

# Catholic Enlightenment – Self-Secularization, Strategy Of Defense, Or *Aggiornamento*?

Some Reflections One Hundred Years After Sebastian Merkle.  
New York Lecture in Remembrance of a Change in Understanding

Harm Klueting

Prof. Dr. Dr. Mariano Delgado in Fribourg zugeignet

The year 2009 is the 100th anniversary<sup>1</sup> of an important change in the understanding of the Enlightenment which took place in Catholicism especially in Germany and in the German-speaking countries. It was the Catholic church historian Sebastian Merkle who opened this change by his German paper “The Catholic View of the Age of Reason”, given at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Berlin at the 12th of August 1908 and published by a Berlin publisher in 1909.<sup>2</sup> Let me first ask: Who was Sebastian Merkle? Afterward I would like to cast a look at the Catholic view of the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment before Merkle. Then I will speak about Merkle’s point of view in his Berlin lecture of 1908. After that some words will be necessary on the development of the concept “Catholic Enlightenment” by Twentieth-Century German, Austrian and French scholars. Finally I will ask for our understanding of “Catholic Enlightenment” nowadays. These are five points.

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<sup>1</sup> Vortrag am 3. Januar 2009 in New York aus Anlass der 100. Wiederkehr von Sebastian Merkles Berliner Rede über die katholische Beurteilung des Aufklärungszeitalters, Lecture given at the 89th Annual Meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association (ACHA) in New York City, USA, Sheraton Hotel Manhattan.

<sup>2</sup> Sebastian Merkle, Die katholische Beurteilung des Aufklärungszeitalters, in: Merkle, Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze. Anlässlich seines 100. Geburtstags, ed. by Theobald Freudenberger, Würzburg 1965, 361–413. – Ibid. 414–420: Sebastian Merkle, Um die rechte Beurteilung der sogenannten Aufklärungszeit [first in: *Schönere Zukunft* 12 (1936), no. 4, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1936, 9–11]; 421–441: Sebastian Merkle, Würzburg im Zeitalter der Aufklärung [first in *AKG* 11 (1914), 166–195].



## Who was Sebastian Merkle?

Merkle was born at the Swabian town of Ellwangen in the south of Germany in 1862.<sup>3</sup> He grew up in the shadow of the famous basilica of the former Benedictine abbey, founded in 764 and converted into the 1803 abolished canon institution and in traditional Catholic surroundings. Since 1882 he studied Catholic theology at Tübingen in the atmosphere of the younger Tübingen school of Catholic theology. His master was Franz Xaver Funk (1840–1907), professor of patristics and an exponent of the Tübingen liberal wing of Catholic theology during that time. In 1887 Merkle was ordained priest and in 1892 he got his Ph. D. in classics. He was an instructor for students of theology at the Wilhelm-College at Tübingen. In 1894 he got a research fellowship and he went to Rome for studies in the Vatican archives, especially the files of the Council of Trent. He stayed in Rome until 1898 and he laid the foundation for his later research in the Council of Trent during those years. In 1898 he became professor of church history at the Catholic faculty of theology of the Bavarian university of Wuerzburg. He remained there until his death at a little village near Wuerzburg at the end of the Second World War. His main work as a church historian was his contribution to the great edition of the sources of the Council of Trent, “*Concilium Tridentinum*”.<sup>4</sup> He edited the first and the second volume – the first with 931 pages in 1901 and the second with 964 pages in 1911<sup>5</sup> – which include the important diaries of the Council’s secretary Angelo Massarelli and some smaller documents, for instance of Girolamo Seripando. Merkle dedicated the first volume of “*Concilium Tridentinum*” to the memory of the ultramontane Carl Joseph Hefele (1809–1893) and the second volume to the memory of Franz Xaver Funk.

