

Cultural Engagement Relevance (“Get with the times”)

Common Characteristics of the Relevance Model

- Optimistic about cultural trends
- Emphasis on the common good, human flourishing, and social justice
- Seldom speak of a distinctive Christian worldview
- Most willing to adapt and reinvent the church’s ministry
- Little distinction between individual Christians and the institutional church in cultural engagement

(Old) Liberal Theology

- “All liberal theologians agree that revelation cannot be *propositional* or *doctrinal*. Why? Because that would mean that in revelation God tells us what to believe and what to do, and that would contradict the most fundamental principle of liberal epistemology, that human autonomous thought has the final word.” —John Frame, *History of Western Theology and Philosophy*
- “The many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism—that is, the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity.” —J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*
- “Fundamentally it is the idea of a genuine Christianity not based on external authority. Liberal theology seeks to reinterpret the symbols of Christianity in a way that creates a progressive religious alternative to atheistic rationalism and to theologies based on external authority. Specifically, modern intellectual inquiry, especially the natural and social sciences; its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience; its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life; its favoring of moral concepts of atonement; and its commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people.” —Gary Dorrien, *Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805-1900*
- A de-supernaturalized Christianity
 - Higher criticism: a de-supernaturalized view of Scripture
 - Darwinism: a de-supernaturalized view of human origins
 - Social gospel: a de-supernaturalized view of the church’s mission
- Liberal theologians
 - Friedrich Schleiermacher: the father of modern theology
 - Albrecht Ritschl: the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man
 - Walter Rauschenbusch: the social gospel
- The social gospel teaches that “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” —H. Richard Niebuhr

Liberation Theology

- Influenced by Marxism and Critical Race Theory
- Society is divided between the privileged and the oppressed
- Theology begins not with Scripture, but with one's self-understanding in relation to systems of oppression.
- Sin is not rebellion against God, but oppression of neighbor.
- Goal is not the glory of God, but the dignity of the oppressed.
- Victimology

Reconcilist Evangelicalism

- Also called (sometimes positively, but usually pejoratively) "woke" theology.
- Generally theologically orthodox.
- Pro-life, pro-traditional marriage.
- Concerned to find common ground and build bridges with secular culture.
- Emphasis on "moral witness" and "social justice"
- Critical of the church's "pursuit of political power."
- Relatively more vocal on issues of liberal agreement, like care for the poor and refugees, and denunciation of racism and sexism.
- Often #NeverTrump

Online Resources

- Stephen Wolfe, "The Evangelical Reconcilers: How Evangelicalism Reconciles Itself with Modern Liberalism," Crosspolitic. <https://crosspolitic.com/the-evangelical-reconcilers-how-evangelicalism-reconciles-itself-with-modern-liberalism/>
- Thabiti Anyabwile, "Is There an Evangelical Social Justice Movement?" The Gospel Coalition. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/evangelical-christian-social-justice-movement/>
- Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, "The Incompatibility of Critical Theory and Christianity," The Gospel Coalition. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/incompatibility-critical-theory-christianity/>
- Joseph Minich, "Reviewing Jonathan Leeman's 'Political Church,'" Mere Orthodoxy. <https://mereorthodoxy.com/reviewing-jonathan-leemans-political-church-pt-1/>
- Joe Carter, "Why Evangelicals Are Divided over Trump," The Gospel Coalition. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-evangelicals-are-divided-over-trump/>