



Kantian Reason *and* Hegelian Spirit

The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology

GARY DORRIEN



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Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit

The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology

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*For Cindy, Nelleke, Mike, Xan, Kevin, and Hannah, with
affection and
treasured memories.*

Preface and Acknowledgments

Until now, I lacked an answer for one of the nicest questions: “Which book of yours means the most to you?” Usually I stammered the truth - “I have no idea.” Otherwise I settled for an evasion - “The next one.” At last I have a real answer, because this book makes an argument about the thinkers and ideas that underlie modern religious thought as a whole.

My work ranges across social ethics and politics, on the one hand, and modern religious philosophy and theology, on the other. I am equally committed to these subject areas, having never tried to settle on one of them or even ranked one higher than the other. There is a disciplinary link between the fields of ethics and theology - theological ethics - but that is not where most of my work takes place. On the ethical side, I work mostly at the intersections of social ethics, social theory, and politics, and on the theological side, I work mostly in the branch of historical theology that deals with modern religious and philosophical thought.

I started this book with the idea of something analogous to my three volumes on *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, but soon I realized that I had too much at stake in this project to give it the encyclopedic treatment. Instead of tracking, in a multi-volume format, the history and variations of modern German and British theology, I went straight for an argument about the importance of Kantian and post-Kantian idealism in the founding of modern theology.

This decision reflects something about how I learned modern religious and philosophical thought, something about how I teach it, and something about my constructive perspective. In college, I cut my teeth

intellectually on G. W. F. Hegel and Paul Tillich. Long before I had an inkling of a future in the academy or anything pertaining to religion, I was drawn to Hegel's theory of self-knowing Spirit arising through the realization of consciousness, an idea that, importantly to me, held a similar lure for Martin Luther King, Jr. But one day I realized that it was pointless to grapple any further with modern philosophers and theologians until I took on Immanuel Kant's critiques of reason. Kant is the single unavoidable thinker in modern philosophy, and one of the founders of modern religious thought along with Hegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Today, in the classroom, I find it impossible to teach almost any subject in religious thought or social ethics without spending at least two weeks on what the subject in question owes to Kant and Hegel. This interpretive and pedagogical standpoint underlies the normative argument that I make in this book - that progressive theology at its best is always buoyed with idealistic conviction and armed with a realistic brake on it.

Karl Barth enjoyed regaling his students with the story of how Hegel and Schleiermacher came up at the same time, Hegel eclipsed Schleiermacher when they lived, and Schleiermacher overtook Hegel, at least in theology, after they were gone. Usually Barth cautioned his students about their acquired liberalism, telling them that they lived in Schleiermacher's age and under his influence, whether or not they realized it. Sometimes he urged them to imagine what theology might have been like had Schleiermacher never existed. But I will argue that even Barthian theology is unimaginable without Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher.

This book is like my previous one for Wiley-Blackwell, *Social Ethics in the Making*, in that I held my students at Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University

chiefly in mind as I wrote it, especially my doctoral students. For me, it is always a high priority to help students grasp the story of the field they are entering. My understanding of it has been greatly enriched by working with three recently graduated doctoral students (Ian Doescher, Eboni Marshall Turman, and Christine Pae), and a special group of graduate students with whom I have worked closely (Nixon Cleophas, Preston Davis, Peter Herman, Dwayne Meadows, and Elijah Prewitt-Davis), and my current group of doctoral students: Lisa Anderson, Nkosi Anderson, Malinda Berry, Chloe Breyer, Babydoll Kennedy, Jeremy Kirk, David Orr, Tracy Riggall, Dan Rohrer, Gabriel Salguero, Charlene Sinclair, Joe Strife, Rima Vesely-Flad, Colleen Wessel-McCoy, Demian Wheeler, and Todd Willison. Blessings and thanks to all.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Kantian Concepts, Liberal Theology, and Post-Kantian Idealism

This is a book about the role of Kantian and post-Kantian idealism in founding modern theology. More specifically, it is a book about the impact of Kantian and post-Kantian idealism in creating what came to be called “liberal” theology in Germany and “modernist” theology in Great Britain. My descriptive argument is implied in this description, which folds together with my normative argument: Modern religious thought originated with idealistic convictions about the spiritual ground and unifying reality of freedom, and there is no vital progressive theology that does not speak with idealistic conviction, notwithstanding the ironies and problems of doing so.

