



## WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL Volume 20 Number 31 August 20, 2025

### The Jesus of Liberalism

By Freddy Davis

Many people believe that if a church is part of a Christian denomination or claims to be Christian, that it actually is. However, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, there are many churches that claim to be Christian, and even promote belief in Jesus, that do not believe what the Bible actually teaches about Him.

#### The Use of Different Authority Sources

The problem that exists these days is that there are numerous different versions of theology that use interpretive methods that completely reinterpret what the Bible teaches, and promote a version of Jesus that uses entirely different sources to portray Him. Here are some examples.

**Jehovah's Witnesses** claim that the Bible is their ultimate authority source, but it actually is not. Rather than teaching the Jesus of the Bible, they take verses out of context to teach a Jesus who is a created being rather than the Creator Himself. Their actual authority source is the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Leaders in their headquarters determine their theology and pass this knowledge down to their churches through their various publications.

**The World Mission Society Church of God** is another group that claims that the Bible is their ultimate authority source, but they interpret the Bible based on the teachings of its founder, Ahn Sahng-hong. To them, Jesus was just one of the manifestations of a unitarian God who in reality is a dualistic being comprised of God the Father and God the Mother.

Another example is **Christian Science**. They also claim the Bible as their authority source, but at the same time don't even use a theistic lens to interpret it. Its founder, Mary Baker Eddy, reinterpreted all of the theistic concepts in the Bible to teach a pantheistic belief. For her, Jesus was merely another human being, but one who

grasped the concepts of Christian Science to a very high degree. In her beliefs, Jesus was simply a "way-shower" who provided an example of how every human being can understand reality and live life. And rather than interpret the Bible according to how it was written, she teaches that the Bible is all allegory and must be interpreted according to the principles taught in her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.

#### The Authority Source of Liberal Theology

So what does liberal theology think of the Bible? When we think of Christianity, most people consider that the authority source would be the Bible. That is not the case in liberal theology, however. While most people who follow one of the forms of liberal theology will use the Bible to support their beliefs, they generally do it by quoting verses and passages out of context.

The reason they have to do that is because their actual beliefs come from another source. All they are able to do, if they want to appeal to the Bible, is find proof texts to support their beliefs that come from some other place.

That "other place" is typically the personal opinion of those who adhere to liberal theology. That approach to theology is actually an expression of Naturalism, not biblical Theism. During the period of the Enlightenment (late 1600s ~ early 1800s), there came to be an increasing emphasis on humanism where belief in God waned and belief in man's ability to live without God grew. This mindset affected virtually every area of life – academia, politics, media, entertainment, business, and even the church. It was during this period that certain theologians began playing around with ways to integrate these more humanistic ideas into religion. It was from these academics that liberal theology was born. And over time, as various humanistic fads made the rounds, these fads were incorporated into the theologically liberal library.

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Naturalism is the belief that the natural universe, operating by natural laws, is all that exists. If that is true, there is no God to reveal moral truth to mankind. When that kind of thinking is inserted into the theological arena, you end up with a set of beliefs where human ideas and preferences become the ultimate authority source, and the idea of an actual objective revelation from God has no place. Rather than looking to God for truth, liberal theology interprets Christian teachings using modern knowledge, science, and humanistic ethics.

### Basic Characteristics of Liberal Theology

Based on the fact that liberal theology is so strongly influenced by naturalistic philosophy, there are certain characteristics that naturally emerge in all forms. The following are some of the prominent ones that are nearly always found.

**1. True religion is not based on external authority** - Subjectivism in doctrine and morality is based on the preferences of human individuals.

**2. Christianity is a movement of social reconstruction** - The idea of the social gospel and social justice are considered more relevant than spiritual matters.

**3. Christianity must be credible and relevant** - The effort to provide personal fulfillment to individuals is more important than sharing God's revelation of Himself and His ways to mankind.

**4. Truth can be known only through changing symbols and forms** - There is no such thing as objectively real revelation from God. Truth is relative to the individual, and its relevance is expressed through the symbols and forms of each generation.

**5. Theological controversy is about language, not about truth** - Liberal theologians are not seeking "truth," but rather seek to develop new novel theological theories.

**6. The historical accuracies of biblical facts and events are not crucial, so long as we meet Jesus in the pages of Scripture** - Religious experience is not about objective truth, but about subjective experiences.

**7. True religion is the way of Christ, not any particular doctrines about Christ** - Truth is found in subjective religious experiences, not in any so called

objective knowledge about God and His revelation.

### Types of Liberal Theology

Over the years, various forms of liberal theology have been created. The core essence of each of them are the same, and are based on naturalistic worldview principles. The origin of the various forms tend to follow the same basic timeline as secular naturalistic forms that emerge from time to time – though the old ones continue to be followed by some even as new ones emerge. Below are some of the more prominent expressions of liberal theology that have emerged over the years, but new ones will inevitably emerge in the future.

### Higher Criticism - Late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Germany.

Higher Criticism is an approach to studying literature that focuses on analyzing the literary origins, historical context, authorship, and date of a text. Liberal theologians took this methodology and began to use it to analyze the Bible, examining its authorship, historical context, and literary forms. While studying these things does have value, liberal theologians use this methodology while also dismissing the possibility of a supernatural origin of the biblical text.

