

Lecture 22 – “The Great Divide”: The Enlightenment & Romanticism

“My taste was for things old and shabby and unpopular, and I regarded with skepticism whatever was acclaimed as the spirit of the age.” John Buchan

“The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint.” Isaiah 44:12. “He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, ‘Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?’” Isaiah 44:20

Background Reading

Gonzalez, chs. 21 and 22

Prayer

From Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769)

“O Prince of Life, teach us to stand more boldly on your side, to face the world and all our adversaries more courageously, and not to let ourselves be dismayed by any storm of temptation; may our eyes be steadfastly fixed on you in fearless faith; may we trust you with perfect confidence that you will keep us, save us, and bring us through by the power of your grace and the riches of your mercy. Amen.”

“The Great Divide”: The Enlightenment & Romanticism

I. The Enlightenment

A. The smile of reason (Voltaire, Diderot, Jefferson)

1. The Promise of Science

“Nature and nature’s laws lay hid in night;

God said, ‘Let Newton be!’ and all was light” (Alexander Pope).

“Everywhere society became more and more enlightened. By which was largely meant that whereas in the Middle Ages the questions that could not be answered theologically were held as negligible, in this century the answers that could not be given scientifically were more and more held to be worthless” (Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove*, 201).

2. The progress of philosophy

a. Rationalism—Descartes (1596-1650)

b. Empiricism—Locke (1632-1704)

3. Early scientists and religion

a. Newton

4. The rise of rational religion

a. *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) by John Locke

b. The centrality of morality (Jefferson’s Bible)

Christianity as Old as Creation (1730) by Matthew Tindal—“Our reason, which gives us a demonstration of the divine perfections, affords us the same concerning the nature of those duties God requires; not only with relation to himself, but to ourselves, and to one another.”

c. Deism

B. The frown of reason

1. David Hume—no certain knowledge possible

2. Lessing—“the big ugly ditch” between history and reason

3. Voltaire—“the best of all possible worlds”?

“Candide, stunned, stupefied, despairing, bleeding, trembling, said to himself: If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others like?” (*Candide, or Optimism* by Voltaire)

“The modern mind was born when Bacon trumpeted ‘man’s conquest of nature’ as the new *summum bonum*. Nearly everyone hopped on his bandwagon, but not Pascal.... Pascal was right....Man’s conquest of nature by science and technology, despite its spectacular success, has not made us happier, has not made us wiser and has not made us holier” (Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans*, 126).

II. Romanticism

A. Rousseau (1712-1778)—“I feel; therefore, I am” (“...a curious discovery to have been made in the middle of the age of reason”—Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation*, 274)

Rousseau’s ideas “came into the brilliant artificial world of the Enlightenment like a warm west wind from the fields into a lighted salon, extinguishing the tapers and filling the air with the scent of damp earth and rain-soaked vegetation” (Christopher Dawson).

B. The Romantic creed

1. The importance of feelings

“Call it Bliss! Heart! Love! God! I have no name to give it! Feeling is all in all:
The Name is sound and smoke,
Obscuring Heaven’s clear glow...” (from Goethe's *Faust*).

2. The sanctity of nature

“Accuse me not of arrogance,
If having walked with nature
And offered, as far as frailty would allow,
My heart a daily sacrifice to truth
I now affirm of nature and of truth that their divinity
Revolts offended at the ways of men”
(William Wordsworth).

3. The role of the artist

“The artist stands on mankind like a statue on its pedestal....Only an artist can divine the meaning of life” (Novalis).

C. Romantic religion

1. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)—*Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*

2. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)—*On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*

3. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) and Transcendentalism

The Romantic Self “can only warm itself by the fires within. When the fuel is spent, and the flames flicker out, there is nothing to do but bank the embers and die, as Emerson did when the final, fatal virus overtook him: ‘Then, as was his custom, he went to the fireplace and took his fire apart, setting the sticks, one by one, on end on each side, and separating all the glowing coals. That done, he took his study lamp in his hand, left the room for the last time, and went upstairs’” (“When the Fire Goes Out,” a review of *Mind on Fire*, a biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson by Robert D. Richardson, Jr., in *Books & Culture*, March/April 1996, 26).