Together with Herman Schnell (1850–1906) Merkle was at Wuerzburg head of the “Liberals” who believed in the possibility of a synthesis between the essential truth of Catholic religion and the essential truth of modernity. This was the Anglo-Irish modernist George Tyrrells (1861–1909) basic definition of Catholic modernism. Indeed Merkle’s change in the understanding of Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment cannot be understood without the background of the modernist movement before and after the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century and especially since the French Alfred Loisy’s (1857–1940) book “*L’Évangile et l’Église*” of 1902 and without the ‘Controversy of Modernism’ after the death of pope Leo XIII in 1903 under pope Pius X and since his antimodernist decree “*Lamentabili*” and his encyclical letter “*Pascendi Gregis*”, both in 1907.<sup>6</sup> The ‘Controversy of Modernism’ was not so stiff in Germany compared with France or Italy. The German bishops held

<sup>3</sup> Theobald Freudenberger, Sebastian Merkle – ein Gelehrtenleben, in: Merkle, *Ausgewählte Reden* (cf. fn. 2), 1–56.

<sup>4</sup> *Concilium Tridentinum* (= *CT*). *Diarium, actorum, epistolarum, tractatum nova collectio*, 12 vols., Freiburg im Breisgau 1901–38.

<sup>5</sup> *CT*, Pars I: *Herculis Severoli Commentarius. Angeli Massarelli Diaria I-IV*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1901; *CT*, Pars II: *Massarelli Diaria V-VII*, L. Pratani, H. Seripandi, L. Firmani, O. Panvini, A. Guidi, P. G. de Mendoza, N. Psalmai Commentarii, Freiburg im Breisgau 1911.

<sup>6</sup> Hubert Wolf (ed.), *Antimodernismus und Modernismus in der katholischen Kirche. Beiträge zum theologiegeschichtlichen Vorfeld des II. Vatikanums*, Paderborn 1998; Claus Arnold, *Kleine Geschichte des Modernismus*, Freiburg i. Br. 2007.



in their pastoral letter of December 1907 that there was no modernism in Germany. But really there was. There was also the controversy between antimodernism and modernism, and Merkle was right in the middle of it. But the bishop of Breslau cardinal Georg Kopp (1837–1914) succeeded in persuading the pope that professors of theology like Merkle must not take the antimodernist oath of 1910. The contemporary Oxford scholar Reginald Walter Macan (1848–1941) said on modernism: “Modernism is not a religion: it is a defense of religion”.<sup>7</sup> Merkle thought the very same of Eighteenth-Century Catholic Enlightenment.

### The Catholic view of the Enlightenment before Merkle

In his Berlin lecture Merkle criticized Heinrich Brück (1831–1903), the Catholic church historian and bishop of Mainz since 1899, and his study of rationalist efforts in the Rhenish archbishoprics, published in 1865,<sup>8</sup> and especially Johann Baptist Sägmüller (1860–1942) – and he criticized the liberal Protestant theologian and later sociologist Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923), in 1908 professor at Heidelberg university and since 1914 professor at the university of Berlin. Merkle disagreed with Troeltsch’s point of view in his article on Enlightenment in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the famous German “*Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*” of 1897<sup>9</sup> that the struggle against church supernaturalism was common for all appearances of Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment. He accepted that only for Protestant Enlightenment but not for Catholic Enlightenment.<sup>10</sup> This is the only patch of his paper where Merkle used the term “Catholic Enlightenment” – in German “*Katholische Aufklärung*”.

Johann Baptist Sägmüller was born near Biberach in Upper Swabia in 1860, became a Catholic priest and professor of church history at Tübingen and later a professor of canon law. As a “consultor” he took part in the formulation of the “*Codex Iuris Canonici*” of 1917. Sägmüller, who died in 1942, was an opponent of the modernists. In 1906 he published his book on “Church Enlightenment at the court of Karl Eugen duke of Württemberg from 1744 to 1793”.<sup>11</sup> He did not use the term “Catholic Enlightenment” but the term “Church Enlightenment” – in German “*Kirchliche Aufklärung*”.

