

# The Protestant Church in the Modern Age – Part 1

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – The figures, events, and movements of the Protestant Church in the modern age
2. aim – To cause us to understand some of the ways the church moved throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> C.

### b. outline

1. The Theological Movements of the Modern Age
2. The Evangelistic Movements of the Modern Age
3. The Ecclesiastical Movements of the Modern Age

### c. overview

1. the church in the modern age
  - a. **i.e.** from the end of the Civil War into the 20<sup>th</sup> C.
  - b. the Industrial Revolution radically changing the social and economic realities of the W
  - c. the rise of Liberalism in the church, springing out of a resurgence of the Age of Reason
  - d. the response of Fundamentalism in the evangelical church, refocusing on the fundamentals
  - e. the response of the Catholic Church during its great loss of temporal power, with a declaration of papal authority (and two *ex-cathedra* pronouncements) and two Councils establishing their identity
2. (**now**) the **Protestant** church in the modern age
  - a. a *multi-part* series addressing the various figures, events, and movements in and around the Protestant Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> C. (Protestant = non-Catholic W “claimants” of Christianity)
    1. **e.g.** the great *thinkers* of the age, in the various *theological* movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> C.
    2. **e.g.** the great *preachers* of the age, in the various *evangelistic* movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> C.
    3. **e.g.** the great *innovators* of the age, in the various *ecclesiastical* movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> C.

## I. The Theological Movements of the Modern Age

### Content

#### a. the reality of theology in the 20<sup>th</sup> C.

1. the liberal movement coming out of Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> C. laid the foundation for a massive **splintering** of theological thinking throughout the *entirety* of the Protestant church of the W
  - a. **i.e.** Fundamentalism (**see above**) was only *one* response of many
  - b. the massive *social* and *economic* upheavals of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. (**i.e.** two World Wars, the Depression, the Civil Rights movement, the Baby Boomer generation, etc.) led to a *number* of theological “factures” in the W, with a number of “theologies” now coming to characterize Protestantism
  - c. **LOW**: the days of a fairly *monolithic* and *orthodox* view of Christianity flowing out of the Reformation was *fractured* by the rise of the modern age itself – massive *cultural* changes = new “theologies”
2. stemming *primarily* from “new” reactions to liberalism: neo-liberalism and neo-orthodoxy (neo = new)

#### b. the rise of neo-liberalism

1. **remember**: the basic tenet of the “original” German liberalism was *reason*: the denial of the inerrancy (and authority) of Scripture through textual criticism (**i.e.** “higher” thought), with the resultant attacks upon the divinity of Christ, the rejection of the supernatural, and the “shift” of the gospel message away from sin and redemption towards social action (**i.e.** the *Social Gospel*)
  - a. it was under this liberalism that most theological education was taking place as the 20<sup>th</sup> C. dawns
  - b. but, some decided to *push back* against the thinking of liberalism, while still “retaining” it
2. **Rudolph Bultmann** (1884-1976) – a German Lutheran theologian, the father of “dialectical theology”
  - a. dialectical theology – the belief in a form of theology based on “dialogue” between two opposing perspectives, where the “truth” can be found somewhere “in between”
    1. **i.e.** the modern notion of being able to hold two *contradictory* positions *at the same time*
  - b. a leading *critic* of liberal theology = he believed that *historical* analysis of the NT is futile
    1. **i.e.** since the Bible doesn’t seem to be interested in *specific locations*, it would appear that the original writers considered the “events” themselves to be *unimportant*
    2. so, for Bultmann, all that matters is the “thatness” of Jesus, not the “whatness” – that he *existed* and died by crucifixion, not the events of his life, *per se*
- b. Bultmann sought to **demythologize** Scripture = applying an *allegorical* hermeneutic which is not bound to any set of “facts”, but to seeing events *merely* to understand their *significance*

