

The Last Judgment and New Church Scholarship:
Some Implications for the Future

Michael H. Hogan
with Jane Williams-Hogan, PhD

Introduction

With the 250th anniversary of the last judgment rapidly approaching in 2007, it seems appropriate to examine what actually happened during the last judgment, what was accomplished by it, and what the scholarly implications are for us today in the New Church. This paper will attempt to do this.

The first part of the paper, entitled, “The Dynamic Engineering of the Spiritual World,” will describe the context and unfolding of the last judgment. I will adhere closely to actual passages from the Word and provide commentary following each of these passages. The aim will be to provide succinct examination of this event for subsequent reference.

The second part of the paper, entitled “The State of Religious Organizations in 18th Century Europe,” will examine some implications of the last judgment in the context of 18th Century history. Of particular interest in this section will be in pointing out some of the implications of what is meant by “Babylon” in Swedenborg’s description of the last judgment. I hope to provide the beginning of a distinctly New Church approach to the Enlightenment in this section.

My concluding remarks will offer some suggestion for future work.

Part I - The Dynamic Engineering of the Spiritual World

The following points will describe the spiritual context of the last judgment; how and where it took place and its implications for the human race on earth.

- 1) There is a constant balance between heaven and hell. An effort to do evil is constantly emanating up from hell, and an effort to do good is constantly emanating down from heaven. The world of spirits is in this equilibrium (its location is halfway between heaven and hell).

The reason the world of spirits is in this equilibrium is that after death we first enter the world of spirits and are kept in the same state in which we were in the world. This could not happen unless there were a perfect balance there. This allows everyone to be examined there as to quality, since we keep the same kind of freedom we had in the world. Spiritual equilibrium is a state of freedom for us and for spirits. (*Heaven and Hell*, #590).

The spiritual world is arranged so that human freedom is maintained within the balance of competing forces. Unless the Lord maintained this balance we would be overwhelmed. This balance permits us, in freedom, to choose the life of heaven or that of hell. Without human freedom there can be no judgment. However, the hells are very powerful and can only be kept in check by constant, intricate effort on the Lord's part (see *Heaven and Hell*, #593). The hells are so powerful in fact that they are permitted no direct contact with humans on earth or in the world of spirits.

The inhabitants of hell, called demons, are so consumed with the love of self that they cannot now be saved. They are implacably hostile to heaven and constantly try to strike against it. They hate anything which is not of service to themselves. It is almost impossible to describe their fury. It is also quite frightening to realize that this intense self-love exists within us as well. If we were not held in balance by the Lord, we would choose to be in hell. Demons are nothing more than human beings who have rejected the Lord's call to love Him

and the neighbor. This state of rejection makes man “viler than the beasts” because he takes many of his human characteristics with him to hell. These include: speech, symbolic thought, guile, planning skills, and the talent of coordinated action. These attributes make him viler than the beast because they make him more dangerous. He can imagine creative ways to achieve his will, justify himself through his perverted intellect, and carry out despicable acts with imaginative brutality. We are no match for this formidable malice. The Lord’s action alone enables us the free space, externally and internally, to choose heaven.

Thus the Lord’s Providence does not permit direct contact between demons and men. Providence does neither permit contact between men and angels of the highest heaven. These are the angels who are in a state of love to the Lord alone. Contact with these angels would violate human freedom as well. Humans would be overwhelmed by the Divine Love to such an extent that they could not choose good or evil as of themselves. They would be swept into heaven without the internal reformation necessary to have acted voluntarily. Only the choice to be led by the Lord, made in true freedom, permits entry into heaven. The Lord never forces anyone to be saved.

So the question arises; if the highest heaven and the lowest hell, powerful as they are, are not permitted direct contact with us, how are the choices of good and evil effectively provided to us, without destroying our freedom? Swedenborg addresses this issue in the passages which follow:

- 2) So that we can be in freedom for the sake of our reformation, we are united in spirit with heaven and with hell. With each of us there are spirits from hell and angels from heaven. By means of the spirits from hell we encounter our evil, and by means of angels from heaven we encounter the

good we have from the Lord. As a result, we are in a spiritual equilibrium – that is, in freedom.

We need to be aware that our union with heaven and with hell is not directly with them but is mediated by spirits who are in the world of spirits. These spirits are with us, more from hell itself or from heaven itself. We are united to hell through evil spirits in the world of spirits, and with heaven through the good spirits there. Because of this arrangement, the world of spirits is halfway between heaven and hell and is at the point of balance.

We can see from this where we get our freedom (*Heaven and Hell*, #599-600).

The world of spirits thus is a medium of contact between heaven/hell and the human race. The good spirits there are in love to the neighbor while the bad spirits are in love of the world. These spirits have entered the spiritual world after death and remain there until they have freely chosen the life of the highest heaven (love to the Lord) or that of hell (love of self). It is interesting to note that love of the neighbor is a form of love to the Lord, but it is not yet fully developed. Its inner essence has yet to be worked out and made manifest. The same can be said of love of the world. That this is a form of self-love is very clear. What differentiates it however, is that the love of self must still accommodate itself to other persons and objects. It is not so obsessed that it needs to satisfy itself at every moment, in every circumstance. Thus it uses honor, reputation, and gain to achieve the fruits of self-love. It seduces rather than rapes, swindles rather than robs, flatters rather than coerces, and commands rather than destroys. But as Swedenborg tells us, a life of this kind eventually confirms itself in us. Then, over time, we become impatient, we dispense with the forms and niceties of worldly social order and seize the objects of our desire directly. At this point we acknowledge no external restraints and become frank predators. The Lord then

allows us to be removed into hell, which is the true goal of our love. There we act out our evils with similar demons in a never-ending cycle of obsession and victimization.

A parallel reality unfolds among those spirits in love to the neighbor. However, it has the opposite outcome. Here the continuing effort to act charitably for the good of another produces both control of the self and a genuine desire to learn what real good is. Since the ultimate in charity consists of doing the highest good for the neighbor, one is constantly driven to seek what is the greatest good. Over time this striving after the essence of good leads the spirit to the conclusion that the Lord himself is the highest good. Thus love to the Lord is discovered to be the true end of charity. At this point the Lord allows the spirit to either heaven and live out eternity with the other angels.

It must be stressed that the world of spirits exists for reasons having to do with the salvation of mankind. Spirits, both good and bad, visit humans in the natural world in order that humans be presented with the means of drawing out their true spiritual choices. Temptations, hardships, inspiration, humiliation, and triumph are all part of the spiritual drama, which is a legacy of every human. The passage through the natural world is the context within which we make eternal spiritual choices. With us at every step of the way are spirits who wish us good or ill. They provide charitable explanation for adversity or they fan our resentment even as we receive high honors. They enflame our jealousies as well as justify our lusts. They help us marvel at the innocence of newborns and they encourage us to unsolicited acts of kindness. In the face of grievous temptation they can give us

strength, while others of them will undermine our resolve. All of this is permitted by the Lord's Providence for our salvation. It is done so that we may be aware of the spiritual implications of even the least things of our natural life.

The question may rightfully be asked, why are these spirits chosen for this task instead of angels and demons? The answer is that these spirits can approach humans without destroying their freedom. The spirits are still in a state of working out their own deepest spiritual choices. While they have definite tendencies toward good or evil, these tendencies have not been fully confirmed. Thus they have a certain similarity to humans. Both are in the process of sorting things out. This permits genuine contact with human beings. This contact appears to be somewhat mutual. Perhaps the Lord intends for evil spirits to confront the destructive ends of the choices they are making by having them once more in contact with the natural world. In any case, no angel or demon is permitted contact with humans because their power is too great, and they therefore would destroy human freedom rather than enhance it.

Another reason why the Lord permitted evil spirits to dominate the world of spirits until the end of the Christian Church was because even the evil spirits there maintained the externals of social order. They ruled over cities, conducted church services, preached good works, cared for the young and maintained civil order. While their motives were primarily hypocritical, they nonetheless provided an orderly context for other spirits who were still in the process of discovering their true loves. In addition, we are told that those in simple good found comfort in this external order and their innocence was preserved.

But this state of the world of spirits during the Christian Church did not last forever. The spirits within it progressed into heaven or descended into hell, but that world itself was not destroyed in 1757. This was the last judgment of the Christian Church. To explain why this came about we turn to the following comments from Swedenborg:

- 3) A last judgment exists when a church is at an end, and the end of a church is when there is no faith because there is no charity. There are many reasons why the last judgment exists when the end of the church is. The principal reason is that then the equilibrium between heaven and hell begins to perish, and with the equilibrium man's freedom itself; and when man's freedom perishes, he can no longer be saved, for he cannot then be led to heaven in freedom, but from freedom is borne to hell; for no man can be reformed without freedom, and all man's freedom is from the equilibrium between heaven and hell. (*The Last Judgment*, #33).

Both heaven and hell are from the human race. Thus, mankind's spiritual destination is directly affected by the quality of the Church which was dominant during its earthly life. If that Church remained fully committed to charity and faith, the number of people entering the spiritual world with love to the neighbor would at least equal the number of evil spirits entering it whose dominant loves were for self and the world. However, if the Church in the world, in this case the Christian Church, has itself abandoned its spiritual principles to become merely another powerful worldly institution, then its ability to lead people to a heavenly life is seriously compromised. This has profound implications for human freedom, which is the basis for salvation. The reason for this is because only spirits from the world of spirits may approach man in the natural world. They bear the essential burden of mediating both good and evil on the earth. They do this both as individual spirits with individual men and also collectively by auras, which

they project from themselves into the world. The balance of these forces keeps the equilibrium necessary for spiritual freedom. When a church is reaching its end, it does not have the power to maintain this equilibrium since the spirits it sends to the spiritual world are becoming confirmed in evil loves. They serve to counsel evil as individuals but also, in concert they emanate auras (which appear as dark, noxious clouds) which actively block heavenly auras from reaching the natural world. This process, if left unaltered, would totally prevent the light of heaven from reaching the earth. In that case, no one could be saved since all would follow their natural inclinations to hell.

As was mentioned earlier, the Lord permitted the world of spirits to exist during the Christian Church because it served His Divine end of providing the necessary spiritual equilibrium for salvation. However, when the world of spirits actually interfered with the balance and tended to lead men to hell, the Lord brought an end to it and to the corrupt church which was supplying it. This is what is meant by the last judgment of the Christian Church. It occurred in the year 1757.

A further explanation of this process is given in the following passage:

- 4) Moreover every church in the beginning is spiritual, for it begins from charity; but in the course of time it turns aside from charity to faith, and then from being an internal church it becomes an external one, and when it becomes external its end is, since it then places everything in knowledge, and little or nothing in life. Thus also as far as man from being internal becomes external, spiritual light is darkened within him, until he no longer sees Divine truth from truth itself, that is from the light of heaven, for Divine truth is the light of heaven, but only from natural light. (*The Last Judgment*, #38).

