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Catholic Theology and the Enlightenment (1670–1815)

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the Catholic Church's engagement with the Enlightenment from 1670–1815. It considers Catholic philosophies of the Enlightenment and new conceptualizations of natural law. The chapter also explores Catholic exegetical discussions during the period, showing how Enlightenment concerns enabled new styles of attention to the Scriptural text, new Patristic scholarship, and the origins of the later liturgical movement. Jansenist and Gallican theologies stimulated reflection on ecclesiology and the papacy, and a variety of thinkers developed new theologies of the state, and of the economy. This period also saw the rise of the Catholic ultramontanism that was to mark Church life until the Second Vatican Council.

Keywords: Catholic Church, Enlightenment, eclecticism, Tridentine reforms, natural law, Catholic theology, reform Catholicism, historical-critical exegesis, strong papacy, Ultramontanist ecclesiology

Much is written about Catholicism contending with modernity, but theologians have neglected the earliest phase of the Church's active engagement with new ideas, namely the period usually referred to as 'the Enlightenment'. Today, however, historians have established a plurality of Enlightenments. The smallest common denominator for all Enlightenment families was the ideal of conceptual clarity paired with critical judgement, but also important was battling dogmatism, prejudice, superstition, and enthusiasm (Sorkin 2008).

Catholic Enlightenment

The great majority of Catholic theologians and philosophers met Enlightenment reasoning with suspicion for two reasons: firstly, its criticism seemed to undermine the trustworthiness of revelation and Catholic tradition; and secondly, more importantly, it

seemed to make reason a judge over truths of faith, ultimately marginalizing the latter. The most important thinker of the new era, Benedict Spinoza (1632–77), seemed to confirm these suspicions. His exclusion of the supernatural in exegesis as well as his persuasive monism threatened to destroy the foundations of the Christian religion. In order to refute Spinozism, Catholic thinkers had to update their metaphysics and methods of theological inquiry. A hesitant reform process attempted to extract from modern thought whatever was useful for the defence of Catholic doctrine. In a sense, one can speak of Catholic Enlightenment whenever Catholic theologians productively engaged with the intellectual challenges of the age, even in an apologetic manner. A productive interaction does not (necessarily) entail the sacrifice of doctrinal truths to fashionable ideas. Rather, Catholic authors tried to understand their opponents and wrestled with their thoughts in as much of a hermeneutic generosity as one could expect from them, even if they utterly disagreed with these opponents. A good example for such a stance is Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier (1715–90), who was admired by the *philosophes* for his purely argumentative style that avoided all polemics. He attempted to battle the Enlightenment critics of Catholic doctrine on their own ground by accepting as many of their presuppositions as possible. In the eighteenth century he became the strongest and most sophisticated voice of Catholic apologetics (Albertan-Coppola 2010). His *Deism Self-refuted* (1767) was among the best critiques of Rousseau, and became, like his *Certitude of the Proofs of Christianity* (1767), an international bestseller (Curran 2011). Of course not every Catholic Enlightener was as irenic as Bergier, but he can serve as a model for understanding what it means to be a Catholic engaging the Enlightenment. Given the variety of political and cultural contexts in which Catholics undertook such an engagement, there was no *unified* Catholic Enlightenment but rather a broad spectrum of Catholic Enlightenments that varied considerably in their acceptance of traditional Catholic theology.

This chapter focuses on the productive interaction of Catholics with the Enlightenment and not on the schools of Baroque scholasticism that perceived Enlightenment thought as heretical innovation or even atheism (e.g. Hardouin 1733). Such a productive interaction relied on the method of *eclecticism* and was inspired by the renewed spirit of the Tridentine reforms in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Catholics consulted the works of modern thinkers, reviewed them, and assessed to what degree they contained valuable insights that were compatible with the doctrinal tradition. This method had the critical advantage that it could easily update books to meet new challenges. Moreover, Catholic eclecticism demonstrated by its own method the self-confidence and critical judgement of the authors and the relative open-mindedness of the Church, but it lacked the coherence of a unitary system of thought that previous Catholic schools of philosophy had possessed and that would return only at the end of the nineteenth century in the form of neo-Thomism. Catholic misgivings about the

