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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Progressive Christianity: The Postmodern Mutation of Theological Liberalism

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by

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Abstract

The intention of this thesis is to historically track Liberal Christianity, distinguishing its different shapes, dissecting its current form of Progressive Christianity, and then refute its tenets by holding them to the standard of orthodox Christianity. This project is organized into a chronological, historical approach to Liberal Christianity followed by a comparative approach to Progressive Christianity and orthodox Christianity. The historical research aims to identify and connect common, theologically liberal elements, a distinct man-centered theology, across different historical horizons, including the delineation of modernity, postmodernism, secularism, and humanism, which are influenced and shaped by theological liberalism. Focusing on the current postmodern era, Progressive Christianity's logical inconsistency and theological incoherence is contrasted with orthodox Christianity. Finally, the culminating purpose is to advocate for the adoption of apologetic education within the church and a renewed church culture toward intellectualism to promote biblical literacy: a priority to equip the saints in order to love God intellectually and guard their hearts so they will not fall victim to Progressive Christianity.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of Problem

There is nothing more dangerous, a deception so severe, than a professing believer in Jesus who blissfully and ignorantly follows a culturally constructed god; this god encourages and celebrates the indulgence of temporal desires and sexual appetites and leads this blinded believer into eternal separation from the One whose love and justice is uncompromising. Liberal Christianity, not a new demonic decoy, has been dressed up in new clothes: Progressive Christianity. Its effects are ubiquitous. Signs in yards shout, “Love is Love,” churches’ logos include rainbow flags and inclusivity slogans, even the President of the United States, who attends Mass each week, endorses a woman’s right to choose abortion, leading the march for religious reform, which is surely a euphemism for subjective morality.¹ Indeed, this new brand of religious liberalism is attractive, seductive even, strengthened by cultural and political power, which claims the attention and devotion of the young, the impressionable, the tired, and the broken.

Progressive Christianity, a child of theological liberalism,² is beginning to infiltrate the evangelical church and deceive the saints, replacing the one and only King with an idol of the world. It masquerades abominable sin as righteousness, like sanctioning same-sex marriage within a church context and celebrating it as holy, pure, and good. To this, Isaiah warns, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who

¹ Dave Andrusko, "Problems Continue to Mount for ‘Pro-Choice Catholic’ Joe Biden," *National Right to Life News* (May 2020): 7.

² Theological liberalism is a stark deviation from orthodox or traditional Christianity. It is recognized by its departure from foundational doctrine such as the divinity of Jesus and the inerrancy and authority of Scripture.

put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (5:20, NIV).³ Progressive Christianity is an enticing and effective campaign that is captivating many Western Christians who want to be culturally relevant and accepted.⁴

This attack of theological liberalism is so insidious because it is an internal attack: an ambush on the unsuspecting and naively trusting. It is not the layman who manipulate Scripture and twist biblical principles to fit a specific narrative, but knowledgeable and charismatic pastors and teachers who sway their congregation into spiritual compromise.⁵ These duplicitous leaders maintain that orthodoxy stifles and blinds; orthodoxy is responsible for the woes of the individual and society. For example, they argue that orthodoxy suppresses sexual identity because it refuses to see, accept, and celebrate the full, postmodern scope of the LGBT community; this is harmful to the sexually diverse individual who seeks societal validation for his promiscuity and detrimental to today’s postmodern, social agenda of inclusivity. John Bowers, an Episcopal priest of decades, reflects,

I struggled very hard trying to keep peace within me toward the orthodox teachings of the church, mainly through my studies, particularly studies of the Scriptures, all the while stumbling along to keep the institution from stumbling into some roadside ditch. And finally I retired! I was no longer required by my professional responsibilities to stay

³ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

⁴ David Young, *A Grand Illusion: How Progressive Christianity Undermines Biblical Faith* (Renew.org Resource, 2019), 14. Young asserts that upper and middle-class Christians are turning away from orthodox Christianity in favor of “a Christian faith that is consistent with the changing values of North American popular culture.”

⁵ Pastors, worship leaders, and theologians such as Brian Zahnd, Greg Boyd, Peter Enns, Richard Rohr, and Brandon Robertson gain access to the masses through social media. Tik-Tok, Twitter, and Facebook are the virtual, new church pews where congregants readily accept a perverted and progressive view of Christianity. Consider that Richard Rohr has an impressive 115,000 Twitter followers, Brian Zahnd has 55,000, Peter Enns has 38,000, Greg Boyd has 37,000, and Brandon Robertson has 18,000. This is a small sample group of overt Progressive Christians, which shows the wide reach of Progressive Christianity’s influence in today’s technological, virtual world.

within the boundaries of orthodoxy. I was free to wander! And so I have. Far and wide. Searching.⁶

Bowers, in his wandering, argues that Scripture is not authoritative but merely suggestive, God is impersonal and unknowable, and Jesus is not divine nor was he raised from the dead, but was a leader and example for social change.⁷ Rather, Bowers advocates an agnostic approach: that he does not know anything, yet invites his audience to join in his theological uncertainty and subjective moralism yet retain the moniker of Christian. As a priest, his prominence and position are greatly influential, which causes new or even seasoned believers to stumble, to doubt, or like Bowers, to wander.

Another influential voice from among the scholars of the (in)famous “Jesus Seminars,” is Marcus Borg, a notable historian and theologian who prolifically wrote about a new brand of Christianity. Borg considered orthodox Christianity to be an “earlier paradigm,” which had been found intellectually wanting, theologically inconsistent, and socially abhorrent.⁸ Thus, an “emerging paradigm” that ordains women into leadership positions in the church, celebrates homosexual relationships through marriage, and denies the exclusivity claim for salvation, is much preferred and palatable in a postmodern era, according to Borg.⁹ These ideas are foundational to the progressive Christian movement: an alluring and dangerous enterprise that is being advanced by prominent, intellectual, and charismatic figures. The warning of Jude poignantly applies:

Dear friends, I’ve dropped everything to write to you about this life of salvation that we

⁶ John E. Bowers, *One Priest’s Wondering Beliefs: Progressive Christianity: A Critical Review of Christian Doctrines* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2016), 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 269-271.

⁸ Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (New York, N.Y: Perfectbound, 2003), vii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

have in common. I have to write insisting—begging!—that you fight with everything you have in you for this faith entrusted to us as a gift to guard and cherish. What has happened is that *some people have infiltrated our ranks* (our Scriptures warned us this would happen), who beneath their pious skin are shameless scoundrels. Their design is to replace the sheer grace of our God with sheer license—which means doing away with Jesus Christ, our one and only Master (Jude 3-4, MSG, added emphasis).

Statement of Purpose

Progressive Christianity must be exposed and refuted. This thesis will argue that the Progressive Christian is a postmodern religious humanist who focuses on severe introspection and subjective reason, what he can feel and see, and not about God. Progressive Christianity is a me-centered, theologically liberal metamorphosis of Christianity, which began during the Enlightenment Era and climaxed as the robust Liberal Christianity of the twentieth century shrewdly adapting with secularism, modernity, humanism, and finally postmodern progressivism. Therefore, the intention of this thesis is to historically track Liberal Christianity, distinguishing its different shapes, dissecting its current form of Progressive Christianity, and dismantle its tenets by holding it to the standard of orthodox Christianity, which will reveal the hallmarks of theological liberalism: to usurp the authority of Scripture and strip away the divinity of Jesus.

Statement of Importance of the Problem

Souls are at stake for the Jesus of Progressive Christianity cannot save. The Jesus of progressivism is a social warrior, a moral teacher, an advocate for universal love; he is about embracing the desires of the flesh, the whims of the moment, letting feeling determine truth. This Jesus affirms only, never judges or condemns. He meets needs by conforming to this changing world. So full of compassion, the Jesus of progressivism encourages subjective

introspection: What will make *me feel* good? What will make *me feel* like I belong? What will make *me feel* important? Essentially, the progressive Jesus promotes narcissism, reducing human beings to base urges and limited intellects. This Jesus, therefore, is not the biblical Jesus who is Creator and Judge: This Jesus is a demi-idol pointing to the supreme idol of self-gratification and comfort. Conversely, the biblical Jesus demands his followers to deny themselves, not indulge themselves (Matt. 16:24), to hold firmly the truth (Tit. 1:9), and not delude themselves with subjective pseudo-realities (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Furthermore, disciples of the biblical Jesus expect discomfort and persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Therefore, adherents of Progressive Christianity may call upon the name of Jesus, but he will reply, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:22). They are, indeed, in great danger, of gaining the world only to lose their souls (Matt. 16:26).

There is an uptake in faith deconstruction where believers are lured into reexamining orthodox Christianity to extricate anything that opposes postmodern ideologies.¹⁰ They are naively guided by cunning leaders with cultural, social, and political agendas; these guides are social justice warriors and Marxists wielding religion as a weapon in their fight against the West, a bane to the progression of humanity. They sell their version of utopia, painting an alluring portrait of free liberty and living.¹¹ This utopia, they insist, can be a reality only through the deconstruction of Christianity, which is the heart of the West.¹² Jean-Luc Nancy, a distinguished French philosopher who spurred the need for Christian deconstruction, advanced

¹⁰ Many influential pastors and worship leaders are publicly deconstructing their faith through online forums such as YouTube. For example, *Good Mythical Morning*, hosted by Rhett McLaughlin and Link Neal, boast an impressive 1.9 million views for the episode “Rhett’s Spiritual Deconstruction,” and 1.1 million views for the episode, “Link’s Spiritual Deconstruction.” Because there is such a dissonance between orthodox Christianity and postmodern culture, many viewers flock to understand how to make these diametrically opposed worldviews compatible. Paul Huyghebaert, “6 Reasons We Are Drawn to Christianity’s Deconstruction Stories,” Renew.org, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://renew.org/christianity-deconstruction/>.

¹¹ Voddie Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), 176.

¹² Clayton Crockett, “Surviving Christianity,” *Derrida Today* 6, no. 1 (May 2013): 25.

that (we all know) “Christianity has ceased giving life.”¹³ Simply put, traditional Christianity has reached its limit in the progression of humanity and, therefore, its life cycle needs to continue with its death and then rebirth. According to Nancy, deconstruction is “a means to take apart, to disassemble, to loosen the assembled structure in order to give some play to the possibility from which it emerged but which, qua assembled structure, it hides.”¹⁴ In other words, hidden behind Christian virtues of charity, generosity, and love lurks the evils of racism, misogyny, and homophobia, which are the exclusive fault of Christianity.¹⁵ Deconstruction breaks down theological structures, such as the inerrancy of God’s Word, objective truth, faith-seeking understanding, and even the purpose and function of church, and replaces them with postmodern ideologies (or rather non-ideologies as is the reconstructive goal) such as critical race theory and intersectionality.¹⁶

Needless to say, the gullible and ignorant are easily led astray, justified by twisted biblical terms and legitimized by group think and subjective feelings. Even the knowledgeable and experienced are misled because they allow Satan to whisper his classic question, “Is that really what God said?” which compels their “deconstruction.” For example, the LGBT community, whose roots are deeply embedded in Progressive Christianity, will ask where specifically Jesus says that gay marriage is prohibited because if Jesus did not say it specifically, then it must be acceptable. Therefore, they concluded that only a fundamentalist bigot, whose stance is based solely on hate, can oppose the LGBT agenda. Leviticus references are voided

¹³ Jean-Luc Nancy, Bettina Bergo, and Gabriel Malenfant, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 142.

¹⁴ Nancy, Bergo, and Malenfant, *Dis-Enclosure*, 143.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 65-90. In chapter four titled, “New Religion,” Baucham outlines how postmodern culture manipulates Christianity based on critical race theory and intersectionality.

because the Old Testament is ripe for contemporary editing (thanks to biblical scholars like Bart Ehrman and Eric Seibert), and Pauline references are too ambiguous and vague (also, Paul said it, not Jesus). Those who begin a “deconstruction of faith” are bullied and cornered: “Do you honestly want to be tied to a religion who is responsible for slavery, or don’t you support love, like Jesus, between two consenting adults?” Many deconstructing believers do not seek theological instruction, biblical answers, nor authentic fellowship, which would gently, yet boldly challenge harmful ideology and erroneous conclusions, because the cultural, political, and social influence is so powerfully vast and specifically targeted at them.¹⁷ Instead, they find a “new” church, a “new” religion: Progressive Christianity.

This research is imperative because Progressive Christianity is a new face of theological liberalism, and people are being duped because they are impressed and tantalized by its bait-and-switch, biblical half-truths, which allows, even welcomes them, to satiate their desires of the flesh while masquerading as virtuous warriors for humanity. They exchange the truth for lies. Used as pawns for cultural, social, and political gain their souls are jeopardized.

Statement of Position on the Problem

The position of this thesis is that Progressive Christianity is the new “modern and trendy” brand of Liberal Christianity, whose roots are centuries deep. By surveying this historical progression, the aim is to identify not only common threads of Liberal Christianity,

¹⁷ George Yancy and Ashlee Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer: The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 191. “Most progressive Christians do not base their religion on strict obedience to the Bible, nor do they feel a strong need to encourage others to accept their interpretation of the Bible or even to accept a Christian faith,” which means they do not focus on converting unbelievers: an abandonment of the Great Commission. Rather, progressive Christians attempt to persuade conservative Christians to adopt their version of Christianity, which aims to build a “value set of inclusiveness, tolerance, and social justice. Christianity is just one of many paths to achieving a society of inclusion and justice for the marginalized. It is not necessarily a superior path.” While conservative Christians reach out to unbelievers to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, Progressive Christians reach out to conservative Christians to help them deconstruct their faith and offer them a societally approved religion of inclusivity, social justice, and globalism.

but also examine how the orthodox church responded: There is great value and wisdom in church history. King Solomon said there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9): Liberal Christianity is nothing new, but it is dressed differently. Thus, a primary purpose is to expose Progressive Christianity, a disrobing of its new, flashing clothing because Progressive Christianity promotes a gospel and a god that cannot save. It is a new attempt (Progressive Christianity) with an old trick (Liberal Christianity). A refutation, equitable and uncompromising, is demanded.

Research and Methodological Design

Limitations and Delimitations

Due to the newness of Progressive Christianity, scholarly sources are few. Most available sources are intended for a lay audience. However, finding common threads (i.e. linking Liberal Christianity to modernity secularism, humanism, and postmodernism) will create a comprehensive illustration of not only Progressive Christianity, but how we got where we are. Accurately defining each “ism” with multiple sources is indispensable for an equitable analysis and evaluation. Therefore, scholarly sources about Liberal Christianity will be utilized and synthesized with popular sources about Progressive Christianity.

The historical inquiry will be limited to three hundred years, divided organizationally into three one-hundred year studies. The Age of Reason (1700’s-1800’s) will range geographically from Europe and America. The American Revival/Great Awakenings (1800’s-1900’s) and the Rise of Liberalism (1900’s-2000’s) will focus entirely in America. Lastly, the theological standard to which Progressive Christianity will be compared is orthodox

Christianity, which means a traditional and biblical theological foundation.

Design Overview

This project will have two distinct approaches: a chronological, historical approach to Liberal Christianity followed by a comparative approach to Progressive Christianity and orthodox Christianity. Chapter Two aims to identify and connect common theologically liberal elements, a distinct man-centered theology, across different historical horizons. Chapter Three defines and explores secularism, modernity, humanism, and postmodernism and their relationship with Liberal Christianity. Chapter Four refutes Progressive Christianity by exposing its logical inconsistency and theological incoherence while upholding the superiority of orthodox Christianity. Chapter Five argues for the adoption of apologetic education within the church and a renewed church culture of intellectualism: a priority to equip the saints through biblical literacy in order to love God intellectually and guard their hearts so they will not fall victim to Progressive Christianity.

Chapter 2

Historical Horizons

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the historical birth and growth of theological liberalism. Covering three centuries, this chapter will be divided into three sections: the Enlightenment Era (1700s-1800s), The Great Awakenings of an American Revival (1800s-1900s), and the Rise of Liberal Christianity (1900's-2000s). Each section will trace the commonalities that have led to today's reality of Progressive Christianity. The aim is to explore historical horizons that are applicable to today's horizon, analyzing the similarities and differences to show the lasting impact of each historical period.

