

# CHRISTIANITY IN EUROPE - ENLIGHTENMENT 15

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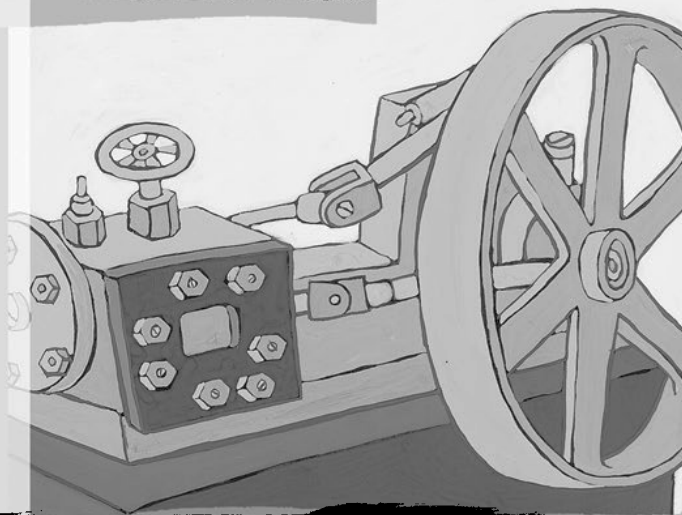
## CHRISTIANITY IN EUROPE AROUND 1800

### Objective

The children obtain some insight into the problems posed by the Enlightenment.

### Contents

- Features of the Enlightenment.
- Christianity in crisis.
- Keeping the faith.



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## Introductory Remarks

### 1 The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment is a European intellectual movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whose effects are still felt today.

People at that time mostly lived a life of dependency (in a state of intellectual immaturity) on landowners, princes, or clergy, for example. One of the significant philosophers of Enlightenment was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who lived in Königsberg, Prussia. His endeavour was to make people aware of their intellectual immaturity and to stimulate the use of their sense of reason in order to act independently. People should decide freely for themselves which traditions, norms, and institutions they want to follow. Common to the various representatives of the Enlightenment was the notion that all people are equal and only capable of deciding between truth and falsehood by means of reason.

From the aforementioned basic thoughts of the Enlightenment, the following principles of law were derived, for example:

- All people are born free and are equal before the law. Serfdom (personal dependency on a liege lord with many tax and service obligations) is to be abolished.
- Every human being has the right to life, liberty, possessions, and the pursuit of happiness. These human rights must be protected by the state.
- There is no authority that is exclusively given by God. Systems of rule can only be established through expressed or implied agreement of the parties involved.
- The state must exercise religious tolerance. Witch trials and torture are to be abolished.
- All have the right to education.

These basic principles were reflected in the constitutions of many democratic states.

### 2 Christianity in crisis

The claim that man is only capable of discerning between truth and falsehood by means of reason, gained wide acceptance in learned circles and even among theologians. More and more people prac-

tically idolized reason. This led Christianity into a crisis, because even the authority of God was no longer accepted. In addition, the sacrifice of Christ as the only means of redemption for mankind was being challenged.

Some theses of the Enlightenment that are definitely incongruent were, for example:

- God is only to be found in nature (Baruch Spinoza, who died in 1677).
- Divine revelation (through the Bible, preaching, etc.) does not occur.
- God may well be the Creator, but His nature remains unrecognizable (Locke, who died in 1704).
- After the creation, God had no more influence on the world. It maintains itself and develops independently (deism).
- Genuine religion is the love of what is good and beautiful.

The thoughts of the Enlightenment had their effects on the preaching of the Protestant Churches, but also in the Roman Catholic Church.

### 3 Counter-movements

Within Protestantism, movements against idolization of reason developed.

- Pietism (derived from the Latin word *pietas*) emerged toward the end of the seventeenth century. It emphasized the personal relationship of the individual with Jesus Christ. The ideal was a practical, Bible-oriented form of Christianity.
- From the end of the eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century, many revivalist movements developed. They were concerned about leading a conscious congregational life according to Christian principles. Over and above that, they emphasized the necessity of repentance. Awaiting Christ's return played a major role in many groups.

Various free churches emerged from these movements. For example

- the Methodists,
- the Herrnhut Congregation of Brethren,
- the Adventists.

The emergence of new religious denominations led to further fragmentation within Christianity.

#### 4 **Agriculture and industry**

In 1769 the Englishman James Watt invented an economically useful steam-driven engine. Soon, significantly greater output was attained than with water- or wind-driven mills, which had previously been common. An era of serious change began in the working world.

Around 1800 most people in Europe lived in the countryside. In the ensuing years the population grew rapidly, but farmers could hardly employ a greater work force. Many people were thus forced to move to the cities in order to work at an industrial company.

The cities grew rapidly. As a rule a worker at an industrial firm earned less than what he needed to support his family. That is why women and even children had to earn money. The workday had 16 or more hours and no break.

