

Freedom from the Gods

The Enlightenment

COGITO ERGO SUM!" exulted the great philosopher Rene Descartes as he proclaimed his sudden intuitive glimpse of reality.¹

Descartes's insight, "I think, therefore I am," is a philosophical, religious, and intellectual watershed in Western culture. His discovery is similar to that of the Greek Socrates more than two millennia earlier, who had intrigued his disciples with the search to "know thyself."

Descartes was a pioneer in Western thought who set the tone for one of the most formative and far-reaching eras in human intellectual development, that of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century European Enlightenment.

Taproots

The intellectual and spiritual taproots of the Enlightenment are

biblical faith and Greek rationalism. For over a thousand years, the Christian church was the dominant institution on the European cultural horizon. By the fourth century of the Christian era, the church was significantly present in many regions of Europe, as far north as England and as far west as Spain.

The church grew, although there was occasional persecution and harassment by the imperial authorities from time to time. However, the spread of Christianity's influence across the European continent proceeded with even greater zest and speed following Constantine's A.D. 313 Edict of Milan, which legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Fourth century Palestinian church historian Eusebius was exuberant. He saw a day coming when the church would have the opportunity to influence the worldview and values of a whole continent and develop a Christian civilization.² That did happen. The continent was Europe, inhabited by many peoples whose traditional religions were typically primal polytheism and spirit veneration. For a thousand years and more, the church wooed and sometimes coerced the peoples away from their ontocratic primal religious orientations and into the Christian church.

These were fruitful years for the Christian faith in Europe. The church sowed the intellectual and spiritual seeds of the Christian gospel, which transformed the worldviews and cultures of the European peoples. This transformation gathered momentum as the Bible gained increasing circulation. Well over a century before the Enlightenment commenced

as a movement, the Bible was becoming more widely known in European societies because of translations and the introduction of printing.

Recall that in biblical faith God is Creator and sustainer of the universe. This means several things.

Creation is other than God.

The earth and universe are good.

Creation is orderly and understandable.

Humankind is commanded to care for the good earth.

People are to develop the earth for the well-being of humankind.

Earlier chapters have explored the dramatic implications of this biblical worldview when compared to other religious systems. These biblical perceptions are the spiritual and intellectual seedbed for a full-orbed scientific and technological culture.

The church also preserved the rationalism of the Greek philosophers and entrusted these insights to its theologians and philosophers. Actually, during the chaos of Europe's Dark Ages, it was scholars living in the protection of the Islamic dar al-salaam which mostly preserved the Greek intellectual treasures for later European consumption. As Europe's spiritual and intellectual climate developed, Greek perceptions were a welcome window into fresh possibilities for European culture.

Recall that chapter five describes some of the attractions between

Greek philosophy and the early church. In time both biblical faith and the philosophies of the sages of Greece contributed to the development of European intellectual culture. It was an exceedingly dynamic culture. By the dawn of the sixteenth century, European societies had spawned more than three score universities!³

In due time the synergy of Greek philosophy interacting with medieval European Christianity created astonishing ferment in European culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Twentieth- century scholar A. N. Whitehead comments,

When we compare this tone of thought in Europe with the attitude of other civilizations when left to themselves, there seems but one source for its origin. It must come from the medieval insistence on the rationality of God, conceived as with the personal energy of Jehovah and with the rationality of a Greek philosopher.⁴

The discussion in chapter six on the Confucian and Greek philosophical experience described the tensions which developed between the Chinese and Greek philosophers and the worldview of popular primal religions. Although the philosophers were skeptical or disbelieving of the gods, they were never able fundamentally to transform the worldview which nurtured polytheism. That worldview believed that the divinities and nature intermingled in oneness. In China, Confucius himself became divinized. In Greece the mystery cults

grew in significance even as the philosophers held forth on the Acropolis.

Biblical faith, anchored in history rather than philosophical speculation, finally and decisively broke the power of the primal nature deities in the Greek experience. As the witness of the church extended across Europe, the same phenomenon occurred. Sometimes quickly, more often gradually, people abandoned the notions that the cycles of nature are fused to the deaths and resurrections of divinities. The transformation was often explicit. For example, the sacrificial rites involved in worshiping and entreating the sun just after the winter solstice were replaced by Christmas, a celebration of the birth of Christ.

This transformation was necessary for a scientific and technological worldview to emerge. Although all societies do develop technologies, a worldview which genuinely and enthusiastically fosters a scientific orientation could only develop in a culture which had abandoned the nature deities. A scientific technological worldview cannot thrive in a culture which believes that a nature spirit or divinity will bite if one builds a highway across its terrain. It is no accident that polytheism never provided a spiritual home for the ideas of Greek philosophy. In the European experience, the church discovered and embraced many of the insights of the Greek philosophers. This polytheism could never do.

The biblical understanding of the person, society, and government also nurtured the spirit of the Enlightenment. The church taught that

the person is eternally significant, created in God's own image. She can think God's own thoughts. The church believes that the person experiences his greatest fulfillment in the community of faith and truth.

During the apex of Catholic Christianity, it was evident that the church was the only truly international community in Europe. The church was the only community which could unite the peoples of the continent as the imperial power of Rome declined. The Catholic Church had united peoples in the bonds of universal truth; the Enlightenment sought universal truth as well.

The church also nurtured the conviction that the state is not the final authority. Although the notion of the divine right of kings persisted, the church nevertheless believed that the political powers should heed the counsel of the church, for it was the church and not the state which spoke with the authority of Christ. In the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, the church confronted the political authorities when necessary.

The medieval theologians believed the church was the expression on earth of the eternal kingdom of God. The church had a transnational global vision which superseded the state. By the seventeenth century, the worldwide missionary endeavor of the European church had already begun. All of these themes influenced the Enlightenment.

For a thousand years, the church molded European culture. The Enlightenment was the child of this Christianized culture. It thrived on

the church's perception of creation, humanity, morality, and society. Yet the Enlightenment is also a reaction against the church. It was a movement whose architects were determined to guide European culture in directions more humanely and globally sensitive than was the church in seventeenth-century Europe.

In previous chapters we have occasionally reflected on the distortions of Western church we have described as Constantinization. The fourth-century Roman Emperor Constantine enabled the church to become a participant in political power. A process commenced of increasingly intimate integration of church and state.

As time passed, the role of the Western church changed from what it had been when the church was a minority community. Instead of conscience in society, the church became the policeman. The church became authoritarian and possessed the power to enforce its will. It developed enormous financial and political power. Too often the church functioned as a self-serving institution which dehumanized people rather than as a community in ministry for others.

Even in realms such as scientific investigation, the church claimed the last word, as demonstrated in the trial of Galileo, a contemporary of Descartes. Galileo's telescopes confirmed for him that the earth and planets revolved around the sun, a notion the church believed theologically erroneous. The church censured Galileo.

The authoritarian power of the church troubled the philosophers of

the Enlightenment. Equating the kingdom of God with the church was a fateful theological development. If that was true, then the church was in itself the ultimate transcendent authority. Whenever any institution, including the church, perceives that it is the ultimate authority, then there will be abuse of power.