Enlightenment were to become so strong that the papacy saw the newly created neo-Thomism as the only viable system to conduct Catholic theology and to address the intellectual problems of the time (Peitz 2006; McCool 1989). Indeed, a major problem of the Catholic Enlightenment was that it understood itself too much as an apologetic endeavour. This is understandable due to the heavy attacks from the radical Enlightenment's monism (Spinoza; d'Holbach; etc.) and scepticism (Bayle), the more moderate Enlightenment propagated by Locke, Montesquieu, or even Voltaire, which undermined traditional Christian doctrines but retained belief in a providential deity, and the state governments that attempted to subjugate the Church (Israel 2010; Sorkin 2008; Lehner & Printy 2010a; Lehner 2010b). The more Catholic thinkers attempted to modernize their defence of Catholicism, the more they neglected the core of theology, the person of Christ. The absence of any serious reinterpretations of Christology or soteriology (Buckley 1987) demonstrates this deficiency.

The works of many Catholic Enlighteners heavily influenced the Catholic Tübingen school and Anton Günther's Vienna school. Many of its core ideas were resuscitated in the earlytwentieth-century modernist crisis and the Reform Catholicism of the first half of the century: for example, historical-critical exegesis, the striving for a strong patristic basis of theology, a new ecclesiology, a reform of the liturgy, and the desire for a profound theological anthropology. Moreover, the systematic outline of theology textbooks and styles of argumentation, e.g. from Benedict Stattler's (1728–97) works, lived on in neo-scholastic textbooks well into the 1940s.

Catholic Philosophies of the Enlightenment and New Conceptualizations of Natural Law

Next to Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), the most original Catholic philosopher of the early Enlightenment was Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715). In his *Search After Truth* (1674) he developed a theory of Occasionalism that attempted to answer the fundamental question of the relationship between body and soul. If there were a radical dualism between soul and body, as Descartes had stated, then it would be inconceivable how the mind can perceive and move bodies through volition. Malebranche's solution was that perception was not a real modification of the mind, and that volition was not efficacious. 'Instead, God presents to the mind the *idea* of the thing seen on the occasion of its being "seen", just as he moves bodies […] on the occasion of our "willing"' (Riley 2000: 249). He does this, however, not through a constant miraculous intervention but through his 'general will'. The latter concept was also the cornerstone for Malebranche's

conceptualization of a general divine providence that did not have to govern creation with the help of particular decrees and interventions in history. This theory 'saved' providence against radical deists, yet at the same time it minimized divine action in the world. Consequently, his theory of providence was invoked by Catholic Enlighteners who intended to defend the deposit of faith as well by thinkers whose goal was the elimination of a personal God for the sake of an impersonal principle of creation. Nevertheless, Malebranche had always insisted that the ultimate goal of history and the purpose of nature was the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who elevates nature from a causally determined mechanism to a complex system with finality (Baur 2000). His philosophy reconstructed a systematic interdependence of faith and reason against scholasticism, which he regarded as anti-Christian (Pyle 2003; Nadler 2000). The Barnabite Cardinal Hyacinthe Gerdil (1718–1802) was an ardent follower of Malebranche and made efforts to reconcile modernity with Catholicism by introducing elements from contemporary philosophy into theology. He viewed natural laws as the effects of divine order and argued against any inherent movement and principles of life within matter itself. In his political philosophy he claimed that political virtue requires religion as its basis because only religion can raise sufficient public commitment. Consequently his *Anti-Emile* (1763) abhorred Rousseau's idea of education without religion and his distrust in institutions. For the cardinal such institutions were necessary to keep human egoism in check (Borghero 2010b; Gerdil 2011).

In France leading Jesuits such as Claude G. Buffier (1661–1737) and Réné-Joseph Tournemine (1661–1739) went far beyond Gerdil and attempted to merge Locke, Newton, and Malebranche into a new synthesis. This new eclectic system was intended to provide an epistemological overhaul of Thomism. According to this synthesis even the idea of God could be said to have derived from sense perception, brought about by the ordination of providence. If the idea of God was derived from the senses, however, then it could be easily (and probably) distorted by them. This fit perfectly with the doctrine of original sin and the subsequent human failure to arrive at a flawless natural knowledge of God. Therefore, the French theologians (and later the Jesuit Wolffian Benedict Stattler), argued that a revelation was needed to instruct humans with infallible certainty about God's identity and plans. The new Jesuit synthesis made many theologians believe that they had found empirical proof for original sin and other Church doctrines. The denial or minimization of revelation by radical and moderate Enlighteners urged theologians to produce a new standard treatise on this very subject. Influenced by the French Jesuit synthesis, Joseph Hooke (1716–96), professor at the Sorbonne, conceived a new way of apologetic theology in his *Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1752). Instead of emphasizing confessional truths, Hooke's main aim was to prove revelation as such. Like many of his contemporaries, he put moral arguments for the existence of God before physical and metaphysical arguments. He also developed a criteriology of revelation and

