

Recommended Reading: The Blight Of Liberalism

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During the past forty years brethren have published many excellent books on the theme of liberalism, but this 2005 lectureship book from the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida, is not only recent (June 11-15)—it also stands as one of the most comprehensive books on this subject ever compiled and is easily the largest one (675 pages) ever to be associated with this annual event.

“The Origin of Liberalism” gets the reader into the subject with some necessary definitions. Of interest are the “two things liberals and antis have in common” (3). Ultimately, the writer traces liberalism’s beginning back to the Garden of Eden but then works his way up to modern liberalism. He discusses three important philosophies: *existentialism*, *pragmatism*, and *irrationalism*, followed by a look at some of the world’s theologians of liberalism, such as Kant, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bultmann, Tillich, and others.

Brother Guy N. Woods knew of the rising threat of liberalism. On November 3, 1966, he wrote to Ira Y. Rice, Jr., expressing agreement with the material published in the first volume of *Axe on the Root* (19); he further warned brethren shortly afterward in the Open Forum at Freed-Hardeman College. Also cited to show how long our current apostasy has been developing is the Introduction to the 1970 Freed-Hardeman College lectureship book by brother Thomas B. Warren (20).

W. Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett were two of the early apostles of liberalism in the 60s, and their doctrine is discussed. (Having known of the damage done by these two men for more than three decades, this reviewer was stunned to find out that one of the elders of a church, living in the same town as Leroy Garrett, was fellowshiping this false teacher and the congregation with which he worships—and he (the elder) had no idea who Garrett was!) This first chapter concludes with a look at Postmodernism.

“The Attitude of Liberalism” brings to light the arrogance of those who challenge the authority of the Scriptures. Generally speaking, such men attack those who uphold the Truth, make up their own definitions, and are willing to settle for unity in diversity (so long as they get to be leaders).

The next chapter describes the infiltration techniques that liberals use (“The Covert Nature of Liberalism”) and provides some recent examples of language that departs from what we read in the Scriptures. One of those involves the phraseology used to describe two of the speakers at this year’s “Tulsa International Soul Winning Workshop” (51). Still more historical material of “Liberal’s Elitism” is provided, including one man who was extremely condescending toward brethren committed to the Truth—until he was arrested for stealing from parked cars and trying to pass a hot check (65).

Such setbacks, however, do not slow down those opposed to the Gospel. They do not have a very high opinion of anyone—except themselves—and that includes “Liberalism’s

View of God.” These men have no confidence in God or His Divine Word. One lengthy paragraph by Jeff Walling demonstrates his view that the Bible is not sufficient (74). Jim Woodroof is equally dissatisfied with the Bible alone (75-76). This declared deficiency of the Scriptures is just part of their problem.

Liberals also challenge the Lord Jesus Christ by first of all denying that sound doctrine is necessary. Carroll Osburn is quoted in that regard from his book, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (89-90). Rubel Shelly defends denominationalism (90) and the unscriptural tradition of Easter (91). In other words, the liberal philosophy is summed up by the word—*Whatever*. According to liberal philosophy, God hardly ever means what He says. They are akin to the Pharisees who undoubtedly thought they were clever to have found a way around the fifth commandment by saying, “It is corban.”

“Liberalism and the Holy Spirit” covers the various theories of the way in which the Bible is inspired (97-98). The writer briefly relates the effect that Calvinism has had on doctrines concerning the Holy Spirit. After giving a brief history of Wesley and Parham, he discusses *neo-Pentecostalism*, the *Vineyard Fellowship*, and the *Third Wave*. Rubel Shelly is eager to embrace this error (why not?). In 1996 he “spoke on the *Mid-South Conference of Spiritual Renewal* conducted at Florence, Alabama” (103). Mike Bickle, founder of the *Kansas City Prophets*, now part of the *Vineyard Fellowship Movement*, also spoke on the same program. This group claims to have the gift of prophecy.

“Liberalism and the Origin of the World” looks at the “big bang” theory and explores interestingly the matter of “cause and effect” (109). The recent admission of Dr. Antony Flew (the atheist who debated brother Warren in 1976) that some kind of God may exist, after all, is also referenced (113). One other challenge to the truth is found by those who espouse theistic evolution. In particular, are noted the views of John Clayton, which (whether he realizes it or not) question the inspiration of the Scriptures (115).