The church's confrontation with governments was more concerned with maintaining power and privilege than in defending the poor and oppressed. Too often the church's promise of heaven after death became a theological basis for neglecting justice and oppressing the poor. The philosophers sought to free European society from the sometimes dehumanizing stranglehold of the church.

The philosophers were also troubled by the divisiveness which the church had brought into European society on the heels of the Protestant Reformation. At the time of Rene Descartes, the Thirty Years' War between Protestant and Catholic princes and regions was devastating central and northern Europe. Both Protestants and Catholics hounded dissidents. Torture and death were awarded those whose heretical views might encourage others in beliefs and practices which lead to hell.

Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" was a declaration of independence from a church system which neglected the needs of the person. The philosophers insisted that through the use of reason, humankind could and should take charge of its own destiny. However, in this quest for a more humanized culture than the established church was

creating, the pioneers of the Enlightenment were not alone. In various European societies, Christian reform movements inside and outside the established church had also attempted to bring correctives to the distortions of institutional Christianity.

There were occasional Christian reform movements in the church even prior to the Enlightenment which used the Bible itself to critique church dogma, tradition, and practice. That is why the Roman Catholic priest Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. That act ignited the reform movement which in due course became the Protestant Reformation. Luther was inviting a debate on church dogma and practice based on a biblical critique. Yet as noted above, the Protestant Reformation also became entangled in political loyalties which plunged northern areas of Europe into a tragic paroxysm of violence.

Other reform movements flourished both in established Catholic and Protestant churches and sometimes also outside these state church systems. Noteworthy are the Anabaptists who were prepared to lay down their lives for their conviction that freedom of conscience for every person is the will of God. By insisting on adult baptism, they put the axe to the European state church system, which had developed during and after the era of Constantine.

Their martyrs stung the conscience of Europe, thereby preparing the way for modern commitments to broad-based human rights. They laid

the foundations for modern political institutions, which affirm and encourage religious pluralism. These sixteenth-century Anabaptists were trail blazers for many dimensions of cultural and political transformation sought by the Enlightenment a century later.

Reason Replaces Revelation

Nevertheless, as the Enlightenment progressed, it became increasingly adversarial to establishment Christianity and skeptical of biblical faith, if not actually opposed to the biblical worldview. Some of the intellectual pioneers of the Enlightenment made an explicit attempt to free the human mind, not only from what they considered to be the abuses of Christian dogma and practice, but also from the shackles of biblical revelation.

Consequently, reason and empiricism replaced the Bible as the means to truth. John Locke, an Englishman (d. 1704), philosophized that divine law was also natural law which could be discerned through reason alone. French philosopher Voltaire (d. 1778) was appalled at religious persecution and sought to discredit superstitions and beliefs which instigated such horror. He believed that self-evident natural laws were the only reasonable basis on which to construct ethical commitments. Scottish philosopher David Hume (d. 1776) was an agnostic and yet optimistic that the benevolent essence of human nature was an adequate basis for moral behavior.

Intellectual turnings such as these in Western philosophy and culture were the beginning of a colossal shift away from biblical faith. These turnings have also affected global culture in astonishing ways.

The brief profile of the Enlightenment which follows only sketches some of the themes especially apropos to global village—nature, ethics, religion, truth, and the person.

Nature

There was the conviction that creation is orderly and understandable. In the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon was a scientist, philosopher, and theologian whose pioneering work foreshadowed the Enlightenment. Yet Isaac Newton is the towering contemporary scientist of the Enlightenment. Newton, like Bacon, was a theologian who received from biblical faith the worldview which undergirded his scientific methodology. His research led to the conviction that God had established natural laws which direct the harmonious flow of nature. The task of scientific methodology was to investigate these laws and apply this understanding for the benefit of humanity.

As the notion of natural laws began to permeate European culture, the concept of "nature" began to replace "creation." In the Bible the earth and universe are always referred to as creation, which reveals a worldview convinced that God creates and also sustains what he has created. The biblical worldview also demands human accountability to

God for the way we relate to creation. However, by referring to creation as nature, the Enlightenment introduced a subtle yet significant shift into Western culture, for it is possible for nature to function independently of God, governed only by natural laws.

If creation is only nature, then there is no need for people to be accountable to the Creator for the manner in which they use nature. For many disciples of the Enlightenment, God himself became largely an irrelevant hypothesis—and then only as a first-cause explanation for the existence of nature. Although the fathers of the Enlightenment would not have predicted these consequences, this cosmic shift in worldview helped to invite the uninhibited technological destruction of nature. There is now no God to whom humankind is accountable for their destructive exploitation of nature. It is evident that the technological centuries which have followed the Enlightenment have brought dramatic improvements in the quality of human life worldwide. It is also evident that the spirit of unaccountable technological exploitation of nature has already ruined entire regions of this planet.

Ethics

John Locke took the Newtonian theories of the laws of nature and applied them to morality. He was a pioneer. Others such as Voltaire agreed that, just as the natural scientists were discovering the laws of nature, natural laws could also be identified in the realms of the moral good. These philosophers were convinced that revelation is not

necessary or helpful in defining morality.

One reason for their disdain of appeals to revelation as a basis for morality was that the philosophers were not impressed by the moral qualities of the established church, which often seemed more committed to greed than morality. The church's critics claimed that it used its presumed access to revelation to oppress rather than humanize people. They argued that reason needed to be the basic foundation of human morality. The same scientific method that unlocked the laws of nature could unlock the "self-evident" laws of morality.

Yet a problem arises. Does nature provide a valid basis for morality? Nature was actually considered divine throughout Europe prior to Christianity. Did those pre-Christian systems nurture a healthy morality? Was it moral to sacrifice a virgin to the sun god after the winter solstice as was the practice among some northern European societies? The fact is that nature knows no ethics.⁵

Evidence of the ambivalent ethical perspective nature provides is what my wife and I felt when we visited Monticello, Virginia, the home of Thomas Jefferson. He was author of the United States Declaration of Independence. Jefferson's pen anchored that declaration in the "Laws of Nature and Nature's God." The evidence at Monticello suggests that Jefferson loved the laws of nature more than the people who were his slaves.

Jefferson created a magnificent estate for himself and his family! He

experimented with nature, exploring new possibilities. He imported flowers and trees from distant lands. Experts have restored the trees, flower bed, and vegetable garden arrangements. The vegetables are planted in patterns according to their color configurations; for example, purple, white, and then black eggplants are in symmetrical arrangements. Above his remarkable garden is a glass- enclosed room in which Jefferson sat to read. The estate is an elegant example of what a person working with nature can create.

Near his glass-enclosed reading room above the patterned vegetable garden is a plaque. In small script it reveals that 157 slaves were needed to maintain this estate. The script elaborates that the slaves worked from sunrise to sundown, seven days a week including holidays. When Jefferson died his will decreed freedom for only five of his slaves; the remainder were sold to pay off the debts on the estate. Many of those black families were broken the day of that slave auction.⁶

In this elegant Monticello estate, nature's god seemed to have no qualms about expressing a greater love for the land than for the people who tilled that land.