This passage makes clear that as it neared its end, the Christian Church passed from an internal to an external state. It passed from a life based on charity to a faith based on knowledge. This transition was both tragic and profound. As the Church and its leadership turned away from the Divine truth, the spiritual light was darkened for them. They then turned for confirmation of their authority to knowledge derived from “natural light.” It is not precisely clear when this transition occurred in the Christian Church. Perhaps it was the rediscovery of classical Greek philosophy during the Middle Ages. This philosophy provided “rational” grounds for faith. This was satisfactory for a while, but it gave the impression that if those grounds could not be maintained, the Church could be “disproved.” Thus began a long and corrosive period of “disputation” which weakened the authority of that church. Perhaps it was brought about by the wars of religion in the 16th and 17th centuries. These wars forced the Church to rely more and more on the power of secular, political forces for its survival. In return, that Church would provide its moral influence to support the power of the state. This was truly a perverse bargain, which virtually put an end to the Church’s independent mission of salvation. It may also be argued that the enlightenment of the early 18th century played a crucial role in undermining it. The answer is certainly complex and this paper will attempt to address this problem from a New Church perspective in a later section. For the present I wish to focus on the spiritual dimension of the problem.

As the Christian Church moved its focus from the internal to the external, it attempted to justify its power and influence in natural ways. In fact, it began to

see its power and influence as good in themselves and sought to defend its prerogatives as absolutely necessary for the good of society. The Church no longer thought of its wealth for the purposes of charity or its power as a means to bring justice. On the contrary, by the early 18th century the Christian Church had become a firmly established force along with the intelligentsia and the state, in virtually every European country. It had become a fully integrated secular institution.

The spiritual mission of the Christian Church at this time was virtually at an end. As Swedenborg put it, “when it is alone (i.e., natural light) and not illuminated by spiritual light, it sees Divine truth as it were in night, and recognizes it as truth for no other reason that that it is called so by the leader, and is received as such by the common assembly.” (*The Last Judgment, Continued* #38).

These social definitions of truth by a leader and the common assembly are a far cry from the original mission of the church. Such a church had simply stopped being a real church. Furthermore its failure had set in motion processes in the spiritual world which were interfering with the equilibrium necessary for human freedom. Without that freedom no one could be saved.

At this point the Lord intervened to reopen the living communication between heaven and the human race. He had no alternative, since at this point the Christian Church had become Babylon.

- 5) *What is meant by Babylon, and what its quality is.* By Babylon are meant all who wish to have dominion by religion. To have dominion by religion is to have dominion over men’s souls, thus over their very spiritual life, and to use the Divine things, which are in their religion, as the means. All

those who have dominion for an end, and religion for the means are in general Babylon. They are called Babylon because such dominion began in ancient times. (*The Last Judgment*, #54).

As can be seen from the above passage, the sin of Babylon is grievous indeed. In fact it amounts to nothing less than profanation. Human history is filled with examples of pagan religious systems being intimately connected to the state. It is often the case that the political systems of ancient societies derived from religious roots. This phenomenon is still discernable in our own time. The Christian Church was not primarily a cultural phenomenon. It was not merely a set of symbols and assertions about the “holy” which guided rituals and legitimated kings. The Christian Church was a true church. It was established on earth as a direct consequence of the Lord Himself becoming flesh and dwelling among us. This was the act of redemption which founded the Christian Church. Into this Church were implanted the real doctrines of Divine Truth. To this Church was entrusted previously unknown truths about the Lord Himself. In addition, the Lord on earth provided countless examples of charity. He stressed that for the Church to remain spiritual, it must begin in charity. The essence of charity is the doing of genuine good to the neighbor without any reciprocal demand. In other words concerns for honors, reputation, and gain should not be the prime motivation for “charitable acts” lest they cease to be charitable at all. Once charity becomes the means to a secular end it loses its spiritual significance. Over time this process hollows out the Church and its internal life begins to die. All that remains are its external forms, rituals and privileges. The effect on the doctrine of the Church is a similar degeneration. At its beginning the doctrine

comes directly from the Lord. It is new and fresh. It's seen as a "revelation." It was not derived from philosophies and ideologies current at the time. In profound ways, it defined itself against those systems. The Lord would often say to his disciples, "You have heard it said, but I say unto you." The words are hardly those of an incremental traditionalist who seeks accommodations. They are stark statements of the freshness of Divine truth. Obviously the Lord and His disciples sought to accommodate his words to individual hearers. The aim was to reach individuals "where they were" in their spiritual lives. But, while that style and manner of presentation could be adjusted, the content of the Divine truth remained the same.

This was not the case for 18th century Christianity. The rise of various secular intellectual and scientific groups emerged which based their approach on purely naturalistic grounds. These groups soon set the terms for intellectual discourse. They did this because they could produce empirical (visual) results to an increasing naturalistic and external world. The Christian Church, after an initial period of hostility, reached out to these movements and embraced them as the dominant discourse of that time. The principle caveat for the Church was that the Enlightenment (as it was ironically called) would not intellectually challenge the formal doctrinal architecture on which the Church's secular power was based. Thus deism, as it came to be called, became the *de facto* theology of the intelligentsia and Church hierarchy. Deism had little if any spiritual content but it did preserve the forms of Christianity, and that was the important thing. The Enlightenment entered into a similar arrangement with the secular state. Many

rulers of the time prided themselves on their “rational” and “enlightened” method of rule. Many of the great projects of this period, both of church and state, were carried out using the instrumentalities characteristic of the pre-enlightenment era, i.e., slavery, serfdom, titles of nobility, forced labor, sale of indulgences, and bribery. As was noted earlier, the net effect of this incredible combination of intellectual, religious, and political power was the creation of impressive examples of external domination and order. The life of genuine charity, which is associated with an internal spirituality, was not a priority within this system.

So by the mid-18th century the Christian Church had reached its spiritual end. It had become the means for those who sought dominion over men by religion. This domination was enforced both naturally and spiritually. Natural domination was enforced by the state while spiritual domination by the Christian Church, which proclaimed that salvation itself could not be achieved without it. Thus was created a coherent and self-reinforced system of control. There appeared to be no way out.

As we now know, the Lord had perceived this situation and knew its spiritual significance for salvation. The last judgment was being prepared. The timing of it was based on spiritual factors, which will be discussed in the following passages.

- 6) *Why they (the Christian Church) were there tolerated, until the day of the last judgment.* The reason was that it is from Divine order that all who can be preserved, shall be preserved, even until they can no longer be among the good. Therefore all those are preserved who can emulate spiritual life in externals, and present it in a moral life, as if it were therein, whatever they may be as to faith and love in internals; so also those are preserved who are in external holiness, though not in internal. (*The Last Judgment*, #59).

The purpose of creation is to form a heaven from the human race. The Lord desires as many to be saved as possible. He knows that even within the degenerate state of the 18th century Christian Church there were many who were instructed by its doctrines and comforted by its ceremonies. These “common people” were in simple good and found inspiration in the ordinary life of the Church. These people existed both on earth and in the world of spirits. It was for their salvation that the Lord waited until the existence of the Christian Church threatened to cut off the spiritual communication between heaven and the human race. The Lord’s forbearance had a positive impact on the salvation of ordinary Christians. We are told that “thus many were led to a life of good, and therefore into the way to heaven; on which account also, many of that religion were saved, although few of the leaders.” (*The Last Judgment*, cont. #59).

The Lord’s solicitation toward all members of the human race is exemplified by his preparation for the last judgment. In preparation for it the Lord sent messengers into the spiritual world. The messengers undertook a “visitation” to both the good spirits and the evil ones. They presented a final call for all to embrace the true life of religion. They did not compel but left the spirits to make their final choice in freedom. When this was done, the Lord’s prophecy was fulfilled: “So shall it be in the consummation of the age; the angels shall go forth, and separate the evil from the midst of the just” (Matthew, 13:47-49). Like all other aspects of the Lord’s Providence, this “separation” was accomplished through the freedom of the participants.

It bears restating that while this judgment took place in the spiritual world as a whole, provision was made for the salvation of each spirit. This was accomplished through both the visitation and the preserving of the world of spirits until the absolute end of the Church which produced it. Thus we are told:

- 7) All are preserved from one judgment to another, who live a life similar to a spiritual life in externals, and emulate as it were a pious and holy internal; by whom the simple may receive instruction and guidance; for the simple in faith and heart look no farther than to see what is external, and apparent before the eyes. Hence all such were tolerated from the commencement of the Christian Church until the day of the judgment. (*The Last Judgment, Cont. #59*).

The question of how the Lord actually accomplished the last judgment of the Christian Church in the spiritual world will be briefly described below. A fuller description of these events will be found in the volumes, *The Last Judgment and Babylon Destroyed* (published 1758), *Continuation on the Last Judgment* (published 1763), and *Apocalypse Revealed* (published 1766). Since the current paper is focused primarily on the effects of the judgment in the natural world, this account will be limited to a general summary.

The destruction of the places inhabited by evil spirits in the world of spirits was begun after the visitation by angels. This was the process of exploring the moral quality of the spirits in order to separate the good from the evil. The good were removed to heaven for further instruction while the evil were left behind. At this point in the world of spirits there were great earthquakes by which the evil spirits realized that the last judgment was at hand. They panicked and fled in all directions, some trying to escape while others attempted to hide wherever possible. But each one tried to bring with him the objects which their desires led

them to value. These things, for which they sacrificed the life of heaven, were destroyed in the ensuing fire and storms. Eruptions from below soon followed, and a great wind picked the evil spirits into the air and carried them, along with the dust which had been their prized possessions, into the hell best suited to their particular love. Through this series of cataclysms in the spiritual world was the Babylonish nation destroyed. This complex process involved the removal of large numbers of evil societies. These then had to be accommodated in hell in such a manner that the overall spiritual equilibrium of creation could be maintained. We are told that this process took the entire year of 1757 to complete. At the end of the judgment the entire world of spirits had been cleared away and the pathways between heaven and the human race were reopened.

With such momentous events taking place in the world of spirits, how was life on earth affected? Were there signs and wonders to announce this fundamental change? The answer, surprisingly is no. The natural world continued on much as it had before. It is as if everything had happened and nothing had happened at the same time. Swedenborg describes this situation in the following passage:

- 8) The state of the world hereafter will be altogether similar to what it has been heretofore, for the great change which has taken place in the spiritual world, does not induce any change in the natural world as to external form; so that after this there will be civil affairs as before, there will be peace, treaties, and wars as before, with all other things which belong to societies in general and in particular. (*The Last Judgment*, #73).