presented a theory of miracles and prophecies—something new in Catholic apologetics (Heinz 1984: 163–171). Nevertheless, his high appreciation of natural religion and natural law, both of which he considered primordial revelation, led many of his critics to claim that he mingled the natural and the supernatural together. Moreover, Hooke's book was one of the boldest attempts to integrate Newtonian physics into Catholic theology, and thus to reconcile science and religion (O'Connor 1995). Only the censoring of Hooke's student Jean-Martin de Prades (1724–84), who had applied the above-mentioned Jesuit epistemology to his dissertation in 1751, brought the Jesuit experiment to a halt (Burson 2010). In Germany, the Benedictine Ulrich Weiss (1713–63) projected in his *On the Improvement of the Human Intellect* (1747) a synthesis of rationalism and empiricism (Lehner 2011: 191–193) that anticipated the Kantian project. At the end of the eighteenth century, it was also first and foremost Catholic philosophers who positively received the critical works of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). For the Benedictine Maternus Reuss (1751–98) Kant had shown that atheism could not be proven and that there was room for genuine faith. Thus, his philosophy was considered an authentically Christian one (Fischer 2005). One of the more original interpreters of Kant was the Salzburg Benedictine Ulrich Peutinger (1751–1817). In *Religion, Revelation and the Church Found in Pure Reason* (1795) he asserted that Kant's system was among the most important philosophical achievements of humanity because it had overcome scepticism and demonstrated the categories as the laws of human reasoning. Unlike Kant, however, Peutinger's starting point of reflection was *pure* reason that precedes any differentiation into practical and theoretical parts; he was in this regard influenced by the works of the former Barnabite Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823), one of the most impressive German idealists who had converted to Protestantism in 1783. Peutinger identified the unity of reason (as the ultimate structure of thinking) with God, wherefore all proofs for the existence of God must fail 'because God, for whose existence one seeks proof from principles, is himself the principle of all principles' (Lehner 2011: 201–203).

Benedict Stattler (1728–97) was an equally ingenious thinker and the most important German Catholic theologian of the eighteenth century. He reconstructed Catholic philosophy and theology with the mathematical method of Christian Wolff (1679–1754) (Gómez-Tutor 2004). His eclectic, empirical dogmatism, which navigated between Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, and Hume (Werner 1866: 173–177) and relied on a similar concept as the French Jesuit synthesis, claimed that clear principles and concepts would allow for clear explanations, convincing demonstrations, and proper, chain-like connections of all doctrines (Scholz 1957: 46–51). In his apologetic works, Stattler arranged his arguments according to the modalities of possibility, reality, and necessity. In *Loci Theologici* (1775) he even merged the authorities of the scholastic theologians, natural reason, philosophers, and history into a new category entitled 'reasonable theology'. For Stattler, theology became a scientific discipline that was not able to give

insight into its object by showing its sufficient reasons, since only the rational parts of doctrine, not the mysteries themselves were reachable by reason. Theology thus became a science of the *naturally* certain elements of revelation. For mysteries, only their non-contradiction and thus the possibility of their existence could be demonstrated (Ruhstorfer 2003: 195). Such a methodology was a compromise—and Georg Hermes (1775–1831) would follow Stattler in this respect (Scholz 1957: 56–59). The impressive consequence with which Stattler connected all doctrines and the methodological outlines of his works remained an important influence for neo-scholastic textbooks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Influenced by Stattler and other Catholic Enlighteners was also Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848), who was undoubtedly the most ingenious Catholic philosopher of the nineteenth century, especially due to his contributions to mathematics but also to his influence on the formation of phenomenology and analytic philosophy (Winter 1969).