In contrast to Merkle Sägmüller agrees with Troeltsch’s view of Enlightenment as a struggle against church supernaturalism. That is the key for understanding the different interpretations. In his view the Enlightenment jeopardized the constitution

<sup>7</sup> Reginald Walter Macan, *Religious Changes in Oxford during the last fifty years*, Oxford 1917. Macan studied Protestant theology at Zurich university.

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich Brück, *Die rationalistischen Bestrebungen im katholischen Deutschland, besonders in den drei rheinischen Erzbistümern in der zweiten Hälfte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Mainz 1865.

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *Aufklärung*, in: *RE*, vol. 2 (1897), 225–241, again in Franklin Kopitzsch (ed.), *Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum*, Munich 1976, 338–374.

<sup>10</sup> Merkle, *Katholische Beurteilung* (cf. fn. 2), 364.

<sup>11</sup> Johann Baptist Sägmüller, *Die kirchliche Aufklärung am Hofe des Herzogs Karl Eugen von Württemberg (1744–1793). Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der kirchlichen Aufklärung*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1906.



of the church, the primacy of the pope and the authority of the bishops. For him the Enlightenment propagated an order of the church “from below” and not “from above” and wanted to change the church into a republican structure – like in Protestantism. The Enlightenment destroyed the dogmas – infallibility of the church and the pope, authority of general councils, doctrine of tradition as the other source of God’s revelation beside the Holy Scripture, inspiration of the Scripture, divinity of Jesus Christ, trinity of God, reality of angels and devil, venerability of Holy Mary and the saints, reality of miracles, effectiveness of the holy sacraments, reality of purgatory, heaven, and hell. Toleration of other denominations was religious indifferentism. He criticized the rejection of liturgies, church holy days, fasting days, devotion of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Virgin, the saints and the rosary, processions and pilgrimages, Sacrifice of the Holy Mass, Latin liturgy, and the replacement of the Holy Mass by sermons on moral philosophy. He deplored the hatred for the celibacy.

#### Merkle’s point of view

In his Berlin lecture of 1908 Merkle polemizes against Sägmüller. He reproaches him for a judgement on the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment and the Eighteenth-Century Catholic church dependent on contemporary critics of the Enlightenment in an uncritical way. Moreover he reproaches him for historiography lead by actual tendencies of church policy, that means by his antimodernist position in the ‘Controversy of Modernism’. Merkle gives a critical survey of Eighteenth-Century Catholic theology: Catholic theology in Germany in the earlier eighteenth century was in danger of being separated from the educated and from the primary sources of belief. This is the major premise. The Holy Scripture was less-known and theology of the Scriptures was disregarded. He quotes Martin Gerbert, the famous abbot of the Benedictines of St. Blasien in the Black Forest, with the complaint about the dominance of scholasticism. The Jesuit order of studies, the “Ratio studiorum” of 1599, did not satisfy the requirements of the spirit of the age. By the way: Merkle does the same what he says Sägmüller has done. He also founded his judgment on contemporary critics, although from the other side. But that is not important. Only essential is Merkle’s new understanding of the Enlightenment for Catholicism and in connection with Catholicism.

In his opinion the anti-jesuit reform of theological studies – especially in Maria Theresa’s and Joseph II’s Vienna – brought a great renewal and, despite of some faults at the beginning, a “second age of humanism”,<sup>12</sup> with studies of sources and a better method of teaching. The reproach for a lack of a true Catholic character and for a change to Protestant or rationalist forms he wants to defeat saying that Catholic was more than scholastic. The state-controlled General Seminaries for the formation of priests founded in the Austrian Monarchy by Joseph II in 1783 were in his opinion not contrary to the decree of the foundation of seminaries by the Council of Trent of 1563. In his view the only problem was that the emperor did not succeed in making