The conventional expectation would certainly be that these great events would have been mirrored in the natural world. In fact, this was the teaching of the Christian Church. That Church believed that the end of the church would

coincide with the end of the earth itself. But it was not in the Lord's Providence for this to happen, because the work of salvation was not complete. There was one more church to be founded, which was to be the "crown of all the churches." This church would be given a new revelation, which could be transmitted to mankind, in freedom, without the interference and hostility of the world of spirits. The last judgment was not accompanied by miraculous happenings on earth. Thus men would not be awestruck into shallow declarations of faith. The Lord designed His New Church to be where human beings, in freedom, could enter with understanding into the mysteries of faith. The spiritual equilibrium had been restored and the mind had been prepared for the new revelation. There would be no further need for explicitly miraculous events to awe and to terrify. This is how Swedenborg explains this process:

- 9) This does not signify that such things (earthquakes, eruptions, etc.) will exist in the natural world: for the Word in its prophecies does not treat of the kingdoms on earth, nor of the nations there, thus neither concerning their wars, nor of famines, pestilences, and earthquakes there, but of such things as correspond to them in the spiritual world; what these things are, is explained in *Arcana Coelestia*. (*The Last Judgment*, #73).

The above statements made in number 73 of *The Last Judgment* are of profound significance to the Church. They treat of things which bear directly on the Lord's plan for the salvation of the human race. However, they also make statements of great importance to the members of the present Church. These statements can be introduced under the headings, *the social* and *the natural*.

The first statement maintains that after the judgment "there will be civil affairs as before." There will be peace and war, treaties and agreements, competition and cooperation as there had been. Thus the structure of the social

world will continue to be guided by laws and processes, which stretch far back into the past. There will be no sudden and visible transformation of the world of everyday life. Human freedom will not be confronted with massive changes in how the world appears to work. The entire hierarchical structure of the 18th century survived intact. Contracts and labor relations, which existed prior to judgment, remained after it. Marriages were not dissolved, municipal officials stayed in office and the languages and social forms of the people continued. The importance of this continuity cannot be overstated, for it is one of the two core assumptions on which the future of New Church scholarship will be based.

The second statement maintains that the judgment bore no significance to “famines, pestilences, and earthquakes” in that natural world. Thus the structure of the natural, physical world will continue to be determined by the constant operation of physical principles, which have been in existence since the creation of the natural world. These principles and processes are organic or inorganic, physical, chemical, or biological. All of the physical processes which underlay whatever terminology humans may currently use remained constant. The “physics” of an era may change, but the reality to which it is meant to refer stays the same. This constancy of physical structure is the second core assumption for modern New Church scholarship.

With this being said, what is the essential problematic for New Church intellectuals in our time? I believe that it consists of providing an account (or a set of interrelated accounts) of the vast changes in social structures and scientific accomplishment which have occurred between the mid-18th century and today.

The issue is quite straightforward: if the social and natural world remained basically unchanged after the last judgment, what could have been the intervening variable that helps us to account for the vast changes which have become visible since that time?

The starting point for that analysis, and the clue to its eventual resolution, is given to us in the Writings. The following passage addresses this vital point:

- 10) But as for the state of the church, this it is which will be dissimilar hereafter; it will be similar indeed as to the external appearance, but dissimilar as to the internal. As to the external appearance divided churches will exist as heretofore, their doctrines will be taught as heretofore; and the same religions as now exist will exist among the Gentiles. But henceforth the man of the church will be in a more free state of thinking on matters of faith, thus on the spiritual things which relate to heaven, because spiritual freedom has been restored to him. For all things in the heavens and in the hells are now reduced into order, and all thought concerning Divine things and against the Divine inflows from thence; from the heavens all thought which is in harmony with Divine things, and from the hells all which is against Divine things. (*The Last Judgment, Continued # 73*).

Thus the great change on earth will be on the internal life of the church.

The externals will remain the same. How will these changes be affected? They will result because the man of the church “will be in a more free state of thinking on matters of faith.” Therefore the extraordinary changes we have witnessed on earth are derivatively related to the fact that “spiritual freedom has been restored to man; and by it interior Divine truths have been revealed; for man in his former state would not have understood them, and he who would have understood them, would have profaned them...man has freedom by means of that equilibrium between heaven and hell...man cannot be reformed except in freedom.” (*The Last Judgment, Continued #73*). It is important to realize that in the years just prior to

the last judgment the Lord had prepared a vessel where his renewed influx could be received. This was the *Arcana Coelestia* whose eight volumes were published between 1749 and 1756. It was immediately after the publication of the last volume in 1756 that the Lord began the series of events which brought about the last judgment. As a result, the new truths revealed by the Lord could be contained in a new revelation, which facilitated their understanding while reducing the probability of their being profaned. The “more free state of thinking on matters of faith” and the text of the new revelation were thus linked in a dynamic and life-giving way.

It is clear that the last judgment intensified the communication from heaven to the human race and that this increased the power of the human mind to understand spiritual things. What is also true is that the capacity of the mind to comprehend even natural things is increased as a man absorbs spiritual influx and orders his intellectual life to take that influx into account. It is not necessary for every human mind to be so ordered in order for there to be an increased intellectual energy. The collective impact of this influx on secular matters would be mediated through the differential receptivity of various members of a given community. This is an extremely complex process which will be impacted by the various feedback mechanisms by which new information is stored and made available to others. But the intimate relationship between the spiritual and natural aspects of the human mind has been made very clear by the Writings in the following passage:

- 11) Our rational faculty is like a garden or flowerbed, like newly tilled land. Our memory is the soil, information and experiential learning are the

seeds, while heaven's light and warmth make them productive. There is no germination without these latter. So there is no germination in us unless heaven's light, which is divine truth, and heaven's warmth, which is divine love, are let in. They are the only source of rationality.

Angels are profoundly grieved that scholars for the most part keep attributing everything to nature and therefore close the deeper levels of their minds so that they can see no trace of truth from the light of truth, the light of heaven. (*Heaven and Hell*, #464).

It is worth pointing out at this point that the source of human rationality is also present in the lowest hells. The light of Divine Truth and Love penetrates even there. This is the only reason why its inhabitants retain the faculties of speech and symbolic thought. Rationality is a definitional property of the human. It can never be removed. It persists to eternity in spite of the perversions it has brought about. Rationality itself cannot guarantee that human freedom will be used for good.

The intimate connection between the mind, properly so called, and the Divine life is so profound that it could be said that the natural world without mind is a "void." This would be true even in the presence of life processes at the non-human level. Human rationality functions as the creative energy which transforms the matter of nature into new and constantly changing objects. Mind has intentions, both material and moral, and the world is both created and destroyed by them. To provide illustration of this point at the purely intellectual level; imagine that you are sitting in an ordinary room in someone's home. The objects surrounding you are typical of what you would expect in such a setting. Now conduct a mental experiment. Pose yourself the following challenge: How many questions could be answered by using only the objects available to you in that room? I am not limiting you to only "important" questions but including even the

silly ones. The questions would include those concerning spatial relations, temporal relations, color, texture, use and temperature. The possibilities are virtually endless. This is precisely my point. Someone could spend his entire natural life working on this challenge and die before he had exhausted it. Imagine now the world of human action. This dynamic intentionality involves action against and for objects and other actors. The result is both complex and transformative. A whole new dimension of reality emerges. This is the reality of the human life world. This is the reality in which our spiritual choices are made and carried out.

Thus, when the last judgment occurred in the spiritual world it transformed not just the internals of the Church but it transformed the human mind as well. Heaven's light, which is Divine Truth and Divine Love flowed into the human mind and strengthened the only source of rationality. The power of this strengthened rationality increased the energy available to the human mind in both spiritual and natural activities. The Writings provide a clear description of how this process was carried out:

- 12) Before the last judgment was effected upon them, much of the communication between heaven and the world, thus between the Lord and the church, was intercepted. All enlightenment comes to man from the Lord through heaven, and it enters by an internal way. So long as there were congregations of such spirits between heaven and the world, or between the Lord and the church, man could not be enlightened. It was as when a sunbeam is cut off by a black interposing cloud, or as when the sun is eclipsed, and its light arrested, by the interjacent moon. Wherefore, if anything had been then revealed by the Lord, either it would not have been understood, or if received, still it would afterwards have been suffocated. Now since all these interposing congregations were dissipated by the last judgment, it is plain, that the communication between heaven and the world, or between the Lord and the church, has been restored. (*The Last Judgment, Continued #11*).

The last judgment in the spiritual world consisted of removing the congregations of evil spirits, which had interposed themselves between heaven and the world. This is compared to the removal of a “dark interposing cloud” which blocks the sunbeam from reaching the earth. The energy and warmth contained in that sunbeam are essential to all natural life. They are also, by definition, essential to the life of the human mind as it struggles to achieve its goals in the world. The interposing congregations in the spiritual world were the result of the growing externality of the Christian Church on earth: it had transformed itself into Babylon, placing political and economic power as the real goals of its activities. This approached profanation because it used the doctrines and ceremonials of the church to dominate its worshipers and secure their obedience. This church was truly dead. It no longer really believed what it preached and was unable to encourage an internal spirituality with those who passed from it into the spiritual world.

The last judgment corrected this situation, and the communication between heaven and the world has been restored. A further question presents itself however. If the Christian Church has ended but the Lord requires mediation between Himself and the human race so that its freedom may be maintained, what earthly vehicle would be available to contain the Lord’s restored communication with the world? Swedenborg addresses this vital question in the following passage:

- 13) Hence it is, that after the last judgment has been accomplished, and not before, revelations were made for the New Church. For since

communication has been restored by the last judgment, man can be enlightened and reformed; that is, can understand the Divine Truth of the Word, receive it when understood, and retain it when received, for the interposing obstacles are removed. (*The Last Judgment, Continued* #12).

The specific vehicle suggested above is the *Arcana Coelestia*. As was mentioned earlier in this essay, the eighth and last volume of the *Arcana*, was published in 1756 just prior to the last judgment. As a result, there existed on the earth a receptacle for the new revelation. There were few who were aware of the *Arcana* when it was published and even fewer who perceived a new revelation. However, the text existed to provide the ground for the eventual enlightenment and reformation of the human race. Swedenborg would produce additional volumes of the Writings throughout the remainder of his life. All of these would serve the purpose of providing a visible expression of the Second Coming of the Lord. Given the intimate connection between the spiritual and the natural world, all of these events had to be in place on earth prior to the Lord's founding of the New Church in the spiritual world in 1770. This was the "crown of all the churches" and would serve as the specific location of Divine Doctrine in the world. Unless this specific church existed on the earth, no human being could be saved.

