

CHURCH HISTORY
Reactions to Historic Protestantism
During the Modern Era in Europe, part 3:
The Age of Science (1800-1900)

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The Modern Church, part 7

- I. *Romanticism*: Romanticism was a reaction to the rationalism of Europe. It came into prominence between 1780-1820. Its proponents felt that the intellect was not enough in life and religion, and emphasized man's emotional side — but it was just as non-Christian as Rationalism. Romanticism stressed a return to nature, individual personality, bond between nature and man, reawakening of religion, revival of humor, a return to the medieval past, man's craving for the remote and supernatural and Greek classicism. In the wake of the Romantic Reaction, there was revival of religion of all types. The Roman Church flourished. This was the beginning of the liberal or modernist movement under men such as Immanuel Kant, Frederick Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl. The importance of this liberal theology was to transfer religion from the head (rationalism) to the heart, indicating that God could be known through religious experience; religion is what one feels.

- II. *Biblical Higher Criticism*: Higher critics attacked the historicity of the Bible. The Bible was not a product of revelation, but a collection of myths, legends and a few historical facts which developed over the years and finally was edited and put in the form we now know it. The Bible became just a record of the religious experience of early Christians. The critics stopped asking, "What does the Bible say?" and began to ask, "What is the Bible?" They denied the authority of the Bible and made it merely a human book.

- III. *Evolution*: The publication of Darwin's Origin of the Species in 1859 culminated a long history of evolution. Now man was no longer the creature of God, but the product of an infinite process of development necessitated by the demands of environment. Man was a product of chance. There was no longer any need for God. The reaction of established religion to Darwinism, which was only (and still is) a theory, was threefold: some capitulated and turned their backs on Christianity; others repudiated the claims of science; and the majority worked out some sort of compromise between their faith and the new science.

- IV. *Comparative Religions*: Not only did the concept of evolution invade the field of science, but of religion as well. It was commonly taught that man started out with no religion and finally advanced to the elevated viewpoint of monotheism, Christianity being the best but not the only religion in the world.
- V. *Modernism or Liberalism*
- A. *Introduction*: Modernism was simply a product of Rationalism, Romanticism, evolution, and the age of science. It made heavy inroads into the established Protestant Church. Modernism was not only a departure from historic Protestantism, but also a definite break from historic Christianity.
- B. *The Characteristics of Modernism*: (1) A high respect for science and the scientific method in religion; a skepticism against any kind of objective revelation as would be found in the Bible. (2) A confidence in man and his future. (3) The importance of experience over doctrine, so that the important thing was that all men have faith, not necessarily faith in Christ. (4) The centrality of the human Jesus who was not Deity but the best of all men. (5) A Spirit of open-mindedness toward new forms of religious thought, but not toward orthodox Christianity. (6) Social idealism.
- C. *The Doctrine Of Modernism*: (1) God is present in all of nature and is present in every man. (2) Since God is in every man, every man is basically good with a spark of divinity. (3) Every man can know God through his subjective personal experience apart from any divine objective revelation from God. (4) Because every man can fan his spark of divinity, man can affect society and build the kingdom of God on the earth through social change.
- D. *The Message of Modernism*: The message is that of the social gospel. The social gospel speaks of the redemption of society from its evils and not the redemption of the individual soul from the shackles of sin. Modernism believes that individuals can be changed through changing society. Of course, liberals denied the atoning death of Christ for sin, making his death a mere example of love. They also denied a literal hell, the resurrection of the Lord, the second coming, and all miracles. But in it all they speak about the necessity of experiencing God in a life.

VI. *Revival and Missionary Effort*

- A. *Introduction:* The nineteenth century was not without its genuine Christian awakening. The true Church came alive to counteract the teaching of the modernists, which had made heavy inroads into almost every Protestant church.
- B. A mild Calvinistic revival moved through the Church of England during the first third of the century under the leadership of such well-known saints as John Newton and William Wilberforce. Meanwhile, Methodist, Baptist and other dissenter groups grew rapidly in number. The Sunday School movement spread across England like a prairie fire, and several Bible Societies were founded in Europe and America, including the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Berlin Bible Society and the American Bible Society.
- C. The nineteenth century has been called the “Great Century of Protestant Mission.” Until this time, the great load of foreign missions had been carried by the Moravian Brethren who had sent out some 2,170 missionaries. The modern missionary movement actually began with William Carey (1761-1834) who founded the Baptist Missionary Society at Kettering, England. The following year Carey set out for India. As reports of his work reached home, Presbyterians, Anglicans and Congregationalists were aroused to form a missionary society for non-Baptists, and the famous London Missionary Society was founded in 1795. Carey was followed by the Anglican Henry Martyn and the Church of Scotland’s Alexander Duff. Samuel Marsden pioneered for over 40 years in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. The London Missionary Society sent Robert Morrison to open up the work in China, and Robert and Mary Moffat with David Livingstone to Africa. In 1865 J. Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission, one of the great interdenominational faith missions.
- D. England and Scotland were not the only European countries sending out missionaries during the nineteenth century. In 1821 the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society and Danish Missionary Society were founded. Three years later, in 1824, the Berlin Missionary Society and the Paris Missionary Society came into being.
- E. Many great Christian scholars rose up to fight the liberalism of that day. Hengstenberg and Franz Delitzsch made an impact in Germany. Abraham Kuyper fought liberalism faithfully and founded the Free University of Amsterdam, destined to become a great center of orthodoxy. All throughout

Western Europe individuals and groups landed telling blows against the bastions of anti-supernaturalism.

- F. During this time Christians moved out to lead in social movements. Orphanages, hospitals and general social concern were all the products of Evangelical Christianity. It was during this time that the Salvation Army and the Y.M.C.A. began.
- G. The Plymouth Brethren sprang into existence, bringing a revitalized emphasis in Bible study and biblical Christianity. Among their great leaders were John Darby and George Mueller.
- H. D.L. Moody and Sankey were used of God in revival in England among the common and educated folk. It would take pages to list the Spirit-sent revivals that fell on England and the Continent during the century. God was mightily at work in spite of the Modernism of the day.