Liberal theology was born in largely illiberal contexts in eighteenth-century Germany and England, a fact that helps to explain why much of it was far from liberal. Most of the great thinkers in this story were Germans, the key founding thinkers were Germans, and there was a vital intellectual movement of liberal theology in Germany for a century before a similar movement existed in Britain. Thus, the German story dominates this book. British theology comes into the picture mostly as it engages German idealism, as do the book's principal other non-German thinkers, Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth, although the British story begins with a figure that preceded Kant by a century, John Locke. For better and for worse, German thinkers dominated modern theology right up to the point that liberal theology in Germany crashed and burned, after which the field was still dominated by the intellectual legacies of Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and the Ritschlian School.

The idea of a distinctly modern approach to Christian theology built upon early Enlightenment attempts in Britain and Germany to blend Enlightenment reason with a Christian worldview. I will argue, however, that early Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism did not privilege the questions of subjectivity, historical relativity, and freedom, and thus did not develop a liberal approach to theology. It took Kant's three critiques of reason and his writings on religion and ethics to launch a fully modern departure in religious thought, through which Kant became the quintessential modern philosopher and inspired rival streams of theology and idealism.

I will argue that Kant's influence in modern religious thought is unsurpassed by any thinker, that his use of metaphysical reason is usually misconstrued, that he was a subjective idealist who mediated between extreme

subjective idealism and objective idealism, that his recognition of universal forms of experience paved the way to post-Kantian objective idealism, that his moral faith mattered more to him than anything except his idea of freedom to which it was linked, and that the key to his system - terrible ironies notwithstanding - was the emancipating and unifying reality of freedom. I will argue that Kant's transcendental idealism laid the groundwork for all post-Kantian versions and that the post-Kantian idealisms of Hegel, Schleiermacher, Friedrich W. J. Schelling, and, very differently, Kierkegaard, surpassed Kant in creatively construing religious experience and the divine. I will argue that the dominant forms of liberal theology flowed out of German idealism and tried to calibrate the right kind of idealism to distinct positions about the way that any religion is true. And I will argue that even the important critiques of religious idealism proffered by Kierkegaard, William James, G. E. Moore, Paul Tillich, and Karl Barth demonstrated its adaptability and continued importance.

Philosophers loom large in this story. Kant defined himself against René Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy, G. W. Leibniz and Christian Wolff, the leaders of the German Enlightenment, and John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume, the luminaries of British empiricism. By the late 1780s, everyone had to deal with Kant and the beginnings of post-Kantian idealism. Samuel Taylor Coleridge plays a major role in this book for doing so, as Coleridge brought post-Kantian idealism to England. Kierkegaard plays a similar role in the book's scheme by prefiguring the twentieth-century reaction against religious idealism from a standpoint that assumed it. Alfred North Whitehead plays a key role in this book's account of the beginning of process theology in England. None of these thinkers was a theologian.

One should not make too much of the lack of theologians. Schleiermacher and Barth, the major Protestant theologians of the modern era, are central figures in this book's narrative. The book also features theologians Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, Ernst Troeltsch, Hastings Rashdall, William Temple, and Paul Tillich. But it matters that non-theologians played such important roles in founding and shaping modern theology.

Until the eighteenth century, Christian theology operated exclusively within houses of biblical and ecclesiastical authority. External authorities established and compelled what had to be believed on specific points of doctrine if one was to claim the Christian name. In theory, the Anglican tradition cracked open the rule of external authority by making reason an authority second to scripture and (in Richard Hooker's formulation) ahead of church tradition. But Anglican theology up to and through the Enlightenment was cautious about what it meant to recognize the authority of reason. The English tradition, though producing a major forerunner of modern theology, John Locke, did not produce any important founders. An ethos of provincialism and the oppressive weight of the state church slowed the development of liberalizing trends in British theology. Plus, the greatest British philosopher, David Hume, was someone that religious thinkers had to get around, not someone who helped them get somewhere. The modern departure in religious thought had to wait for the later Enlightenment, biblical criticism, the liberalizing of German universities, Kant, an upsurge of Romantic and Absolute idealism, and Schleiermacher's determination to liberalize Christian theology within the context of the Christian church and tradition.