While the history of the New Church itself is beyond the scope of this essay, it is clear that this Church will see a time of increased intellectual energy for the human race. This is because the light of heaven strengthens the faculty of rationality itself. This capacity has been given to man, in freedom, to aid in understanding the new revelation. "Nunc licet" is the motto of the new Church.

It is of profound importance to remember however, that the moral choices between good and evil remain as they were. The increased power of the mind permits the doing of good or evil on a truly massive scale. Man's freedom is a constant, his evil loves remain, and his increased capacities are no guarantee that he will choose to do good with them. This is the ironic fate of our times. It is no wonder then that this Church is the "crown of the churches." For only this Church has the power to restrict and direct the vast natural forces which the mind can now summon to its purposes. The recent, tragic history of the 20th century is a brutal reminder that this struggle is a constant one. It will never disappear. It is our calling to be continually and intentionally engaged in it.

As a concluding point to this section of the paper it must be pointed out that this is all part of the Lord's Providence. The natural world of struggle and anxiety is not the entire story. The purpose of creation is a heaven from the human race. The Lord does everything possible to help us to salvation. There is a brilliant light at the end of this night. In fact, we carry this light within us even as we struggle against evil in this world. This is the great consolation of the Church. It protects us from despair. It encourages us to explore the deeper levels of our minds where the truth of heaven lives. Acknowledgement of this deeper level separates us from both nature and natural man. It also guarantees triumph against both.

The Writings speak forcefully of this spiritual optimism in the following passage. They also invoke the reality of the Lord's resurrection as a comforting parallel to the current state of the Church:

- 14) The state of the world and of the church before the last judgment was like evening and night, but after it, like morning and day. When the light of truth does not appear, and truth is not received, there is a state of the church in the world like evening and night; that there was a state before the last judgment, may appear from what is said above; but when the light of truth appears, and the truth is received, there is a state of the church in the world like morning and day. Hence it is that these two states of the church are called “evening and morning” and “night and day,” in the Word. Since such things are meant by “evening and night,” therefore the Lord, in order to fulfill the Word, also was buried in the evening and afterward rose again in the morning. (*The Last Judgment, Continued* #13).

This spiritual consolation is an appropriate way to end the first section of this paper. Our faith is in the Lord and our strength is in Him also.

The second section presents an analytical description of the state of the various Christian Churches in 18th century Europe. Particular attention is paid to those churches which were most integrated into the political and intellectual power structures of the time. It is written from a New Church perspective and thus presents a somewhat different assessment of the Enlightenment than that which appears in conventional histories.

It has two principal aims. The first is to provide the specific historical background for what Swedenborg terms the Babylonish Churches. These are at the last stage of the Christian Church when the love of the world and the desire for social power emptied the church of its spiritual life. These churches had become so decayed that they used worship and doctrine as means to obtain political dominion. The second aim is to provide an example of a history informed by New Church categories and understanding. The background of this historical period is seen in spiritual terms. Its struggles involved the definition of the essential purposes of spiritual institutions. A New Church scholar may even see

parallels between the end of the Israelitish Church and the 18th century Christian Church. This second aim is to provide an example only; it does not claim to be the definitive account of 18th century Christianity. In fact, it hopes to be the first of many such attempts. If it accomplishes its aim of stimulating New Church scholarship in this and similar areas, it will have accomplished its goal.

Part II - The State of Religious Organizations in 18th Century Europe

The 18th century, Swedenborg's century, was a climactic time for Christianity. The mantle of the established churches was falling. During the first half of the century, the established churches, the Catholic, the Lutheran, and the Anglican, all in the grip of orthodoxy and formalism, had forged a seemingly innocent alliance with the forces of the Enlightenment. During this same period these state-supported churches had fastened their attention on enthusiastic movements as the potential source of their own disruption. Quakers, Pietists, Moravians, Methodists, Jansenists, and Quietists, to name some of the more prominent minority religious movements, were all carefully watched and constantly decried by the established churches, and in some cases, they were even politically suppressed. By 1750, none of these movements had managed to capture the mantle of established Christianity for itself, nor had they been able to independently become the dominant spirit governing the hearts and minds of Western men. On the contrary, by mid-century "enthusiasm" was either spent or it had settled itself into a pattern of accommodation with the world; secular naturalism had begun to carry the day, and rationalism was in the process of picking up the mantle from the churches. For anyone who cared, the Second Coming and the millennium seemed farther away than ever. "Walpole sums up the age neatly: 'there were no religious combustibles in the temper of the times, Popery and Protestantism seemed at a stand. The modes of Christianity were exhausted and could not furnish novelty enough to fix attention.'" ¹

It is within this social-historical context that Swedenborg made the claim to be the revelator of a rational Christianity. It would appear that Swedenborg shared with the rationalists the need to confirm truth in this world, and like them he heeded the call for a clear and logical mind. While, like the enthusiasts, Swedenborg seemed to share a knowledge of the inner way and the desire for piety of heart. Thus, in his claim of two foundations of truth, Swedenborg was neither wholly rationalistic, nor wholly enthusiastic, but in his claim he shared the vision of the “third force,” seeking a united Christianity that was both true and good, rational and moral, wise and loving.² Unlike Locke, who in the tradition of the “third force” in Christianity, had constructed a reasonable Christianity by means of his own rationality, Swedenborg claimed that his rational religion came from God, as he was led to explore the spiritual world by means of the Word, and that being given of God, it was therefore, a “really new religion” fulfilling the pun Voltaire had made concerning Mr. Locke’s *Reasonable Christianity*.³ For according to the Writings of Swedenborg, the true rationality of Christianity could be actually and firmly established only if it was established by the Infinite Author and Redeemer Himself in a new and deeper revelation. It could never be established through the finite reason of any man.

Swedenborg’s claim exceeded that of either the rationalists or the enthusiasts, and yet it shares an inspiration with both. What follows here is an overview of the intimate relationship between the established churches and the forces of rationalism. This relationship carried mortal dangers for the churches since it undermined the primacy of Revelation for them. Yet they seem to have

almost totally ignored the threat of rationalism, welcoming reason into their midst, while they grossly overestimated the potency of the minority enthusiastic religious movements. A description of these relationships should be of assistance in making an assessment of the revelation given through Swedenborg, and the subsequent difficulties of the institutionalization of that revelation into the form of a church.

The Philosophy of the Enlightenment – An Overview

The enlightenment, the preeminent intellectual movement of the 18th century, was cosmopolitan in outlook and international in scope. England, France, and Germany all produced men who made major contributions to the movement.⁴ The thrust of the Enlightenment was analytical and critical, with the aim of destroying “the wild beasts of superstition” in order to secure for mankind the freedom to grasp reality.⁵ Traditionally, the enlightenment is said to have begun in 1689 with the English Revolution, and to have ended in 1789 with the outbreak of the French Revolution.⁶ The Enlightenment was essentially the work of three closely connected generations of Europeans.

The first of these, dominated by Montesquieu and the long-lived Voltaire, long set the tone for the other two; it grew up while the writings of Locke and Newton were still fresh and controversial, and did most of its great work before 1750. The second generation reached maturity in mid-century: Franklin born 1706, Buffon in 1707, Hume in 1711, Rousseau in 1712, Diderot in 1713, Condillac in 1714, Helvetius in 1715 and d’Alembert in 1717. It was these writers who fused fashionable anti-clericalism and scientific speculations of the first generation into a coherent modern view of the world. The third generation of Holbach and Beccaria, of Lessing and Jefferson, of Wieland, Kant and Turgot was close enough to the second, and the survivors of the first, to be applauded, encouraged and irritated by both.⁷

These secular men of letters were known to be "facile, articulate, doctrinaire and sociable," and they have come to be identified by the French term "philosophe."⁸ These urbane men were not merely detached observers of a civilization undergoing change; these were men with a vision of the future and who relished their role as midwives in the birth of a new age. This vision of a new age seen by the philosophes was nothing less than the possibility of establishing, in the West at least, a paradise on earth.

The proof of this possibility was all around them. Europe in the 18th century was experiencing a level of prosperity previously unimagined. The philosophes were convinced that the source of this wealth sprang from recent scientific discoveries and economic and geographic expansion, specifically through colonialism, capital accumulation, and the exploitation of nature in the hitherto remote corners of the earth. Furthermore, these men were convinced that all of these activities were unquestionably the products of human enterprise rather than blessings dispensed from God in heaven.

The potential threat to their vision of an earthly paradise was Jesus Christ, the so-called guarantor of heavenly paradise. This threat did not call men to disobey their Creator; rather He whispered to men a spiritual message, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His Righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."⁹ Thus, the essential concern of the Enlightenment was that the realization of man's earthly paradise would be endangered as long as men continued to seek salvation through Christianity. The "other worldly" concern of Christianity would undermine the reorganization of human action which they believed was essential for human happiness. It follows therefore, that "the vital question at issue in the 18th century was, 'shall Europe be Christian or not?'"¹⁰ To the professors of the Enlightenment, the philosophes, it appeared

that the successful resolution of this issue and the future happiness of mankind required that Christianity be denied in Europe. In their eyes, if the authority of Christianity was maintained, or more firmly established, European civilization could look forward to the continuation of persecution, unspeakable horror, brutality, and irrationality. If, on the other hand, the authority of Christianity could be illegitimated in the eyes of most rational and inquiring men (and that was their self-appointed task and mission) then liberty, freedom, and prosperity would follow as a natural consequence.

From the point of view of the philosophes, Christian theology and philosophy was the intellectual and spiritual husk surrounding the seed of man; they must be cast off and rejected before man's real nature could be clearly and universally recognized, and then given room to grow. Although the philosophes disagreed with each other on countless issues, they were of one mind in their animus toward Christianity, and they were united in their singular profession that man was autonomous and self-sufficient. In pronouncing man's true nature to be autonomous and self-sufficient, the philosophes acclaimed the irrelevance of Christianity. To the philosophes, the natural eye encompassed all of man; this appearance was the reality. The truth that they were endorsing was simply that man can be adequately understood, and can sufficiently understand himself, in nature without requiring recourse to either spiritual or supernatural explanations. To explain man by means of the spiritual and the supernatural, Christianity was not only redundant to the philosophes, but rendered man dependent upon that other reality, and defines him as an insufficient master in his own world. Even though the Christian point of view purported to recognize man's exalted possibilities by highlighting his spiritual nature, such a conception of man was increasingly being viewed as an insult to man's enormous natural capabilities which in the late seventeenth and early 18th centuries were becoming more

visible, particularly in the areas of science and economy. Furthermore, the philosophes judged the Christian conception of man as even more suspect because it did not seem to grant to man the dignity which even Christians would accord to the most insignificant of natural creatures.

