PURITAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

20th CENTURY MAN CENTEREDNESS

A PAPER SUBMITTED TO DR. PRONK FOR MODERN CHURCH HISTORY

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I. Liberal Theology and Its Their Presumptions

Liberal Theology\(^1\) and apostasy\(^2\) are similar in many aspects. I am not trying to state that every individual that practices or believes in a liberal theology system is an apostate. I would however state, that a good number amount of liberal theologians tend to be or become apostates. The Liberal Theology of today’s Postmodern culture is not something that has just crept in or somehow managed its way into our churches of the 21st century.\(^3\) Liberal theology was a movement in which Christianity is classified by features such as, the embracing of higher criticism of the bible and which often leads to the willingness to question supernatural elements of the biblical stories in and throughout the whole bible. One of the best illustrations of this would be the virgin birth. Another thing that characterizes the liberal movement is its rejection of a literal interpretation of the Bible and its inerrancy. They also allow others to have their own liberal views of God so that they can believe what they want about God. Furthermore, in recent


years liberalism has put such an emphasis on fellowship and community that it encourages homosexuality. They also seem to be very willing to consider and adopt viewpoints which have their roots outside of Christianity! This is especially true in the areas of science and philosophy. Interpreting theology in the light of modern scientific theories usually results in a perversion of the gospel and the Word of God. Then, lastly, and most importantly the liberal view of salvation, the meaning of the cross and the gospel is broader than we Baptists Bible College students hold to. In fact it amounts to universalism.

Ultimately, the word liberal denotes a more progressive attitude towards Christianity. Liberalism is based on individual, subjective experience, and respects the freedom of the individual to hold and express views which fall outside the boundaries of conservative religion. I would like to expound upon what Theological Liberalism is, so that by tracing its roots in history we may understand how we got s stuck with what we have today Theological Liberalism is rooted in three main presuppositions which they bring to their theology. These three main presuppositions, no matter what branch of Liberalism we are referring to, started in the early 19th century, came to fruition in the 20th century leaving us with its dreadful legacy in the present century. Its’ first root is in the idea that religion should be able to adapt itself to felt needs of the people. For the Liberal Theologian this change is both foreseeable and desirable. With this kind of theology there is no absolute truth. Truth can change due to feelings or whatever one may bring from their own minds to the Bible. Their second rooted idea is that the final authority of religious context is based on one’s own personal experience. What we have here is a person who can actually base his beliefs, morals, and ethics on something they have done, or what their feelings are in an experience. Finally, Liberal Theology holds to the belief that man is made inherently good. Holding to this view would lead to the optimism regarding the
evolutionary process and also was the primary focus behind the postmillennial teaching of the 1800’s. In the end, this doctrine of man being inherently good leads to a relationship with God based on works and them carrying out their servitude duty that they may believe honors God. In most cases this is due to the lack of intellectual knowledge of the Word of God, God Himself, and the redemption of Jesus Christ through faith alone.

II. The History of Modernity to Post-modernity

I would say were liberalism started their roots were in such ideas like orthodox scholasticism and rationalist reactions. During the later 1700’s the truth in which the reformation had brought back to the church had started being attacked once again. The truth being the Scriptures what had once always been looked at as the absolute truth had now been looked at like as if it had no development or no growth in the culture. The longer that individual’s looked at the Word of God like this, rationalism grew even more. This view of rationalism leads to the mindset that Scripture wasn’t given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit but by human. One of the first men we see teaching this was J.P. Gabler in 1787. Gabler wrote many works on theology, mainly on the topic of Dogmatic theology. Galber believed that there was always a reason for what was done in the Bible and would always try to find universal laws to explain the supernatural accounts in the Scriptures.

The pain in this type of mindset is that it has never left our minds even today. It has formed and shaped even the conservative side of Christendom in some ways. Men today still think this way. No matter what the situation may be in our lives, we still try to find reason for everything, or we try to question things that seem hard to believe. Although rationalism has been nearly deceased over 200 years, still today it’s after affects have rippled off into the minds of
today’s believers. The way Glaber studied the Bible is still carried out in many teachings of historical theology today. Although this is not actual liberalism its’ self, these are just some of the mindsets that liberalism would all use later in its job to obliterate absolute truth.