<sup>12</sup> Merkle, *Katholische Beurteilung* (cf. fn. 2), 373.



the pope and the bishops enthusiast for these institutions which could have been an enormous advancement of theological studies. Merkle contradicts the opinion that catechesis under the influence of Enlightenment suppressed essential parts of the doctrine and the truths of faith. Those were only particular cases. He defends Johann Ignaz Felbiger's (1724–1788) catechism of 1765 against the reproach of indifferentism in faith and asserts that this catechism followed the new direction only in the method and depended really on the "Catechismus Romanus" of 1566. Merkle does not defend in the same way the later Jacobin Eulogius Schneider (1756–1794) and his catechism of 1790, which was only focused on moral theology and did not say anything about the sacraments; but he defended Schneider's catechism against the reproach of Antitrinitarianism.

Merkle praises the attempts for liturgical reforms and for a liturgy in German instead of Latin and criticizes the critics who excoriated an up-to-date liturgy as a change to Protestantism and moreover as an assassination on religion. He praises the more active participation of the people in the worship by hymns in modern languages instead of chants in Latin although he calls "vandalism" if magnificent old chants were replaced by trivial songs. He hails the reduction of religious Holy days and approves the refusal of confraternities, pilgrimages and processions because of pastoral, moral and economical reasons. He takes up a positive attitude to Josephinian tolerance. He shares more or less the dislike of the Enlightenment for monks and nuns and praises Joseph II's abolition and secularization of abbeys and monasteries in the Austrian Monarchy and focused the use of the properties of the secularized monasteries for the improvement of the cure of souls and for the benefit of parishes or schools. For him Catholic Enlightenment was not a struggle against supernaturalism but a struggle against exaggerations of the belief in miracles<sup>13</sup> – and Catholic Enlightenment wanted to arm people against the problematic influences of the Enlightenment to teach them to overcome these influences, but not by an anxious isolation against the Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> Merkle says that nobody should canonize the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment had many problems, errors, and shady sides, but – on the other hand – with its struggle against outdated phenomena the Enlightenment was a passage to a new age.

### The concept "Catholic Enlightenment" by Twentieth-Century scholars

After 1914 Merkle published nothing on Enlightenment or Catholic Enlightenment but only an article on the enlightened theologian Franz Berg in 1922.<sup>15</sup> He was not the historian of the Catholic Enlightenment; he was the leading German historian of the Council of Trent before the younger Hubert Jedin (1900–1980). Despite of his

<sup>13</sup> Merkle, *Katholische Beurteilung* (cf. fn. 2), 364.

<sup>14</sup> Merkle, *Katholische Beurteilung* (cf. fn. 2), 370.

<sup>15</sup> Sebastian Merkle, *Franz Berg, katholischer Theologe, Historiker und Philosoph 1753–1821*, in: Anton Chroust (ed.), *Lebensläufe aus Franken*, vol. 2, Würzburg 1922, 14–25. – Cf. Bibliography of Sebastian Merkle in Merkle, *Ausgewählte Reden* (cf. fn. 2), 116–125.



Berlin paper of 1908 Catholic Enlightenment was not a main subject for German-speaking scholars during the 1920s and 1930s. But there were Max Braubach (1899–1975), a professor of modern history at the University of Bonn since 1928, and Ludwig Andreas Veit (1879–1939), a Catholic priest and professor of church history at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau. Braubach wrote about “Church Enlightenment” in 1928;<sup>16</sup> Veit published on Eighteenth-Century enlightened literature and the church in 1937.<sup>17</sup>