Jefferson was a deist, a true son of the Enlightenment. The deist perception is that God might have created the world in the distant past but is not presently involved in history or nature. Thus the only reliable cues we possess concerning right and wrong we receive through nature. Although Jefferson confessed that he detested slavery, for him the love

of nature and his elegant estate usurped authentic concern for his slaves.

Beautiful Monticello is a sign in the soul of the North American heritage. That sign reveals that nature is not a solid foundation for ethics. We recognize that too often the churches also provided a distorted conscience concerning slavery. Yet Monticello is especially poignant, for this estate was owned and administered by the father of the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Jefferson provided a clear trumpet call for Americans to taste the delicious freedoms which the Enlightenment offered. Yet for Jefferson, when there was a collision between the well-being of his slaves and the care of his flower beds, the flowers took precedence.

Religion

The notion of "religion" began to enter the intellectual furnishings of Western awareness. Prior to the Enlightenment, church and faith were the soul of the culture; this was the way of life. The Enlightenment changed all of that by giving faith and church a label—religion.

The phenomenon of religion can be studied and analyzed scientifically. Some people are religious and others not. A person can opt for religion, ignore it, or oppose the phenomenon. Enlightenment thinkers believed that reason rather than religion needed to be the arbiter of self-evident morality and truth. They were convinced that any reason-based morality is a universal global morality, whereas morality

appealing to religion tends to be narrowly defined and applicable in the confines of a sectarian community.

Skepticism of religion and the church was not always benign. Eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon described the role of the church in the Roman society in his book *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*.⁷ With irony he demonstrated that religions, including Christianity, contributed to the cultural, moral, and political decline of Rome. A contemporary of Gibbon's, Abbe' Raynal, described the glories of a non-Christian Asian culture in *The Philosophical and Political History of the Indies*. These were influential books.⁸

These histories, like all scholarship of the times, claimed to be objective and scientific. These "objective" histories demonstrated that religion in Europe was not necessarily conducive to human happiness and well-being. There was deepening uncertainty that Christianized European culture had a civilizing mission in the world.

The idea that history could be studied scientifically unleashed dynamic historical research and writing. The assumptions of natural science invaded these efforts in historical objectivity. In the natural sciences, the worldview shift from creation to nature ushered in skepticism concerning extraordinary phenomena. There was no room for the extraordinary in a worldview in which self-sustaining natural laws governed the phenomena of nature. Therefore history needed to weed out accounts of extraordinary events. Thus the rewriting of the

accounts of world religions dismissed stories of the extraordinary as being legend, fantasy, or superstition.

Before long, the scientific historians were applying the tools of their discipline to the Bible. In the hands of scholars who did not believe in biblical theism, the Christian Scriptures were analyzed with the assumption that the extraordinary does not occur. The universe is a closed and autonomous system with no possibility of acts of God in nature or history.

We have observed that the U.S. philosopher-president Thomas Jefferson embraced a deistic approach to history and nature. Although Jefferson was not a biblical scholar, he rewrote the New Testament accounts of Jesus in accordance with the perspectives of the scientific historiography of the late eighteenth century. He scissored out all references to the extraordinary in the life of Christ. The account ends with a dead Jesus in a tomb, for in Jefferson's worldview, there could be no resurrection of Jesus. Jefferson named his work *New Testament: Philosophy of Jesus*.⁹

Jefferson viewed himself as a good Christian. Yet the title "philosophy" for his rewritten scripture reveals a radical divergence from Christian faith; biblical faith is not a philosophy. Jefferson's approach to the Bible is consistent with the so-called scientific historiography. The assumption is that God never acts in history or creation.

Thomas Jefferson was not an atheist; neither was he a biblical the-

ist. Like Jefferson, many who moved in the worldview of the Enlightenment considered themselves deists. As mentioned above, deists accept God as the most reasonable first cause for the existence of the universe, but his existence has little or no relevance to the processes of history or nature. For the deists, nature and history are like a clock, which once made and wound, runs on and on with no assistance. We are on our own! We alone are responsible for our destiny.

Truth

Universities developed to encourage people to seek the truth. The Latin and French roots of the term *university* suggest the entire realm of knowledge turning toward a center of worth. "Uni-Verse"—all knowledge with a truth center.

It was in third-century Alexandria, Egypt, that the forerunner of the modern university movement occurred. Origen (d. 254 c.) was one of the professors in this school, which attracted students from throughout the Middle East region. They came because no area of inquiry was considered off-limits. This exuberant center for universal enquiry was the Alexandrian Catechetical School.

The Alexandrian school is the forerunner of the liberal arts universities that have accompanied the spread of the church into many regions of the global village. These church-related universities have been founded on the premise that all reality is worthy of study. And there is coherence and plan in all dimensions of knowledge. There is a center

toward which all data points, truth in which all reality converges. That center is God. He is the source of all truth, and therefore all reality is touched with meaning and purpose.

The Enlightenment agreed with the church that there is a truth center. However, the Enlightenment placed human reason, not God, in that truth center. By enthroning human reason at the center of the university, the Enlightenment nudged God into the periphery of reality. The consequence is that there is now no truth center.

The university has become a hodgepodge of unrelated accumulation of data; our modern universities demonstrate that human reason alone is incapable of discerning universal truth. Personal or group values and data have usurped the place of a truth center. There is no turning toward a center, for there is no awareness of a center.

The loss of a universal center pervades Western culture. A debate in my home community illustrates our confusion. The central city high school staff developed a course on core values for living. The school board, community, and staff became sharply divided about this course. While some argued that there are basic universal human values which such a course should communicate, others were equally adamant that it is nonsense to speak of core values.

"We shall teach values which our own community cherishes," the staff promised. "We shall, for example, teach integrity."

The objectors complained, "You can't do that, for our community has

no consensus on values. Integrity is certainly not a core value in our community."

Thus in a society infected by drug abuse, teen-age pregnancies, AIDS, broken homes, theft, murders, unemployment, child abuse, and arson, sages who lead our city high school are incapable of agreeing on any foundation for community values. The best they can do is provide an educational system which provides data. The learning experience must be designed in such a manner that it is bereft of any truth or value center.

The disciplines of the natural sciences are also bereft of a center. For example, a 1991 issue of *Newsweek* described some incredible explorations in astronomy during the decade of the 1980s. One of the perplexing discoveries is that there seems to be pattern in the galaxy systems. One of the patterns is that the galaxy clusters are spaced at 400 million light-year intervals!

The article quotes Edmond Bertschinger of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology asking, " 'Why should the process that made galaxies pick out that pattern? It is so beyond our understanding that theorists dismiss them for the time being'—hoping they're an illusion."¹⁰

Why would some astronomers feel uneasy about this pattern in the universe? Obviously the pattern does not fit into contemporary theories of the universe. The quote from Bertschinger does not elaborate.

