

Modern Theology

I. Neo-orthodoxy

A. Tenets

1. A “realistic” response to the demise of optimistic liberalism
 - a. Emphasis on radical evil
 - b. Holds to a transcendent God (“wholly other”)
2. Reinterprets orthodox concepts to speak to modern age (hence *Neo-orthodoxy*)
3. Views Scripture as a means of (or witness to) revelation, not itself revelation
4. Affirm different realms of history: *Heilsgeschichte* vs. *historie*
 - a. Salvation (redemptive) history vs. “real” history
 - b. Understanding by faith vs. limited reach of human research
 - c. Accused of dismissing historicity of redemptive history
5. Dominated American theology in middle of 20th cent.: “Neo-Orthodox Consensus”

B. Leaders

1. Forerunner: Soren Kierkegaard (19th cent.)
 - a. “Christian existentialism”
 - 1) “Existence precedes essence”
 - 2) Traditional Christian teaching (e.g., Calvinism) says “essence precedes existence,” i.e., what gives purpose & sense to life—what gives a person his identity—derives from the sovereign will of God
 - 3) Existentialism says that a person creates his own “essence” (meaning and identity) by his choices and actions
 - 4) Leads to individual paths to salvation
 - b. Stages of life
 - 1) Aesthetic: Living for pleasure for oneself
 - 2) Ethical: Living by principle with others in mind
 - 3) Religious: Living for God in faith but with uncertainty
 - c. “Leap of faith”
 - 1) Method of moving from one stage to another
 - 2) Escape from despair & hopelessness but an escape to uncertainty
 - 3) Apart from any rational basis, a man makes a “leap into the dark” of commitment to something higher and better; this is faith
 - d. God is transcendent
 - 1) Rejected the immanent God of the liberalism of his day
 - 2) God is hidden or “wholly other” (Barth)—unknowable except by faith
2. Founder: Karl Barth
 - a. Began with his commentary on Romans written shortly after World War I
 - b. Considered the most “conservative” of the leading Neo-orthodox theologians
 - c. Strong bias against natural theology
 - 1) Saw no—or at least limited—value in use of philosophy
 - 2) Clashed with Emil Brunner on this point
3. Reinhold Niebuhr
 - a. “Realistic theology”
 - b. Stress on social ethics
 - c. Believed in a natural sinfulness of man, but not because of the fall but because of the limitations of human nature

4. Paul Tillich
 - a. Classified as liberal and/or Neo-orthodox but defying categorization
 - b. Necessity of philosophy in doing theology, particularly existentialism
 - c. Man is consumed with the question of being (and the danger of non-being)
 - 1) Man is plagued by fear/anxiety
 - 2) Leads ultimately to “God,” who is the “Ground of Being”
 - d. Almost Gnostic and dualistic view of Christ
 - 1) Separates Jesus from Christ
 - 2) Makes Christ the conveyer of “New Being” to humanity
 - e. A philosophical, not theological, view of God
5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer
 - a. German theologian executed for his opposition to Hitler
 - b. Concepts
 - 1) “World come of age” and “religionless Christianity”: The world has matured to the point where old concepts of religion must be refashioned
 - 2) “God of gaps”: God is used to explain gaps in human knowledge, so that as human knowledge grows, the sphere of God shrinks
 - 3) “Cheap grace”: forgiveness without repentance
 - c. Cited by “God is dead” school of secular theology (concept of God no longer has any relevance) in the 1960s

II. Process Theology

- A. Founder: philosopher-mathematician Alfred North Whitehead
- B. Tenets
 1. “God is becoming,” changing through constant activity
 2. Tries to explain evil by limiting God’s power
 - a. God persuades, but He will not coerce
 - b. God cooperates with His creation rather than exercising sovereignty
 3. God does not know the future
 4. Panentheistic: God is very closely joined to His creation
- C. Free-will theism
 1. “Openness of God”
 2. Evangelical process theology? Hyper-Arminianism?

III. Theologies of Liberation

- A. Framework
 1. Central concept: God is on the side of the poor and oppressed
 2. Seeks to correct “unjust structures” in politics and society
 3. Relies on popular sociological categories: Race, Class, Gender
 4. Often relies on Marxism and Marxist categories (e.g., class conflict, dialectic)
 5. Theology not judged by “timeless truths” but its effect in liberating poor & oppressed
 6. The norm for theology is the *experience* of the oppressed group (poor of Latin America, African Americans, women)
- B. Forms
 1. Liberation Theology
 - a. Earliest form, originating in Latin America in the 1960s; traditionally the Medellin (Colombia) Conference of 1968
 - b. Predominantly Catholic

2. Black Theology
 - a. Leaders: James Cone, Martin Luther King Jr.
 - b. Played on traditional images of deliverance in black theology, such as the Exodus (King's "I Have a Dream Speech")
 - c. A theological rationale for the civil rights movement
 3. Feminist Theology
 - a. Views Christianity as "patriarchal" & seeks to purge it of such elements
 - 1) Criticizes the Scripture as presenting a "sexist" viewpoint
 - 2) Reinterprets teachings such as Christ's submission to the Father in light of the feminist theological agenda
 - b. Open to pagan elements, such as worship of "Sophia," the wisdom goddess representing the wisdom of God
 - c. Womanist theology: Black feminist theology
- IV. Closing Thoughts: What is necessary to "doing theology"?
- A. Founded on the Bible
 1. Undependable foundations
 - a. Not experience
 - b. Not tradition/history
 - c. Not reason
 2. Continuous biblical critique
 - a. Bereans of Acts 17:11
 - b. Reformation idea of *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* ("the reformed church always reforming")
 - B. Founded on Christ
 1. Person of Christ
 2. Work of Christ: How does He save?
 3. Judge any theology ultimately by how it treats Jesus Christ