An Age of Reason: The Enlightenment Era

The Enlightenment, reaching from Europe to America, was a robust multi-discipline renaissance of mathematics, scientific discovery, philosophy, religion, and politics, which forever changed the landscape of the emerging West.¹⁸ Despite the more recent scholarship on the historical shift of Western culture and intellectualism known as the Enlightenment, which questions the potency and distinction of this movement, the reliance on reason is maintained as an axiomatic cornerstone of this era spanning the years c. 1690 - 1790.¹⁹ Antecedent to this intellectual movement is the contributions of René Descartes (1596–1650) whose famous maxim *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), initiated the methodology of severe introspection and

¹⁸ S. J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2018), 1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

authority of the individual.²⁰ While not opposed to the church, Descartes rejected its authority to inform epistemology, opening a floodgate for philosophical and theological skepticism and conflict that had been previously cemented shut by the ubiquity and dominance of medieval Christendom.²¹ Following Augustine, Descartes' skepticism turned inward to find ultimate morality and truth.²² However, unlike Augustine whose radical reflexivity revealed a heightened need for and dependence on God, Descartes, whose philosophy defended and depended on the existence of God, concluded, "God's existence has become a stage in my progress towards science through the methodical ordering of evident insight. God's existence is a theorem in my system of perfect science."²³ Thus, subjective standards of rationality render God as an inference based on man's reasoning.²⁴

So profound was the impact of Descartes' philosophy, like wildfire, it fanned the flames of cultural, scientific, and even political revolution igniting the seismic shift toward individualism and reason within the church and the world. Jonathan Israel notes, "As the supremacy of theology waned, non-theological accounts of man, God, and the world...penetrated with novel and unsettling consequences..."²⁵ Indeed, the roots of modernity were birthed within this historical-cultural context of warring factions of the philosophical conservatives and innovators, scholastic Aristotilians, and the Cartesians, giving rise to a new and powerful

²⁰ William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: Volume 2, From 1500: A Primary Source Reader* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 688.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Benjamin K. Forrest, Joshua D. Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 328.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 24.

secularized West.²⁶ Descartes' "individualized" philosophy and Newtonian "scientific revolution" combined as a powerhouse of influence, which was no longer confined to the academic elite as "...very soon the hugely divisive issues at stake also began to be debated in taverns, passenger barges, and popular pamphlets in the vernacular."²⁷ The Enlightenment Era dynamically and severely disrupted the status quo of the church, specifically, with the rise of Deism.²⁸

Despite the heretical outcome, the Enlightenment was not an anti-religious movement. Rather, it was a reordering of authority and priority among the English elite, which permeated every discipline and every walk of life, including religion, which affected the full range of socio-economic strata from the famed wealthy to the disenfranchised poor. Simply put, the rise of Deism was a movement within the church, not outside: a homegrown, intellectual campaign that reflects a dissatisfaction, and even a disillusionment, of the political use of the church in varying Christian communities, which endured the recent English Civil Wars.²⁹ In fact, the line of deist and Christian was ambiguous: there were Christians tending to Deism and deists with sympathies to Christianity.³⁰ The tenets of Deism, rooted in rationality and philosophy, are necessarily diverse; they are subject to individual assessment and verified by individual authority. Nevertheless, there are commonalities, which include a denial of "the veracity and hence the authority of Scripture, the existence of the Trinity, and Jesus' divinity; [the deists] considered the world eternal and thought that man's ingenuity, exalted by art and industry, could

²⁶ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 25.

²⁷ Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 170.

²⁸ Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath, *The History of Apologetics*, 329.

²⁹ Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion*, 49.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

rival the omnipotence believers ascribed to God.”³¹ Essentially, superior reasoning overthrows blind tradition, scientific experimentation and empiricism expels the awe and the wonder of God, and creation is independent from its Creator. Focused on piety and the standard of virtuous living, the Bible is valuable only for ethical purposes; natural reasoning of man exclusively points to truth.³² More radical deists came to view Christian doctrines as unnecessary, the Bible as inferior, and only acknowledged a Creator-God who is distant, even apathetic, to daily function.³³ Thus, “deism has traditionally been considered one of the great secularizing forces of the Enlightenment.”³⁴ For example, Thomas Paine strived to usurp the “Book of Scripture” with the “Book of Nature;”³⁵ John Adams boasted that “the United States of America... [is] the first example of governments erected on simple principles of nature” not laws derived from divinities.³⁶ John Locke, a Rationalist, asserted that reason is the arbiter of truth, not faith, which was corroborated by Matthew Tindale’s famous *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, where he surmised that if a proposition “cannot be found to be agreeable to reason, or if reason alone will not show the truth, then... [it] is to be rejected.”³⁷ As the deists’ movement evolved, the more distant from orthodox Christianity it moved. Immanuel Kant rejected the traditional proofs of God, Benedictus de Spinoza advocated pantheism,³⁸ while David Hume despised the claim of

³¹ Christopher Nadon, ed. *Enlightenment and Secularism: Essays on the Mobilization of Reason* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 9.

³² Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath, *The History of Apologetics*, 328.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion*, 70.

³⁵ Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister, *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 21.

³⁶ Nadon, *Enlightenment and Secularism*, 12.

³⁷ Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 225.

³⁸ Sweis and Meister, *Christian Apologetics*, 24.

miracles mocking Christians as “barbarous and ignorant.”³⁹ In this Western world of the enlightened, man’s value and authority eclipses God’s power and divine revelation.

The Age of Reason is distinguished as an epicenter of cataclysmic social, political, economic and religious change; its aftershocks resonate in today’s West. Colloquially, it is a “my-way-or-the-highway” Western, twenty-first century world, where trust in self and science is a culturally religious standard. Every individual warrants a valid opinion, regardless of expertise or experience, dependent on subjective reason, or perhaps, transient feeling. The Scriptures are a suggestion, not revelatory nor authoritative, although still ethically valuable to some and simply irrelevant to others. Another shock wave of importance is that “in late-seventeenth-century England and late Enlightenment France a secular ‘bourgeois’ public sphere began to develop that marked the arrival of the undeniably powerful and supposedly modern phenomenon we term public opinion.”⁴⁰ Indeed, many have been found woefully guilty in the court of public opinion, regardless of fact or truth. The long lasting legacy of the Enlightenment, which is still acutely seen in today’s world, is the importance of man over God, the reliance of the individual for truth, the elevation of human reason, and the potent influence of public opinion.

The Great Awakenings of An American Revival

The massive upheaval of the deists’ movement launched a great divide within the church and inaugurated an age of Great Awakening in America. In 1734, Jonathan Edwards set revival in motion during the Northampton Awakening, a prelude to the famous and influential Great Awakening of 1740, which fundamentally molded the spiritual, theological, and political nature

³⁹ Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 43.

⁴⁰ Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion*, 72.

of the soon-to-be United States of America.⁴¹ In fact, some historians suggest that the American Revolution was successful because the foundationally spiritual emphasis of the Great Awakening intimately unified the thirteen colonies.⁴² Leading the saints, theological and philosophical giants like George Whitefield, David Brainerd, and Samuel Davies, refuted the deists' claims, upholding the existence of a personal, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God, the veracity and necessity of divine revelation, and the fallibility of reason alone.⁴³ Advocating a Calvinist orientation, the sinfulness of man and his fallen reason could only be redeemed through God's election and grace, moved by the Holy Spirit to regenerate the mind and heart. Jonathan Edwards, a vocal and passionate opponent of deism, not only mocks foolhardy reliance on reason, but argues, "Were it not for divine revelation, I am persuaded that there is no one doctrine of that which we call natural religion [but] would, notwithstanding all philosophy and learning, forever be involved in darkness, doubts, endless disputes and dreadful confusion."⁴⁴ Such robust apologetics and intellectualism prompted the founding of Dartmouth College in 1769.⁴⁵ Seeking to expose counterfeit religions, while highlighting the supremacy of orthodox Christianity, Edwards and others cultivated a spiritual revival that strengthened and equipped the church against Deism on pre-American soil.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, another vibrant revival commenced: the Second Great Awakening. Perhaps in response to a rapid increase of population, army soldiers coming

⁴¹ Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath, *The History of Apologetics*, 325.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 324.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 329.

⁴⁵ William Speer, *The Great Revival of 1800* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publishers, 1872), 10.

home bringing “vices and infidelity” from Europe,⁴⁶ or even religious floundering in a newborn nation who separated church and state, a new wave of evangelicalism took aggressive root, advocating for Christian perfectionism, temperance, social reform, and experiential conversion.⁴⁷ A theological shift toward Arminianism compelled preachers like Charles Finney, John Humphrey, John Wesley, and William Boardman to focus on the heart, personal experience, and the human action of “becoming ‘doers of the word’ instead of simply ‘hearers of the word’—as a result of their true faith.”⁴⁸ So profound an impact on the church, the Second Great Awakening unified considerable theological division within multiple denominations including Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Methodist, and Baptist.⁴⁹ In fact, this Arminianism, perfectionist, millennialist theology has aided the development of the “mainstream tradition of American Evangelical Protestantism.”⁵⁰ Moreover, the style of preaching changed dynamically: spontaneous tent meetings with charismatic evangelists enlivened the congregation with the zealous theatrics of singing, shouting, and crying out.⁵¹ Although effective with a boom of conversion, the Second Great Awakening tended to “overemphasize immediate personal conversion to Christ instead of a studied period of reflection and conviction; emotional, simple, popular preaching instead of intellectually careful and doctrinally precise sermons; and personal

⁴⁶ Speer, *The Great Revival of 1800*, 12.

⁴⁷ Hadley Kruczek-Aaron, *Everyday Religion: An Archaeology of Protestant Belief and Practice in the Nineteenth Century* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2015), 17. Arminianism, named after Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius of the late sixteenth century, emphasizes the responsibility of man “to work out his salvation,” which is contrasted by Calvinism that emphasizes the sovereignty of God.

⁴⁸ Kruczek-Aaron, *Everyday Religion*, 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁰ Kruczek-Aaron, *Everyday Religion*, 7.

⁵¹ Richard Lee Rogers, “The Urban Threshold and the Second Great Awakening: Revivalism in New York State, 1825-1835,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 4 (2010): 697.

feelings and relationship to Christ instead of a deep grasp of the nature of Christian teaching and ideas.”⁵² Furthermore, an ardent insistence to “perfectionist policies,” which obliged a strict attention to visible, pious action (it is what I *do* for God that makes me a Christian), eclipsed the intellectual and educational needs of the new believer (it is what I *know* about God that makes me a Christian) left the church vulnerable.⁵³ Simply put, “the intellectually shallow, theologically illiterate form of Christianity that came to be part of the populist Christian religion”⁵⁴ resulted in two major American cults: Mormonism (1830) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (1886).⁵⁵

The lasting effects of the Great Awakenings are a combination of positive and negative. While an American evangelical culture emerged, dynamic and unique, with successful, experiential conversions, a seed of anti-intellectualism was planted as many new converts were left without biblical education as the American frontier expanded.⁵⁶ Thus, a lack of readiness and defense permeated the church, leaving her exposed to the attacks of enlightened thinkers, like Kant and Hume, whose alluring philosophical, yet naturalistic arguments inspired Transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau to take root in American soil.⁵⁷ Christian attitudes exclusively focused on heart, action, and a witness to the

⁵² J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 16.

⁵³ Kruczek-Aaron, *Everyday Religion*, 18.

⁵⁴ Moreland, *Love Your God*, 16.

⁵⁵ By cult, it is meant as a theological category that is a stark deviation from orthodox Christianity (as opposed to the sociological or cultural connotation of cult). Both Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses emphasize ecclesiastical power over revelatory power. That is, the religious organization has supreme authority over its doctrine, not the Bible. Moreover, each religion demotes Jesus as a created being and the gospel message is altered: different Jesus and different gospel (2 Cor. 11:4).

⁵⁶ Moreland, *Love Your God*, 16.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

Holy Spirit, rather than to the mind, truth, and an intellectual pursuit of God and His Word: they *knew*, through the personal experience and assurance of the Holy Spirit that Christianity is true, but they could not *show*, through proofs and evidence, that Christianity is true.⁵⁸ Without sufficient answers and defense, the church began to abdicate her cultural influence. These effects are relevant today. J.P. Moreland observes, “This withdrawal from the broader intellectual culture and public discourse contributed to the isolation of the church, the marginalization of Christian ideas from the public arena, and the shallowness and trivialization of Christian living, thought, and activism. In short, the culture became saltless,” leading to the rise of a new brand of Christianity.⁵⁹

The Rise of Liberal Christianity

At the turn of the century, Friedrich Nietzsche declared the death of God, a severe progression of David Hume’s apathetic god and Immanuel Kant’s reasoned morality apart from God.⁶⁰ The effects of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* allowed for naturalistic views of the world, extricating theism from mainstream acknowledgment and elevating Newtonian thought of a mechanistic world.⁶¹ Therefore, more and more people began to regard the Bible as more of an ethical standard rather than “true propositions about various topics that require a devoted intellect to grasp and study systematically.”⁶² Essentially, empiricism won the day; the quest for

⁵⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger, Darrel L. Bock, and Josh D. Chatraw, *Truth in a Culture of Doubt: Engaging Skeptical Challenges to the Bible* (B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 26.

⁵⁹ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God*, 18.

⁶⁰ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford Press, 2016), 87.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶² Moreland, *Love Your God*, 17.

truth began at doubt, instead of faith, guided by man's reason, not God's revelation. Hence, it was a world dominated by skepticism, which was "easily the best-documented moment of widespread doubt in human history."⁶³ Heavily laden by this doubt, the twentieth-century dawned a desire to construct a new chapter of life, to create a new world, where old traditions and new sciences were juxtaposed into a religious, social, and scientific mash-up: Liberal Christianity.⁶⁴

Evolutionary sciences reinforced in public schools coupled with the anti-intellectualism of the church rapidly gave rise to a compromised and illegitimate Christianity.⁶⁵ This new religion, also called modern or theological liberalism, allowed for dual loyalty: a publicly approved stance of scientific integrity and a private, religious life to fill in the gaps. William Edgar delineates, "The term *liberalism* refers to an attempt to assure people of their freedom (liberation) from tradition and of the ability of [the] Christian faith to adapt to the contours of the modern world (hence, *modernism*, a synonym)."⁶⁶ Essentially, liberalism operates without adherence to doctrine and focuses on the practicality of function: a pragmatic approach.⁶⁷ Thus, cornered by Darwinism, historicism, high biblical criticism, and Freudian psychology, liberalism aimed to reframe Christianity to the modern world.⁶⁸ Among the reframers were Paul Tillich, who developed a "method of correlation," which applied Christian symbols as a bridge

⁶³ Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Doubt as History: The Great Doubters and Their Legacy of Innovation, from Socrates and Jesus to Jefferson and Emily Dickinson* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 371.

⁶⁴ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 28.

⁶⁵ Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 12.

⁶⁶ Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 308.

⁶⁷ Terrence Merrigan, "Newman and Theological Liberalism," *Theological Studies* 66, no. 3 (Sep 2005): 606.

⁶⁸ Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 308.

to existential humanism; John Hick denied high christology and the exclusivity of Christianity, while John Shelby Spong renounced the virgin birth, diminishing Jesus as a mere expression of God's love.⁶⁹ Henry Emerson Fosdick, a baptist preacher, told his congregation that "the Bible is only a certain record of events and could not be believed literally."⁷⁰ Liberal Christianity whittled away so much tradition and doctrine that even the person of Jesus could not be distinguishably unique.⁷¹

This divided yet pragmatic loyalty to modernity and religion yielded sharp criticism twofold. As Gresham Machen cogently identifies, "Modern liberalism may be criticized (1) on the grounds that it is un-Christian and (2) on the ground that it is unscientific."⁷² Simply put, liberalism did not satisfy Christian qualification nor the scientific demand to dismiss it entirely. Focusing on the former, two stark factions emerged: the liberals and the fundamentalists. Religious liberals, minimizing the revelatory power of Scripture, the divinity of Christ, and the need for salvation, focused on social reform and modern relevance.⁷³ They were the educated laity domesticating religion.⁷⁴ Conversely, fundamentalists tended to be highly suspicious of the need to defend the Bible and Christian doctrine, emphasizing "the Holy Spirit in understanding the Bible as opposed to serious historical and grammatical study."⁷⁵ Pigeon-holed into becoming the antimodernists, fundamentalism was caricatured as blinded and willfully ignorant: "If

⁶⁹ Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 308.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ James Hitchcock, "Conservatism and Liberalism (Theological)," *New Catholic Encyclopedia. Ethics and Philosophy* Vol. 1. (2013): 307.

⁷² Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 6.

⁷³ Hitchcock, "Conservatism and Liberalism (Theological)," 307.

⁷⁴ Merrigan, "Newman and Theological Liberalism," 606.

⁷⁵ Moreland, *Love Your God*, 17.

science comes into contradiction with the Bible so much the worse for science!”⁷⁶ Culturally dismissed as killjoys for their vehement support of Prohibition, the fundamentalists’ reputation was fully destroyed by the Scopes or “monkey trials” of 1926, which crippled their credibility in the academic, social, and public sphere.⁷⁷ Opportunistically, liberals took their seat at the cultural table. J.P. Moreland aptly notes, “Theological liberals have understood that whoever controls the thinking leadership of the church in a culture will eventually control the church itself.”⁷⁸ Founded on a multicultural ethic for the betterment of society, political liberalism equitably submits “all doctrines, whether religious or secular, to the test of public reason.”⁷⁹ Freed from dogmatic chains, liberalism blossomed within public opinion, transcending into political identity with far-reaching force; its primary mission was to create a liberal state. Theo Hobson identifies, “Liberal Christians see the liberal state as integral to their religious identity; that is, they see themselves as part of this story.”⁸⁰

This is a cataclysmic shift from God-centered theology to man-centered theology, from spreading the gospel message to spreading political ideology, from caring for the spiritual well-being to prioritizing physical well-being; instead of seeking the approval of God, the seeking of societal approval fundamentally fractured the unity of Christianity. Charles Taylor asserts,

From this perspective, the great watershed of Christianity is not the Protestant Reformation (Luther and Calvin continue the Augustinian tradition, albeit with very

⁷⁶ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 7.

⁷⁷ Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 310.

⁷⁸ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God*, 24.

⁷⁹ Jacob Levy, Jocelyn Maclure, and Daniel M. Weinstock, *Interpreting Modernity: Essays on the Work of Charles Taylor* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020), 85.