In the beginning of the 1800’s the rise of philosophy started to creep into the mindset of Christianity. Namely, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and F.C. Baur were the two were seemed to bring this into the play of Christianity. Mainly, Baur had left the ideal if rationalism and started to form another line of thinking. This would now look for the spiritual meaning rather than for the rhyme and reason behind something. Baur instead of looking for why Jesus taught what he did, Baur would search for the Jesus’ spiritual realization. Meaning that instead of looking at the truth of which Christ spoke of, he would search for deep historical movements in His teachings that would show the work of the Spirit at work in the church. Also unlike rationalism Baur instead of looking at the importance of Scriptures, he focused more on the historical development. This would allude to the fact that theology its’ self is connected to history. This grew extremely popular in Germany and was taught in New Testament studies.

A lot of these principles have always formed a major tradition carrying through the early churches, the monastic movement, the healing movements, the Roman Catholic Church and even yes our Protestant churches, to the Progressive Movement here of late in the 19th-century the United States and the Civil Rights Movement for racial justice in the American South, and Liberation Theology for justice to the poor in South America. Ever since the 1900s, when Progressive Christianity has formed a major portion of Americans' traditions for what constitutes the morals by which a good society is run. Christian Progressives were among the first to advocate equal treatment of Jews and Catholics from within the Protestant establishment, basing their understanding of human rights on a faith in the worth of other human beings derived
from the gospel. Progressive Christianity stresses fairness, justice, responsibility, and compassion, and condemns the forms of governance that back up war, rely on corruption for continued power, deprive the poor of facilities, or reject particular racial or sexual groups from fair participation in national liberties.

Liberal theology is a branch of religious thinking, or ideas which appeared on the scene around the late last 2 centuries. Like political liberalism which was also emerging at the same time, liberal theology stresses the value and how important of a person’s freedom of thinking and expressions. Liberal theology became dominant in the mainline churches in the 20th century. Although Fundamentalist Christianity has been rejected by the mainline churches, liberalism's dominance was waning by the late 20th century with the rise of the more moderate alternatives like; Neo-orthodoxy, Paleo-orthodoxy, Postmodern Christianity, and more conservative movements such as Neo-evangelicalism and the Confessing movements.

III. Need for Truth was needed

First and foremost I would ask them not to bring their false ideas as to what is truth to the table. Then I would show them that the Word of God is inspired and that it is to be used not to analyze but to read and see what we can do to honor and glorify our Lord. Then I would also show them the deity of Christ and what that can show in our salvation because of the fact that his blood is the cure for our sin. Then we would have to show them more about Christ and who he is form the scriptures and prove to them about his death and resurrection. Then show them Adams sin and original sin and how we are all sinners from birth. Also on how sin is selfness and not something that just happens or that we are allowed to even do because we want to or can. These are all doctrines and areas that they lack and hurt upon. Then lastly teach them to repent
of that sin and show them that faith is not a feeling in which they think. Yet it is a choice that they can make to enter the Lord’s family forever. And then I’d let them know that Christ death was not an example but yet was the only death that will ever pay for our sins, and there is where we can find true forgiveness in Christ alone in which he accomplished at the cross.

IV. How liberalism of the 20th century Deconstructed the Text

When dealing with the text like previous lose of contextdoes not happen often?. When it comes to liberal Theology, context is thrown out the door. Liberal theology has allowed Pluralistic Relativism to come in to the picture which gives truth an all together new meaning. This is the act of allowing truth for multiple meanings. I have my truth, you have yours, and everything is OK. The problem with this is that when Liberal Theology comes to a text like this they will explain that the way they see it is not wrong but it’s another way that is right. The use and misuse of scripture happens constantly. It seems to be that hermeneutics is thrown as well as absolute truth out the door. We have individuals selling books using scripture as something to fill a fit need, or get a fixed feeling. We have speakers giving a phrase or verse to back up their statements so that they can have an audience of hearers agree with them, but know nothing of the scriptures in whole. We have men and sometimes women preaching different gospels from what Scripture says 2 Tim. 4:1-5. This is mainly due to the so called “theologians” of today’s culture that thinks they know God, but in all honestly I wonder if they do know God. These theologians today do not let scripture stand alone, like scripture says that it can and does stand alone. I find it extremely funny when a man of God says he believes in the Holy Bible, and then in no way does

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their theology stand on Scripture alone. The scripture alone is the means of our path to Godliness, and this scripture alone stands alone.  