In the Christian vision, the key to man's nature was located beyond him in the spiritual realm. However, the spiritual realm was thought to be beyond reason, and therefore lay shrouded in mystery. Faith constituted the only means through which man could have access to the spiritual, and thus, knowledge of the key.¹¹ Within the Christian conception of man, the human potential for power was vast, but its possession was unpredictable. Because in order to possess that power, man must first acknowledge his dependence upon the spiritual realm as the source of his power, and then he must accept the fact that all knowledge of that realm comes from the gift of faith. Within this framework, all man's power and all his self-knowledge is derivative.

Man, so conceived, is nothing of himself, yet with the gift of faith he is everything. Faith however, apparently cannot be bought with reason, man's distinct innate possession, and it is therefore neither consistently available, nor ultimately controllable.

With the philosophes came the popularization of the opposite point of view, grounded in their experience of themselves. The key to man's nature was now located within himself and in his natural environment. The philosophes in acknowledging that the key to man's nature lay in nature itself, willingly accepted the logic of the limitations thus placed on man. To them, man was regarded as the best of nature, neither more, nor less; however, this equivalence with nature did not diminish man's stature in their eyes, and perhaps, if anything, they felt that man's image was thereby enhanced. For

it would appear that, to the philosophes, acknowledging the natural limits of man was desirable, if with that recognition came real power to control within those limits.

The philosophes felt that their position regarding the nature of man was both more accurate and aesthetically more pleasing than the Christian point of view. It was more accurate, because in limiting causation in the natural world to natural causes, events could not only still be understood, but apparently they could be understood more simply and more completely. Thus, logical elegance was achieved without in any way seeming to reduce man's explanatory power. This elegance, combined with the autonomy it granted man, made their position very pleasing aesthetically.

The philosophes, by rejecting the broader sphere of action of the Christian perspective which demanded man's dependence, acknowledged only the natural world as really relevant to man's action, thereby according to man his independence. In restricting the relevant sphere of man's action to the natural, man could conceivably know all the laws governing his action, and therefore he could predict the consequence of his choices. Access to all the necessary information gave him control. With control came power, independence, and self-sufficiency. Man could now make himself, and could at last establish an earthly paradise.

This, in brief, summarizes the position of the philosophes, and it thus establishes the emerging intellectual tenor of the times in which Swedenborg lived and wrote. At that time however, on the surface at least, the dominant intellectual understanding of reality was still supplied by the various state-dominated Christian churches. It is to this Christian understanding of reality that both the philosophes and Swedenborg provide alternative, and opposing interpretations. In order to accurately assess Swedenborg and

his theological contribution to the West, it is important to realize that Swedenborg and the philosophes shared a common evaluation of the condition of 18th century Christianity. Their mutual perception was that Christianity was dead. They differed completely in their explanations regarding the cause of this lifeless condition, and they retained and revitalized for their own systems radically different elements of the Christian experience. While Swedenborg acknowledged his debt to Christianity, the philosophes naively assumed that they had none. It is therefore important to investigate the immediate sources of the philosophes Weltanschauung, in order to understand more accurately their relationship to their Christian heritage and in order to investigate the possibility that the philosophes were not at all illegitimate children of the church but that perhaps they were its most legitimate and forthright offspring.

The Status of Christianity

To suggest that the philosophes were the legitimate heirs of 18th century pluralistic Christianity implies that their understanding concerning the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of the universe was not spawned by some unholy alliance between the scientific method and ancient pagan philosophy as some have suggested. But that rather it was a logical extension of the inner religious ambiguity lodged within the heart and mind of the officials of the state-supported institutional churches.

In the 18th century, there was no one image of God shared by all Christians. This fact was increasingly obvious to the cosmopolitan elements of Europe. Many gods were worshiped, all in the name of Christianity. Although many men still believed in an all powerful God who knew the least particulars of all human life, and who could be petitioned to act on man's behalf through prayer, such a view did not appear to be the

dominant view of the well-educated and the well-to-do. To these men, God was the Creator who had set the universe in motion and who had organized it to run according to natural laws, which could be discovered through man's reason. According to this view God could not be bothered by the particulars of each human life, having directed all his effort toward the winding up of the universal clock; thus man was essentially on his own in the living out of his life, aided by the divine only through the gift of reason. In still another perspective, man had been created by God solely for His glory, and therefore the fate of man was up to the good pleasure of God. Within this perspective, no action on the part of man brought salvation either in this world or in the next. For yet others, they saw that God had implanted a divine spark in all men, and His will could be known through inner contemplation, and thus each man was, himself, somehow divine. The relationship of Christ to all these different conceptions of God was as varied as the views themselves. For some men, Christ was the mediator between God and man; for others, he was a divine teacher, a great man, or merely a mythic figure. This bewildering array of competing images of both God and Christ in the 18th century seemed to lead rational men to conclude that, in essence, God was unknowable, at least with any certainty. It would also appear that for the men of that age, only *certain* knowledge could be trusted as a credible guide to life. Therefore, this intellectual ambiguity regarding God's nature led many men, including churchmen, to quietly disregard Him and His Word as the ethical guide to their affairs, and instead, they sought an apparently surer path in human prudence and human reason.

Although this approach to everyday life had been practiced by the power brokers of Europe, whether sacred or secular, for some time before the 18th century, this

orientation to practical action had not been openly articulated. Thus, when the philosophes finally spoke in public, they spoke what had long been both whispered and practiced by the powerful in private. And when the philosophes exemplified in their life the belief that man indeed is his own maker, they were in fact imitating the actions of churchmen (among others), having seen through the more pious pronouncements uttered by such men. When viewed in such a light, both the accommodations and the tensions between the philosophes and the socially legitimating structures of the church and state comes more clearly into focus. The accommodations resulted from their shared understanding, while the tensions were the product of a difference of opinion over just how far such an understanding should be allowed to spread. Thus it would appear that in the 18th century, a non-Christian point of view was socially acceptable as long as it was reasonably contained. The sin of the philosophes, therefore, from the point of view of those in authority, was not their anti-Christian rhetoric as such, but it was the fact that they broadcast it so loudly. Thus, it could be said that the central question as to whether Europe should be Christian or not was not limited to her laymen and her secular institutions, but was a question to be addressed to many of her churchmen and her religious institutions as well.

Lay Impiety

Indifference to Christian doctrine and values was not confined solely to the social elites of the 18th century. Observation of, and commentary concerning, lay impiety and indifference toward Christianity abounded at this time. In England,

Bishop Butler sardonically reported, “It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry; but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly, they treat it as if in the present age this were an agreed

point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world.”¹²

Swift also observed that, “ ‘hardly one in an hundred among our people of quality or gentry appears to act by any principle of religion’ and the vulgar, especially in great towns were equally irreligious.”¹³ And Boswell noted that “ ‘It is a strange thing that the Bible is so little read. I dare say there are many people of distinction in London who know nothing about it.’”¹⁴

In 1749, David Hartley expressed essentially the same views of the laity, and also leveled serious criticism against the clergy in his work entitled *Observations on Man*:

There are six things, he wrote, that threaten ruin and dissolution to the states of Christendom: the lewdness of the upper classes, the contempt of authority in the inferior ranks, the corruption of the younger generation through bad education, the prevalence of self-interest among the governors, the great worldly-mindedness of the clergy, and the gross neglects in the discharge of their proper functions, and (in fact Hartley had listed this first) the great growth of atheism and infidelity, particularly amongst the governing part of these states.¹⁵

In France, the situation was no better: “Cardinal Bernis recorded in his *Memoirs* that by 1720 it ‘was no longer considered well bred to believe in the gospels.’”¹⁶ Among the provincials, houses were no longer decorated for the “fete-Dieu,” laws had to be decreed against taverns staying open during mass, and even during the celebration of the mass itself, “churches were places of assignation and irreverent behavior.”¹⁷ These observations suggest that, in the Roman Church, even its pageantry no longer sustained mass appeal. In Germany,

Goethe record[ed] the decline in church attendance, the failure of Protestantism to hold the imagination even of those eager to believe. The religion he got in church in his youth, he recall[ed], was “merely a sort of

morality" whose teaching "could appeal neither to the soul nor to the heart."¹⁸

Clerical Impiety

Among the clergy, the vanguard of Christianity, the situation could only be regarded as much worse. Their crisis in religious confidence appears to have been widespread. It affected the clergy of both the established churches and the minority and dissenting churches. It affected Catholics and Protestants alike, throughout all of Western Europe. The general character of this crisis is perhaps best illustrated by the story surrounding the publication of d'Alembert's essay *Genève* for the *Encyclopédie*.

In August 1756 d'Alembert came to Les Delices to see Voltaire. It was a true eighteenth century visit long and leisurely, enriched by sociability: it mixed work and urbane talk in about equal doses. At the time Voltaire was on excellent terms with the Geneva pastorate, the tight oligarchy of Calvinists pastors, bankers, and physicians who dominated the little republic—and he invited leading citizens to meet his distinguished guests. They came, ate Voltaire's fine food, and talked to his agreeable, celebrated visitor. D'Alembert turned out to be a good listener, apparently interested in Geneva, and so the patricians told him much. A year later, when d'Alembert published his article on Geneva in the *Encyclopédie* they regretted their candor.¹⁹

What d'Alembert wrote concerning the Genève pastorate was that,

"some of them no longer believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ" In fact some pastors did not condone Calvin's burning of Servetus and interpreted the Bible in purely rationalist fashion. "In a word . . . some Genevan pastors have no religion other than a perfect Socinianism."²⁰

What this story illustrates is the fact that in private some churchmen at least appeared to have acknowledged fraternity with the philosophes. Although the Genevan pastors publicly denounced the epithet of Socinian, Voltaire, who, as an intimate of these men, was in a position to know, continued to maintain that d'Alembert had spoken the

truth -- and the truth appears not to have been limited to the Calvinists in Geneva, but was the truth of the age.

In England, Hume observed a similar situation, where the modern wing of the Scottish clergy preached an enlightened theology comparable to that of their Genevan brethren. "They taught . . . that whoever could please God must resemble Him in goodness and benevolence, and those who had it not must affect it by politeness and good manners."²¹ In an essay written in 1742, Hume claimed that

"Most people, in this island, have divested themselves of all superstitious reverence to names and authority. The clergy have entirely lost their credit; their pretensions and doctrines have been ridiculed; and even religion, can scarcely support itself in the world."²²

It would appear, therefore, that while in Geneva it was necessary for a philosopher to unmask the clergy, in England the clergy themselves seemed equal to the task; and although it may have been true that religion in the 18th century could not support itself, this was of little practical consequence, because the state, for its own reasons, had long since relieved the church of the necessity. This was as true for the rest of Europe as it was for Britain.