III. Conclusions: Romanticism and Enlightenment in the Modern World

Questions from Class

Was Emerson a theologian?

What does Dr. Calhoun mean by “the autonomy of reason?”

What can be said about the development of Romanticism?

How did the church react to all of this?

What was Kant’s basic belief?

How does the Westminster Confession of Faith reflect the Enlightenment?

For Further Study

In the following readings you will find various Christian answers to the Enlightenment philosophy and the religion of reason or deism which it encouraged. Read a selection from *The Case of Reason* by William Law from *A History of Christianity: Readings in the History of the Church*, vol. 2, ed. Clyde L. Manschreck (Baker, 1981), 236-41.

William Law (1686-1761) was a nonjuror minister of the Church of England (he declined to take the oath of allegiance to George I in 1714). He is remembered for his writings and his practical works of piety. His most influential book was *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, which greatly influenced many of the leaders of the evangelical revival in England. It is strong in its treatment of the disciplines of the Christian life but weak in its doctrines of grace and the atonement and lacks joy in the good news of the Gospel message.

Law's *Case of Reason* was written to answer the popular deistic work *Christianity as Old as the Creation* by Matthew Tindal. In his five points "showing the state of the controversy," Law precisely and fairly describes the Enlightenment religion of reason or natural theology as presented by deists such as Tindal. Summarize the main issue in a sentence.

Confidence in reason, Law argues, may well be both irrational and vain.

- *How does Law answer the deistic argument that God is not arbitrary but works according to what is "fit" or appropriate (and therefore fully discernible by man through nature)?
- *What fact of human life defies human reason, according to Law?
- *To what does natural religion easily lead?
- *What movement (parallel to the Enlightenment) does Law anticipate in his argument in the first column of page 240?
- *What do you think of Law's answers to the deistic view of how a person can be right with God?
- *What point does Law make in comparing power and reason in God and man?

A. Read a selection from *Natural Theology and Belief* by Thomas Reid from *Reformed Reader: A Sourcebook in Christian Theology*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Johnson and John H. Leith (Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 44-48. Thomas Reid (1710-96) was for fourteen years pastor of a Presbyterian church in New Machar, Scotland, before becoming regent of King's College (in 1751) and professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow (in 1764). He is well-known in philosophical and theological circles as the originator of Scottish realism, or as it was often called common-sense philosophy. Scottish realism attempted to find a way out of the skeptical impasse which philosophy had reached as a result of the work of Enlightenment philosophers, particularly Reid's fellow-Scot, David Hume. Common-sense philosophy proceeds according to certain innate, self-evident first principles (about the self and the external world), the authority of which is grounded in the constitution of our common human nature. It was believed that all human beings operate in much the same way, as even David Hume did when (despite his skeptical ideas) he ducked his head when walking under a low tree branch! Scottish realism flourished in the nineteenth century in Scotland and America, when John Witherspoon at Princeton College and Archibald Alexander at Princeton Seminary touted its usefulness for philosophy and theology. It faded during the latter part of the century when other systems captured the centers of intellectual thought but continues to influence twentieth-century philosophy through such diverse figures as G. E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Roderick Chisholm, and Alvin Plantinga.

Traditional Christians were not prepared to surrender "natural theology" to enlightenment skepticism or deistic appropriation, as is shown in the brief section from Thomas Reid on "Natural Theology." Belief in

God, Reid argues, is not one of the first principles of common sense but may be deduced from those principles. What do you think of Reid's relationship between reason and Scripture?

In "Belief" Reid attempts to exonerate "belief" from philosophical skeptics. Why do we believe what we believe, according to Reid?

B. *Miracles* by C. S. Lewis is a classic refutation of Hume. The universe since Einstein has opened up to the possibility of any event; the question is no longer, *what can happen?*, but *what has happened?*