⁸⁰ Theo Hobson, *Reinventing Liberal Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 16.

different accounts of divine grace) but the early modern assertion of the goodness of the world - an assertion associated with but not confined to Deism. The world is good because it has been ordered to further human well-being; the great law of nature is that everything is to be preserved (to use Locke's phrase) 'as much as may be.'⁸¹

The fascination with the temporal, the present, and the insistence of man's influence on the world supersedes eternal interest; it is a forgoing of tradition, heritage, and truth itself for the sake of liberty, to believe and live without restraint for the betterment of self and society.⁸²

There lies the imprudent and perilous deviation from desiring to know God to desiring to know self. Furthermore, Liberal Christianity perverts orthodox Christianity and breathes new life into hybrids of belief systems including secularism, humanism, and progressivism.

Summary

The Enlightenment Era rebelled against the religious and social status quo, defying the political power of the church, elevating the mind of man, and establishing the power of public opinion. A hearty reliance on reason propelled an epistemic and scientific quest to know truth without God as its source. Thus, the importance of man repudiated the importance of God. Deists dismissed and replaced divine revelation with empirical data. Miracles were made of man's derangement or fancy, and faith became folly.

The American Great Awakenings did much to refute Deism, unifying a people whose nation would be founded under God, the Giver of inalienable rights.⁸³ However, as America expanded and the Enlightenment lingered, a patchwork church high on heart conviction and low on mind instruction diluted evangelical power and ecclesiastical function.⁸⁴ The church entered

⁸¹ Levy, Maclure, and Weinstock, *Interpreting Modernity*, 131.

⁸² Hobson, *Reinventing Liberal Christianity*, 15.

⁸³ Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath, *The History of Apologetics*, 325.

⁸⁴ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God*, 18.

an anti-intellectual era where she would eventually be pushed to the margin.⁸⁵ While fundamentalists refused to engage with skeptics, liberals aspired to amalgamate Enlightenment thought with Christian tenets. Instead of church power, liberals sought state power.⁸⁶

The rise of Liberal Christianity may be considered as the theological deconstruction of orthodox doctrine and the social reconstruction of religious themes and symbols to advance human flourishing. Propelled by the public defeat of fundamentalism, Liberal Christianity thrived in a consumer society that elevated the here-and-now: an increase in physical comfort and convenience incited many to toss aside religious discomfort and inconvenience. To religious liberals, theological coherence and consistency was irrelevant to the advancement of the liberal state.⁸⁷ Rather, the twentieth century weaponized this new brand of Christianity as a political and social sword for power and progress.⁸⁸ Thus, stripped bare of any full truth and filled with cherry-picked pithy slogans and virtue signals, Liberal Christianity is a counterfeit: a white-washed tomb. Its offspring, Progressive Christianity, is no less pervasive, destructive, and hollow.

⁸⁵ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God*, 18.

⁸⁶ Hobson, *Reinventing Liberal Christianity*, 15.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 233. Hobson argues that Liberal Christians are called to a “political vision,” which imagines that “God wills the state that secures the fullest liberty.” That is, Liberal Christians are dedicated to the freedom of the liberal state: more social freedom means God’s will.

⁸⁸ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 10-12. Consider the public school system. While public education is a societal good, the state’s powerful interference demands that “the choice of schools must be taken away from the individual parent and placed in the hands of the state. The state then exercises its authority through the instruments that are ready to hand, and at once, therefore, the child is placed under the control of psychological experts, themselves without the slightest acquaintance with the higher realms of human life, who proceed to prevent any such acquaintance being gained by those who come under their care.” Machen cites a law in Nebraska (1919) that prohibits the inclusion and instruction of any other language except English; a law in Oregon (1922) requires all children in lower-grades to attend public school, excluding private and homeschooling options. The “Lusk Laws” in New York (1921) threatened all schools without accredited licenses to be subject to closure. A more recent example is the inclusion of Critical Race Theory and Sexual Identity curriculum in all public schools, in all grade-levels.

Chapter 3

The Bad Fruit of Liberal Christianity

Introduction

This chapter will feature the profound effects, the bad fruit, of Liberal Christianity in today's modern world. Twenty-first century secularism and humanism share a distorted Christian worldview that maligns and appropriates uniquely Christian values and ideals. Although each deserves its own analysis and refutation, the aim is to define terms to better understand how Progressive Christianity developed in order to effectively dismantle its veracity and credibility. Moreover, while secularism and humanism have extensive historical roots ranging from ancient Greece to the Reformation, the focus is their current mutation and impact, which overlaps and further highlights the persistent and cunning elements of Liberal Christianity.

Modernity and Postmodernism

The historical context of modernity, which spans from the Enlightenment era and the rise of industrialization to post-World War II and the Civil Rights movement, rests in scientific, technological, and epistemic supremacy: a golden age of transcendence above all other historical contexts.⁸⁹ Modernity upholds “freedom and individualism in all spheres of human life.”⁹⁰ Democracy and Capitalism are foundational to this modern era, offering the poor, the marginalized, the outcast hope for prosperity and identity.⁹¹ As the modern era pushed forward, orthodox Christianity was pushed out as an antiquated and restrictive collectivism because the

⁸⁹ Bradley Bowden, *Work, Wealthy, and Postmodernism* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2018), 33.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

modern world is *advanced*: advanced in technology, advanced in medicine, advanced in science, advanced in societal prosperity and human flourishing.⁹² However, no advancement, despite all the gain, could ever conquer pain, suffering, evil, and death. Hence, this incongruity results in a “malaise of modernity;” that is, a sense of meaninglessness and hopelessness unique to the modern era.⁹³ To counteract this reality, modernity has seen “an explosion of new religions, ideologies, moral codes, and spiritual options to fill the void left by the displacement of Christianity” leaving generations to wallow in an identity crisis and a juxtaposed framework of morality.⁹⁴

Deeply rooted in modernity is the paradox of diversity in unity: wanting to stand out in a crowd, while being just like the crowd. Developed by German philosopher J.G. Herder, the “ethic of authenticity” asserts everyone is an individual, distinct and unique.⁹⁵ Filtered into a modern context devoid of its theocentric approach (for being uniquely made has deep Christian roots), the ambition to self-realize is a premium and imperative value: “If I fail to give expression to my original way of being human, according to this ethic, I miss the point of my life.”⁹⁶ Colloquialisms, such as “listen to your heart” and “you do you,” show this modern bend toward egocentrism and subjectivity, which justifies any choice as long as it reflects a unique expression of self. However, the construction, not discovery, of this “ethic of authenticity” inevitably fails to satiate and hastens in a postmodern era.

⁹² J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God*, 18.

⁹³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 299.

⁹⁴ Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath, *The History of Apologetics*, 683.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 684.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Today's postmodernism scrutinizes the cost of modernity's advancement, elevating the sins of the past to promote a nihilistic worldview promoted by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, key influencers of Karl Marx and Jacques Derrida. So ardent in the belief of correcting historical woes, some postmodernists "go so far as to say that science and technology—and even reason and logic—are inherently destructive and oppressive, because they have been used by evil people, especially during the 20th century, to destroy and oppress others."⁹⁷ Philosophy, science, psychology, and even language is tainted by the modern era. For example, to label someone a "worker" is oppressive as it implies an inferior status because of the linguistic and social relationship between "worker" and "boss."⁹⁸ Moreover, postmodernism posits that all humans are socially determined; there are no choices, no pattern of human nature, just inevitable outcomes based on societal pressure.⁹⁹ Thus, if there are no choices, but mere external determinations, then ethical standards flux ushering in the postmodern ideal of moral relativity.¹⁰⁰ Postmodernists maintain that "because cultures have differing ethical values, none of them can be 'absolute,' and no ethical values can be said to be better than others. This is all related to the Postmodernist belief that we cannot know anything with absolute certainty," which

⁹⁷ Mary S. Ford, "By Whose Authority? Sexual Ethics, Postmodernism, and Orthodox Christianity," *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 26, no. 3 (December 2020): 301.

⁹⁸ Sean Devine, "Christianity, Science, and Postmodernism," *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice* 15, no. 1 (February 2007): 29.

⁹⁹ Ford, "By Whose Authority?" 301.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Morality becomes subjective to the individual. Why should we hold a person accountable for behavior that is inevitably determined by societal castes? Is it fair to make a criminal only to punish him for the crime society has groomed him to commit? Thus, postmodernism yields to differentiated standards of morality. Personal choice and accountability are irrelevant.

is (incoherently) the only certainty that can be known.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, postmodernists repudiate metanarratives, which are foundational to discern and establish meaning.¹⁰² Sean Devine notes,

Metanarratives are universal rules used to legitimate questionable beliefs or actions. Instead of appealing to foundational knowledge, postmodernists believe that each community develops its own narrative capturing its own truth that permits its members to speak a common language and establish a commonly accepted reality. No narrative, such as the Christian narrative, is more foundational than another.¹⁰³

Every discipline, discovery, action, story, and word is subject to critique in postmodernism (except, of course, postmodernism itself).

The highest moral value of postmodernism is the concern for the victim, the oppressed, the previously silenced: Their intersectionality (that is, their race, socio-economic circumstances, and sexual preferences) heightens their “victim” worth. This hyper-focus on victimhood is anthropologically unique to this postmodern era: “The phenomenon has no precedent.”¹⁰⁴ The postmodernist wields intersectional victimhood to isolate an oppressor, a scapegoat for all past, present, and future evils in order to advance “the easy life of nihilism without obligation or sanction.”¹⁰⁵ However, this is problematic for the postmodernist because the origin for the modern concern for the poor, the tired, the abused, and the broken is unequivocally Christian.¹⁰⁶ Hence, there is a deep-rooted anti-Christian foundation to postmodernism because Christianity holds to the supreme and complete authority of divine revelation, the Bible, which clearly distinguishes between good and evil, virtue and vice, righteousness and blasphemy, exclusive

¹⁰¹ Ford, “By Whose Authority?” 301.

¹⁰² Devine, “Christianity, Science, and Postmodernism,” 29.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ford, “By Whose Authority?” 302.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 303.

truth and cunning falsity. Therefore, postmodernism swears hostility and vitriol to any scientific, philosophical, and theological criticism that hinders their social and political agenda.¹⁰⁷

In today's postmodern world, which seemingly still borrows from the modern era while loudly abhorring it, theological liberalism has mutated in order to find purchase in this hostile climate. For example, secularism is raging, which adopts Christian origins and themes, exploiting them for postmodern use.¹⁰⁸ Humanism is burgeoning, employing Christian values to advance social agendas.¹⁰⁹ Both are flourishing amid the social and cultural chaos of postmodernism.

Secularism

When Fredrick Nietzsche pronounced the death of God in *The Gay Science* with a madman yelling, “Where is God? . . . I'll tell you! We have killed him—you and I,” Nietzsche foresaw the coming secular age.¹¹⁰ That is, God would become unnecessary, even unbelievable.¹¹¹ God, as Nietzsche suggests, is not a literal reality, but rather a fantastical concept that could no longer keep up with the progress of humanity. For example, the metaphysical God is refuted by

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 307-309. The Yogyakarta Principles, are “a ‘how-to’ guide for politically implementing on a world-wide basis ‘the free choice of gender, sexual orientation, and identity’ as part of a scheme to compel all nations to live out a Postmodernist view of reality in their laws.” Gabriele Kuby, a German sociologist, expands, “the principles demand that all countries of the world take totalitarian measures to change their constitutions, laws, social institutions, education systems, and their citizens’ basic attitudes in order to enforce and legally compel acceptance and privileged status for homosexuality and other non-heterosexual identities and behaviors . . .” Any opposition, by word or action, justifies legal retaliation with the “use of intimidation, defamation, and campaigns.”

¹⁰⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 543.

¹⁰⁹ John de Gruchy, "Christian Humanism, Progressive Christianity, and Social Transformation," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 31, no. 1 (2018): 54.

¹¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119.

¹¹¹ Matthew Edwards Harris, “The Reception of Nietzsche's Announcement of the ‘Death of God’ in Twentieth-century Theorizing Concerning the Divine,” *The Heythrop Journal* 59, No. 2 (2018): 148.

the success of scientific data and philosophical inquiry; the dramatic societal benefit and security from technological advancement renders God useless.¹¹² Essentially, humanity has outgrown the belief in God. It, therefore, falls on man to control and maintain *saeculum*, which is Latin for “this current age” and the linguistic and epistemic root for secularization.¹¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian, considered it “man’s coming of age” to advance into a post-religious era.¹¹⁴ Any continued adherence to religion stifles humanity’s maturity and diminishes societal health.

As Harvey Cox pontificates,

Secularization simply bypasses and undercuts religion and goes on to other things. It has relativized religious world-views and thus rendered them innocuous... Secularization has accomplished what fire and chain could not: It has convinced the believer that he could be wrong, and persuaded the devotee that there are more important things than dying for the faith. The gods of traditional religions live on as private fetishes or the patrons of congenial groups, but they play no role whatsoever in the public life of the secular metropolis.¹¹⁵

Despite this seemingly flippant dismissal of religion, secularists openly admit that without Christianity, this secular age would cease to exist.¹¹⁶ Indeed, Christendom provided a model of societal reform and progress, which advanced science and philosophy to “improve the condition of mankind.”¹¹⁷ Christianity established a historically unique movement that paved the way for secularization, and paradoxically, a way to dispose of all religion.

¹¹² Harris, “The Reception of Nietzsche's Announcement,” 150.

¹¹³ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 40.

¹¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 476-479.

¹¹⁵ Cox, *The Secular City*, 40.

¹¹⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 543.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The Reform Master Narrative, described by Charles Taylor, begins in postaxial religions, like Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, which espouse imminent transcendence can only be achieved through virtuous living, demanding a separation between the mundane (unholy) and the sacred (holy).¹¹⁸ This division of holiness permeated Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages, bestowing spiritual fulfillment only to the clergy, not to the laity.¹¹⁹ As the Reformation took root, it obscured this division, giving all access to the sacred. By sanctifying everyday life, the Protestant Reformers unintentionally initiated the rise of secularism by bolstering individualism and reason.¹²⁰ No longer is spiritual fulfillment only for the priest, but for the butcher, the farmer, the merchant, who all employ their own reasoning, express their own virtue, and identify what is holy, independently of the Roman Catholic church. Furthermore, rightfully repudiated by the Reformers, blind superstition is extricated from the masses; however, the supernatural, no longer separated as holy, is subjected to the misnomer of superstition. Alternatively, naturalism is embraced, mutating to hyper-rationalism that aims to control nature, severing the reliance of God and grace.¹²¹

In addition to the Reformers' unintended influence, there are three specific elements of biblical Christianity that facilitate the secular age, according to Harvey Cox: the disenchantment of nature from the Creation account in Genesis, the desacralization of politics from the Exodus, and Mount Sinai's deconstruction of values, specifically the ban of idols.¹²² Creative yet conniving hermeneutics notwithstanding, these biblical accounts demonstrate Israel's unique

¹¹⁸ Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath, *The History of Apologetics*, 678.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 179.

¹²¹ Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath, *The History of Apologetics*, 679.

¹²² Cox, *The Secular City*, 50.

monotheism in the Ancient Near East, which initiated the historical process of secularization.¹²³ First, as God, who is spaceless, timeless, and immaterial,¹²⁴ speaks the world into existence, nature is demystified, thereby allowing man to view the world matter-of-factly: There is no enticing magic behind natural order and laws.¹²⁵ For example, the celestial bodies are mere creations, not demigods. Similarly, the predictability of seasons are ordered, not swayed by pagan worship. As history unfolds, God, who dispelled the need for magic as a way to explain nature, becomes superfluous as science explains creation without the need for God. This disenchantment of nature in Genesis “is really a form of ‘atheistic propaganda,’” which advances humanity toward independence from religion.¹²⁶

Having dismissed the need for God to explain Creation, the next progressive step toward secularization is the desacralization of politics, which is found in the Exodus: “It symbolized the deliverance of man out of a sacral-political order and into history and social change, out of religiously legitimated monarchs and into a world where political leadership would be based on power gained by the capacity to accomplish specific social objectives.”¹²⁷ Simply, political power and divine power are irrevocably separated, establishing a precedent for the coming secular age. Therefore, secularization suggests society can thrive outside the caprice of the ancient gods or the obedience to the monotheistic God, but rather on the common, collective good. Once again,

¹²³ Cox, *The Secular City*, 50.

¹²⁴ Paul M. Gould, Travis Dickinson, and R. Keith Loftin, *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel* (Nashville, NT: B&H Academic, 2018), 40. The cosmological argument for the existence of God asserts that space, time, and matter have a Cause, which would mean the Cause is necessarily spaceless, timeless, and immaterial.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹²⁶ Cox, *The Secular City*, 54.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

the need for God to explain creation and maintain society becomes obsolete. Furthermore, an undercurrent of agnosticism develops in the secular age. Ronald Beiner argues,

None of us know where the universe comes from or why it exists. Theists don't know. Atheists don't know. Agnostics don't know. None of us knows. So for any group of people to come forward and say, not only do they have privileged access to the source of the universe, but they know what rituals it wants performed and what moral code it wants to see prevail - well, that's both a colossal presumption, morally and intellectually speaking, and also a colossal (and potentially dangerous) claim to power and authority.¹²⁸

Ultimate authority must be rejected. Therefore, the advancement of humankind depends on the expulsion of God's illusory power and authority, usurped by man's scientific prowess and philosophical strength in his *saeculum*.