Pattern suggests plan. Plan is only possible if there is purpose, if there is a truth center. However, Enlightenment culture has determined that human reason alone shall be enthroned at the centers of learning. Human reason alone is incapable of discovering the ultimate purpose of the universe. Yet evidence of plan in creation would suggest that there is universal truth, a center which gives plan, meaning, and purpose.¹¹

However, it is difficult for contemporary Enlightenment culture to digest indications of plan or purpose. "The god of physics gives us what we wish. But he does not tell us what we should wish," observes George Santayana as he describes the plight of Enlightenment culture.¹²

A professor in a secular university may not exclaim, "The purpose of human life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever!" Such a statement might lead to dismissal from the university.

Yet it is considered academic sophistication to state, as an anthropology professor once did in my class, "You are only animals. There is nothing special about being human."

Is there supporting evidence for any of these alternatives? Western society has discovered with surprise that we experience meaninglessness when human reason becomes a global god. Yet the culture persists in a worldview of meaninglessness. It is difficult to receive evidence to the contrary.

Nevertheless, in modern times, in the soul of Enlightenment culture itself, there are indications of a persistent and disturbing nudge to

consider the possibility of plan or meaning. Modern people experience that disquieting invitation right in the scientific community.

Modern theories of the universe must accommodate the evidence of both chaos and causality in nature. There is no predictability in chaos, such as in a tornado. Causality is precisely predictable, such as the rotations of the planets around the sun. Yet in the intermingling and complex phenomena of both chaos and causality, we discover overall pattern and organization. These discoveries confound the dominant theories of simple causality which informed the scientific community for the past three hundred years.

Physics and mathematics are also going through major paradigm shifts. Computers demonstrate amazing design and pattern in mathematical formulas; these patterns often converge with similar structures in nature which electron microscopes reveal. The computer and electron microscope are unlocking the astonishing "organized complexity"¹³ of the universe.

That organized complexity seems especially and remarkably focused toward the development and sustenance of human life on earth. Human life would be impossible if there were even the slightest divergence in the overall pattern, such as in the amazing complexities required for the formation of the carbon molecule. This is astonishing. It is as though a master architect put the universe together.

It is most astonishing that people are able both to observe and to

decipher the pattern. This is true even though the pattern might be mysteriously encoded. An example is the exceedingly complex ladderlike structure of the DNA molecule which is the carrier of genetic imprints. It is amazing that people are able to crack the codes. The pattern is a mystery hidden in codes which are often profoundly complex. Yet some people have the genius to decipher the mind of the architect by cracking those codes. And the codes all hang together, like a crossword puzzle. When one code is cracked, it provides clues as to how to crack other codes.

The evidence points toward a unitary principal or plan in the universe. That plan provides for the intricate complexities and interdependent patterns which enable the existence of human life on earth.¹⁴ But who is the architect?

The Person and Government

The Enlightenment put the person at the center of the universe. Through intellect alone persons could come to an understanding of truth and morality. The function of truth and morality was happiness for the individual. The ingredients needed for the person to experience happiness were natural rights, built into the laws of the universe, just as Newton's laws of physics. They included the right to freedom and to own property.

The sharp accent on individual happiness as the good was in danger of becoming nihilism and anarchy. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a voice

for the counterbalance of the rights of society functioning in harmony with individual rights to produce true happiness. His book *The Social Contract* argued that all individual rights must be social.¹⁵ His vision was of government functioning in a contractual relationship with individuals and society, as all work together to produce the social and cultural conditions in which happiness could thrive. The function of government is to guarantee the rights of the person in society.

For Rousseau government does not acquire legitimacy by divine right, but rather through a social contract with the governed. There is no transcendent authority to which government is accountable. Rational ideas are a more reliable basis for government policy than are our notions of God. Such understandings of government have inspired the evolution of liberal democracies.

Yet in time a fateful difficulty arose. The rational ideas that had replaced God became gods; in the twentieth century, several rational deities have brought hell on earth. "Scientific" truth created ideas and these ideas became ideologies that could not be challenged because they were founded on "scientific" truth. They became the arbiters of political institutions and created a fixation on performing global missions. Nazism and Marxism are examples; so is United States manifest destiny. Respectively these ideologies were based on the "science" of human racial evolution, the "science" of dialectical materialism, and the "self-evident" truths of nature.

World War II was therefore not a collision of nationalisms. Rather it was an Enlightenment war, a conflict between "scientifically" grounded ideas that had a worldwide political mission. An ideological war is far more dangerous than a conflict between nations!¹⁶

Ironically, and in astonishing contradiction to the value which the Enlightenment placed on the person, the notion of the significance of the person has also contributed to a worldview which can condone the genocidal wars of modern times. In modern societies, which are permeated by the notions of the rights, freedoms, and responsibilities of the person, everyone shares responsibility for the wars which the government of the people administers. This notion can provide a sense of justification for the bombing and destruction of civilian population centers.

Of course, the destruction of civilians has always been a temptation in times of war; in ancient times whole cities were sometimes obliterated. Nevertheless, the twentieth-century phenomenon of specifically targeting cities such as Hamburg or Hiroshima for destruction or sowing the fields of farmers in Laos with cluster bombs seems to be nurtured by a worldview which holds civilians responsible for the acts of their governments.

A Global Philosophy

European governments and societies were influenced by and

experimented with the convictions of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment also has embraced non-European societies. In fact, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the influence of the Enlightenment has extended far beyond Europe. Most cultures around the world have been affected. Societies throughout the global village both embrace and reject the global influence of Enlightenment philosophy.

The American Experiment

We shall especially explore one experiment which sought to embrace the philosophy of the Enlightenment in forming a political system. The experiment we explore occurred in another continent, North America. The United States Declaration of Independence is the epitome of Enlightenment thought:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such

principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

(The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776)

The leaders of the American experiment were proponents of the Enlightenment. That was the foundation of the Constitution which they formed with its Bill of Rights; balance of powers between legislative, judicial, and administrative branches of government; and elections for government officials. These all reveal a worldview which had been informed by the Enlightenment. This is especially true of the separation of church and state which is a significant characteristic of the American way of life.

The Enlightenment championed the inalienable rights of the individual to freedom, property, and the pursuit of happiness. These philosophers of two and three centuries ago were confident that their values based on reason were right, not only for Europeans, but for all humankind. In the American experience, this notion was enthusiastically embraced. The Americans believed the "self-evident" natural right of the individual to "the pursuit of Happiness" is universally valid. The Americans were convinced that they were the pioneers for these rights, and had a "manifest destiny" to spread the good news of individual liberty and freedom throughout the earth.

The boundless space and opportunity which the Western frontiers provided helped to sustain these optimistic notions that the spread of

personal freedom around the globe is inevitable. The mission of the United States of America was and is to help that happen. Even more than two centuries after the Declaration of Independence, a U.S. presidential candidate can woo voters by proclaiming that this nation is the last best hope for humanity.