Rationalistic tendencies notwithstanding, mystical theology also influenced Catholic philosophy during this era. Fenelon's (1651–1715) idea of 'disinterested love' led not only to the establishment of interconfessional networks of mystical theologians and thus to more religious tolerance, but also to the appreciation of disinterest as a moral value. His disinterested love of one's neighbour even foreshadowed the natural law morality of later generations and especially Kant's moral theory (Force 2003: 169–204). Fenelon's most important disciple was the convert Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686–1743). In his thinking Ramsay combined his master with Malebranche and Bayle and advocated in his bestselling book, *A New Cyropaedia or the Travels of Cyrus* (1728), a universalist conception of Christianity. In his *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1748) he took up Matthew Tindal's famous charge and argued with the help of an ingenious universalism and syncretism that Christianity *was* as old as the creation. His thoughts became of great importance for Hume, Coleridge, and Jonathan Edwards, but were undeservedly forgotten by his Catholic peers (Eckert 2009). Like Ramsay, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803) was also influenced by Fenelon's thought, but he argued instead for a distinctly heterodox theosophy and esotericism. Together with Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821) he also contributed to a conservative political theology in the aftermath of the French Revolution (Armenteros 2011). Also heterodox was the work of the Benedictine Léger Marie Deschamps (1716–74), who constructed a radically anti-supernatural system of philosophy that he described as 'enlightened atheism' (Puisais: 2001).

The eighteenth-century reconceptualization of natural law, which abandoned a teleological understanding of nature for the sake of a mechanistic and utilitarian one, and its desacralization, which made the welfare of the state the guiding principle and bestowed on the sovereign the supreme power over the Church (*jus circa sacra*), were an

enormous challenge for theology. According to such thought other religious denominations could no longer be considered threats and had to be tolerated for the sake of political stability and prosperity. For the Austrian canonist Valentin Eybl (1741–1805), natural law stood even higher than any positive ecclesiastical law and functioned as the ultimate key to how one interprets revelation (Fritsch 2004; Fritsch 2007). In Italy, the Jansenist theologian Pietro Tamburini (1737–1827) wrote *On Ecclesiastical and Civil Tolerance* (1783), a highly skilled analysis of the concept of tolerance, distinguishing between philosophical, religious, and theological tolerance. However, he did not regard atheism as tolerable (Davidson 2000). More outspoken than Tamburini was Giovanni C. Amaduzzi (1740–92), who in 1778 projected a Christian political philosophy that not only requested the reinforcement of the social contract, the abolition of feudal rights, and an end to slavery, but also a society that was based on the natural rights of man (Rosa 2010: 239). Cesare Beccaria (1738–94) demanded the abolition of torture and capital punishment and a more humane punishment for prisoners (Rother 2007). More radical was Henri Grégoire (1750–1831), who audaciously advocated a universal religious tolerance, full emancipation of Jews, and full racial equality (Sepinwall 2005; Grégoire 1996). Similar thoughts of tolerance were defended by the Polish priests Hugo Kollataj (1750–1812) and Stanislaw Stazic (1755–1826) (Salmonowicz 1993; Butterwick 2010). In Rome, Pope Pius VI (1775–99) commissioned Nicola Spedalieri (1740–95) to write a Catholic response to the French Revolution's *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789). His *The Rights of Man* (1791) stirred up great interest since it pleaded for the grounding of the human rights in natural law and not in revelation. Moreover, it proved Christianity to be not only the inventor and promoter of human rights but also the fundament of any moral society. It soon became a bible for reform-oriented Catholics throughout Europe (Borghero 2010a).

Exegesis and History

The cliché that the Reformation directly led to the rise of critical exegesis has long been proven wrong, and the Renaissance humanists are now credited with it, but the achievements of Catholic exegetes have not yet been fully appreciated (Reventlow 1985; Reiser 2007: 233–237). The latter's works were certainly overshadowed by the many Protestant exegetes who were able to work with less magisterial oversight and usually with less restrictive censoring institutions. Consequently, they could fully unfold their exegetical agendas and state bold ideas. Moreover, the majority of Catholic exegetes of the Early Modern period lacked a sufficient knowledge of the oriental languages and relied more heavily on the Greek and Latin manuscripts of the Bible. They made a greater

