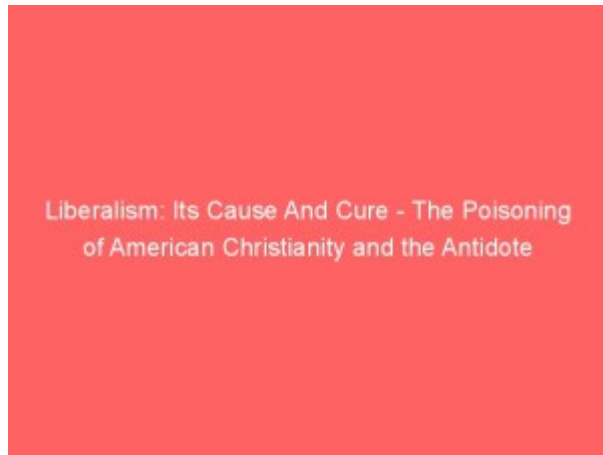


# Liberalism: Its Cause And Cure – The Poisoning of American Christianity and the Antidote



By Gregory L. Jackson, Ph.D.

## **Dedication and Thanks**

The orthodox Christian faith is known to us because God used faithful servants, who suffered great hardships, to hand down His Word to our generation. Although many despise the Word and neglect the sacraments today, our greatest privilege is to transmit the truth of God, unalloyed, to the next generation, so that the Holy Spirit might preserve their faith in Christ, the Son of God, until they are united with us at his throne. Therefore, this book is dedicated to the next generation of children growing up in the Age of Apostasy.

I would like to thank Pastor Mark Ochsankehl for his constant help in preparing and editing my books for publishing on Lulu. Little would have been published without his initial work and final editing.

I encourage other Lutheran writers to put their best work on Lulu so others may view and learn from them. Blogs are fun, and I enjoy writing them, but the posts of today get buried and lost. Even the author has trouble finding them.

## **Introduction**

This book began as an attempt to explain to the ordinary church member the corruption of the Christian faith. As Martin Chemnitz said in his Examination of the Council of Trent, "These are the last and mad times of a world grown old" (Part I, p 50). The typical church member does not understand how a minister could deny the virgin birth of Christ or explain away the meaning of the cross and yet remain a pastor. Nevertheless, the oldest denominations in America, commonly known as the mainline churches, are now dominated by religious leaders who have turned away from the faith they once confessed.

The biblical term for turning away is apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2:3), but this sign of the end is also known as modernism or liberalism. Lutheran apostasy is treated extensively in *What's Going Wrong Among the Lutherans?*, a book which prompted many of the topics in this volume.

In order to appreciate why ministers are having prayer vigils to support abortion on demand or expressing solidarity for a pastor accused of sex abuse, one must study the history of American Christianity to discover how the wrong use of reason became a weapon of destruction against biblical faith.

The first chapter, "Decline of the Mainline Churches: the Merry Widow Waltz," shows how attacking the inerrancy of the Bible became a fixation of the mainline church leaders. The second chapter, "Merger Mania: Becoming Unitarian," discusses how the liberal interpretation of the Bible spread through the political process of denominational merger. Evolution has been used to argue for a new view of the Bible and morality, so the third chapter outlines the American Christian promotion of Darwin's theory and a possible response from Darwin's own research. Since conservative Christians often feel intimidated by logical tricks of well educated liberals, "Defending Morality" exposes the logical fallacies used to promote doubtful claims of truth. Many conservative Christians have turned to charismatic and Pentecostal groups for support, so they need to realize the close relationship between liberals and charismatics, the topic of chapter four.

"The Cure" offers the antidote to the poisoning of the Christian faith, the means of grace, as taught by the Bible, defended by the church fathers, confessed by the conservative Lutheran Reformation, and handed down to us by our pastors and teachers.

Many people have helped and encouraged me with this project, offering suggestions and improvements: Clem Haberman, Dr. Paul Boehlke, Patsy Leppien, Rev. G. Jerome Albrecht, my wife Christina, and my son Martin.

