from those who had called themselves deists. The true deists were committed to the static concepts of an immutable reason and immutable human nature, always and everywhere the same.

To arrive at a concept of moral evolution meant to leave a place for Christianity. Turgot was more logical than Voltaire; if man is making gradual progress through developing his rational powers, how can you dismiss the whole Christian epoch as a regression? It was more reasonable to conclude with Turgot that Christianity had been "a powerful agent of civilization," even if now perhaps obsolete. Christianity

was not a republication of a hypothetical religion of nature; neither was it a monstrous fallacy. It was a step in the moral evolution of man.[50] And it was still a useful one, though a minority of "philosophers" could not believe it literally. It is important to note that when the belief that all men possess reason enough to spell out religious truths faded, those who had been militant deists preferred to keep silent. Benjamin Franklin is a good example. He relates in his autobiography how he came to think that his youthful deism, "tho' it might be true, was not very useful," and thereafter he encouraged a Christianity he clearly felt to be very useful though it might not be true.[51] Middleton and Hume would agree with him that the masses still needed Christianity—perhaps they always would. This view was not a casual cynicism; it was the logical outcome of the deistic debate.

This might well be called the basic dilemma of deism, on which it fell: if all men can see religious truth so easily and naturally without Revelation, why is it that they do not, and never have? The deist complained that all men except a few were and are under the sway of "priests"; and then he added in the next breath that there is and never has been the least need of priests. Here was a manifest absurdity.

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[50]John Morley, Biographical Studies (London, 1923), pp. 24-25; J. B. Bury, The Idea of Progress (London, 1920), pp. 156-157. Ronald S. Crane's articles, "Anglican Apologetics and the Idea of Progress, 1699-1745," Modern Philology, XXXI (1934), pp. 237-306, 349-382, show how the idea of moral evolution appealed to some orthodox Christians (notably Edmund Law) as a weapon against deism.

[51]Benjamin Franklin, Representative Selections, ed. Mott and Jorgenson (American Writers Series, 1936), pp. 55, 70.

CHAPTER VI

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DEISTIC CONTROVERSY

1.

It becomes evident right away that deism was successful on the destructive side mainly because it profited by Christianity's own weaknesses. The strategy of exploiting the "divisions of the Christians" was very skillfully employed by Anthony Collins and his cohorts. Such divisions were many, as Christians submitted their faith to the test of reason and scholarship.

The attack by Daniel Whitby on Mill's New Testament, pounced upon by Collins in his Discourse of Freethinking, indicated a certain crisis in the interpretation of Scripture. Men were beginning to wonder exactly what the Bible did say—indeed, exactly what it was. In 1707 William Whiston touched off a long debate when he admitted that the Bible as it stood was not good enough to support Christianity, and claimed the need for a sweeping revision in the canon and text of Scripture. The messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, said Whiston (whose sincerity was beyond question), must be literally fulfilled; a mere allegorical interpretation exposes Christianity to ridicule. Yet literal interpretation would not stand up, Whiston believed, and so he saw nothing for it but to conclude that Scripture as it stands is defective, and the true books remain to be restored. He believed with his usual firmness in his own theory as to the proper reconstruction

of the Bible, but few others could share his eccentric views. He had, however, inadvertently dealt the prophecies a sharp blow.[1]

The prophecies were universally regarded as the strongest support of Christianity's truth. It was beyond dispute that Christianity as revealed truth rested firmly on Judaistic foundations, the New Testament on the Old, Jesus on the prophecies.[2] Christ believed in, and justified himself by, and found his purpose and inspiration in the Old Testament; no one can reject the divine inspiration of the Old Testament without also rejecting the New. That Christ was the Messiah foretold was both central to Christian doctrine and its strongest, indeed indispensable proof. Many other prophecies in the Bible were thought to provide, in their precise fulfillment, the best evidence for the supernatural character of the Bible period. Since Grotius, orthodox Protestant Christians had grown accustomed to interpreting the prophecies in a "double sense," a view which Whiston now pronounced fatal to Christianity. Was it not true that the "allegorizing" of deists like Woolston led straight to infidelity?[3]

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[1]The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies, printed in the Boyle Lectures (A Defense of Natural and Revealed Religion, ed. J. Michol and S. Letsome, London, 1739), II, 259-348. Also An Essay towards Restoring the Truth of the Old Testament, 1722.

[2]A. A. Sykes, An Essay upon the Truth of the Christian Religion (London, 1725), p. 2; William Warburton, The Divine Legation of Moses (London, 1738), pp. 5-6. Thomas Morgan and Matthew Tindal, the deists, tried to detach ethical Christianity from its Hebraic roots, calling themselves "Christian deists," but their Christianity was not, of course, supernatural.

[3]See The Old Apology . . . for the Christian Religion . . . Revived (1705). Many of the early Fathers were fond of allegorizing, and so indeed was so devout a Christian as Pascal. This could never be considered heretical unless carried to great extremes, as Origen and Woolston did carry it. See Carré, op. cit., p. 33, for comments on the development of allegorizing tendencies in Christianity.

For Woolston, soon to become the most scandalous of the deists, had started on the primrose path by allegorical interpretations under the influence of Origen. To Whiston the lesson was clear: there must be no smuggling in of allegory in any form, there must be precise and literal fulfillment of every prophecy.

The confusion of some divines may be illustrated by Calamy's suggestion that the prophets were inspired but possibly their transcribers were not, and had erred.[4] Clearly this way led only to confusion, to the discrediting of every line of the Bible. The suggestion that the Bible might be of human origin, not divine, anticipated later criticism, but few were yet prepared to accept such a disconcerting conclusion. Neither was there any serious support for Whiston's theory that the pure revelation had been extensively corrupted, presumably by the Jews. (This, too, foreshadowed subsequent awareness of great chronological and textual confusions in the Old Testament.) In some intelligible sense, the Old Testament prophecies must have been fulfilled. Many Christians were reluctant to give up the double sense, but not a few agreed with Whiston that prophecies must have a single, literal sense only.[5] Both ways were dangerous: to be satisfied with partial allegory, and also to attempt to defend the literal fulfillment of every prophecy.

Anthony Collins, tongue firmly in cheek, hastened to step into this

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[4]See his Fourteen Sermons (1710).

[5]See A. A. Sykes, op. cit.; and George Benson, in Richard Watson, ed., A Collection of Theological Tracts (London, 1785), IV, v-viii, 431-513. But the shrewd William Warburton thought Sykes "rash and mad" to give up the double senses. (Nichols, Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century, II, 626.) This latter interpretation was that the prophecies applied to the coming of the Messiah in a secondary and allegorical sense only, but had a literal application to their own times.

breach. Ridiculing the idea that the prophecies were literally fulfilled, Collins informed Whiston that to insist upon this is "most destructive of Christianity."[6] He marshalled all the discrediting evidence against literal fulfillment. Implying that he shared Whiston's opinion that allegorical interpretation would be detrimental, Collins hoped to leave Christianity damned either way. Christians were understandably irritated by this mischievous intervention in their problems by a deist; they could hardly deny that they had left themselves open to it. Collins surely was, as Philip Doddridge exclaimed, "one of those unhappy people who have made it their interest to disbelieve Christianity, and are therefore searching out for any shadow of argument to support their consistency."[7] Nevertheless, Collins had struck at a sore place, and hit it hard. The Grounds and Reasons made a sensation, and has been called the most effective of all deist tracts. "The minds of many are intent upon this important subject," Sykes wrote in 1725.[8] This was the most turbulent period of the deistic debate.

Collins' shrewd and barely disguised attack on Scripture itself was followed by Thomas Woolston's assault on the miracles, still less disguised. The former, Whiston noted, made "a very great noise" when it appeared.[9] An even greater noise was made by Woolston, though some dismissed him as mad. Possessed of a lively and vigorous style, the author of Free Gifts to the Clergy and Discourses on the Miracles of Our Saviour

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[6] A Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion (1737 edition), p. 234. First published 1724.

[7] Correspondence and Diary, I, 457.

[8] Essay upon the Truth of the Christian Religion, pp. iii-iv.

[9] Memoirs, I, 316.

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climaxed the boldness of the deists, and paid for it in deprival, ostracism and finally imprisonment. He was no very weighty arguer. It is thought that no fewer than 30,000 copies of his attack on the miracles were sold.[10] That it did the deist cause much good may be doubted. A shocked respectability whispered that Woolston was both insane and ignorant—an enthusiast and a poor scholar, the two worst crimes in this age. Any one troubling to read his works finds too much shrewdness and wit to believe that a madman wrote them; yet he also finds that Woolston was incapable of careful argument, and, though he had been a scholar, he had reached a stage where, as he said, he did not care whether his learning was correct or not. It is easily demonstrated that he was insincere in his claim that he wished to save Christianity from the literalists.[11] "I am resolved," he wrote, "to run down the letter, in order to make way for the spirit of the Scriptures." He purported to follow the early Fathers; but it is evident that he had ended in hostility to the whole of Christianity.

Woolston, who had dared to make fun of the Gospels themselves, drew innumerable replies.[12] So did Collins and Tindal, whose book Christianity As Old As the Creation now appeared. Deists were growing bolder, and were at the peak of their success. The effect of Woolston's death in jail, where he languished on a charge of criminal blasphemy, scarcely hampered the cause, for the blood of martyrs is notoriously the seed of any church, and England seemed abashed at this persecution. If deism

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[10]A. S. Farrar, A Critical History of Freethought (London, 1862), p. 193.

[11]N. L. Torrey, Voltaire and the English Deists (New Haven and London, 1930), pp. 48-49.

[12]Some are listed in Nichols, Literary Anecdotes, I, 405. Replies to Tindal set a record, evidently numbering more than 100.

nonetheless quickly declined, the fault lay in the sterility of its own creed rather than in the failure of its criticism.

Strongest of the critics of Christianity was Collins. There were plenty of defenders of the prophecies, but they were not very effective. Thomas Sherlock believed that each prophecy need not be precisely fulfilled; it is enough to say that "Jewish religion itself, as containing virtually the hopes of the Gospel, is a Prophecy."[13] This was sensible and surprisingly modern, but not apt to seem adequate at a time when it was generally assumed that "a supra-natural revelation must be attested by supernatural proof."[14] Sykes agreed with Whiston that literal fulfillment had to be shown. Samuel Chandler, and later John Leland, attempted to deny that the Old Testament prophecies are indispensable to the truth of Christianity.[15] In view of the many explicit statements Christian apologists had long been making to the contrary, the defeat here is all too evident.

Weak as Woolston was, his daring had opened up a field very tempting to the talents of deists. Annet, Morgan, and Chubb took up the case against the miracles, including the central miracle itself, the Resurrection. Richard Shalbroke and Gilbert West, among others, felt obliged

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[13]The Use and Intent of Prophecy (1724), a very popular work.

[14]A. Richardson, Christian Apologetics (London, 1947), p. 163. For a modern view of the prophecies, see H. W. Porteus, in H. W. Robinson, ed., Record and Revelation (Oxford, 1938), pp. 248-249.

[15]Samuel Chandler, A Vindication of the Christian Religion (London, 1725); Leland, View, II, 102-103. On pp. 104-109, ibid., Leland mentions the chief replies to Collins. Samuel Chandler was a well-known Dissenting minister, sometimes confused with Edward Chandler, Bishop of Durham, who also wrote against Collins. It was in replying to the latter's Defence of Christianity from the Prophecies of the Old Testament that Collins made what ultimately proved to be a sound surmisal about the date of the Book of Daniel--a good example of deistic shrewdness. See Collins' Scheme of Literal Prophecy.

to defend the miracles of Christ with exhaustive examinations of the evidence; the vivid summation of Thomas Sherlock was a best-seller.[16] It appeared that deists were not even willing to accept the possibility of such miracles. Annet found "inconsistencies, improbabilities, absurdities and contradictions" in the testimony for the Resurrection, as did Chubb; but beyond this they had the argument, derived from Newtonianism, that the course of nature is not to be altered. The earlier deists had not presumed to challenge the very miracles of the Saviour; Chubb had even accepted them as adding "greater weight or power" to His message.[17] Now it was said that the Resurrection was so inherently unlikely that hardly any amount of circumstantial evidence would be convincing.[18]

It was this that John Jackson and Samuel Clarke thought rank atheism. Jackson, replying to Annet, remained confident that the prophecies and miracles could stand the test of any fair criticism.[19] Perhaps the

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[16] Smalbroke, A Vindication of the Miracles of Our Blessed Saviour (2 vols., London, 1729-31); Peter Annet, The Resurrection of Jesus Considered by a Moral Philosopher (London, 1744); Chubb, Posthumous Works, I, 332 ff.; Thomas Sherlock, The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ (1729). Smalbroke (1672-1749) was a fruitful controversialist who wrote also against Whiston and the Arians, against Dodwell on the soul, etc. Peter Annet, the last English deist of any importance, was also the most radical, and influenced strongly the later American movement associated with Tom Paine and Elihu Palmer.

[17] The True Gospel, pp. 52-53. That earlier deism was merely more cautious is indicated by the fact that while Toland's remarks on the miracles had been very ambiguous in Christianity Not Mysterious (pp. 144 ff., 1712 edition), he later made his scepticism more explicit—see Walter Merrill, op. cit., p. 63.

[18] Annet, op. cit., (3rd edition, 1744), pp. 75-77. Hume's famous essay on miracles appeared in 1748 (in Philosophical Essays concerning the Human Understanding), though he had written it earlier. For Lord Shaftesbury's bold insinuations as to the doubtfulness of miracles, see Aldridge, Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto, pp. 361-363.

[19] Address to the Deists, p. 71 and passim.

deists had gone too far. Sherlock's famous "Trial" was recognized as a popular success even by deists.[20] It seemed as if orthodoxy had carried the day after all; but then from an unexpected quarter Conyers Middleton launched a series of bombs. This Cambridge scholar, disciple of Bentley and the equal of any in learning, returned a devastating rebuttal to a book Daniel Waterland had written against Tindal.

2.

Whether Middleton was deist or Christian has rather unnecessarily troubled some writers.[21] Clearly, whatever you choose to call him, his significance was in his relative disinterestedness. A scholar and a rationalist through and through, deep piety was remote from him, yet he possessed none of the malignancy of the carping deist who delighted in smashing Christian idols. He would have been orthodox if he could. He had taken the measure of the debate between deist and Christian. He knew very well that the deists were neither fools nor villains, and could not be defeated by invective—or even by argument, on the grounds chosen. It annoyed him to hear Waterland call Tindal an ignoramus, and he reminded that divine astringently that Tindal was at least his match! He said bluntly that the ministers had nothing to offer against Collins

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[20]Arnet, op. cit., p. 3. Gilbert West's long and thorough defense of the Resurrection (1747), which may be found in vol. V of Watson's Collection of Theological Tracts, was also regarded as very successful.

[21]Leslie Stephen accused him of "conscious insincerity"; Sykes (Church and State, p. 421) is inclined to defend Middleton's "sincerity." (Church and State, p. 421) is inclined to defend Middleton's "sincerity."p. George Sherburn (in A. C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England, p. 1003) characterizes Middleton's best-known work as "unintentionally subversive," which is not strictly accurate. Torrey, Voltaire and the English Deists, pp. 155-171, discusses Middleton. That Middleton was clear from some of his letters (Miscellaneous Works, vol. II) as well as from a note in Nichols, Literary Anecdotes, III, 165-166.

"in which a man of sense could reasonably acquiesce."[22] This was not the propaganda of an inveterate deist, but the cool judgment of a great scholar. Faithful to the "plain historical method" of Locke, Middleton had been led by this method to abandon the view that the Scripture was perpetually inspired. To insist on complete inspiration will only bring Christianity into ridicule.[23] It is absurd to try to vindicate every text in its literal sense. Yet he also saw the foolishness of the deist claim that "the light of reason" is enough to give, as Tindal had said, "a perfect and complete rule of duty in all cases, both towards God and Man." Reason, Middleton pointed out, had never in all history been a foundation for popular religion. In short, this sensible if unemotional don perceived that both literal Christianity and constructive deism were unbelievable.

What then remained? Middleton did not go beyond the facts in the case; he was not a Law or Wesley, nor even a Hume. He could only say that while Christianity is not strictly true it is useful, since the masses must have mysteries in their religion. Like Buffon, he was prepared to admit "il faut une religion au peuple," and draw a line between peuple and philosophe. This apparently cynical view should not be interpreted as malicious; it was rather the dilemma in which he and others had been left. The controversy had deposited them on this awkward ledge, and they knew not how to get off.

Middleton's Letter to Dr. Waterland led eventually to the Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers ("which are supposed to have sub-

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[22] Miscellaneous Works (1752), II, 138-143, also iii.

[23] Ibid., II, 19; 73-74; 163-164.

sisted from the earliest ages through several successive centuries of the Christian church") (1749). On this attack on the reliability of the Fathers of the early church in their claims of miracles, the admission of Bishop Warburton that it "had given the miracles of the early ages such a blow as they would not easily recover from" is a sufficient comment.[24] The implications were evidently outrageous. John Wesley, to be sure, was unfair and inaccurate when he wrote

> It is easy to observe that the whole tenor of your argument tends to prove . . . that no miracles were wrought by Christ or his Apostles; and that these too were fools or knaves. . . .[25]

For Middleton had not attacked the integrity of the Apostolic Fathers, though he did attempt to show that they themselves had claimed no miracles; it was the Christians of the second and third centuries whom he indicted for gullibility. It is significant, however, that good Christians thought as Wesley did, and doubtless it was natural.

In other writings, Middleton denied that the apostles (also the prophets) were incapable of error, and detected inconsistencies in the Gospel accounts of Jesus.[26] This was surely carrying the critical spirit to the brink of iniquity.

To Middleton, whose Letter from Rome was a famous assault on Catholi-

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[24]Nichols, Illustrations, II, 179-181. Warburton could only salvage one or two miracles from the carnage Middleton wrought; he sought to vindicate one in his Julian (1750), for which, however, he had a naturalistic explanation.

[25]"Letter to Dr. Middleton," in Works, (1830), X, 1.

[26]See Miscellaneous Works, passim; e.g., "Reflections of the Dispute between the Apostles Peter and Paul," and "Reflections on the Variations or Inconsistencies Which Are Found among the Four Evangelists." In the latter he sees a general harmony which is strong evidence for the truth of the story, but he denies that the evangelists never erred.

cism, these were "superstitions" he was attacking, better suited for Romanism than for rational Protestantism, and he certainly did not think of himself as anti-Christian, though he was bitterly attacked as such.[27] But there was absolutely none of the *haereticus sensu polo* spirit in him. He followed where scholarship led, and no one showed so lucidly that it led away from Biblical literalism. It is safe to say that after Middleton educated men could no longer hold to a belief in the plenary inspiration and complete accuracy of Scripture. In his keen-sighted historical method the higher criticism had been born, though it would be a long time maturing. The century between Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants* and Middleton's *Free Inquiry* marked the rise and fall of Biblical Christianity. It is interesting that the *Free Inquiry* had not said a word about the Bible, but its method, the historical one of placing sacred history in the context of secular history, was revolutionary.

If the Bible was still the religion of Protestants, it must be on some other terms than Chillingworth had meant when he penned that famous phrase. Yet Middleton's same scholarship slew the deists in the same stroke; for no educated man could not think that Tindal was either credible or relevant. The way was cleared for the long task of reconstructing Christianity on a historical basis. It must not be supposed that Middleton abruptly ended all the preceding controversy. Deists continued to attack the external evidences of Christianity, and Christians to defend them. Middleton was furiously assailed, and lived long enough

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[27] See *Ibid.*, II, 305, 496 ff., for his answers to his detractors. His shrewd criticism of deism may be noted on pp. 175-176.

to dispose of only one or two of his critics. The debate about miracles and prophecies went on.[28] How far orthodoxy was from accepting any historical view of religious development may be judged from Warburton's comment that Hume in positing an original polytheism was guilty of "an atheistic naturalism." Orthodox Christianity was thus "deistic" compared to the radical new naturalism of Hume's historical method: Christians agreed with deists that monotheism had always existed.

3.

To detach Christianity from its Old Testament roots was always a strategic goal of the deists. If Tindal was "the first English deist to attack the Scripture in detail from the point of view of morality,"[29] no deist had ever neglected an opportunity to cast aspersions on the Jews, their Law and their prophets, their society and their view of God as exhibited in the Old Testament. The reason for this intellectual anti-Semitism of the deist movement is obvious: to discredit the Jews was to discredit Revelation, for they were its instruments. We need not question the sincerity of the deist when he argued that Christianity is sound, if it is a Christianity that "does not stand on the legs of Judaism."[30] It should stand instead on "the rock of nature," it ought to be just the "republication of the religion of nature," not a special revelation vouchsafed to the Jews. On these terms deists were always ready to embrace Christianity; the terms, of course, amounted to a demand

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[28]For some later tracts on the prophecies and miracles, see Watson's Collection of Theological Tracts, vol. V.

[29]Torrey, op. cit., p. 128.

[30]Ibid., pp. 195-196, quoting Peter Annet.

that Christianity as a special religion abdicate. Thomas Morgan tried to define the two parties as the "Christian Jews" and the "Christian Deists."[31]

To Tindal's and Morgan's disparagement of the Jews there were a number of replies in the expected manner.[32] The unexpected one was William Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses. Over this famous work a furious controversy broke out among the clergy to the renewed delight of the deists; Morgan thanked Warburton, ironically, on behalf of the deists.[33] Warburton's book reflected the man himself: it was a brilliant yet evidently perverse tour de force. The learned friend and theological tutor of Alexander Pope seems to sum up in his personality all the brilliance and oddity of theology in the age of reason. He had a horror of being thought unorthodox, but, carrying on the Clarke tradition, he nearly reasoned himself out of orthodoxy. The Divine Legation, called "the most learned, most arrogant, and most absurd work" produced in English theology for a century, had a main thesis both "simple and ingenious"—in the opinion of half his fellow clergymen, over-ingenious. Warburton, they declared, was either a subtle enemy to

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[31] The Moral Philosopher (1737).

[32] For example, Francis Webber, The Jewish Dispensation Considered and Vindicated. . . (1738); Moses Lowman, A Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews (1740); John Leland, The Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament Asserted, vol. I (1739).

[33] A Brief Examination of the Rev. Mr. Warburton's "Divine Legation of Moses," p. 1. Morgan was regarded by Warburton as a "senseless and abandoned scribbler" who only repeated Tindal. The judgment seems sound; yet Morgan had a flair for popularization, and The Moral Philosopher was widely read. Thomas Morgan was, like Chubb, a poor boy (Welsh), educated by a Dissenting minister; became a Presbyterian minister but was dismissed about 1721 for his extremely unorthodox views. He then became, evidently, a physician, and, most certainly, a prolific pamphleteer of indifferent worth.

Revelation or else a very indiscreet friend.[34] Echoes of the controversy were to be heard as late as 1766, when the great scholar Lowth attacked Warburton's thesis; and the bitterness of it may be judged from Warburton's own remark that he had been more reviled than any deist.[35] Among the sharp replies The Divine Legation drew was one by the great William Law, who had supposedly abjured all such argumentation. Here was another Sherlock-South affair to scandalise Christianity.

Warburton was scarcely as eccentric as William Whiston, and was most anxious to be considered an orthodox Christian, unlike his friend Conyers Middleton. But there is much evidence that those who admired his abilities feared his inclinations to singularity. In his magnum opus he had, as he thought, invented a new method of proving the truth of Scripture, at the same time striking a clever blow against the deists. The new method was that Warburton called using internal evidence rather than (exclusively) external.[36] In this method, which involved a certain idea of growth and development in religion, later students might detect the faint gleam of modern higher criticism. But Warburton had only one idea in mind: to show that the absence of belief in immortality among the Hebrews proved that they must have been under divine guidance. He was aware that deists had often disparaged the moral and religious concepts of the Old Testament, supposing that this weakened the plausibility of the Jews being the chosen people. But Warburton held that it demonstrated the opposite. The Jews must indeed have been chosen, else

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[34]See A. W. Evans, Warburton and the Warburtonians (London, 1932), passim—the most authoritative study of an important figure.

[35]Nichols, Anecdotes, II, 176-177.

[36]The Divine Legation of Moses (1738), pp. 1-2.

they could not have survived without a belief in immortality! Thus Warburton hoped, as he said, to show the truth of Christianity even on the deists' own principles.[37]

For most of his contemporaries, the argument was too paradoxical. It resembled the old joke about the infidel converted to Christianity after a look at the Papacy because he reasoned that nothing so corrupt could endure unless indeed divinely protected! It was at any rate in conflict with strongly held beliefs—that immortality had always been believed in since Adam, that the Old Testament gives proof of such beliefs, that this idea was not hidden from the Jews by God and Moses.[38] It opened up a fresh argument, also bound to be barren and inconclusive in the absence of greater knowledge about ancient history, one which could only delight the deists, puzzle the orthodox, and perhaps disgust the public. In subsequent volumes of The Divine Legation Warburton extended his range to write interestingly on a number of different questions; the work is an uncommonly rich one. He was a learned and ingenious man, though alleged to be disputatious, arrogant, and a lover of paradox. He was a stout champion of orthodoxy on many questions, a keen exposer of the inconsistencies in deism.[39] But it was the fate of

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[37]Warburton recognised an inconsistency of the deists when they also argued that pre-Christians were all quite moral, and capable of adequate religious knowledge. (See Ibid., pp. 413-414.) To deism the Jews were a people apart too, it seemed: they alone were incapable of even natural religion. Christians, Warburton says, must hold that pre-Christians were neither too weak nor too strong in reason: not strong enough to discover the true principles of religion unaided, yet not so weak as to be unable to appreciate those truths when they were revealed.