After the Americans had subdued the continental frontiers, they commenced expending increasing energy on their global manifest destiny. All the wars Americans have engaged in during the twentieth century have been interpreted as protecting or spreading the ideals of freedom and democracy. Even the Vietnam War was interpreted by political leaders as being an extraordinary act of national sacrifice and generosity on behalf of an oppressed people who desired the same freedoms Americans enjoyed.

In the hard political realities experienced in the confrontation with communism, those Enlightenment-inspired freedoms which Americans have sought to defend have occasionally degenerated mostly into the freedom to own property. Too often the right of Americans to own property in other lands has been the freedom most energetically defended. Especially in countries in the Caribbean and Central and South America, there has been frequent U.S. military and political intervention to protect the presumed right of U.S. property and business enterprise to function freely in the region.

Western Hegemony

The Enlightenment provided a rationale and justification for European and U.S. hegemony in the world during the heyday of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialism. However, it also appears that the European colonial governments, who had been most influenced by the principles of freedom championed by the Enlightenment, were the most readily persuaded to retreat from the evils and improprieties of colonialism.

Portugal was never significantly influenced by the Enlightenment. Might this account for the fact that Portugal was the last European power to surrender control over an African colonial empire? On the other hand, Britain, a center of Enlightenment development, eventually accepted the call for freedom for India which Gandhi championed. That was the beginning of the mostly peaceful dismantling of Britain's vast global empire.

Yet the philosophers do not merit all the credit for a commitment to the ideals of freedom and human dignity. Although the church as viewed by the philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often functioned in a manner which seemed inimical to the happiness and fulfillment of the person, it is nevertheless true that the humane ideals which the philosophers cherished are nurtured by biblical Christian faith. The Christian gospel has often inspired and empowered the church to minister with and among oppressed people. That has been true throughout the colonial experience.

For example, I lived in East Africa when African nations were gaining independence from colonial Europe. At that time, 80 percent of the educational systems were operated by the churches. The churches were energizing communities and were encouraging the spread of secular education.

Although the church in mission often seemed to benefit from the presence of European colonial government, it is also true that in many situations the church was the most persistent and obnoxious adversary of the imperial system. Examples are the Jesuits in South America or the Church of England in South Africa. During the nineteenth century, the witness of the church was significant in ending the slave trade throughout the British Empire. Clusters of faithful Christians did oppose evils which dehumanize the person during an era of heady Western imperialism.

Of course, the church did not always and consistently function as a conscience. There were many tragic compromises with the colonial powers. For example, the strong anti-Christian bias of the first decades of the Chinese communist revolution was grounded in a century of obnoxious alliances between Christian missions and Western economic and political imperialism in China. The Enlightenment sometimes rightly critiqued the church for having a blind eye on human rights.

Global Secularization

This exploration accepts a divergence between secularization and secularism. As mentioned occasionally in previous chapters, secularization is the process of change, movement, and development in a humanizing direction. Secularism is a commitment to human development with little or no recognition of the Creator. In secularism humanity is at the center of the stage. Thus secularization may become secularism. This is what happened in the mainstream of the Enlightenment.

Yet the secularization process does not need to drive a culture into the embrace of secularism. Too often commitments to human development go to seed when that happens. The experience of Western culture suggests that secularism cannot sustain authentic secularization. Secularism lacks the moral and spiritual energy needed to sustain dynamic wholesome human development.

An astonishing phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is that a secular worldview similar to the Enlightenment has spread around the globe. This profound transformation is working like a leaven in the worldview of peoples everywhere. This is especially true of global urban culture. English is becoming the language which unites this universal urban secular culture.

There is a universal revolutionary change let loose which functions at a far deeper level than merely borrowing "ideas" or "practices" from Western culture. Western culture may have assisted the transformation

process, but mere cultural transfer is hardly an adequate explanation for the pervasive worldwide disenchantment with the status quo so characteristic of the modern global community and especially urban culture. From whence has this disenchantment come?

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin¹⁷ and professor Arend Theodoor van Leeuwen,¹⁸ writing from different vantage points (India and the Netherlands) refer to this disenchantment with the status quo as the phenomenon of "secularization." They describe this as a powerful and irreversible process which is more and more attracting the whole community of humankind. They affirm that secularization is the conviction that there is movement and purpose in human history and that human development is right and possible.

Both Newbigin and van Leeuwen observe that secularization does not develop or spread through societies before the witness of the church is present. On the other hand, secularization occurs wherever biblical faith is present. That basic observation leads these scholars to conclude that the presence of the church is the seed which creates secularization. They are convinced that secularization is the progeny of biblical faith.

The presence of the Christian gospel in a society is the yeast which creates the conviction that history and the person have significance and purpose, that history is moving toward a future glorious fulfillment. The gospel is the yeast which functions to turn a society away from worldviews which believe that history is a meaningless cycle or that it

hangs without real or significant movement.

Biblical faith informs a culture that the good heavens and earth are not divine, nature is understandable, and the earth can and should be made better through human enterprise committed to the well-being and progress of people. Even though only a few people in a culture may explicitly embrace the Christian gospel, nevertheless, *as the lifestyle, perspectives, and biblical narratives emanating from the Christian community begin to penetrate the culture, a serendipitous result is secularization. Once a people have glimpsed this invitation to human freedom and development, there is no turning back.*

The Dyak chief of West Kalimantan described in chapter seven is an excellent example of the relationship between the Christian faith and secularization. For centuries these people of the rivers had functioned in an ontocratic worldview which believed that capricious spirits caused natural phenomena. Life revolved mostly around the need to pacify these spirits through sacrifice and entreaty. Squawking birds were the omens of the spirits. At least annually human sacrifice was required by the spirits.

Now all of this was changing. The sacrifices were offered no more. Squawking birds were hardly noticed. The developing Christian congregation had developed a thriving medical clinic and agricultural development project. Literacy was being introduced. As the village chief explained it to me, the church had brought enlightenment to his people

in just a few years.

The words of this goateed man with his large straw umbrella hat; this illiterate Dyak chief of a small clan of three hundred river people in the isolated jungles of West Kalimantan; this man whose words were accompanied by the croaking of frogs from the flooded river which flowed around and under the village homes elevated on wooden piles cut from the forest; this man who was interested in knowing how large the river is which flows past my village, for he could not conceive of traveling from village to village without a river highway—the words of this man seemed to have come right from the mouth of the eighteenth-century French interpreter of the Enlightenment, Voltaire.

This is what the Dyak chief said to me: "Now we think, plan, and do our work. In this way we experience progress. It is much easier being a chief now than it used to be because we don't worry about the squawking of the birds any more."

The philosophers of the Enlightenment would have substituted "religion" for the "squawking of the birds." Yet the meaning is the same. The Dyak chief and his people have begun drinking from the stream of secularization. And the waters of that stream are refreshing. The power of the "birds" of religion who inhibit human development have been broken forever. Reason has usurped the role of the "birds" in human planning. There will be no turning back.