"So is My Word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

Pastor Gregory L. Jackson  
The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2010

## **Chapter One: Decline Of The Mainline Churches –**

### **The Merry Widow Waltz**

Dean Inge, a noted theologian, said, "The church which marries the Spirit of the Age will find herself a widow in the Age to come." In a sentence, Inge described the catastrophic decline of all mainline church bodies during the last century, a merry widow waltz at an ever-increasing speed. Loss of membership, loss of influence, and loss of financial strength in the mainline churches have been so great that Time magazine made the subject a feature story.<sup>1</sup> According to the Gallup organization, mainline membership has shown a

major decline since 1967. Methodist preference is down from 14% to 9%. Baptists decreased from 21% to 20%. Lutheran preference dropped from 7% to 6%. Episcopalians sank from 3% to 2%. Presbyterian preference plummeted from 6% to 3%. "No preference" jumped from 2% in 1967 to 9% in 1988.<sup>2</sup>

The mainline (or liberal) churches are commonly defined as those denominations which have the longest history in America: the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Disciples of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, the American Baptist Conference, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Most of them share the following characteristics: use of the historical-critical method in the study of Scriptures, a history of abandoning former confessional standards through merger, membership in the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, and a positive attitude toward the Social Gospel movement. The Roman Catholic Church, while not considered a mainline denomination, has taken on many of the characteristics of liberal Protestantism by adopting the same historical-critical approach to the Scriptures.

Some people wrongly assume that the hallmarks of radicalism, now flaunted by bishops of various denominations, are the result of the ferment of the 1960s. They are a century late. The 1960s simply revealed some of the long-festered weaknesses of an alien religion, an anti-Christianity which still goes by the name of liberal Christianity.

Many people were awakened to the radical nature of the mainline denominations when various members of the National Council of Churches vied with each other in ordaining active homosexuals. Other believers have been disturbed over the moral and financial support given by their own church bodies to abortion on demand. Still others have been dismayed by the uncritical attitude toward Marxism and liberation theology on the part of their world mission executives. In addition, the members find almost no emphasis on worship, evangelism, or family values.

Those who fled the mainline churches for the television evangelists found themselves equally shocked by revelations of gross financial mismanagement, prostitution, and homosexuality. They thought they had found a safe harbor from the doctrinal chaos of the mainline churches, not knowing they had simply identified with another form of liberalism, Pentecostalism.

Even the most liberal member of the most liberal denomination is likely to be shocked and horrified to learn that few mainline theology professors believe in the virgin birth of Christ. A member of Planned Parenthood doubled over in horror, holding her stomach, upon learning this, even though she scarcely went to her mainline church at all.

Although social issues, such as abortion and homosexuality, have stirred mainline members to action, the substance of the problem is not the erratic course taken by church leaders on these issues, but rather the approach taken in studying and teaching the Bible. Those people who have formed conservative caucuses on the issues have found themselves speaking another language than that of their denominational leaders. Nothing they do seems to budge the

executives and seminary professors. In fact, the opposition of conservatives seems to be relished by mainline leaders, serving only to encourage even more destructive decisions. The history of biblical scholarship explains why the polarization between mainline members and ministers has taken place.

The denial of the divinity of Christ is the fruit of higher criticism, commonly known as biblical scholarship, or the historical-critical method. (In the Christian Book Distributor catalog, the traditional commentaries which assume the inerrancy of Scripture, are not labeled as scholarship; however, the works of the liberal publication houses, which state that the Bible is full of errors, are listed as scholarly works.) Higher criticism has some basic unwarranted assumptions which serve as the foundation for most works of biblical scholarship:

1. The Bible is a book like any other book, no more inspired by God than *Gone With the Wind*.
2. Historical statements recorded in the Bible are not reliable.
3. Accurate prophecies must have been written after the fact.
4. Jesus was not the Son of God and did not consider himself the Son of God.
5. The miraculous events of the Bible (the creation, the plagues preceding the Exodus, the virgin birth, and the resurrection of Christ) were not the work of God but coincidences or the invention of man.
6. Divine acts can be described as "myths," with the explanation that they have power in their effect upon the religious imagination, whether the events happened or not.

These rationalistic theses evolved in Europe among a few professors who stood almost alone in their peculiar views. Now most of the Protestant ministers and Catholic priests in America are trained with these anti-Christian views and subtly teach them in their churches. Mainline Bible study programs are based upon these anti-scriptural ideas. Therefore, mainline members who take these courses to learn more about the Bible end up in having their faith undermined in subtle ways.

#### **Reimarus: Liberal Hero**

We can blame Reimarus, a German professor who died in 1768, leaving the German author Gotthold Lessing to publish the famous Reimarus or Wolfenbuettel *Fragments* posthumously. Reimarus, who did not believe in the divinity of Christ, contended that much of the New Testament was a pious fabrication. What he could not explain rationally, he rejected altogether.

The rationalist believes that people with psychosomatic illnesses were healed by Jesus in this way: after imagining they were sick, they started thinking they were well. Lazarus, who imagined himself dead, eventually considered himself alive! The feeding of the 5,000 was easily explained: the crowd hid

their lunches until the boy shared his meager fare. Stricken by his generosity, they hauled out their own sandwiches and had baskets of leftovers. A miracle of sharing! This rationalistic explanation has been used many times in the mainline churches to support stewardship, although the miracle has nothing to do with sharing and everything to do with the power of the Son of God.

