

“AGAINST LIBERAL THEOLOGY”  
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A SUMMARY

I have been asked to provide a short summary of this book. It is impossible to do so, without deleting some of this book’s important contents. That said, I will do the best that I can do in order to try to comply with this request.

Since “theology” might be defined as “the study of God”, or “a study of beliefs about God and things related to God” (our author’s definition), and all Christians hold to certain core beliefs about God, it is difficult to conclude that “Liberal Christian Theology” is “Christian” in any sense of the word. It should be noted, in advance, that our author does not contend that those who espouse liberal theology are not Christian, or that they are not saved, or that they are not good people. He leaves these determinations to God. His simple message is that the theology put forward by Liberal Christian Theologians is “not Christian”, but rather is a theology for some other religion akin to Unitarianism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or Mormonism. He makes this point by making extensive, well researched use of the beliefs and positions put forward by Liberal Christian Theologians, and then comparing those beliefs and positions with those of Orthodox Christianity. So the author’s basic point is that Liberal Christian Theology is not Christian.

While our author reviews the history of Liberal Christian Theology, which he concludes found its most solid beginning footing through the preaching, teaching and writings of highly respected and influential German theologian and pastor, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), and which he identifies with a number of American pastors, authors and theologians, I am going to skip this review of that history. Suffice it to say that a number of highly influential American “Christian” clergymen and authors (one of whom twice appeared on the cover of Time Magazine) have strongly espoused some form of “Christian Liberalism”. So it behooves us to know just what this form of purported “Christian Liberalism” is, and even whether it is “Christianity” at all, or is, as our author urges, some other religion. Helpfully, our author seeks to help us identify just what Liberal Christian Theology is, and what beliefs (or, more properly, lack of beliefs) its proponents hold.

In order to provide any sort of “summary”, as requested, I think that it would be best to just start with one of the author’s adopted definitions of Christian Liberalism, and then address what the proponents of that Liberalism do not believe, as opposed to trying to identify just what it is that they do believe, as our author concludes, at several places in his book, that we can be better informed if we understand just what “Liberal Christian Theologians” do not believe, as opposed to what they do believe.

“The generally agreed upon definition of liberal Christianity, liberal theology, is a ‘maximal acknowledgment of the claims of modernity in Christian thinking about doctrines.’” Modernity is, of course, a cultural mindset stemming from the Enlightenment or Age of Reason and the scientific revolutions. It places great faith in the scientific method and reason, and nature, and in what can be actually observe. It, therefore, rejects anything supernatural, including miracles. Therefore, Liberal Theologians, true to this definition, have wanted and want to make Christianity more acceptable in a “thinking society” or culture, which made up of “reasonable and logical” individuals, who are educated in “naturalism” (nature is all that there is), and who

reject the supernatural as being mere superstition. They, therefore, espoused and espouse a form of "Christianity" or liberal theology which adapts to "the highest ideals or ideas of then current society or culture" (meaning, I and the author suppose that such form of Christianity can and will vary as the discoveries of science evolve and change and the social/cultural norms and ethics change). To them "...the view of God must in each age be reevaluated and reconciled in light of our best views of the world." Some of their most prominent "ideas are:

1) Jesus Christ was not divine. He was not God. He was a fully human man who was "closer to God" than anyone else, and who best "revealed" God and the attributes of God in a superior fashion. Even if He was divine, He was not such eternally but was simply a human who "was adopted by God."

2) Miracles do not and cannot occur. Any event or condition which is claimed to have been or to be a miracle has to have a scientific explanation, even if the "science" which would explain it has not yet been discovered.

3) Scripture is not the Word of God. It is not divinely inspired. It is a book which has great use in the establishment of morals or ethics, but it is not otherwise authoritative.

4) Authority of any Higher Being is generally rejected, but not by all Liberal Theologians.

5) Since there are no miracles, the Resurrection of Jesus did not occur, and most certainly, the idea of a Virgin Birth is absurd.

6) There are no such things as supernatural beings, such as angels, demons, Satan, etc.

7) Christians are established as such more by their experiences of God and by logic and reason, and not by any beliefs in the authority of Scripture.

8) There is no belief in the Trinity. The Trinity does not exist

9) Liberal Christianity elevates modern reason and experience and culture and cultural norms (which evolve over time) as sources which trump the Bible and orthodox Christian Tradition. The Bible is simply a "reservoir of influential symbols and images and a record of original Christian experiences."

10) The Liberal Christian Church is a symbolic form of Jesus which is not bound by time but is subject to reinterpretation by the Liberal Church in every age and generation.

11) A very prominent Liberal Theologian and Clergy Person questioned whether it is possible to be a believer and a citizen of our century. For some prominent Liberal Theologians Christianity becomes a sort of re-presentation of modern self-understanding.

12) Many Liberal Theologians, based upon so called "higher criticism" or "redaction criticism" contend that the Bible cannot be trusted, even asserting that those parts of the Bible which refer to "prophecies that were fulfilled" must have been inserted into Scripture only after the predicted event had occurred.

13) Prayer does not change things. It only changes me.

14) Liberal Christians have settled on panentheism, the belief that God and the world are interdependent, that God did not create the universe out of nothing, that God is immanent in the world and the world is immanent in God, but that God is not transcendent. In other words, many of them are Process Theologians. The theme of God's immanence, but not transcendence is the foundation of modern liberal theology.

15) Liberal Christian Theologians deny the extreme brokenness of the human condition, and have an optimistic hopefulness about humanity's ability to transcend nature, and a belief that

everyone is saved. They shrink away from talk about God's wrath, judgment of people and hell, and find any talk of bloody, brutal sacrifice to be abhorrent.

This is but a very brief outline of some of the beliefs and disbeliefs of Liberal Christian Theologians. In some cases, the above numbered statements might be overly broad, but such an overly broad approach is required in order for the desired brief summary of our book to be provided.

It should be noted that our author does not contend that those who accept basic, core, Orthodox Christian Beliefs do not have differing opinions, sometimes vastly differing opinions, about a number of issues (which we might call "Christian Issues"), which rest beyond or outside of those Core Beliefs, such as, for example, pre-selection, predestination, the role of women in the church, etc. What he does contend is that many, if not most of the "beliefs" of Liberal Christian Theologians lie well outside of the mainstream of Core, Orthodox Christian Beliefs, and, therefore, are "beliefs of a religion other than Christianity". In his words, these Liberal Theologians "have cut the cord with Christianity".

The author also recognizes that Biblical interpretation can change, over time, as new facts are learned and as the science of Biblical exegesis evolves. He also makes no contention that the message of Christianity should not be communicated in ways which make it understandable to people of each culture and generation. The means and methods of communication of the message must evolve over time, in order that the people of every generation and culture can receive it and understand it, but the core beliefs which are communicated must not change in order to "conform with the norms of the current culture". As the author might put it "that which conforms with everything, stands for nothing". The author also has no issue with "Progressive Christians", who are not "Liberal Christians" and who hold to the core beliefs of Christianity, but are perceived as being more "progressive" than many orthodox Christians with respect to various matters of opinion, such as, by way of example only, the roles of women in the church and the home.

Well, I have already exceeded my "summary limit". I apologize for that. I hope that this "summary" is helpful.