The final pivotal element from the Bible is the Sinai covenant and the deconstruction of values.¹²⁹ When God pronounced, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Ex. 20:3-4, NIV), He set a precedent of relativity by comparing Himself to other inferior gods, thus, imbuing a relativized consciousness into man.¹³⁰ Therefore, the secularist distinguishes his historical, cultural, and social perspective as limited and subjective: "Simple ethical certainty, of the sort once available to man, will never be possible again."¹³¹ Thus, past civilizations, such as the Aztec Empire and their insatiable lust for human sacrifice as a means of appeasing the gods to maintain social order, is outside of this age's critique, for in the Aztecs' *saeculum*, slaughtering innocent children

¹²⁸ Ronald Beiner, "Taylor, Rawls, and Secularism" in *Interpreting Modernity: Essays on the Work of Charles Taylor*, edited by Jacob Levy, Jocelyn Maclure, and Daniel M. Weinstock (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), 84.

¹²⁹ Cox, *The Secular City*, 60.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

was a societal necessity. However, the secularist maintains an elevated status: He is the new product of humanity, a modern man honed by the liberation of religion only achieved through Christianity.

Secularization, then, is not simply releasing all religious concepts and boundaries, but also a process by which men develop meaning and significance in this current world, not a transcendent, fantastical one.¹³² Charles Taylor surmises that the modern man has a buffered identity, rather than a porous one, which gives him “autonomous order to [his] life.”¹³³ For example, the Aztec was porous, absorbing the magical fantasy of myths and abiding by its demands; the modern man is buffered, safeguarded against enchantment and mysticism, thus gaining freedom to construct his own rules and beliefs based on his visible world. This manufactured framework is called “immanentization - a subtle process by which our world, and hence the realm of significance, is enclosed within the material universe and the natural world.”¹³⁴ Released from the transcendent threat of everlasting punishment and the ineffable, abstract concept of heaven, this world, this *saeculum*, holds the maximum of all meaning and significance.¹³⁵ From this secularist stance, the world is a free ideological buffet: Christianity to Hinduism, theism to atheism, New Age to Progressive.

Despite the fundamental differences of worldviews and ideologies, secularism allows for a motley array of choice to construct the secular man’s world. For example, consider anatheism which is “so formidably ample, supple, and generous— generous to the secular, generous to the

¹³² James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 29.

¹³³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 39.

¹³⁴ Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 46.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

sacred, generous to the atheist, generous to the theist.”¹³⁶ In *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*, Richard Kearney inquires, “What kind of God could be Lord over a nonreligious Christianity?...Christianity thus becomes...a secular faith that sees the weakness of God as precisely the summons to rekindle the strength of humanity.”¹³⁷ Secularism shows its theological liberal origin as it eclipses the need and value of God while augmenting the power and abilities of man: the pursuit of God becomes the pursuit of self.

Secularism and Secularization

A clarification is needed to distinguish between secularism and secularization as many secularists do not identify as such, but rather he identifies as a modern man in a secular age. Cox delineates, “Secularization implies a historical process, almost certainly irreversible, in which society and culture are delivered from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical world-views...Secularism, on the other hand, is the name for an ideology, a new closed world-view which functions very much like a new religion.”¹³⁸ To evade culpability of failed secularist societies, that is of socialist and communist totalitarianism, while maintaining the freedom to live without religious constraint, the modern, buffered man promotes himself above the ruckus of the political and the religious state. Instead, he promotes a secular regime, which includes: “(1) the right not to be coerced in one's religious beliefs or lack of such beliefs, (2) the equality of citizens, irrespective of their beliefs or non-beliefs; and (3) the assurance that all

¹³⁶ Jens Zimmermann, *Humanism and Religion: A Call for the Renewal of Western Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22.

¹³⁷ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 66, 69.

¹³⁸ Cox, *The Secular City*, 50.

voices will be heard and respected.”¹³⁹ However, good intentions fueled and tethered by meaningless subjectivity are doomed to fail. It is quite evident, based on the historical atrocities of socialist and communist parties whose secular allegiance to the common good and enmity toward religion marked the bloodiest century in the history of the world, secularism and secularization are intimately tied despite the denial of its adherents.¹⁴⁰

To suggest that the secular man is irreligious, that he has transcended ideologies, is to misinterpret the definition of religion because every man, even the secular one, yields to and worships something or someone and obeys a prescribed worldview. To deny this is semantic dishonesty at best, and delusional hubris at worst. Therefore, the salient distinction between secularism and secularization is an untenable utopian theory and the inevitable dystopian practice. What gave rise to these diametric extremes are the merging of the mundane and the sacred, the distortion of biblical accounts, the propensity to bolster humankind’s power and capabilities, and the elevation of temporal experience, which are hallmarks of Liberal Christianity.

Humanism

A baseline definition of humanism, which today spans diverse ideological categories from Christian to atheist, is “a mode, system, or attitude of thought or action centering upon distinctly human interests and ideals, especially contrasted with naturalistic or religious interests.”¹⁴¹ It may be considered as a philosophical and theological foundation in which to view

¹³⁹ Beiner, “Taylor, Rawls, and Secularism,” 86.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism's Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration* (Gastonia, NC: TAN Books, 2020), 12.

¹⁴¹ Martin R. P. McGuire, “Medieval Humanism” in *The Catholic Historical Review* Vol. 38, no. 4 (1953): 397.

and understand how man interacts with man and the world. Often, humanism is a holistic examination and analysis of the classics, specifically the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, most notably during the Renaissance: a looking-back in order to overcome the present and to ensure the future.¹⁴² However, Christian humanism, a distinctly theocentric view of man and his production, is a synthesis of classical philosophy and Christian theology.¹⁴³

Modeled by Paul preaching in the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34), there is a rich history of debate among prominent, historical church figures utilizing man's reasoning to access God's truth: How do faith and reason relate, and how ought we to use them? Three models demonstrate the relationship between faith and reason: Faith and Philosophy in Tension, Faith Seeking Understanding (FSU), and the Thomistic Synthesis (TS).¹⁴⁴ Most importantly, all three models demand faith as fundamentally necessary to Christian life and place theology as the means of knowing.¹⁴⁵ To begin, Tertullian, a second century apologist, rejected the prominence of philosophy and the appropriation of pagan culture famously condemning, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic?" (Tension Model).¹⁴⁶ This declaration epitomizes the stark contrast between the sinful nature of man and the purity of faith and their contentious relationship. Conversely, St. Augustine, a fourth century Christian philosopher who held Platonism in high esteem, defended that Platonists approach God's truth but need faith to actually reach it: "Unless you believe, you will not

¹⁴² Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 13.

¹⁴³ McGuire, "Medieval Humanism," 398.

¹⁴⁴ Steve Wilkens, *Spectrum Multiview Book Series: Faith and Reason: Three Views*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 8.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath, *The History of Apologetics*, 94.

understand,” (FSU Model).¹⁴⁷ However, it was Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth century Catholic priest, who ultimately synthesized philosophy and theology (TS Model), establishing a faith and reason balance for modern Christian humanism.¹⁴⁸ Martin R.P. McGuire champions that the Thomistic Synthesis “...is intensely devoted to the cultivation of all the higher aspirations of man, it recognizes and defends the sacredness and dignity of human personality, and it insists on absolute moral and intellectual values in the natural order...[regarding] man and his role in the universe...in the relation to a personal God and His divine dispensation.” However, McGuire’s modern humanist is severely influenced by today’s theological liberalism and postmodernism: so in love with the mind of man, the creation of his own hands, and the prestige of the cultural spotlight, today’s humanist not only forfeits the faith demanded for acquiring truth, but also the thirst for truth itself.¹⁴⁹

Today’s humanist cheapens the word humanist. The once robust, intellectual pursuit to understand man’s aptitudes for good and evil, his keen observations of the natural world, his personal relation to the divine to seek transcendent truth has been reduced to “a philosophy of life that encourages us to be more humane.”¹⁵⁰ It speaks nothing of truth, nothing of how to know that truth, and nothing of man’s relation to God, the source of truth. It is devoid of genuine theology and honest philosophy. Jens Zimmermann, a professing Christian humanist, explains, “Naked truth does not exist. Neither pure reason nor pure revelation is given to human beings.”¹⁵¹ Postmodern thought demands subjectivity, a deconstruction of historical wisdom, and

¹⁴⁷ Forrest, Chatraw, and McGrath, *The History of Apologetics*, 145.

¹⁴⁸ McGuire, “Medieval Humanism,” 407.

¹⁴⁹ Zimmermann, *Humanism and Religion*, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Sennett, “Humanism” in *Hedgehog Review* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 30.

¹⁵¹ Zimmermann, *Humanism and Religion*, 4.

even an abandonment of all axiomatic truth to progress humanity. Humanism, therefore, has been secularized.¹⁵²

The postmodern humanist is emphatically concerned about social justice, the acceptance and celebration of the LGBT community, women's rights, the inclusion of the immigrant, and giving a voice to each individual according to his or her intersectionality.¹⁵³ Unchained from the metanarrative, postmodern humanism seeks to uphold the individual narrative, which is an "enriching experience of difference...in terms of human rather than mechanical complexity...[which] are critical measures for judging the state of modern society."¹⁵⁴ In other words, postmodern humanism measures its success by highlighting individual narratives as unobjectionable evidence in order to condemn historical events, practices, and modernity, advancing social justice.¹⁵⁵ Once again, this brand of humanism looks inward for meaning, not outward or upward. By limiting knowledge to personal introspection, postmodern humanism, ironically, impedes progress, their loudly expressed mission, by rejecting metanarratives, which reveal truths necessary for societal and personal progress. Essentially, the postmodern humanist demands less knowledge, less insight, less wisdom, which will inevitably result in a less humane world.

¹⁵² Just as secularization diminished the pursuit of God and truth, so has it devalued the pursuit of understanding and seeking a transcendent relationship with God. Thus, humanism has been through a secularization process to focus solely on man and his physical and societal well-being.

¹⁵³ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, xvii.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Sennett, "Humanism," 30.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* An especially heinous modern practice is capitalism, which inherently robs man of his unique narrative. As job availability geographically expands and time-efficient technology develops, the human experience is diminished. Sociologist Richard Sennett reveals, "My studies of workers—both manual and white-collar—have led me to the conclusion that they are profoundly unhappy simply to narrate these erratic shifts as their own life stories. The flux of time is weakening their powers as narrators; they can see their working lives only in bits and pieces." While available employment seems to suggest economic progress, a net good for humanity, highlighting individual narratives undermines that progress in order to advance the false utopian fantasy of socialism, which is a high value in postmodern humanism as it promises a higher quality of life for humanity.

There are two distinct sects of postmodern humanism: non-religious and religious. Both hold the other misguided. The non-religious humanist is staunchly antagonistic toward religion, while the religious humanist claims, “True humanism...requires religion.”¹⁵⁶ In response, the non-religious humanist would point to all religious history, showing a ubiquity of inhumanity. Any religion at the helm of cruelty, subjugation, and oppression is classified as all religion: there is no distinction between Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. Religion has marred humanity; all are contaminated with blood. Hence, the non-religious, atheist humanist defends that

This life is the only life we have, that the universe is a natural phenomenon, constantly regenerating itself with no supernatural component, and that we, men and women alike, can live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason, kindness, gentleness, empathy and humanity. They have trusted the scientific method, evidence, and reason to discover a full and growing understanding of the universe and have placed human development, welfare and happiness at the center of their ethical decision-making.¹⁵⁷

Congregation, community, and prayer are pointless pursuits and promote indoctrination instead of free thought and discovery.¹⁵⁸ Alternatively, the non-religious humanist seeks to guide others by their example in order to help converts “drop any dependence upon gods or any other supernatural influences in how to live a fulfilling, happy, moral and productive life; [this] would be required, as would be maintaining good relations with all other people, indeed with all living things.”¹⁵⁹ The non-religious humanist, so ardently devoted to control and authority, as far as it can impact the natural world and his fellow man, refuses to acknowledge a metaphysical reality that could subvert his control and authority. To these humanists, the problem of pain, suffering,

¹⁵⁶ Zimmermann, *Humanism and Religion*, 3.

¹⁵⁷ David Findlay Clark, *Against All Gods* (Chicago, IL: Austin Macauley Publishers, 2020), 124.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

and evil is too massive for there to be a God; thus, the responsibility falls on them to pursue justice, give voice, and offer happiness to the world.¹⁶⁰

The religious humanist, on the other hand, maintains the necessity of religion in order to successfully manifest true humanism. God, however, is not required, just religion. The religious humanist is concerned with the integration of Western identity with the current pluralistic cultural reality of the postmodern world with the supreme goal of globalization.¹⁶¹ Essentially, no one religion is exclusively true, but rather they are all equally valuable and malleable to reach a humanistic ideal. In fact, any religion can be cherry-picked in order to advance humanism. Most notably and applicably is Christianity. The postmodern Christian humanist is *progressive* and maintains,

Being Christian means to be truly human rather than being religious in any narrow sense of that word; it also means striving to become more fully human in solidarity with the rest of humankind in the struggle for a more humane, just and peaceable world that respects human dignity and freedom, as well as the integrity of creation. I am a humanist because I am a Christian, and as a Christian I seek to be the best humanist I can be...¹⁶²

When speaking of God, the postmodern Christian humanist is not referring to a “theistic supernatural old man in the sky,” but to an experience of love, of courage, of humanity.¹⁶³ John Shelby Spong asserts, “The task of the Christian church is not to convert the world to some religious ideology. The task of the Christian church is to free every person in this world to live more fully, to love more wastefully, and to have the courage to be all that they can be in the

¹⁶⁰ Clark, *Against All Gods*, 133.

¹⁶¹ Zimmermann, *Humanism and Religion*, 3.

¹⁶² de Gruchy, "Christian Humanism," 54.

¹⁶³ John Shelby Spong, "A Bridge Supreme: Connecting Humanism to a Liberal, Loving Christianity" in *The Humanist* 76, no. 6 (2016).
https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A470463047/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=3d4a9b92.

infinite variety of our humanity.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, the postmodern Christian humanist is today’s progressive Christian.

Summary

Twenty-first century secularism, which claims roots in historical Christianity, and humanism, which thrived within a robust Christian context, have been distorted to fit into a postmodern era. Secularization, spurred by theological liberalism, infected humanism by exalting man over God, man’s ability over God’s sovereignty, and humanity over truth to the point of irrelevance to some, amenity to others, and a tool for progressivism for today’s postmodern religious humanist, also known as the progressive Christian. Through this exploration, Progressive Christianity’s origins are paved by the postmodern value of the victim’s individual narrative, secularization that elevates the importance and impact of man, and the diluting and distorting of biblical authority and truth to advance a pernicious agenda of social justice, reform, and globalization.

¹⁶⁴ Spong, "A Bridge Supreme."

Chapter 4

Exposing Progressive Christianity

Introduction

Having surveyed the historical horizons of the Age of Reason in the eighteenth century, the American Revivals of the nineteenth century, the rise of Liberal Christianity in the twentieth century, and examining and defining modernity and postmodernism and their profound impact on secularism and humanism, the identity of Progressive Christianity takes shape: It is a heretical deviation of orthodox Christianity, packaged for today's postmodern world. It is merely the new deformed and mutated counterfeit, contrived by theological liberalism, that has plagued each fallen generation. Consider the lure of Manichaeism in the third century or even the deists in the seventeenth century: both manipulated the quality and character of God, usurping His power and authority, which diminished or discarded the need for grace-given salvation.¹⁶⁵ Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*, which is still magnificently poignant and relevant one hundred years later, warns of the coming liberal mutation of Christianity: "The great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive to Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology."¹⁶⁶ Thus, Progressive Christianity is the evolutionary counterfeit of the twenty-first century.

¹⁶⁵ Nadon, *Enlightenment and Secularism*, 9. Deism rejected the authority of Scripture, dismissed the divinity of Jesus, and relied on man's ingenuity to reconcile the evil of the world. Stephen Ney, "Teleology and Secular Time in Armah and Ngũgĩ: Augustine, Manichaeism and the African Novel," *Research in African Literatures* 48, no. 2 (Summer, 2017): 38. Manichaeism was based upon "an absolute dualism that took the universe to be constituted by the struggle between two equal and opposite, uncreated, material principles: darkness and light," which rendered Jesus a mythical character of good equal to that of the mythical character of evil. Furthermore, the chosen elite, based on their own power, worked within this dualistic framework to overcome evil.

¹⁶⁶ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 2.

The aim of this chapter is to not only define what Progressive Christianity is, highlighting its logical inconsistency and theological incoherence, but to argue that Progressive Christianity is not Christianity at all; it is an independent religion, which is unequivocally false. It is a hollow religion, pasted together with meaningless platitudes, arbitrary morality, and fantastical subjectivity. While Progressive Christianity steals Christian themes and manipulates biblical texts, its departure from orthodoxy undercuts its validity: without the authority of Scripture, the absolute divinity of Jesus, and the adherence to objective truth, Progressive Christianity forfeits the claim of an authentic life-changing, soul-saving Christianity.

The Liberal Tenets of Progressive Christianity

Progressive Christian beliefs are necessarily nebulous because they reject creeds and dogma; their approach is unassuming and whimsical to adhere to the cultural currents of postmodernism. Truth claims and orthodoxy are their anathema; unbridled love, diversity, and inclusivity are their anthem. However, there are guidelines which govern this pseudo-Christian movement. Outlined in the 8 points of Progressive Christianity by Fred Plumer, adherents (1) follow the actions, not the words, of Jesus; (2) welcome diverse paths to access the “Sacredness, Oneness and Unity of all life;” (3) create inclusive community with skeptics, agnostics, and people of all races, sexual orientations, gender identities, and socio-economic statuses, including “all creatures and plant life;” (4) dedicate their lives “to walk as Jesus might have walked in this world with radical compassion, inclusion, and bravery to confront and positively change the injustices we experience as well as those we see others experiencing;” (5) value grace, open minds and hearts, and reject exclusive truth claims; (6) promote peace and justice to all life on Earth; (7) save the integrity of Earth and Creation; (8) vow allegiance to compassion and selfless

love in pursuit of “personally authentic and meaningful faith.”¹⁶⁷ At first blush, these eight sentiments, while panentheistic,¹⁶⁸ seem vague and without much theological weight. However, a deeper inspection of these pithy slogans reveals a cunning mission to usurp Christianity itself.