The solution to the problem of discussing the content of the Bible without believing the truth of the Scriptures was solved by David F. Strauss, a lone wolf who argued for the mythological approach to the Bible in his *Life of Jesus*, 1835. The mythological school, still very popular, simply asserts that the deeper meaning of the miraculous event does not depend on whether or not it happened. Some argued that the miracles were simply natural events which were exaggerated in the minds of the witnesses. Ernst Renan popularized this "naturalistic" perspective in his *Life of Jesus*, 1863. Fortress Press has published many of these liberal lives of Jesus in a special series. Some of them are:

Hermann S. Reimarus, *Fragments*;  
Shailer Mathews, *Jesus on Social Institutions*;  
Shirley Jackson Case, *Jesus, A New Biography*;  
D. F. Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*; and  
Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Life of Jesus*.

Albert Schweitzer, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, summarized the German research in his *History of the Life-of-Jesus Research* (the German title translated literally), better known as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1906. Schweitzer identified with the Unitarians.

The innocent bystander looks upon these weighty tomes as paying homage to the Savior, and, in a backhanded way, they do. But the intent is clearest in the D. F. Strauss title, where the Christ of faith is distinguished from the Jesus of history. These higher critics wrote with the assumption they could find the kernel of history, the real dope on Jesus, somewhere within the myths, legends, and fables of the New Testament. Those who delve into the scholarly journals of the period can find an endless supply of articles asking whether Jesus considered himself the Messiah. Almost all of the articles and books answer, "No."

The Lutheran retreat from the inerrancy of Scriptures is discussed in great detail in Kurt Marquart's *Anatomy of an Explosion* and Craig Stanford's *The Death of the Lutheran Reformation*. The betrayal of Evangelicals on this issue is treated in Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* and Francis Schaeffer's *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. The history of the topic is covered in *Challenges to Inerrancy*, edited by Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, and *Inerrancy and the Church*, edited by John Hannah.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Historical-Critical Method**

In order to understand the denial of the divinity of Christ, the traditional study of Scriptures must be compared to the "modern, scholarly" historical-critical method, also known as "higher criticism." The traditional method,

commonly called the historical-grammatical method, was used by the early church fathers, Luther, and the founders of the mainline Protestant denominations. The modern style of biblical study, the historical-critical method, was borrowed from a trend in the study of Greek and Latin literature. This trend, of trying to find multiple authors and influences in each work of literature, was abandoned by the classical scholars as rather useless, but continues to be the norm of modern biblical study. A following comparison shows how the historical- critical method masquerades as scholarship while begging the question. (See "Popular Logical Fallacies" for examples of begging the question, commonly called circular reasoning.)

#### Comparison of the Two Methods of Biblical Study

| <b>HISTORICAL-GRAMMATICAL</b>   | <b>HISTORICAL-CRITICAL</b>  |
|---|---|
| Leaders: church fathers, Luther, the reformers.   | Wellhausen, Bultmann.   |
| Denominations: Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and various small conservative denominations.                                      | Unitarian, Roman Catholic, U. Presbyterian, American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Reformed Church in America, Episcopalian, etc. |
| Sees the Bible as a whole. The Bible is inspired. The Bible is the Word of God.   | Views the Bible in fragments. The Bible is just a book. The Bible contains man's word about God.  |
| The Bible contains no errors or contradictions.   | The Bible is full of errors and contradictions.   |
| The Bible is the norm of faith.   | Only some parts of the Bible are normative.   |
| Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible.  | The books of Moses were written or edited by J, E, D, and P.  |
| The Biblical accounts of divine activity are true.  | All acts of God are mythical and not reliable, though some may be true.   |
| The proper meaning of the text may be obtained from knowing the grammar of the passage and the historical setting. The Bible is clear and sufficient for our faith. | The real meaning of the passage is derived from isolating the true elements from later additions. Only an expert, a "scholar," can reach some tentative conclusions about any given text.   |

Most laity have an innate sense about the proper method of reading Scripture. They interject, when the divinity of Christ is denied by mainline theologians, "But isn't it clear that Jesus considered himself the Messiah? Doesn't the Bible clearly teach that Jesus was born of a virgin and that he rose from the dead?"

One can only reply, "You are talking another language. You believe the Bible is the Word of God, his clear and infallible revelation, sufficient and authoritative. They consider the Bible another book, not very well written, full of errors and contradictions."