State Churches

In France, the monarchy had established its virtual control of the church as early as 1512 by means of a papal concordant, signed during the Fifth Lateran Council.²³ In Germany, a similar degree of control of the churches by the state did not emerge until 1648, when the signing of the treaty of Westphalia established the rule of "cuius regio eius religio." This doctrine, the result of the brutality of the Thirty Years War, means

literally “whoever rules, his religion rules also.” After 1648 the Germans decided that religious questions were essentially political questions to be resolved by political means. In England, even though the crown had gained control of the church in the 16th century, when Henry the VIII broke with Rome, complete subordination of the church to the state occurred only after the Restoration in 1660.

England-The Anglican Church

The effect of this state of affairs upon the clergy in particular, and the state of Christianity in general, is not hard to imagine, nor difficult to document. Church employment, particularly in England and France, was sought increasingly by men for whom the attainment of concrete worldly goods far exceeded their spiritual aspirations, and, generally speaking, such men would advance in their employment as long as the original relationship between these priorities was maintained. Both the church and the state found the employment of such men an asset. For the church, seeking social acceptability and political advantage, such men could be useful in the attempt by the church to deal with the forces of the state on its own terms. For the state, seeking peaceful national hegemony, such worldly men could be bought with the type of currency they had to offer. Walpole's use of "translation" to ensure the twenty-four Episcopal votes in the House of Lords is illustrative. This is how the system worked:

A promising cleric, usually a complaisant and articulate orator, would be first appointed to one of the least desirable bishoprics -- to Bristol (worth £450 a year) or Liandaff (worth £500). Then, if he behaved himself by voting right and talking well, he could move up to middle-range sees like Lincoln or Exeter, which carried between £1,000 and £1,400 a year. Finally he might aspire to one of the sees endowed with great prestige, munificent funds, and lucrative patronage: the archbishop of Canterbury

drew £1,000 and the bishop of Durham £5,000 a year, to say nothing of the clerical sinecures in their gift.²⁴

The brilliance of this system can be seen in the career of Benjamin Hoadly:

Hoadly was a fervent Whig who as a young man attained some notoriety as a liberal pamphleteer; he was a disciple of Locke who fitted smoothly into the Hanoverian regime. By 1715, a year after the accession of George I, Hoadly was bishop of Bangor, a Welsh see he never visited ... in 1721, after a lengthy and not very edifying controversy over the status of the sacraments and the powers of the clergy, he was made bishop of Hereford. As Whiggish as Walpole, more Latitudinarian than Tillotson, he could be stopped by nothing, not even the charge of deism; he was made bishop of Salisbury in 1723, and in 1734, at the height of Walpole's power, he was appointed bishop of Winchester, which brought him £5,000 ... proof that a man of liberal sentiments and servile temper might go far in the 18th century Church of England.²⁵

Although Hoadly's career is an extreme example and was criticized by other high churchmen of the day, nonetheless Samuel Johnson could still complain in 1775 "that no one can now be made a bishop for his learning and piety; his only chance for promotion is his being connected with somebody who has Parliamentary interest."²⁶

Although Johnson's complaint tells us nothing about the typical country curate found in the British Isles at that time, the *Spectator* does.

When Sir Roger de Coverly ... looked for a parson he asked for "a clergyman rather of plain sense than much learning, of a good aspect, a clear voice, a social temper and, if possible, a man that understood a little of backgammon." He was successful: the parson he found was beloved by his parishioners, kept peace in the village, and was a good scholar, though he does not show it.²⁷

And while one can assume that there were some spiritually minded clergy in England at this time,

the Englishman's need for peace after a century of upheaval and the revulsion of the educated and respectable men against religious enthusiasm coalesced with the growing authority of naturalism to produce a torpid church and a tepid religion. 'The Church of England,' one good

Anglican said, was an admirable institution because 'it is fit for the people, subject to the laws, and most suitable to the clergy. For here, without care, without thought, and without trouble, honour and ease are enjoyed at once, which is a state that most men wish for.'²⁸

This picture of the clergy totally at home in the world, living with honor and ease, without natural or spiritual care, is a portrait of a church at peace, whose battle has been won. It is a picture of shepherds at rest, knowing that no more wolves roam the land. It brings to mind fishermen who can daily without danger reap the sea. From this description of the state of the church by a good Anglican, it would appear that for the Anglican clergy, at least, there was no need to call upon the analytical and critical skills of the philosophes to slay the "wild beasts," because for them the "beasts" were long dead and paradise had already been found.

France—the Catholic Church

In 18th century France, the wealth of the church, and therefore one would suppose the self-satisfaction of the clerical hierarchy, surpassed even that of the Anglican establishment. Although the church was not as rich as many observers, including the philosophes, thought, nonetheless, the church owned approximately one tenth of the land in France and possessed the commensurate political power.²⁹

It was in law the first estate, free from taxation and servile obligations, and it successfully resisted practically all attempts to curtail its privileges: In 1750 and 1751 the hierarchy induced Louis XV to withdraw the vingtieme, a 5 percent tax on its income, which it refused to pay on political as much as on financial grounds.³⁰

The differentials in income between the church hierarchy and an ordinary priest, "bad enough in England were near ten times worse in France ranging from the statutory

300 livres minimum for a priest up to 400,000 for leading bishops, a ratio of 1:1300.

Virtually all the bishops were nobles and most were non-resident."³¹

The arrogance of the church regarding finances was equaled by the ignorance of the clergy concerning the content of their Christian heritage, and by the impious pursuit of fashionability on the part of the higher clergy. "By the eighteenth century the key to the symbolic language of medieval Christendom "had been lost and there was a universal revulsion toward all things Gothic."³² Driven by the desire to be current and modern, church tableaux were white washed, tombs were effaced, and tapestries were destroyed.

Even the Benedictines of St. Maur, steeped in medieval manuscripts and historians to the bone, were unable to read the language of cathedral sculpture. The learned Montfaucon faced such sculpture with more piety than, say, his contemporary Montesquieu, but with no more comprehension: to him they were statues of French Kings and portrayals of historical events. And it was priests like those who taught the young philosophes in the schools.³³

Not only did these priests, through their ignorance, inadvertently teach them disdain for the medieval heritage of the church, but they (particularly if they were Jesuits) encouraged in them an affection for new ideas, natural science, arts, and letters.³⁴ The Jesuits, until their dissolution in France in 1764 by royal decree, were at the forefront of the modernizing forces within the church. They were "vigorous and accomplished classicists, excellent rhetoricians, they supported the revival of ancient classics and propagated the new evolution in their schools, their journals and their polemics." Their book-review journal, the *Journal de Trevous*, "was conspicuous for its openness to new ideas and its objectivity."³⁵ However, they were not alone in the move to modernize and temporize the church in France.

Sermons and educational tracts continued to treat the traditional subjects, but they treated them in a new way, almost as if a philosophe were looking over their author's shoulder. The old simple stark faith was being replaced by a gentler version, appropriate to a public informed about scientific discoveries and striving for bourgeois comforts. The very props of religious emotion were weakened in the widespread appeal to reason and reasonableness.³⁶

In this atmosphere, sermons on death and hell gave way to the virtues of a good Christian life. The image of God, the stern and indifferent absolute monarch, was replaced by an image more suited to the bourgeois mentality. He was now a fair-minded businessman who saved those who kept their contracts. Under these circumstances, concepts like original sin and the fall of man could no longer find a market.³⁷ In the eighteenth century, place hunting became the lot of the French cleric. Survival was dependent upon one's marketability, and therefore the times dictated a form of natural Christianity (a contradiction in terms) as the religious commodity most likely to sell. Deism was common among the higher clerics as well as among the enlightened, but here the line was drawn. "Louis XV, no prude, refused Paris to Cardinal Lomenie de Brienne: 'No, the archbishop of Paris must at least believe in God.'"³⁸ It was possible at this time to still find religious enthusiasm in France, but in general, it was of the most vulgar superstitious sort. For example, when a new tomb was discovered in a cathedral in 1757, "Word got around that a new saint had been discovered, and a frenzied mob tore the remains to pieces making off with bits of bones and rags."³⁹ The church also, for all its accommodation to the spirit of the age, was still capable of unleashing all its rage and fury over what would appear to be a trifling assault on its sensibility, as in the la Barre affair.

In 1766 there was outrage, when the young Chevalier de la Barre failed to doff his hat in respect while a Capuchin religious process passed through the streets of Abbeville. (It was raining.) He was charged and convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to "the torture ordinary and extraordinary," his hands to be cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and to be burned alive.⁴⁰

The sentence was executed and la Barre was put to death. This attempt on the part of the church to reassert its moral authority, through the public punishment of a trivial act of impiety, after so long an association itself with the fashionable impiety of the times, was hypocritical to say the least. When men, such as Chamfort, could observe that "a vicar-general may permit himself a smile when religion is attacked, a bishop may laugh outright, and a cardinal may give his cordial consent," the attempt to manipulate public sentiment regarding the ostensible virtue of the church was ill-conceived, callous, and, cruel.⁴¹ The irony was not lost on the critics of the church, and few, enlightened or not, were appropriately deceived. The church, undaunted, continued its public policy of power without piety until the revolution in 1789 swept its pretensions away. The philosophes role in all of this, unlike in England, where their task had largely been accomplished by the clergy itself, was to call the church to an honest account of its ideology, to admit on the public level the fellowship it shared with the philosophes in the salon. The French church, blinded by its own sullied splendor and political interests, refused; and in wanting it both ways, the church lost it all.

Germany -- the "Landeskirchen"

The religious situation in Germany in the 18th century was complicated by the fact that Germany was not yet a nation. In some ways it could be said that there were as many religious solutions as there were princes. However, throughout Germany, one condition was self-evident: “everywhere, regardless of which free city or principality might be mentioned, whether Catholic, Lutheran, or Calvinist, the state dominated the church. The territorial churches -- "Landeskirchen" – of the German states were more dependent on the secular power than the Anglican church under Walpole, and to say that is to say a great deal.”⁴² The effect of this situation on the clergy was predictable.

Neither political nor theological vigor could persist in such an atmosphere. Lutheran and Calvinist pastors and Catholic priests all preached humble submission to the worldly power and practiced it. Church affairs were under strict and often petty control; sermons were written with an eye to the authorities. Pastors were employed as civil servants, teachers, promoters of patriotic morale, and, as Herder complained in a celebrated outburst, as government spies. Clerical appointments depended on political favor or private patronage. Some posts were for sale, others were auctioned off, but few were desirable: the pay of the clergy was almost invariably small, their social status low, and their life dreary.⁴³

If this servile state of affairs was the condition of the established church in a given area, the condition of the minority church or churches in that same area were, without question, much worse.

