

INTRODUCTION

ECUMENISM AND ENLIGHTENMENT CATHOLICISM: BEDA MAYR O.S.B. (1742–1794)

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Enlightenment research has come a long way. The Enlightenment that was once seen as a uniform event is now considered a multi-perspectival, multi-layered, and multi-centered movement “in which similar sets of questions about man and the universe were answered in different ways.”¹ As John G.A. Pocock said, “We can no longer write satisfactorily of *the* Enlightenment as a unified and universal intellectual movement.”² The Enlightenment can no longer be identified with an “age of reason,” nor as simply a homogenous or anti-religious movement, but must be seen as a process of cultural and sociological diversity,³ a movement with cosmopolitan and nationalist, devout and agnostic, erudite and ignorant tendencies.⁴ However, it was not until the early 1980s that,

¹ László Kontler, “What is the (Historians’) Enlightenment Today?” *European Review of History* 13 (2006): 357–371, at: 360. Peter F. Barton, *Jesuiten, Jansenisten, Josephiner* (Vienna: 1978), 166–167. John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment. Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge: 2005), tries to convince the reader of the coherence of the Enlightenment and is rather critical of the “diversity” approach (esp. 1–51: 377–405). Another critical voice is that of Robert Darnton, e.g. in his essay “The case for the Enlightenment: George Washington’s false teeth,” in idem, *George Washington’s False Teeth: an Unconventional Guide to the Eighteenth Century* (New York/London: 2003), 3–24.

² John G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge: 1999), 13. Critical of this approach is again John Robertson, “The Enlightenments of J.G.A. Pocock,” *Storia della storiografia—History of Historiography* 39 (2001): 140–151.

³ Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, 16–18. Ibid., 16: “If no single philosophy characterizes Enlightenment thinking, they ask, why should any area of intellectual activity be excluded? [...] Ultimately it becomes impossible to exclude any not obviously reactionary form of thought from the Enlightenment’s liberal embrace. But there is a price to pay: an Enlightenment so inclusive is in danger of losing any coherent, distinctive, intellectual identity.”

⁴ Giorgio Tonelli, one of the most important historians of 18th century philosophy, stated in the 1970s: “There are few periods in the intellectual history of the western world which were hypostatized more than the one called Enlightenment. Considering this era as a whole determined in time (1700 to 1800?) and in space (Central and Western Europe?) is an historical device whose use certainly was expedient in E. Cassirer’s and P. Hazard’s time, but which is quite inadequate now.” (Giorgio Tonelli, “Lumières,

due to the emphasis on social history research of religious phenomena, subjects like the Catholic Enlightenment were rehabilitated. Only then did it become acceptable to view the Enlightenment in certain European countries (e.g. the Holy Roman Empire) as predominantly “religious.”⁵ This “religious” Enlightenment shared with its better known “secular” twin some presuppositions “[...] but could not share them all, precisely because it was grounded in an ecclesiastical institution based on divine revelation of a personal God, and could not, except with the sacrifice of its very essence, accept the whole program of the *philosophes*.”⁶

As László Kontler observed: “Theology has come to be recognized, as was still the case in the eighteenth century, as a form of knowledge, and religious networks of communication as vehicles for exchanging and possibly reforming knowledge.”⁷ Such religious Enlightenment can be found in Judaism, in the Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Europe, and later, in the American colonies. In Catholic circles, some of the Enlightenment networks were run by religious orders, e.g. the Jesuits,⁸ but primarily the Benedictines, and often enough these orders were not only responsible for the exchange of ideas but also for stirring up wide ranging controversies.⁹ The term ‘Catholic Enlightenment’ is quite disputed. However, it seems preferable to ‘Reform Catholicism’ since the latter does not take into account that this movement was influenced by the European Enlightenment process. Moreover, an understanding of the Catholic Enlightenment as a process of its own, with its own dynamics, communication networks, and programmatic ideas, seems to be more and more accepted. Again, this

Aufklärung: A Note on Semantics,” *International Studies in Philosophy (Studi internazionali di filosofia)* 6 (1974): 166–169, at: 166).

⁵ Reinhard Koselleck, “Aufklärung und die Grenzen der Toleranz,” in Trutz Rendtorff (ed.), *Glaube und Toleranz, Das theologische Erbe der Aufklärung* (Gütersloh: 1982), 256–271; Werner Schütz, “Die Kanzel als Katheder der Aufklärung,” *Wolffenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung* 1 (1974): 137–171.

⁶ Samuel J. Miller, *Portugal and Rome. An Aspect of the Catholic Enlightenment* (Rome: 1978), 1–2.

⁷ Kontler, “What is the (Historians’) Enlightenment Today?” 359. Rudolf Schlögl, *Glaube und Religion in der Säkularisierung. Die katholische Stadt: Köln, Aachen, Münster, 1740–1840* (Munich: 1995), 80–109, shows with reference to three major Catholic cities in the Empire that the self-understanding of the bourgeoisie was emphatically defined by religion.

⁸ Catherine Northeast, *The Parisian Jesuits and the Enlightenment, 1728–1762* (Oxford: 1991).

⁹ James Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: 2001), 48–49.