#### **Yale and the Progress of Higher Criticism**

Yale University was founded in 1701. "Conservative before she was born," in the words of Roland Bainton.<sup>4</sup> When Yale was founded, New Englanders were naming their children Ichabod, because the glory of Israel was departed (Ichabod means the glory has departed, 1 Samuel 4:21). The Calvinism of the founding fathers was being watered down. Harvard was already degenerate.

Jonathan Edwards was one of the most famous graduates of Yale, a school founded to provide both civil and religious leadership for New England. Edwards' grandson, Timothy Dwight the Elder, became president of Yale in 1795 and lectured students in the basics of Christianity, leading to a genuine religious awakening after eight years of effort. Dwight's, *Theology Explained*, 5 volumes, 1818, became a classic of the era. His hymn, "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord," is in The Lutheran Hymnal. Timothy Dwight the Younger, grandson of the Elder, studied higher criticism in Europe but still taught the old methods at Yale when Benjamin Bacon was a student.

#### **Benjamin Bacon**

How was biblical instruction carried out at Yale when Benjamin Bacon studied there at the turn of the century? Bacon himself described it:

- 1) That the apostle John wrote the fourth Gospel was considered established for all time;
- 2) Objections to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch were dismissed as the work of hostile critics;
- 3) The historical-grammatical method, used by Luther, was dominant, and liberalism was rebuked.<sup>5</sup>

Bacon saw the Yale of his youth as battling rearguard actions. Yale Divinity, after the Civil War, was like the seminaries of conservative denominations today. However, when Dwight died in 1916, the age of conservative biblical scholarship in the mainline churches was drawing to an end. The traditional faith represented by Jonathan Edwards, Timothy Dwight the Elder, and Timothy Dwight the Younger ceased to matter.

Bacon started teaching at Yale in 1881 after serving as a Congregationalist minister for 13 years. Bacon combined the three German schools of higher criticism in his treatment of the feeding of the 5,000. Following Paulus, using a rationalistic interpretation, Bacon explained the abundance of food as the sharing of hidden food. Copying D. F. Strauss' mythological method, Bacon saw the "legendary" elements as derived from the Old Testament accounts of Elisha feeding 100 men (2 Kings 4:42-44). Emulating F. C. Bauer's effort to find the real story behind the story, Bacon discerned in the narrative a

group of early Christian controversies being settled.<sup>6</sup>

If Bacon was so free with the text, what did he actually believe? There are some hints in *Yale and the Ministry*. The Congregationalist magazine reported humorously in 1911 that Bacon was put through a mock trial, the charge being—orthodoxy!<sup>7</sup>

Bainton reported that Bacon and another professor made Dean Charles Brown, a Social Gospel advocate, doubtful about the Virgin Birth. When questioned about his faith, Brown “handled the question with superb finesse. He would say, ‘What do I believe about the virgin birth? Exactly what the Apostle Paul believed. And what did he believe? He never mentioned it.’”<sup>8</sup>

### **The New Scholarship at Yale**

Bacon was not entirely to blame for the shift at Yale. Such dramatic changes required institutional approval by now-forgotten board members. A key change came about when Yale Divinity was at its lowest ebb, in 1905, when Edward L. Curtis was appointed acting dean. Curtis had previously taught at the Presbyterian seminary, McCormick in Chicago, where he alienated conservatives. (McCormick is thoroughly liberal today.) Curtis battled for the new methods and theories. In his work on *Chronicles in the International Critical Commentary*, he judged the books worthless as history but valuable for their idealized version of the past. Bainton wrote: “After coming to Yale, Curtis put to flight armies of aliens in the battle for higher criticism.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1886, George Barker Stevens began teaching New Testament at Yale. Stevens, now largely forgotten, denied the veracity of the Gospel of John and rejected the atonement of Christ. Yale Divinity gradually became an interdenominational school, abandoned its prescribed creed for professors, and became much more open to the winds of change. When Douglas C. Macintosh was hired in 1907, the only question asked which was remotely related to theology involved his position on close communion.<sup>10</sup>

The Social Gospel movement, which borrowed its’ Brotherhood of Man and Fatherhood of God theology from the European liberals, arrived at Yale at the same approximate time as the new style of biblical criticism. In 1887, Washington Gladden, a minister from Columbus, Ohio, gave the Lyman Beecher lectures at Yale. In 1917, Walter Rauschenbusch gave the lectures which continue to be published as *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. Those three decades, 1887-1917, established the Social Gospel as the definitive form of American Protestantism. Although the terminology and agenda have changed over the years, the Pelagianism (man saves himself) of the Social Gospel movement has persevered, corrupting every denomination enchanted with so-called modern biblical scholarship.