The longest chapter in the book is “Liberalism’s Effect on Bible Translations.” All brethren would profit from reading this excellent summary (119-68), which begins with a history of English translations and sets forth the characteristics of a good one. Consideration is given to some of the deficiencies of modern translations, beginning with the Revised Standard Version and includes the New International Version and a few others (142-55). The chapter concludes with a look at how today’s erring brethren have followed some of the doctrinal departures in these faulty versions. The writer cites about 55 sources and provides 62 endnotes.

As the reader might imagine, “Liberalism’s View of the Church” is different than what faithful brethren have preached for decades. The writer points out the way liberals use their own special language when referring to us, such as “our heritage,” “our fellowship,” and “our traditions,” all of which seek to make us denominational (171). Some mention is also made of unity efforts (181), which have not promoted harmony but compromise. A companion chapter is: “Liberalism and the Uniqueness of the Church,” which refutes such popular notions as “one church is just as good as another,” “the church is just like the airport,” and “join the church of your choice.”

The next area of consideration is: “Liberalism and the Work of the Church,” which includes a chart of “How to Determine Authority from God’s Word” (212). Included is a lengthy section on the role of women in the church, feminism’s influence upon the church, and false arguments made to justify women in positions of leadership. Since the work of the church is so broad, an entirely different aspect is examined: “The Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Organization” in Nashville, Tennessee (231-37).

Related to the previous topic is “Liberalism’s Effect on the Mission of the Church.” Some of the strange things that are referenced are that liberal congregations are now supporting *In Search of the Lord’s Way*, one congregation is advertising a “Recreation Ministry,” and brethren are allowing their young people to attend Winterfest, which is little more than a Pentecostal pep rally (250). Also related is “Liberalism and Church Growth,” which analyzes thoroughly what hinders church growth and what truly promotes it.

Hardly any aspect of our worship and work has been left untouched by those who have departed from the faith; thus the reader finds material dealing with “Liberalism’s Effect on the Organization of the Church.” Heretics like Lynn (“big sick denomination”) Anderson are recommending that brethren follow the thinking of denominational leaders (274). “Liberalism and the Eldership” notices that some elders go beyond their authority—while some are not permitted to exercise the authority they have. Women Elders have been added in some churches, and others have bought into the faulty notion of “Reevaluation/Reaffirmation of Elders” (292-94).

The chapter that discusses “Liberalism and Fellowship” asks the important questions: “Can we continue to fellowship apostate congregations?” (307-308). In “Liberalism and Worship” there is a portion of an interview from *The Baptist Standard*, which provides some insight into Max Lucado’s heretical ideas. There follow chapters relating to liberalism’s effect on singing and preaching. On page 342 the editor of this volume, Michael Hatcher, prints a chart concerning music—what God does and does not authorize.

The next two applications of liberalism relate to salvation and baptism. The former reveals the weakness of “the umbrella of grace” concept, and the latter looks at teaching of *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* by Edward T. Hiscox, a philosophy endorsed by Max Lucado (369, 376).

“The State of the Church Today” includes some interesting statistics about current congregations of the Lord’s church (379-82) and is followed by “How To Recognize a Liberal Congregation,” which includes the following subsections: “A Needed Vaccine Against Liberalism,” “A Needed Antidote for Liberalism,” and “A Needed Amputation of Liberalism.” A chapter that clearly needs to be read by brethren everywhere is: “Moderates’ Pave the Way for Liberalism.” Most congregations do not just wake up one day and say, “We think we should be liberals.” It occurs by degrees, and all should be aware of the warning signs.

At this point is included the chapter titled, “Reaction to Liberalism—Anti-ism.” Two of the sub-headings are “Common Elements of Anti-ism and Liberalism” and “Expediency: Major Principle Misunderstood by Anti-ism.” The first of these provides an explanation for some brethren swinging from one extreme to the other.

Few would probably envy being assigned “Liberalism and Our ‘Christian’ Schools,” and 33 pages is probably not nearly enough room to cover everything, but the reader will certainly have enough information to seriously consider the subject. Most of us already know about Abilene Christian University (447-55), but the writer refreshes our memories with references to theistic evolution, Carroll Osburn’s disdain for Truth, the school’s willingness to support fellowship broader than that prescribed in the New Testament, and its support for feminism and unscriptural roles for women.

Some professors at Abilene felt compelled to take issue publicly against one of their colleagues who wrote a letter to the editor, upholding the biblical view which opposes homosexuality. Their letter of rebuttal against him and in favor of the homosexual is reprinted on page 454. This, by the way, is the upshot of liberalism: their “love and compassion” cannot allow them to condemn anything or anyone—except those who stand for Truth both morally and doctrinally.