[38]William Law, A Short but Sufficient Confutation of the Rev. Dr. Warburton's "Divine Legation of Moses" (1757).

[39]No one, for instance, argued so well that the deists cannot prove their alleged natural religion to be really natural; for they really

his best-known work to do, in the opinion of many of his contemporaries, more harm than good to the Christian cause.

4.

Of these lengthy disputes pursued with so much intellectual labor, most if not all seem to be obsolete; and our modern verdict on them is apt to be the same as that which Gibbon, only a few years later, pronounced on Warburton's book: "a monument, already crumbling into dust, of the vigor and weakness of the human mind." The ingenuity lavished by both deist and Christian on the external evidences was mainly wasted, since both wrote largely without that factual historical knowledge of the Bible and its times since uncovered. Their unhistorical approach renders their quarrels meaningless. What point is there in asking whether the Jews were moral or immoral, whether they did or did not believe in a future life, as if there had been no change throughout their history? Warburton was right, roughly speaking: the Jews developed the idea of a future existence quite late, and then not in the Christian sense. But he did not deal with the question as a development at all. Out of all this discussion, however, there did slowly emerge the foundations of modern criticism. Middleton and Warburton bring us to its threshold. The Germans were stimulated in their scholarship by the English debate. Is it not always true in human history that a vast amount of irrelevant

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have the advantage of the Christian revelation in arriving at principles which they falsely take to be attainable by unaided reason. As we would put it, there is no such thing as an abstract content of "reason" outside the social and historical milieu. This is an argument often used against deism; see Dryden's Religio Laici, also Weekly Miscellany, October 27, 1733. Warburton had a gift of shrewd thinking and trenchant expression beyond most others of his day, dull as his theological paradoxes may seem to a modern.

intellectual energy is required in order to distill a little intellectual progress?

There were many other disputes growing out of deism, some of which had only a personal interest, others of which led away from the Bible to general philosophic and moral discussions. As an example of the former, there was the question of Alexander Pope's deism.[40] The general significance of this is that the poet, while innocent of any heretical intent, had absorbed deistic currents of thought unknowingly, so pervasive were these. Pope could pillory Toland and Tindal, yet absorb and convey the ideas of Leibniz and Bolingbroke. That the Essay on Man is loosely deistic seems evident, though the fact had to be pointed out before it was recognized. Warburton was able to attack the Essay as "rank atheism" first, and then change to lead the vindication of Pope. Atheism, Pope thought (so did the deists), is absurd. But so is theology. Why should there not be a universal "common sense" religion, so that all this vapid theologizing might be avoided? Why should man strive to grasp the supernatural, anyway? Doubtless it exists; but human reason is too weak to grasp it, being proportioned to positive facts alone, and so "the proper study of mankind is man." To "look through nature up to nature's God" is only common sense, but to go any farther leads to foolishness. Catholicism, scepticism, and genteel deism blended in Pope's admittedly confused but significant philosophy. What it meant above all was that men of taste were profoundly bored with theological disputes. They did not want

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[40]The subject is discussed in many places; see among others Evans, Warburton, chap. V; Nichols, Illustrations, II, 53-54; Merrill's study of Bolingbroke, op. cit.; and passages in E. Sayous, Les deistes anglais et le christianisme (Paris, 1882). An article by P. Van Tieghem in Revue de littérature comparée (Paris), III (1923), 190-212, discusses the influence of Pope's "Universal Prayer" on French deism.

to be branded heretics or infidels, not at all—this was enthusiasm. The disputatious "freethinkers" disgusted them; but so did disputatious divines, and they did not want to have to defend their orthodoxy in this way.[41] One may say that they wanted the advantages of orthodoxy without the burdens, and that they proposed to solve the problem by dismissing it. But one may not deny that they represented a deep revulsion against the barren and interminable debates about the proofs of Christianity and the points of Christian doctrine. The more popular journals learned to avoid all theological controversy.[42] A great English historian has written that this period was marked by "a general indifference to all questions of religious speculation or religious life."[43] The statement is much too sweeping; but it is true that both the general public and the men of letters increasingly ignored the theological combatants, finding the debate most tedious.

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[41]Arthur O. Lovejoy, "'Pride' in Eighteenth Century Thought," Modern Language Notes, XXXVI (January, 1921), pp. 31-37: "The authors who were perhaps most influential and the most representative in the early and mid-eighteenth century made a great point of reducing man's claims to 'reason' to a minimum, and to belittling the importance of that faculty in human existence. . . ." This phenomenon was the literary reaction to rational divinity. We observe it in Bolingbroke, the deist. Reason was rejected only as far as it attempted to probe the supernatural, however, in the main.

[42]Defoe, Writings, ed. Lee, II, 128-130: in 1719 Defoe apologized for inserting a theological note into his paper. "Religious things are sometimes tiresome to many of your readers, who generally expect something more diverting. . . ." The Spectator, of course, made a point of avoiding theological abstrusities in favor of entertaining moral edification. Benjamin Franklin reflected the boredom with theology as he related in his Autobiography how he could take no interest in the "polemic arguments" of the Pennsylvania Christians, which he found "dry, uninteresting, and unedifying."

[43]John Richard Greene, A Short History of the English People (London, 1921), p. 735.

5.

The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, who died in 1713 but whose ideas exerted an influence throughout the century (being carried on by Frances Hutcheson especially), was above all a man of taste, willing to say genially that "the most ingenious way of becoming foolish is by a system." He did not make a system, and he abhorred the rationalistic moralists as well as the theologians, but his essays contributed to the deist cause, both negatively and positively. Shaftesbury was really neither very original nor very acute, but he was a consummate literary artist in the prose style.[44] He revived the Pomponazzian argument that virtue is its own best reward, from which it was inferred that Christianity's reliance on future rewards and punishments is a false or inferior morality. Whether false or inferior makes a difference, to be sure; if the latter, Shaftesbury must find himself in the familiar position of saying that an enlightened few do not need revealed religion, but the rest do, and it is necessary for society. Evidently this was indeed Shaftesbury's view. He was quite willing to accept the Anglican Church as a useful institution. The deists, however, were soon arguing that belief in a future life has no value for anyone, and that man as a

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[44] R. S. Crane, "Suggestions towards a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling'," Journal of English Literary History, I (December, 1934), 205-230, and Ernest Tuveson, "The Origins of the 'Moral Sense'," Huntington Library Quarterly, XI (May, 1948), point out the sources of Shaftesbury, mainly the Platonists. D. D. Raphael, The Moral Sense (London, 1947) indicates that Shaftesbury's ethical ideas were not very clear, and it remained for Hutcheson to give them more precise statement. Alfred O. Aldridge, "Two Versions of Shaftesbury's Inquiry Concerning Virtue," Huntington Library Quarterly, XIII (February, 1950), points up the craftsmanship of the essays.

"sociable animal" has sufficient natural morality.[45] This idea they had received from Shaftesbury.

Hutcheson, developing Shaftesbury, would teach that "the ethical ideal is possible of attainment by man without the acceptance by him of a theological basis." A "moral sense" exists instinctively, anterior to all religious beliefs. Benevolence is a part of human nature, Shaftesbury supposed, using the analogy of moral approbation with esthetic pleasure. More definitely naturalistic in Hutcheson, this theory was really directed against the egoism of Hobbes and Mandeville, who asserted the impossibility of disinterested benevolence. Nor did Shaftesbury claim that the instinct of benevolence operates automatically; he thought it had to be carefully educated and cultivated. But the deists were quick to take over and exaggerate the idea.

Orthodox Christians immediately detected a dangerous heresy in the essays of Shaftesbury. They were considered as "very artfully" attacking revealed religion under cover of "fine language and beautiful sentiments."[46] The 1709 Boyle Lectures were directed against them, only two years after they first appeared.[47] Pope told him, said Warburton,

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[45]Thomas Chubb, Some Observations . . . [on] Mr. Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses, in Posthumous Works, I, 69-94. It was a part of Warburton's argument, of course, that belief in a future life is indispensable to society, except under a special and divine dispensation.

[46]Doddridge, Correspondence and Diary, I, 62. A. O. Aldridge's work, Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto, not only analyzes the question of Shaftesbury's deism but includes (pp. 371 ff.) an extensive list of the references to Shaftesbury in the eighteenth century.

[47]Hunt, Religious Thought, III, 116-117. Most of the essays published together as the Characteristics in 1711 had appeared earlier, 1707-10. Aldridge, loc. cit., points out that a version of the Inquiry concerning Virtue had circulated earlier among a small number.

that the "Characteristics had done more harm to revealed religion in England than all the works of infidelity put together."[48] For one thing, the essayist gave an impetus to the use of ridicule, which tendency deists had already shown, but in which they were now much encouraged. They could quote the eminent Lord Shaftesbury that ridicule was nothing less than the "test of truth."[49]

Shaftesbury's attack on immortality and his assertion of an innate moral sense were both embarrassing to Christians. They were hard to meet, because set forth in terms of the highest sort of ethical ideal. Possibly Christianity had laid too much stress on the usefulness of its doctrine, as its greatest proof. A belief in immortality had been declared indispensable to morality and social order—the only way to hold in check men's passions. Locke, and later Bolingbroke, said that immortality cannot be proved, but is most useful.[50] Shaftesbury questioned whether the idea was even useful. Did it really make men better? He thought not. Might society get along very well without any such thing as a Christian church? Shaftesbury led to the implication that it might, though he himself would not have gone so far. Strictly speaking, no doubt, it is irrelevant for a Christian to inquire whether Christianity has made the world a happier place.[51] Yet the Christians of this

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[48]Evans, Warburton, p. 200.

[49]See Alfred O. Aldridge, "Shaftesbury and the Test of Truth," PMLA, LX pt. 2 (March, 1945). Professor Aldridge points out that Shaftesbury did not actually claim that ridicule was the test of truth, but he did insist that it was a legitimate device to use on religious subjects.

[50]Locke, An Essay concerning Human Understanding (Ed. A. C. Fraser, London, 1894), II, 192; Bolingbroke, Works, IV, 327.

[51]Jenkin, A Brief Confutation, p. 46.

age had said the opposite too many times.

Shaftesbury was answered many times, not often with outstanding success by Christians.[52] The shrewd Bernard de Mandeville stabbed at him and Christianity both. Man, as he saw it, is neither rational nor benevolent, but simply selfish.[53] So he is, indeed, to many Christians; Mandeville himself, like Pierre Bayle, owed much to the Calvinist tradition. The optimistic Christians of this era, however, were not Calvinists.[54] In arguing that good and evil impulses have nothing to do with formal belief or religious doctrine, that a society of atheists might be as virtuous as a society of (presumed) Christians, Mandeville naturally shocked respectable opinion, and it was no wonder he was universally reviled. He did not believe the great majority of men to be rational, or benevolent, or capable of Christian salvation. But human selfishness is socially harmless; viciousness cancels out, "private vices equal public virtue." In appearing to sanction wickedness Mandeville so disturbed a righteous generation that even Edward Gibbon applauded the pious William Law for refuting such a "licentious doctrine."[55] This harsh realism did not even appeal to the average deist,

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[52]For example, Isaac Watts, Self-love and Virtue Reconciled Only by Religion (1739); part II of Berkeley's Alciphron; John Leland, letter V in View of the Deistical Writers, where (I, 71-72) numerous other answers to Shaftesbury are listed. See also Aldridge, op. cit., pp. 371 ff.

[53]Many deists (see Chubb, True Gospel, pp. 18-19, or Morgan, Moral Philosopher, I, 393-394) seized upon the ethical theory of the rationalist theologians Clarke and Wollaston that morality is derived from an eternal and unalterable "reason of things." Wollaston, in whose Religion of Nature this is most extensively (and foolishly) worked out, assailed Shaftesbury's idea that human instincts may be trusted. Shaftesbury in turn had poked fun at the intellectualistic system-makers. Mandeville laughed at both.

[54]See further below, chapter VIII.

[55]Gibbon, Autobiography (Everyman's Library), pp. 16-17.

who generally thought of man as both rational and good. He was not above using it, however, to discomfit Christians.

Perhaps this whole generation owed a debt to Mandeville for exposing the hollowness of its pretensions to virtue. William Law found himself forced to agree with Mandeville that mere morality is about as good on infidel terms as on Christian. "He brought the great question, whether 'right' and 'wrong' mean anything, to an issue."[56] Mandeville did not so much attack Christianity as deny its relevance to eighteenth century England. And it is certainly true that to the great majority, Christianity meant a rather complacent creed of bourgeois morality. The deepest Christians saw that if it were no more than that it must perish at the hands of deism. The crisis was really one within Christianity. A handful of deists could not slay her, unless she had already mortally wounded herself.

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[56]William Law, Remarks on the Fable of the Bees, edited with introduction by F. D. Maurice (Cambridge, 1844), p. ix.

CHAPTER VII

ORTHODOXY AT BAY

> We are outrageously attacked from both within and from without, by open enemies, and false brethren; with pretext of Scripture and in defiance of it. . . .—Francis Squire, 1723.

1.

Deism was never respectable. To an overwhelming majority of Englishmen, rank unbelief was abhorrent. If Christians had presented a firm and united front against the scoffers, the outcome would never have been in doubt for a moment. The "false brethren" were more dangerous than the open enemies; or, to put it more fairly, it was confusion within the orthodox camp that rendered its cause desperate. We have already seen how persistently deists dwelt on the discords of the faithful.

It is best to define an orthodox Christian as one who "considers it important to be what he regards as an orthodox Christian."[1] This included nearly everyone; it included, for instance, Whiston the Arian, who thought Socinians and deists scandalous, and it included so unusual a sect as the Quakers, who did not like to be associated with deism.[2]

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[1] Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, I, 23.

[2] A Quaker attack on deism is Alexander Arscott's Some Considerations Relating to the Present State of the Christian Religion. (London, 1731; reprinted in Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin, 1732). The apostate Quaker George Keith brought charges against his former brethren of affinity with deism, but these were very loose. For an interesting

But the objective standards of orthodoxy were increasingly in doubt.

Orthodoxy was certainly not Romanism, for all remained staunchly hostile to the Catholics. Cruder Whig propaganda continued to accuse the High Church Tories of "papist" tendencies, but this was as wide of the mark as the Tory hint that all Dissenters were bloody revolutionaries. Far into the eighteenth century, all sides employed the appeal to prejudices against Rome. The conservative apologist Berkeley asked if all this undermining of the true faith would not leave an opening for "Popish emissaries."[3] Quakers and Methodists were quite commonly accused of being papists in disguise. Freethinkers and moderate Churchmen were quick to label any appeal to authority as Romanism. The deist Thomas Morgan wrote on "the absurdity of opposing faith to reason," but here he spoke not for the deists alone.[4] There was never any question of closing the debate by an appeal either to an infallible chair or to blind faith.

It was Protestant Christianity, then. But the Protestants in England were deeply divided. The dominant Anglican Church was bitterly torn into factions. Those Whiggish Anglicans who had inherited the mantle of Tillotson and Stillingfleet, including such as Benjamin Hoadly and Samuel Clarke, incurred the reproaches of the High Church element, as betrayers of the true way; there are no severer strictures in this

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discussion of the relationship between eighteenth century Quakerism and deism, see F. B. Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1948), pp. 171-174, 210-212, except that Tolles is confused as to the definition of deism and ranks Locke, Clarke and Wollaston as deists.

[3] Works, II, 117-118. See also James T. Hillhouse, The Grub Street Journal (Durham, N.C., 1928), p. 242, for some strong anti-Catholic views of a High Church organ.

[4] A Collection of Tracts . . ., pp. 151 ff.

period than those passed by one Anglican on another, mainly by the disgruntled Tories on the victorious Whigs. Doubtless this was chiefly a political quarrel—yet it is well to remember that politics and religion were still connected.[5] A 1704 pamphlet stated accurately enough that "all this noise about High and Low Church . . . signifies no more than Whig and Tory."[6] But after all the question of church and state was religious as well as political. High Church Tories sincerely believed that the Whiggish political doctrines dealt a mortal blow to the position of the Church, and hence to all religion. To these embittered reactionaries, the Church of England had been ever since 1689, in Dryden's phrase, "a meer mock queen of a divided band." Toleration had begun it; this was, to Charles Leslie, "a sacrificing of God to Mammon."[7] All subsequent evils they regarded as stemming from the events of that year, which had devastated their cherished principles of hereditary monarchy, non-resistance, and especially the firm alliance of church and state. The Revolution, they believed, had substituted in religion the mere fiat of man for the authority of God; utility in place of Scriptural command, and "Erastianism" in place of the proper equality of

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[5]See below, chapter IX.

[6]See A Dictionary of English Church History, ed. S. L. Ollard (London, 1912), p. 115. Aside from his loyalty to the Stuart cause and disgust at the appointment of Whiggish bishops in lieu of those who refused to swear allegiance to the new government, the marks of a "high flyer" were his suspicions of toleration, with demands for strict enforcement of laws against Dissent; his inclination to like more ceremony in the Church, though this was vague and scarcely doctrinal; and perhaps his attitude towards Reunion, though this was also no very clear criterion, since projects for alliance with the French (Gallican) church were advocated not only by High Churchmen like Hickes and Leslie but also by Archbishop Wake (1717-1720), who was surely not a Tory.

[7]Leslie, Theological Works, III, 413.

church and state. "I say it is a necessary and infallible consequence," wrote Francis Squire, "that if we take not our faith and our manners implicitly from the authority of God, we must do it from the fancy and caprice of man."[8]

In the mythology of Non-Jurors and their sympathizers,[9] this is what had happened when an anointed monarch had been deposed by Parliament, and, most of all, when bishops who refused to recognize the act were deposed by the state.

> For how can she constrain them to obey
> Who has herself cast off the lawful sway?

The Church was no longer a true one. Dr. Sacheverell, leader of the Tory uprising of 1709, denounced the Whig bishops as "factious and schismatical impostors."[10] This intrepid soul, a true "fanatic" in the [illegible][11] what a great many Anglicans were thinking. Such invective was treasonable after 1715, and several people paid with their lives for repeating it

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[8]Squire, An Answer to the Independent Whig (London, 1723), p. 10. Thomas Gordon, the crude but popular "Independent Whig," gave an extreme version of the Whig position, embarrassing to moderate Whigs, which was deistic and cynically Erastian (justifying the Established Church on grounds of political expediency alone.) See the volumes of the Independent Whig (London, 1747.)

[9]I.e., those who refused the oath of allegiance to William and Mary in 1688, and were deprived. To the extreme Non-Jurors, the Church since 1688 was without legitimacy, and their own society the only true church. Many who sympathized with them and grumbled at Whiggism did not carry defiance this far.

[10]See Abbie T. Scudi, The Sacheverell Affair (New York, 1939).

[11]The pamphlet Faults on Both Sides (London, 1710), though moderate, blames Sacheverell as a "fanatic" and as a priest meddling in politics. Ordinarily these were unpopular characteristics; Sacheverell won support mainly because of hostility to the incumbent Whigs on the war issue.

a few years later. But many Anglican clergymen went on thinking it and saying it privately. In 1717 George Hickes, foremost of the non-juring bishops, said it for the last time, publicly: the clergy cannot be deprived by any secular power, and it is blasphemy to pray for a Hanover, whose alleged Church of England is a schismatical imposture.[12] Benjamin Hoadly, most "political" of the Whig bishops,[13] replied that James II was properly excluded, and the Non-Jurors properly deprived for not swearing allegiance to the government. But he went on to define the Church in such terms as few honest Anglicans could accept. If the so-called Bangorian controversy presented the alternatives, there was evidently a most unpleasant choice between treasonable fanaticism and semi-deistic Erastianism. The Bangorian controversy left the Church still hopelessly divided and confused.[14]

Hoadly's version of the nature of the Church was so broad that even Edmund Calamy, the Dissenter, saw in it more of Dissent than of Anglicanism. Hoadly went beyond the limits that even his fellow Latitudin-

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[12]See William B. Gardner, "George Hickes and the Origin of the Bangorian Controversy," Studies in Philology, XXXIX no. 1 (January, 1942), pp. 65-78.

[13]See Edwin R. Bingham, "The Political Apprenticeship of Benjamin Hoadly," Church History, XVI (September, 1947), pp. 154-165. Even Whiston, expelled as an Arian, disapproved of Hoadly as a "political bishop." That he earned his appointment by political writings on behalf of the Whigs, and that he shamefully neglected his diocese, are reproaches that ought not to prevent a recognition of Hoadly's intellectual honesty and ability as a liberal clergyman.

[14]Hoadly's sermon of March 31, 1717, on "The Nature of the Kingdom or Church of Christ," defined the church as no more than the body of sincere believers, and repudiated all authority over its members' "consciences or conduct." It led to a famous quarrel which ended in a dean and a bishop giving each other the lie direct. Even Calamy the Dissenter thought that "this unhappy squabble did a great deal of mischief" to religion generally. An account of the controversy with a list of all the important documents may be found in vol. II of Hoadly's Works (1773).

arians thought discreet. But their position was his in the broader outline. "Mutual charity, not . . . a pretense of uniformity of opinions" was to be the basis of the church; the right of private judgment, reduction of necessary beliefs to a few fundamentals, and a tendency towards moralism (expressed as a concern for "virtue and holiness" rather than theological opinions)—these were tenets of the liberal wing.[15] The only other road, they argued, led to Rome—or, as Clarke said, turning the Erastian charge against his accusers, to Hobbes.[16] But this mild and complacent spirit was a red rag to High Churchmen. They reserved their choicest epithets for Gilbert Burnet, and then Benjamin Hoadly, and then Edmund Gibson.[17] Yet differences of doctrine were almost non-existent. The question was one of church discipline and government, with a heavy overcast of political animosity. True, High Churchmen were aware of the threat of moralism, and insisted that religious duties are more important than good deeds. They never trusted private judgment quite so far, displaying a readiness to demand conformity and to exercise discipline against any cleric who strayed beyond

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[15] A. A. Sykes, The External Peace of the Church (London, 1716), is a good brief statement of the liberal Anglican position, by one of the more notably liberal Anglicans, scarcely less distasteful to the conservative faction than Hoadly.

[16] Samuel Clarke, Works, IV, 240 ff.

[17] See Hunt, Religious Thought, III, 1-31. Whig Anglicans could answer quite as bitterly; see William Fleetwood's satirical letter ridiculing High Church doctrines of apostolic succession and "infallibility," strong enough to be reprinted in the anti-clerical Pillars of Priestcraft and Orthodoxy Shaken, vol. III (1763 edition).

the Thirty Nine Articles.[18]

Circumstances were against the "high flyers" in the age of Walpole. Even before that, the Act of Union (1707) had dealt a severe blow to the theory of religious uniformity, by conceding that Scotland might retain her own (established) Presbyterian church.[19] After 1714 the Occasional Conformity Acts, passed in the late years of Anne, were repealed. (The Test and Corporation Acts remained, but were scarcely enforced.) The intransigent spirit of Sacheverell, Leslie and Atterbury gradually departed, the failure of the '15 being of course the critical event; and Thomas Sherlock, who becomes the leading Tory Churchman in the 1730's, is a far milder figure. When purged of its intolerance and political prejudice, the High Church tradition contained a core of real Christian piety unique in this age. Out of it issued the religious revival; it is hardly accidental that William Law had been a Non-Juror and that Wesley's family drew on the same tradition. (John Byrom was also the son of a Non-Juror.) Likewise Butler and Berkeley, greatest of the Christian apologists, must be ranked with the element in the Church that had always mistrusted the glib rationalism of the Whig bishops. These men really cared about religion, whereas the suspicion

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[18]Seen in the Clarke case, discussed above. Arthur W. Hopkinson, About William Law (London, 1948), pp. 35-38, contains a good brief summary of the High Church position, as reflected in Law's critique of Hoadly. Fleetwood, Works (1854), III, 4-40, 143-173, 186-210, sheds light on certain differences concerning baptism and the Sacrament—particularly the performing of baptism by laymen, defended by liberals.

[19]W. E. H. Lecky, Rationalism in Europe (London, 1910), II, 121. See Leslie's laments over this act, Rehearsal, vols. II-IV (1707-08), passim. It is worth noting that in America this precedent was immediately used to challenge the legality of an Established Church beyond England proper.

is that the others cared only about morality or scholarship; and after they had at length learned to stop blaming the decay of piety on "the downfall of Monarchy and Episcopacy,"[20] they proceeded to constructive thinking.

In Alciphron, Berkeley traced the infidels back to Latitudinarianism. By this time even Bishop Gibson was convinced that the men of latitude were "semi-infidels, who . . . were destroying the whole work of our redemption by Christ and making Christianity little more than a system of morality."[21] The progress of deism led to a certain reaction against such weak-kneed Christianity. Defeated on the political field, the high Anglicans were eventually to prove victorious in the religious. Yet the eighteenth century was no time for Anglo-Catholicism. A stricter adherence to the ceremonies was about the only message High Church had, and it was not a very vital one (we remember Wesley's obsession with ritual in his student days.) John Wesley and William Law emerged from this tradition, but they were beyond the pale of Anglican orthodoxy; for the high as well as the low Anglicans remained victims of that terrific prejudice against "enthusiasm" which caused Wesley and Whitefield to seem like the worst of monsters. Meanwhile the church remained strongly rationalist, if not Hoadlian. In 1738 the famous Bishop Warburton, advising an aspiring young religious student what to read as his basic education, recommended Locke, Cudworth, Wollaston, Stillingfleet,

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[20]Nichols, Anecdotes, I, 319. See also p. 384 for a similar comment in the letters of clergymen. The latter one blames the Whig bishops because they "publish the vain inventions of men, instead of the pure word of God."