The expressed purpose of progressivism is constant change. Stagnation, particularly tradition, is its antithesis. Therefore, the goal of Progressive Christianity is to maintain a state of constant movement, to be “socially and politically transformative”¹⁶⁹ and to promote a consistent pattern of evolution: it would seem that each new version of Christianity is an improvement from the last with the next evolutionary step yet another improvement, *ad infinitum*. Phillip Gulley, a self-ordained theological mover of the evolving church, notes

[It] may seem presumptuous and egotistical, as if God were using me to liberate Christianity from its ancient moorings and carry it forward. But on a closer look, it makes perfect sense that if there are many versions of Christianity, that if Christianity has mutated and evolved over the centuries, it’s reasonable to conclude it will continue to do so. It is also reasonable to conclude God might inspire a number of people to shepherd that process, that I might be one of them, just as you might be, and that a fitting response is to share our insights with others. Therefore, to speak of an evolving Christianity isn’t to undertake a radical and unilateral overhaul of the faith, but to suggest a possible way forward that not only honors the ethos of Jesus but is covenant with our time and culture.¹⁷⁰

Aligning with postmodernistic deconstruction, Progressive Christianity seeks to uproot any tradition and doctrine that is socially and culturally conflicting, which is a classic theologically liberal scheme. Thus, this evolving Christianity will reflect on the egalitarian Jesus of Nazareth,

¹⁶⁷ Fred C. Plumer, *The 8 Points: By Which We Define Progressive Christianity* ed. 2020 (The Center for Progressive Christianity), <https://www.progressivechristianity.org>.

¹⁶⁸ Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 66-70. Borg asserts that “panentheism is not a modern invention, but an ancient and traditional concept of God,” which aligns with the omniscience of God. Considering God panentheistic allows people to access divine intention and intervention. Borg offers that panentheism is “a way to think about God as an alternative form of [supernatural] theism.” It highlights the presence and transcendence of God to be “ineffable” and impersonal.

¹⁶⁹ de Gruchy, “Christian Humanism,” 2.

¹⁷⁰ Philip Gulley, *The Evolution of Faith: How God Is Creating a Better Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, 2011), 2.

not on Christ the King, upholding his actions of feeding the hungry and befriending the outcast, not his claims of divinity nor his warnings of condemnation.¹⁷¹ It will reject the elitism of male leadership and encourage female and homosexual leadership.¹⁷² Moreover, communal worship is to be avoided as it affirms unthinking conformity and unquestioned obedience.¹⁷³ Rather, the evolving church will “listen carefully to its young people, letting their enthusiasm and yearning for authenticity inspire a passionate and relevant faith.”¹⁷⁴ This evolving, progressive church, borrowing Christian terms and ideals, is a cultural construction relevant only for religious postmodernists.

It is not only ambiguous guidelines of faith that render Progressive Christianity a fraud, but the insidious use of half-truths that ensnare the uneducated that make it maliciously duplicitous. Indeed, there are ten half-truth principles, or as Michael Kruger quips, “commandments” of Progressive Christianity.¹⁷⁵ Each principle contains a morsel of truth, but is horribly maligned through today’s postmodernistic interpretation. Outlined by Richard Rohr in his devotional series “Returning to Essentials,” the ten commandments of Progressive Christianity are: (1) Jesus is a model for living more than an object for teaching; (2) affirming people’s potential is more important than reminding them of their brokenness; (3) the work of reconciliation should be valued over making judgments; (4) gracious behavior is more important than right belief; (5) inviting questions is more valuable than supplying answers; (6) encouraging

¹⁷¹ Gulley, *The Evolution of Faith*, 4.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷⁵ Michael J. Kruger, *The Ten Commandments of Progressive Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Cruciform Press, 2019), 6.

the personal search is more important than group uniformity; (7) meeting actual needs is more important than maintaining institutions; (8) peacemaking is more important than power; (9) we should care more about love and less about sex; and (10) life in this world is more important than the afterlife.¹⁷⁶ Unlike the dubious 8 points of Progressive Christianity, these ten commandments offer a point of refutation because half-truths may be exposed as outright, blatant lies. Framed and repudiated by Kruger, each commandment submits an iron-clad truth, but is buffered by lies, which reveals that the truth submitted was simply a shadow of the truth, not the real thing, invalidating the truth claim entirely.¹⁷⁷

Commandment One: Jesus the Model, Not the Messiah

The pivotal first step of undermining the heart of Christianity is denying the divinity of Jesus. This is the glaring red flag of theological liberalism, which can be historically traced in every cult. Expectantly, Progressive Christianity relegates Jesus as a mere mortal.¹⁷⁸ Machen highlights a critical distinction between Liberal Christianity and orthodox Christianity and how each views the figure of Jesus: “Liberalism regards [Jesus] as an Example and Guide; Christianity as a Savior: liberalism makes Him an example for faith; Christianity, the object of faith.”¹⁷⁹ Truly, self-appointed theological, progressive reformer Philip Gully outright rejects the virgin birth, the sinlessness, and the miracles of Jesus, maintaining that “the church worship of

¹⁷⁶ Richard Rohr, “Returning to the Essentials,” Center for Action and Contemplation, assessed February 26, 2022, <https://cac.org/returning-to-essentials-2017-11-30/>.

¹⁷⁷ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*. This chapter follows Kruger’s research organizationally and expands on each “commandment.” Kruger offers a rare scholarly source on Progressive Christianity, which is why it is used heavily in this chapter.

¹⁷⁸ Philip Gully, *If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2010), 16.

¹⁷⁹ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 96.

Jesus is something [Jesus] would not have favored.”¹⁸⁰ This clear line in the sand not only shows Progressive Christianity’s liberal paternity, but its theological inconsistency: If Jesus is propped up as a model for righteous conduct and radically generous living and loving, then surely his own words would corroborate this progressives depiction of his exclusive humanity. But, they do not.

While it is true that Jesus is the epitome of human perfection, He is also fully and perfectly divine, according to His own words and actions. This theological paradox is perplexing, even outrageous. Indeed, in order to fully grasp the outlandish claims of divinity Jesus made, the historical-cultural context must be foundational. Israel, God’s chosen people, separated as a unique monotheistic group, held fast to their ancestral roots proclaiming the Jewish creed or *Shema*, ““Here, O Israel: The LORD is one”” (Duet. 6:4). They endured much, and stumbled much, to retain the purity of monotheism in a very polytheistic world. Therefore, when Jesus outrageously forgives sins (Mark 2:5), graciously accepts worship (Matthew 14:33; Luke 24:52), and boldly declares “before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58), an allusion to Exodus 3:14, He unequivocally illuminates His divine nature as the unique and sovereign God of Israel. Religious leaders knew full-well that when Jesus referenced messianic passages and applied them to Himself, He was declaring His divinity. Furthermore, Jesus reveals Himself not as a separate deity, but “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15). Richard Bauckham notes, “When New Testament Christology is read with this Jewish theological context in mind, it becomes clear that, from the earliest post-Easter beginnings of Christology onward, early Christians included Jesus, precisely and unambiguously, within the

¹⁸⁰ Gully, *If the Church Were Christian*, 16.

unique identity of the one God of Israel.”¹⁸¹ Not only are Jesus’s own words definitively and obviously clear to a twenty-first century audience and His miraculous actions (specifically, the resurrection) explicitly shown in reliable historical New Testament accounts and reputable extrabiblical sources, His words and deeds were unilaterally understood by first-century Christians: Jesus was wholly divine and wholly human. Moreover, by declaring Jesus as God, these first Christian saints had everything to lose amid the religious zealots who crucified Jesus and the polytheistic Roman regime who wanted undivided allegiance. Nowhere in this historical-cultural context is Jesus simply a man, a mere model for righteous behavior.

It must be noted that the significant figure of Jesus is strikingly singular in the whole of human history: Confucius nor Buddha ever made exclusive deity claims, Mohammad never considered himself equal with Allah, and no such divine declaration was ever uttered in Judaism.¹⁸² For the Progressive to assert that Jesus maintained that he was a mere man is a willful and historical lie. Consider that if Jesus, as the Progressive asserts, was simply a model of good living, then surely He would have answered Pilate quite differently: “No I am not the Son of God, the King of the Jews; I am just a virtuous teacher.” However, Jesus did not; He endured the mockery, the beating, and the crucifixion. This would seem to attest to his divine proclamation. Additionally, if Jesus is the model in which the progressives live by, then they must either concede that honesty is unnecessary to living well (Jesus lied to Pilate and died knowing the lie) or that lying is model behavior. C.S. Lewis cleverly observes, “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg- or else he would be

¹⁸¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Essays on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2018), x.

¹⁸² Dean L. Overman, *A Case for the Divinity of Jesus: Examining the Earliest Evidence* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 3.

the Devil of Hell.”¹⁸³ Indeed, the choice must be made whether Jesus was a liar, lunatic, or lord. However, a moral model is not an available nor justifiable option.

Commandment Two: No to Original Sin, Yes to Personal Potential and Maturation

There is a pernicious, postmodern campaign that encourages people to lavishly love themselves with slogans like “love the skin you're in,” “I'm worth it,” and “I was born this way.” Consider public schools that adopt self-esteem curriculum, or sports teams where everyone gets a participation trophy. Even morbidly obese models are hailed for their brave beauty. There is no innate brokenness, deserved failure, earned wages from sin, but rather indoctrinated narcissism. Everyone is viewed through the lens of who they could be, not who they really are, perpetuating the falsity that humanity is inherently good. Essentially, this allows sinful behavior to be categorized as natural and, therefore, acceptable: It socially justifies sin. The “Love Thyself” crusade is juxtaposed in Progressive Christianity to maintain postmodern relevance by eradicating a core biblical principle: that humanity is fallen, plagued by rebellious sin. However, what Progressive Christianity conveniently ignores is that the problem of evil in this world is the direct result of man's sinfulness; that is, human will usurping the power and authority of God's will. Augustine defined evil as *privatio boni*, an absence of good or a falling away from good; its origin is pride, an undue exaltation of self, a foolish yet knowing reprioritizing of worshiping self over worshiping God.¹⁸⁴ What evil is and how it is caused is exclusively man.

Nevertheless, Progressive Christianity rejects the doctrine of Original Sin, which reveals its theologically liberal roots to deviate from foundational Christian doctrine. In fact,

¹⁸³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2015), 55.

¹⁸⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions of St. Augustine*, Translated by Albert Outler (WORDsearch, 2013), Book VII, Chapter 12.

Progressives argue that “churches that regularly teach that people are sinners are guilty of ‘spiritual abuse’ and ‘mistreatment’ of their people” because it is “unhelpful.”¹⁸⁵ The rejection of Original Sin is based on the rejection of the historical biblical account of the Fall; for the Progressive, Adam and Eve are mythical characters in one of many valid yet fantastical creation myths.¹⁸⁶ However, this careless assumption reveals ignorance. All Ancient Near East creation accounts have common elements, which show a common historical era. Yet, the uniqueness of the Genesis account reveals a monotheistic Creator, a singular example among polytheistic neighbors, who is not capricious nor dependent, but is omnipotent and omnibenevolent.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, the Genesis account of creation is unique enough among other creation stories to merit attention and yet similar enough to merit authenticity. Furthermore, the intended audience, ancient Israel, accepted the historicity of Genesis. Richard E. Averbeck contends that “the primary purpose of the story was to help [the Israelites] think of their God as the framer of their lives by the way he fabricated and set up their world.”¹⁸⁸ The specificity of Adam was received as historical truth: it coherently explains the supremacy and benevolence of a Creator-God and the discrepancy of the fallen world predicated on the actual event of Adam’s rebellion. This is, of course, the Bad News; without it, however, there is no Good News.

Still, Progressive Christianity is staunchly committed to the rejection of Original Sin. Why? If there is no sin, there is no problem; if there is no problem, there is no need for a solution. Gully explains,

¹⁸⁵ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 15.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ J. Daryl Charles, *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 2017), 12-13.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 68.

The church has typically understood salvation as being rescued from sin and going to heaven when we die. But what if we believed salvation was our life-long journey toward maturity, love, and wholeness? Were that the cause Jesus would not be the one who saves humanity by his sacrifice of blood, but the one who exemplifies this maturity, love, and wholeness, the one whom Christians can look and say ‘we can be like him!’¹⁸⁹

Notice the adherence to commandment one: Jesus is a model, not Messiah because humanity does not need Him as a Messiah, a Savior, a God. His death on the cross, for the Progressive, was not to save guilty sinners, but a powerful demonstration of social injustice.¹⁹⁰ Rather, Progressive Christianity capitalizes on the truth of our identity: that we are image-bears, who are made new in Christ and are gifted with the process of sanctification, which “restores the beauty of God’s image within us.” However, Progressives undermine this truth by rejecting the inherent sinfulness of man and the substitutionary atonement of Jesus, which renders sanctification, or the potential to wholly mature as Gully advocates, theologically inconsistent and untenable. Indeed, without the acknowledgement of man’s brokenness, his desperate need for rescuing, and the ultimate sacrifice of the cross, there is nothing left that is tethered to Christianity. James Hitchcock notes that Progressives or “religious liberals minimize the belief that human beings are in need of salvation. They consider the doctrine of Original Sin unduly bleak and see their mission as that of improving human society and protecting nature,” which epitomizes postmodern humanism and upholds the theologically liberal campaign of rejecting core Christian doctrine.¹⁹¹ To assert that potential and maturation is exclusively relevant and Original Sin

¹⁸⁹ Philip Gully, *If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2010), 33.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas C. Jackson, “Take Up Your Cross and Follow: Carrying the Cross of Christ in the 21st Century,” *Progressive Preacher By FR. Tom Jackson*, June 25, 2017, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://cypriansfsermons.wordpress.com/2017/06/25/take-up-the-cross-and-follow/>.

¹⁹¹ James Hitchcock, “Conservatism and Liberalism (Theological),” *New Catholic Encyclopedia. Ethics and Philosophy* Vol. 1. (2013): 308.

insignificant, even damaging, is a lie, and an extremely dangerous one that supports the postmodern agenda of moral relativism because sin becomes subjective and arbitrary.

Commandment Three: Reconciliation over Judgment

Recall that Progressives are postmodern religious humanists: How man relates to man in the here-and-now trumps how he relates to God eternally. Therefore, the Progressive strives to heal broken human relationships through human means. There is biblical precedent to uphold earthly reconciliation and peace, which is the truth that Progressive Christianity appropriates. For example, it is commanded to continually forgive one another (Luke 17:4; Eph. 4:32; John 20:23), strive to immediately reconcile (Eph. 4:26) within marital and familial relationships (1 Cor. 7:11; Col. 3:21) and church relationships (Matt. 18:15). Jesus blesses the peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), and Paul exhorts believers “to make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Rm. 14:19). Indeed, Christians should be known for their generous forgiveness and radical love (John 13:35). However, it is how Christians love, how reconciliation is achieved that progressives manipulate. Gully maintains that the Church must abdicate its “culture of judgment..and surrender its fondness for black-and-white, either-or thinking.”¹⁹² After all, commandment two obscures what is sin. And, subjective morality cannot withstand the scrutiny of objective judgment; therefore, to judge is unacceptable, even repugnant. Rather, every action is beyond judgment and every action ought to be blindly accepted as moral to cultivate a culture of reconciliation. This begins with radical inclusivity:

...the church is a community where all people are welcomed and recognized as God's good creation and where acceptance moves beyond mere toleration of differences and diversity to complete acceptance of all people... Therefore, we do not exclude or hinder people's participation in the full life of the church based on, but not limited to, gender,

¹⁹² Gully, *If the Church Were Christian*, 61.

race, age, sexual orientation/identity, socio-economic status, marital circumstance, ethnic origin, theological perspective, or physical/mental challenges.¹⁹³

For the Progressive, all beliefs, words, and actions are equally valid; they must be in order to reach the ultimate goal of reconciliation. The cost and compromise is objective truth.

The Progressive's critique is that the church has no moral authority to judge when its own members are guilty of sin: it is an accusation of hypocrisy. However, "the Bible never requires a person to be sinless before they speak out against sin. Personal perfection is not a prerequisite to standing up for what is right."¹⁹⁴ Even a drunkard can call out a thief, and a thief can call out a drunkard. Consider that hypocrisy means measuring the same moral behavior with a different moral standard: it is "look[ing] at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay[ing] no attention to the plank in your own eye" (Matt. 7:3). Ironically, hypocrisy is also condemning a people as judgmental when the act of condemning requires judgment. In other words, Progressives declare judgmental behavior worthy of public shaming while showing judgmental behavior in order to do so: "I can judge you for judging, but you can't judge me for judging." It seems to be an arbitrary convenience that allows these moral elites to decree what is wrong while denouncing anyone else who decrees what is wrong.

While seeking peace is an enduring biblical principle, to assert that judgment hinders reconciliation is also a blatant falsehood. Indeed, without judgment, without identifying sin, repenting of that sin, true reconciliation cannot be realized. There seems to be a similar distinction between peacemakers, which demands aggressively seeking truth and righteousness, and peacekeepers, which demands compromise and never achieves enduring peace. To love

¹⁹³ Kimberly Lockwood, "Creating an Identity and Protecting Inclusivity: The Challenge Facing Progressive Christianity," *International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations* 10, no. 1 (2010), 43.