The founding and early development of liberal theology was sufficiently rich in Germany and Britain that this book restricts itself to accounting for it, always in a manner that focuses on the importance of German idealism. I do not pursue the founding of liberal religious thought in other national contexts, aside from occasional references that illuminate what happened in Germany and Britain. I do not take the story of liberal theology beyond the responses of Barth and Tillich to it; otherwise I would have another multi-volume project on my hands. For the same reason, plus two more, I do not describe the attempts to develop a Roman Catholic version of liberal theology that occurred during the historical frame of this account. Roman Catholic Modernism was mostly a French phenomenon, and the Vatican crushed it in the early twentieth century. The development of a Catholic tradition of liberal theology had to wait until Vatican Council II.

For over a century the only distinctly modern approach to theology was the liberal one; thus, when analyzing trends in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theology, I shall use these terms interchangeably, always with the caveat that neither term had a stable meaning until the twentieth century. "Liberal theology" is more complex and slippery than most of the literature about it, and the same thing is true of German idealism. In the former case, an over-identification of liberal theology with late nineteenth-century Progressivist idealism, or a too-simple rendering of a Kant-to-Harnack tradition, made liberal theology too easily debunked by its neo-orthodox detractors, who convinced the rest of the field to define liberalism as they did. In the case of German idealism, complexity was undeniable, but much of the literature gets around it by treating idealism as only one thing or by simplistically rendering Kant as a subjective idealist.

For historical understanding and constructive purposes, it is better not to evade the historical and theoretical complexities. Liberal theology cannot be understood without coming to grips with post-Kantian idealism and its influence in the Kierkegaardian and Barthian reactions to it. More importantly, it cannot be revitalized lacking a robust sense of the divine presence in movements that lift up the poor and oppressed and that contribute to the flourishing of all people and creation.

Imagining Modern Theology

Modern theology began when theologians looked beyond the Bible and Christian tradition for answers to their questions and acknowledged that the mythical aspects of Christian scripture and tradition are mythical. How should theology deal with modern challenges to belief that overthrow the external authority of Christian scripture and tradition? What kind of Christian belief is possible after modern science and Enlightenment criticism desacralized the world? How should Christian theology deal with the mythical aspects of Christianity and the results of biblical criticism? These questions were peculiar to religious thinkers of the modern era; Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin did not ask themselves how to do theology without an infallible external authority or whether Christian myth should be demythologized.¹

Eventually there were distinctly modern theologies that were not liberal; Kierkegaard was the key precursor of that possibility. The founding of modern theology, however, was a decidedly liberal enterprise. The roots of liberalism lie deep in the history of Western thought, especially in the Pauline theme of spiritual freedom, the fifth-century Pelagian emphasis on free will, the limitations on sovereign authority in the Magna Carta

Libertatum of 1215, and the Renaissance humanist stress on free expression, all of which resonate in the modern Western appeal to the rights of freedom. As a political philosophy, liberalism originated in the seventeenth century, asserting that individuals have natural rights to freedom that are universal. As an economic theory it originated in the eighteenth century, asserting the priority of free trade and self-regulating markets. As a cultural/philosophical movement it arose in the eighteenth century as a rationalist critique of tradition and authority-based belief. As a theological tradition it originated in the eighteenth century in tandem with modern humanism, biblical criticism, and Enlightenment philosophy.

Historically and theoretically, the cornerstone of liberalism is the assertion of the supreme value and universal rights of the individual. The liberal tradition of Benedict de Spinoza, John Locke, Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson taught that the universal goal of human beings is to realize their freedom and that state power is justified only to the extent that it enables and protects individual liberty. From the beginning this tradition had an ambiguous, often tortured relationship to its own rhetoric of freedom, for liberalism arose as an ideological justification of capitalism *and* as the recognition that tolerance was the only humane alternative to the religious wars of the seventeenth century. In both cases liberal ideology deemed that vast categories of human beings were disqualified from basic human rights. Liberalism valorized the rights-bearing individual to underwrite the transition to a political economy based on self-interested market exchanges, which benefited the capitalist bourgeoisie. The liberal state tolerated plural religious traditions, which led to the separation of church

and state, which led, eventually, to the principle of tolerance for other kinds of beliefs and practices. The state, under liberalism, became an ostensibly neutral guarantor of the rights of individuals and communities to pursue diverse conceptions of the good life, which did not stop liberals from denying the rights of human beings who were not white, male, and owners of property like themselves.