[21]Berkeley, Works, II, 45; Sykes, Gibson, p. 264.

Grotius, Puffendorf, and even Bayle.[22]

Between the (orthodox) Dissenters and Anglicanism there were no particular differences of doctrine.[23] There was a tendency, especially after 1725 (and in the New World as well as the old), for Dissenters to conform, possibly in accordance with Emerson's observation that no Dissenter rides in his coach for three generations. Certainly there were many signs of the decay of Dissent, mainly from an excess of prosperity and respectability; the alarm became great around 1730.[24] Nothing better indicates the temper of the age than the almost complete disappearance of the multitudinous sects of the seventeenth century, and the absence of any new ones. Presbyterian, Independent and Baptist, along with Quaker, persisted but in all cases showed signs of diminishing vitality. Clearly the decline of persecution and the growth of their wealth softened the Dissenters' zeal. Still, the "Dissenting interest" survived, a vigorous and prosperous ten per cent of the nation; in terms of knowledge and ability, Nonconformity proved the equal of Anglicanism.[25]

Dissent, as well as Anglicanism, lacked unity. It had been split

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[22]Nichols, Illustrations, IV, 849-850. The letter is a most interesting one.

[23]See, in addition to Henry W. Clark, History of English Nonconformity (London, 1913), vol. II, the useful little book by Duncan Coomer, English Dissent under the Early Hanoverians (London, 1946).

[24]E.g., Strickland Gough, Enquiry into the Causes of the Decay of the Dissenting Interest (London, 1730); Philip Doddridge, Free Thoughts on the Most Probable Means of Reviving the Dissenting Interest, 1731; Dr. Calamy observed (1728) that many Dissenters of all sort were concerned "about the decay of the Dissenting interest, and the occasion of it." (Own Life, II, 529-530).

[25]H. McLachlan, Essays and Addresses (Manchester, 1951), includes a defense of the learning and qualities of civilization of the eighteenth century Dissenters, by a veteran historian of that subject. See review of this book by F. Kenworthy in Hibbert Journal, July, 1951, pp. 415-416.

in 1695 by "perfectly scandalous" quarrels between Calvinists and Arminians (the former called Antinomians and the latter Arians by their enemies). In the doubtful days under Anne, they drew together again from fear of persecution, but again were torn apart by the Arian question, 1719-21. The "happy union" of 1690-91 between Independents and Presbyterians was one casualty of these disputes.[26] The stormy meeting at Salter's Hall where that question of the Trinity was debated was the triumph of disunity and the defeat of any effort to impose a doctrinal unity on Dissent. The local church determined the creed; and within Presbyterianism, for instance, one found Calvinists, Arminians, and Arians. Independency remained more orthodox, with perhaps more religious zeal and a warmer spirit of faith, expressed in Watts' hymnody which flourished among these gathered covenanters. Doctrinally the general trend in Dissent was towards "a kind of theological indefiniteness"—broad-minded and tolerant but passive and negative.[27] Watts' music and the suggestion of Dr. Doddridge that preaching might be changed in favor of more plainness and warmth must not be confused with anything like the evangelical spirit. English Dissent was to show nothing to compare with the Great Awakening in America, and evangelicalism had

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[26]See F. H. A. Micklewright, "A Footnote to the Happy Union of 1690," Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society, VIII, 28-29.

[27]F. Kenworthy, Trans. Unit. Hist. Soc., VIII, 61. J. H. Colligan, in Eighteenth Century Nonconformity (London, 1915), attributes the decay of Dissent to a neglect of "churchmanship"—the elevation of individual opinion and rationalism above all elements of form and tradition—which seems to be another way of saying that these eighteenth century Dissenters were true children of the age of reason.

to emerge from within the Church of England.[28] Doddridge and Watts were fine neo-classic gentlemen and scholars, pious but restrained, abhorring enthusiasm. They were the leaders of a community not noted for its religious vigor in this period. Dissent had become respectable; and though it is surely not true that all Dissenters had grown very wealthy, their upper strata were among the leaders in the rise of a new wealthy class.

Certainly the movement relaxed before the warm fire of this tolerance and prosperity. After 1715 they had little to complain of. Some, in an effort to arouse the group from complacency, tried to stir up a new attack on the Establishment between 1732 and 1736, and a drive to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. It is most doubtful if this unsuccessful campaign resurrected much zeal among the Dissenters. "I desire to be thankful for the liberty we have," one of their ministers wrote in refusing to become a militant fighter for new rights at this time.[29] The reaction was typical. Dissenters of this period wished to stir up no trouble, and were complacent.[30] Not until the days of Price, Priestley and Cartwright would nonconformity show vigor, in a new direc-

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[28]"The enthusiasm of the Methodists shocked the staid Independents of the 1740's"--Davis, Watts, p. 49. Watts joined the bishops in denouncing Whitefield. He and Doddridge wanted a far more chaste revival than this. See Watts' Guide to Prayer with its rejection of all "enthusiasm" in worship.

[29]Letters to Dissenting Ministers and to Students for the Ministry from the Rev. Mr. Job Orton, ed. S. Palmer (1806), I, 156. Published in part as Letters to a Young Clergyman (London, 1794). Daniel Neal's partisan History of the Puritans was a reflection of this campaign against the Establishment 1730-36; it stirred up a violent literary war between Anglicans and Puritans--see, e.g., the numerous articles on it in Weekly Miscellany, ca. December, 1733.

[30]For the startling decline of religious spirit among the Quakers, see W. C. Braithwaite, The Second Period of Quakerism (London, 1919), and F. B. Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House, espec. pp. 30-42.

tion somewhat, and then hardly with the approval of the great majority. Aroused by the struggle of their co-religionists in America, these militant battlers for liberty and democracy revealed that the major genius of Nonconformity was still resistance to arbitrary rule--a political rather than a religious genius. In the earlier part of the century that spirit had little chance to exhibit itself.

2.

To sum up, although orthodoxy of all sorts could agree in opposition to (a) Romanism, (b) rank infidelity, and (c) enthusiasm, and shared a common optimism that Christianity was unassailable on grounds of reason, still its own divisions strengthened the deistic opposition. Unlimited rational inquiry, as well as the drift to a Pelagian moralism,[31] began to alarm some Christians. The moderate wing of Anglicanism continued to believe that free inquiry could not harm Christianity, but their position was somewhat discredited by what we can call Hoadlianism. There began to emerge, under the leadership of Law, Butler, Berkeley and Wesley, a partial, sometimes an absolute retreat from reason. Before describing that movement briefly, we ought to make note of the defeats orthodoxy suffered. Some of these have been mentioned in previous chapters.

It may be enough to point out that in 1736 an Anglican bishop wrote an essay on The Difficulties and Discouragements Which Attend the Study of the Scriptures which seemed to abandon, in despair, the classic Protestant foundation of Christianity. To be sure, Bishop Hare doubtless

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[31]See the following chapter on Arminianism.

wrote in irony when he suggested that to study the Bible is the best way to become a heretic.[32] Hare, a liberal, had in mind the calumny to which his friends Clarke and Whiston had been subjected for their honest inquiries. His intention was certainly to satirize the already evident retreat from reason. But there were many who took Hare seriously, and in fact Hare himself clearly felt that the study of Scripture was the cause of difficulties. The book is really an argument against any such thing as a fixed standard of "orthodoxy." Hare was saying that uniformity of belief on the basis of the Bible is impossible, and subtly pleading for complete freedom of belief. Whichever way the book was taken, it was much discussed, and is most significant. Faith in a firm foundation, Biblical, for a single, basically uniform Christian creed was wavering. The Bible as interpreted by reason seemed no longer a very sure guide to Christian orthodoxy.

This was hardly the achievement of deism alone. Orthodoxy implicitly recognized this by its habit of disparaging the deists. "Had a hundred such pens as these been employed on the side of religion," wrote Swift, "they would have immediately sunk into oblivion and silence. . . ." If the deists were so slight, why had they succeeded? It becomes evident that deists had only carefully pointed up the pitfalls that lurked in the way of rational Christianity. Doubtless it was true that the deists were not great men.[33] But they had wit enough to arrange in

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[32]See the preface to Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses (1738), pp. iv-vi. Hare's work is printed in the anti-clerical compilation, The Pillars of Priestcraft and Orthodoxy Shaken, vol. IV.

[33]Leslie Stephen, the great nineteenth century student of English thought in the eighteenth century, helped perpetuate the view that the deists had no ability at all, which is surely false. The sanest remarks

their most damning form facts and ideas already disclosed by orthodoxy itself.

Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious had capitalized on Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity, subtly exaggerating its thesis. The question of prophecy, opened up by William Whiston, had proved a deist windfall. From William Sherlock to William Warburton, well-intentioned Christians had done the real damage. Toland and Tindal entered into the question of church and state only after High and Low Anglicans were already at each other's throats.[34] Anthony Collins intervened mischievously to good effect in the Dodwell-Clarke controversy on immortality.[35] Collins was the master of such tactics, and therefore the most effective of the deists; his Discourse of Freethinking and Grounds and Reasons are simply clever textbooks of orthodoxy's contradictions. It is not easy to think of any deist, however, who did not spend most of his time cataloging the "divisions of the Christians."[36]

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on this are those of Conyers Middleton, in his "Letter to Dr. Waterland" (Miscellaneous Works, II). Middleton observed that while Collins and Tindal were neither great scholars nor great thinkers, they were the equal of most of their orthodox opponents, and were shrewd students of religion who knew perfectly well how to exploit every weakness in the Christian position.

[34] See Toland's Memorial of the State of England (1705) and Tindal's The Rights of the Christian Church (1709).

[35] 1706-07. Henry Dodwell, the Non-Juror, presented the ultra-episcopalian theory that the soul is immortal only when baptized by an ordained bishop, and argued that the Church must become dispensable on any other view. Clarke felt obliged to correct this absurdity, and the two engaged in a war of words; see Clarke's Works. Collins' Essay upon the Nature and Destiny of the Human Soul presented Dodwell with some facetious praise for arguing that the soul is mortal.

[36] Tindal's Christianity as Old as the Creation and Morgan's Moral Philosopher are other examples.

Clearly the confusions of the Christians turned on the effort to find clarity and certainty, and a clear standard of orthodoxy, in the Bible aided by "reason." During the 1730's, immediately after the great outburst of deistic controversy, it is not surprising that we find a few leading Christians so dissatisfied with this method that they are seeking for a new way. Complacency gives way to troubled thought. In 1702, a certain J. F. Osterwald published A Treatise concerning the Causes of the Present Corruptions of the Christians, and the Remedies Thereof.[37] But the work contained no very vital message, and in general there was very little of this sort of searching for the root of the trouble, earlier in the century; no trouble was sensed. There was stubborn persistence in the view that Christianity could defend itself rationally, and defeat every criticism. Perhaps there might be doubt that Leslie's method was quite so "short and easy." But in 1723 the conservative Anglican Francis Squire, while protesting against the deistic demand that "everything must be made plain and easy," held fast to reason; he proposed to demonstrate that Thomas Gordon's deistic position was really far more irrational than the Church of England doctrine.[38]

High Churchmen used the Revolution as a scapegoat, and seemed to feel that all would be right with religion if only a Stuart sat on the throne. As an example of how a rather typical (in this respect) Augustan Anglican considered the question of reform in religion, take Swift's remarks; he could only suggest that the royal family and social leaders should

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[37] Reprinted in Watson's Collection of Theological Tracts, VI.

[38] Answer to the Independent Whig, p. 29.

strive to make infidelity unfashionable, and that more churches might be built. Ministers should be better trained, but they are warned against emotionalism; "a plain, convincing reason" is all they require.[39]

But in the 1730's the need for a "new way with the deists" emerged strongly. It appeared in William Law's Case of Reason (1731), George Berkeley's Alciphron (1732), Joseph Butler's Analogy (1736), and in John Wesley's first evangelical work (1738). The sense of crisis was strong. There was great concern over the apparent successes of deism; still more, perhaps, about the indifference of Christians.[40]

There was no way out of the dilemma on the assumptions of the age of reason. Berkeley, Law and Butler each broke through these assumptions. None of them had much immediate influence, but all were of the utmost significance. In one way or another they show a deep disappointment with Swift's "plain convincing reason"—because it is neither plain nor convincing. So deism at length created in Christians a discouragement with the grounds of the debate, with the treatment of Christianity as a problem in legal evidence or an exercise in common sense.

3.

William Law rejected reason the most boldly. He was, rather easily, the finest religious writer of his age, perhaps the only one who bears comparison with the great seventeenth century divines. Law did not doubt the Bible, but he had come to doubt the wisdom of testing the

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[39]"Letter to a Young Clergyman," and "Project for the Advancement of Religion," in Works, vol. II.

[40]See Weekly Miscellany, 1733-34, for signs of alarm among the pious at the spread of deism and of indifference.

authenticity of Christianity by Bible analysis. It was his opinion that to treat religion in this way, as a problem in evidence, was to play the deists' game. He had himself been a redoubtable controversialist, but, as he wrote, "the more books that were written in this way of defending the Gospel, the more I was furnished with new objections to it. . . ."[41] At length he came to the radical conclusion that to trust in reason is gross idolatry. Thus the great mystic turned and rent not only the deists but most Augustan Christians as well—those whom he named "nominal Christians," "historical Christians," and "literal Christians." All, that is, who did not know "the true life of the new birth." To be formally orthodox, in the merely outward sense, is utterly worthless. Law fled back to the "witness of the spirit," and with his advice to "turn inwards," to give up the academic defense of Christianity, and with his bold assertion that "the Gospel is within you, and you are its evidence," he seemed "enthusiastic" even to Wesley. "If you are afraid of reason hurting your religion, it is a sign that your religion is not as it should be. . . . Complain therefore no more of want of evidence; neither books, nor study, nor learning is wanted. . . ."

It was impossible to accept such advice; it was equally impossible to ignore Law's tremendous prose, and his charge that true spiritual Christianity was not to be found anywhere in England. We are not Christians, Law said, unless our life "is a common course of humility, self-denial, renunciation of the world, poverty of the spirit, and heavenly

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[41] Mystical Writings of William Law, ed. W. S. Palmer (London, 1908), p. 122. Other quotations herein are from this excellent selection of Law's writings.

affection."[42] To live as a Christian meant "dying to the world"—a lot to ask of the eighteenth century. To live as a Christian was, indeed, an accepted ideal; but Tillotson, the great Latitudinarian, had made it easy, while Law made it quite another thing. "The whole duty of man" had been a prudent, sober life—easier, said Tillotson, than the way of vice and wickedness.[43] Law did not think it was easy.

The magic of Law's prose, as is well known, exercised a spell over even such unlikely mystics as Edward Gibbon and Samuel Johnson. Deploring the fact that Law's mind was "clouded by enthusiasm," Gibbon remarked that "a philosopher must allow that he exposes with equal severity and truth, the strange contradiction between the faith and practice of the Christian world."[44] The new version of piety was, however, much too strenuous for most. And Law's rejection of reason was much too extreme. He became one of those writers, it seems, whom everyone praised, but few followed.

Berkeley's Alciphron was another memorable work whose message was striking and disregarded. It was subtler than Law's, doubtless too subtle; the great philosopher's mind did not work in ways that ordinary people understood. Lord Hervey thought it too metaphysical and abstruse, adding the complaint that Berkeley was attacking a straw man in assailing

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[42]John Wesley was much influenced by Law, though not uncritical of him; and we see the influence above all in the Wesleyan conviction that "Though you bear the name, you are not Christians. You have neither Christian faith nor love." Wesley, Works, X, 77.

[43]See chap. VI of Sykes, Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century, for an excellent presentation of the dominant Tillotsonian concept of a Christian life.

[44]Gibbon, Autobiography (Everyman's Library), pp. 16-17.

"atheism"—which shows that Hervey quite missed the point in Berkeley.[45] Alciphron is an uneven work, and at times reads like conventional apologetic, while at others it is most ineffectual (as in the attack on Shaftesbury).[46] Berkeley, like Law, had once been a rationalist. But breaking through, especially in section VI, is the perception that God cannot be "proved" by rational means, that "faith alone is required." Berkeley keenly felt a major crisis, as did Law and Wesley and Butler also. "Our prospect is very terrible, and the symptoms grow stronger every day." What all these men sensed, Law and Berkeley perhaps the most acutely, was that something was drastically wrong with the whole outlook of the age of reason—that "his enemy was nothing less than the age itself."[47] It had eliminated all the "mysteries," in a deeper sense than that in which the word was ordinarily used even by those who pretended to believe in them (they meant merely rational enigmas.) It tried to prove God mathematically, and it divorced morality from religion. Scepticism about the rational proofs, in a way that often anticipated Butler's work of a few years later, was combined in Alciphron with Berkeley's idealistic view that the human mind can directly apprehend the Divine (foreshadowing transcendentalism).[48] Berkeley was very effective

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[45]Berkeley, Works, II, 12-13. Cf. Franklin's remark that Berkeley was "not very well understood" in America, despite his influence on Samuel Johnson.

[46]Berkeley also misunderstood Mandeville, who replied most effectively in A Letter to Dion (1732). See Dialogues II and III, Alciphron.

[47]John Wild, George Berkeley; a Study of His Life and Philosophy (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 497.

[48]Interestingly enough Berkeley here clashed with the "analogical" school of William King and Peter Browne, who, concerned to prove that we cannot know God at all except by analogy, influenced Butler. Both were in rebellion against the rationalistic proofs of God, but with a dif-

in exhibiting the freethinker, the "minute philosopher," as a narrow and shallow creature. He was not very effective in communicating what he felt to be the right approach to religion. Clearly, however, it was not the sort of rationalism that characterized the age, orthodox and deist alike. He too had struck at all, not just the deists.

Benjamin Hoadly, at least, perceived that from his point of view Alciphron was "the most plain attempt to bring obscurity and darkness into all science, as well as to make nonsense essential to religion, that this last age had produced."[49] The book was, in the opinion of Swift and Gay, "too speculative" to make much of a popular impact. Perhaps also it was too lacking in unity. Berkeley, in "scattered remarks," had anticipated the line which Joseph Butler was to work out with great care.[50] The famous Analogy (of religion and nature), which has freely been called not only the greatest apologetic work of the century but "the greatest product of British ethical thought," was not much noticed in its time, perhaps because Butler had few graces of style to match those of Law and Berkeley. It is surely a violation of strict historical truth to assume, as is often done, that Butler's book "brought to a

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ferent method. Berkeley was more radical than Butler; for he wished to strike at the metaphysical basis of science by denying matter's reality, which to him was the root of the evil. The more pragmatic Butler sought to save religion by the very method of science.

[49]Quoted in Wild, op. cit., pp. 360-361. Berkeley shared with Butler and Jonathan Edwards of Massachusetts a rare scepticism about the assumption that Newtonian science fitted Christianity perfectly.

[50]George A. Johnston, The Development of Berkeley's Philosophy (London, 1923), p. 315; also A. C. Fraser, Life and Letters of George Berkeley (Oxford, 1871), p. 200.

sudden end the deistic controversy."[51] The myth of Butler slaying all the deists at one mighty blow cannot be maintained against serious criticism. Yet Butler's book did win subsequent great fame because it tackled in a solid way the central objective in the counter-attack on deism: to show that "nature" and "reason" are not, after all, clear guides to certain knowledge.[52] There are at least as many difficulties in natural as in revealed religion. Christianity is above our comprehension—and so is Nature.[53] Abstract reason is a poor guide to truth; let us consult experience, observe the world as it is, and then we perceive that it is not so clear. Nature is full of strange confusions and anomalies. With his empiricism and caution, Butler was more truly scientific in his outlook than those who made vague unwarranted assumptions about the perfect clarity and certainty of nature. He drove home his points with solid facts rather than hortatory ejaculations. Alas, it was the fate of his facts to suffer shipwreck with the march of sciences, finally.[54] Meanwhile his method was certainly successful as against the deists.

There remained the question, raised by many, whether his argument did not slay the Christians along with the deists. The rationalist James

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[51] Dublin Review, vol. 199 (Summer, 1936), p. 123. Doubtless deists were perplexed by a man who used their own arguments—who, for example, began the section on immortality by using a Newtonian argument (inertia) to suggest the probability of the soul's survival. But it should be noted that the small circle of enthusiastic deistic controversialists (Collins, Toland, Tindal) no longer existed by 1735. One must also bear in mind how dubious a defense of Christianity Butler's work seemed to his orthodox contemporaries.

[52] Outstanding on Butler is the work by E. C. Mossner, Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason.

[53] Butler, Works (London, 1852), p. 240,256, etc.

[54] Mossner, op. cit., chap. VIII.

Mill, as his famous son recorded it in his Autobiography, thought so; William Pitt remarked that Butler's work "raised in his mind more doubts than it answered."[55] It is certain that Butler's "probability" was of dubious value to men accustomed to sureness. "Nothing is certain" and "we are but poor short-sighted creatures at best" were strange words to eighteenth century ears, and were less comforting statements than "Christianity is demonstrably true," and "the advance of science proves the truth of religion." It was not easy to explain to those living in the high noon of the Enlightenment that most things are really dark.

But Butler belonged in spirit with those who were beginning to reject the idea that religious truths are of the same order as scientific, that proofs of God and Christianity are comparable to proofs of the laws of motion or the events of history. In a way Butler was a more conservative figure than Law, or even Berkeley. While John Wesley found Law too enthusiastic, Butler would say of Wesley's evangelical style, "Sir, it is a very horrid thing." He employed the cool rational method, as he clung to the conservative church; he appealed, as it were, from reason drunk to reason sober. If his aim was to show how little about religion our reason can tell us, he still employed the rational method. He was content to make it logical to embrace, so to speak, the "calculated risk" of believing Christianity. In other ways Butler was far from conservative. His ethics won David Hume's tribute as truly empirical. There is in him an awareness of the psychological justification for

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[55]Robert and Samuel Wilberforce, Life of William Wilberforce, (London, 1838-39), I, 95. James Martineau later observed that the Analogy was "a terrible persuasive to atheism." It must be remembered that Butler did no more than raise, persuasively, the question whether the same objections may not be brought against a natural religion as against a revealed one.

religion: man yearns for it, and therefore it must be true.[56] Like Hume, he conceded that human nature is complex, and contains different impulses, including both self-love and benevolence. The divinely implanted regulator is Conscience (which Leslie Stephen said Butler deified). The dictates of conscience are the laws of God. Butler was naturally forced to distinguish his "conscience" from the deistic "moral sense."[57] But he has certainly travelled a long road from those old Christians who regarded the very study of Ethics as the Mathers of New England did—"a vile piece of paganism." The study of human nature, in order to discover the science of ethics, has become the prime task of a Christian. One may wonder whether Butler, after destroying the rationalistic deists, did not capitulate to the deists who preferred the impulses of the heart to any formal creed.

It is doubtful that these writings had much immediate influence. A few years later (1743) Henry Dodwell, Jr., wrote in more popular style the book called Christianity Not Founded on Argument. Possibly those were right who accused Dodwell of intending to cast ridicule on Christianity.[58] However that may be, the answers showed emphatic rejection of the notion that Christianity could not or should not be defended on rational grounds. Deist and Orthodox had, after all, a great deal in

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[56]Writings (1897), II, 209-211; William J. Norton, Bishop Butler, Moralist and Divine (New Brunswick, N.J., 1940), pp. 215-217—a work generally excellent on Butler's thought, especially the ethical side.

[57]See William E. Alderman, "Shaftesbury and the Doctrine of Moral Sense in the Eighteenth Century," PMLA, XLVI (1931), 1088-1090.

[58]John Leland, Remarks on . . . Christianity Not Founded on Argument (1744), pp. 3-6.

common: they could agree that Berkeley was incomprehensible, that Hume was not to be taken seriously, and that Law and Wesley were mad.[59] In brief, that it was monstrous to overthrow that common ground of "reason" where Christian and anti-Christian liked to meet and fight their duels, under a set of rules both sides accepted.

In the American colonies, Samuel Johnson of Connecticut and New York, a study in the religious currents of the age, learned to mistrust the "deplorable progress of infidelity and apostasy in this age of mighty pretense and reasoning," which he traced to "the well-meaning but too conceited Mr. Locke."[60] With his friend Berkeley he enjoyed philosophising but learned to draw a firm line on matters of faith. Distrusting the mob and the enthusiasm of the Great Awakening evangelists, he found refuge in this Berkeleian Anglicanism balanced between cool reason and blind faith. A moderate Arminian like Berkeley, he rejected both deistic Pelagianism and enthusiastic Calvinism. Here was a tenable if precarious position for an intellectual aristocrat; but Johnson had to watch the

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[59]Any discussion of John Wesley is impossible here, but it is worth noting that he was by no means an "enthusiast." This makes the almost universal revilement of him all the more significant. He did stress the emotions, but he had a keen awareness of the dangers of excessive emotion unlimited by reason, and it is no exaggeration to say of this great Christian that

> His head was as clear and utilitarian as Franklin's, without the least particle of mysticism or extravagance; whilst his heart flowed with a zeal like Loyola's, and glowed with a charity like Fenelon's. (Christian Examiner, July, 1847, p. 14.)

[60]Herbert and Carol Schneider, eds., Samuel Johnson, II, 15. Earlier, Johnson had nearly been converted to "Dr. Clark's and Bishop Hoadly's way of thinking," (I, 21.) This tentative approach to liberal rationalism, and the dreading back from it during the 1730's during the deistic furor, was evidently fairly typical of intelligent Anglicans.

great majority proceeding towards either infidelity or enthusiasm. Berkeley and Butler might save Christianity for conservative intellectuals; it was unlikely that they could lead a popular revival.