use of allegorical or mystical interpretations of the text than earlier generations of scholars, both of which made their writings less respected in the Protestant-dominated world of biblical scholarship. By the end of the seventeenth century this had changed, and a steadily increasing number of highly skilled Catholic exegetes served the Church. The most important Catholic exegete of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was Richard Simon (1638–1712), who developed an original hermeneutic to interpret sacred Scripture (Müller 2004). Against the rationalist Socinian interpretation of Scripture he insisted on a rule of faith that has to guide exegesis. Due to the overemphasis on the allegorical meaning of Scripture among his colleagues, he stressed the primacy of the literal meaning and supported Cardinal Cajetan's (1469–1534) rule according to which the explanation of a verse is acceptable if it suits the text and does not contradict the teachings of the Church even if it deviates from the consensus of the Fathers. He was also convinced that the doctrine of inspiration had to be rephrased intelligently, if it should withstand the criticism of Spinoza. Thus he stated that the human authors of the Bible were instruments of inspiration and made mistakes—due to the use of their own reason—in ordering the biblical narratives or even abbreviating their sources (Reiser 2007: 185–218; Rogerson 2008: 838–843). A generation later, the Benedictine Augustin Calmet (1672–1752) continued Simon's approach to exegesis, but avoided altogether the mystical interpretation of Scripture in his twenty-three-volume 'literal' commentary on all books of the Bible. In their criticism of Christianity, Diderot, Voltaire, and others depended substantially on the scholarship of Calmet, who had not avoided pointing to inconsistencies and falsities in the biblical texts (Schwarzbach 2001; Martin & Henryot 2008). Like his commentaries, Calmet's *Dictionary of the Bible* (1720) was also widely read in Europe. It was translated into numerous languages and served for the next 150 years as *the* standard reference work (Rogerson 2008: 846). While Calmet was praised by the papacy for his work, his colleagues, the Jesuits Jean Hardouin (1646–1729) and Joseph Isaac Berruyere (1681–1758), were censored by the holy office. Hardouin, who was a fierce anti-Enlightener but at the same time an ardent proponent of literary criticism, was censored because his historical criticism led him to state that most writings of the Church Fathers were forgeries; Berruyere was censored because his *History of the People of God* (1728–58) paraphrased the entire Bible—often in a heterodox way—much like a romantic novel. Both also argued that historical records were irrelevant for understanding the Christian faith because they were unreliable. Only tradition, kept alive in the magisterium of the popes gave sufficient certainty to the faithful (Palmer 1967: 53–77; Chadwick 1987: 70–73). It was, however, the Catholic physician Jean Astruc (1684–1766) who is credited with opening the way of literary-critical analysis to the Old Testament. He had accepted the lack of integrity of the Book of Genesis as demonstrated by Hobbes, Spinoza, and le Clerc, but he did not share the common disbelief in Moses's authorship. Instead he argued that Moses compiled a series

of sources. One of the main criteria for dividing up the biblical sources were the different divine names 'Jehovah' and 'Elohim'. With this view he made possible future differentiations of literary sources in the Old Testament and their reconstruction. The Oratorian Charles Francois Houbigant (1686–1784) followed Astruc's principles and published in 1753 a four-volume edition of the Old Testament that reconstructed the text with the help of the Samaritan Pentateuch. It belongs to the finest achievements of early modern exegesis and is undeservedly forgotten (Rogerson 2008: 846–850).

A secularist approach to the Bible, as set forth by Protestant exegetes (Sheehan 2005), was often the reason why Catholic exegetes came into conflict with ecclesiastical or state censors. The most prominent case was that of Johann Lorenz Isenbiehl (1744–1818) of the University of Mainz in Germany. In his 1778 book on the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, he had insisted that the verse did not indicate the future birth of the Messiah, not even allegorically, and thus shared Anthony Collin's and d'Holbach's view that a prophecy must always be literal (Reiser 2007: 277–330). Similarly engaged with the historical-critical method was Johann Jahn (1750–1816), a Norbertine and professor of exegesis at the University of Vienna. In his *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1792; Engl. 1827) he came to the conclusion that the books of Job, Jonah, and Tobias were not historical accounts but educational poems, and that the New Testament healings of demonic possessions had to be explained naturalistically. His theory of inspiration, which followed the sixteenth-century Jesuit Leonard Lessius (1554–1623), attracted the most criticism. Inspiration was no longer distinguished into different types but conceived as preservation from error. Thus, authors of the Bible wrote according to their own imagination and experience, while divine inspiration only preserved the authors from writing anything incorrect but did not directly guide the minds of the scribes (Burtchaell 1969: 44–87). In England Alexander Geddes (1737–1802) worked ceaselessly on his project of a new translation of the Bible, which offered a mythopoeic reading of the Old Testament that influenced Blake and Coleridge. He also interpreted Scripture according to his political convictions, asserting in 1792 that the Hebrew commonwealth had been a republic and Moses a Jacobin (Goldie 2010). Less radical was the Salzburg Augustinian Aloys Sandbichler (1751–1820), who defended with great sophistication the reliability of the textual basis of the Bible (1783) since he saw the textual authenticity of sacred Scripture endangered due to excessive and limitless criticism (Raggenbass 2006: 237–247). Together with his Benedictine colleage Leander van Ess (1772–1847) he also worked for the improvement of biblical literacy among Catholics (Altenberend 2001).