1. Jesus' teachings were *myths* designed to make points about how one ought to live *in whatever framework they find themselves* – not stories about *redemption*, but stories designed to help us “live” now – to be understood *for today*
    - a. **note:** this is *over against* the liberal view that Scripture has *little to say* about faith and life as an inaccurate pool of “information” – Bultmann sees Scripture to have real “value”
  2. **i.e.** for Bultmann, the reader of Scripture must look at the recorded events and “decode” the lasting significance hidden in the event
    - a. **e.g.** the story of Adam and Eve doesn't communicate the Christian myth of original sin, but (rather) shows humanity's refusal to accept the gift of authentic *experience*
  - c. **IOW:** the *dialectical* nature of Scripture is to balance the “historical” event on the one side and the “significance” of the event on the other – that the truth is “between” them
  - d. this *Scriptural* perspective would come to dominate the various new “theologies” of the 20<sup>th</sup> C.
  3. **Paul Tillich** (1886-1965) – a German-American Lutheran philosopher
    - a. **note:** where Bultmann was influential over a “new” view of *Scripture*, Tillich was influential over a “new” view of *God*, particularly in how God relates to humanity
    - b. Tillich was fascinated with **the idea of being** (**i.e.** ontology), particularly the being of God
      1. for him, God was not “a being”, but (rather) a “nature of being” = *God exists because we exist*
      2. God is the being in which all things find their ground; he is the “grounding force” for all reality
      3. **i.e.** God is “beyond” essence and existence – God is “the answer to the question implied in man's finitude ... the name for that which concerns man ultimately”
    - c. Tillich's *Systematic Theology* is based on the dialectical method – a dialogue relating questions asked by man's probing into answers given in revelatory experience and received in faith
      1. **e.g.** questions about man's *existence* leads to answers revealing God as the ground of being
      2. **i.e.** he rejected the anthropomorphic “personal God” of popular Christianity, but he did not deny the reality of God – however, he saw that “reality” only in the nature of *our* being
    - d. this *view of God* would come to dominate the various new “theologies” of the 20<sup>th</sup> C.
- c. the rise of neo-orthodoxy**
1. **Karl Barth** (1886-1968) – a Swiss Calvinist theologian, the “greatest” theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. (?)
    - a. Barth was born to a Swiss Reformed pastor, and loved theology from an early age
      1. he first studied under his father at Bern, spent a semester at Tübingen, went to Berlin, and eventually to Marburg – at these places, he was captivated by the great liberal thinkers
      2. after his studies, he was ordained to the pastorate – first in Geneva (where he carefully read Calvin's institutes), then in Safenwil (c. 1911)
    - b. at Safenwil, Barth became a Social Democrat (1915), involving himself in the parish issues of peasants and laborers – thinking that Jesus had come to begin a new world order based on the distribution of wealth to the poor and needy and a society of justice and economic equality
      1. but ... World War I shattered that view – the massive destruction and loss of human life caused Barth to rethink the idea of a “new world order” (i.e. it wasn't coming soon!)
        - a. **note:** it is the massive turmoil of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. that will be the “fracturing” point of many positions in Christianity that came into the century (e.g. the rise of dispensationalism)
      2. in a conversation with his best friend, Eduard Thurneysen, in 1916, the two friends decided that it was time to do theology on a different basis: returning to the text of Scripture
        - a. and *the very next morning* Barth undertook a study of Romans that would shake the theological world, through his eventual publishing of his *Commentary on Romans*
    - c. Barth insisted on the need to return to faithful exegesis rather than “systematic constructions”
      1. **e.g.** the God of Scripture is transcendent, never an object of human manipulation
      2. **i.e.** he reacted *against* the religious “subjectivism” that he had learned from liberalism – and, he feared that he had not gone far enough in moving away from the liberal tendency to find God in the “best of human nature”
      3. so, he renounced the theology that led him to join the Social Democrats, and now insisted that social justice matters (still important) are not to be confused with the *eschatological* Kingdom
    - d. Barth continued his theological pilgrimage, publishing his *Christian Dogmatics* in 1927
      1. in it, he declared that the object of theology is not “the Christian faith” (as espoused by the liberal theologians; **i.e.** a subjective view of Christ), but the Word of God
      2. however, Barth's journey to understanding the idea of the “Word of God” continued to develop, culminating in his *unfinished work Church Dogmatics*, published between 1932 and 1967
    - e. unfortunately, Barth is a difficult theologian to “pin down”, even though his works (at first glance) seem to be filled with powerful insights into *orthodox* Christian beliefs