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CHAPTER VIII

ARMINIANISM

> The design of Christianity is to make men good and keep them so.—Denham.
>
> There are Christians who rob Christianity of its mysteries. . . . They open the way to deism, that is to say, a disguised atheism.—Bossuet.

1.

The early Anglicans had been "Calvinistic";[1] but in the eighteenth century that fact seemed a little incredible to members of this church. One of them was most surprised to learn from his researches that the Articles were Calvinistic, that "till about the time of Archbishop Laud the Clergy were universally so," and that in those days the anti-Calvinists were the despised Anabaptists.[2] Nothing, however, was less suitable to optimistic rationalism than the Augustinian, Calvinistic scheme, with its gloomy annihilation of natural man. Arminianism in its milder form permeated this period, and in one sense is not heresy but orthodoxy. But towards mid-century an extremer form of this doctrine became what John Wesley called no better than "deism in new dress," or, again, Socinianism.[3]

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[1]Calvin did not invent the idea of predestination and damnation, but only strongly re-asserted traditional Christian dogma. See G. G. Coulton, The Medieval Scene (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 18-20.

[2]Nichols, Illustrations, IV, 326.

[3]See Wesley's Doctrine of Original Sin (1757); or his Journals (ed. N. Curnock), IV, 327.

Wesley considered himself an Arminian; so the more extreme version of this doctrine, which he declared to be just as dangerous as the opposite extreme of Calvinism, had perhaps better be called by the name of the ancient heresy of Pelagianism. Freedom of the will, denial of original sin, and the possibility of salvation by moral excellence alone—these things the British-born theologian of the 4th-5th centuries had taught, the classic example of a Christianity stressing God too little and Man too much. Arminius, the early seventeenth-century Dutch Remonstrant, may better be compared to those Semi-Pelagians of the earlier time who sought a compromise on the vexed questions of free-will vs. predestination, moral freedom vs. absolute human depravity. His was a mediating doctrine.[4] Augustine and Calvin went too far in the other direction, annihilating Man completely in their earnestness to glorify God.

But admittedly the precarious middle ground Arminius sought to occupy—of which Wesley had a keen appreciation—"gliding by almost imperceptible degrees, reached a position with little to distinguish it from Socinianism [or Pelagianism]."[5] This position was approached from 1720 on by such learned and respectable theologians as John Taylor, Nathaniel

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[4]See article "Arminianism" in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, I.

[5]Ibid. See also Tayler, Retrospect of Religious Life, p. 202: "The Arminian and Socinian systems were not identical, but grew out of a common tendency of mind." A Socinian could not avoid being an Arminian also, in that denial of Christ's divinity entailed denial of the orthodox idea of the Atonement, of Original Sin and justification by faith; and if conduct is the basis of God's judgment on man, then man must (as it was commonly thought) be free moral agents.

Lardner and George Benson.[6] It began to threaten, from within, the reduction of Christianity to no more than a moral code; "far more dangerous than open deism itself," Wesley wrote.

The preceding half-century had seen the serious weakening of Calvinism. It had all but disappeared within the Anglican Church.[7] The jesting answer to what the Arminians held had long been that they held the best bishoprics and deaneries in England; and the notable Calvinist John Edwards was forced to resign from St. John's College at Cambridge because of his views.[8] High and Low churchmen alike were Arminian. In 1707 Charles Leslie, the Tory, wrote that predestination "is more fatal to the souls of men, than idolatry itself, or the worst form of popery."[9] On the latitudinarian side, Arminianism had always suited the spirit of these "men of moderation." Tillotson's sermons were as far as possible from a hell-fire religion, and it was the country parsons who were sometimes less mild.[10] In the early eighteenth century Daniel Whitby was

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[6]It was Taylor's book on original sin that inspired the replies of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley. Wesley (Works, IX, 192-193) concedes Taylor's learning and ability, observing that his book had received few replies. George Benson was a distinguished scholar, respected by all save for his Socinianism.

[7]G. R. Cragg, From Puritanism to the Age of Reason; A Study of Changes in Religious Thought within the Church of England, 1660-1700 (Cambridge, 1950), contains an excellent chapter on "The Eclipse of Calvinism" during the period 1670-1700.

[8]I. Morgan, The Nonconformity of Richard Baxter, p. 37. See "John Edwards" in D.N.B. Edwards' dismissal was about 1670; he was still active in 1707, and remained about the only example of a prominent Anglican Calvinist.

[9]Rehearsal, vol. I, nos. 233-237 (1707) are devoted to excoriating John Edwards of Cambridge. Cf. Krapp, op. cit., on the origins of Arminianism in Puritan times as an aristocratic reaction against popular Calvinism.

[10]Sykes, Church and State, pp. 258-261, 265-266.

the leading spokesman on the question for the moderates. Eternal damnation and hereditary sin, Whitby declared, are contradictory to "common reason."[11] He noted that most Anglicans were Arminians; and no better proof of this can be found than in Anthony Collins' Discourse of Freethinking, where, seeking as usual to show that there is controversy on the question within the Church, the deist is able to name, on the Calvinist side, no one worth naming except the above-mentioned John Edwards.[12] In the Anglican ranks, then, Arminian sentiment was all but universal; on this doctrine Charles Leslie and Samuel Clarke, right wing and left, could agree.

Having in 1629 defied the King by passing resolutions against "Popery and Arminianism," Dissent was Calvinistic by tradition. Yet this tradition had been much modified. The typical Dissenter struggled now to explain away his Calvinism, leaning heavily on the great Richard Baxter's compromise formula.[13] The General (Arminian) Baptists vigorously asserted that Calvinism was monstrous, its corollaries an evil God and a hypocritical Christ.[14] Most Dissenters, however, were at once

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[11]Daniel Whitby, Six Discourses (Worcester, Mass., 1801), preface.

[12]Collins mentions Jane, Brideaux [sic], Carlton [sic], Davenant, South, and Edwards as Calvinists. None of these except John Edwards can be identified as a then-living Calvinist of any note. The deist clearly went far afield here to make his case for dissension within the Church.

[13]I. Morgan, op. cit.; Calamy, Own Life, I, 470-471; A. W. Harrison, Arminianism (London, 1937), p. 161. In America, the same tendency went on among the New England Puritans; they were, as Perry Miller notes, "perilously close to talking Arminianism" at this time—see his "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity," Proceedings of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, XXXII, 271 ff.

[14]John Smith, An Essay on Universal Redemption (London, 1701).

somewhat ashamed of their Calvinist past and reluctant to leave it altogether.[15] George Benson, who began (1723) as a Calvinist, was forced to leave his Abingdon congregation in 1729 because of his Arminianism. Thomas Bradbury, enthusiastic Calvinist Whig who preached the "divine right of the Revolution," was a breath of the militant Puritan past not entirely unique, especially among the Independents.[16] Yet most of these erstwhile Puritans were now close enough to Arminianism, though they might not like the name.

The Baxterians, though they accepted Election, shied away from Reprobation; some, they would have it, are assured of absolute salvation, but the rest are not necessarily damned, and may be saved.[17] The distinction was an uneasy one. The rigorous Calvinistic doctrine that some are saved and some are damned had become the rather flabby suggestion that some are just more saved than others.

The question was not one on which Scripture shed much conclusive light.[18] But the temper of the age inclined the scales against Calvin's extreme doctrine, which seemed like enthusiasm and smacked of rebellion;

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[15]Coomer, op. cit., pp. 78-79, gives some figures on Arminianism as well as Arianism within Dissenting congregations. For example, of 44 Presbyterian churches in the London area in 1730, 19 were evidently Calvinist, 12 Baxterian, 13 Arminian.

[16]See Bradbury's Fifty Four Sermons (London, 1762).

[17]See Isaac Watts, The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind (Works, vol. II); cf. the critique of Wesley, "Predestination Calmly Considered," Works, vol. X.

[18]Whitby's claim (see op. cit.) that Calvinism was contrary to Scripture was countered by John Edwards' The Arminian Doctrine Condemned by the Holy Scripture (1711)—the results were inconclusive. Cf. Watts, Works, VI, 152.

it was castigated as "Antinomianism."[19] The two great objections which a rationalistic age lodged against Calvinism, in addition to its threat of "enthusiasm," were that it made God the author of evil, and that in denying free will it wrecked moral responsibility.

Moral responsibility was felt to require free will. "Without the liberty of human action there can be no religion," Clarke declared. "What ends and purposes of religion more clocks and watches are capable of serving, needs no long and nice consideration."[20] Berkeley classed "fatalists" along with atheists, enthusiasts and sceptics as enemies of religion.[21] The only thinkers who had labored to dispel the confusion surrounding this concept of "free will" were Spinoza and, in England, Hobbes and Anthony Collins the deist.[22] This association of determinism with infidelity made the free-will position all the more sacrosanct. Not until Jonathan Edwards took up his pen on the American frontier was it made perfectly clear that moral responsibility does not require "freedom of the will"—indeed, that freedom of the will actually itself destroys moral responsibility. And it should be noted that even Edwards'

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[19] See the Crisp-Williams controversy among the Dissenters, 1695-98, described by Calamy and others. Joseph Hussey, The Glory of Christ Unveiled (London, 1706) is an "Antinomian" to whom Arminianism is "sin and abomination." But the extreme Calvinists were not popular even within Dissent.

[20] Clarke, Works, III, 851.

[21] Berkeley, Works, II, 23. In dialogue VII secs. 16-20 of Alciphron, the ordinarily subtle Berkeley seems to be much confused by the free-will problem, and ends by refuting the determinists in roughly the same manner in which Dr. Johnson was to refute him.

[22] Collins, A Philosophic Inquiry concerning Human Liberty (1715); republished 1729 as A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity. Very astute.

invincible logic was furiously resisted.[23]

Moral responsibility was a powerful objection to the "fatalistic" system of Calvin, then, but on analysis some of these objections vanished. The heart of the matter was the making God the author of evil—the ancient Christian problem of evil. Dr. Doddridge, himself torn between the two systems, received a letter from a doubter who applied to him for aid, being afflicted with Arminianism; he could not, he wrote, believe in a malevolent Deity such as would

> by design, create a race of creatures who he knew would offend him; for which offences he designed everlastingly to punish them; excepting some few, whom, for no other reason than his own good will and pleasure, he resolved to save. . . .

"I readily acknowledge," the good minister replied, "that you have fallen on a considerable difficulty in the Christian scheme."[24] For the Calvinist might, of course, retort that if you doubt this you must impugn the divine omnipotence. This "considerable difficulty" John Locke himself had not been able to solve; in his letter to Molyneux he had confessed himself unable to reconcile divine omnipotence with human freedom, though he declared himself morally convinced that both existed. It was natural that this classic Christian dilemma arose anew in a period of rationalistic religion.[25]

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[23]Wesley was shocked by Edwards—see his Works, X, 463. The remarks of Jonathan Edwards, Jr., in his Works (ed. Tryon Edwards; Boston, 1854), I, 481 ff., on the confusion of the Calvinists prior to his father's great work on Freedom of the Will, seem to be accurate enough. For the resistance to Edwardean theology in New England, see Joseph Haroutinian, Piety Versus Moralism.

[24]Doddridge, Correspondence and Diary, II, 429-430.

[25]Cassirer notes the immense amount of attention paid to the problem of evil in the eighteenth century, from Leibniz on, as if "the fate of metaphysics and religion must hinge on this fundamental problem." (Philosophy of the Enlightenment, pp. 143 ff.) Aldridge, Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto, pp. 322 ff., discusses the optimistic theodicy of Shaftesbury.

The deists took pleasure in agreeing with Bayle that neither Arminian nor Calvinistic Christianity can solve the problem of evil—only the Manichees were consistent here.[26] If the Calvinist is forced to deny God's benevolence, the Arminian must deny His omnipotence. In the eighteenth century, the latter seemed the least of the two evils.

Most Christians preferred to think there was no real dilemma, and took the best of both worlds. Susanna Wesley's letter to her son John in 1725 expressed an abhorrence of predestination, because it makes God the author of sin, yet she insisted that divine foreknowledge exists and is not inconsistent with human freedom: God's knowing that something will occur does not mean that he causes it to occur.[27] So also Wollaston: "It involves no contradiction to assert that God certainly knows what any man will choose."[28] Nevertheless, the problem remained. The reaction against Calvinism involved the danger of pushing the opposite position too far. Do that, and you ended in the making of Christianity into no more than a genteel code of ethics—"to make men good and keep them so." Along with predestination and the grim doctrine of salvation for the elect only, original sin would logically depart, and then all sinfulness, leaving men not really in need of salvation at all. The middle ground, as Wesley and Watts knew, was hard to keep. So Richard Baxter, author of the compromise, had complained apropos of this question that

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[26]Anthony Collins, Vindication of the Divine Attributes (1710), pp. 4-6. This work was written against aspects of William King's De Origine Mali, perhaps the most notable effort to solve the Christian problem of evil in this period. In it Collins takes his usual sly pleasure in complicating the problems of the orthodox. See also Charles Blount, Oracles of Reason, p. 194.

[27]Cited in Harrison, Arminianism, pp. 189-190.

[28]The Religion of Nature Delineated, p. 136. Wollaston dealt elaborately, if superficially, with the problems of free will and evil in this popular work. See also Clarke, The Being and Attributes of God (Works, II, 566 ff.)

"If you discover an error to an injudicious man he reeleth into the contrary error, and it is hard to stop him in the middle verity."[29]

The real nub of the whole controversy involving free will and unde malum was original sin.[30] John Taylor struck to the heart of the matter in his important work on original sin (The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, 1738). It is very evident that those who insisted, against Taylor, on the inherent sinfulness of man were very much on the defensive.[31] Yet if man was not naturally a sinful creature, Christianity seemed to disappear in a vapor of moral platitudes; if he was, God must then have created him so?—a Calvinistic conclusion so monstrous that Wesley thought one must be either a Manichee or an atheist to believe it.[32] To the ultra-Arminians, Wesley retorted that they destroyed religion: if we are not sinful, why do we need a savior? For the best purposes of religion, the great evangelist knew, man had to be sinful, yet made so by his own free will, and redeemable, if he really wished it, by the same. "O poor encouragement to despairing sinners!" was his comment on predestination. Jonathan Edwards, he protested, had made God

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[29]The Autobiography of Richard Baxter, ed. by J. M. Lloyd Thomas from the Reliquiae Baxterianae (London, 1925), p. 99.

[30]See Conrad Wright, "Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will," Harvard Theological Review, XXXV (October, 1942), pp. 241-261.

[31]Watts' Ruin and Recovery of Mankind is a study in hesitant Calvinism. Aware that the consequence of abandoning the sinfulness of man must be deism (Works, VI, 54), Watts tries his best, but, we feel, without real conviction, to prove that mankind is a degenerate creature and the earth a poor place on which to live. He himself balks at the idea of inherited sinfulness, though he thinks it is necessary to believe this. Lockean psychology as it was being developed by David Hartley and others made inherited sin most implausible.

[32]Works, X, 311.

the author of sin, a monstrous thing. But unfortunately, what was so desirable psychologically was illogical. Could it really be that "that some are saved is the gift of Him who saves; that some perish is the fault of those who perish"?

It would be unwise, of course, to look no deeper than a problem in logic for the period's troubles with "Arminianism." The truth is that this age did not have that profound sense of man's worthlessness on earth which leads to the Augustinian-Calvinist position. John Locke, in The Reasonableness of Christianity, set the tone in declaring that happiness is possible in this life. The Platonists agreed: obey the inner law of your own nature, planted there by God, and happiness will be the result. There was no "sense of sin" in these theologies. Even Bishop Butler's system seemed to find no place for original sin nor any very pressing need for atonement. Therefore did Jonathan Edwards of Massachusetts, from his radically Calvinistic vantage point, accuse the entire century of Arminianism.[33]

For this it has been blamed by some moderns concerned to beat a retreat back along the road taken in the eighteenth century.[34] But it could not very well have been otherwise. We may argue that if Christianity is not large enough to accommodate men in their optimistic as well as in their pessimistic moods, it may expect to confront crises.

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[33] Works (Worcester edition, 1858), I, 467: "Arminianism has gradually more and more prevailed, till they are become almost universally Arminians. And not only so, but Arminianism has greatly prevailed among the Dissenters, and has spread greatly in New England, as well as Old."

[34] See for example Joseph Haroutinian, op. cit., and other writings of this author.

For men will periodically weary of the gloomy view and strike out confidently to build their happiness here on earth. It is not very relevant to protest that this is an illusory pursuit. Happiness in heaven or on earth may both be illusions, but they will be sought, the one yielding in turn to the other as conditions of life change. In this eighteenth century, there was no possible way of rejecting, as Jonathan Edwards almost alone rejected, the plea of Dr. Turnbull to "Let not the vices of mankind be multiplied or magnified. Let us make a fair estimate of human life. . . ."[35] The eighteenth century was a swing in the pendulum towards optimism, and the pursuit of happiness.

In New England, the old Puritanism made the pulpits ring with protests against the soft and easy spirits of the age. In 1743 William Balch was brought severely to task for allegedly teaching "that man is naturally virtuous, that morality is the height of Christianity." In old England, the Puritan spirit had been considerably damaged, and we hear fewer protests of this sort. Eventually, however, "Arminianism," associated with Socinianism and Arianism, began to go so far that orthodox Christians drew back in alarm from the Benhams, Lardners, Taylors and Fosters. The terms of the question were drastically changed by David Hartley and Joseph Priestley, after mid-century. Into this we need not go. Priestley, following the naturalistic, "associationalist" psychology of Hartley, did not believe in free will at all. By 1770,

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[35]Quoted by Jonathan Edwards in The Doctrine of Original Sin Defended—see Edwards, Representative Selections, ed. C. H. Faust and T. H. Johnson (New York, 1935), pp. 317-318.

Hartley's ideas, wrote John Wesley, were "now adopted by almost all who doubt of the Christian scheme."[36] Here was an optimistic determinism, proclaiming that man is the creature of his social environment—but that this social environment may be changed, to the end that the world and human nature may be freed from evil. Regardless of what logical inconsistencies there were in the exuberant notions of Priestley, his message, obviously, was significant. The pioneers of a naturalistic psychology, —Hartley, Hume, Thomas Reid—were carefully studying human nature, and agreeing that man is neither intrinsically bad nor good, but a bundle of impulses both good and bad—potentialities to be developed. Responsibility, as Priestley himself said, was being transferred from God to the social reformer. Human nature was being viewed as perfectly plastic; and the vision of "perfectibility" was opening up.

It is superfluous to ask what place the old concept of a soul depraved from birth, as a consequence of Adam's sin, could have under the new and exciting dispensation of social progress.

2.

When William Wilberforce at the end of the century came to write his report on what was wrong with Christianity, at the beginning of his indictment he noted the refusal of most educated Christians to believe in the corruption and weakness of human nature. "The bulk of Christians are used to speak of man as of a being naturally pure, and inclined to all

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[36] Works, X, 469. Hartley's Observations on Man was written in 1749; Priestley's Philosophical Necessity in 1777. Both are discussed in Basil Willey's The Eighteenth Century Background (London, 1940), chaps. VIII and X. See also Nancy Moore, "David Hartley," in Hibbert Journal, October, 1949.

virtue. . . ."[37] They would have been shocked to have been called deists, yet, since they felt no sin, they did not think of Christ as Savior, but simply as an excellent moral teacher.[38] Complaining that the nominal Christians had lost all knowledge of real Christianity, Wilberforce with sure instinct picked out the decay of the sense of sin as the basic cause. Controversy had done its share to make men weary of theology; religion was being pushed off to one side of life by an increasing absorption in purely secular politics and business; but what really signalled the decline was a general and growing inability to believe in Christianity's central idea—man as a weak and wretched creature in a doleful world, in dire need of being rescued and assured of a better world to come.

Viewed in this light, such men as the learned and pious Benson and Taylor, and even Joseph Priestley, and in America Jonathan Mayhew, with their explaining away of sin and their free offer of salvation to all who will but strive, may well have been seeking to save something for Christianity against the optimistic, secular spirit of the age.[39] Nevertheless, Wesley and Wilberforce had a right to wonder what was left of Christianity when you went this far in appeasing the times. Priestley's God was a placable one, most anxious for man's happiness, a "wise and kind parent" fitting us for happiness by mild corrections.[40]

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[37] William Wilberforce, A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System . . . (3rd edition, London, 1854; first published 1797). Pp. 19-20 ff.

[38] Ibid., pp. 50 ff.

[39] Samples of the theology of Benson, Taylor, Lardner and Belsham, with comments by Bishop Watson the editor, may be found in Collection of Theological Tracts (1785), passim. Cf. Priestley, Memoirs, I, 15-57.

[40] Ibid., I, iii.

Such an amenic religion, as Erasmus Darwin said, seemed like "a feather-bed for a dying Christism."

Was this mild, Arminian Christianity no better than deism, or was it a defensible effort to adapt Christianity to modern circumstances? The reduction of religion to morality, and the optimistic view of human nature, were related to deism. On the other hand, Calvinism also could lead to deism, singular as this may seem. A Calvinistic background was notable in the cases of both Bayle and Mandeville. Mandeville was prepared to reject Christianity as a working social force because it seemed to him that the great majority of men were without grace, unregenerate.[41] Natural man being totally depraved, and most men being in the natural state, Calvinism leads logically to either a dictatorship of the regenerate (tried in Geneva and in Massachusetts but wholly impractical) or else a drastic divorce between religion and society, the "principle of segregation" between the "order of nature" and the "order of grace."[42] "The church is God's enclosed garden," as Roger Williams had written, "but the world is the devil's wilderness where good wheat and tares flourish and decay together."[43] Thus in positing too great a gap between man and God, between nature and grace, Calvin's uncompromising demands could break down religion as an active social principle, leading

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[41] See J. C. Maxwell, "The Ethics and Politics of Mandeville," Philosophy (London), XXVI, no. 98 (July, 1951).

[42] Calvin had declared that there are degrees of inferior grace, enough for social purposes, but of no value to sanctification. A. S. P. Woodhouse's introduction to Puritanism and Liberty (London, 1938), espec. pp. 58-60 and 85-86, has a superb discussion of this.

[43] Quoted by Arthur Barker, Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, 1641-1660 (Toronto, 1942), pp. 91-93, another thoughtful analysis of this problem in Calvinism.

to the conclusion that the society of man is the "devil's wilderness." This might lapse into Mandeville's deistic cynicism.

Jonathan Edwards the Calvinist found himself close to Mandeville in denying virtue to natural man in his ordinary social acts, which are entirely selfish. John Taylor the Arminian pounced upon this weakness in Calvinism which constantly insisted upon the utter corruption of man in the natural state. This doctrine cuts off hope and encourages corruption by insisting upon it. What wonder if Christians are wicked when Christians tell them that they are inevitably so?[44] To which Edwards would rejoin that unless we view the heart of man as corrupt and all goodness as the gift of God, we must take the heart of man as good and leave no place for God. No doubt rigorous logic was on the Calvinist's side. But was it not true that these rigorists did fatal damage to religion? A recent writer has pertinently observed of the modern neo-Protestant's over-stress on Deity's transcendance, with the accompanying belittlement of man's natural capacities, that one can carry this sort of thing too far; the twentieth-century reaction against liberalism is again in danger of upsetting the balance as against Man.[45] One can belittle man too much. Arminianism of Wesley's sort was in truth properly balanced on the razor's edge of this perennial Christian equation between God and Man.

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[44] John Taylor, The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin (London, 1738), pp. 230-231, 257-259, 350. Cf. Edwards' reply, The Doctrine of Original Sin Defended.

[45] H. D. Lewis, Morals and Revelation (London, 1951), essay on "Morality and Religion."

It is equally certain, however, that the latter eighteenth century toppled over on the opposite side, the optimistic man-centered side. Undoubtedly a mild and worldly religion reflected the economic facts of a prosperous and complacent age, dominated by the bourgeoisie. The reduction of religion to nothing more than prudent conduct was naturally accompanied by its elimination as an independent force in various spheres of activity. "Political arithmetic" has begun by 1750 to grow into the science of economics. By about the same date politics has very nearly completed its separation from religion. It is time to turn to some consideration of this matter of religion's, and religious liberalism's, relationship to these other spheres of life.

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CHAPTER IX

THE SECULARIZATION OF POLITICS

> Religion, ceasing to be the master-interest of mankind, dwindles into a department of life which it is extravagant to overstep.—Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism.

1.

Tawney's key statement provides the starting-point for any consideration of religion and society in the earlier eighteenth century. "What was in question," another student of intellectual history observes of this period, "was a colossal secularization of thought in every possible realm of ideas at the same time, after the extraordinarily strong religious character of much of the thinking of the seventeenth century."[1] The trend was especially notable in politics. It was also true that economic life cast off what remained of a medieval heritage: Christian charity and the doctrine of stewardship received a new interpretation which had little to do with the giving of alms or the limitation of profits (Tawney's "new medicine for poverty").

Pious and orthodox Christians participated in this broad movement. "Liberalism" in this sense, viz. Whiggism in politics and a trend towards laissez-faire in economics, is the dominant philosophy in eighteenth century England, and by and large a conservative one. For however radical

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[1] Herbert Butterfield, The Origins of Modern Science, 1300-1800 (London, 1950), p. 166.

English ideas seemed to European absolutists in this era, they were associated at home with a conservative oligarchy. Liberty and constitutional government were congenial to this ruling group; democracy and social equality were abhorrent. The "masses" were barely beginning to push themselves onto the stage of history (see infra pp. 183-185), and were in fact regarded by the new bourgeois potentates as peculiarly vicious. The humanitarian movement, along with the beginnings of a demand for political democracy, had to await the last quarter of the century for real growth.[2] Until then, the England that inspired Voltaire and Montesquieu with its liberalism remained, on a modern view, sunk in complacency, amid social evils which cried for attention but received little.