Braubach used the terms “Church Enlightenment”, “Church-religious Enlightenment”,<sup>18</sup> and “Catholic Enlightenment”<sup>19</sup> synonymously. Catholic Enlightenment was in his definition a struggle against superstition, belief in miracles or exorcism, struggle against baroque exaggerations in piety, especially in religious holidays, processions, pilgrimages, veneration of saints, saying the rosary, and promotion of catechesis and preaching, focussing internal devotion instead of a great external display, but also education and tolerance.<sup>20</sup> Concerning education the Catholic Enlightenment understood monks as teachers and monasteries as holders of schools contrary to enlightened education. Tolerance meant respect for the faith of non-Catholic Christians and sufferance of their cult.<sup>21</sup> Catholic Enlightenment was, in his opinion, not radical Enlightenment but moderate Enlightenment which did not want to call Catholic belief in question.<sup>22</sup> Braubach does not overlook the danger of the Enlightenment for church and religion – derision of the sacred, rejection of the dogma, indifferentism and apostasy –, but above all he saw the positive effect of the Catholic Enlightenment in liturgy, schooling, education, preaching, and catechesis.<sup>23</sup>

Veit did not use the terms “Church Enlightenment” or “Catholic Enlightenment”. In his opinion Enlightenment was only rationalism and contrary to the belief in revelation. This was close to Troeltsch and to his understanding of the Enlightenment as struggle against church supernaturalism and contrary to Merkle.<sup>24</sup> Veit understands Enlightenment only as a corrosive impact on church and religion and enlightened literature as a “literary storm signal”<sup>25</sup> before the secularization.<sup>26</sup> But he denies a victory of the Enlightenment not only in the German ecclesiastical

<sup>16</sup> Max Braubach, *Die kirchliche Aufklärung im katholischen Aufklärung im Spiegel des ‘Journal von und für Deutschland’ (1784–1792)*, in: *HJb* 54 (1934), 1–63 and 178–220, again in Braubach, *Diplomatie und geistiges Leben im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, Bonn 1969, 563–659.

<sup>17</sup> Ludwig Andreas Veit, *Das Aufklärungsschrifttum des 18. Jahrhunderts und die deutsche Kirche. Ein Zeitbild aus der deutschen Geistesgeschichte*, Cologne 1937.

<sup>18</sup> Braubach, *Kirchliche Aufklärung* (cf. fn. 16), 13 et al.

<sup>19</sup> Braubach, *Kirchliche Aufklärung* (cf. fn. 16), 13.

<sup>20</sup> Braubach, *Kirchliche Aufklärung* (cf. fn. 16), 218.

<sup>21</sup> Braubach, *Kirchliche Aufklärung* (cf. fn. 16), 218f.

<sup>22</sup> Braubach, *Kirchliche Aufklärung* (cf. fn. 16), 13.

<sup>23</sup> Braubach, *Kirchliche Aufklärung* (cf. fn. 16), 220.

<sup>24</sup> Veit quoted Merkle only once (op. cit., 39).

<sup>25</sup> Veit, *Aufklärungsschrifttum* (note 179, 13. – Quoted in the title of his article by Bonifaz Wöhrmüller, *Literarische Sturmzeichen vor der Säkularisation*, in: *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens und seiner Zweige*. New Series 14 (1927), 12–44.

<sup>26</sup> Veit, *Aufklärungsschrifttum* (cf. fn. 17), 25.



principalities but also in the two important Catholic secular principalities, Bavaria and the Austrian Monarchy. Bavarian state-run church reform and Austrian Josephinism are not to classify as Enlightenment in the sense of struggle against dogma and faith.<sup>27</sup>

Braubach's and Veit's studies were published in prewar-Germany or in Germany under Nazi-rule. But both men were far away from Nazism. The same applies for the historian Franz Schnabel (1887–1966), who gave in the forth volume of his "German history in Nineteenth-Century",<sup>28</sup> published in 1937, a survey of the Catholic Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Germany.<sup>29</sup>