¹⁹⁴ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 18.

radically means to have hard conversations, seasoned with salt, calling people to repent, so they may be reunited with the Father. Radical love is not ignoring or celebrating sin: what good is it to achieve shallow peace, receive recognition for validating sinfulness, gain the world only to forfeit everlasting reconciliation with God (Mark 8:35)? While human judgments are fallible, the inescapable judgment of God is infallible: seeking reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ is the only path to salvation, everlasting peace, and joy with God. Progressive Christianity foolishly denies vertical reconciliation with God, focusing solely on the horizontal reconciliation of man, not realizing that the horizontal can only come to pass through the vertical: without peace with God, there is no peace available for man.

Commandment Four: Right Manners Over Right Belief

If radical inclusivity is to be the highest good in Progressive Christianity, then being good mannered is the highest virtue. This is evident in television advertisements that encourage kindness, children's shirts that invite others to be "Bee Kind" beset by friendly yellow and black cartoon bees, and even celebrities begging their followers to choose kindness on Twitter. Kindness, for the postmodernist, is blind acceptance and celebration; it never disagrees nor refutes. Therefore, Progressive Christianity must uphold the high standard of right manners to maintain relevance and popularity in this postmodern era.

If the virtue of kindness eclipses the virtue of truth, that is, the right thing to believe in, then orthodox Christianity is vulnerable to attack (for orthodox Christianity values kindness *and* truth). Gully accuses orthodox Christianity as obsessed with right theology, to the detriment of the evolving Christian movement, indicting Bible-adhering, truth-loving believers as Pharisees, fixating on a "misguided quest for theological purity."¹⁹⁵ However, this comparison is historically

¹⁹⁵ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 22.

and biblically untrue. Jesus's critique on the Pharisees was not that they adhered to orthodoxy, but legalism.¹⁹⁶ So obsessed with the letter of the Law, the Pharisees ignored the purpose of the Law. In fact, Jesus knew the Law and the purpose of the Law so clearly that people were amazed by his teaching (Matt 22:33; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32). He continually and accurately referenced the Old Testament and even wisely wielded it in the wilderness to overcome testing and temptation (Luke 4:4, 8, 12). It would seem that through Jesus's example, "teaching people good theology is not the problem, but the solution."¹⁹⁷

Yet, Progressive Christianity must maintain an inclusive theology, a diverse hermeneutic in order to engage in this postmodern, deconstructed era. The objection to orthodoxy, to right belief, is grounded on what faith is. The pervasive cultural consensus seems to divorce faith and reason; that in order to adhere to faith, reason must be forfeited. As Huck Finn pronounced, "Having faith is believing something you know ain't true." Thus, if faith is reduced to childlike whimsy, its efficacy is nullified. Marcus Borg expands, "When you think about it, faith as a belief is relatively impotent, relatively powerless. You can believe all the right things and still be in bondage. You can believe in all the right things and still be relatively unchanged. Believing a set of claims to be true has very little transformation power."¹⁹⁸ Therefore, the "right things" are rather unimportant. If believing "right things" do not immediately, physically, socially, and emotionally produce a desired gain, then believing the "right things" is not only irrelevant, but potentially harmful to producing that desired gain. Thus, the behavior of a person, his gracious

¹⁹⁶ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 22.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 30-31.

behavior, is more important, more transformative, more productive than believing. Ironically, the Pharisees' practice of outward works is adopted by the Progressive.¹⁹⁹

Nevertheless, Progressive Christianity defends its evolution based on historical and theological disagreement. The proof that there is no "right belief" is the variety of Christian denominations: they all claim exclusive "right belief," which justifies an elimination of them all.²⁰⁰ Released from dogma, unchained from faith that contradicts science, freed from the struggle to resist sin, this evolving Christianity develops its new orthodoxy. Andreas Köstenberger explains,

If it can be shown that early Christianity was not as unified as commonly supposed, and if it can be suggested that the eventual rise of Christian orthodoxy was in fact the result of a conspiracy or of a power grab by the ruling political, cultural, or ecclesiastical elite, this contributes to undermining the notion of religious truth itself and paves the way for the celebration of diversity as the only "truth" that is left. And thus the tables are turned—diversity becomes the last remaining orthodoxy, and orthodoxy becomes heresy, because it violates the new orthodoxy: the gospel of diversity.²⁰¹

What matters, to the Progressive, is what is seen. Behavior, as well as race, gender, and overt sexuality, can be seen, therefore, it is upheld as an ideal. Faith is rendered superfluous, even irrational. Interestingly, the liberal roots of Progressive Christianity's doctrine to erode the value and power of faith is "just as tenaciously and intolerantly upheld as any doctrines that find a place in the historic creeds."²⁰² However, Jesus refutes this faithless dogma. If what is seen is only what matters, then the Pharisees request for a sign to legitimize Jesus's claim is reasonable. Yet Jesus responds by condemning them as a "wicked and adulterous generation" (Matt. 16:4)

¹⁹⁹ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 23.

²⁰⁰ Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 28.

²⁰¹ Michael J. Kruger and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 181.

²⁰² Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 16.

and continues to chide his own disciples as an “unbelieving and perverse generation” when their lack of faith produces no healing (Matt. 17:17). This shows that faith matters, the object of faith matters, which is why right belief or theology matters. Knowing who God is, knowing right theology, which allows for unwavering faith to be rooted, yields true conversion, real salvation, and authentic soul transformation.

Simply knowing the name Jesus, without understanding who he is, cannot save. As Peter’s faith faltered and the waves threatened to overtake him, Jesus rebuked his “little faith” (Matt. 14:31). Although Peter believed rightly in Jesus, it was too little, the object of his belief, of his God, too small; his theology was faulty, so he sank. Peter did not fully understand who Jesus was; he understood a portion, but not the whole. Consider that Jews, Muslims, and Christians all recognize the name of Jesus and can attest to his historical impact. However, to the Jew and Muslim, Jesus was merely a prophet, not the Son of God, not the Savior of the World, not the only path to salvation, and not the King who will return again. In other words, the Jewish and Muslim understanding of Jesus is starkly different from the Jesus of orthodox Christianity. The former cannot save. Similarly, the Jesus of Progressive Christianity cannot save. This is why theological liberalism is so devastatingly dangerous: It distracts with smokes and mirrors, with good works and good manners, twisting and mutating foundational theology to fit the current culture. This is why Christians are commanded to “watch your life and your doctrine closely” and to teach “appropriate and sound doctrine” understanding that God’s grace, not our own gracious behavior, “teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (1 Tim. 4:16; Titus 2:1, 12). While Christians are to be gracious, an outward expression of an inward transformation, the foundation

of their behavior is rooted in the right belief of who God is, who Jesus is, and the Good News of the gospel.

Commandment Five: There Certainly Is No Certainty

Postmodernism dogmatically casts doubt on everything. To assume certainty is to perjure oneself as an arrogant fool doomed to repeat historical folly. Thus, Progressive Christianity adopts this postmodern dogma and positions itself “as humble and inquisitive, merely on a journey of discovery;” its opposition, then, is the “less-than-humble dispensers of rigid dogma...mean [and] entrenched know-it-alls.”²⁰³ It is quite a marketing strategy that has yielded much popularity among postmodernists. Indeed, this postmodern mantra is a refrain from the Enlightenment Era, where subjective searching and individualized assessment was deemed as a societal virtue while blind, fanciful devotion to the church was condemned as a societal vice. However, there is historical merit to this prideful and foolish representation of Christians as many rapid conversions and the Western expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth century watered-down intellectualism in American churches giving rise to the ignorant and arrogant Christian caricature. In fact, Charles Malik warns that “the greatest danger confronting American evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism.”²⁰⁴ However, to generalize that all Christians reject intellectual pursuit is erroneous. There is a rich and robust family history of brilliant minds asking the hard questions, seeking truth no matter where it leads. Consider intellectual titans like Justin Martyr, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and Blaise Pascal, Soren

²⁰³ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 25.

²⁰⁴ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 4.

Kierkegaard, and Alvin Plantinga: all contributing to the wealth of philosophy, theology, and apologetics available today.

Epistemic humility is but a charade for Progressive Christianity, just as it was for Deism. It is a dishonest maneuver to manipulate the laity. When maintaining no position as the position, it allows a type of intellectual tyranny. Developed by Descartes, this “method of doubt” heavily scrutinizes what one thinks he knows, and if he uncovers the “least grounds for doubt” it is to be completely discarded as false.²⁰⁵ This, of course, raises the question: Can anything really be known? The quest for certainty is a circuitous journey that inevitably ends in uncertainty. This “method of doubt” is so popular among postmodernists because it justifies their lack of commitment to truth and accountability. Moreover, Progressive Christianity applies this epistemic ploy with devious intention. Hiding behind each “I don’t know” is a severe doctrine: we know that you *can’t* know.²⁰⁶ The truth, they insist, can not be known (which is the only truth known!). This hypocritical inconsistency allows the Progressive to stay in the limelight as an intellectual, humble wanderer while surreptitiously bullying honest, intellectual inquiry and discovery. While this is a shrewd, tried-and-true ploy of theological liberalism, it inevitably produces shallow understanding and deep confusion.

Conversely, genuine epistemic humility begins by acknowledging that God is incomprehensible to mere man, but He graciously has made Himself knowable for man. There are attributes of God, explanations, and circumstances that are beyond the scope of finite man. For example, the problem of evil requires acceptance that God, who is omniscient and good, has reasons to allow pain and suffering that man does not know. After all, Job never receives an

²⁰⁵ Thomas de Zengotita, *Postmodern Theory and Progressive Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 16.

²⁰⁶ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 27.

answer for his suffering, but rather an admonishment: “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!” (Job 40:2). Likewise, when God’s sovereignty is questioned, Paul berates, “Who in the world do you think you are to second-guess God? Do you for one moment suppose any of us knows enough to call God into question?” (Rom. 9:20, MSG). Truly, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of epistemic humility, and acknowledging God as perfectly supreme is understanding (Prov. 9:10).

While it is true that not everything that is knowable is equally clear or equally satisfying, there is poignant clarity in morality, what is good and what is evil. Not only did God create a conscience within man, but made available His Word. Indeed, Augustine attested, “For among the things that are plainly laid down in Scripture are to be found all matters that concern faith and the manner of life.”²⁰⁷ Therefore, Christians can clearly know how to live a righteous, moral life. However, this is where Progressive Christianity conforms to the pattern of this world and inevitably commits a logical fallacy. If postmodernism demands uncertainty, how can the Progressive take a moral stand if morality is subjective and uncertain? Consider the Progressive’s ardent and zealous position as an advocate for the LGBT community. How can he vehemently support gay marriage, for example, if he cannot know if gay marriage is, in fact, moral or immoral? Furthermore, how can he condemn opposition to gay marriage if it cannot be certainly determined if the opposition is moral or immoral? If the position of the postmodern Christian humanist, that is the Progressive Christian, is no position, then to be logically consistent, he would not support nor condemn any position. Of course, he does take a position, which shows inconsistency at best, and fraudulence at worst.

²⁰⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching*, Translated by James Shaw, Revised and Edited by Kevin Knight (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/12022.htm>.

As the Progressive takes the position of the epistemic vagabond, he also judges with certainty the Bible-believing Christians have a “childish point of view” and are pitifully “stuck” in their orthodoxy.²⁰⁸ Indeed, Progressive Christianity is “quick to condemn all sorts of behavior they see in the world around them, while insisting that [orthodox Christians] are wrong when they do so.”²⁰⁹ They are certain that defending the historicity of the Bible and using it as a basis for morality is foolhardy (because you can’t know that is God’s actual Word, as the deists vehemently declared!) while being certain that creating postmodern subjective morality paves the way for progress (because you can know what feels good!). Progressive Christianity denounces orthodox Christianity for honest, epistemic humility while masquerading as the real truth-seek.

Commandment Six: It’s About the Spiritual Journey, not Religious Conformity

Progressive Christianity markets itself as liberated from religious bondage, free to spiritually wander, and open to embrace each experience as a new step toward a unique (albeit ambiguous) destination. According to Progressives, religion is oppressive. It shuns and disfellowships, judges and excommunicates while spirituality ebbs and flows, knows no boundaries for exploration, and welcomes diversity of expression.²¹⁰ With spirituality, there are no determined expectations, no severe discipline, no stringent compulsion. There is no need to pick up a cross²¹¹ in order to follow Progressive Christianity; there is no expectation of trial and

²⁰⁸ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 28.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

²¹¹ Jackson, “Take Up Your Cross and Follow.” The orthodox Christian understanding of Matthew 16:24 (“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”) accepts the requirement of complete submission and sacrifice to follow Jesus, recognizing the potential for persecution. Conversely, Progressive Christianity dramatically alters this biblical principle by first reframing the Crucifixion as

testing nor changing and conforming. Furthermore, a spiritual journey with an undetermined end implies that God has not clearly revealed Himself nor a message about salvation: God and the Gospel become open to personal interpretation and practice, which is a primary goal of theological liberalism.²¹² This is dangerously enticing: To believe the church prevents spiritual growth, that there is no cost to follow Jesus, and that God and His message are subjectively esoteric. This is the lie, the half-truth: there is joyful freedom in Christianity (truth), which is fulfilled by a spiritual journey, not the browbeating church (lie). This is a perfect example of how theological liberalism manipulates Christian doctrine: a classic bait-and-switch.

A common accusation from the spiritual Progressive is that the church indoctrinates, stifles questions, and force-feeds propaganda. However, orthodox Christianity has always held a high regard for inquisitive minds, encouraging questions, and thirsting for pure truth. In fact, it is orthodox Christianity's claim to have pure or absolute truth that Progressive Christianity finds socially repugnant.²¹³ Indeed, orthodox Christianity claims not only that absolute truth exists and is known, but the Source of that truth exists and can be known. Furthermore, orthodox Christians desire unified *conformity* in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-29). Just like lumps of clay that the Potter lovingly molds into His created and purposed pots, orthodox Christians submit to be disciplined because God disciplines those He loves (Jer. 18:4; Heb. 12:6). To the outside progressive, this is not freedom, but slavery. C.S. Lewis supposes that many view God as a senile heavenly

an unnecessary act of evil, an example of social injustice. Therefore, to pick up the cross of Progressive Christianity means to fight social injustice. Rev. Thomas Jackson urges, "Our first step is to notice the Crucifixions occurring around us. Where in your life and in mine do we see people in pain? We have to pay attention and see who is hurting," and allow the Holy Spirit to choose which "cross" or social cause to carry.

²¹² Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 30.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

grandfather who freely dispenses temporal enjoyment for all.²¹⁴ However, God is not that, but a loving Father who desires His children to accept His gracious sacrifice, break free from the bondage of sin, and be transformed into the image of the Son. Progressive Christianity erroneously assumes that comfort, gratification, and pleasure is the proof of goodness and love: what *feels* good must *be* good. However, removing sin from life is not pleasurable, nor simple; it does not *feel* good. Lewis continues, “It is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.”²¹⁵ Progressive Christianity, then, believes in a deity that does not really love humanity, a deity that does not want righteous transformation, but who wants capricious beings forever trapped in their sin, (a deity similar to the one Deists worshiped). These particular truths deeply offend the postmodern religious humanist who wants to be the savior of humanity and the arbiter of truth on a (futile) spiritual journey.

Commandment Seven: Deconstruction of the Institution, and Commandment Eight: Peace over Power

Both commandment seven and eight highlight a postmodernistic agenda: to promote the “project of progress”²¹⁶ by stripping the church of authority (deconstruction of the institution) in order to reinvent a progressive church that submits power to the state (peace over power). Progressive Christianity must socially and politically advance a new, reformed Christianity in order to find security in a postmodern landscape. Aligning with commandment two, Progressive

²¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* in *The C.S. Lewis Collection: Signature Classics and Other Major Works* (HarperCollins e-books, 2017), 289.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 290.

²¹⁶ Zengotita, *Postmodern Theory*, 12.

Christianity insists that “evil is mainly the result of social structures and can be corrected by human effort,”²¹⁷ through the scathing tool of critical theory, which aims to deconstruct every human social system through subjective, hyper-analysis to the point of absurdity and to a predetermined condemnation. Recall the previous example of linguistic oppression: that “worker” and “boss” perpetuates social injustice.

Even more egregious than language, according to the postmodern deconstructionist, are the institutions that have dominated the West. Religious institutions, specifically the orthodox Christian church, are especially heinous as most claim to have absolute truth and maliciously force their man-given authority over the laity. Gully complains, “It seems to be a common trait among humans and institutions we create to ignore our flaws even as the failings cripple our ability to function and grow.”²¹⁸ This rightly identifies that man-made institutions are not perfect. However, it is not the institution that corrupts, but man. In fact, to argue that institutions are the bane of society and man its savior is self-refuting: corrupt man makes corrupt institutions.

Nevertheless, Progressive Christianity aims to distance itself from the church while simultaneously calling itself the new church. To Progressives, the orthodox church is dispensable because “Jesus appeared to give [the church] little thought...neither its genesis nor continuance seemed a priority to him.”²¹⁹ However, this claim is outrageously false. Jesus proclaimed, “On this rock I will build My church. The powers of hell will not be able to have power over My church” (Matt. 16:18, NLV). Jesus affirms the institutional function of the church (Matt. 18:15-20) and decrees the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20). Furthermore, Paul expounds on the relationship between Christ and the church, that Jesus died for her, so that “he might sanctify

²¹⁷ Hitchcock, “Conservatism and Liberalism (Theological),” 308.