There remains the question, whether the religious freethinkers exerted any radical influence on political or social questions. We might expect that the Tolands, Tindals and Chubbs, the deists and Socinians, would show an equal zeal for humanistic reform in these matters as in religion. But it is not so easy to equate the radical or liberal tradition in politics or social questions. Let us, however, examine that question in its place. We need first to consider the whole picture, first the political, then the socio-economic.

2.

"The ecclesiastical and civil state," wrote Clarendon, "was so wrought and interwoven together, and in truth so incorporated in each

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[2]As is explained further below, the humanitarian movement led by Tory Anglicans like Thomas Bray which flowered early in the century, creating the S.P.G. and societies for reform of manners, as well as the charity schools, was largely submerged by the triumph of Whiggism and failed to carry on its promising work.

other, that like Hippocrates' twins they cannot but laugh and cry together."[3] In the 1660's, John Phillips had observed that "You cannot come to hear or read a sermon . . . but let the text be what it will, half the sermon is a matter of state."[4] In 1700, G. M. Trevelyan remarks, at the basis of politics lay "the undying feud of Anglican and Puritan, of Church and Dissent."[5] As late as 1753 it was still most convenient to define political parties in religious terms, the Whigs being moderate Churchmen and Dissenters.[6] Nevertheless, between Clarendon and the Duke of Newcastle much has changed. Our period is one of transition.[7] By 1720 the question of the succession is placed beyond serious dispute; Jacobitism is dead save as a romantic pose, though as that it will have a remarkable vitality; and the old High Church dogma of divine right has become an anachronism. Yet the strong habitual association between religion and politics only very gradually wanes.

"It seems very natural," Defoe had written, "that as a sense of religion dies, the love of virtue must also decay." "The ruin of a state," thought Swift, "is generally preceded by . . . contempt of religion."

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[3] History of the Rebellion (1888, ed. Macray), I, 406.

[4] Quoted in T. G. Stephen, op. cit., p. 98.

[5] G. M. Trevelyan, England under Queen Anne (London, 1930-34), vol. III, The Peace and the Protestant Succession, p. 263.

[6] The Reliquiae, or the Merits of Whig and Tory, 1753; quoted in C. H. Cotterbill, English Historians and the American Revolution (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Cal., 1932), p. 4.

[7] As Trevelyan observes, "the world of Marlborough and St. John, of Defoe, Swift and Bachurzell" is vastly religious in the same sense "as the world of Laud and Baxter, of Cromwell and George Fox"; yet to a degree, still, "the rivalry of Church, Dissent, and that vague heathen guild—Free Thought—is the very pulse of the machine of politics."

Whiston took it for granted that atheism leads to men becoming "cannibals and lawless monsters." Thus religion was necessarily related to politics as long as it was felt that the very bonds that attach men to each other are religious. The end of Christianity would surely mean the end of society; if there is no respect for God, how can there be any respect for the judge, or the father? This feeling was ubiquitous, and indeed long remained so. Gladstone held it as strongly in the nineteenth century as Berkeley did in the eighteenth.[8] But religious liberalism made some dent in it by suggesting that morality may be detached from formal religious belief. Shaftesbury and Mandeville, those "two authors of infidel systems," Berkeley feared, "setting out from opposite principles, are calculated to draw all mankind, by flattering either their vanity, or their passions, into one or another system."[9] There was some substance to Berkeley's fears. Religion itself, as we have seen, tended to turn into little more than moral instruction.

Nevertheless, respectable men continued to defend the necessity for an established religion. "A constitution of civil government without any religious establishment is a chimerical project, of which there is no example," wrote Bishop Butler.[10] Religion is necessary to civilised society; a state religion is necessary to a given state. This traditional reasoning was seldom challenged--not even, as we shall see, by deists.

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[8]George Berkeley, A Discourse Addressed to the Magistrates and Men in Authority (Dublin, 1738), forcefully presents the theme that if religion and the Church lose respect, the civil magistrate cannot long retain any.

[9]Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[10]Joseph Butler, Writings, II, 308.

Political parties in the modern sense were very far from existing, either in practice or theory. All hands deplored the presence of "factions" and pleaded for unity—on their own terms, of course.[11] Although such factions existed, everyone knows that the distinction between Whig and Tory was very confused between 1690 and 1714, and after that possibly even more confusing.[12] Clearly the really bitter feud among Englishmen involved High Church Jacobites, on the one hand, and on the other the Hanoverians, embracing the Dissenters and moderate Anglicans. The former found its greatest strength among the country squires and the inferior clergy, but Toryism also appealed to the literati, after 1720 especially, for they found the Whigs pedestrian and Walpole tight-fisted.[13] The notable political development of the period is the emergence of a non-Jacobite Toryism—that is, an effort by the anti-Whigs to establish themselves on a new basis, discarding the impossible principles of divine right.[14] But this Hanoverian Toryism did not succeed until the

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[11]John Toland, Whig and deist, deplores parties in The Art of Governing by Parties (London, 1701). Cf. Spectator, no. 125, for a Whig plea for unity—on Whig terms.

[12]The story may be followed in such excellent books as William T. Morgan, English Political Parties and Leaders in the Reign of Queen Anne (New Haven, 1920); Charles B. Realey, The Early Opposition to Robert Walpole, 1720-27 (Philadelphia, 1931); Keith G. Feiling, A History of the Tory Party 1640-1714 and The Second Tory Party 1714-1832 (London, 1924 and 1938); Louis B. Namier, England in the Age of the American Revolution (London, 1930).

[13]See M. D. Hessler, The Literary Opposition to Robert Walpole, 1721-1742 (University of Chicago dissertation, 1934).

[14]George L. Cherry, "The Legal and Philosophical Position of the Jacobites," Journal of Modern History, XXII (December, 1950), points out that the Jacobites of 1688 did not, strictly speaking, all believe in jure divino. Many of them subscribed to a variant of the compact theory, and rested their case for the Stuarts on precedent rather than divine right. However, all of them believed that the lineal succession to the throne ought not to be altered to suit man's expediency. Tory Churchmen were much inclined to insist that there was a divine sanction to the monarchy.

time of George III.

The die-hard Tory—Non-Juror in the church, Jacobite in politics—accepted nothing of 1688-89.[15] Church and state and the landed interest had there fallen, all together and by the same hand. He did not doubt that Moderation, Dissent, Whiggery, Parliamentary supremacy, and the rule of Money all were part of the same infamous plot. He wished to return to a simpler past where Altar, Throne and Hearth were unique and supreme loyalties. It appeared to him that in hereditary succession in both church and state lay the only safety for society. Overthrow that principle and you enthrone anarchy, and a train of other evils, all stemming from the initial act of disobedience. "The first Whig was the Devil," Johnson and Boswell solemnly agreed.[16]

So far as concerned the Church, Jacobite Tories argued that if divine right fell, the Establishment lost all its sacred character and in fact might as well be abolished.[17] For religion cannot command respect when bishops are made by the Court, by politicians and not the anointed king;

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[15]It is important to realise that the events of the Glorious Revolution, and the legislation that followed (Toleration Act, Bill of Rights), did not really end the quarrel of Whig and Tory, or settle anything clearly. Nor did it abruptly achieve the divorce of religion from politics. See Charles F. Mullett, "Some Paradoxes of the Glorious Revolution," and "William Sherlock and the Revolution of 1688," in Huntington Library Quarterly, X (November, 1946 and May, 1947).

[16]This devil theory of the Whigs was not original with Dr. Johnson, but a familiar piece of Tory ideology; see Charles Leslie's Rehearsal, vol. I, nos. 54, 68, 83.

[17]Thus Dr. Hickes, the eminent Non-Juror, in Nichols, Illustrations, III, 277. The sad reply of his correspondent was, "should all be for abolishing Episcopacy who do not believe in it jure divino, I am persuaded it would not stand long." Tory theory was divorced from Tory practice here as elsewhere, for Tory-minded Churchmen did not ordinarily demand the abolition of the Church, though in theory they held it no true church or a critically degraded one.

its "foundations they cannot think divine, while they see the Church dependable by the State. . . ."[18] This charge that the Whiggish Church was "Erastian" was not without force. A Shaftesbury or a Thomas Gordon would openly admit that the Church was now a matter of political convenience; Whig bishops would deny it, but could with difficulty evade the charge that the Church could not now pretend to exist independent of any political regime.[19] Francis Atterbury's Letter to a Convocation Man started a long argument in which the Tories failed, naturally, to establish that the Church had always before been independent of secular control.[20] Yet their real point remained: there had never before been such a spectacle of a change in government leading to a change in the church. "The Erastian principle," Tories cried, had now perverted religion; it had "turned the gentry deists, and the common people Dissenters," Leslie mourned. Who could respect a political church?

To the extreme Tory, Hanover still meant treason and anarchy. He was "really unable to comprehend why anyone should desire to remain out-

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[18]Leslie, Case of the Regale and the Pontificate, in Theological Works, III, 295-297.

[19]The liberal Whiston conceded that "Political bishops" were an evil, and pointed to the results in a certain Dr. Cannon, who said he would have been a Catholic at Paris or a "Mussulman" at Constantinople, who shamefully signed the Anglican articles without faith, "taking religion to be an engine to promote peace in this world, rather than happiness in the next." Whiston, Memoirs, I, 112.

[20]See Rand, op. cit., III, 1 ff; David Douglas, English Scholars (London, 1939), pp. 200 ff.; Sykes, Church and State, chap. III; Carpenter, Thomas Tenison, chap. II, for discussions of this important controversy. Here and then Gibson took up the Whig side. They were certainly successful in refuting Atterbury's historical arguments. But the proroguing of Convocation was an evident sign that the Whig bishops did not have the support of the lower clergy.

side her [Church of England] communion save from pure malignity."[21] Religious toleration and the "natural rights" philosophy of the Whigs both became to him pure evil. The great sin of the Puritan in Tory eyes had been his "preaching rebellion to the people as the doctrine of Christ."[22] Out of this had issued the Lockean philosophy in which rebellion was not any of Christ's affair (the neo-Calvinist theory of "segregation," mentioned previously). Here was nothing but bloody anarchy. Defoe pointed out that it was ridiculous to identify the respectable Augustan Dissenter with a revolutionary, yet Tories continued to do it. Readers of the Rehearsal would gather that every Nonconformist was a regicide. "Republican and Whig are Jack Presbyter's lay-elders, rebellion is his lay-fact, as schism his ecclesiastical."[23] This same Sir John Presbyter, in a Tory satire of the day, had no answer when robbed by bandits who appealed to their "natural rights." "Those cobwebs you have all swept down/ By sweeping off your Sov'reign's crown"—the cobwebs being law and order.[24] Religion and government were indeed inseparable to the old Tories, for the simple reason that a schismatic was demonstrably a rebel. When Dr. Sacheverell rallied the mob against Dissenters and Whigs, it was impossible to separate the religious from the political motives, for the Sacheverellites admitted no such distinction. They looked upon the existing Church of England, as

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[21] W. F. Lord, "The Development of Political Parties during the Reign of Queen Anne," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, XIV (n.s.), 1900, p. 75.

[22] Clarendon, op. cit., II, 322.

[23] Leslie, Theological Works, VI, 354, 445, etc.

[24] H. N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, I, 50-51.

Defoe said, as "schismatical . . . all her members perjured revolters, both from their religion and their sovereign."[25] Leslie identified the Whigs with atheists, or at the best deists.[26]

Enough, perhaps, of an attitude that lingered on with a "sunset charm," as J. N. Figgis puts it, assuming that such rancorous distortions can have charm; as a romantic pose, long after it had the least basis in reality. Seventeen-fifteen disposed of the last remnants of Jacobite reality.[27] Before that, more rational Tories were modifying their position. It was becoming impossible to believe in absolute monarchy and the old doctrine of the duty of absolute obedience.[28] Swift, though a Tory, rejected non-resistance as nonsense: "What, not be able to depose

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[25]Defoe's Review (Facsimile Text Society, 1938), vol. V, August 30, 1705.

[26]Rehearsal, I, 40. Thomas Wright, Caricature History of the Georges, pp. 5-6, gives the following Tory song:

> Bold Whigs and fanatics now strive to pull down
> The true Church of England, both mitre and crown,
> To introduce anarchy into the nation
> As they did in Oliver's late usurpation.

[27]Realey, op. cit., pp. 149-152, 230, points out the complete collapse of Jacobitism as a political force by 1725. The statement that "Jacobitism remained a serious and powerful political cause until 1746" (F. J. C. Hearnshaw, Conservatism in England, p. 128) is very dubious indeed. Sir Charles Petrie, The Jacobite Movement: The Last Phase, 1716-1807 (London, 1950), concedes that Jacobite strength declined very greatly for the twenty years after 1720. (Pp. 21, 30 ff.) He finds (pp. 49-50) that the negative factor of dislike for the Whig regime, or apathy towards it, was significant in the '45. In Ireland and Scotland, of course, active Jacobitism did exist.

[28]The most penetrating analysis of the breakdown of divine right theory remains J. N. Figgis, The Divine Right of Kings (1934 edition). Benjamin Hoadly's Original and Institution of Civil Government (Works, vol. II) includes an easy victory over the "patriarchal" theory of Filmer, who attempted to justify absolutism by an appeal to history, and whom Locke had already routed. Figgis makes clear that on any grounds but religious injunction divine right was doomed.

a Nero or Caligula?"[29] Hoadly's presentation of Whig political philosophy drew many indignant rejoinders, and yet nearly all of them rested their opposition on grounds that were utilitarian: any right of revolution means anarchy, and the worst of tyrants is better than anarchy.[30] Such hysterical extremism had been perhaps plausible in 1660 but could not be taken seriously by sober men in 1720. And it was significant that Tories were ceasing to defend non-resistance as a religious duty and were arguing for it only as a social expediency, where their case was much weaker.[31]

Before long Tories were deciding that one ought to obey the constituted authority, but not because it is that of the anointed king.[32] The shift to Hanoverian Toryism, to an acceptance of the Revolution and the Settlement, considerably lessened the difference between Whig and Tory, and was bitterly criticised by the dwindling band of Jacobite die-hards,

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[29] Sentiments of a Church of England Man, in Works, II, 215-216. The examples of Nero and Caligula were the customary ones invoked by the Tories themselves, who had commonly declared that one ought to obey even the worst possible tyrant rather than take up arms against constituted authority.

[30] Numerous criticism of this sort are presented by Hoadly, loc. cit., with his replies.

[31] See Berkeley, Discourse of Passive Obedience, 1721. Bolingbroke, chief architect of the new Toryism, praised the Act of Settlement, the 1688 Revolution, and the existing Constitution without stint; his ingenious position was that Walpole and the Whigs were upsetting the proper balance of the 1688 constitution and were creating a new sort of Parliamentary tyranny. See his Collection of Political Tracts (London, 1748), pp. 242 ff., 267.

[32] See again Figgis. Defoe, Sept. 8, 1705 Review, boldly pressed home the counter-charge of the Whigs, that divine right means tyranny.

but was inevitable. The Tories were, indeed, in a quandary, and Tindal rubbed salt in their wounds when he chided the Jacobite clergy with now themselves preaching revolt against the throne.[33] Tories soon accepted the permanence of the new order. Thomas Sherlock, whose father had been one of the first to recant his non-juring position (in 1691), soon led the clerical Tories towards a more moderate position.[34] Swift, Bolingbroke and Berkeley accepted for Toryism the basic Whig axiom that government is "natural" and not (immediately) divine. There remained, of course, important differences of emphasis. The Tory continued to feel, as Berkeley felt, that unlimited freedom must end in anarchy or tyranny, being "sufficient to dissolve any human fabric of polity or civil government."[35] The Tories had not abandoned their instinct to seek discipline and unity, in government and religion both. They did slowly abandon their effort to impose it at the point of the sword, as God's evident mandate. They accepted toleration as a going concern while resisting as best they could its consequences.[36] Schism remained in their eyes an evil, but scarcely a mortal sin. Whigs and Tories were beginning to become "liberals on the Left and Right." David Hume's effort to define the parties about mid-century was notable in indicating

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[33]Matthew Tindal, New High Church Turned Old Presbyterian (1) (London, 1709).

[34]Carpenter, Sherlock, pp. 6-13; Thomas Sherlock, Works, III, 336-339.

[35]Berkeley, Works, IV, 503.

[36]Evidence of Tory repudiation of religious persecution may be found in the language of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts, in Berkeley, The Querist, nos. 83 and 84, and in Memoirs of the Duke of Wharton, pp. 360-376. On the other hand, there was a strong inclination to demand prosecution of deists and enforcement of the disqualifying acts against Dissenters. See Weekly Miscellany, passim.

how little now separated them.[37]

The Tories, then, might be "Erastians" too. "I leave it among the divines to dilate upon the danger of schism as a spiritual evil," Swift wrote, "but I would consider it only as a temporal one."[38] Swift had assailed Tindal's Rights of the Christian Church as Erastian, but his own outlook was in fact equally so.[39] He differed from the Whig bishops in that he thought political convenience better served by not tolerating religious dissent. The truth is that for both Whig and Tory, jure divino became irrevocably obsolete. Soame Jenyns put it baldly enough a few years later:

> I would by no means Church and King destroy
> And yet the doctrine taught me when a boy
> By Grub the Curate, now seems wondrous odd,
> That either came immediately from God.[40]

3.

The moderate or Whig clergy accepted both deaths—the death of political divine right joyfully, that of religious divine right with a certain embarrassment, if they were Anglicans. Benjamin Hoadly, the Bishop of Bangor, was the most notorious of the Whig bishops. Hoadly, however,

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[37]"Of the Parties of Great Britain," in Essays, Moral, Political and Literary, ed. Green and Grose (London, 1889), I, 139: a Tory is "a lover of monarchy, though without abandoning liberty, and a partisan of the family of Stuart; as a Whig may be defined to be a lover of liberty, though without renouncing monarchy, and a friend to the settlement in the Protestant line." Hume thought the Tories stressed order more than liberty, and the Whigs vice versa.

[38]Works, XI, 212.

[39]The point is well developed by C. Looten, La pensée religieuse de Swift, pp. 114 ff.

[40]Quoted in Feiling, Second Tory Party, p. 9. The Monthly Review, August, 1749 (vol. I, 315), notes of a divine right political treatise, "This author proceeds on the old principle of passive obedience." (Italics ours.)

denied that he was Erastian. He declared himself horrified at the thought of "debasing the most sacred thing in the world into a political tool, as an engine of state."[41] Frank acceptance of the Church as simply a social and political convenience was confined to freethinkers, and no bishop or other respectable Whig wished to be known as one of them. Yet Hoadly seemed logically to leave no real place for the Church. His Original and Institution of Civil Government (1710) presented the Whig view that government is of human origin, not divine, and that there is a right of revolution against unjust rulers (to which end he argued against a "strict construction" of such passages as Romans 13:1). The end of government is the happiness of society; freedom of religion is essential to this happiness. Hoadly was consistent then, a few years later in the famous Bangorian controversy, he defined the church as invisible and wholly spiritual—in effect, as his critics noted, dissolving the Church of England as a society. But in practice neither the secular nor the ecclesiastical Whigs wanted to do away with the Church.

In Whiggism was a strong tradition of hostility to clerical interference in politics. From Milton to Harley, it had believed that the clergy "ought not to be suffered to meddle with politics," for they were no friends to "the rights and liberties of the people."[42] The Whig publicists Tutchin, Trenchard, and Gordon preached this in its most extreme form. "Shun the side which as got the majority of these spiritual guides with them," Trenchard advised. "However useful their profession may be

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[41] Hoadly, Works, II, 425.

[42] See Trevelyan, The Peace and the Protestant Succession, p. 53; John Dennis, in Somers Tracts, vol. XIII.

to our souls, we find the generality of them no great friends to our bodies. . . ."[43] Yet it appeared that a Whiggish church guided by Hoadlys and Wakes, in which "fanatics" were kept from power, was an asset. Conversely, Tories began to complain that Whig bishops minded their flocks too little and politics too much.[44] The Walpole organ, Osborne's London Journal, praised Hoadly as the "great apostle and converter of the clergy to the principles of the Revolution and the sentiments of liberty. . . ."[45] Thomas Gordon contrasted "proud, persecuting, covetous, rebellious, perjured priests" like Sacheverell and Atterbury with those bishops who were "loyal, moderate men; men of conscience and moderation." A church of the latter sort, Gordon baldly affirmed, is a useful institution, though perhaps not a divine one.[46] The creed of this "independent Whig" was plain enough, but not very palatable. It appeared to make the Church the spiritual arm of the Walpole government. There is evidence enough, indeed, that this is about what it actually became.[47] But it was embarrassing to admit it.

"We are not to look into the Scriptures for the English Constitution," John Tutchin drily remarked in 1703. He nevertheless felt obliged to argue that non-resistance is un-scriptural; the Whigs usually pre-

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[43] Independent Whig, II, 276; cf. Observator, II, no. 34, and III, no. 83.

[44] Bolingbroke, A Collection of Political Tracts, pp. 205-206.

[45] Quoted by Laprade, Public Opinion in Eighteenth Century England, pp. 373-374.

[46] Independent Whig, II, 374, 415, etc.

[47] Walpole was angered when Bishop Gibson presumed to cross him on a purely episcopal question. In 1736, it is true, Whig and Tory churchman united to defeat bills sponsored by the ministry, relating to tithes and church property. See Sykes, Bishop Gibson, pp. 164 ff.

posed their own version of the famous injunction to obey the powers that be.[48] Even the Whigs, then, did not leave religion out of politics where they could cite it to their advantage. But the essence of Whiggism was the resort to nature for a demonstration of government's origins. A purely natural government, however, left no very clear place for an Established Church, short of the abhorred Erastian position, which to this era seemed like the worst cynicism. It is embarrassing to read some of the Whig efforts to justify the Establishment. Bishop Warburton's was the most notable such effort during this period.[49] Aware of the Erastian danger, or at least aware of the opprobrium attached to it, Warburton insisted he would have the Church be "neither a slave nor a tyrant." Yet his justification for it turns out to be entirely "civic utility." And he concedes that it does not matter what the Established Church is, so long as it teaches some sort of God and his Providence over human affairs. Whatever the largest such religious body is ought to be made the official state religion, just because it is convenient for the state to deal with such a body.

Warburton sought to deduce all this, of course, from natural law; the same Nature in which Locke had so clearly found the source of civil government ought to show the reason for an established church. But it is painfully evident that Warburton began with his institution and then

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[48] *Observator*, II, no. 47. See also Bishop Fleetwood, *Works*, III, 129-142. Fleetwood argues that the 13th Romans means submission to the Hanoverians, which indicates the strong Whig tendency to think of their revolution as the last. John Locke had also rebutted divine right on scriptural grounds as well as natural, by way of being sure.

[49] *The Alliance between Church and State* (1736). Commentaries may be found in Evans, *Warburton*, chap. III, and Sykes, *Church and State*, pp. 316-326.

tried hard to wring a rationale out of poor nature. It is a labored apology, for all Warburton's characteristic ingenuity, and it scarcely succeeded in making the Church more than a tool of politics. As against such tortured apologetics, the Dissenting case for full religious liberty was far more convincing.[50] The High Churchmen were right in feeling that the Church of England was lost if it threw away its claim to a special divine sanction. On utilitarian grounds, nothing was easier than to show the silliness of any established church. Paley will say, what in the last analysis the Anglican liberals could only say, that the Church is merely a "scheme of instruction."[51] Why then should the Anglican scheme of instruction be officially preferred over any other Christian scheme of instruction?

The reason given by Walpole, and then Burke, was, of course, just that it is not expedient to move what is at rest: when it is not necessary to change it is necessary not to change.[52] An effectual if illogical "balance" had been attained, which statesmen were not going to disturb. Against this sort of political logic the more militant Dissenters would beat in vain. There could be no question about the politics of all Dissenters. "There is not one Jacobite to be found among them, or ever was, that I have ever heard of," Defoe asserted safely enough. "They must be

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[50]See for example Isaac Watts, " A New Essay on Civil Power in Things Sacred," Works, vol, VI—which disposes of the question in a few lucid pages.

[51]William Paley, Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy (London, 1785), VI, 10.

[52]Nichols, Illustrations, II, 895; John Harvey, Memoirs of the Reign of King George II (London, 1931), I, 121-132; Sykes, Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century.

for King George, and that for ever."[55] High Church intolerance had forced them to look to the Whigs for protection. Contented and prosperous, the Dissenters were far from being the rebels and subversives of old Tory propaganda, and they were not especially anxious to demand more concessions either.[54] Between 1689 and 1714 their position was still precarious, and from time to time the Tories and the mob howled against them (there were in fact such mobs as late as 1733.) The Tories succeeded during their brief season of power between 1711 and 1714 in passing the Occasional Conformity Act and the Schism Act. The death of Queen Anne and the coming of the Hanovers saved the Dissenters, and the obnoxious measures were repealed a few years later (1718-19).

But the Dissenters' political value declined during the Whig supremacy, and Walpole would not move further, towards repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Anglican Whigs had once fought against such bills as Occasional Conformity because they needed Dissenting support against Jacobites and Tories.[55] That was no longer so necessary. The danger was now that of giving further offense to the quiescent but potentially hostile group of Tory Anglicans, who would have been incensed at additional concessions to schism. When in the 1730's some Dissenters tried to renew the offensive for full religious and civil equality, they

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[53]Defoe's Writings, ed. Lee, II, 86; Review, Sept. 25, 1705. There had once been Quaker Tories, in the time of Charles II, but High Church intolerance had ended this.