Oklahoma Christian University has at least one professor who openly supports the theory of evolution (455). Another OCU professor is one of the officers of the “Winterfest Group,” which subjects young people to Jeff Walling and “contemporary Christian performers” who are not even members of the church (457). OCU also publishes *The Christian Chronicle*, which promotes every aspect of liberalism and in its recent July issue degraded itself by airing information for all to see that did not need to be made public.

Harding University has professors like Flavil Yeakley, John Mark Hicks, and Evertt Huffard (Dean of the school) who promote openly or approve of the “community church” concept (460-62), which is reflected in many of their graduates’ disassociation with the churches of Christ. Jimmy Allen, once a great Gospel preacher, has now compromised even on the plan of salvation, as promoted in his book, *Rebaptism?* (464).

David Lipscomb is well-known for its apostasy and fellowship of those who are “Christians” but just do not “go to the church of Christ” (466). They also invite false teachers in to conduct seminars, such as Joe Beam who claims that God tells him when someone lies to him in a counseling session (467). F. LaGard Smith, “Scholar in Residence of Christian Studies,” announced as early as 1988 at the Pepperdine lectures that God will destroy the soul, not punish it. He has decided that the biblical doctrine of hell cannot be true (468). Although Freed-Hardeman and Faulkner University are not in the same category as these others, they are definitely fellowshipping along liberal lines (469-76).

The next chapter deals with “Liberal Publications and Workshops,” and it covers the “Spiritual Growth Workshop” here in Orlando, Florida, along with the “Tulsa International Soul Winning Workshop” (486-87). It also refers to *The Christian Chronicle*, which is published by Oklahoma Christian University (488).

Following “Liberalism’s View of Law and Love” is a connection that brethren need to see, which perhaps we have overlooked: “Liberalism and Calvinism.” Some of our brethren have had so much association with denominationalists that they are now teaching the theology of John Calvin. Given attention are Jack Exum’s *The ABC’s of Grace* (507-508), Bill Love’s *The Core Gospel* (508), Milton Jones’ *Grace: the Heart of the Fire* (with a Foreword written by Max Lucado 508-509), William Mural Worthey’s *Jesus Our Righteousness* (509-

13), David Chadwell's *Having the Faith of Abraham* (513-15). Briefly mentioned are Mike Cope's *Righteousness Inside Out* and Norman Bales' *How Do I Know I Am Saved?* (515). The chapter also mentions those whose views of the Holy Spirit tend toward Calvinism, including those of Terry Rush, Terry Bell, and Mac Deaver (516-17). Of course, Max Lucado and Rubel Shelly have been leaders in asserting certain aspects of Calvinistic doctrine (519-20). Brethren need to give this material serious consideration.

The next five chapters cover some additional fundamental applications: "Liberalism's Ethic," "Liberalism and Morality," "Liberalism and the Role of Women," "Liberalism's Support of Homosexuality," and "Liberalism and the Home." The material on homosexuality is from the perspective of liberals in society rather than the church.

Another chapter dealing with the effect of this philosophy in society is "Liberalism in the Courts," which considers: "How Should We View the United States Constitution?" and "Following Precedent." An Appendix is included of all appointments to the Supreme Court (600-602). A not-altogether-unrelated topic is "Liberalism in Politics," which deals in part about the intent of our founding fathers. The idea that there is no truth in politics, which liberals obviously believe, comes from Karl Marx. In his eulogy of Marx, Engels stated: "Our dialectical philosophy abolishes all the notions of absolute and definitive truth" (610). Other quotes from Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas are similar.

"Liberalism and Public Education" presents a thorough look at the history and current condition of our public schools. If students are unable to read or execute simple mathematical calculations in their minds, there is a reason for it—these abilities are being de-emphasized by many. Several examples are cited of both teacher and student deficiencies. Note the comments of "the smartest student" in a class (623). John Dewey himself, who has had a profound effect on public education, said that "early education need not be tied to specific content" (635). Grades are being deemphasized while the student's self-esteem is exalted. Values clarification, death education, sex education, and several other topics are discussed. A look at some of the textbooks being used is instructive, also. The 44-page chapter closes with "Ten Principles Used By All Liberals" (653-60). This section shows how that the liberals in education and the liberals in the church used the same methods.

The volume closes with a look at "Liberalism in the Media"—an obvious fact, but we are in danger of becoming desensitized to it. The book costs only \$12 (plus postage) and may be ordered from the Bellview Church of Christ, 4850 Saufley Field Road, Pensacola, FL 32526.

Winter Park