

and Charles Wesley—Methodism—was also part of the Enlightenment. The Methodists socialized religion and inculcated a gospel of good works, as reflected, for example, in their efforts to educate the poor. Already tending to the same worthy ends, both moral philosophy and religion were reinforced by the new political economy of natural liberty. For Adam Smith, “self-interest was a moral principle conducive to the general interest,” and the general interest “was simply the totality of interests of all the members of society, including the working classes.”

In sum, the moral philosophy of compassion, the Wesleyan gospel of good works, and the new political economy were responsible for creating an England of schools, hospitals, almshouses, and charitable societies. The social ethic mixed the secular and the religious, the private and the public, and helped England survive an economic revolution without suffering the political revolutions that roiled the Continent.

The French Enlightenment was fundamentally different. “Where the British idea of compassion,” Himmelfarb observes, “lent itself to a variety of practical meliorative policies to relieve social problems, the French appeal to reason could be satisfied with nothing less than the ‘regeneration’ of man.” The philosophes tended to elevate “the whole of mankind” over the individual, the species over one’s neigh-

bor. They disdained the masses—the rabble—who “could not be educated because they could not be enlightened; and they could not be enlightened because they were incapable of the kind of reason that the *philosophes* took to be the essence of enlightenment.”

Attitudes of the French Enlightenment colored France’s subsequent revolution, and, Himmelfarb notes, the revolutionary Republic of Virtue “celebrated not the virtue of compassion but that of reason—an abstract elevated reason that denigrated the practical reason of ordinary people.”

The philosophes and the revolutionaries believed in an ideal of the perfectibility of man and wanted to remake the human race. The British wanted to make life better for individual human beings. British society, says Himmelfarb, “respected the liberty of human beings to be different, and at the same time the equality of human beings in their essential nature. The philosophes, by contrast, committed to the principle of reason, a reason not accessible to all people, had no rationale for a liberal society, let alone a democratic one.” The spirit of the French Enlightenment lives on in communism and in the social engineering of the welfare state, whereas notions at the heart of the British Enlightenment—compassion, evangelicalism, natural liberty that is both moral and economic—in recent years have helped to redefine the social ethic in America.

## *A Christian America Still?*

“The ‘Secularization’ Question and the United States in the 20th Century” by David A. Hollinger, in *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (Mar. 2001), The Divinity School, Duke Univ., P.O. Box 90975, Durham, N.C. 27708-0975.

There are two basic points of view about secularization in the United States, observes Hollinger, a historian at the University of California, Berkeley. According to the first, which is international and comparative, secularization made little headway in 20th-century America. The country remains “the most Christian of the major industrialized nations of the North Atlantic West.” The second point of view is national and singular, and quite different from the first. It takes Christian cultural hege-

mony for the norm and argues that America drifted far from that norm in the course of the 20th century.

Of course, America is more secular than it was a century ago, and yet, Hollinger argues, Christianity continues to be a major force in the culture. (In the presidential campaign of 2000, voters got to choose between two major-party candidates who made their Christianity a part of their appeal.) A too narrow embrace of one or the other point of view can have, in

Hollinger's words, "striking intellectual and professional consequences." Thus, specialists in American religious history who adopt a master narrative of Christian decline in a national tradition "shoot themselves in the professional foot" and isolate themselves from an American historiography to which they could contribute more substantially if they acknowledged the continuing legacy, and indeed the vitality, of Christianity.

Hollinger expresses four "modest hopes" about the approach such scholars will take to the issue of secularization. The first is that they will grapple with the question of why secular outlooks made so little headway in the United States in the 20th century by comparison with what occurred elsewhere in the Western industrialized world. His second hope is that historians will sharpen the discussion of secularization by using instead, in some specific contexts, the term "de-Christianization," which is a more accurate way of representing what has occurred. After all, the secularization to which church historians refer is most often "the decline in authority of one specific cultural

program—that of Christianity."

Hollinger's third hope is that studies of de-Christianization will confront directly the implications of the process for those who are not Christian to begin with, especially American Jews. Jews were victims, for example, of American higher education's Christian hegemony, and they benefited by de-Christianization. That presents "an interpretive challenge," notes Hollinger, for those church historians who focus primarily on the downside of de-Christianization.

Finally, Hollinger hopes that "we can attend more directly to the cognitive superiority of science than some of the scholars who have the most to say about de-Christianization have proved willing to do." Science, in his view, is not on "an equal epistemic footing with other ways of looking at the world, all of which are then encouraged to respect each other under the ordinance of a genial pluralism." Time will tell whether the response to Hollinger's "modest hopes," especially among the professional historians to whom they are addressed, will be genial at all.

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

### *Regulating 'Frankenfoods'*

"More than a Food Fight" by Julia A. Moore, and "European Responses to Biotechnology: Research, Regulation, and Dialogue" by Patrice Laget and Mark Cantley, in *Issues in Science and Technology* (Summer 2001), The Univ. of Texas at Dallas, P.O. Box 830688, Mail Station J030, Richardson, Tex. 75083-0688.

Many Americans aren't wild about genetically modified foods, but it's in Europe that "Frankenfoods" are encountering the greatest resistance from consumers and, increasingly, governments. German foreign minister (and Green Party leader) Joschka Fischer said recently that "Europeans do not want genetically modified food—period. It does not matter what research shows; they just do not want it."

The European Union imposed a de facto moratorium on the approval of new genetically modified products in 1999, and while regulations have been proposed that would allow the lifting of the ban, five of the EU's 15 member countries oppose them. Moreover, the regulations include a still undefined "precautionary principle" that could set the bar very high—and that could be exploited as a protectionist tool. For the United States, the stakes are large:

About one-third of its \$46 billion in food exports, and a growing proportion of all American crops (more than 50 percent of soybeans, for example) are grown from genetically modified seed.

Moore, a public policy scholar at the Wilson Center, contends that much of Europe's resistance can be traced to a decline of public confidence in science growing out of "events that have no direct link to genetic engineering." The British government, for example, spent many years assuring Britons that bovine spongiform encephalopathy, better known as mad cow disease, posed no risk to humans. But in 1996, the government did an abrupt about-face. Seventy people have died from a form of the disease; as many as half a million more could die during the next 30 years. Infected cattle have since been discovered in other