

# Congregationalism – Heritage & Future

Class #5 – The Rise of Liberalism  
October 14, 2020

## Terms

- 1) Different views of the final authority in the church:
  - a) The **Bible** = Classical Protestantism / Historic Christianity
  - b) The **Church** = Classical Roman Catholicism
  - c) The **Individual** = The individual (reason, or experience, or emotion)
- 2) Simple theological/political divide:
  - a) **Conservative** = Focused on conserving biblical/Christian culture.
  - b) (Classical) **Liberal** = Focused on liberty and freedom. (Equality of access)
  - c) **Leftist** = Focused on equality. (Equality of outcome)
- 3) Our focus is “theological liberalism” not American “political liberalism.”
  - a) You (use to) can be a liberal Democrat and a fundamentalist Christian.
  - b) Likewise you can be a conservative Republican and an atheist.  
(Or a theological liberal like Rush Limbaugh or Ben Shapiro.)
- 4) Broad movements in modern Church history:
  - a) **Reformational** (1517-1648) = Focus of faith informed by tradition & reason.
  - b) **Enlightenment** (1648-1789) = Focus on reason alone.
  - c) **Modernity** (1789- ) = Focus on experience/emotions.
  - d) Enlightenment & Modernity greatly affects Christianity.
- 5) In the West, secularism (spiritual neutrality) is assumed to be true along with a strong anti-supernatural bias.
- 6) Theological Liberalism defined:
  - a) Desire to adapt religious ideas to modern culture and modes of thinking.
  - b) Rejection of belief based on authority alone; the Bible is neither supernatural nor infallible.
  - c) Focus on the immanence of God through person experiences.
  - d) Strong call for social action (the Social Gospel Movement, Liberation Theology).
  - e) Humanistic optimism on the progression of society and mankind. – Evolution
  - f) Focus on God’s work among men as salvation, not punishment and sin. All will be saved.
  - g) Increasingly the Liberals (and Evangelicals) are becoming Leftists.
- 7) Theological Liberalism/Leftism is at best heresy, at worst it is a demonic pagan religion.
- 8) Richard Niebuhr (a Yale Professor who was no fundamentalist) defined liberalism beautifully: *“A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”*

## Timeline of Liberalism as it Relates to Christianity in the America

- 1618-19      The Synod Dort (Calvinism vs. Arminianism)
- 1636-38      Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony over the “free grace” position of Anne Hutchinson. (personal revelation vs. Scripture as the final revelation)
- 1636      Harvard University founded by traditional Calvinist Congregationalists.**
- 1637      René Descartes publishes Discourse on the Method, begins the “Enlightenment” Has the famous motto: *Cogito, ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I Am”)
- 1643-53      The Westminster Assembly defines “high” or “traditional” Calvinism.**
- 1648      Cambridge Platform in Massachusetts, defines Congregational polity. It is of the Puritan (or “high/traditional) form of Congregationalism from the Westminster Tradition.**
- 1658      The Savoy Declaration of Faith is published. (The Congregational version of the Westminster Confession of Faith.)**
- 1670      Benedictus Spinoza, the father of “Higher Criticism” publishes his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* anonymously. He rejects Mosiac authorship of the Pentateuch and argues that all supernatural biblical events (prophecy & miracles) have natural explanations.
- 1680      The Savoy Declaration is adopted as the Congregationalist confessional statement in Massachusetts**
- c.1700      Connecticut religious authorities are distressed by the colony wide decline in piety and church discipline.
- 1701      Yale University founded by the Congregationalists out of concern Harvard is going liberal.**
- 1708      Saybrook Platform, as commissioned by the Colonial Legislature, passes as a new constitution for the Congregational (state) Church in Connecticut. To stem the liberal decline in Connecticut to return the Westminster Tradition. It tries to bring moderation between Congregationalists and Presbyterians.**
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- 1675      The German Lutheran theologian Philipp Jakob Spener publishes *Pia Desideria* and begins the Pietist movement.
- c.1730-55      The First Great Awakening in New England between the Pietist “New Lights” and traditional/liberal “Old Lights”
- 1746      College of New Jersey (later called Princeton) founded by Presbyterians.**
- 1774      The first Unitarian church in England established in London.
- 1780/1833      Congregational Church disestablished in Massachusetts

- 1784 The King's Chapel Anglican Church in Boston becomes the first church in America to officially teach Unitarianism.
- 1785 First Universalist church founded in Boston.
- 1790 Congregational Church disestablished in New Hampshire.
- 1805 Harvard College appoints Henry Ware, a Unitarian, as Hollis Professorship of Divinity.
- 1807 Andover Theological Seminary is founded by orthodox Congregational Calvinists because Harvard has gone liberal. Within a decade Andover will go liberal.**
- 1818 Congregational Church disestablished in Connecticut.
- 1821 G. W. F. Hegel publishes Elements of the Philosophy of Right, which argues "*the rational alone is real*".
- 1821-22 Friedrich Schleiermacher publishes Der Christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche ("The Christian Faith According to the Principles of the Evangelical Church"). He tries to bring together the Reformation and the Enlightenment by rooting the source of dogma in religious feelings, especially the absolute dependence of God as revealed in Jesus, not Scripture, creeds or reason. He is considered the father of Theological Liberalism.
- 1858 Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. publishes the The Deacon's Masterpiece or The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay, satirical allegory of the demise of Calvinism in New England.
- 1859 Charles Darwin publishes On the Origin of Species.
- 1865-1929 Theological Liberalism begins to take over all Christian institutions.
- 1867-83 Karl Marx publishes Das Kapital.
- 1890 The theological trial of Prof. Charles Briggs at Union Seminary. His ministry license is removed for rejecting biblical inerrancy. He is later ordained by Episcopal Church and is allowed to stay at Union.
- 1899 Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, publishes The Interpretation of Dreams
- c.1923 The Frankfurt School begins in Germany, encouraging Cultural-Marxism.
- 1923 John Gresham Machen publishes Christianity and Liberalism.**
- 1925 The Scopes Monkey Trial.
- 1929 Princeton Seminary, the last bastion of orthodoxy, goes liberal.
- 1929 Westminster Theological Seminary is founded by conservatives from Princeton, (Machen) in Philadelphia to defend historic traditional Calvinism.**
- 1935 Machen is tried and suspended from ministry by the (liberal) Presbyterian Church. He is not allowed to use the Bible in his defense.
- 1937 The Cultural-Marxist Antonio Gramsci dies in prison in Italy

- 1973 Derrick Bell publishes Race, Racism and American Law, one of the foundation texts of Critical Race Theory
- 1989 The term “*intersectionality*” coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw
- 2017 The Nashville Statement, a conservative Protestant affirmation of biblical marriage and sex, is published.**
- 2018 The Dallas Statement, a conservative Protestant rejection of Social Justice, is published.**
- 2018 The “Revoice Conference” (taking a soft stance on LGBTQP+) starts to divide the conservative Presbyterian Church of America (PCA).
- 2019 The passing of Resolution 9 (saying CRT is an acceptable tool for theology) passes at the Southern Baptist Convention, which starts to divide the largest (and conservative) Protestant denomination in the USA.
- 2020 Conservatives within the PCA begin to form a new denomination: Vanguard Presbyterian Church.