²¹⁸ Gully, *If the Church Were Christian*, 125.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). There is rich symbolism in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea that speaks of God relationally as Israel’s Husband (Is. 54:5, 62:5; Jer. 2:2, 3:14, 31:31-34; Ez. 16:8, 16:62-63; Hos. 2:14-23), which heightens the symbol of the church as Jesus’s bride who will one day be made perfect in Him: “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (Rev. 19:7-8). Indeed, Jesus had much to say about the genesis, continuance, and fulfillment of the church.

The primary function of the church is to share the Good News while selflessly caring for and loving all image-bearers of God: a reach to the vertical and the horizontal. Theological liberalism seeks to alter that primary function, deviating from clear, biblical directives and doctrinally sound tradition. Kruger warns, “We dare not make the church into just another tool to address social ills...we cannot forget that the primary task of the church is to worship Christ and proclaim his word.”²²⁰ However, this is exactly the intention of Progressive Christianity: to utilize the new, evolving church as a vehicle to promote social change and justice. This is why it is vitally important to the Progressive to tarnish and impugn the church, thereby rendering her as a social abomination, a menace that must be vanquished. Thus, the power of postmodern deconstruction. A virulent weapon is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which has already begun to infiltrate the evangelical church, causing great disruption among the laity and leadership.

²²⁰ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 38.

Researched and delineated in his book, *Fault Lines*,²²¹ Voddie Baucham identifies four key presuppositions to CRT: racism is normal, convergence theory, anti-liberalism, and knowledge is socially constructed.²²² These presuppositions are axiomatically assumed; there is no room for dispute. Already pigeon-holed into opposing racial groups, this tyrannical socio-economic theory also capitalizes on intersectionality, which invalidates the knowledge and insights of all heterosexual white males while upholding the experiential truth of people of color.²²³ Two distinct and combative groups emerge from this ideology: the oppressed (based on racial identity, sexual proclivity, and socio-economic status), and the oppressors (all white people). This socially damaging theory has permeated the church, dividing her into racial segments: the white church and the black church.²²⁴

This is blatantly unbiblical. First, the identity of the saved is not based on external, physical features, sinful behavior, monetary power, nor political influence, but on repentance and submission to Christ, accepting His gift of grace, and becoming a new creation in Him (2 Cor.

²²¹ Voddie Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), xvi-xviii.

²²² Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 8-11. These four presuppositions are described as follows: (1) Racism as normalcy is experienced everyday for most people of color; (2) Convergence theory means “whites are incapable of righteous actions on race and only undo racism when it benefits them; when their interests ‘converge’ with the interests of people of color;” (3) Anti-liberalism is a general rejection of equality theory, legal reasoning, and rationalism; (4) “Knowledge is socially constructed” denounces the science/reason method of white people and encourages people of color to retell their stories in light of ubiquitous racism. However, Tara Yosso in “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” in *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no.1 (August 2006), clarifies that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and may be assumed as true knowledge.

²²³ Sherwood Thompson, *Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 435. “Our experiences of the social world are shaped by our ethnicity, race, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, and numerous other facets of social stratification...these aspects of social inequality do not operate independently of each other; they interact to create interrelated systems of oppression and domination. The concept of intersectionality refers to how these various aspects of social location ‘intersect’ to mutually constitute individuals’ lived experiences.”

²²⁴ The 2020 Census of American Religion conducted by PRRI divided Christians into racial groups: White Evangelical Protestant, White Protestant, Black Protestant, Hispanic Protestant, and other Protestant of Color. There are no other racial distinctions noted in the other religions represented.
<https://www.prii.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>

5:17). The new creation in Christ Jesus is identified by his faith through his good works (Jas. 4:24). Christians, or “little Christs,” should be easily recognized by their Christ-like behavior: “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal...be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer” (Rm. 12:9-12). Second, the church is not to categorize who its people were before they knew Christ, but who the saints are once they accept Jesus as Lord. Paul teaches, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). While the church celebrates its diversity *in function*, it is united in identity and purpose (Rm. 12:4-5): followers and worshipers of Jesus who proclaim the Good News to all nations. Paul exhorts, “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.” (1 Cor. 1:10). This internal disruption of the church is not a new ploy from the enemy, but is renewed by Progressive Christianity as CRT. Baucham sharply condemns, “...the injustice I see is the false witness-bearing, Marxist ideology-promoting, Gospel-perverting ideology of Critical Race Theory and its offshoots.”²²⁵ Progressive Christianity’s use of CRT clearly shows its insidious agenda to divide and overthrow the church.²²⁶

The overall intention of Progressive Christianity is to dominate orthodox Christianity, wresting its God-given authority away in order to submit it to the liberal state because this will bring about peace for all humanity, or so they believe.²²⁷ Yet, it is important to clarify what peace

²²⁵ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 176.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 141-149. Baucham investigates the political maneuvering of Resolution 9 at the Southern Baptist Convention (2019), which utilizes CRT to categorize people groups within the church.

²²⁷ Hobson, *Reinventing Liberal Christianity*, 15. Hobson contends, “The liberal state should be affirmed as the proper modern context for Christianity” in order to bring about an “infinitely better economic and cultural order.”

means to the postmodernist. He assumes that peace is visible, that it means no more hunger, thirst, poverty, famine, and war. He imagines that peace is colorful: every color of people and every gender and sexual identity is equally represented in positions of power. He foresees a religious and cultural integration that upholds postmodern values and dogma. He envisions peace as a realistic outcome of global socialism, when radical inclusivity is achieved through a shedding of oppressive institutions and the people who support them. However, this forced peace, which is entirely dependent on the subjugation and annihilation of the “oppressors” or any who thinks or even looks differently than what is acceptable, is no peace at all. This fake peace actually promotes intolerance, hate, and an insipid populace, who willingly give up their God-given right to think and choose for the propagandist promise of peace. This is yet another lie of Progressive Christianity.

Bowing down to the whims of the world, elevating feelings over truth, silencing dissent through authoritarian politics, is antithetical to peace and is doomed to fail. However, there is a peace available to man now: a peace not between man and man, but a peace between man and God. This peace, then, is not initially external nor physical, but internal and spiritual. True peace begins when men acknowledge their sinfulness, humble themselves and repent, and accept the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Peace must begin with the vertical relationship with God, and then it extends to the horizontal relationship with his fellow man. However, the path to peace is, ironically, not peaceful. Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10: 34). To follow Jesus is to take the path of peace, which leads to persecution. Christians have been and always will be persecuted for proclaiming Jesus as Lord, holding onto His truth, and worshiping Him above all. There is a theological paradox between peace and persecution in that as the world bears down with pain

and suffering, peace is afforded to faithful saints. There is peace only in Jesus who makes known the path of life, fills His people with joy, and prepares eternal pleasure at His right hand for His children (Ps. 16:11). Salvation is true peace and is freely given: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27). This peace is quite unlike the proposed peace of Progressive Christianity, for not only is it attainable and ever-lasting, it is not compulsory nor exclusionary.

Commandment Nine: Love Is Love

Progressive Christianity is highly legalistic as it deems worth in a very visible way. Outward projections and displays, much like the Pharisees loudly praying to show off their religious piety (Matt. 6:5), elevates the Progressives’ postmodern status. None is more important, however, than supporting the LBTG community openly and boldly.²²⁸ Identifiers such as rainbow flags on pithy yard signs, clever and colorful bumper stickers, and recognizable icons on social media demonstrate how good of a postmodernist you are. Tolerance in this context means celebration: If you are unwilling to celebrate sexual orientation and gender identity, then you are hateful, mean, and worthy of public disrespect and social cancellation.

The successful rhetoric of Progressive Christianity can be delineated into five effectively ensnaring steps: “(1) Tout the moral virtues of those in sexual sin; (2) Insist that God has bigger things to worry about; (3) Show that disputed sexual behavior leads to good results; (4) Portray those who are against certain sexual behaviors as mean-spirited and cruel; (5) Insist Jesus is on your side.”²²⁹ This following is the application of these five steps: Consider the sitcom *Modern*

²²⁸ Young, *A Grand Illusion*, 3. Young observes, “It is somewhat odd that a formerly private thing such as sex has become the dividing line between traditional Christians and progressives in North America - but it has indeed. In America, sex is both nothing and everything. It is nothing in that the emerging American consensus seems to be that very few sex and gender rules exist. Sex is, well, just sex - it’s no big deal. But sex is also everything in the U.S. because it has become a major religious, cultural, and political battleground...Sex is the defining issue of our day.”

²²⁹ Kruger, *The Ten Commandments*, 45-49.

Family that showcased a loving yet quirky gay couple and their adopted daughter, which perpetuates the narrative necessary for step one. Next, maintain that “I think God has bigger things to worry about [than our sex lives]. Let’s just be grateful you have each other,” which is step two.²³⁰ Step three was introduced in step one: why can’t a loving couple, no matter their sexual orientation, provide a home for a child in need? Step four is also aligned with the beginning narrative for whoever is against love must be unkind and cruel. The final step is questioning, where did Jesus condemn gay marriage? Indeed, a new Bible translation called The Queen James Bible aims to illuminate eight verse that speak of homosexuality and “seeks to resolve interpretive ambiguity in the Bible as it pertains to homosexuality [editing] those eight verses in a way that makes homophobic interpretations impossible.”²³¹ For example, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are given the prepositional phrase “in the temple of Molech,” thereby narrowing sinful homosexual behavior by historical-cultural borders. The words *pagan* and *idolaters* are added to Romans 1:26-27, which once again classifies a contextual specificity for immoral homosexuality. In other words, as long as homosexuality is not preformed in the temple of Molech and is not used as a means of worship to render to the participant an idolater, then homosexuality is not an abomination in God’s sight: it is just as valid as heterosexuality. This rehearsed system is, unfortunately, extremely effective at captivating the laity.

However, love is not love: the sentence is linguistically nonsensical. Each step of this evil scheme can be refuted. Outward kindness is not a pass to sin freely (Step 1). Nice people sin, as do cruel ones. Indeed, all have sinned (Rm. 3:23) and missed the mark of God’s perfection. Evil often masquerades in shallow kindness, as it can be a tool of manipulation: a wolf in sheep’s clothing. God has much to say about humanity’s sexuality: what He desires for us and what He

²³⁰ Gully, *If the Church Were Christian*, 158.

²³¹ *The Queen James Bible* (queenjamesbible.com, 2012) 1. The editors of this translation are anonymous.

considers an abomination (Step 2). Those eight verses, marginally altered by The Queen James Bible, clearly indicates God's position on homosexuality. Unfettered sexual sin is not only vile in the eyes of God, but will receive judgement: no good can come from sinfulness (Step 3). Evil seeks to destroy what is good. Christians ought to be repelled by sin, but patient and welcoming to the sinner (Step 4). The mean-spirited Christian caricature is erased by compassionate truth given with gentleness and love. Finally, Jesus did have something to say about marriage (Step 5). His first miracle was at a wedding: this would suggest his endorsement of marriage.

Furthermore, Jesus could have corrected the people saying that homosexuality was only a sin in specific circumstances. After all, Jesus had to correct many things the people were doing that misrepresented God. But, he did not. Rather, he reaffirmed God's Word: "'Haven't you read,' he told them, 'that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female...for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?'" (Matt. 19:4-5). Love is not love. Rather, God is love and showed His love through the sacrifice of His Son to wretched sinners (1 John 4:7-12). And without God as the standard of love and His Law as the guardrail for behavior, the Progressive's position is precarious. For, how far is the standard for appropriate, moral, and "loving" sexual behavior? Pedophilia? Bestiality? If love is love, without boundaries and all encompassing, then everything is permissible.

Commandment Ten: Temporal Over the Eternal

Postmodern thought depends on uncertainty; its theologically liberal origins demands it. Truth cannot be known. Morality is not stagnant. The "project of progress" must continue to promote physical well-being for all of humanity. For Progressives, the problem of this world is not man's rebellion against God, but man's inhumanity toward man. The "project of progress"

means a focus on healing relationships in the here-and-now, for eternity is uncertain. Gully maintains, “I decided not to invest any effort in saving people’s souls from a hell I didn’t believe in.”²³² For Progressive Christianity, the eternal is irrelevant because it cannot be visible and felt. It has no meaningful impact on the human condition. Thus, moralism, not salvation, is preached: It is what you do in this world, how much you adhere to postmodernistic thought, that decides your worth, which aligns with commandment four (Right Manners over Right Theology). By upholding moralism, Progressives align with naturalists, advancing that morality is a societal structure that can be adapted based on the common good.²³³ In fact, naturalists claim that because morality exists, it must be derived from naturalistic processes, which means that society holds the ultimate, moral authority.²³⁴ Thus, if society authors morality, it must be relative, based on the society’s historical and cultural context. Progressives, as postmodern religious humanists, would submit that their historical and cultural context is superior.²³⁵ However, this lacks coherence: If there is no standard of absolute goodness and truth, then everything must be necessarily good and not good. Moreover, the Progressive cannot be certain that any moralism, even a postmodern, contractarian one, is better than another because certainty is eternally elusive,

²³² Gully, *If the Church Were Christian*, 181.

²³³ Michael Moehler, *Contractarianism: Elements in Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 3. Progressive Christianity adopts the moral theory of contractarianism, which “justifies moral rules through agreement among agents on the moral rules by which the agents are affected. Contractarian moral theory assumes that such implicit or explicit agreement is voluntary in that agents accept the agreed-upon moral rules if they reflect freely on the rules’ demands and implications, although the agents may agree with the rules for different reasons.” Note that this theory emphasizes societal agreement, which highlights Progressive Christianity’s bend toward globalism: “If only everyone would see things our way, uphold our standard of morality, the world would be a better place.”

²³⁴ William Lane Craig and Shelly Kagan, “Is God Necessary for Morality?” The Veritas Forum, June 24, 2012, YouTube video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm2wShHJ2iA&t=4552s>. Kagan affirms contractarianism and contends that it is compatible with objective morality and that we, as a moral community, are aributors of that objective morality (11:30). This is his refutation to the Law Giver Argument “Do requirements require a Requirer?” (15:58).

²³⁵ Ford, “By Whose Authority?” 301. Postmodernism posits that all previous societies are heavily laden with injustice and innocent blood, and the only way to move forward, to progress, is to break down and weed out historical moorings, which will produce a refined and superior world.

although even the concept of “eternally” is dubious. It is a *carpe diem* religion: choose to live for the temporal and physical for the eternal and spiritual are uncertain.

Having access to the Scriptures, it appears that Progressive Christianity is like the seeds which fall among the weeds and thorns: “the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful” (Mark 4:18-19). Postmodernism has choked any authentic Christianity out of Progressive Christianity: It is no longer about reaching up to God, but about reaching into self and out to man. The world with its lures has captivated and straggled the hope of the Christian message, the hope of eternity with Jesus.

Conclusion

Without Jesus as King, without recognizing the desperate need for a Savior, without right theology, without faith and truth, without submitting to God, without the church, the Bride of Christ, without reconciliation to God, without the hope of salvation, there is no Christianity. Each of these commandments show a false doctrine, a twisted dogma that maligns orthodox Christianity. Because Progressive Christianity deviates so egregiously, which shows its theologically liberal heritage, it reduces itself as logically inconsistent and theologically incoherent and exposes itself as a glaring counterfeit and a categorically diametric religion.

Chapter 5

Apologia: Equipping and Fortifying the Saints

Introduction

The expressed purpose of this thesis is to trace the historical roots of theological liberalism, reveal its inevitable, metamorphic evolution in a secularized, postmodern era, and expose Progressive Christianity as a cunning fraud. However, this research is meaningless without application, like a crippling diagnosis without a hopeful treatment. Therefore, the zealous intention of this chapter is to offer actionable insights to resist and refute not only Progressive Christianity, but to stand firm amid the chaos of postmodernism. The first is a call (back) to intellectualism in the church, the second, an appeal to apologetics as the backbone to everyday evangelism.

As noted in previous chapters, orthodox Christianity has been cast into the margins of intellectualism, losing precious cultural ground. J.P. Moreland implores, “We must recapture our intellectual heritage if we are to present to our brothers and sisters, our children, and a post-Christian culture a version of Christianity rich and deep enough to challenge the dehumanizing structures and habits of thought of a society gone mad.”²³⁶ Indeed, Christianity holistically supplies for the demands of every truth-seeker, offering doctrinal coherence and logical consistency. Moreover, history, sociology, biology, and a myriad of other academic disciplines align spectacularly with the Scriptures. However, the stigma of intellectualism, that it is only for an elite few, prevents many people, believers and nonbelievers alike, from approaching the defensible truth. In fact, the prejudice goes both ways: the intellectual views himself above the layman, and the layman views the intellectual as out-of-touch with the real

²³⁶ Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, 101.

world. Therefore, the first hurdle for the church to jump is to motivate believers and give equitable access to theological scholarship.²³⁷

When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind*” (Matt. 22:37, added emphasis). Christians are commanded to love God, to pursue Him, to obey Him with every aspect of themselves. This must be the primary motivation to dive into the ocean of academia: to love God intellectually. From exploring the intelligent design of DNA to analyzing ancient archaeological evidence, everything learned may be applied as worship to the wonderful, awesome Creator. Philosophical investigation will reveal the attributes of God and how they are interdependent and necessary, which deepens genuine praise as He becomes more known. Learning the historical veracity of the Bible and the historicity of the Resurrection profoundly humbles and affords an honest opportunity to fully submit to the authority of Scripture and fully understand the reality of the precious gift of the Lamb. Loving God with all the mind does not require enrollment into seminary, structured assignments, or severe assessments, but a response to use the God-given gift of man’s faculty of reason,²³⁸ harnessing that innate, childlike curiosity to know Him more fully. The church must make every effort to break down barriers which stifle inquisitiveness and call the saints to shake their prejudices and even their past educational experiences, so they may love the Lord with all their minds, aiding the necessary development of spiritual maturation.