[54]See Defoe's Shortest Way to Peace and Union, 1703; and ante, p. 129, for Dissent's refusal to join whole-heartedly in agitation for further legal privileges.

[55]Carpenter, Thomas Tenison, pp. 118-119.

failed because of languid support from their own eminently contented fellows and the hostility of the Whig ministers.[56]

However weakly the Establishment might be justified in theory, it existed, and Walpole certainly did not intend to make enemies by attacking it; everyone knows that that genial politician desired to awaken no sleeping canines. The Dissenters, he knew, were his in any event, and he propitiated them by gifts of money and by lax enforcement of the disqualifying laws.[57] The balance was on dead center, and the languid protests of a Dissenting group which was on the whole prosperous and contented, against some mild burdens, were not calculated to disturb it.

3.

It was notoriously difficult to tell a Whig from a Tory in this period. Tacitly accepting the Revolution, the Tories had scarcely yet found any new principles. Within the Church, the moderate Tory Sherlock, a favorite of Queen Caroline's, did not greatly differ from the once-despised Whig bishops; and in 1736 the Church united in defense of its

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[56]See ante, p. 129. The effort to repeal the Test Act was very nearly successful in 1735; Harvey (op. cit., II, 530-543) noted that at this time anti-clericalism was strong and "the churchmen had never so strong reason to believe the decay of their interest in this kingdom." But an alarmed Church rallied to defeat this and other bills in 1736 (Mortmain and Tithe bills).

[57]Occasional conformity, the practice at which Tories had aimed, permitted one to pass technically as an Anglican by rare appearances at that church. The Schism Act would have struck at the Dissenting academies. Test and Corporation, which remained on the books, prohibited Dissenters from holding public office unless they would take the sacrament after the manner of the Anglican Church. Lax enforcement, as expressed in permitting occasional conformity and in passing annual indemnity acts for the protection of office-holders who did not fill the requirement, did not of course eliminate the fact that a really conscientious Dissenter could not legally hold office.

privileges. The Tory traditionalists showed a tendency to look back beyond the Stuarts to Hooker's more flexible philosophy.[58] In political theory, Whig and Tory could come close to agreement on a moderate version of the compact; thus it is not easy to say whether the political philosophy expressed in Synge's A Gentleman's Religion is Whig or Tory. The civil magistrate, this typical "gentleman" held, derives his power from the consent of the people, but when once established "it is to be looked upon as ratified and confirmed by God's own appointment," and requires obedience—obedience up to what point is left unsaid.[59] Here was a formula on which Whig and Tory might agree. It left the Hanovers firmly in power but satisfied Tory desires for authority. The desire of the Whigs to justify no more revolutions after 1688 was as marked as the gradual admission by the Tories that they could not after all undo 1688. In their theory of the Church, both were confused. Conservative churchmen mourned the decay of the Church, and were much inclined to blame the Whigs, but had no practical solution. Liberal Churchmen rested so strongly on religious freedom, private judgment and natural right that they left the Establishment no very dignified excuse for existence. Without exactly intending it, both groups might be said to have been putting the Church in that position which J. Middleton Murry has called "the absolute nadir of the Christian religion"—when, early in the nineteenth century, the Erastian church knew no better function than that of preaching political conservatism as an arm of the state.

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[58] Nichols, Illustrations, IV, 327.

[59] Synge, A Gentleman's Religion, pp. 208-209.

Thus, although the dissociation of Church and State was by no means complete, politics could laugh and cry without religion by 1750; it was the latter that was becoming subordinate. Perhaps we might risk the generalisation that in 1670 one was a Tory because he was High Church Anglican, while in 1770 one was an Anglican because one was a Tory. Toland and the freethinkers had always poked fun at the idea that because one man kneels in church and another does not they should form themselves into separate political parties.[60] They had done so because the Tory mind had stubbornly denied that stable government could be had except on a basis of religious obedience to the monarch. Reenforced by civil war and fear of anarchy, this Stuart theory was fed on the association of Dissent with rebellion in the age of the Puritan Revolution and took a good while to die. Shaken by the desertion of James II, Tories impotently witnessed the triumph of anti-hereditary principles and a revolution in the Church hierarchy which filled the sees with men scarcely to be distinguished from Dissenters. They had, indeed, much to complain of during the rule of the cynical Walpole. But they could not turn back the clock. Tarred with the brushes of popery and tyranny, they were seriously discredited, the more so as stable and prosperous government prevailed despite their laments. Gradually they accepted the finality of the Revolution, and abandoned Jacobitism.

The Whigs for their part always accepted the divorce of religion from politics; but not of church from state. Illogically enough, they

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[60] On Toland see more below, in chapter XI. The noteworthy thing is that although this representative freethinker ridiculed the idea that government required religious uniformity, he thought, as a good Whig, that there ought to be an official church.

kept the Established Church, though they could really only justify it as a pleasant custom. Dissenters and even deists accepted this without protest. Perhaps they were mindful of a warning issued by John Wesley some years later. "Do you imagine there are no High Churchmen left?" he asked the politically radical Nonconformists of 1775. "Did they all die with Dr. Sacheverell? Alas, how little do you know of mankind!"[61] That is to say, the return of "fanaticism" continued to be a possibility all through the century; Tory High-Church emotions smoldered but did not die; it was always dangerous to disturb the "balance" by any additional pressure in the direction of liberalism.

Certainly the events of 1790 verified Wesley's judgment. It goes without saying that few liberals wanted any sweeping social or political changes. They were content to rest with what they had, without further baiting the Tory bull.

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[61] Wesley, Works (London, 1830), XI, 136.

CHAPTER X

RELIGION AND THE RULING CLASS

> I believe, sir, you will agree with me, that never had any nation a fuller enjoyment of liberty than we have had since the Revolution.—John Leland, 1754.
>
> In some other countries the upper part of the world is free, but in Great Britain the whole body of the people is free.—Joseph Butler.

Complacency, of the sort expressed above by Leland and Butler, was the keynote of an age which found itself generally prosperous, with few really acute social problems, and a mild but stable government. But fully to understand what such statements meant by "liberty" we need to add that, to Bishop Butler, liberty consisted in submission to the authority of government and in the preservation of a class hierarchy, with the poor kept in their appointed place.[1] The sanction of religion was given to the class structure and submission to one's assigned station. As of yore, it was a sin to wish to rise above one's rank; and Butler, quite conventional in his views here, declared that the relationship between rich and poor had not been essentially changed by the new urban environment—it still should be as it had been on the manor.[2]

In economics as well as politics, the period was one of relative

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[1] Works (Oxford, 1897, ed. Gladstone), II, 295, 314, 329; see also Norton, op. cit., p. 150.

[2] Butler, op. cit., II, 253.

quiet, a moment of equilibrium underneath which, indeed, momentous preparations were going on for great changes which would come near the end of the century. Some historians, insisting quite properly that the industrial revolution was not made overnight, have pushed back the origins of that process to the beginning of the century.[3] This does not disturb the fact that industrialism's striking social consequences were not felt until later, that large capitalistic units were as yet exceptional, not typical, that class divisions were not yet generally sharp as between owner and worker, and that the horrors of the early factory system were not yet very noticeable.[4] In brief, while industrial capitalism had arrived, it had not become acute.

It is possible to trace the turn towards laissez-faire back to the Restoration, and to say that "the economic drift of the century was towards a sharper demarcation of classes and towards depriving the poor of such economic protection as the Tudor and early Stuart governments had managed to keep for them."[5] This was certainly true; within the nation "the principle and practice of free trade and exchange made great headway" in the eighteenth century, though by no means complete.[6] On

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[3]See remarks in Eric Roll, A History of Economic Thought (New York, 1942), pp. 93-94. Such studies as J. U. Nef, The Rise of the British Coal Industry (London, 1932), have revealed the earlier roots of the industrial revolution; see also Nef's article, "The Progress of Technology," in Economic History Review, October, 1934. Alfred P. Wadsworth and Julia D. Mann, The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire 1600-1780, (Manchester, 1931), show that by 1750 Lancashire had achieved in most sectors of its industry "a fairly high level of capitalistic organization." (p. 211).

[4]Paul Mantoux, The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1943, tr. Marjorie Vernon), pp. 68, 376, passim.

[5]E. Lipson, Economic History of England (London, 1931), III, 264-265; 312-313; Feiling, History of the Tory Party, p. 20.

[6]John M. Clark, in Clark et al., Adam Smith, 1776-1926 (Chicago, 1928), p. 61.

the other hand, it is possible to say that (relatively) there was "little or no social discontent."[7] It is not true that there was absolutely no discontent. There was the mob, which Fielding named the Fourth Estate.[8] Sacheverell's mob, the Spitalfield weavers, the anti-Jewish riots of 1753, mobs against Dissenters and against Catholics—the sort of thing that culminates finally in that extraordinary outburst of 1780, the Gordon riots: rioting that is aimless and leaderless and futile, yet certainly significant. It was a sign of growing inequality and growing insecurity for many of the poor. Although everyone agrees that this was a time of exceptional prosperity for England at large, it is equally evident that this prosperity was fluctuating and "very unstable," with the poorer classes subject to great temporary hardships.[9]

But insofar as the lower classes protested it was not in the name of any coherent philosophy of social change. Revolutionary sentiment was lacking, and what little thought there was among these classes was towards a restoration of "the old governmental control over economic

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[7]G. M. Trevelyan, in Turberville, ed., Johnson's England, I, 7. See also the same author's English Social History (London, 1947), pp. 294-295.

[8]See Max Beloff, Public Order and Popular Disturbances 1660-1714 (Oxford, 1938); W. C. Sydney, England and the English in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1891), II, 193-195; R. F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century (London, 1945).

[9]Mantoux, op. cit., pp. 72-73; Beloff, op. cit., passim; Wearmouth, op. cit., sec. I, chaps. I-III. The statement by G. N. Clark (Science and Social Welfare in the Age of Newton, p. 58) that "in the eighteenth century the standard of living was rising" needs to be qualified in obvious ways: there was often less security than before. Chapter III of Eli Ginsberg, The House of Adam Smith (New York, 1934), on "The Laboring Poor," is an eloquent summary as seen through the unorthodox eyes of the great Scottish economist.

activity and social life" rather than towards any new order.[10] In 1751 a writer thought he detected a spirit of "mutiny and independence" among "the gross body of the people."[11] Quite evidently there was such a vague discontent abroad, but it was as yet formless and without direction. There was a proletariat before the factory age, capable of commenting on their exploitation by those who

> . . . . gain all [their] wealth and estate
> By many poor men that work early and late.

But only the dimmest origins of a trades union movement existed. What is beyond dispute is the fact that the poor, as always, existed—the poor who, as Cowper wrote,

> . . . . inured to drudgery and distress
> Act without aim, think little and feel less.

The innumerable local riots show that they sometimes felt, but also that they did generally think little and act without aim.

It was not the Fourth Estate's century, but the Third's. The dominant classes in England exhibited an understandable complacency. John Toland, deist and Whig, thought that English liberty "wants very little of perfection," and was rendered indignant by even those good-natured slights on the home of freedom contained in Defoe's "True-born Englishman."[12] "What can you desire more than you have already?" John Wesley asked the malcontents in 1774.[13] The only reproach that literary Tories

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[10]Beloff, op. cit., pp. 153-155. Wearmouth (op. cit., p. 51) makes the statement that "the suffering masses of the eighteenth century never tried to alter the Constitution and never openly desired a change in the form of administration."

[11]John White, Free and Impartial Considerations . . ., pp. 7-8.

[12]Toland, The Art of Governing, p. 161; State-Anatomy of Great Britain, pp. 44-45.

[13]Works, XI, 139.

could think of was—too much wealth and indulgence, leading to a corrosion of moral fiber, to "vain, luxurious, and selfish effeminacy."[14] This Tory protest against a commercial age was fairly faint, if not so faint as the complaints from the voiceless poor. The Tory who lamented Whig materialism did not often extend his criticism to a championing of the poor. He might, indeed, charge the Whigs with callous heartlessness; we see in this period the beginning of the Tory indictment of bourgeois economics on humanitarian grounds which culminates in Carlyle and Ruskin a century later.[15] But Henry Fielding, for example, worried mainly about the effect of bourgeois "luxury" on the lower classes, making them restless and unruly; he agreed that the poor have themselves to blame for their plight, and his remedy was to lower wages while punishing the "incorrigible idle," which was what any bourgeois would have said.[16] The real source of Tory pessimism would appear to have been much less any real sympathy for the poor than their own plight—the plight of rural gentlemen, not to mention professional authors. "For many years, a country squire has been an object of ridicule," one of them noted in 1750, in a tract advising country squires how to live respectably

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[14]Such charges were common; see the pages of the Tory True Briton (in Memoirs of the Life of the Duke of Wharton, 1731); John Brown's famous Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times, or Henry Fielding's An Enquiry into the Late Increase of Robbers, etc. (London, 1751).

[15]Swift's bitter satire of "political arithmetic" is of course a case in point. See George Wittowsky's article on the background of Swift's "Modest Proposal" in Journal of the History of Ideas, IV (January, 1943), pp. 75-104.

[16]Fielding, op. cit., pp. 17-19, 35-36, 88-90.

in the face of rising prices.[17]

Whiggism meant commercialism, a thing resented by the "old England" Tories as much for social as for economic reasons. Through trade, the commoners had acceded to political power.[18] The English merchant, who now boasted that "our trade is the most considerable of the whole world," could also note with satisfaction that, in Defoe's words, "trade in England makes gentlemen." "Money was becoming more and more the measure of prestige and power."[19] The new aristocracy of trade was purchasing land on a large scale and thus directly invading the aristocracy.[20] The rural squires, simple of mind and taste, looked upon this urban monied class as something of a scandal, dishonest and wasteful. What the City thought of the rural squires is reflected in Addison's Tory fox-hunter, and in the Whig myth as later classically perpetuated by Macaulay.[21]

On the other hand a rising capitalist class in industry was very apt to think of itself as frugal and virtuous as against a profligate nobility; these nouveaux riches were likely to be Dissenters.[22] In any event

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[17]John Trusler, The Way to be Rich and Respectable (London, 1750). The author's advice included a recommendation to stay home on the estate, pursuing the simple and robust life, instead of going to foppish London each year. As L. B. Namier points out, the squires actually did cease even to attend Parliament in these years.

[18]Fielding, op. cit., preface.

[19]Mantoux, op. cit., p. 163.

[20]Lucy S. Sutherland, A London Merchant, 1695-1774 (London, 1933), pp. 5-6.

[21]Samuel C. McCulloch, "Some Conflicting Views on the Clergy in England in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, XVI (September, 1947), discusses the accuracy of Macaulay's well-known derogatory portraits of country squire and country parson in chap. III of his History of England from the Accession of James II.

[22]Especially in the rising manufacturing towns of West, Midland, and North. In London the commercial class was more apt to be Anglican. See Coomer, op. cit., p. 53; Wadsworth and Mann, op. cit., pp. 241 ff.

it was clear to all that the Whigs were the party of commerce and finance. The Whig power, Tories declared, was based on "setting up a monied interest in opposition to the landed."[23] The bitterness of the Tories towards this plutocracy was often intense. Pope, it seems, would have been glad to abolish money altogether! The Whigs for their part feared the economic implications of a Tory victory. The Jacobite was pictured with "a sponge in his left hand" to repudiate all the acts benefiting trade, abolish the Bank of England, etc.[24] The price of stocks fell with the successes of Dr. Sacheverell. Toland referred to "priests" (Tory High Churchmen) as enemies of trade.[25]

The growth of luxury, of an ignoble materialistic spirit, was commonly related by critics of Whiggism to the decay of religion.[26] In this age the Tory philosophy attacked commercial capitalism from the viewpoint of an older order dominated by the country gentlemen. In that rural squirearchy religion had played a role, if not an extraordinary one. The parson, of course, was a fixture in that stable, stratified rural society. He was scarcely as benighted as Macaulay imagined, even if he "did not think of himself in any special sense as a messenger of the Lord, but as a country gentleman . . . who had a social status to maintain, and who happened to have certain clerical duties to perform."[27]

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[23]Swift to Pope, in Pope's Works, ed. Elwin (1831), III, 123.

[24]Spectator, no. 3; Observator, IX, no. 53.

[25]Toland, State Anatomy, p. 44.

[26]John Brown, Estimate (Dublin, 1757), pp. 98 ff.

[27]Elizabeth K. Nottingham, The Making of an Evangelist: a Study of John Wesley's Early Years (New York, 1938), p. 53. James Woodford's Diary of a Country Parson (ed. J. Beresford, 5 vols., Oxford, 1926-31), is famous as the best picture of a parson's life in the eighteenth century.

The English country gentleman "looked upon religion as necessary to a decent and respectable living and as essential to a well-ordered state. . . . A pattern of life that ignored religion was unthinkable to them."[28] But a gentleman was not a religious fanatic, and the squires had very little taste for theology, preferring books of "practical divinity" such as Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living or Tillotson's Whole Duty of Man. A gentleman was a Christian in conduct, which meant that he went to church and treated his tenants with a certain amount of Christian kindness. Such charity by no means included any notion of equality. Class lines were tightly drawn, and the parson no more than the squire dreamed of crossing them. Not only was the class system supported by appeals to Scripture, but it is to be suspected that "sin was the prerogative of the lower orders."[29] We shall not find any questioning of the class system even among the most humane and sensitive of the eighteenth century gentry; the gentle poet Cowper, prince of humanitarians, will insist that "differences of rank and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well-being of society."[30] This was accepted by all, and it may reasonably be said that one of religion's functions—if not the only one—was to help maintain this proper subordination of rank. "Each does his duty in that state of life

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[28]Louis B. Wright, First Gentlemen of Virginia (San Marino, 1940), pp. 66, 134-135.

[29]Nottingham, op. cit., p. 50. We are reminded of the Duchess's famous rejoinder to Wesley, that "it is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth"—Tyerman, Whitefield, I, 160-161.

[30]L. C. Hartley, William Cowper, Humanitarian (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1938), p. 39.

to which it hath pleased God to call him," the Anglican catechism pronounced. But the parson's duties included philanthropy and kindness to the poor, and this element of stewardship was equally a part of the Christian tradition.

Religion had long sat rather lightly on the squires, because religious fanaticism was associated with the Roundheads. It was the latter whose change in religious intensity was apparently the most marked. The Dissenters had become, certainly, far quieter and more conservative. The Tory myth of Jack Presbyter as a radical was, of course, just that; and Dissent had always been primarily a middle-class faith. Presbyterianism was "not a religion for gentlemen."[31] Neither was it a religion for the riff-raff. Its class bias had always been evident and strong. "Freeholders and tradesmen are the strength of religion and civility in thelland," Richard Baxter had written, "and gentlemen and beggars, and servile tenants, are the strength of iniquity." On the other side of that coin, we find Tory-Anglican contempt for "shop-prating weavers and cobblers."[32]

The erstwhile weavers and cobblers had quite commonly become men of substance in the eighteenth century. The greater capitalists were very apt to be Dissenters.[33] As of 1719, Philip Doddridge noted that

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[31]Clark, History of English Nonconformity, II, 6.

[32]Quoted in Richard B. Schlatter, Social Ideas of Religious Leaders, 1660-1688 (Oxford, 1940), p. 167. A valuable work.

[33]See note 22 and in addition Tawney, op. cit., pp. 252-253; R. V. Holt, Unitarian Contributions to Social Progress in England (London, 1938), chap. 2. Arthur Raistrick, Quakers in Science and Industry (London, 1950), points up the role played by Quakers in industry, trade, and finance: the concluding chapter is a thoughtful examination of both the reasons for this and the consequences to religion.

Dissent's position had become "highly respectable."[34] Not only the Presbyterians and Independents but also Quakers and Baptists tended to become well-to-do and respectable. The Quakers, it was observed, were shedding their plain clothes for buttons and ruffles.[35] Some prosperous Dissenters conformed in this period, but whether they did or not made little difference, for they were no longer Roundheads, and all but the most prejudiced Anglicans recognised that Puritanism had lost its sting.[36]

Poverty they regarded with contempt. On the familiar Puritan terms worldly success was the proof of spiritual success, but no one can fail to sense that in the eighteenth century the equation has become far more crassly materialistic. It was the somewhat astonishing rule among the Dissenters that a brother who became bankrupt "must expect to be cut off from our body. . . ."[37] True, the great Nonconformist prophets —Baxter, Bunyan, Penn—had clearly expressed the traditional warnings against excessive greed and against unscrupulous economic practices. Christian economic ethics are sufficiently ambiguous, and from Calvin one might derive a kind of socialism (as the Christian Socialists later did) as well as capitalism.[38] But the stern admonitions against exces-

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[34] Correspondence and Diary, I, 29.

[35] César de Saussure, A Foreign View of England in the Reigns of George I and George II (New York, 1902, tr. and ed. by Van Muyden), p. 327. Such observations were numerous; see Schlatter, op. cit., pp. 232-235.

[36] Fleetwood, Works, II, 348.

[37] A. P. Davis, Isaac Watts, p. 38.

[38] See Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches (New York, 1931), II, 641-649.

sive wealth, the warnings against exploiting the poor, the prohibitions of usury and other such practices, while they are still occasionally heard in the eighteenth century, are not much honored. We feel inclined to believe Collins the deist when he writes that he never heard of but one clergyman in all England who thought usury to be a sin.[39] Defoe's "complete English tradesman" was in theory, and no doubt sometimes in practice, "a fair downright honest man," who "never grinds the faces of the poor."[40] He was taught the doctrine of Christian stewardship. But we shall have to give some place to the complaint of the American Quaker, John Woolman, that too often a capitalist on the make ignored it, that "in the mouth of many it is but a cant, unmeaning expression."[41]

Doubtless the stewardship doctrine influenced many employers and tradesmen to greater humanity.[42] It is equally clear that the middle class had discovered a "new medicine for poverty" far different from indiscriminate charity. "Damn the poor"—"God cannot love the wretch he starves"—such was Alexander Pope's interpretation of the outlook of the monied class.[43] Pope was a prejudiced witness where Whigs and merchants were concerned, but he seems to have been all too right. The Puritan's individualism did lead him to regard the poor as men of no virtue and grace. Middle class opinion was unanimous, "from Locke and Defoe to

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[39]Discourse of Freethinking, p. 74.

[40]Daniel Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman (London, 1738), II, 143.

[41]Quoted in Tolles, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

[42]Isabel Grubb, Quakerism and Industry before 1800 (London, 1930), argues that in this respect the Friends were better than average.

[43]Pope, Works, III, 138-139. Cf. Basil Williams, The Whig Supremacy, pp. 123-133.

Chalmers," that the poor had only to blame their "personal follies and Christian ingratitude."[44] "Everyone but an idiot knows that the lower classes must be kept poor or they will never be industrious." Arthur Young's famous remark was all too typical.[45]

For the ruling classes, religion had ceased to be austere. The religion of most people of means in this period was a mild and comfortable one, well expressed in the "Gentleman's Religion" observation that "I find no reason to think that [God] has decreed us all, or any of us, to be absolutely miserable whilst we remain in this world."[46] The sanctity of property was strongly stressed in religious utterances. Sermons on the "temporal advantages of religion" were common. The left hand of Christianity, a prudent man's faith, held riches and honor.[47] The social outlook of such a Whig as Bishop Hoadly reflected the comfortable conviction that religion's tasks were to defend property and liberty and prosperity, as established by the Glorious Revolution, from Tory threats.[48]

This Whig system was not, needless to say, a democratic one. The Puritan had believed in democracy no more than the Anglican, but that God had placed men in "their several stations and callings." "A noble,

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[44]Wadsworth and Mann, op. cit., p. 335. See John Clayton, Friendly Advice to the Poor, 1755.

[45]Arthur Young on Industry and Economics, ed. Elizabeth P. Hunt (Bryn Mawr, 1936), presents examples of Young's astonishing but typically class-conditioned view of the poor—e.g. pp. 45, 55, 95, 112.

[46]Synge, op. cit., p. 184, 185 ff.

[47]See Nichols, Anecdotes, I, 140, 379. Henry W. Sams, "Self-love and the Doctrine of Work," Journal of the History of Ideas, IV (June, 1943), 320 ff., calls attention to the "prudential" element in the Christianity of this age, with pursuit of wealth and honor a good.

[48]Hoadly, Works, II, 111-117.

a gentleman, a yeoman, the distinction between them is rightly of great interest to the nation," Cromwell had said. Political power, according to the dominant Roundhead faction, rightly belonged only to propertied men.[49] Diggers and Levellers had been crushed by the powerful reaction against extremes of "enthusiasm." When, a century after 1640, the Methodists appeared, a group whose intent was quite innocent of any social or political radicalism (Wesley being almost the prince of conservatives in such matters), they still were not merely suspected but bitterly reviled and persecuted by all as dangerous revolutionaries, because they sought to reach the masses and because their religious outlook seemed to involve "enthusiasm."[50] Nothing better illustrates both the fear of the people and the still existing association of religion with political and social attitudes.[51]

The rationalists of our period, whether orthodox or deistic, were by no means political radicals. Worshiping liberty and property, they were quite satisfied with the Whig regime as it existed after 1714. What of those who lacked property? Little sympathy was wasted on them. For those "idle and vicious," there were harsh penal laws and the workhouses. The "drones" of political arithmetic were entitled to no sympathy. A sober and honest man could presumably rise to a higher rank. Such at

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[49] Woodhouse, ed., Puritanism and Liberty, passim, among the Army debates of the Puritan revolutionary period.