Whenever the ruling house was inclined to bigotry, the minorities in its territory were subjected to harassment or outright persecution. In the Palatinate, which was declared to be Roman Catholic by the Peace of Rysvick in 1687, public posts were reserved to Catholics, while Protestants, who made up four fifths of the population, were fined for major or imaginary infractions and compelled to celebrate Catholic holidays.⁴⁴

Although there were exceptions to the rule, this type of intolerance was the

dominant behavioral norm between all forms of Christianity in 18th century Germany, and threatened use of force by neighboring states, not moral scruples, was the primary check on such activities. Thus, it is evident that the peace accords of the 17th century did not end the fratricide in Germany, so much as they encouraged the development of more sophisticated, and therefore, more insidious forms of warfare. This shift in tactics on the part of the various Christian generals led to significant attrition in the armies of the faithful through immigration, indifference, and bewilderment. The very continuation of the war to establish some one true Christian faith encouraged the development of a potentially more powerful army, that of the “enlightened” sons of cultural nationalism.

Toleration, where it was practiced, surprisingly enough, had essentially the same effect. If Frederick of Prussia can be used as an example, toleration was inspired less by Christian precepts than by Christian indifference and calculation. The version of a tolerant state promoted by Frederick, the dedicated disciple of Voltaire, appears to have had profit, not piety, as the motivating principle. The results of these contradictory policies were predictable. Long before the efforts of the philosophes could take their toll, Lessings’ father, a “Pastor Primarius,” saw “godless deism” and that “horrible monster atheism” taking hold. The clergy could offer little to offset this development, having thrown in their lot with the state at the time of the Reformation to ensure their material survival, however meager the rewards subsequently turned out to be.

The great majority of pastors wasted their sermons on parading abstruse learning, interpreting obscure biblical passages, and spinning out etymological quibbles. Anticlericalism was rife among religious men – indeed especially among religious men – indeed especially among them – since they were repelled by what they heard in their churches and tormented by their need of a pure Christianity.⁴⁵

Although Georg Litchetenberg's comment thanking God 'a thousand times' for 'letting him grow up to be an atheist' cannot be taken as the summary of the German situation, it reflects one of the most powerful possibilities contained within it.⁴⁶

The Triumph of the Philosophes

The portrait of the established churches which emerges from this brief review of their status in the 18th century, is a picture of Christian institutions connected in name only to the spiritual vision of Jesus Christ, their founder. It is a picture that bears a remarkable resemblance to the whited sepulchers referred to in the gospels, splendid without and full of dead bones within.⁴⁷ For by the 18th century, either with consent, or through craft and confusion, the words of Christ had been laid to rest by the churches. This burial was demonstrated by observing the manner in which the men, who were dedicated to the perpetuation of his name, conducted their lives. Their actions indicated that his words were of no effect.

The philosophes, although they had their own blind spots, saw the established churches at that time for what they essentially were – privileged institutions which had used Christ's promise of spiritual salvation in order to amass for themselves temporal power and wealth. The philosophes' objection to the churches was not that they had amassed great power and wealth as such; the philosophes themselves had never questioned their own allegiance to the establishment. Rather, their objection was focused on the fact that the churches could only maintain their advantage through sheer intellectual dishonesty. By the 18th century, this dishonesty could no longer be dismissed by claiming either that it was sincere, or simply mistaken. It could only be a matter of

calculation, given the crises of faith experienced by so many churchmen, which were witnessed so frequently by the philosophes. Thus, the philosophes hammered so hard at the churches because the churches continued to claim exclusive privileges in temporal society based upon their special relationship to spiritual forces, which, despite their claims, they continually disregarded. The philosophes were offended by the position of the churches, but not for the traditional reasons. The philosophes, unlike previous critics of the established Christian Church, did not want to call the clergy to renew their faith in the spiritual message of Christ, but rather, quite the opposite. What they wanted, and what they did, was to publicly applaud clergy for having already moved so far from the message of Christianity, and to encourage them to move over farther from it more quickly. It is interesting to note that, throughout their assault on Christianity, the animus of the philosophes was almost entirely focused on the ideology through which the churches maintained their position, rather than on the men who had the power. Essentially, the philosophes had no quarrel with the men themselves. They enjoyed their company, were at home with them, and on occasion they even sensed an intellectual kinship with them. One must assume that on the personal level at least, the feelings of the clergy toward the philosophes were mutual. D'Alembert praised such men in his celebrated article on *Geneve*, when he singled out the Genevan pastors "for the profundity of their learning and the purity of their morals, for their fraternal concord, and advanced religious views."⁴⁸ Voltaire sought solace and hospitality from one such man, the Benedictine Calmet at the abbey of Senones in Alsace in 1754, having been dismissed in disgrace from the court of Frederick the Second of Prussia in the previous year.⁴⁹

Since the philosophes held nothing personally against these men, they failed to understand why their compliments were rarely accepted, or so little appreciated by the clergy. As Voltaire said to Dr. Theodore Tronchin, his physician and friend, who chaired the committee appointed by the Genevan government to refute d'Alembert's observations, "M. d'Alembert has the courage to tell you that you approach this simple and divine cult (Socinianism), and you are cowardly enough to take it in bad part."⁵⁰ It was almost as if the philosophes thought to themselves, concerning the clergy, if only we could work together to get this Christian stupidity behind us, we could all share in the certain rewards of such an enterprise. What the philosophes misjudged in their approach was the effect that the realization of their demands would have on the established structures themselves. Living primarily on the periphery of power, they underestimated the role of ideology in the maintenance of that power. The philosophes little realized that, in stripping the existing structures of their ideological component or source of justification, they would not just rid the world of Christianity as they thought, but they would also expose the unjust and exploitative nature of the entire system as well. However, by the time of the la Barre case, it would appear that some of the clerics, at least, had seemed to grasp what was at stake – full exposure, no doubt, would cause their heads to roll. If, in the meanwhile, other heads, perhaps a trifle more innocent than theirs, were required to prevent such indecent exposure, so be it.

What the clergy failed to realize, at that point, however, was that by the very exercise of their "legitimate power," they had completed the exposé. General recognition of this was only a matter of time. There are many cases in history where a power structure loses the personal allegiance of those who maintain it. Once this happens, the

privileges of power and position are often enough to generate a truly savage defense of the established order. What was unique to 18th century Christianity was the internal destruction of the spiritual life of the Church. This led the churches to become even more dependent on the police powers of the state. This truly was an unholy alliance since it committed the churches to oppose virtually any reforms in the society. They became intensely hostile to challenges to established authority in politics as well as religion. The philosophes were among the many who were horrified by this clerical abuse of power, and they longed for a tolerant society founded upon man's reason, and modeled after the ideals of the pagan classical philosophers. Just as their affections for a "man-centered" world had been nurtured in the worldly atmosphere of the 18th century churches, and were in fact more of a reflection of the affections of those institutions than a reaction to them, so also was their love and authoritative reverence for the classics. The philosophes were not originators, they were critical reflectors of the spirit of the age in which they lived. The philosophes had no faith in the Christian message, because so many of the leaders of the churches had abandoned that faith; they had faith in the power of man, and in the independent power of reason, because most of the men of affairs, both governors and clerics, expressed such a faith. They had respect for the Classical authors because the churches had long used the classics to support men's belief in the Bible. When the existence of these texts had been discovered, the church had quickly moved to co-opt them for Christianity, hoping by such a move to strengthen its hand and thereby its control. For a time, it succeeded. The church had legitimated the classics and given them its imprimatur when it had almost total control over society. At that time, in the 12th and 13th centuries, it had control over both the use and interpretation of those texts. However,

when the unified church was no longer a reality, and there were multiple Christian realities with multiple authorities, the classics, by now almost sacred texts themselves, managed to keep their place in literate society. For literate men, who found their church and their God distant and indifferent to their human plight and needs, the classical philosophers, bright, witty and down to earth, filled a void and were regarded as companions and friends who, unlike churchmen, were always willing to converse man-to-man, honestly, and without pretense.

What the philosophes found so attractive in the ancients, and strove to imitate in their own lives, was their dislike of religion and superstition, their emphasis on man, their love of the “vita activa,” and their scorn of the “vita contemplativa.” According to the ancients, man existed to do, and contemplation and thinking were honorable human activities when realized in action. The ancients like Seneca and Cicero, whom the philosophes idealized as culture heroes, epitomized these qualities. As Cicero said, “For the whole glory of virtue lies in activity;” and Seneca proclaimed that, “to boast about our retirement is indolent ambition.”⁵¹ The task of the philosopher, according to Cicero, was “teaching lessons in moral duties,” and the true philosopher would not only teach these lessons, he would live them.⁵² Although the philosophes were unwilling to see that the philosophers they so admired could not always realize their own ideal way of life, given the realities of ancient public life, nonetheless, the philosophes cherished the ideal as realizable in order to clearly set themselves apart from the Christian monastic ideal, which emphasized contemplation and devotion to the glory of God in prayer as man’s highest calling in life. This opposition to the Christian ideal led them to follow men like Cicero more so than Plato or Aristotle, whose approaches were more balanced in terms of

the three classical archetypes of life, contemplative, active and lustful, and which could therefore be co-opted more easily by Christianity.

The classical philosophers, once purged of their Christian overtones, became the moral authority for the philosophes and others like them, because they were articulate and forthright spokesmen of the pagan philosophy that the philosophes had been permitted, and even encouraged, to imbibe in the “Christian” environment of their youth. In turning to the classics as the direct source of their moral vision, they turned their backs on what they considered the dishonest and often cruel “pagan” vision of the churches. Directly embracing the classics, even in their own eclectic fashion, made them appear honest. It lent the philosophes an air of moral superiority, which permitted them to speak out frankly and to persuasively declare that their vision of natural man was the whole truth. They did this, in large part, because they were certain that the leading churchmen and aristocrats secretly believed the same thing.

While the established churches fostered an intimate and potentially suicidal relationship with the forces of human reason, both ancient and modern, as a means to maintain their dominance and control in a world that they sensed was changing, they were being challenged from within by men so starved for spiritual food that they no longer sought sustenance through the churches at all, but went straight to God himself. These men and women sought to express their religiosity in a wide variety of ways. Regardless of these differences, however, the established institution saw them as united by a single dangerous principle, “Enthusiasm.” Many religious movements originated in this general “enthusiastic” quest which started about 1650, and culminated in the latter half of the 18th century. These movements for the most part, however, were outside of the

main stream of history; and although they certainly were not inconsequential, they did not choose to address what was becoming the central question of the age, namely what was to be the place of reason and rationality in the life of man? For them, “reason,” since apparently it did not “save” men, and since it could not answer the only question of importance, “what shall we do and how shall we live,” essentially had no role to play for them. Salvation came from God, it came from within, not from without, and thus, ceremony, ritual, law, truth, and theology were of little or no import to man. So instead they concentrated on perfecting the inner way, the way of the heart and spirit, and in this they were innovative and creative. And although they had little immediate influence on Western thought, given the triumph of scientific rationalism, interest in these movements was later stirred when men moved beyond rationalism and sought to know more fully the inner way, not in order to find God but rather so that they could understand the psyche of man.

