**19th Century Modern Liberalism and “Fredrich Schleiermacher”**

**Friedrich Schleiermacher** (1768-1834) is called the **“Father of Modern Liberal Theology”**. He was a pastor and founder of the University of Berlin. As a philosopher, he was a leader in German Romanticism. He was a contemporary of Hegel. He accepted Kant’s[[1]](#footnote-1) fundamental principle that knowledge is bound to experience. In His chief theological work, *The Christian faith according to the principles of the Evangelical Church*, “**the source of the basis of dogmatic theology are religious feelings**… not the creeds or the letter of Scripture or rationalistic understanding.” The aim of the work was to reform Protestant theology, to put an end of supernaturalism and rationalism, and to save religion and theology from ever changing systems of philosophy.

 Schleiermacher wanted to make Christianity relevant to the modern age. Sound familiar? He said, “True religion is about the living experience of the divine, not about the dead letter of doctrine. It is about “a living experience of the divine, a taste for the infinite.” He believed that true religion needs to be experienced. Everyone wants to experience God, right? Sounds exciting! The foundation stone of the Christian faith was this “the essence of piety was to have a conscious of being absolutely dependent.”

 Sin, you see, is the loss of God consciousness. Man forgetting God. A failure of a feeling toward God. The forgiveness of sins is the cleansing of my consciousness of guilty feelings. The question then is, “Where did sin come from?” Answer: Man makes it up. Evil is the sinful loss of God consciousness. Sinners are saved or redeemed when they achieve a constant potency of his God consciousness and become like Christ. Salvation is inspiration. Focusing on Christ’s God consciousness and forgetting our own is the essence of what it means to be a Christian—to have an ongoing and uninterrupted consciousness of being absolutely dependent on God consciousness. Oh, Uh?

 Christianity was the culmination of an evolutionary process of religion. There are no right and wrong expressions of religion, just steps in the process. The OT was a primitive form in the development of religion, and the Trinity, for example, was simply a preliminary step in the development of God consciousness. History is the record of the development of an evolutionary process of conscious dependence of God. (Darwin’s biological evolution, by the way, comes out of an already existing popular evolution understanding of reality in the 19th century).

 His premise was that Christian doctrine, “*propositional truth claims*” are accounts of Christian’s religious affections set forth in speech. **The NT is simply the apostles expressing their feelings** and this inspires us to do better. Eschatological language is not really about future events, since no one can know the future, but an idea in which we can aspire, to help us do better. The last judgment is about the separation of the Church from the world. There is no hell, no eternal punishment since the eternal blessedness of Christ’s consciousness is being disseminated throughout humanity.

 Schleiermacher questioned every fundamental doctrine and redefined everything. There was no fall, no sin, no atonement, and no intervention of God in human history, no personal relationship with God. He turned everything on its head.

**Johnathan Edwards** - the Word creates the affection of love toward God.

Light causes heat and our affection for God arises out of our understanding of the information.

Truth Causes the Affection



Affections Cause the Truth

**Friedrich Schleiermacher** – doctrine truth is merely an expression of how I feel

The authority of theology is your affections—feeling.

 Christians would come to Berlin and hear him preach and hear about his great love and affection for Christ. But who was this Jesus that he loved? Jesus was a perfect pious man, the first Christian, but Jesus was not God become man, but man become godly. You see, God is not even a reality. The consciousness of God is the existence of God, not a personal God. Consciousness is God. As a result, there are no petitioning prayers since God does not intervene or interact with individuals. God consciousness is not a relationship, but an impersonal living force that permeates everything.

 What about Christ’s death on the cross? There is no real purpose for the cross to apply God’s anger. God is not angry since God is no person to anger. Consciousness does not get angry. “Jesus’ sufferings on the cross demonstrate the potency of God consciousness was unchanged in Him and we can be impressed by this.” We all have a God consciousness, but Christ has a stronger version of it. Christ is an enable, not a savior of helpless sinners. Christ helps those who want to do better. He is about pulling us up to a perfect stage of humanity, our Perfector. Christians ought to share Christ’s God consciousness with others, through the NT and preach Christ, for the evolution of greater God consciousness.[[2]](#footnote-2)

 Schleiermacher was also instrumental in the modern field of hermeneutics, so much so that he is also considered the **“Father of Modern Hermeneutics”**. His method of interpretation was to not only consider the “outer expression” in the language (natural or normal sense), but to also consider the “inner thoughts” of the author in order to acquire the “understanding in the highest sense”. He **added a psychological process** in the interpretation of the text, so the reader can understand the nuance of the author—a kind of psychosocial analysis of the author’s inner thoughts. However, any certainty of actually knowing what the text means “is limited by the possibility of misunderstanding the text”[[3]](#footnote-3)—hopeless uncertainty. His process of interpretation turned theology into psychology—pure subjectivity.

**Four Themes of 19th Century Liberalism**

1. **Naturalism** – Anti-supernaturalism – No Divine intervention into the affairs of men – the ultimate is Deism.
2. **Immanentism** – God is near or everywhere – Not transcendent, above it all – the Ultimate is Pantheism. [Immanentism is the belief that Deity indwells and operates directly within the universe or nature].[[4]](#footnote-4)
3. **Humanism** – Emphasis on human virtue and accomplishment – Humanity is basically good. Man alone can build a better world without God or religion. “God is not so mad; man is not so bad”.
4. **Optimism** – things are getting better through human progress – Social Gospel/Post-Millennial

Note: Karl Barth said in the 1930’s that 19th century Liberalism led to Nazism.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Analysis**

 Question? How are we supposed to develop an infinite affection for a God who has no affection for us, who actually feels nothing? How are we to exactly feel for an impersonal God who has no feelings? So, God does not actually love the world? How does that make you feel?

 Has God spoken? Yes! He has spoken LOUDLY in the world and His Word! He has spoken simply and plainly and expects man to be able to understand what He has spoken. And He will hold man accountable for what He has said.

 Does God have affections/feelings? Yes! He is infinitely compassionate, loving, and kind! Does God really Care? Yes! He cares very much for humanity. “God so loved the world…” God is love.

 Is God vengeful? Yes! He has a right to and a responsibility to bring vengeance against sin and evil doers. And He certainly will in the last judgment. Just read Revelation objectively. He is just and righteous.

 Does God get angry? Yes! God gets very angry! He is very angry! And He has every right to do so. He is very angry with sin, sinners, and evil doers. However, He will not be angry forever. His anger will be spent at the last judgment. Hell is a real place of eternal punishment for all who have rejected Christ’s person, provision, and promise of everlasting life. How does that make you feel? Not good? Then do something about it and believe on Him.

 One can easily see the many characteristics of Schleiermacher theology and 19th century liberalism in New Liberalism—the Emergent Church or Progressive Christianity—a progressive and deeper version into darkness, moving away from a personal Trinitarian being who is holy, righteous, and just, but also loving and compassionate. He is a God who can be experienced and affectionately known through an objective reading of what God has spoken. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

1. Kant asserted that, because of the limitations of argumentation in the absence of irrefutable evidence, **no one could really know whether there is a God and an afterlife or not.** (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western\_philosophy) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michael Reeves, Understanding the Roots of Theological Liberalism, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Forum of Christian Leaders, FOCLonline.org [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wikipedia. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. www.collinsdictionry.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 67 Friedrich Schleiermacher, Bruce W. Gore, Philosophy and History of Christian Thought//youtu.be [↑](#footnote-ref-5)