[50] The unbelievable animus against the Methodists may be followed in Wearmouth, op. cit. E.g., p. 153: a Methodist was regarded as "a dangerous man to the person and Government of His Majesty King George."

[51] "The doctrine of the inward light," Dr. Johnson thought, "to which some Methodists pretend, is entirely incompatible with political and religious security."

least is the outlook we find reflected in the sermons of the day. "Submission and humility," along traditional Christian lines, are enjoined upon servants; "the state of servitude is absolutely necessary, by the order and appointment of the wise Creator and Disposer of all things." But by industry and honesty a servant may rise. The master has a duty to be fair and just to his servants.[52]

This code, as the industrial revolution was to show, had its equivocations for those unfortunate enough not to have already risen to wealth. The early eighteenth century did not yet witness the tensions of the factory age; yet there were enough social evils. A few only were prepared to go beyond the narrower version of the stewardship idea to begin the humanitarian movement.

We have only to glance at the bourgeoisie in other lands to recognise aspects of both religion and social philosophy characteristic of this class in all places. The French bourgeois also thought the workers were paid too much, and were lazy and vicious.[53] In religion, the outright deist shocked him—a dangerous philosophy; yet there was, as M. Roustan has noted, a bit of the philosophe in him—tolerance suits him, he is too hard-headed for mysticism, he prefers a religion that does not get in the way of business, and is not too expensive. It does not surprise us that the English merchant Braund owned a copy of a deist book.[54] It would have surprised us very much had he not remained out-

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[52]William Fleetwood, Works (Oxford, 1854; first published 1737), I, Discourse XIV, XV, and XVI. Also II, 261 ff.

[53]Marius Roustan, Pioneers of the French Revolution (tr. F. Whyte, 1926), chap. VII, also p. 229.

[54]Lucy S. Sutherland, A London Merchant.

wardly orthodox—or if he had owned a copy of Law or Whitefield. The merchant was, after 1710, constantly congratulating himself on England's prosperity, which he attributed mainly to "the security and liberty which the nation gained at the Revolution."[55] This happy situation he did not wish to disturb by a movement either forward or backward. A religion which preached acquisitiveness, and made few demands on his purse, was what the dominant bourgeois wished. Evidently both a Whiggish Church of England and a debilitated Dissent were willing enough to provide something of the sort. As for the few who enjoyed being outright deists, they generally contented themselves with exposing the hypocrisy of this arrangement, without suggesting a change.

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[55] Alexander Mackenzie, Characteristics of the Present State of Great Britain (London, 1758), pp. 100-101, 199, etc.

CHAPTER XI

RELIGION AND SOCIAL REFORM

> We can never estimate the religion of any age or society without observing its attitude towards the poor.—G. G. Coulton, The Medieval Village.

1.

Arthur Young spoke for his age. Despite an occasional shedding of the poet Thomson's "social tear," too often open to Mandeville's suspicions about its sincerity, there was no real humanitarian movement until the last quarter of the century.[1] There was the beginning of one, the fruit of a religious philanthropy, at the beginning of the century. The men whom Thomson celebrated in verse—Thomas Bray, James Oglethorpe, and the Wesleys, to name the foremost—set going the charity schools, founded the societies for reforming manners and propagating the gospel, and ultimately inquired "into the horrors of the gloomy jail." They founded the colony of Georgia.[2] Add to them such nonconforming philanthropists and reformers as the celebrated Quaker John Bellers and the unitarian Thomas Firmin.[3] But this impulse had very nearly played out

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[1]Consult L. C. Hartley, William Cowper, Humanitarian; M. G. Jones, The Charity School Movement (Cambridge, 1938); Betsy Rodgers, Cloak of Charity: Studies in Eighteenth Century Philanthropy (London, 1949).

[2]See V. W. Crane, The Southern Frontier (Durham, N.C., 1928), chap. XIII. The Anglican philanthropists are also discussed in B. K. Gray, A History of English Philanthropy (London, 1905).

[3]See A. Ruth Fry, ed., John Bellers, 1654-1725 (London, 1935); Oscar Sherwin, "Thomas Firmin," Journal of Modern History, March, 1950, pp.38-41.

by 1730. Although some claim a tradition of religious charity stretching across the century from Robert Nelson to Hannah More, it would seem that this tradition thinned down to the faintest trace between the first decade or two and the last.[4] As Thomson wrote,

> Much still untouched remains, in this dark age;

and amid many evils there were remarkably few men to employ "the patriot's weeding hand."

Until after 1750 at the earliest, there was no disposition to "pry into the state of society." "It was beyond the range of their mentality to conceive that the poor were poor because Society was an ill-regulated machine."[5] Bellers and Firmin did, indeed, advocate constructive social projects for the employment of the poor in experimental "colleges of industry," and thus won a niche for themselves as dim precursors of Owenite socialism. Mid-century is a dividing point beyond which the mind would move towards new concepts of economic science and social determinism.[6] But in general to the eighteenth century humanitarianism means charity, not social engineering.

There was little enough of that, assumed in theory to be the duty of all Christians. The charity-school movement was the finest fruit of early-century humanitarianism: "the glory of the age we live in," Addison called it in 1712. But after 1723 it deteriorated sadly, until

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[4]Jones, op. cit., p. 13; cf. Hartley, op. cit., p. 2.

[5]Ibid., p. 8.

[6]See the previous remarks on Hartley's psychology and Priestley, leading towards Bentham and Philosophical Radicalism also. The essay by Jacob Hollander in Adam Smith, 1776-1926, "The Dawn of a New Science," places mid-century, especially Hume, as the birth date of a "deliberate and systematic" approach to economic science, leading towards Smith.

these schools, in most of England, became scandalous, the prototypes of Dickens' Dotheboys. Mandeville did not exaggerate much when he called them just a fashion of the hour.[7] The zeal of the little group that established them was not enough to sustain them against public indifference and political hostility. To the Whigs they were a Tory project, suspected of touching Jacobitism. But for the reasons why Whigs neglected them (quite often turning them, after 1723, into workhouses) we must turn to the prevailing social philosophy: "The conviction that the education of the poor was economically unsound and socially destructive was well entrenched."[8] Would it not unfit them for their role as manual laborers? There was an equivocation in the middle-class philosophy: the theory that the workers may rise by their own efforts clashed with the conviction that each class ought to keep its place, and the latter was stronger. The real desire of the middle class was for a working class that would be industrious and sober but well-disciplined and tractable.[9] The charity schools were used only to inculcate religious lessons which were economically useful: not to steal from your

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[7]Mandeville's Essay on Charity and Charity Schools (1725) is included in The Fable of the Bees—see F. B. Kaye's standard edition, 2 vols., Oxford, 1924.

[8]Jones, op. cit., p. 13. We owe to A. D. Lindsay (The Modern Democratic State, I, 135) the observation that as late as 1822 an English clergyman opposed educating the lower classes as "dangerous to the public peace," while Merle Curti in his The Social Ideas of American Educators recounts a similar opposition, based on fear of spoiling the workers for their lowly tasks.

[9]Constant complaints about the "idleness and stubbornness of the poor" appear from 1680 on; they will not work steadily, "and when they do work they will often mar what they do." See Dorothy Marshall, The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1926), p. 8.

master, to make dutiful servants, to waste no time at work.[10] This was the only sort of education wealthy people would invest in; and after 1723 even this is neglected. The "blackguard boys," armies of homeless, lawless, degenerate children, roamed the country. The remedy for them was thought to be the workhouse.[11]

The idea of catechistical instruction in the charity schools had not been favored by the noblest minds of the earlier period—Bellers, Firmin, and John Locke. They had favored work projects, where relief might be combined with practical education.[12] It is doubtful if these worthy men would have approved the workhouses as they existed after 1723, becoming as these did in time "a symbol of dread and despair."[13] Their great merit was that they reduced the rates and drove the poor to work. Philanthropy, on the dominant middle-class view, had nothing to do with the giving of alms. ("Giving Alms No Charity" was the title of a Defoe tract.) Philanthropy consisted in lowering wages. For this would increase commerce and industry, which in turn would provide work for the poor.[14] Possibly respectable Christian employers did not openly sub-

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[10]Jones, op. cit., p. 78, etc.; cf. Fleetwood, loc. cit. The charity schools used no non-religious books. Miss Jones also discusses the Nonconformist schools, pp. 130-134, which were separate.

[11]Defoe, Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business, 1725. His Works, ed. John S. Keltie (Edinburgh, 1872), contains this tract and also Giving Alms No Charity (1704).

[12]Charles Povey, The Present State of Great Britain (1714 ed.), presents the case for such "hospitals of industry."

[13]H. Hamilton, England, a History of the Homeland (New York, 1948), p. 497; see Crabbe's "The Village."

[14]In the tracts mentioned Defoe, the typical burgher, holds that the only cause of unemployment is the laziness of the poor and the profitableness of bogging. He is against workhouses where the poor would be put to work making things, because of the competition with private industry. The right remedy for idleness, he suggests, would be forced-labor battalions for all vagabonds.

scribe to Bernard Mandeville's cynical view that the poor must be kept poor, otherwise there would be no one to do the dirty work. But they did feel that the poor must be kept poor so that they would be industrious, and would work for low wages (primitive workhouses keeping them from the recourse of idleness), so that trade and industry might prosper.[15]

Christian stewardship had manifestly assumed paradoxical forms, if it still existed. The greatest Christians continued to set an example of charity. Butler and Law gave freely of what they had; Cowper lived up to his maxim, "if you abound, impart." John Wesley endowed stewardship with meaning, for the Methodists, if their message was in some respects the typically middle-class one of "work and earn," insisted that the rich must give freely, and enjoined secrecy to avoid the Mandeville accusation that charity was really selfish. Certainly the Christian spirit produced some attention to social evils. "In sermon after sermon preachers painted the terrible punishments which awaited the uncharitable in the afterworld."[16] However, this view of social evil was sharply limited. It was limited, first, by its own philosophical belief that evils are of divine decree, inherent in an order of things beyond human control or questioning.

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[15]See C. A. Moore, "Whig Panegyric Verse, 1700-1760," PMLA, XLI (1926), pp. 362-401. John Moore, A View of Society and Manners in Italy (1790 ed.), I, 327-328, observes that in augmenting his own fortune a rich merchant is "increasing the riches and power of his country and giving bread to thousands of his industrious countrymen." It would seem that Mandeville's "private vices equal public benefits" had won the field; and it received, at least partly, the sanction of Adam Smith.

[16]Rodgers, op. cit., p. 7.

Let poverty or want be what it will,
It does proceed from God; therefore's no ill.

Therefore there was no thought of social changes, but only of what mitigation private benevolence might provide. More serious than this, the newwealthy class had come to hold with Defoe that real charity was not the giving of alms; it was evidently the indulging of their own greed, with the comfortable thought that the more they made the better off the poor were.

In order to influence them towards reform it became necessary to appeal to their self-interest.[17] But the dominant classes did not see their self-interest as lying in such things as education, penal reform, or projects for the unemployed.

The only notable movement of social consciousness was created by religious philanthropists, culminating in the day of Wilberforce, Clarkson, Howard, and Miss More. This was mainly a conservative Church of England group, though with a persistent Quaker influence.[18] This notable movement lies beyond our study. In contrast with this religious philanthropy, we should note the cult of benevolence. The pleasures of charity were "the most lasting, valuable and exquisite" of all.[19] This effort to apply Shaftesbury's ethics of virtue as its own reward deserved,

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[17]"If compassion cannot move you," William Sharp pleaded in 1755, "let consideration of interest prevail with you." Bishop Berkeley, in The Querist (ed. J. M. Hone, 1936), makes his appeal to the intelligent interest of the upper classes, in a series notable for trying to think out a national economic program for depressed Ireland.

[18]Rodgers, op. cit., passim. Thus Granville Sharp, though not a Quaker, was evidently influenced by Quakers.

[19]See Gentleman's Magazine, August, 1752, "Benevolence"; Robert Eden, The Harmony of Benevolence (London, 1760).

it is to be feared, the sneers of Mandeville, for it does not appear to have produced any zealots of philanthropy or reform, and was more apt to be a fashionable pose. Zealotry, indeed, was the enemy of enemies to the neo-classic gentlemanly code Shaftesbury was so closely related to. A "virtuoso" of reform would have committed the unpardonable sin of enthusiasm. Bishop Gibson was afraid of being thought enthusiastic because he ventured to attack immorality at the Court![20]

2.

The religious liberals, for their part, were scarcely reformers. That numerous evils existed, ripe for the reformer, need not be argued at length.[21] That the condition of the poor was "nasty and scandalous" Henry Fielding conceded.[22] The eighteenth century historian of the poor laws gives a picture of callousness and cruelty by the workhouse overseers, chiefly concerned to reduce the rates.[23] There was the harsh penal code, with its death sentence for even petty robbery. The pressing of sailors was defended by so "liberal" a Whig as John Tutchin.[24] As is well known, the Asiento treaty of 1723 gave England's merchants a lucrative stake in the slave trade; except for some Quakers and a poet, no one protested the slave trade until after 1770. In brief, English

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[20]Sykes, Gibson, p. 191.

[21]An outstanding brief description of the age's social evils may be found in William C. Sydney, England and the English in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1891), II, 192-195.

[22]Fielding, op. cit., pp. 43 ff.

[23]Richard Burn, History of the Poor Laws (London, 1764).

[24]Observator, III, no. 85 (February 7,1705).

society was afflicted with all those evils that were later to challenge the energies of the evangelical humanitarians and the utilitarian reformers. It is obvious enough that "much still untouched remained." How far did those who were radicals in theology partake of radicalism in social, economic and political reform? The answer would seem to be, scarcely at all.

At least it is hard to find evidence of that "tremendous interest of most of the deists in the public good" quite commonly alleged.[25] The English deists were neither reformers nor democrats. There is little social significance to be drawn immediately from their writings and activities. "Drawn from virtually every scale of society . . . , virtually unknown to each other,"[26] they formed no such cohesive society as did the French philosophes, nor did they ever have such definite social and political goals. Their numbers included aristocratic dilettantes like Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke; university men such as Tindal, Woolston and Middleton; scribblers on the make, the Tolands and Morgans; self-taught amateur theologians like Annet and Chubb, the latter being a rank plebeian, a journeyman glovemaker by trade. What seems true of all is a lack of interest in practical projects of reform. Thomas Firmin, the unitarian philanthropist, is the exception.

Perhaps this does the deists an injustice. In a period that produced few new political or social ideas, Bolingbroke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville and Toland all have a certain social significance, though it is not

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[25] A. C. McGiffert, Protestant Thought before Kant (New York, 1936), p. 229.

[26] Mossner, Butler, p. 45.

in a single direction. But between religious radicalism and socio-political radicalism there is no necessary connection. Americans are familiar with the fact that Washington, Hamilton, and John Adams, as well as Paine and Jefferson, were (roughly) religious deists.[27] The social and political inferences from deism were most ambiguous. To give only the most obvious example, the two most persistent ethical ideas in deistic thought were the contradictory ones that man is selfish and needs to be tricked by the rulers (Mandeville, leading to Alexander Hamilton) and that man is benevolent (Shaftesbury, leading to Thomas Jefferson).[28] Again, the Newtonian, deistic assumption of "the harmonious order of nature" might mean almost anything: a drive to do away with injustices, or the worst sort of laissez-faire complacency.[29]

Doubtless deism had a certain implicit democratic content. First of all, the deists always fought the battle for free speech and for toleration, though they might well draw the line at free speech for Jacobites and toleration for Roman Catholics.[30] Then too, the philosophy

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[27]It may be relevant to point out that the leading "free thinker" of the nineteenth century in the United States, Robert Ingersoll, was conservative enough in his political views.

[28]Adrienne Koch, The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson, indicates Shaftesbury's influence on Jefferson. D. J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, is a discerning statement of those ideas which came to Jefferson from English deistic thought, mainly via Priestley.

[29]The contradictory impulses here are nowhere better shown than in Adam Smith; see the essays in Clark et al., op. cit. Whether to assume benevolence or self-love, whether to play the reformer or the apologist for economic egoism--this unresolved dilemma is responsible for the ambiguities in the great economist, which make him still a controversial figure.

[30]Charles Blount, the early deist, led the battle against the licensing act, 1679-93; Anthony Collins' plea for freedom of thought was famous, and all heterodox religious thinkers naturally desired freedom for their own views. Toland (see below) certainly expressed an advanced

of deism assumed what Professor Lovejoy has called "intellectual equalitarianism."[31] Chubb would say that "Christians stand to each other in the relation of brethren only, and not in relations of master and servant. . . ." "The gospel which Christ preached to the poor . . . was plain and intelligible, and level to the lowest understanding."[32] "Christianity Suited to Plain Men" had been the title of a section in Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity, where he declared that "these are articles that the labouring and illiterate men may comprehend." No priests are needed; all men have sufficient understanding to know the truth—here was deism's very creed.

But, with characteristic inconsistency, deism was also marked by a certain intellectual snobbishness. The same Chubb wrote that he expected his writings to appeal only to "the more intelligent part of our species, who are not interested in popular opinion. . . ."[33] Bolingbroke spoke of the "rabble" as "a monstrous beast" which "has passions to be moved, but no reason to be appealed to."[34] With Hume and Middleton, as has been noted, faith in the common understanding of men is abandoned completely—the masses need "superstition," and "philosophic" religion is only for the few.

Voltaire and Diderot also had this contempt for the "canaille,"

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and sincere idea of liberty of opinion, yet excluded Catholicism from his range of toleration.

[31]See the famous essay on "The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," loc. cit.

[32]Chubb, The True Gospel, pp. 11, 49, 62-63. Also Toland, Christianity Not Mysterious, pp. xix, 141.

[33]Chubb, Posthumous Works, I, 63-65.

[34]Letter to Swift, July 10, 1721; see the latter's Correspondence, ed. F. E. Ball.

which did not prevent them from being tremendously significant as reformers and inciters to social change. One must not forget that the socially more militant French and American deists went to school to the English.[35] The reason why the English deists were far less dynamic may be found partly in the difference between France and England. The philosopheg were bourgeois, but they struggled against religious intolerance, legal inequality, a privileged and snobbish aristocracy, and obsolete economic practices. In England such feudal objects of middle-class hostility existed to a far lesser degree. The "harmonious order of nature" meant to Voltaire and company a struggle against an obviously "unnatural" regime; to Tindal, Toland et al. it meant more nearly just the regime that existed, the Whig England which, indeed, Voltaire himself thought ideal.

John Toland concerned himself with political matters more than any other English deist, save Bolingbroke. Toland had an excellent education, and a very high opinion of his own talents.[36] Locke and Leibniz, who were his friends, thought him opinionated, conceited, and probably superficial. His integrity is beyond question: Harley was his patron, but he withdrew from that statesman when he turned Tory. Toland liked to think of himself as independent of parties, and could well claim to

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[35] N. L. Torrey, Voltaire and the English Deists, carefully demonstrates Voltaire's debt to the English.

[36] Anna Seeber, John Toland als politischer Schriftsteller (Württemberg, 1933), is an excellent source; see also, for some Toland vita, F. H. Heinemann, "John Toland and the Age of Reason," in Archiv für Philosophie, September, 1950. Among Toland's writings on which the ensuing analysis is based are these: A Collection of Several Pieces (2 vols., 1726); Anglia Libera (1701); Memorial of the State of England (1705); The State-Anatomy of Great Britain (1717); The Destiny of Rome (1718); introduction to Toland's edition of Harrington's works (Dublin, 1737 edition), and a few other pamphlets.

be no sycophant, despite his poverty and need for attachments. Yet he was committed wholly to the Whigs, and never went beyond Whig orthodoxy. His "sine qua non" principles were religious toleration, the Protestant succession, and civil liberty. Editor of the works of Harrington and Sydney, author of a life of Milton, he denied that he was an extreme republican, or that he agreed with what he called the "democratical schemes of government" of Milton and Harrington. Believing in the classical "mixed" system, he regarded the nobility as a natural pillar of society; and, as he said, all true "republicans" admired, "almost to adoration," the Hanover settlement. He was perfectly satisfied with Hanoverian, Whig England, praising it as "the most free and best constituted in all the world." He did not attack the established church, but agreed with Warburton that "some public and orderly way of worshiping God, under the allowance, endowment and inspection of the civil magistrate" is necessary to a state. Toland the deist assumed that it belongs to the nature of man to have a religion; therefore it belongs to the nature of a state to have some common religion. He would, however, grant full toleration, within Protestantism—like all deists he was violently anti-Catholic. He does indeed approach a theory of pure religious freedom. Like Pope, he argues that a variety of religious opinions is as natural as a variety of tastes, and is not an evil. The advanced element in his views on tolerance is his argument that there is no final and fixed religious truth, but a constant progress, analagous to the situation in science. His exclusion of Catholics is based on their alleged political subversiveness.

Toland's opinions on free speech, civil liberty and religious

toleration indicate deism's contribution to these causes. However, the deists were far from alone in favoring such things. This was a normal Whig outlook. Toland, enthusiastic but somewhat complacent Whig, self-styled "fighter for the truth and assertor of liberty" (his self-composed epitaph), hardly original in any opinion but persistent and even courageous in the Whig faith, may perhaps stand as a typical specimen. He indicted the "spirit of bigotry and persecution," insisted that a Government need not have but one religion (though it should have a public church), and castigated the Tories as despots and papists in disguise. But he never got beyond these ordinary Whig principles. In some of his pamphlets written around 1700, he did show an awareness of the inadequacies of the 1688 Revolution, noting the need for Parliamentary reform.[37] But after the Hanovers came he had no complaints. Disliked for his religious views, he would scarcely have warranted any special comment on account of his political ones, and seems to have had no socio-economic ones beyond a Whiggish enthusiasm for commerce. He was a rather typical Whig.

It was generally assumed, at least by Tories, that "freethinkers" were Whigs, and Tory propaganda liked to associate Whigs and atheists, in which there was of course no truth.[38] The great majority of Whigs repudiated deism, and welcomed the support of the Tindals and Tolands about as much as a modern New Dealer or Laborite welcomes the support of

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[37] The Danger of Mercenary Parliaments (1700) and The Art of Governing by Parties (1701).

[38] Swift, commenting on the appearance of Shaftesbury's Characteristics, called it "free Whiggish thinking." (Correspondence, I, 111.) See also his attack on Collins.

Communists. Walpole Whiggism and deism came closest together, perhaps, in the crude but gusty writings of Thomas Gordon, the popular "Independent Whig."[39] Intemperate attacks on the clergy and on the Tories were blended with a cool Erastianism and a crude deism.[40] But Gordon soon proved to be an embarrassment to the Whigs.

However, not all deists were Whigs. Bolingbroke and Hume, the neo-Tories, discovered that their emancipation from religious orthodoxy did not necessarily mean devotion to Robert Walpole or the Duke of Newcastle. One could easily take the conservative side—the side, as Hume put it, that leaned more to authority than to liberty—without taking the devout position. One could, and can—to put it simply enough—believe in Christianity and be a liberal, or a radical, and one can reject religion without rejecting a variety of views on political and social questions which are ordinarily thought of as highly conservative. There had been a strong tendency for Tories to believe in strictly orthodox Christianity because they had identified this with a secure (divine right) monarchy. But that tendency waned as politics drew apart from religion. (Very pious people in the Dissenting tradition had always been Whigs.) It may be noted, and has been, that the sceptic is very

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[39] See J. M. Bulloch, Thomas Gordon, the Independent Whig (Aberdeen, 1913).

[40] "He that can read, and has a common portion of reason," Gordon thought, "may find such plain and easy directions in the New Testament, as will instruct him how to find the ready way to Heaven; by which he will avoid the tedious ambiguities of a mercenary guide." Independent Whig, II, 374. Yet there ought to be a church, and bishops—"I will not presume to determine, whether . . . by a divine or human institution." Ibid., 415.

apt to be a Tory.[41] Hume, Middleton and Bolingbroke mistrusted human wisdom, in the mass, too much to believe in the progress of human society very readily.

If the attack on such evils as the slave trade and fulsome jails came mainly from Anglicans and Quakers, the impulse to political reform and democracy came mainly from the left wing of Dissent--from the group that included Priestley, Cartwright, Jebb, and Price.[42] Unitarians, apostles of a Pelagianized Christianity, they were not deists strictly speaking, but held, as Priestley was to warn Paine, that it is as dangerous to believe too little as it is to believe too much; nevertheless they were too heterodox to be admitted as Christians by the orthodox. They lie beyond our scope. By this time, deism in England was, as such, dead, but some of its elements surely lived on in the drastic Nonconformism of the Priestley group. Deism had never struck any deep roots, had always been disreputable, and had, without establishing any valid philosophy, lived chiefly on sensationalism, which soon lost its appeal. In a society as prosperous and secure as that of England in this period, it was not easy to maintain even a scandalous notoriety very long by making faces at the gods. The gods were too plainly smiling on England (propertied England, at least) to merit such ingratitude.

Deism had not accompanied this religious iconoclasm with any clear, constructive social or political ideology. It was a middle-class ideology

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[41]Brodvold, Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, p. 20. See Basil Willey's chapter on the "cosmic toryism" of those who hold with Pope that "whatever is, is right." Hume's scepticism leads to the mood of relying on custom because of a mistrust of reason. The conservatism of Burke has another foundation than that of Leslie.

[42]See R. V. Holt, op. cit., chap. III; Anthony Lincoln, Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent, 1763-1800 (Cambridge, 1938).

which did not even appeal to the middle class, wherein lies the secret of its failure. Respectable opinion of the deists was always that expressed by a magazine at the height of the movement in 1733: "a set of men who, from no better motive than vanity, or malicious wickedness, are laboring to subvert society."[43] The diagnosis was excellent, except that the deists were not really laboring to subvert society, for they had no political or social program to offer. It is quite true that their radicalism was capricious and based chiefly on personal vanity.