The founding of modern theology is an aspect of this story. Liberal theology, in my definition, was and is a three-layered phenomenon. Firstly it is the idea that all claims to truth, in theology and other disciplines, must be made on the basis of reason and experience, not by appeal to external authority. From a liberal standpoint, Christian scripture or ecclesiastical doctrine may still be authoritative for theology and faith, but its authority operates within Christian experience, not as an outside word that establishes or compels truth claims about particular matters of fact.²

Secondly, liberal theology argues for the viability and necessity of an alternative to orthodox over-belief and secular disbelief. In Germany, the liberal movement called itself “mediating theology” because it took so seriously the challenge of a rising culture of aggressive deism and atheism. Liberal religious thinkers, unavoidably, had to battle with conservatives for the right to liberalize Christian doctrine. But usually they worried more about the critical challenges to belief from outsiders. The agenda of modern theology was to develop a credible form of Christianity before the “cultured despisers of religion” routed Christian faith from intellectual and cultural respectability. This agenda was expressed in the title of the founding work of modern theology, Schleiermacher's *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (*On Religion:*

Speeches to its Cultured Despisers). Here, Britain was ahead of the curve, as there was an ample tradition of aggressive British deism and skepticism by the time that Schleiermacher wrote. British critics ransacked the Bible for unbelievable things; in Germany, a deceased anonymous deist (Hermann Samuel Reimarus) caused a stir in the mid-1770s by portraying Jesus as a misguided political messiah lacking any idea of being divine; Schleiermacher, surrounded by cultured scoffers in Berlin, contended that true religion and the divinity of Jesus were fully credible on modern terms.³

The third layer consists of specific things that go with overthrowing the principle of external authority and adopting a mediating perspective between authority religion and disbelief. The liberal tradition reconceptualizes the meaning of Christianity in the light of modern knowledge and values. It is reformist in spirit and substance, not revolutionary. It is open to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially historical criticism and the natural sciences. It conceives Christianity as an ethical way of life, it advocates moral concepts of atonement or reconciliation, and it is committed to making progressive religion credible and socially relevant.

This definition is calibrated to describe the entire tradition of liberal theology from Kant and Schleiermacher to the present day. A great deal of the literature in this field defines liberal theology by features that were distinctive to its heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Ritschlian School theology ruled the field and powerful movements for social Christianity existed in England, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States. For most of the twentieth century, the standard definition of liberal theology equated it with Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von

Harnack, and Social Gospel progressivism. Some critics, following Karl Barth, treated Schleiermacher and Hegel as founders of a bad tradition of theology that led straight to Ritschl and Harnack. Other critics, following Paul Tillich and an older usage, identified liberal theology wholly with the bourgeois culture-religion of the Ritschlian School. In both cases, liberal theology was defined, polemically, as Christ-of-culture optimism and modernism - a usage that was adopted by all manner of dialectical, neo-orthodox, Niebuhrian, Anglo-Catholic, Roman Catholic, and conservative evangelical critics. It became so pervasive that even liberal theologians who rejected Progressive era liberalism swallowed the regnant definition. For example, Daniel Day Williams, an American process theologian, offered this definition of liberal theology in 1949: "By 'liberal theology' I mean the movement in modern Protestantism which during the nineteenth century tried to bring Christian thought into organic unity with the evolutionary world view, the movements for social reconstruction, and the expectations of 'a better world' which dominated the general mind. It is that form of Christian faith in which a prophetic-progressive philosophy of history culminates in the expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth."⁴

Here, as was typical by 1949, liberal theology was equated with the evolutionary ideology, cultural optimism, and social idealism of its Social Gospel heyday. It was identified with factors that were peculiar to its dominant moment, 1890 to 1914. A century of pre-Ritschlian liberal theology centered on Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel fell out of this definition; more importantly for twentieth-century critics of liberalism, liberal theology only existed after World War I among tiny bands of idealistic progressives and Christ-of-culture modernists who refused to get their clocks fixed. That did

not describe Williams or any of the liberals that influenced him, notably Alfred North Whitehead and Henry Nelson Wieman, yet Williams recycled the very definition of his tradition that marginalized him and it.