#### 5 **The political situation**

The Enlightenment broke the firmly established state order and caused a few monarchs to make reforms. Also the king of France made some concessions to the demands of the Enlightenment. For some political groups, however, these did not go far enough. They used their increasing influence on the people to stir up dissatisfaction with state conditions.

This led to a revolt by the people in Paris in 1789, marking the beginning of the French Revolution. In the same year still, a constituent national assembly was convened, which later forcibly abolished the previous form of government. The king was deposed and executed.

From that time on, the National Assembly ruled increasingly with despotism and terror. The basic principle of the Enlightenment (to be led by reason) was reversed.

During the revolution and in the time following it, the Christian calendar was replaced by a revolutionary calendar, and instead of God, the Goddess of Reason was venerated.

Within the confusion created by the revolution, General Napoleon Bonaparte came to power in France. Under his command the French armies conquered large parts of Europe. The wars brought fear, terror, and poverty to the people. Wars to liberate the suppressed peoples of Europe followed. Eventually Napoleon had to step down.

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## Lesson Plan

### Lead-In

#### Question Prompt

With the Congress of Vienna in the year 1815, an era of restoration began in Europe. In part, previous political routines were restored, human rights curtailed, and the role of the nobility was strengthened again. For more than thirty years Europe remained without political disruptions.

#### Discussion

Imagine there were no schools. How would you feel about that?

### Implementation

#### Teacher's Presentation

The children openly express their feelings. They will likely bring both positive and negative aspects to light.

Children often find going to school every day a burden. Eventually most children realize that learning is to their advantage. Some states have introduced compulsory school attendance for all children. Until the eighteenth century, compulsory school attendance was unknown. Only very few children had the opportunity to go to school in those days. But that is not the only difference between then and today.

Could you imagine

- working 16 hours per day in a mine?
- living without any freedom whatsoever?
- being at the mercy of other people's arbitrariness?
- having no possessions?
- not being able to express your opinion?

These were signs of the time which fundamentally changed people's views about individual rights, the state, and religion.

#### Workbook, Exercise 1

The children read the board text in the picture, which lists demands based on legal principles from the Age of Enlightenment.

#### Discussion

In eighteenth century Europe the following realizations gained acceptance.

- All people are actually equal.

## Workbook, Exercise 2

## Discussion

## Teacher's Presentation

From this evolved the individual's rights to freedom, equal standing, personal possessions, and protection by the state. These principles are also designated as (inherent) human rights. They were later guaranteed in the constitutions of many states.

- There must be more religious tolerance.

As a result, the individual was given more personal freedom. He could now decide on his religious affiliation himself. In addition, torture and witch trials were abolished.

- Education may be helpful in bringing people out of intellectual immaturity and dependencies.

This was to be the foundation for an existence worthy of a human being in a just society led by sense and reason.

- Rulers do not have unlimited power over their subjects.

This helped shield the individual against state despotism.

The children work on the exercise together.

- The statements on the professor's sheet accept only that which can be derived through reason. They were initially taught at universities and schools, but then also made generally available to the people. They began to influence people's thoughts and feelings more and more. Belief in God and His revelations gradually became weaker. Increasingly, decisions were made and lifestyles determined by sense and reason.

- We apply reason to understand God's word. It can only be grasped by faith, however.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was great scientific and technological progress in Europe. Natural scientists in particular had withdrawn from the influence of religious ideas and in their research now allowed themselves to be guided exclusively by reason. Gradually one learned to understand things that previously were not understood. The more one depended on reason, the greater the problems one had with the Christian faith. What was rejected above all was the possibility of divine miracles.

Not all people held reason as their highest priority, however. In this Age of Reason, there were many who kept their faith. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, people who tried to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ gathered together. They strove for spiritual revival,

	<p>oriented themselves by the Bible, and lived a life of piety and active love toward their neighbour. This movement is called Pietism (from the Latin word <i>pietas</i>), and its followers were called Pietists.</p> <p>From about 1770 to the first half of the nineteenth century, various movements emerged which strove to revive Christendom from its slumber. Christianity was to consider the fundamentals of the gospel again. These are called revivalist movements.</p> <p>Triggered by Pietism and the revivalist movements, new Christian denominations emerged (such as the Herrnhut Congregation of Brethren, the Methodists, and the Adventists).</p>
Statement Prompt	We too live in a time in which many people primarily place confidence in their intellect and personal capabilities; faith is on the decline.
Discussion	<p>We are children of God and want to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ use our intellect, but not make it the focal point,</li> <li>■ keep our faith,</li> <li>■ orient our lives by the gospel,</li> <li>■ be humble with respect to God's omnipotence.</li> </ul>
Conclusion	A child reads to the class.
Bible	<p>Proverbs 3: 5–6:</p> <p><i>"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."</i></p>
Workbook	The children write the Bible verse into their workbook.

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## Notes

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