Although it was fashionable to pooh-pooh Rauschenbusch soon after he lectured at Yale, he distilled the theology and aims of liberalism with superb prose and moving stories. To this day people in graduate school are judged by their admiration for Rauschenbusch. One critical remark can render the graduate suspect in the eyes of the professor. Rauschenbusch thought he was

accomplishing a great good for mankind and the church, but his horrible distortion of the Christian faith damaged the core of Christian teaching. He considered himself an evangelist and felt he was rescuing Christianity from oblivion.

A brief summary of Rauschenbusch's theology can help the innocent observer of the church scene see how corrupted theology was already in 1917.

Rauschenbusch was not too sure about the origin of evil, relying as he did on the historical-critical assumption of J,E,P,D as authors of the Pentateuch. His thoughts on personal salvation have nothing to do with salvation by grace, but focus instead on whether the "converted" person is good enough to be accepted into the church, whether he has the right notions, affinities, ideals.

The social gospel furnishes new tests for religious experience. We are not disposed to accept the converted souls whom the individualistic evangelism supplies, without looking them over.<sup>11</sup>

In a previous work, Rauschenbusch had harsh words for Dr. Friedrich Pfotenhauer (1859-1939), the last truly conservative president of the Missouri Synod, who served from 1911 to 1935.

In Theology, Rauschenbusch praised Christian Science, perhaps aware that the dean of Yale Divinity, Charles Brown, was a certified healer with a diploma from Mrs. Eddy.<sup>12</sup> Though he praised the fading light of Christian Science, Rauschenbusch rejected the accuracy of the Scriptures. He wrote that instances of Jesus' use of "church" were in passages of doubtful authenticity.<sup>13</sup> He also sharply distinguished between the intentions of Jesus (as he saw them) and the claims of the church— the Jesus of history as distinguished from the Christ of faith.

Rauschenbusch used the kingdom of God as his central concept, not in the sense of the invisible church, the body of believers, but in the sense of those areas where God's justice is established by man. This is the central motive power of mainline Christianity today, that man must use the power of the church to redeem society, through legislation and boycotts, quotas and petitions, Russian assault rifles, and condoms. Rauschenbusch utterly rejected the biblical concept of inspiration, claiming bitterly that it "quenched the Spirit."<sup>14</sup> Needless to say, Rauschenbusch rejoiced in the fruits of the historical-critical method.

The last few pages of Theology contain the most destructive bit of propaganda published in this century. There Rauschenbusch distinguished between the prophet (himself, Jesus, and other good guys) and the priest (the Pharisees, conservatives, and other bad guys). "The priest is a religious professional." He lusts for power, rewrites history (the Bible), and opposes free expression. He is a middleman, a selfish exploiter of religion.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Rauschenbusch concluded from his study of history:

The prophet becomes a prophet by some personal experience of God, which henceforth is the dominant reality of his life. It creates inward convictions

which become his message to men. Usually after great inward conflicts and the bursting of priest-made barriers he discovered the way of access to God, and has found him wonderful,—just, merciful, free.<sup>16</sup>

By identifying Jesus with this peculiar notion of the prophet, and by connecting suffering with the prophetic to end all social injustice, Rauschenbusch ignited fires which have since burned fiercely in the mainline denominations.

Every mainline pastor who assaulted a congregation with salvation-by-works sermons earned, thanks to Rauschenbusch, the right to call himself a prophet. All opposition, the mainline seminarian was told, was due to those selfish priests and their mindless slaves. While many self-appointed prophets found other callings in time, enough survived the doctrinal wars of the last 50 years to become denominational presidents, seminary professors, board chairmen, agency directors, college presidents, and pastors of large congregations. Others found that paying lip service to social activism and remaining silent about doctrinal problems earned rewards and prevented trouble.

The original Social Gospel agenda was basically the New Deal of President Franklin Roosevelt: labor laws to protect union members, a minimum wage, pure food and drug legislation, child labor laws, social insurance for the elderly and disabled, justice for farmers, and repudiation of war. The first *Superman* comic book, issued in 1938, showed the influence of the Social Gospel agenda. Superman dealt with unfair labor practices, cheating in football, and obscene profits enjoyed by an armaments manufacturer who fomented war to increase business. The Social Gospel agenda was established first by the Methodist Church, in its Social Creed, later adopted by the Federal Council of Churches in the early 1900s.

The Federal Council of Churches was organized to serve as the institutional arm of the Social Gospel movement, uniting the liberal Protestant churches in an integrated effort to use their power to bring in the kingdom of God. After too many Reds were found under the bed, the FCC was reorganized as the National Council of Churches in 1948. The National Council of Churches helped spawn the World Council of Churches, whose work was pioneered by earlier ecumenical movements.