After the Second World War there was the French "*Nouvelle théologie*" of Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895–1990), Yves Congar (1904–1995) or Henri de Lubac (1896–1991). The *Nouvelle théologie* was closely connected with the Second Vatican Council of the years 1962 to 1965 – Chenu, Congar and Lubac, who were removed from teaching and publishing by the Holy See under pope Pius XII, played key roles in the shaping of the Second Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council completed the rehabilitation of Catholic Enlightenment in Catholicism – the later cardinal Walter Kasper wrote in 1988: "After the Second Vatican Council the Catholics can look back at the Enlightenment without embarrassment."<sup>30</sup> The Second Vatican Council realized many of the demands of the Catholic Enlightenment. This is to be seen, for instance, by the Council's Declaration of the Freedom of Religion "*Dignitatis humanae*".<sup>31</sup>

But after the Council of the 1960's there was no uncritical or euphoric view of the Catholic Enlightenment. One of the voices after the Council was that of Eduard Hegel (1911–2005), a Catholic priest and professor of church history at Bonn and Hubert Jedin's successor at that university in 1966. In his German study "The German Catholic church under the influence of Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment" of 1975<sup>32</sup> he uses the term "Catholic Enlightenment" only once, just at the end.<sup>33</sup> He understands the Catholic church as the strongest contradiction against the concept of religion of the Enlightenment. He speaks about damages of the Enlightenment to the

<sup>27</sup> Veit, *Aufklärungsschrifttum* (cf. fn. 17), 52.

<sup>28</sup> Franz Schnabel, *Deutsche Geschichte im 19. Jahrhundert*, 4 vols, Freiburg im Breisgau 1929–1937.

<sup>29</sup> Schnabel, *Deutsche Geschichte* (cf. fn. 28), vol. 4, 10–13. – Quoted according to the second edition (1951) by Hans Maier, *Die Katholiken und die Aufklärung. Ein Gang durch die Forschungsgeschichte*, in: Harm Klüeting (ed.), *Katholische Aufklärung – Aufklärung im katholischen Deutschland*, Hamburg 1993, 40–53, especially pp. 47–49.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Kasper, *Wahrheit und Freiheit. Die ‚Erklärung über die Religionsfreiheit‘ des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*, Heidelberg 1988; quoted by Maier, *Die Katholiken und die Aufklärung* (cf. fn. 29), 50.

<sup>31</sup> In German in Karl Rahner /Herbert Vorgrimler (edd.), *Kleines Konzilskompendium*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1966, 28000, 661–675. – Cf. also Harm Klüeting, *Die vierte große Zeitbombe? Warum die Konzilerklärung über die Religionsfreiheit keine Verbeugung vor dem Zeitgeist ist*, in: *Die Tagespost. Katholische Zeitung für Politik, Gesellschaft und Kultur* no. 64, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2009, Pentecost Special, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Eduard Hegel, *Die katholische Kirche Deutschlands unter dem Einfluß der Aufklärung des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Opladen: 1975.

<sup>33</sup> Hegel, *Die katholische Kirche* (cf. fn. 32), 31.



church – reduction of ecclesiology, subordination of the church under the state (the idea of ‘rational territorialism’), misunderstanding of contemplative life, restriction of Christianity only to ethics. But he concedes defects in monastic life. He lauds the catechism of the Enlightenment but he criticizes the theological shallowness of some textbooks. He emphasizes that many enlightened theologians tried seriously to defend revelation and the sacred character of the Holy Bible and that the historical-critical method could be a defensive weapon. But he also criticizes the apostasy of other theologians. Altogether his judgement is a positive one: “It is the merit of Catholic Enlightenment that Catholic Enlightenment listened to the questions of the people of that age, that Catholic Enlightenment saw the problems, and that Catholic Enlightenment searched courageously for solutions for these problems”.<sup>34</sup>