Nevertheless, the Dyak chief has not really become Voltaire, at least

not yet. Although he is drinking from the stream of secularization, he has not yet become a secularist. The Dyak Christians include worship and prayer in their planning and life together. The church and the Christian gospel have revealed to them that God loves them and invites them to become part of his family who are committed to joyous human development. They have discovered that God is opposed to all forms of superstition. They have become a people inspired by the gift of hope.

However, the boundary between a commitment to secularization and secularism can be easily traversed. At the church-operated riverside medical clinic in West Kalimantan, I observed no praying for the ill children who received medication from the Indonesian Christian nurse. They received only pills. That act of healing through science without any prayer was surprising in this Dyak society where the spiritual dimension of existence had always been so central.

I could almost feel the thought processes of the Christian nurse. If the natural laws related to healing are understandable and reliable, why pray? Once enlightenment happens, why consider God? Do people really need God to understand and subdue the good, reliable, and understandable earth? Does humanity really need to know and obey God to establish a just, righteous, and harmonious society? Does Jesus have any relevance to a people who have been freed from the bondage of "religion" or the "birds"? As for spirits and gods, were they always only imagination anyway?

Global Secularism

The manner in which a people answer those questions determines whether God or humankind will be at the center of the secularization process. When a society places the person in the center of the stage and nudges God into the irrelevant and unnoticed periphery, that is secularism, and that is what has happened in the European Enlightenment. Marxism has been one of the most powerful expressions of secularism; that will be the theme of the next chapter.

A characteristic of modernity is that secular perspectives, which are skeptical of the dynamic involvement of God either in the natural order or in history, pervade the global community. These perspectives are packaged in various philosophical wrappings. Some examples are atheism, deism, agnosticism, humanism, New Age movement. Although the Christian faith may have originally planted the seeds of secularization, these and other such ideologies which prevail in the modern global village are not biblically grounded.

The spirit which induced Thomas Jefferson to scissor from the biblical gospels all references to the miracles of Jesus is now a global phenomenon. The conviction that nature and history function autonomously of any divinities, spirits, or God is present in societies around the world. Although the biblical accounts of God's acts in history have nurtured and sustained the perspectives which originally formed the secularization processes, now that the phenomenon is under way,

secular ideologies often replace faith in God. A big bang formed the universe with all its complex intricacies. The God of biblical theism is irrelevant.

Recounting his wartime travels, Curzio Malaparte tells of a conversation at a 1943 diplomatic dinner in Helsinki. The guests were conversing about a communist prisoner who had killed the prison chaplain because the pastor had challenged the prisoner's atheism.

A guest commented, "He had tried to kill God in the pastor."

The Turkish ambassador elaborated, "The murder of God is in the air; it is an element of modern civilization."¹⁹

Free Enterprise

The Enlightenment gave birth to the free enterprise theory of economic growth. It also birthed Marxism, which the next chapter explores. Both systems are committed to the accumulation of material wealth through human enterprise. In a free enterprise or capitalist system, the individual entrepreneur gains freedom to acquire personal wealth. The right to private property is a cornerstone of the free enterprise system. Market forces determine prices and wages and which products shall be produced.

Adam Smith (d. 1790) was the seminal philosopher of the free enterprise system. His *Wealth of the Nations* was published in the same year as the United States Declaration of Independence. Adam Smith

perceived that greed is a natural law and should be the engine which empowers the economies of nations. Of course, Smith and his fellow economists gave greed a more respectable name—self-interest. He worried about the evil consequences of a capitalism not grounded in ethics; the system could only function wholesomely in a healthy ethical environment.²⁰ Greed with no ethical moorings would be a cataclysm.

The fundamental theory is that if people are encouraged to function in accord with their natural inclinations of self-interest, market forces will bring about good for all. Smith spoke of the invisible hand which functions in market forces, blessing the whole society when an economy is structured in accordance with natural laws.²¹ The ideal system is free enterprise, which provides opportunity for individual initiative. In such a system, self-interest produces incredible wealth which benefits the society as a whole.

In a free enterprise economy, market forces will temper the inclination of greedy people to exploit others. For example, the insensitively greedy merchant will lose customers. Yet self-interest empowers the whole system. It creates dynamic economies.

The free enterprise capitalist system has produced enormous wealth in the global village. It has also created ecological disaster. Market forces cannot control the rape of the sea and land by greedy people. Natural law as championed in the free enterprise system is not enough to rescue our planet from destruction. The quest for immediate wealth must be

tempered by concern for the well-being of the earth and the survival of future generations.

Future hope and responsibility must temper greed. Responsible governments everywhere are discovering that greed must be controlled. Otherwise the planet will be devastated. Nations and governments must incorporate future hope into their laws governing human economic enterprise. Governments and societies must set boundaries.

It is also evident that the invisible hand is not working well in bringing blessing to the global village as a whole. This hand, thought to distribute the fruit of self-interest in a manner which benefits all, has in many circumstances become the hand which takes from the poor and gives to the rich.

During the 1980s, the people living in absolute poverty in our global community increased from 500 million to 1,100 million. Huge disequilibriums are developing between the rich north and the poor south. By the beginning of the 1990s, the huge region of Africa south of the Sahara was producing an annual gross national product equal to that of tiny Belgium. Much of this poverty-wealth disparity has developed in free enterprise global systems.

On a recent flight to Peru, my nighttime reading included a section in the *New York Times* describing the economic plight of that country. I learned that the median income for a government civil servant in the capitol, Lima, was one-tenth of what was required to support a family of

four at poverty level in that city! At that time Peru was paying \$50,000,000 monthly in interest rates to Western banking systems.

In 1990 the poorest countries, in the global community transferred \$38,000,000,000 to the wealthy countries through interest payments. In most impoverished countries, the net flow of wealth is away from the poor and into the banks of the wealthy. Self-interest, which functions without restraints in a free enterprise global system, contributes to poverty, suffering, and death for one-fifth of the global community.

The Problem of Evil

The pioneers of the Enlightenment were optimistic about human nature and enthusiastic about the capabilities of reason to discover and apply the good. They encouraged decision makers to form social institutions so as to give the individual freedom to think and do as she chooses. Then all would be well.

This basic optimism concerning human nature was not sufficiently alert to the persistent reality of evil.²² The twentieth-century German experience shook the confidence of Western culture. By the first third of the century, Germany had developed one of the most sophisticated and open-minded intellectual establishments the human family had ever enjoyed. Yet that is where the Holocaust happened. A characteristic of the Enlightenment and of all subsequent Western culture is that there is an unwillingness to recognize or deal with the very real phenomenon of evil.

Yet what is evil? What is good? The pioneers of the Enlightenment believed that human reason alone could discover and apply the good. However, three centuries ago they functioned in a Christianized society which had a fairly clear consensus regarding the nature of the good. That consensus has weakened in modern Western and global society, where pluralism abounds.