English deism struck fire in France and America where it was assimilated to social radicalism under different conditions. Such radicalism, it appears, had no opportunity in England—where the middle classes, unlike the French, were content, and where the lower classes, unlike the American, had not yet approached the threshold of power.

The unitarians who from 1768 on expressed a democratic force in England were, as we said, perhaps deistic in the widest sense. Christianity had become worldly; the pursuit of happiness in this world had become its theme. A long review of one of James Foster's books in 1749 noted that if men were "cautious and prudent, diligent and industrious," they would be "crowned with prosperity."[44] Such a mild, worldly religion, which served so well for a prosperous burgher, also suited those who wished secular reforms in society. The "dying Christian," in Priestley's case, made way for the energetic reformer. Many new things might emerge once religion had been reduced to a "compartment," to mere

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[43] Weekly Miscellany, December 1, 1733.

[44] Monthly Review, I, 368.

vague morality. The real point of departure towards the modern idea of secular progress would appear to be the exclusion of Christian ideas from society. Christianity as increasingly "Arminianized" was a moral code increasingly indistinguishable from secular behavior. Christianity was absorbed by, dissolved into secularism when it ceased to represent anything more than "prudence." No longer influencing culture as a whole as an independent force, it was in this sense "compartmentalized." A secularized and compartmentalized Christianity might be adopted by secular profit-seekers or secular reformers; it no longer had a will of its own.

In America we observe such a figure as Jonathan Mayhew, who was to some orthodox clergymen "no better a Christian than a Turk," but who certainly considered himself a Christian. His energies were however directed entirely towards secular goals: political freedom, full civil liberties.[45] If Priestley and Mayhew and Cartwright were not deists, they devoted themselves to goals no deist could disapprove: the happiness and freedom of men on earth. But they were beginning to add some positive social ideas to deism's negativism.

The critical moment in the emergence of a positive spirit of reform undoubtedly came later than the deists' heyday, and consisted in the awareness of evil as being social and remediable.[46] It begins about 1750. The religious people who carried it forward most notably were those left-wing Dissenters, who began to call themselves Unitarians. By the end of the century, the identification of Unitarian with Democrat

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[45] See A Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission, 1750, and other Mayhew writings.

[46] M. Roustan, op. cit., p. 23.

had become a natural one. The young Coleridge heard it said of himself that "In religion he is a Unitarian, if not a Deist; in politics a Democrat, to the utmost extent of the word."[47] But who were the young Coleridge's ideals? Hartley, Priestley, and William Godwin. He had, we surmise, scarcely heard of Toland and Tindal, Collins and Chubb. No doubt their mistake had been in not tying their religious radicalism to a political credo equally advanced and energetic. Theyearly deists should have realized that, if Christianity was fading, the center of importance would shift from religion to practical politics.

3.

The failure of deism also puzzled the Methodists. They alone reached the working classes. For their pains they were denounced in the most intemperate language, as anarchists, enthusiasts, fanatics, revolutionaries. In this denunciation "liberals" of all sorts joined. Charles Chauncy and Samuel Johnson in America, William Warburton and Conyers Middleton in England, showed sufficiently that all middle-class liberals, whether deist or Arminian, shared a distrust of the mob when stirred by a Whitefield, that "Cant Cads in a canonical."[48] In America, it is true, the Great Awakening had some rather striking social, economic and political

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[47] Quoted in E. K. Chambers, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Oxford, 1938), p. 29. On the growth of democratic ideas among the "rational Dissenters," (who were unitarian in theology but did not admit to deism) see A. Lincoln, op. cit.—a thoughtful and scholarly work. The American Revolution was a turning-point in the emergence of an outspoken political radicalism within Dissent (though by no means the majority of Dissenters).

[48] Harold E. Bernhard, Charles Chauncy, Colonial Liberal, 1705-87 (Chicago, 1945) studies a genteel, Arminian "liberal" who was hostile to the Calvinistic Great Awakening. (It is a capital blunder on the part of G. A. Koch, in Republican Religion, to regard the Great Awakening as an Arminian movement.)

aspects.[49] Wesley, however, was very far from being a social or political radical, and certainly never thought beyond the idea of making the poor sober and industrious so that they might raise themselves by self-help. In the long run, he doubtless aided capitalism, by disciplining the poor and spreading the gospel of thrift and steady habits. But the democratic ingredients contained in his genuine love and concern for all of God's children, regardless of class, rendered him suspect as a bloody-handed revolutionary.[50] Wesleyanism made it obvious that English free thought had never reached, and never even tried to reach, the lower classes. It was as far beyond the wishes of a Bolingbroke or Shaftesbury to do so as it was beyond the talents of a Chubb or Annet.[51]

Militant deism, doubtless, did have a certain social role to play—in the French Revolution, with its Jacobin Supreme Being, and at about the same time in America, with the activity of Tom Paine and Elihu Palmer.[52] In a somewhat extraordinary example of a nation influenced

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[49]John C. Miller's article on "Religion, Finance, and Democracy in New England" in vol. VI of the New England Quarterly, and Oscar Zeichner's Connecticut's Years of Controversy, 1750-76 (Williamsburg, 1949) bring out class lines as between the aristocratic Old Lights and the lower-class New Lights, the religious quarrel often blending into the economic and political. Also excellent in bringing out social angles is Wesley M. Gewehr, The Great Awakening in Virginia, 1740-90 (Durham, 1930).

[50]In addition to Wearmouth, op. cit., especially pt. 2, chap. 2, see on the persecution of the Methodists J. H. Whiteley, Wesley's England (London, 1938), a work rich in social detail.

[51]Bolingbroke, Works, III, 55; Aldridge, Shaftesbury, p.367; both of these citations refer to passages in which these freethinkers dwell on the desirability of keeping free thought out of the hearing of the "vulgar," lest it excite them to discontent.

[52]G. A. Koch has told, sympathetically enough, the story of the effort to make deism into a popular republican cult in the United States, and the failure of that movement, in Republican Religion. John Morley's brilliant essay on "Robespierre," in Biographical Studies (London, 1923), contains a more severe indictment of the French deistic cult.

by its own ideas as reflected back through foreign sources—an example which is a tribute to the impotence of the earlier English deists—Voltaire and Paine began to reach the English working classes, to a degree, about 1796.[53] These prophets of French and American liberalism had absorbed deistic ideas from the English deists, but not until they had related them to a social and political ideology did the English masses hear about them. This popular deism was not very important. Paine was effective through The Rights of Man, not The Age of Reason; if this extreme deist was to become the very "centre and life" of the "radical" political movement of the 1790's, it was not because he attacked religion, but because he spoke out against political corruption and inequality.[54] This English radicalism paid relatively little attention to religion. Who could still believe that "priests" were the chief enemies of man?

What was significant was the reduction of religion to an adjunct of politics, by men of both camps, the conservative and the liberal. Clearly Edmund Burke was a Christian because he was a conservative in politics—because, that is, he saw in the Church a useful tool of political conservatism and because the French radicals were inclined to deism.[55] In like manner Paine, it would appear, was an anti-Christian

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[53] As Walter P. Hall points out in his British Radicalism, 1791-97 (New York, 1912), p. 95, Paine's Age of Reason was scarcely read in England until later; it was his political tract, The Rights of Man, which caused the stir.

[54] Ibid., pp. 85 ff.

[55] H. G. Schenk, The Aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars (London, 1947), chap. I, pp. 5 ff. especially, discusses Burke's religion and the whole ideological basis of the period's return to religion, for political reasons, as a buttress against the forces of change unleashed by the French Revolution. These conservatives felt, as it has been said of Gentz, more strongly about the value of religion than about religion itself.

chiefly because he associated that faith with the aristocracy he hated. Of this degradation of religion we have already spoken. It was, perhaps, the inevitable consequence of a period when religion and politics, while in fact dissociating, were still linked in men's minds as the Hippocrates' twins of Clarendon; when new economic and social forces were creating new conflicts and struggles which had nothing to do with theologies, but still bore their imprint.

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CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

> The thing we call heretic has one very good side. It means a person who has at last wished to see with his own eyes. The question is only whether the eyes were good.—Lessing.
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> The Unitarian Church forgets that men are poets.—Emerson.

It is not easy to summarize the results and the significance of the eighteenth century religious debate. On the simplest view, the Christian religion had been vindicated, reason had won out, and deism had been beaten off with its own weapons. It was assumed that Butler and others had answered every deist argument. In 1744 John Jackson, Samuel Clarke's old lieutenant, thought that Christianity had profited from the attacks of deists and emerged stronger than ever.[1] It was assumed that Hume's scandalous essay on the impossibility of miracles stood refuted.[2] In 1820, in Boston, Francis Wrangham edited The Pleiad, a reprinting of the outstanding eighteenth century anti-deist tracts, in the firm belief that these immortal writings had dealt the coup de grace to infidelity for all time.

It was not for another century that Christianity was forced to yield its stronghold on what Gladstone called the "impregnable rock" of

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[1] An Address to Deists, pp. 159-160.

[2] Noted by A. C. McGiffert, Protestant Thought before Kant, pp. 219-221.

attested evidence. In 1865 a leading Anglican divine still argued that religion rested squarely on Scriptural revelation as attested divine by miracle and prophecy.[3] Deism had started a great critical movement, but it lacked the tools to finish the job. "Though silenced, it was not answered," a distinguished contemporary theologian has said of deism, "and though dead, it yet speaketh."[4] But the opinion prevailed that it had been answered, and the discrediting of Scripture as immediately inspired had to await a later scholarly movement. Before the time of the higher criticism, popular freethought in the deistic tradition never quite died out, but was a fairly negligible thing in the nineteenth century.[5] Possibly it was true, as John Stuart Mill claimed, that a large number of the "brightest ornaments" secretly were sceptics or deists, fearing to be so publicly because of the social and political consequences that might ensue if the masses lost their faith.[6]

Deism had certainly failed to prove its case, though it had shaken Christianity badly. The greatest virtue of the deists was undoubtedly that suggested by Lessing: they dared to think for themselves, to see with their own eyes. And though their eyes might have been poor, their insistence upon using them passed into the great and successful Western tradition of free inquiry as no negligible contribution.

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[3]See A. L. Lilley, Reason and Revelation, p. 7.

[4]F. R. Tennant, Miracle and Its Philosophic Presuppositions (Cambridge, 1925), pp. 96-97.

[5]It has been traced for the United States in Albert Post's Popular Free Thought in America, 1825-1850 (New York, 1943).

[6]Autobiography of John Stuart Mill (New York, 1924), p. 32. Thus as of ca. 1843 the view of Karl Marx that religion had become a tool of the upper classes to drug the people was one with a great deal of evidence to support it.

Perhaps Emerson put his finger on their greatest fault. Certainly the psychological deficiencies of deism as a religion are obvious. But Lessing himself recognized the failure of the "free thinkers" even as thinkers. They had their own sort of bigotry—as Montesquieu recognized when he said that Voltaire had his own church. Berkeley's picture of the "minute philosopher" hit near the mark of deistic pretentiousness. The deist committed all the sins of intellectual arrogance and narrowness; he seldom rose above the sneer; he reveled in what the sage Franklin called beating your mother to prove your manhood. He was willing to consign all the Christian past—twenty-five centuries of religious development—to the trash heap; the world, it would seem, had been waiting for a Toland or a Chubb to bring it light! These faults sterilized deist thought. In part, it is true, they were the faults of an age wholly lacking a historical sense, but the deists were not able to rise above this blemish. When Turgot and Lessing found that Christianity had after all at least marked a stage in moral progress, strict deism was finished. The perspective of historical development was destined to supersede the infantile perspective of a priestly conspiracy. "It is ill reasoning against religion," wrote Montesquieu, "to compile a long list of the evils it has inflicted, without doing the same for the blessings it has bestowed."[7] In general, this was the method of deism. It aimed at tearing down Christianity by an unfair attack, and in place of it offered a pathetically inadequate and confused religion, a dogma—this is the worst we can say of the deists—more sterile and far less

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[7]See Esprit de lois, book 24, chap. 2.

emotionally satisfying than traditional Christianity.

Although some assumed that Christianity had held fast with reason, the deist period also had much to do with the reaction against reason. "Reason," a representative clergyman thought in 1731, "has impertinently meddled with the Gospel, and that with such overbearing sedulity as to darken it more and more. . . ."[8] Dr. Johnson agreed that there had been too much impudent speculation on sacred matters. A certain crisis in civilization had been reached when "an inquisitive and free-thinking age," as one orthodox writer called it, had come in sight of reasoning itself out of its religion, with David Hume going so far as to state flatly that one must now cease to inquire or cease to believe. Few accepted Hume's unpleasant alternative; but while they liked to pretend that belief had been sustained by inquiry, they exhibited also a certain desire to avoid further trials by reason. This was simply retrograde and reactionary. But it was related to a more constructive realization that reason is not all of religion. The despised Methodists did at length open the eyes of men to quite another way of religion. Oliver Goldsmith was one who thought that much could be learned from the Methodists; he was writing in 1759-60 that "reason is but a weak antagonist when headlong passion dictates; in all such cases we should arm one passion against another. . . ."[9]

The whole story of the drift towards romanticism is much too complex

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[8]Joseph Milner, Gibbon's Account of Christianity Considered, etc., p. 154.

[9]See The Bee, no. 7 (November 17, 1759); Works, ed. Gibbs (1884), I, 271.

to analyze here. The deistic controversy had played its part in that process, indirectly. "I had to deny knowledge to make room for faith," said Kant; and perhaps the strongest single ingredient in romanticism's revolt against the age of reason was this urgent desire to save the religious experience from the rationalist theologians and sceptics. But something of deism remained, if we think of that side of deism which sought for a broad, non-sectarian spirit in religion—the quest for that "natural religion" which depended on no special theology. Romantic religion was an answer to deism, yet a retention of some portions of it, with a new emphasis. The emphasis shifted from head to heart, from universal reason to private intuition, from the rational proofs to the individual experience, but it was a similar quest the romantics carried on for a single, non-dogmatic faith. The pious mystic William Law had spoken of "an instinct of goodness in the soul" common to all men. In 1776 Soame Jenyns argued that Christianity is not proved by the prophecies and miracles but by "internal marks of divinity."[10] "If one listened only to what God says to man's heart, there would never have been but one religion on earth."[11] The creed of the Savoyard Vicar, describable as romantic deism, was deeply significant for the great figures of the next epoch. Wordsworth and then the Transcendentalists held it. Pantheistic and mystical, the "immanent" theology of a Schleiermacher would have shocked an eighteenth-century deist as much as an orthodox Chris-

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[10] A View of the Internal Evidences of the Christian Religion.

[11] Masson, The Religion of Jean Jacques Rousseau, p. 309. See also Journal of John Woolman, p. 325; Hobhouse, William Law and Eighteenth Century Quakerism, p. 278.

tian.[12] But it had developed out of deism.

It is said that deism was overthrown by romantic subjectivism, wherein each man would have his own private religion, as sharply opposed to deism's insistence on a single rational standard.[13] But this view seems to overlook romanticism's tendency to believe that there was universal, objective truth, written in each heart to be sure but not wholly private; the individual being indeed the very basis of the universe, yet an intrinsic part of a greater, organic structure. In any event the quest was similar to deism's in the rejection of formal theological creeds in favor of some simpler, immediate, and universal religion. Emil Brunner has pointed out that generally speaking the nineteenth century agreed with the eighteenth in holding all religion to be essentially one, a monistic view to which theology becomes irrelevant.[14] The quest for the basic Christian "spirit" beyond creeds continued. "Ask me not, then, whether I am a Catholic or a Protestant, Calvinist or Arminian," John Adams wrote. "As far as they are Christians, I wish to be a fellow-disciple with them all."

This mood had grown up in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the evaporation of reason and the Bible as a clear standard made

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[12]See Richard B. Brandt, The Philosophy of Schleiermacher (New York and London, 1948), p. 307, etc.

[13]Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, pp. 293 ff., especially 310-311.

[14]See his essay in Cavert and Van Dusen, eds., The Church Through Half a Century (New York and London, 1936). Herbert W. Schneider, History of American Philosophy, pp. 269-364, deals with Theodore Parker, the American transcendentalist clergyman, as deist. Cf. the religious views of the American romantic poet, William Cullen Bryant, presented in Tremaine McDowell's introduction to the American Writers Series Bryant.

for a tendency to feel that there is no such thing as heresy, that each man seeks God in his own way, that quibbling over theological details is bootless. In 1749 the exclusion of a unitarian by an Independent church occasioned an indignant exclamation by an English journal of by no means radical sentiments: "To how great a height does the spirit, we dare not say Christian spirit, of these trifling zealots carry them! Even in this enlightened age!"[15] A few years later a foreign visitor thought that "almost all the English have a different faith," and were quite undisturbed by this singular lack of doctrinal unity.[16] This tolerance of mere theological differences, which undoubtedly rested on a good deal of indifference to all except a minimum of moral rectitude, represented a sort of triumph for deism.

The reader may refer to our chapter on "Arminianism" for remarks on the weakening of Christianity through the century; also to the sections on secularizing influences. As to the latter, politics, of course, continued to crowd out religion. We recall that in 1673 "divinity" was the commonest table-talk; it remained so in the rural areas, at least, for a long time after that. But in 1762, a century later, a visitor to England noted that when strangers struck up a conversation a political discussion was sure to follow.[17] If, as Leslie Stephen remarked, the first half of the century had been a period of political stagnation, the

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[15]Monthly Review, I, 456. See also Robert Clayton, An Essay on Spirit (London, 1751), dedication.

[16]Duc de la Rochefoucald, La vie en angleterre au XVIII^ème siècle (1784), ed. Jean Marchand (Paris, 1945), p. 118.

[17]Count Frederick Kielmansegge, Diary of a Journey to England in the Years 1761-1762 (tr. by Countess Kielmansegge, London, 1902), p. 255.

last half was quite otherwise. George III, Pitt and Edmund Burke, not to speak of two revolutions abroad, made politics practically exciting and theoretically interesting. Then the grand idea of progress, social reform and "perfectibility" struck the young intellectuals; and in the thought of so representative a radical as Joseph Priestley, religious reform is quite secondary to this exciting vision of social utopia. The "true Christianity" purged of "corruptions" which Priestley wrote of went with perfectibility, practical science, political reform; its purpose was to cast a kind of virtuous effusion over the dream of social progress. The earlier deists had had few glimpses of this vision. Still, they had been by and large optimistic, secular-minded, concerned to elevate politics above religion.

The faults of a Pelagianized Christianity are obvious. Having proclaimed its own victory over the deism it professed to abhor, Christianity then so diluted itself that Wesley exaggerated very little in describing it as deism in disguise. A rational, liberal Christianity sacrificed the "mysteries," sin, and contempt for material things. It thereby lost most of its excuse for existence. The crisis in Christianity at the end of the century has been commonly enough recognized. Coleridge and Carlyle felt it their mission to call England back to some sort of real religion. The religious future lay with the Evangelicals and the Anglo-Catholics, to both of whom the eighteenth-century clergy became a byword of reproach for a shocking lapse into paganism and indifference.

All this lies far beyond our purview. But it is perhaps relevant to conclude by mentioning some possible applications to the present.

Today, amid a powerful reaction among Christian theologians against religious "liberalism," the status of some ideas first strongly presented by the liberals of the eighteenth century is worth noting.

The Bible as immediate and literal revelation has, of course, fallen. The "neo-orthodox" of our day share with the liberals an awareness that the Bible is a human document. (However, liberals of the latter nineteenth century learned to read it as poetry, as great inspirational literature, in a way quite foreign to the deists.) The concept of revelation has become a historic one: "something that happens, the living history of God in His dealings with the human race."[18] The Bible is a witness to this revelation; it is not the revelation. The deists both won and lost here. The Bible is not defended any more, by educated Christians, in the sense in which it was fervently defended by the eighteenth century orthodox; it even seems most strange to us that intelligent men so close in some ways to the modern epoch could have defended it in that way. But neither, of course, is the Bible regarded as the deists regarded it, as a fraud insofar as it pretended to be anything unique—as (at best) simply one statement of a general "religion of nature." Christians may hold that the historical experience of the Hebrews is without parallel in its religious significance, and in that view they would be supported by historical science and the opinion of most informed men.

Modern Protestant theology is no longer, then, Bible-centered; Chillingworth's famous dictum has become obsolete. An idea of the shift can be gained by noting that modern defenders of the doctrine of the

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[18]Emil Brunner, Reason and Revelation, p. 381.

Trinity do not care at all that the doctrine is not scriptural. How that would have bewildered Dr. Clarke! What matters is that "that doctrine is required for a full understanding of the experience of Christianity as a religious community."[19] Modern Protestant Christianity has appealed to experience. So radical a revision the eighteenth century divines could not have faced; it has been forced on moderns. To dispense with Scripture as direct revelation, the former thought, was to yield all. Courageously, Lessing in that century declared that "The Christian religion is not true because the evangelists and apostles taught it, but they taught it because it is true." Today, Dean Inge can declare what seems obvious, that "the craving for signs and wonders is a weakness of religion." But it is still not clear that the older ministers were not right; we may wonder whether a religion that cannot be literally believed in can ever again command such unquestioning mass allegiance as was once the case.

If historical investigation has destroyed the orthodox view of the Bible, it has also, at points, discredited the deists. The deistic interpretation of Christ is a case in point. The ethical Jesus of religious liberalism, so vital to deism and moralistic Christianity, does not seem to be historical, as Albert Schweitzer, Johannes Weiss and others have shown. "Liberal ethical Christianity can be gleaned even from the Sermon on the Mount only by selection."[20] So the test of truth was often

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[19]Claude Welch, "Faith and Reason in Relation to the Doctrine of the Trinity," Journal of Bible and Religion, XVI (January, 1948), p. 21.

[20]E. R. Goodenough, in Review of Religion, XII, 304. The "eschatological" or "apocalyptic" Jesus emerges instead—hardly the teacher of secular morality.

fatal to deism as well as to orthodoxy.

Doubtless each era sees what it desires to see in Christ. Eighteenth century deism was a part of the broader movement of liberalism within Christian culture which succeeded in eliminating the prophetic, other-worldly element in Christianity and adapting religion to the purposes of optimistic secularism. Today, and especially since 1914, "recoil from liberalism is the most important feature" of theology.[21] Quite simply, the explanation lies in the collapse of secular progress as a tenable faith.[22] But we can hardly avoid feeling that in rejecting liberalism and turning to a radical critique of secular optimism, Christianity is moving closer to its original and essential character. For Christ and his followers did not come, in the beginning, to bring peace, but a sword; they had no vision of earthly and worldly progress, but rather a keen sense of the disintegration of such things for want of deep spiritual insights. Neither the deists nor the Pelagians properly understood the spirit of Christianity. A "religion of humanity" may be very well; it is a quite different thing, as Comte recognized, from Christianity.

Perhaps the chief legacy of religious liberalism is faith in reason. That is still in dispute. Reason is mistrusted extremely by the Barths and Brunners who have in our time sought to cast out all the old sins of an excessive, man-centered liberalism vitiating the essential nature of Christianity. The great religious revival which took place early in

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[21]Van Dusen, in The Church Through Half a Century, p. 64.

[22]Ibid., passim.

the nineteenth century revolted against the "barren rationalism" and "narrow intellectualism" of the Enlightenment period only to find itself eventually weakened by its own sort of narrowness, in the guise of Biblical literalism, intellectual narrowness, and inability to accommodate itself to new discoveries of the human intellect in science (and, we might add, an esthetic narrowness repellent to all humanistic studies).[23] The neo-orthodox revival of the twentieth century revolted against the meek submission of liberal Christianity to science and secularism, only, it may be, to fall once again in danger of glorifying the irrational. The new irrationalism is resisted by many Christians who find themselves wondering, quite as did those Restoration and Augustan divines, how a religion unsupported by reason can possibly stand.[24]

"Reason" is a vague enough term. The theistic belief that God is rationally demonstrable, *via* such arguments as the teleological, succumbed to the blows of Hume and Kant, and may or may not be recoverable.[25] That religion is primarily intellectualistic—i.e. only a form of philosophy—few would any longer care to claim. But in the long run, surely, the rational theologians of the eighteenth century were right in this, their basic claim: that Christianity must not fear the test of untrammeled inquiry, nor abandon reason as the touchstone of what is true and

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[23]See McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant*, as quoted in J. H. Randall, *The Making of the Modern Mind* (Boston, 1940), pp. 408-409.

[24]See for example Edgar P. Dickie, *Revelation and Reasoning*, p. 106; Paul Schilling, in *Journal of Bible and Religion*, XVI (January, 1946), p. 14. The whole of this issue is devoted to a symposium on the subject.

[25]Charles Hartshorne, "Two Levels of Faith and Reason," *ibid.*

right. If it does, it is lost, at least until the dark ages return. The eighteenth century Christians were wrong in thinking that the case for their religion was unassailable on the grounds of historical evidence, i.e. that the Bible was certainly a direct revelation. They lost, and the blow was a hard one. Christianity is still trying to recover. But it must still grapple with its fate with the weapons of reason, as opposed to authority, superstition, or "enthusiasm."

So perhaps we may properly conclude with a comment of Dr. Barrow's, quoted by the deist Bolingbroke: "If we seriously weigh the case, we shall find that to require faith without reason is to demand an impossibility, and that God therefore neither doth nor can enjoin us faith without reason."

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