

Liberal Christianity and Liberal Theology are Dangerous

Schleiermacher launched liberal Christianity and liberal theology. Who followed him? Who are the other prototypes of the tradition? After Schleiermacher came Albrecht Ritschl, another major German Protestant theologian (1822–89), whose influence led to a whole school of liberal theologians and pastors labeled Ritschlians. Ritschl wrote numerous books of theology and church history, including, most notably, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (1870). Ritschl used the philosophy of German thinker Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) to distinguish between “facts” and “values,” and Ritschl relegated religion to the realm of values. Christianity is not about facts but about values—what ought to be the case—especially the values of the kingdom of God as espoused by Jesus. Ultimately, Ritschl was unsuccessful in drawing an absolute line between facts and values, but he set in motion the liberal theological trend of reducing Christianity (and religion in general) to ethics. Christianity, he taught, was primarily about the kingdom of God on earth, a society organized by love.

Traditional orthodox doctrines and dogmas took a back seat in Ritschl’s theology. When historical doctrines appeared at all, they were reconstructed to fit with modern sensibilities. He believed the Bible is not the inspired Word of God written but the record of “the apostolic circle of ideas” that points to ethical living in and for God’s kingdom on earth, in society. One outstanding example of his liberalism in theology is his definition of Jesus Christ, in which he taught that when Christians say that Jesus is God, they mean that Jesus has the value of God for them because he inaugurated and embodied the values of God’s kingdom among people.

(Against Liberal Theology: Putting the Brakes on Progressive Christianity by Roger E. Olson, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Reflective, Kindle, 2022, 24 & 25 of 180)