### Our understanding of Catholic Enlightenment

For the current understanding of Catholic Enlightenment Bernard Plongeron (\*1933), professor emeritus of church history at the *Institut Catholique de Paris* and priest of the diocese Nanterre, is a leading authority.<sup>35</sup> He has published some important books and articles on Catholic Enlightenment especially during the 1960s and 1970s. The French Plongeron does not use the French word “la lumière” – the French term for “Enlightenment” – but the German word “Aufklärung”. He does not speak about “la lumière catholique” but he uses the partly German term “l’Aufklärung catholique”<sup>36</sup> – also in French and Italian articles. In his opinion the demands and ideas of Catholic Enlightenment were close to Kant’s well-known definition of Enlightenment of 1784<sup>37</sup> because he emphasizes Catholic Enlightenment as a struggle against superstition – superstition as the greatest prejudice in the meaning of Kant’s concept of prejudice. He quotes the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, chapter 12: In Latin “rationale obsequium”, in English “a reasonable service”, in German in Martin Luther’s translation “vernünftiger Gottesdienst”.<sup>38</sup> And he quotes the pastoral letter of the bishop of Toul of 1765 – “Reason convinces us of faith”<sup>39</sup> – and the Gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 11, where Jesus says: “I thank thee, O Father, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them

<sup>34</sup> Hegel, *Die katholische Kirche* (cf. fn. 32), 31.

<sup>35</sup> Bernard Plongeron, *Recherches sur l’«Aufklärung» catholique en Europe occidentale (1770–1830)*, in: *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 16 (1969), 555–605; Plongeron, *Questions pour l’Aufklärung catholique en Italie*, in: *Il Pensiero Politico. Rivista di Storia delle Idee Politiche e Sociali* 3 (1970), 30–58; Plongeron, *Théologie et politique au siècle des lumières (1770–1820)*, Genf 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Also in French articles and also for Catholic Enlightenment in Italy. I do not speak about the Latin-American ‘*Ilustración Católica*’, cf. Bernard Plongeron, *Was ist Katholische Aufklärung?*, in: Elisabeth Kovács (Hg.), *Katholische Aufklärung und Josephinismus*, Wien 1979, 11–56, especially 19f.

<sup>37</sup> Plongeron, *Was ist Katholische Aufklärung?* (cf. fn. 36), 22. – Immanuel Kant, *Was ist Aufklärung?* *Aufsätze zur Geschichte und Philosophie*, Göttingen 1975, 55.

<sup>38</sup> Plongeron, *Was ist Katholische Aufklärung?* (cf. fn. 36), 23 (epistle to the Romans 12,1).

<sup>39</sup> Plongeron, *Was ist Katholische Aufklärung?* (cf. fn. 36), 24.



unto babes”.<sup>40</sup> But when Kant, a philosopher of Lutheran tradition, defines as superstition the religious practice of the cult as means to justification Plongerón contradicts: such a struggle against so-called superstition is not Catholic Enlightenment.<sup>41</sup>

In my own contribution to the debate, published in 1993, I distinguished for the German-speaking countries between “Catholic Enlightenment” and “Enlightenment in the Catholic parts of Germany”.<sup>42</sup> I called “Catholic Enlightenment” the attitude towards the Catholic church and belief, which wanted to defend dogma and supernaturalism, and “Enlightenment in Catholic Germany” the attitude which was against dogma and supernaturalism.<sup>43</sup> The Fulda canon Philipp Anton von Bibra (1750–1803), for instance, or Franz Wilhelm von Spiegel (1752–1815)<sup>44</sup> were representatives of “Catholic Enlightenment” in this understanding; Eulogius Schneider, the former Franciscan friar, then professor at Bonn university and at the end a Strasbourg Jacobin, was a representative of the rationalist “Enlightenment in Catholic Germany”. I saw Catholicism and Enlightenment as contrary and the mainstream of the Enlightenment in secularization. Therefore I understand Catholic Enlightenment as a phenomenon of transition and as an alliance only for some time.<sup>45</sup>