The state of eighteenth-century exegesis brings us to the question as to how Catholic *dogmatic* theologians used the new insights of this field. Slowly but steadily the historical and literal meaning of Scripture marginalized the mystical interpretation of Scripture. Also, scriptural proofs were no longer placed in textbooks after tradition and

ecclesiastical teachings, but before them. Theologians even moved away from amassing Scripture quotations to a more coherent biblical theology. Certainly the eighteenth-century preference for simplicity and historicity led to an overemphasis on the literal meaning of biblical passages, while the ideal of finding the essential aspects of Catholicism often led to theological minimalism. Nevertheless eighteenth-century pragmatism helped to rediscover the kerygmatic character of Scripture and led to a more anthropocentric theology. In Germany, Engelbert Kluepfel (1733–1811) envisioned a 'theology in the Spirit of Jesus'. In a similar manner, Bernhard Galura (1764–1856) used the 'Kingdom of God' as a systematic principle for theology in order to regain the original language, simplicity, and beauty of Christianity. The focus on the historical Jesus led Marianus Dobmayr, OSB (1753–1805) to state that Jesus' sinlessness did not come without severe inner struggle and that his human knowledge was limited to what was necessary for his mission. Most ingenious was Franz Oberthuer's (1745–1851) biblical anthropology, which the author wanted to be understood as a 'philosophy of the Bible'. Despite his appreciation for a strictly historical and literal explanation of Scripture, his overriding principle was that a passage should be primarily interpreted anthropologically, to the extent that it answers the questions of human moral desires (Reinhardt 1970: 31–46).

There is no theologian who better embodies the Catholic Enlightenment quest to defend essential Catholic dogmas by explaining their intelligibility in modern terminology and by reconciling Catholicism with modern culture than Ludovico Muratori (1672–1750). Along with the achievements of the Maurists, his groundbreaking historical research contributed to a new historical consciousness that was necessary for the conceptualization of a development of doctrine. It was especially his book *On the Moderation of our Cleverness in Religious Matters* (1714) that inspired reform theologians throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It demonstrated, like no other book, what the Catholic Enlightenment intended, namely to reform Catholic theology and Catholic life by rediscovering the tradition and bringing it into dialogue with the best of contemporary thought. He despised radical, individualist theologians and instead argued for moderately free research within theology as long as it respected its borders, namely the deposit of faith. For Muratori, such a moderate Enlightenment of Catholicism was desirable to cleanse theology from fruitless speculation, superstitious beliefs (e.g. witchcraft; cf. Midelfort 2005), and excessive piety, and to lead it back to a discovery of its simple beauty and persuasiveness. He often reminded scholars that undecided theological questions could be freely discussed. This inspired many theologians throughout Europe to distinguish more carefully between the essence and the periphery of Catholicism. Regarding the interpretation of Scripture he pointed out that the Church Fathers deserve respect and veneration when they teach about Christ and the Church or about morals, or when they unanimously agree, but that in scientific

questions, and everything besides faith and morals, one can follow other, better, truer, and more probable explanations wherever one finds them. Thus, a Copernican explanation of the world would not collide with the principles of scriptural exegesis (Muratori 1779: Book 1, ch. 23, 236–237). Moreover, Muratori also became famous for his outspoken criticism of excessive veneration of the saints. He detected such particularly in Marian devotions, especially in the so-called blood vow. In the Habsburg lands, a vow obliged candidates at universities before their graduation to swear an oath to defend the Immaculate Conception, if necessary with their life. Muratori vehemently rejected this practice, since the doctrine was not yet definitively settled. In *The Science of Rational Devotion* (1747) Muratori anticipated much of the liturgical renewal of the twentieth century when he demanded a simple, Christo-centric liturgy that allowed full, conscious, and active participation of the laity (Rosa 2010: 218–222).