V. The Problem with Liberalism’s Epistemology

Liberal Theologians main problem in this area is the dealing with epistemology. There are three major ways in which the scriptures and truth is revealed to man, humans, religion, and revelation. Humanly speaking, this is man as the means of absolute final authority. To which I say if this is the way you view scripture what is the reason for even needing scripture. Another view of epistemology is religion, which is mainly the Roman Catholic Church in today’s culture. Although Roman Catholicism believes the Bible is the final authority, it still has allowed tradition to play a role in what it believes about scripture. The practice of praying to Mary, and saints are just two of the examples of their many unscriptural doctrines. Lastly and which I would hold to in epistemology is the view of revelation. This believes that God has communicated himself to man through His spoken Word, the Bible. Although this is a main line view of epistemology there are mainly people in today’s culture that have lost the meaning and view of importance of this scripture. Liberal Theology has brought so many views such as the German rationalism, high criticism, and enlightenment thought in to not only into its system, but as well as man in today’s culture of postmodernism. The advances in Liberal Theology in the past 100 years with the mind set on making the church healthy has lost the meaning of many

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doctrines, God, sin, atonement, hell, and most of all salvation. This all is what has lead to the wrongful teachings, and misusing of the Bible.

VI. Liberalism in the Charismatic Movements

What had happened in their time was that they began to mishandle the Word of God which was extremely important. With a less lack view of epistemology and not allowing the Word to interpret itself by adding their own personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences led to a diminished gospel, and not the Gospel which was given to us by scripture alone. Liberal Theology has infused these views of their gospel, into their hermeneutics and this has led to the decay of scripture. That is why scripture in postmodern culture sees scripture as, “what it means to me”, and not what its’ original meaning to the reader was.

With these problems in time they would lead to major denominational beginnings of the 20th century in which were all liberal. Their man centered mind bought about feelings and experiences that would captivate the one attending and give them a type of spiritual high so that they could feel good about themselves. These were mainly played out through Pentecostal type churches that began their own set of beliefs to try something new and get away from the traditions of the past.

To explain this, the Pentecostal movement was/is a movement that places special emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as shown in the Biblical account of the Day of Pentecost. Pentecostalism is similar to the Charismatic Movement, but developed a little earlier and separated from the mainstream church. Charismatic Christians, at least in the beginning of the movement, they tended to remain in their own respective of denominations.

7 2 Tim. 2:15
Secondly the Charismatic movement was/is a movement that began with the adoption of certain Pentecostal beliefs. See, one didn’t like how one worked over time, so they started their own set of beliefs. These were specifically what are known as the biblical charismas of Christianity. Speaking in tongues, prophesying, slaying in the spirit, miracles and healings. Within mainstream Protestant and Catholic churches. As time went by and by then the Charismatic Christians then formed their own churches and denominations because of their unhappiness to worship how they felt, of was feeling at the time. Because of the continual cross-over between Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement, it is increasingly difficult to speak of Charismatics and Pentecostals as being two separate movements. Beliefs of these two different groups are very similar. Although each movement however is unique in its historical beginnings. These beings came from the influence of the mainstream churches, Dennis Bennett, which is an American Episcopalian, is the reason of this poor movement's seminal influence. Bennett was form California and during the 1960’s said he had the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that had given him this movement. But after the 1970’s these people was forced into the denominations along joining forces with the Pentecostals. This has then passed on into the U.S. and now spreading rapidly in Canada ever since the 1980’s. It appears today that in modern-day Charismatics and Pentecostals are far more united in experience that they have and theology because both movements have adopted elements of Mr. Latter Rain teachings who had influenced the teachings of these movements in the 1950’s with mostly Pentecostals which also was complete heresy. And now this movement spreading into other countries like as far as Brazil and even running their sound churches.

Thirdly in time came along the Vineyard movement, an organization of over 850 churches worldwide, and due to its size is generally considered to be a part of the Christian
denomination. Church leaders and most laity, but they did not typically consider the Vineyard to be a denomination. This is because of their culture within most Vineyard churches that happens to discourage the use of denominational labels for some stupid reason. The Central Governing Body of the Vineyard is a 12-member board of directors. The board is made up of the eight regional overseers of the church plus 4 additional leadership members, including the National Director. Currently, the National Director of the Vineyard is Bert Waggoner. All major decisions, including all major theological and doctrinal statements, are made by the board of directors and not by the word of God. These people don’t even have a statement of faith for their denomination for the longest time. Then in 1983 they started one and took more than 10 years until 1994 till them even had a generic one! And now here of late in 2004 they have a 10 point code for the faith, so they say. Most Vineyard churches have no official membership or any kind of joining procedures or even no membership records. Instead, a community of believers is formed by those who attend Sunday services they say, and weekday “home groups,” and participate in various church ministries that they have to reach the lost with their happy feel good messages. They even have their own publishing houses so that no one can see or know about their material they use. They have it all actually even their own music recording company; this is basically a cult in its self I believe.