In earlier chapters we referred to Allan Bloom, a twentieth-century U.S. philosopher who stands firmly in the tradition of the Enlightenment. His popular book *The Closing of the American Mind* describes the easy drift into relativism which characterizes modern North American society. Bloom insists that relativism is a betrayal of the clear, reasoned thinking which the Enlightenment demanded. Nevertheless, he seems to flounder in his quest for a way out of the quicksand of our moral relativism.²³

For Americans of the last several decades, the only real virtue is nonjudgmental openness to all values, no matter how contradictory they are. In the face of pluralistic national and global communities, the highest virtue proclaimed throughout the societies in which the Enlightenment has triumphed is this: be open-minded! Both the absence of clear moral perspectives and a philosophy of life which exalts the individual pursuit of happiness are inviting Western culture into hedonism.

Recall that Hindu philosophy and religion also embraces relativism.

In this regard, Hinduism, or movements derived from Hinduism, are attractive to modern Western societies. The Hindu option does not place on the person with philosophical inclinations the requirement to discover and apply universal morals. Neither does it accept the biblical orientation which insists that, although cultural diversity is right, there is one righteous God, one humanity, and one morality grounded in self-giving love and commitment to the well-being of others.

The fathers of the Enlightenment would be appalled that their idealism has been distorted into an easy-going relativism. They, just as their ancient Greek counterparts, were confident that rational thought and intuition could perceive clear, universal moral virtue. Alas, instead of continuing the quest for that universal good, the new morality celebrates pluralism in the global village with only two foundational commitments: Enjoy yourself. Be open-minded.

The American Crisis

The U.S. experiment with a democracy grounded in the principles of the Enlightenment is an instructive example of the dialogue between faith and secularism in a secularizing society. In the mid-1980s, Robert N. Bellah and a team of social scientists at the University of California published a study, *Habits of the Heart*, which described and interpreted case studies of mainstream American culture.²⁴ The intention of this study was to develop a profile of the American worldview some two

centuries after launching this experiment in democracy.

The study demonstrates that there are two major themes which inform American commitments. First is the biblical covenantal theme. The Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock is the archetype of that theme. They came to the New World seeking religious freedom. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, they formed a covenant community in which they intentionally sought to apply the principles of biblical faith (especially Old Testament). They lived with an awesome awareness of the transcendent authority of God. A biblical covenantal theme has always been a significant influence in the American worldview.

The second theme comes into American culture from the Enlightenment. The archetype of this theme is the Declaration of Independence. In that declaration there is one particular theme which has become dominant in American society—the pursuit of happiness! The study demonstrates that in American culture the pursuit of happiness is largely interpreted in individualistic terms.

The several centuries in which Americans struggled with the conquest of the Western frontier significantly enhanced the individualism theme. By the late twentieth century, freedom and individualism had become the dominant theme in American culture. Americans believe the purpose of life is the pursuit of individual happiness.

The Enlightenment theme of individual freedom has overwhelmed the biblical covenantal themes in American culture. There is almost no

awareness of God from the perspective of biblical faith. This is not to say that Americans are atheists. Indeed not! But the function of God in the American worldview is different than in biblical faith.

For most Americans, God's function is to assist them in the pursuit of individual happiness. Largely absent in the culture is any awareness of God, the transcendent one, who confronts the person calling for repentance and righteous living. There is almost no awareness of the church functioning as a covenant community. Few people would consider seeking specific moral guidance from the church, because such decisions are exclusively an individual matter.

The individual pursuit of happiness overwhelms other values and commitments. Enduring covenantal relationships are incomprehensible in a society where individual self-fulfillment is paramount. Even a relationship as intimate and significant for the well-being of society as the family is expendable in the interest of the individual pursuit of happiness. At every level, relationships take on a contractual character. They endure only as long as the individual is experiencing self-fulfillment.

Surely this individualistic development in American culture is a fulfillment of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's worst fears. Just over two centuries ago, he worried that the Enlightenment could self-destruct on the shoals of individualism. His *Social Contract* was an attempt to bring a corrective into the movement. He argued that personal fulfillment

could develop authentically only in communities of accountability.

Just over two centuries later, Bellah and his colleagues lament the way individualism is sabotaging precious qualities in American culture. They worry that American society cannot endure without a revival of covenantal commitments.²⁵

Commitment to the individual pursuit of happiness, when combined with the power over nature which scientific technology offers, is creating ecological disaster. Bellah and his colleagues lament modern American culture, in which there is only a whisper of awareness of accountability to the Creator. In biblical faith, humanity is commanded to subdue the earth—but with accountability to the Creator. The biblical mandate is for humankind to work in *partnership with God to preserve, care for, and develop the good earth*.

The Enlightenment encouraged Western culture to ignore these foundational commitments of biblical faith. Creation became nature, which is governed by natural laws. These laws function independent of any relationship to a creator. Accountability to the Creator has been severed.

Is the Enlightenment Helpful?

The second chapter in our exploration of global gods identified issues of global human survival and well-being. Each subsequent chapter has reflected on aspects of those issues. The Enlightenment has been a

powerful influence in the global community and yeast permeating responses to global issues. These summary statements identify ways the Enlightenment informs global culture.

1. The Enlightenment has been supremely an urban movement. Modern global urban culture is really Enlightenment culture. It undergirds a worldview which nurtures the technological commitments required to sustain modern urban societies.

The English language is a significant medium of communication in this global urban culture. Modern communication systems link all these urban centers of global culture. Television and radio are significant facilitators of global Enlightenment values.

2. The Enlightenment desacralized creation. The universe is now referred to as nature rather than as creation. While it may seem awesome and exhilarating to assume responsibility to use nature for human desire without reference to the Creator, the consequence is often ecological disaster.

Perhaps the ultimate crime against creation has been the development of nuclear weapons. If they are ever used on a massive scale, the good earth will be mined. If there is no Creator to whom we are accountable, then the destruction of the earth is our right if we so choose.

3. Hope for a better future may help to inhibit irresponsible use of the good earth. Yet a deficiency of modern Enlightenment culture is the

crisis of hope. Is it possible for a culture to sustain a sense of hope and purpose without awareness of transcendent reality?

If the universe consists of only more and more galaxies to be discovered, but there is no God providing purpose to the whole phenomenon, then human existence really has no ultimate purpose. The consequence is malaise. Why be concerned about the future?

4. The Enlightenment championed the worth of the person. A positive development has been increasing global concern for human rights. This includes the affirmation of pluralism in the context of secular government.

5. Global Enlightenment culture has now come to the place where it cannot conceive of universal truth. Human reason has been enthroned as the center of the universe. Reason left to itself is capable of absorbing enormous quantities of data and developing fascinating philosophical speculation. Yet coherent universal truth eludes modern Enlightenment societies.

The test of time has demonstrated that the parents of the Enlightenment were misguided in their assumption that rational reflection would bring forth self-evident truth. Enlightenment culture celebrates personal values, but it cannot comprehend universal truth claims. The consequence is moral, cultural, and religious relativism.