### Neo-orthodoxy - 1920s and 1930s

Neo-orthodoxy emerged as a reaction against the liberal theology that had previously become prominent in Protestantism. It was imagined as a means of reclaiming core Christian doctrines while, at the same time, engaging modern society. It put an emphasis on God's transcendence, the reality of sin, and the importance of encountering Jesus Christ. And while it was more conservative theologically than Higher Criticism, it still embraced a lower view of Scripture than evangelical theology. Rather than viewing Scripture as the Word of God, it views it as "a witness to God's revelation." Neo-orthodoxy also put a strong emphasis on engaging with social and political issues.

### Existential Theology - 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

Existentialism began purely as a secular philosophy and placed an emphasis

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If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:  
[info@marketfaith.org](mailto:info@marketfaith.org)

Phone: 850-383-9756

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on subjective experience, faith, and the search for meaning in life. It did not acknowledge the existence of God, but sought to find meaning in a world where no objective meaning exists. These existentialist ideas were introduced into theology by theologians such as Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich who focused on the experiential meaning of biblical texts as it sought to interpret them in light of lived experiences. While it nominally acknowledged the existence of God, it did not portray Him as the personal living God of the Bible.

## ***Liberation Theology - Late 1960s and early 1970s***

Liberation theology is basically the overlaying of Marxist principles onto Christianity. Like Marxism, it divides society into the “haves” and the “have nots.” It then deems the poor and oppressed as the good guys who are the “have nots,” and the rich and powerful as the “haves.” The objective is help the oppressed get out from under the thumb of those who are oppressing them. Social justice is its ultimate goal. There have been numerous forms of Liberation Theology, each with its own designated oppressed and oppressor. Some of the more prominent have included Latin American liberation theology, Black liberation theology, feminist liberation theology, Latina/o liberation theology, Native American liberation theology, and LGBTQ+ liberation theology.

## ***Postmodern Theology - 1980s and 1990s***

Postmodernism also began as a purely secular philosophy and was initially focused on the arts and architecture. It later came to be applied to theology by certain liberal theologians. This philosophy is a rejection of modernist philosophy and rejects a belief in universal truths. It is also highly skeptical toward reason and objectivity. It rejects what it calls metanarratives (an overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances) in favor of mininarratives (a very short narrative that captures a single moment, idea, or experience). It promotes the notion that there is no such thing as objective truth, only personal truths.

As a theological philosophy, it begins by rejecting absolute truth. Thus, it rejects the notion of an objectively real and knowable God and puts an emphasis on subjective individual religious experience. Thus, rather than accepting that God has revealed truth in the Bible, it proposes that individuals can discern their own truth as they read the biblical, or any other, text.

## **The Jesus of Liberalism**

Jon Paul Snyder is a professor of theology and religious studies at Emmanuel College in Boston, Massachusetts. He enjoys teaching world religions “as lived realities.” While he claims to be a Christian, he teaches about other religions in a sympathetic way that expresses his belief that all religions are equally valid.

Recently, Snyder shared his views about Jesus in an article in the Daily Kos. It is a progressive digital media platform focused on the U.S. Democratic Party and liberal American politics. While most people who interact on that platform are secularists, he wanted to demonstrate that a person can be a “Christian” yet hold beliefs compatible with Progressivism. In justifying his approach he wrote:

*As a blogger there, I am a progressive like you, only from a Christian perspective. In support of progressivism, I am trying to articulate a progressive Christian political vision. ... As I argue for progress from a Christian perspective, I am in no way asserting the superiority of faith to atheism, or Christianity to any other worldview. I am just trying to advance humanity from my own particular perspective. I think that God prefers kind atheists to mean Christians. My hope is that we can all cooperate across worldviews to create a more just, inclusive, and peaceful world.*

(See his entire article at <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2025/7/10/2332728/-Jesus-doesn-t-like-oligarchs-either-Christianity-is-an-equality-Gospel-not-a-prosperity-Gospel>)

From there, he went on to share his view of Jesus. He presents Jesus as one

who 1) overturns the social hierarchy, and 2) advanced the idea that an egalitarian community comprises salvation. He teaches that all people are equally loved in the eyes of God, and that the highest expression of Christianity is to strive for a world where everyone is equal. Thus, the Jesus of liberalism is not the Jesus revealed in the Bible, but one who promotes Marxist ideology.

### **But Is it True?**

When people think of liberal theology and the liberal churches that follow it, the tendency is to think of them in terms of Christianity – just with a little different emphasis. But that is not true. These liberal churches are just as much cults as are the Jehovah's Witnesses, the World Mission Society Church of God, and the Christian Science churches that were mentioned above. They preach a gospel that they claim comes from the Bible, but which actually does not.

It is critical for Christians to know the difference between genuine biblical Christianity and the many false teachings that profess to be Christian, but are actually anything but. A different gospel promotes a different God, a different view of human beings, and a different way of salvation. These false beliefs lead people away from God, not to Him.

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