They say the scripture is the final authority but yet they have like councils that make up rules, doctrines and laws and ordinances and theology for their denominations that do not come from the word and they don’t even come up with scriptures for all them. They have put feeling and what they believe to be true and what seems cool, or good at a time or for the crowd over the actually biblical doctrines and word of God that they so call to be their authority. A huge idea that they think is that the book of Acts is for doctrine and use that to defend them when they
don’t look at the bible as a whole and see that it was meant for use of history and to show how the church was stated and progressed. The action of the apostles becomes their doctrines and beliefs to be true for their church. The problem lies at the interpretation of the scripture and how it is looked at. They never stay with the same hermeneutic thought out the whole scripture, and make no distinction between what the purposes are of the books written for and why and to even who! I get less upset with these people and once again they are cults, as far as I am concerned.

VII. Liberalism and Feminism

The Evangelical female usually holds the conservative bases of the bible but not always but, also fights for their rights in the society that they live in. The feminists try to do away with the gender based roles everywhere, in their own homes, in the church, and also generally in society. While most of society is not that motivated with the feminists, they stay strong and go along with what they believe in.

The reason that evangelical feminists came about is that some females believe that they should have a spot in the society of its time. They choose to go to the Bible for answers and believe that God wants them to be a feminist. They want to be able to do many of the same roles that men do. In today’s society it is pretty normal to see a women being able to do everything a man can. Feminists tend to preach the bible incorrectly, taking it out of scripture. Their ways of thinking have been known to be called a liberal way of thought. Most thinking that Paul hated women and he did not want them to have any part in the society. Women in today’s society pick up the practice of feminists so easy. Most women that are in the evangelical practice will argue that God is not a man, but a woman. There are
some females that will agree that He was a male, but that he was a feminist and that he believed in the role of women, even though it was a over powering male society.

They, as in feminists, take things out of control or out of line. They believe that God cursed them, but it was just saying that men should just be head of household and take care of their wives. One of the scriptures I have found that they start with is using Luke 10:38-42 to show on how they say Jesus was all about having women and men equal with one another. They also try to say that Jesus picked out the 12 and they were Jews. Now why can we have gentile leaders today in the church since Jesus only picked out Jews in his 12. So if gentiles are aloud then women are as well. Another scripture they use is Gal. 3:28 where it talks about Jew and Greek and so forth and somehow they get all have to be equal and includes men and women as well. Also in Eph.5:21-24 they see it as mutual submission under God and not women under man that is under God. These passages and all the ones that they hit on have been all taking out of their original context to make it mean and sound and seem like the way they want it or the way they need it to be so that they can be used to fit for their life style or there sinful actions that they continue to allow and do in God’s church. Other in the movement just say that Paul was wrong in teaching what he did! Because Christ never used words or any actions to show what he had sad and never stated anything or did anything to teach such truth that Paul spoke on in which he did in several books about where women stand in the church. I would say to these idiots that if that potation of scripture is false and false of Paul then since when do I get to pick and choose what scripture I am allowed to use and not allowed to use in the church. We see this all because of one reason. That is because of liberal theology has allowed us to pick and choose what is truth. What is right in our eyes and what we believe, and I say to this since when did what we want or what we think was
right become the reason for God’s Word.

**VIII. Concluding Thoughts**

In conclusion, liberalism during the 20th century hurt many of even today’s denominations in fighting against or the creeping into today’s churches. Man muse need to not try to look for new things, new ideas, or try to make new doctrines because they are tired of the new.? Just because something has been tradition or old, doesn’t mean it needs to be changed. This is where liberalism went wrong. When man seeks out their own pleasures, their own wants we are left with not lifelong filling joy. Key doctrines in which had been truth for years in the past have been there for a reason, because they are truths from scriptures and not in need of revamping or looking at them from a man-centered view. We see that when theology and doctrines are based on man, nothing but failure well and has occurred for these movements. The purpose of religion of religion in these movements was to make man Christ for man, and not man for the glory of Christ. Even today in the 21st century we see that many of the movements and churches that had started in this time already have died out or in the process of dying out. This is due to no foundation of the Man, instead of foundations built for men and by men. What happen during this time was the beginning of truth at stake, in which we today see now hurting more than ever of how this post modern world has corrupted and changed the minds of men in the church. We must stand firm upon the truth of scripture and who Christ is. We must know Christ; know his word and what it is in all of its truth. If not, we will end and become no different than that of 20th century liberalism.
Bibliography


PS- I have done all of the reading.