²³⁷ What is meant by “equitable access” is translating complex theological concepts for the laity, giving them access to rich theology that is presented and differentiated for specific ages and academic levels: a task fulfilled by professional educators.

²³⁸ Moreland, *Love Your God*, 45. There are many faculties, or abilities, of the human mind. To reason is to gain knowledge and then apply it to justify beliefs, whereas the moral faculty is to inherently know right from wrong and then apply it. Senses, memory, and logic are all informative abilities of the mind; reason is just one of them.

Not only will a renewed intellectual fervor enhance individual discipleship, which enriches community fellowship, it may begin to reshape and redefine Christianity in the court of public opinion, opening up a seat at the table for open, civil discourse. And, as postmodernism constructs, or rather deconstructs, this current culture, Christian voices will contend and engage with it. This, of course, is apologetics, defined as “...a response to culture and its *critiques of* or *questions for* Christianity and is always done in conversation with culture and the people that define it.”²³⁹ Significantly, there is not simply a timeless need for apologetics, but an urgent command to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet. 3:15). To fully grasp the apostle Peter’s charge, the surrounding context matters. Amid the physical and social pressures to culturally conform, Peter’s intended audience contended not only with pagan antagonism from nonbelievers and theological conflict with believers, but also the temptation to slide back into their previous, sinful life.²⁴⁰ Because of their own spiritual doubt, they were vulnerable and ready to give up.²⁴¹ Peter offered encouragement and instruction citing Psalm 34 (1 Peter 3:9-12), but critically he illuminated a choice: to yield to the fear of the world or to “revere Christ as Lord” (v.15).²⁴² If the latter, then “always be prepared to offer an *apologia*...” or defense for the hope they have in Jesus. This command is an outward manifestation of revering Jesus as Lord: it is not only how Christians behave with generosity, charity, and love that show their faith (Js. 2:14-17), but the content of what Christians say, gently and respectfully. Note that Peter was not commissioning

²³⁹ Forrest, Chatraw, and McGarth, *The History of Apologetics*, 23.

²⁴⁰ Josh Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2018), 16.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

intellectual browbeating or academic bullying “...but rather level-headed instructions using words and phrases like ‘gentleness,’ ‘respect,’ ‘a clear conscience,’ and ‘good behavior.’”²⁴³ How Christians answer is just as important as what they answer. It is with humility and confidence that Christians enter into, not only theological and philosophical conversations, but everyday, social interactions.

Therefore, all Christians are commissioned apologists. However, how many are always prepared to answer the postmodernist? The progressive humanist? In order to empower the saints to revere Christ by offering a reason for the hope within them, the church must cultivate an atmosphere of welcoming learning, differentiated instruction, and appropriate application of apologetics. The modern-mega American church seems to prioritize entertaining the saints, instead of teaching them, accommodating them with coffee, air-conditioning, surround-sound and mesmerizing lights, instead of challenging them to participate, learn, memorize, and analyze. The gentle critique is that “the church to a large part has not sufficiently taken note of and passed down the historical and theological knowledge that builds a foundation for a reasonable faith.”²⁴⁴ How can this be rectified? Trained teachers, not merely charismatic preachers, need to break down historical data, philosophical jargon, and complex theology into manageable, purposeful, and digestible bites that can be utilized by any-aged believer. Proper hermeneutics must be modeled and practiced weekly to unify the church in biblical literacy, correctly interpreting and applying God’s Word.²⁴⁵ Specifically, to combat the lies of postmodernism and Progressive

²⁴³ Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 17.

²⁴⁴ Köstenberger, *Truth in a Culture of Doubt*, Conclusion.

²⁴⁵ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hayes, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Read, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 191-193. There is a postmodern appeal to interpret everything according to personal preference. However, the Bible must be read, interpreted, and applied correctly; there is a fixed meaning. “As an author writes, they argue, he or she intends to convey a certain meaning in the text. This intended meaning of the author’s is the true meaning of the text.”

Christianity, saints must be equipped with knowledge about the veracity of the Bible and the undisputed facts of the Resurrection.

The Veracity of the Bible

Step one of Liberal Christianity is to cast doubt on the authority of Scripture. This devious strategy was deployed throughout each historical, liberal mutation of Christianity. If Liberal Christianity can succeed in impugning the veracity of God's Word, then the Law, the Gospel, the Resurrection, any doctrine that is uncomfortable or inconvenient can be easily rejected because the Bible holds no divine authority: it allows the pick-and-choose approach, like when the Progressive *picks* Jesus's actions to follow as a man, but *chooses* not to follow His words as a King. Then, what theological value is the Bible to Progressive Christianity? Marcus Borg answers,

...the Progressive position on The Bible is not just a rejection of the idea that it is a divine product to be interpreted literally, but [an] embracing [of] this text as a human product containing metaphorical truths about God. The messages in The Bible are to be interpreted metaphorically and this not only helps Progressives to avoid the contradictions created by literal interpretation, but allows them to gain insight into how one should live in this world. These metaphors can transform lives and one's relationship with God. But there is no list of rules that can be followed with the goal of getting into Heaven.²⁴⁶

In other words, the Bible is a product of human hands, which are fallible. Thus, error is permissible and evident, according to the Progressive, allowing for a subjective interpretation:

"This is what it means to me."²⁴⁷ However, orthodox Christianity holds that the Bible is inerrant,

²⁴⁶ Lockwood, "Creating an Identity and Protecting Inclusivity," 40-41. Lockwood paraphrases Marcus Borg's *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* in order to highlight an inconsistency within the Progressive's inclusivity stance: "There is a logical inconsistency in saying we believe X and you can be part of us no matter what you believe. What if one of your beliefs negates or contradicts what we believe? If this contradictory belief does not eliminate you from the community, it at the least makes one a less authentic member of the community. We can see marginalization of the non prototypical Progressive Christians beginning with any set of belief statements a community might choose." This is why Lockwood endorses the "Eight Points," which more broadly identifies Progressive Christianity without creedal statements, thus avoiding logical inconsistency.

²⁴⁷ Duvall and J. Daniel Hayes, *Grasping God's Word*, 9.

true, and everlasting, a divine work God-breathed, which is why it is authoritative (Is. 40:8; Ps. 12:6; Matt. 24:35; John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). Furthermore, the Bible “reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.”²⁴⁸ Consider that if the Bible were not inerrant and divine, it would hold no authority; then Christianity would be untenable. Christian doctrine, theology, absolute truth, and morality would be subject to doubt and fallibility without God’s Revelation. Moreover, the character of God would be questioned; His goodness and power diminished (for is He not *good enough* to reach out to His people or *powerful enough* to reach out?), His perfection, illusory. Indeed, defending the trustworthiness of the Bible is of paramount importance for not only is it the visceral authority and visible foundation of the Christian worldview, but it holds the power to unveil the falsity and corruption of Progressive Christianity.

It is not just Progressive Christianity that attacks the reliability of Scripture, but academia, which has also been twisted to support postmodernism. No longer is academia a collaboration of diverse ideas, but rather a mighty, institutional, social status distributor that perpetuates the expert fallacy (just as superficially effective as *ad hominem* arguments) to advance the propaganda of postmodernism. New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman has led many to doubt with his historical expertise in books such as *Jesus, Interrupted*.²⁴⁹ As an esteemed college professor, Ehrman seems to relish wielding his intellect to blindside his students, mocking their fundamentalist ignorance of the Bible or bullying them into accepting his own biblical worldview. Likewise, Ehrman overwhelms and befuddles the layman with his charismatic

²⁴⁸ Steven B. Cowan, *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 12.

²⁴⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted* (HarperCollins ebook, 2009).

interviews, accessible commentary, and gripping storytelling offering an extremely narrow view of the Bible. With arrogance and flippancy, he aims “not to point out every discrepancy that can be discovered in the New Testament, but only some of the most interesting or important ones.”²⁵⁰ Equating discrepancy with error, historian Ehrman bombards his audience with example after example of biblical disparity while shrewdly omitting conservative scholarship, legitimate explanations, and, ironically, historical and cultural context. This subjectively-applied evidence supports Ehrman’s thesis: eye-witness accounts are not trustworthy, miracles are non-historical, “virtually impossible events,” Jesus was not a liar, lord, or lunatic, but a created legend, and therefore, the Bible is not reliable.²⁵¹ The reason why Ehrman basks in the cultural limelight, celebrated as an accredited New Testament expert is because he aligns with the postmodern narrative: truth can not be known for certain. Although Ehrman, a once zealous evangelical, now considers himself an agnostic atheist, Progressive Christianity embraces his research because it justifies their misuse of the Bible and the claim that it has no authentic, divine authority because it is a filled-with-error, human product.

Given the ubiquity of doubt in this culture, how can saints be armored for the onslaught of twisted historical information? How can the church prepare college students to enter into hostile academia? What is the pertinent and precise evidence that justifies believers standing firmly on the Word of God? To begin, it is foundational to approach the Bible with respect to its historical times, varying cultures, and divergent genres. Reading the Bible as a twenty-first century creation is an error of the reader, not the Bible. The scope and complexity of the Bible is vast; it must be approached with humility and wisdom. Conclusions based on theological bias,

²⁵⁰ Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, Chapter 2.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.

even from within the orthodox Christian community, can misrepresent, or worse, malign and manipulate the Word of God. For example, when Ehrman examines the Gospels, trying to find chronological discrepancies to support his presuppositions and conclusions, he willfully neglects that “ancient literature from this time period often did not narrate events in the exact chronological order. Instead, historical events were arranged for thematic and topical reasons.”²⁵² Furthermore, so-called discrepancies are not errors, but different perspectives that legitimize varying accounts. In fact, the historian’s role is to harmonize the differing accounts to increase the historical picture. Additionally, diverse points of view verify historical accounts as reliable. Andreas Köstenberger rightly critiques, “To reduce all (or even most) diversity to contradiction is more characteristic of the type of monochrome, black-and-white fundamentalism Ehrman professes to have left behind than of the kind of judicious, nuanced scholarship to which he professes allegiance.”²⁵³ Saints must humbly and wisely approach the Bible, trusting that God will be faithful in revealing His truth. There is no need for blind allegiance, which stifles honest curiosity and diminishes the impact of Scripture. Rather, the church should not only welcome questions about the veracity of the Bible, but supply the much needed answers.

Believers who stand firmly on the Word of God must learn and be able to recall facts and evidence that justify their claim. For example, the Bible, which comes from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning “books,” is a collection of historical accounts, prophecies, poems, books of wisdom and laws, biographical narratives, and letters, each with its own historical, cultural, and literary context.²⁵⁴ Written by at least forty different authors over the span of several centuries

²⁵² Köstenberger, *Truth in a Culture of Doubt*, Chapter 2.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ R. Douglas Geivett, “Can and Would God Speak to Us? A Dialogue on Divine Speaking” in *In Defense of the Bible*, ed. Steven Cowan. Geivett offers a mock conversation between a Christian and a skeptic about what the Bible is. Examples of how to discuss theological topics colloquially is an effective and easily differentiated instructional strategy, which is necessary for applied learning.

makes the Bible's literary and theological continuity a true wonder, as no other book even comes close to such diversity and preservation. Boasting over 5,800 manuscripts with the earliest dating to 125 AD, the Bible was extensively copied and distributed, which allows for intense historical scrutiny.²⁵⁵ Through this scrutiny along with archaeological and anthropological data, the Bible continues to be historically reliable.²⁵⁶

Being equipped with relevant and undisputed facts about the Bible will empower believers to walk amid this culture of doubt. They can confidently engage knowing that the opposition is subjective. In other words, differing points of view, not factual evidence, will not shake them because their *reasoned* faith is grounded in accurate knowledge of the historical origins of the Bible. However, if it is agreed that the Bible is an excellent reliable historical corpus, then the next hurdle is to justify that the claims made are, in fact, true. Specifically, the claim that Jesus died and was raised to life.

Evidence for the Resurrection

In the theological liberal playbook, the next strategy after undermining the authority of the Bible is stripping away the power and divinity of Jesus. In order to dismiss Jesus as just a created being, a mere mortal, an every-day Joe, his miracles, specifically the resurrection, must be categorized as metaphorical, legendary, or simply an impossibility. Progressive Christianity

²⁵⁵ Gould, Dickinson, and Loftin, *Stand Firm*, 83-85. There are only two manuscripts of Tacitus, a second-century reputable Roman historian, and his *Histories and Annals*, from the ninth and eleventh century: 700 years after the autograph. Compared to the New Testament of the first century, there are 2,600 copies beginning a mere 50 years after the original document. This contrast shows the historical supremacy of the Bible.

²⁵⁶ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 137-156. Kitchen cogently examines the archeological record of King David and Solomon. While his book is not intended for a lay audience, salient facts can be gleaned, such as the Tel Dan Inscription, which is available evidence and a useful tool for everyday apologists.

fancies the figurative language of coming to life, a theme of self-discovery after deconstruction whereas agnostics like Ehrman advocate that the resurrection of Jesus and his miracles are a legend, gathering bravado after each generational retelling. Finally, hostile skeptics and materialists from David Hume to Anthony Flew to Richard Dawkins consider belief in miracles nonsensical and delusional because miracles can not be empirically proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. Conversely, orthodox Christianity holds tightly to the actualized miracles of the Bible and the literal resurrection: that Jesus died, was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead, fulfilling prophecy (1 Cor. 15:4). So critical is the actual historical event of the resurrection that if there is no bodily resurrection, then there is no Christianity. Paul maintained,

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, *our preaching is useless and so is your faith*. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, *your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, *we are of all people most to be pitied* (1 Cor. 15: 13-19, added emphasis).

Indeed, Christianity hinges on the actual resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, the question for the everyday apologist is, what evidence of the Resurrection exists that substantiates faith in a risen Lord?

Blind and unreasoned belief is harmful for discipleship and evangelism. Rather, believers have *reason* for the hope within them; they have sought after evidence and reasoned with their God-given faculty that Jesus did rise from the dead. This is a historiographical approach, meaning evidence is gathered, then holistically aligned with an existing hypothesis. There are several competing hypotheses that attempt to explain the resurrection naturalistically, such as the hallucination, swoon, and fraud hypotheses. Yet, no matter how many outlandish hypotheses develop, “bedrock facts” of the Resurrection that are historically and scholarly accepted support

the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead.²⁵⁷ Gary Habermas has cogently collected twelve of these “bedrock facts” regarding the resurrection, yet advocates three “minimal facts” to reason for the bodily resurrection: (1) Jesus died by crucifixion, (2) shortly after Jesus’s death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe Jesus had been resurrected, and (3) Paul converted to Christianity after an experience that he interpreted as the risen Lord Jesus.²⁵⁸

Saints must be equipped and ready to defend the historical reality of the resurrection with these “minimal facts;” they are readily comprehensible for the laity. That Jesus died by crucifixion is confirmed not only by different historical accounts in the New Testament, but also confirmed in ten extrabiblical sources.²⁵⁹ Additionally, the actions of the disciples before, during, and after the crucifixion indicate that they experienced something: the disciples before the crucifixion were eager yet faithless, during the crucifixion were cowardly and despondent; whereas the disciples after their experiences were zealous, courageous, and willing to die for the message of the Gospel. Consider that a person may die for a belief they believe is true, but they do not sacrifice themselves for a knowable lie.²⁶⁰ Finally, the conversion of Paul must be evaluated. What dramatic event could have happened to Paul to transform him from a persecutor of The Way to becoming persecuted for The Way? Habermas notes, “One striking aspect of this argument is the unanimity even among skeptics, who acknowledge that Paul certainly had an experience that he thought was an appearance of the risen Jesus. Accordingly, they regard Paul

²⁵⁷ Michael R Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 19.

²⁵⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 463.

²⁵⁹ Gary Habermas, *The Rise Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 16.

²⁶⁰ Gould, Dickinson, and Loftin, *Stand Firm*, 119.

as an eyewitness.”²⁶¹ These “minimal facts” support the conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead. There is, of course, a vast wealth of data and argumentation that bolstered the validity of the Resurrection; however, for the everyday apologist, these “minimal facts” are manageable and profitable for evangelism.

Conclusion

In order to equip believers to withstand the mire of postmodernism and the deception of Progressive Christianity, intellectual pursuit to advance apologetics is vital not only to survival, but growth. Investing in education, that is exercising the mind to gain knowledge about God and His Creation, may increase the vitality and zeal of the Christian community and inform a new, public representation of Christianity: a reasoned faith that is shared with gentleness and respect. Furthermore, intellectualism and apologetics may unify the church: Christians share not only the same heart of Christ, but the same mind for Christ. The Christian worldview is necessarily singular, meaning social critical theories cannot damage her unity. Political and social issues are viewed through the same Christian lens with the same aim: to share the Good News and worship Jesus. Postmodernism and Progressive Christianity cannot endure the truth, life, and power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

²⁶¹ Habermas, *The Rise Jesus and Future Hope*, 20.

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