The National and World Councils of Churches are officially separate but cross-pollinate frequently and share the same headquarters in New York City. Statewide councils of churches and local ecumenical forums blanket the nation with a network of activist ministers and laity who join efforts to lobby for peace and justice legislation and to boycott certain businesses.

Even more fertilization is provided by the Geneva, Switzerland, headquarters of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation. The World Council of Churches is also located in Geneva and works with LWF and WARC. The groups share the same doctrinal indifference, the same identification of social activism with real Christianity, and the same enthusiasm for Marxist analysis of societal problems.

For theology, the Depression was judgment day, the fulfillment of what the Social Gospel had predicted. The 1930s brought about changes in seminaries and denominations, radical departures already established at Yale, Harvard, and Union. Princeton abandoned its Calvinistic conservatism in the 1930s. At the same time, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod was attacked from within for being out of date and too dogmatic. The Augustana Synod changed its faculty in 1931, moving toward the day when they could merge with the doctrinally vague United Lutheran Church in America.

In each case, the battles won at Yale, Harvard, and Union were replayed in the tiny, obscure seminaries of America, where the bright young professors basked in the glory of their earned doctorates. They were not the bearded old conservative fogies of their denomination's dark past. They were modern scholars in their own right, with publications (usually heavily subsidized by the denomination's printing house) independent of criticism from "reactionary Fundamentalists."

Yes, the liberals sighed, the battles were tough, but once the younger clergy were trained in the new methods, the denomination would take off into new flights of creative social activism. The progressives worked very hard, practiced the strictest form of excommunication and fellowship, promoted one another and never ceased to make converts out of believers.

The process of undermining the faith of the clergy has been gradual, working best where unnoticed. The more conservative denominations of the Midwest were not affected at first. They were established by the wave of immigrants in the middle of the last century, when Iowa was still the frontier. Unlike their mainline counterparts, which had already Americanized, the new denominations continued to work in their mother tongues.

The new Americans started their own colleges and seminaries. They were isolated from the trends in the mainline seminaries. An Ivy League education was not valued at first. Instead, doctrinal fidelity and denominational respect earned pastors a place in teaching.

Later, a degree from Yale, Harvard, or Princeton seemed to lend prestige to a tiny seminary or college. As time passed, a Ph. D. was required of all professors, but doctrinal fidelity was considered a throw back to the dark ages, when old Prof. Johnson or Zweig spoke with a funny accent and displayed his obsolete perspective by denouncing evolution and doctrinal aberrations.

The historical-critical drama was replayed in each denomination and each seminary. Some became angry and quit, thereby making the next step toward infidelity easier. If a walkout was organized so that large numbers left at once, the liberals rejoiced at losing so much ballast so effortlessly. The ecumenical nature of graduate study served to draw denominations together, especially those with similar ethnic or confessional ties. Leaders also had a common bond in their complaints about reactionaries who resisted their new ideas. While the conservatives of various denominations avoided one another because of their practice of fellowship principles, the liberals worked with each other at many different levels, finding common ground in their progressive views.

## Educational Victories

The capture of the newer colleges and seminaries by the historical-critical method had a slow but profound effect on each denomination. College and seminary professors have a lasting influence on their students, especially upon ministers, who remain students all their lives. One Yale Divinity professor observed, "I can tell what year a minister graduated from seminary by looking at his library." The bulk of a minister's library will be purchased during college and seminary, when he has the most time to study. His reference books, especially the biblical commentaries, will become familiar to him during those formative years. If he enters college believing in the inerrancy of the Bible and the divinity of Christ, a different perspective will either convert him or drive him away. Either reaction is a victory for the historical-critical method, since both alternatives purify the denomination of rejected views.

A minister's office will be filled with books which teach the infallible truths of the Word of God, as Luther did, or attack those truths. The two different approaches can best be illustrated by the experience of one young man entering seminary. One pastor took him aside and said, "Remember this, no matter what happens, always stay with the Word of God and study it closely. Never depart from it." A mainline pastor took the same student into his study for "a lesson you can use throughout your whole ministry." What followed was a demonstration on how to open a new book without hurting the binding. Or, as one pastor noted, confessional ministers say, "God's blessings" to each other, while mainline pastors say, "Good luck."

College and seminary students want to be regarded as good students. Few, if any, want to stand out as difficult students. If they begin with a simple Sunday school attitude toward Jesus, then a complex, adult, scholarly perspective seems far better. If their denomination is just moving toward the historical-critical method, only a light touch is used. The divinity of Christ is left alone, but the historicity of Adam and Eve is left open. The professor may simply say, "Is it possible that Adam and Eve are symbolic of mankind?"