Ecclesiology, Politics, and the Christian

While academic theology attempted to find ways to communicate with the culture and science of its day, the popes of the eighteenth century had a predominantly hostile view of most Enlightenment ideas. They typically feared that such ideas could endanger faith, morals, and the influence of the Church. Only in the pontificate of Prospero Lambertini/ Benedict XIV (1740–58) did the Church have a fruitful dialogue with modernity. As a canonist he had applied the insights from his friend Muratori to argue in 1729 against an official liturgical feast of the Sacred Heart, and in his main academic work on beatifications and canonizations (1734–37) he emphasized the heroic and thus moral virtues of the candidates for sainthood much more than miraculous deeds and mystical experiences. Nevertheless, he did not reject mystical experiences altogether, as can be seen from his recognition of the experiences of Caterina de' Ricci, whom Benedict canonized in 1746. Instead, he carefully moderated between the Enlightenment demands and the tradition of the Church, between a Tridentine appreciation of baroque piety and a moderate rationalism that desired religion to be free of excesses and fanaticism. Nevertheless, with the condemnations of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Beccaria, La Mettrie, d'Holbach, and Helvetius in the 1750s, the gap between the Enlightenment propagators and Church leaders widened and became insurmountable with the outbreak of the French Revolution and its aftermath (Rosa 2010: 232; cf. Printy 2005). The revolution itself had substantial theological roots in the public resistance of Jansenism against the crown and the Jesuits (Van Kley 1999).

The theological influence of Jansenism on eighteenth-century theology was immense. Especially appealing were its ideas of a reform of the Church in the spirit of the Early

Church Fathers, a decentralized Church government, moral rigorism, better education and pay for clergy, practical education of the laity, and a certain liberality concerning individual religious practices, including the use of the vernacular in the liturgy (Strayer 2008). Jansenist and Gallican theologians contributed to a renewed ecclesiology when they criticized the monarchical role of the papacy and the attempts of Ultramontanist theologians to reduce the bishop's office to a mere derivation from the pope's office. In the course of the eighteenth century, Jansenist-Gallican ideas spread throughout Europe and achieved in the canonist works of Bernard Zeger van Espen (1646–1728) a sophisticated articulation (Cooman 2003). In the second half of the century, these thoughts were summarized in Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim's (1701–90) widely read *Febronius* (1762). The book inspired the movement of Episcopalism that sought to strengthen the office of bishops and minimize papal influence (Printy 2009; Lehner 2008). Many regarded Episcopalism as necessary since one could no longer expect reforms from the papacy. Besides the bishops, hope for reforms also rested on the sovereigns: for example,. on Maria Theresa (1740–80) or Joseph II (1780–90) in Austria (Beales 1987/2009). In Habsburg Tuscany, Archduke Leopold (1765–90) convened the Synod of Pistoia (1786) which, heavily influenced by Jansenism, articulated a more collegial system of Church administration. It also argued against the Curia '[…] that the bishop has received from Jesus Christ [and not from the Pope, U.L.] all the powers necessary for the good government of the diocese' (Bolton 1970: 99). The new ecclesiology of Beda Mayr OSB (1742–94), with his concept of limited papal and ecclesiastical infallibility, was intended to begin an ecumenical dialogue about a reunification of the Christian Churches (Lehner 2009a; Lehner 2009b).

The rise of Catholic Biblicism, the improvement of patristic theology, and eighteenth-century utilitarianism also engendered liturgical studies as a new theological discipline. New vernacular rituals were produced and journals launched in which theologians exchanged ideas about possible reforms. In 1784 Benedict Werkmeister (1745–1823) even began to celebrate Mass in the vernacular in Stuttgart. He and many of the more radical theologians, however, increasingly saw in the liturgy a means for moral instruction. Felix A. Blau (1754–98) summarized this position: 'All acts through which we become wiser and better are liturgical' (at Keller 1996: 22). Theologically questionable were their attempts to separate contract and sacrament in matrimony, and to deny the indissolubility of marriage altogether (Keller 1996: 44–64). The Synod of Pistoia (1786) wished to restore the liturgy 'as an action common to priest and people […] by bringing back the Liturgy to a greater simplicity of rites, by expounding the vernacular, and by pronouncing it in a clear voice' (Bolton 1970: 82). Its moderate liturgical reforms, however, were rejected by the bull *Auctorem Fidei* (1794) as dangerous, since it implied that the order of worship was corrupted or at best insufficient. Pastoral theology, which was also invented in the course of the century out of the desire to optimize the social