1. specifically, Barth's works can be categorized as *dialectical* – pushing to the extreme some element he finds in Scripture, and then pushing to the other extreme some other element
2. **e.g.** as for the reliability and authority of Scripture, Barth *seems* to be evangelical in nature – however, when he talks about inspiration he tries to “integrate” how God *gave* the Scriptures and how that Scripture is *received* by us – Calvin *separates* it such that the Scriptures are true *even if nobody accepts it*; Barth would see it as being true *because* people accept it as true
2. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (1906-1945) – a German Lutheran theologian, pastor, anti-Nazi dissident
  - a. born in Breslau (now Poland) to a psychologist and neurologist
    1. Bonhoeffer earned a bachelor's and master's from the University of Tübingen, and a doctorate from Humboldt University of Berlin in 1927
    2. in 1930, Bonhoeffer began study at Union Theological, NY, but complained about the lack of theology at the school – he studied under Niebuhr, and made friends with a black seminarian, who introduced him to the Baptist church
    3. it was here that Bonhoeffer began to see things “from below” – from those who suffer oppression – he was ordained in 1931, after having returned to Germany, at the age of 25
  - b. in 1933, Bonhoeffer rejected a parish appointment in E Berlin in protest of the new nationalist policies that were being enacted within the rise of Nazism to power
    1. instead, he accepted an appointment as pastor of two German-speaking churches in London
    2. Barth accused him of running away, and in 1935, Bonhoeffer returned to Germany, rejecting an offer to study non-violent resistance under Gandhi
    3. in 1937, Bonhoeffer published *The Cost of Discipleship*, an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount – a 4-part treatise of the call of Jesus to his disciples and the implications of that call
      - a. Bonhoeffer believed the *Sermon* was to be taken literally – doctrinal orthodoxy had to result in a life of discipleship – to follow Christ in words *but also in deeds*
      - b. Bonhoeffer coined the term “cheap grace” in the opening of the book = the shallow preaching of grace as a mere principle; giving intellectual assent *only* to the doctrine of forgiveness, without true repentance or any real desire to be delivered from sin
      - c. he argued it began in the medieval church (with a “Christianized” world), recovered with costly grace under Luther and the Reformation, but continued in Lutheranism
      - d. ironically, he saw this form of preaching most prevalent in the U.S. during his visits here
  - c. in 1938, Bonhoeffer was ejected from Berlin by the Nazis
    1. during the next three years his involvement in the underground against Hitler increased
    2. he felt that his earlier pacifism had left the struggle to others (re: Barth)
    3. he was arrested by the Gestapo in April 1943, and (while imprisoned) struggled with the idea of a “religionless Christianity” = religion being Barth's idea of “a human effort by which we seek to hide from God” – **i.e.** a Christianity devoid of elements that *resist* God
      - a. note: many trace the following theological movements to these kinds of thinking ...
    4. Bonhoeffer was executed April 9, 1945, just a few days before Allied troops capture the prison
- d. the rise of “alternative” theologies**
  1. all of the above were *neo-* theologians, in one way or another, taking the *central theme* of liberalism (**i.e.** social action) and attempting to understand it, some in an “orthodox” fashion
  2. but, the point was the same: that Christianity was designed to *liberate* various oppressed peoples
    - a. so, out of the *combination* of world events *with* a “liberal” (neo-liberal or neo-orthodox) view of Scripture, God, Christ, salvation, eschatology, etc. flowed **liberation theologies**
      1. **i.e.** a *massive fracture* of theology from orthodoxy into a bunch of “splinters” each of which would penetrate various branches of evangelicalism (and still are!)
    - b. liberation theology = the belief that Christianity's main message is the deliverance of oppressed people-groups from under social, economic, racial, class, gender, etc. “oppressions”
    - c. **e.g.** under Gustavo Gutierrez – the liberation of those under third-world poverty; under James Cone – the liberation of blacks from racism, feminist liberation theology, etc.
  3. the *common thread* through all of this was the abandonment of *sola Scriptura*
    - a. as time progresses, cultures and social norms change, and Christians are *forced* address these changes – others will do so *if no response from the church is forthcoming*
    - b. the liberal response is to *bend* to these changes, without a consistent basis of authority
    - c. the biblical response is to *articulate* (again!) the ancient truths revealed by God
  4. resulting in the new *pervasive thinking* of modern theology: *you* are the “consumer” – you get to decide what you want “from” your Christianity *and what you want it to be*