When a college and seminary have been thoroughly modernized, the student has only the tomes of the historical-critical method to read. The seminary bookstore does not sell the old books based upon the inerrancy of Scripture, if they are still in print. The professors mention them only to scoff or to offer faint praise, such as, "Lenski really knew his Greek, but he is outdated."

The educational situation seems ideally suited for the promotion of false doctrine. If the seminary is deeply committed to teaching the denomination's confession of faith, it must also show its students how to identify and refute false doctrine. The students must therefore read the classics of the historical-critical school and understand their approach.

If the seminary, however, is committed to the historical-critical method, the students are told to avoid the old books, if they are told anything at all. No one is told, "My predecessor in New Testament believed in the divinity of

Christ, but I don't." Students are brought along slowly, until the denomination is so packed with progressives that a debate on doctrine will turn into accusations of disturbing the tranquility of the church, hurting the finances of the school, or trying to gain a reputation at the expense of others.

### **Pietistic Bridge**

Midwestern Lutherans have seen their denominations move from conservatism to radicalism within one generation. Many of them went to colleges which forbade dancing, card playing, and movies. They remember straight laced professors who never expressed a doubt about the Bible, whether in a class on Christianity or in the biology lab. Now the same institutions seem to glow with pride in adopting the worst excesses of the mainline denominations. In fact, through merger, the ethnic colleges of Lutheran pietism have become mainline members.

The pietistic movement had a great impact on all Lutheran groups, but especially on the Midwestern churches, made up of Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, and Danes. Pietism began with the work of Philip Jacob Spener, whose *Pia Desideria* in 1635 set forth a six-point program for improving the piety of Christians. It included 1) more diligent Bible study, 2) application of doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, 3) an emphasis on deed rather than doctrine, 4) an emphasis on prayer for the erring and unbelieving rather than theological debates, 5) reform of seminary studies with a greater role for personal piety, 6) a devotional arrangement of sermons. Unlike Luther, Spener did not hold that heaven and earth depended on every point of doctrine. Influenced by Reformed theologians, Spener rejected the Real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Likewise, the Pietists denied baptismal regeneration, along with the Reformed.<sup>17</sup>

Spener and his successor at Halle University in Germany, Francke, pioneered the lay-led Bible study and prayer groups that characterize Pietism. Halle became the center of Pietism, training thousands of clergy, including Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, through whom Lutheran pietism was established in the General Synod in America.

Adolf Hoenecke pointed out the fundamental flaw of Pietism:

*Wohl scheint auf den ersten Blick die ganze Differenz recht unbedeutend; aber in Wahrheit gibt sich hier die gefaehrliche Richtung der Pietisten zu erkennen, das Leben ueber die Lehre, die Heiligung ueber die Rechtfertigung und die Froemmigkeit nicht als Folge, sondern als Bedingung der Erleuchtung zu setzen, also eine Art Synergismus und Pelagianismus einzufuehren. (At first glance, the total difference seems absolutely insignificant, but in truth the dangerous direction of Pietism is made apparent: life over doctrine, sanctification over justification, and piety not as a consequence but declared as a condition of enlightenment, introducing a kind of synergism and Pelagianism.)<sup>18</sup>*

When the Scandinavian and German Lutherans settled the Midwest, they were influenced largely by the Pietism of their countries. While the emphasis on

rejecting the worldliness of their homelands seemed laudable, the lax attitude toward correct doctrine and the Lutheran confessions worked like leaven through each group.

At the heart of the Pietistic dilemma was the conflict between confessional Lutheranism and the Reformed influence which insisted upon the proper evidence of the Christian life. One could not put a carefully prescribed life first and also make correct doctrine the first priority. Because Pietism influenced all Protestant groups, the Lutheran Pietists often saw great affinities with others who supported the Temperance Movement and other social causes. Working together promoted doctrinal tolerance and diversity.

Since Lutheran Pietism emphasized Bible study over correct interpretation of the Bible, advocates of the historical-critical method had an easy time in using such piety against the historic stance of inerrancy. Bible study groups and Sunday school teachers were slowly introduced to the claims of the historical-critical method. When presented by a pastor who would never drink a beer or play a hand of Old Maid, the new claims seemed sanctified by a holy life. Such a pastor might present Jonah as a parable, but never suggest that Jesus died for nothing.