6. However, Enlightenment culture has created several "scientific" ideologies that have claimed universal political validity. Politics became

ideological; so-called rational ideas become ideologies that transcend the parameters of the nation. American manifest destiny is one expression of the synthesis of ideology and the political in a mission that moves far beyond the constraints of a national political system.

Ideology married to politics was the root inspiration that catapulted the global community into World War II. This was a war of political ideologies—Nazism, Stalinism, and American manifest destiny—in collision. All were inspired and nurtured by the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Each was an ideology firmly grounded in scientific self-evident truth. Let the world be aware. Rational ideologies married to political systems can be treacherous!²⁶

7. The Enlightenment in its primal vision was a champion of human freedom. This theme has powerfully contributed to the movements for independence among colonized nations, beginning with the United States in the late eighteenth century.

In more recent times, the freedom theme threatens the fabric of nation-states as ethnic-national groups seek greater autonomy. In some circumstances the Enlightenment notions of the social contract have been revived, as for example in the nations of the former Soviet Union. The perception is that ethnic-national communities should have the right voluntarily to decide the issues of participation in a nation state or community of nations. Such ideas place enormous strains on the political and economic fabric of nation-states.

8. The Enlightenment also affirmed the integrity of the person. Commitments such as universal education for all are one of the consequences. Even in the poorest nations, universal education for the children has become a reasonable expectation. Yet it is important to recognize that in the developing world, the church has often been in the vanguard of facilitating that commitment.

9. The Enlightenment has sown the seeds of individualism in cultures. Some social scientists warn that Western societies are in danger of disintegration because of an overemphasis on the right of the individual to seek individual self-fulfillment.

10. The application to economic theory of the individualism and self-interest which the Enlightenment fostered in Western societies has produced astonishing wealth. Yet those same theories have contributed to tragic decline into deep poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

11. The individual self-fulfillment theme in global culture is creating havoc with the family. For too many people, covenantal relationships are sacred no more. The thought of self-sacrifice and self-discipline for the well-being of the family is an echo from a distant past for many who are drinking from the wells of modern global urban Enlightenment culture.

12. The Enlightenment has not done well in reducing the frequency or fury of war. In the wake of the Enlightenment, France experienced a bloody revolution. The United States was the first nation created in the glow of the Enlightenment. That nation was born in bloodshed.

The quest for individual freedom which the Enlightenment championed has too often inspired war against oppressors. Other wars have been fought to extend the wonderful fruit of Enlightenment culture to those less fortunate. During the nineteenth century, colonial wars were too often justified under the mandate of extending the benefits of Western civilization.

The humanization themes of the Enlightenment may have helped to instill conscience in the liberal democracies of the West against the use of excessive violence in their colonial empires. Or was it the conscience of the church? In the twentieth century, England surrendered much of her vast empire, in most cases through amicable agreements with the leadership of freedom movements in the colonies.

13. The Enlightenment has been a powerful movement for change. It is a desacralizing movement which encourages the replacement of religious or faith perspectives with secular commitments. In modern times these perspectives have become adversarial to religious institutions and beliefs. This is especially so when those institutions or beliefs are perceived to restrict individual freedom.

14. The Enlightenment critiqued superstition. It has also been critical of religion as a whole. It is especially ruthless against religious expressions which are superstitious and dehumanizing. In this way, the critical spirit of the Enlightenment may actually be a gift to religions by inviting them to rid the movements of superstitious beliefs and

dehumanizing practices.

The Enlightenment perspective demands that people of faith be prepared to give account of the basis of their belief. Evidence is required if the believer is to function with credibility. On what basis do Hindus believe in the reincarnation of the soul, or Muslims that the Qur'an has been revealed by God, or Christians in the bodily resurrection of Jesus? What is the data on which belief is founded?

Is the data credible? The Enlightenment worldview is intolerant of belief not grounded on reliable evidence. This questioning approach to the truth claims of believers might also be a gift of the Enlightenment to the global community. Authentic religion requires evidence; otherwise it might be only illusion.

15. It appears that in relationship to theistic faith, the Enlightenment worldview has become a closed-minded system. The modern spirit of the Enlightenment seems to have developed a bias against considering that God might act in history or creation.

A Secular Gospel

The global village is entangled in a paradox. On the one hand, there is universal intrigue with the humane and technological qualities of the Enlightenment culture. A sign of this intrigue is the voracious quest throughout the world for learning a European language —English, French, German, Spanish. English is especially attractive around the

world. English has become an important window through which a non-Western person can observe Enlightenment culture. That is the chief reason for the quest for a European language such as English.

On the other hand, there is apprehension concerning the quality of modern Western societies. Other peoples perceive that Western culture is becoming decadent. There is anxiety concerning the ecological disaster which uninhibited technological growth has created.

There is dismay that it is hard to discover hope in Western culture. The individualism and moral relativism of contemporary Western culture nurtures a debilitating hedonism. The huge U.S. budget deficits appall the world community. Our friends ask why the United States chooses to function so irresponsibly, because these deficits create serious problems for the global economy. Western culture is squandering her economic and moral capital.

It is true that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century church structures and hierarchy often opposed the humane, political, or scientific aspirations of the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, it is also true that the presence of biblical faith contributed significantly to the invigorating foment and worldview which enabled the Enlightenment. The synergistic interaction with Greek philosophy was also important.

A salient quality of the Enlightenment was hope. The original taproot of that hope was the conviction that God is working in history to bring about the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. However, Western culture

now ignores and even denies these spiritual roots which have nurtured the flowering of scientific methodology, the sense of hope and anticipation which is the essence of commitment to human and economic development, and the humane qualities, rights, and freedoms which intrigue so many others in the global community.

It might be that others from non-Western societies will become the true preservers of an enlightenment and secularization which nurtures the qualities of human dignity, freedom, hope, and development which the European Enlightenment sought. These are the people who, like the Dyak chief, seek expressions of secularization nurtured by faith in the Creator.

An example are the Quechua Indians in the Cusco region of the high Andes of Peru. They are descendants of the Incas. Recently I met with a medical and economic development team serving in Christian congregations of Quechua people.

"The worldview of these mountain people is perplexing," confided the North American development team.

"We will invest half a day planning for community uplift. Then they conclude the discussions with prayer, singing, festive worship, climaxed with exuberant informal conversation."

I queried. "Could it be that their faith is forming them into an authentic development community?"

Theirs is an enlightenment whose taproot is faith in the Creator of the

good earth who loves them and energizes with hope.

Interestingly, the Quechua now want to learn Spanish. Why?

Spanish is the official language of Peru. Yet there is more to the quest for Spanish than integration into national society. Spanish will open a door for Quechua participation in global Enlightenment culture!

Reflection

1. In what ways had biblical faith and the church planted the seeds in European soil which brought forth the Enlightenment?
2. Assess the effect of the Enlightenment on the global community.
3. What might be the danger to the ecological well-being of the earth of humankind considering the earth as "nature" rather than "creation?"
4. Account for the persistent interest the global community has in understanding Western culture. What is attractive about Western culture? What aspects are not attractive?
5. Account for the changes taking place in the village of the Dyak chief