utility of religion, was usually based on empirical knowledge without extensive theological underpinning. Its goal, as the works of Franz Giftschütz (1748–88) in Vienna show, was to instruct Christians to find inner happiness and righteousness. Consequently, such theologians viewed the Church solely in sociological and judicial terms (Arnold 1949: 79–98; Lehner & Printy 2010a). Most creative was Franz Xaver Mezler's (1756–1812) use of recent medical findings in order to create a 'pastoral medicine', which conveyed to future priests the indispensable elements of anthropology and natural history (Mezler 1794).

In moral theology the work of St Alphonsus of Liguori (1696–1787) proved to have the most lasting influence. Although not an Enlightener, he engaged with the thought of his time, learned from its style of argumentation, and ultimately conceived of a new form of person-centred moral theology that shaped Catholic moral theology until Vatican II. He defended the sacraments as a central part of moral theory and sanctification against rationalist critics and based his moral theory on a principle of gentleness that avoided laxism and rigorism (Printy 2005). Liguori's devotional book, *The Glories of Mary* (1750), reached more than a thousand editions and became a fundamental reference point for Catholic Mariology, making full use of modern ways of communicating theological knowledge to a broader public. After Vatican II the works of this doctor of the Church (1871) were increasingly marginalized, yet they are slowly being rediscovered (Dillenschneider 1931/34; Rey-Mermet 1989; Giannantonio 1999).

One of the first Catholics who developed ethical reflections on the modern economy was the Enlightener Antonio Genovesi (1713–69) in his *Diceosina* (1767), in which he reasoned that social relations had the final goal of happiness. Society was for him the place for the enjoyment of social relationships. Therefore, economic life:

> is an exercise of virtues: the market is a place to put into practice the virtues, in particular 'civic' virtues, such as the love of the common good and the control of individualistic passions. […] The market is the place where each agent is helping others to satisfy their wants. […] Public happiness is, as Genovesi and the whole tradition of *pubblica felicita* say, the sum of individuals' happiness. Within a theory of happiness as *eudaimonia*, the more individuals behave virtuously, the more individual happiness increases, the more civic virtues grow, the *happier* the population is

> (Bruni 2004: 28–29).

The engagement of Catholicism with the Enlightenment process was diverse in its methods but also in its results. While many theologians wanted to use modern thought to update Catholic theology in order to make it intellectually attractive and intelligible,

some desired to restructure the entire deposit of faith. In its best form, the Catholic Enlightenment was the resuscitation of the Tridentine reform with modern means; at its worst, it amounted to theological subjugation to the state with heretical tendencies. The tendency of Catholic Enlighteners to work with the state against the papacy helps one to understand the latter's resistance towards state interventions in the nineteenth century and its increasing distrust in the Enlightenment after the French Revolution. By the end of the eighteenth century, the papacy had come to understand the power of the 'public' better than the Catholic Enlighteners. With an enormous gain of moral authority during and after the Napoleonic exile, the popes were able to use popular Catholic sentiment to strengthen their own position against nationalist tendencies. As a result a strong papacy and an Ultramontanist ecclesiology emerged that were able to homogenize the Church during the nineteenth century into a truly coherent, universal body that existed until the 1950s. However one views the Church's contending with modern thought in the 1eighteenth century, recent research has shown that many Catholic thinkers believed in the complementarity of modernity and Catholic theology, in the possibility of updating theological argumentation, and that modern science and thought can improve the faith life of the Church. The Catholic Enlightenment illustrates where the dialogue of the Church with modern thought was fruitful and where it failed, and can serve therefore as lesson and potential guide for twenty-first-century theology and its relationship to modernity. The existence of a broad spectrum of Catholic Enlightenments also calls into question such categories as Counter-Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment, terms that have been used frequently to overlook the original eclecticism of Catholic thinkers in the eighteenth century and, consequently, exclude them from every canon of literature, philosophy, and even theology.

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