It would not be fair to say that enthusiasm competed with the Enlightenment to capture the hearts and minds of 18th century men. Both of these movements had assessed the condition of the established Christian churches and found them wanting. The enthusiasts rejected the institutionalization and externalization of Christ’s message which they thought they witnessed in the dominant churches, even those established through the Reformation. They wished to reclaim the spirituality of Christ’s message directly, bypassing the structures, ritual, and dogma of the organized churches. The way of the enthusiasts was through the heart of every man. Its end was the experience of heavenly salvation.

The philosophes or rationalists on the other hand, rejected the spiritual claims of the churches, and objected to their institutional power because it was claimed dishonestly, not because it was made by men. The way of rationalists was through the mind of man. The end for them was the human construction of paradise here on earth. For the enthusiasts, the spirit of Christianity was the real, and the form was the lie; for the rationalists the form of Christianity was the real, and the spirit was the lie.⁵³

The modern age formed by the spirit of the Enlightenment obviously sided with the assessment of the philosophes; however, the persistence of religion in the face of the triumph of the spirit of rationalism suggests that there were many, even at the very end of the Christian Church, who would welcome a deepened spiritual life. These were the “simple” whom the established church dominated for the sake of its secular power. It was for the salvation of these people, and for the billions of others around the world yet unborn, that the Lord brought about the last judgment on the Christian Church. It was for this end that Swedenborg was chosen to receive the new revelation for the New Church. This revelation is the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ whose heavenly purposes we seek to glorify and to serve.

Part III - Concluding Remarks

The spiritual and natural events described in this paper present the New Church scholar with an exciting array of research challenges. In essence the last judgment presents a classic experimental design. There is an independent variable, i.e., the last judgment, and there is a dependant variable, i.e., human history. This history existed before the last judgment and continued after it. But the issue is really much more complex since the last judgment had no direct effect on the natural world. There was no concomitant climate change, no massive geological dislocation and no changes of any sort in the physical/chemical laws governing natural existence. In fact, we are told by the Writings that the structures of social existence were not immediately impacted either. Politics, family structure, churches, languages, treaties, ceremonies and economic systems remained intact. We are therefore perfectly justified in asking, what are these “exciting research challenges” which are now presented to New Church scholarship?

The answer lies in the method by which the last judgment was affected and by the indirect manner by which it impacted the human and natural worlds. The judgment was a spiritual event whose essential effect on earth was within the human mind itself. The mind is easily the most potent object in the world. Its transformative power is virtually limitless. By appropriating the natural structures of the world into its symbolic language it can “get inside” nature and control it. It can link its own forms to nature and “animate” it. Nature, thus “awakened,” innocently places its raw energy into human hands. This is no trivial process and

it has been part of the human experience for thousands of years. What differentiates the year 1757 from all that had gone before was that the Lord cleared the spiritual world of impediments to His Divine light and thus provided the human mind power to enter “intellectually” into the mysteries of faith. This increased mental energy was directed from faith to charity and thus to use. This direction toward use was a powerful incentive for human action to penetrate the processes of the natural world. However, since man retained his spiritual freedom, there was no guarantee that he would direct his increased analytical powers to moral and beneficial ends. The temptation to employ these powers for domination and political power is very strong. The challenge for the New Church is to understand the true source of such power and to direct it to use, i.e., the spiritual and material advancement of the human race. This is the path to a prosperous moral order on the earth. It is also the path to the life of heaven. The purpose of the Lord’s creation would then be fulfilled.

This challenge for the New Church is the work of generations. It will stretch out far into the future. There are, however, some challenges which present themselves to New Church scholars here and now. There are topics which demand our attention and which we can address immediately. These concern the changes on the earth which occurred at the same time as the last judgment or shortly after it. A serious analysis of these changes, from a New Church perspective, will shed light on the intense intellectual ramifications and potential of the end of the Christian Church. Renewed spiritual freedom and a new

revelation to explain it have produced an explosive impact in the human world.

The challenge of New Church scholarship is to explicate this impact.

I have produced below a preliminary list of topics to be studied by the new scholarship. I trust this list will be deepened and extended in the future.

Religious Changes: How were religious structures altered after the mid-18th century? What were the key issues? Who received the Writings and what did they do with them? What sort of people were attracted to them and why? What is the history of the various New Church organizations? Why did some succeed and some fail; What has been the impact of the New Church outside of the Christian world?

Theological Changes: What was the impact of the Writings on Christian doctrine? on the trinity? on faith-alone? What was its impact on the place of charity and reform of life? on the resurrection of the body and the place of the clergy and the church in civil society?

Political Changes: How was the political world different before the last judgment than after? How would New Church doctrine fit into this process? What concepts motivated the Ancient Regime? Were they compatible with the Writings; What was the prevalent concept of rights, political participation and equality?

Scientific Changes: How were scientific and technical activities impacted after the mid-18th century? Was the concept of “practical improvement” related to that concept of “use?” if so, how? Were there changes in the power of scientific and mathematical theories at this time? if so, why? Were advances in medical

treatment after this time related to scientific and moral changes which were also occurring? if so, how?

Moral Changes: The latter part of the 18th century saw the first organized anti-slavery and political reform societies; what was the New Church connection to these, and how did it operate? Temperance and women's movements also occurred at this time; was there a link to the church? Demographic changes were profound at this time; birth rates and infant survival rates dramatically increased, while age-specific death rates declined; what happened?

Economic Changes: The application of technology to economic production generates the Industrial Revolution at precisely this time; what concepts were involved? Did New Churchmen participate in this? Agricultural science advanced -- much larger crop yields and greater crop diversity, plus major advances in animal husbandry; what happened? Acceleration of both urbanization and increased literacy rates occur at this time; why?

Arts Changes: The mid-18th century witnessed major changes in architecture, painting, music, and literature; how can these changes be characterized? Who was involved in them and what aspects of the Writings supported them? How did these changes prefigure 19th century artistic achievements, now that we can see New Church influences much more clearly?

Philosophy/Psychological Changes: The mid-18th century marks the birth of the "self-reflective" approach to human analysis; in philosophy this is marked in the later Kant and in Hegel; what was their connection to the Writings? Idealism enjoys a resurgence in 19th century Britain; why? To what degree do the

Writings have any influence on recent philosophy? The “self-reflective” approach has achieved its greatest impact in psychology, and New Churchmen have played an important role in this; why is this? Are there doctrinal connections? if so, what are they?

The foregoing list of research topics and questions is meant to stimulate scholarship in the New Church and to encourage additional areas of inquiry. It is not meant as definitive, but rather to serve as a starting point.

It is my hope that this paper, taken as a whole, could serve as the basis for an expanded reach in New Church intellectual life. At the present time we certainly possess an abundance of highly sophisticated and committed scholars. If we could focus the energy of this group on topics where a New Church perspective makes a concrete and distinctive contribution to human knowledge, we will, indeed, have served a great use. We will have stimulated our own intellectual traditions, but as importantly, we will have reached out to a world struggling to find purpose and peace.

¹ Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Atheneum, 1980), p. 345.

² The “third force” was the eirenic and ecumenical movement in Christendom, which wanted to unite theology and morality, or rationality and morality in one universal faith from the time of Erasmus until the 18th century Enlightenment. A discussion of the movement is found in Johnson *A History of Christianity*, part five, pp. 267-328.

³“Mr. Locke’s reasonableness of Christianity is really a new religion” (Peter Gay’s *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 321, quoting Francois Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Notebooks*, 45).

⁴ Other countries, however, did contribute to the Enlightenment, for example: Italy and the British colonies.

⁵ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 131 (hereafter cited as Gay, *The Enlightenment*).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ Matt. 6:33.

¹⁰ Paul Hazard, *The European Mind: 1680-1715* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1963), p. 46.

¹¹ Faith was established as the essential ingredient of the religious life both in the Reformed movement and in the Council of Trent. To see this, see the section on the Council of Trent in Keneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), p. 868.

¹² Gay, *The Enlightenment*, p. 339, quoting Bishop Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, (1736), “Advertisement.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, quoting Jonathan Swift, “A Project for the Advancement of Religion and for the Reformation of Manners,” *Bickerstaff Papers and Pamphlets on the Church*, ed. Herbert Davis (1957), p. 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 340, quoting James Boswell, *London Journal*, 1762-1736, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (1950), 278 (under June 12, 1763).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, quoting David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty and His Expectations*, 2 vols. (1749: edn. 1791), 2:441.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 339, quoting Cardinal de Bernis, *Memoires et Lettres*, 2 vols. (1878), 1:41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 353

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 350 quoting Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, *Dichtung and Wahrheit*, in *Gedenkausgabe*, 50.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, quoting Jean le Rond d’Alembert, “Geneva,” in *The Encyclopedie*, 94.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 342, quoting Elizabeth Mure, in Bryson, *Man and society*, 6.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 341-342.

²³ Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, p. 280.

²⁴ Gay, *The Enlightenment*, p. 343.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.344

²⁶ *Ibid.*, quoting Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (under April 14, 1775), 2:352-3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 344-345, citing, *Spectator*, No. 106.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, quoting Sir Godfrey Copley, quoted in James Sutherland, *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (1948), 13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p 352.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

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- ³¹ Ibid., p. 354
- ³² Ibid., p. 352
- ³³ Ibid., p. 353
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 355.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 354
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, p. 354 (original source not cited).
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 355.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 353 (original source not cited).
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 354 (original source not cited).
- ⁴² Gay, *The Enlightenment*, p. 349.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 347.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 350.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., quoting Georg Lichtenberg, Aphorism E 249. *Aphorismen*, 1775-1779, ed. Albert Lectzmann (1906), 70.
- ⁴⁷ Matt. 23:27.
- ⁴⁸ Gay, *The Enlightenment*, p. 336.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 363.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 337, quoting Voltaire to Cideville, January 15 (1758), *Correspondence*, xxxii, 49.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 189, Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1:6, Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, LXVIII, 3.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 190, quoting Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1:2.
- ⁵³ Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion: With Special Reference to the XVII-SVIII Centuries* (London: Oxford Press, 1950), p. 8.