Because Pietism resonated with Reformed doctrine, Lutherans who were swept up in the movement placed a greater degree of emphasis on feeling saved and doing sanctified works than on the objective means of grace. The unfortunate and artificial split between head and heart knowledge, deed and creed, prepared the Pietists for the clandestine assaults of modernism. A later Swedish Pietist, Peter Waldenstroem, 1838-1917, began a new denomination in America by attacking the Atonement. Heick, a historian of doctrine, noted:

His theology bears a close resemblance to the teaching of Albrecht Ritschl. He is a striking example of the fact that a pietistic way of life and theological liberalism may go a long way together.<sup>19</sup>

One can see that even with the Social Gospel movement, the earnest desire to make a difference in society was a hallmark of the influence of Pietism. By emphasizing the outward signs of the faith while disregarding the pure doctrine of the Bible, Christians lost the gospel by adding the law.

### **The Fruit**

What has been the result of this vast effort? How can we measure the fruits of liberalism? The seminaries of mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism teach future ministers to doubt the truth of the Bible and the certainty of their salvation. The offerings of faithful Christians are diverted from genuine gospel ministry to support political lobbying, abortion on demand, homosexuality, and worldwide terrorism. Mainline church leaders, united by efforts of the National Council of Churches, clamor to oppose American foreign policy actions while supporting the intentions of the Soviets. Court cases to support the free exercise of religion, as guaranteed in the Bill of Rights, are countered by briefs from mainline churches working in concert with the American Civil Liberties Union and Norman Lear's People for the American Way. Through the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights,

denominational executives gather to sign statements declaring that abortion is a religious right. Mainline campus ministries use their positions to promote radical left-wing activities at colleges across the nation. Homosexual ministers receive unctuous blessings from clergy while launching vicious assaults on the Bible. Legend has it that when Julian the Apostate died in 363, after failing to make the Roman Empire pagan again, his final words were, "Galilean, you have conquered." Now many are tempted to murmur instead, "Reimarus, you have conquered."

#### NOTES

1. Richard Ostling, "Those Mainline Blues," May 22, 1989, pp. 94- 96. See also *Newsweek* cover story, Dec. 17, 1990.
2. *The Northwestern Lutheran*, May 1, 1988, p. 174.
3. *Anatomy of an Explosion, A Theological Analysis of the Missouri Synod Conflict*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977. Craig S. Stanford, *The Death of the Lutheran Reformation, A Practical Look at Modern Theology and its Effects in the Church and in the Lives of its People*, Ft. Wayne: Stanford Publishing, 1988; *The Battle for the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976; *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1984; *Challenges to Inerrancy, A Theological Response*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1984; *Inerrancy and the Church*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1984.
4. *Yale and the Ministry*, New York: Harper, 1957, pp. If.
5. Bainton, *ibid.*, p. 174.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 214f.
7. *Ibid*, p. 204.
8. *Ibid*, p. 207. Bainton's merriment over the confessional agility of Dean Brown is obvious. Bainton's *Yesterday, Today, and What Next?*, is an attack on the Christian faith, published by the Augsburg Publishing House, 1978. A fine book for appreciating mythological interpretation is *Kerygma and Myth*, by Rudolph Bultmann and Five Critics, New York: Harper and Row, 1961. Because Herman Sasse, a conservative Lutheran, seemed critical of the mythological approach, "essays which take Sasse's line" were omitted from the *Kerygma and Myth* volume (p. ix).
9. *Ibid*, p. 179.
10. *Ibid*, p. 203.
11. *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, New York: Abingdon Press, 1945, p. 96. Rauschenbusch taught at Rochester Divinity School, which is now merged into several other divinity schools. Rauschenbusch's father was Lutheran and could have become a founder of the Wisconsin Synod. The father's conversion to the Baptist perspective prevented that outcome. J. P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, published by the Protestant Conference, Sauk Rapids: Sentinel Publishing, 1981, pp. 36, 39.

12.Theology, p. 121. Bainton, op. cit, p. 205.

13.Theology, p. 131.

14.Ibid, p. 192.

15.Ibid, p. 275.

16.Ibid.

17.Otto Heick, *History of Christian Thought*, 2 vols.

18.*Evangelische-Lutherische Dogmatik*, 4 vols, ed, Walter and Otto Hoenecke, Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1912, III, p. 253. See also Ernst Wendland, "Present-Day Pietism," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, vol. 49 (1952), pp. 19-35.

19. Heick, op. cit, II, p. 218.

Continued in [Chapter Two Merger Mania](#)

## **All chapters of Liberalism: Its Cause And Cure**

- [Introduction and Chapter One – Chapter One: Decline Of The Mainline Churches](#)
- [Chapter Two Merger Mania](#)
- [Chapter Three: The Mainline Churches And Evolution](#)
- [Chapter Four: Charismatics Are Liberals](#)
- [Chapter Five: Defending Morality](#)
- [Chapter Six: The Cure](#)