Finally I mention Bernhard Schneider<sup>46</sup> (\*1959) and his article on “Catholic Enlightenment” of 1998.<sup>47</sup> He understands Catholic Enlightenment as an effort to bring the church to modern times – like pope John XXIII’s *Aggiornamento* of 1961<sup>48</sup> – with the aim to defend church and faith.<sup>49</sup> In this understanding Catholic Enlightenment is apologetic against the radical Enlightenment<sup>50</sup> although he does not see Enlightenment and Catholicism as contrary.<sup>51</sup> Schneider wants to integrate Catholic Enlightenment into the history of the Catholic church.<sup>52</sup> There is no real contrary

<sup>40</sup> Plongerón, Was ist Katholische Aufklärung? (cf. fn. 36), 25f. (Matthew 11,25).

<sup>41</sup> Plongerón, Was ist Katholische Aufklärung? (cf. fn. 36), 27.

<sup>42</sup> Harm Klüeting, ‚Der Genius der Zeit hat sie unbrauchbar gemacht‘. Zum Thema ‚Katholische Aufklärung‘ – Oder: Aufklärung und Katholizismus im Deutschland des 18. Jahrhunderts. Eine Einführung, in: Klüeting (Hg.), Katholische Aufklärung (cf. fn. 29), 1–35.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>44</sup> Max Braubach (Hg.), Die Lebenschronik des Freiherrn Franz Wilhelm von Spiegel, Münster 1952; Harm Klüeting, Franz Wilhelm von Spiegel und sein Säkularisationsplan für die Klöster des Herzogtums Westfalen, in: Westfälische Zeitschrift 131/132 (1981/82), 47–68; Rudolfine Frein von Oer, Franz Wilhelm von Spiegel zum Desenberg und die Aufklärung in den Territorien des Kurfürsten von Köln, in: Klüeting (Hg.), Katholische Aufklärung (cf. fn. 29), 335–345.

<sup>45</sup> Klüeting, Der Genius der Zeit (cf. fn. 42), 8f.

<sup>46</sup> The book of the young American historian Michael Printy, Enlightenment and the Creation of German Catholicism, Cambridge: 2009, was published after my New York lecture. – I will give my comments on this book in the American ‘The Catholic Historical Review’ and in the German ‘Historische Zeitschrift’.

<sup>47</sup> Bernhard Schneider, ‚Katholische Aufklärung‘. Zum Werden und Wert eines Forschungsbegriffs, in: Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique 93 (1998), 354–397.

<sup>48</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, “Aggiornamento” in: LThK<sup>3</sup>1993, 231.

<sup>49</sup> Schneider, Katholische Aufklärung (cf. fn. 47), 384f.

<sup>50</sup> Schneider, Katholische Aufklärung (cf. fn. 47), 385.

<sup>51</sup> Schneider, Katholische Aufklärung (cf. fn. 47), 387.

<sup>52</sup> Schneider, Katholische Aufklärung (cf. fn. 47), 390.



between his and my understanding of Catholic Enlightenment; there is only a contrary between his and my understanding of the Enlightenment in general.

### Conclusion

Catholic Enlightenment was an attempt of *Aggiornamento* and a strategy of defense against the radical Enlightenment, but sometimes with the danger of self-secularization.

### Abstract

The article calls Sebastian Merkle's Berlin paper "The Catholic View of the Age of Reason" of 1908, which stood at the beginning of today's understanding of Eighteenth-Century Catholic Enlightenment. The liberal Catholic church historian moved away from Sägmüller's point of view and denied for Catholic Enlightenment Troeltsch's understanding of Enlightenment as struggle against church supernaturalism. For him Catholic Enlightenment only was a struggle against exaggerations of the belief in miracles, an attempt to arm people against the problematic influences of the Enlightenment and to teach them to overcome these influences, but not by an anxious isolation against the Enlightenment. The article also asks for the use of the concept "Catholic Enlightenment" after Merkle, specially by M. Braubach, L. A. Veit, E. Hegel, B. Plongeron, H. Klueting, and B. Schneider.