The standard definition was wrong at both ends. It ignored that the liberal tradition had its richest intellectual flowering before Ritschlian theology existed and it denigrated an ongoing tradition that is still creatively refashioning itself a century after World War I. Moreover, the fact that British liberal theology was called “Modernism” is a tribute to the fateful, soon crushed, but creative attempts by Alfred F. Loisy, Maurice Blondel, Lucien Laberthonniere, Friedrich von Hügel, and George Tyrell to imagine a Roman Catholic form of modern theology. The party vehicle of Anglican liberal theology, the Modern Churchmen's Union, embraced the term “Modernism” during the very period that the Vatican abolished liberal wellsprings in the Catholic Church. Although Anglican liberals tended to come from the church's liberal Protestant wing, they respected what their Roman Catholic counterparts had tried to do.⁵

The father of liberal theology, Schleiermacher, did not call himself a liberal, and the icons of liberal theology stood for various things that were far from liberal. These facts considerably complicate the idea, which I endorse, of a liberal tradition that began in the eighteenth century and that remains an important approach today. The key to the ascendancy of liberal theology in the nineteenth century is that it outgrew its origins as an ideology of freethinking criticism to become a theology grounded in, and at home with, the Christian church.

Kantian Liberalism and Mediating Theology

Johann S. Semler, a biblical scholar at the University of Halle, was the first person to embrace the name "*liberalis theologia*," in the late 1760s. Semler was a "neologian," the name by which the founders of German historical criticism identified themselves. They included Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, Johann Jakob Griesbach, J. G. Herder, Johann David Michaelis, F. V. Reinhard, and J. J. Spalding. Before liberal theology existed, there was a basis for it in the work of these pioneering biblical and historical scholars.⁶

The neologians claimed to study the Bible from a scientific standpoint stripped of dogmatic presuppositions. They revolutionized biblical scholarship by deciphering the historical development of the biblical text, rejecting the taxonomical and naturalistic interpretations of rationalist criticism. They took a third way between orthodox supernaturalism and deist criticism, charging that both were ideological, superficial, and lacking in critical rigor. Revelation confirms the truths of reason, they argued. The Old Testament contains myths like other scriptures, not all parts of the Bible are equally inspired, and the gospels were written out of distinct historical contexts that shaped what Christianity became. Semler, responding to a public outcry over Reimarus' interpretation of the gospels (which was published by G. E. Lessing), charged that Reimarus offered sloppy scholarship and warmed-over deist tropes. There is such a thing as a rational Christianity that sticks to facts and does not indulge in special pleading of any kind, Semler urged. This was the kind of Christianity that suited the modern age. Under Semler's leadership, Halle became the center of critical theology in the 1750s and

sustained this leadership position into the 1780s, when a declining Semler backed away from defending academic freedom. By the 1780s, the neologians had embraced *liberalis theologia* as the best name for their party, now under the intellectual leadership of a commanding thinker, Immanuel Kant.⁷

The expressed aim of the original liberal theologians was to win doctrinal freedom in the church by diminishing the power of the regnant Lutheran orthodoxy. "Liberal theology" was the moniker of an agenda, achieving doctrinal freedom, and a group, the Kantian theologians. Before 1789 it was possible to fight for intellectual freedom in the German church without getting political. Kant was cagey in dealing with the politics, as were the neologians. All had to deal with the tyranny of the princes, and most were grateful to King Friedrich II (Frederick the Great) for tolerating, to a point, opinionated intellectuals. But Friedrich II died in 1786, and three years later the French Revolution broke out. Keeping religion and politics separate became impossible, especially for republican types like Kant, especially under a king, Friedrich Wilhelm II, that Kant loathed. In 1792 Kant published a book about religion, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*; two years later the king censored Kant for disseminating wrong views about religion.

Kant submitted to silencing, waited for Friedrich Wilhelm II to die in 1797, and resumed writing about religion. *Liberalis theologia* became known, above all, for the belief that religious and political freedom go together, though Kant's first three biographers, all theologians that knew him personally, played down his republican radicalism. The public identity of liberal theology was solidified in Germany during the fall of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic invasions, an upsurge of

German nationalism, and the rise of a so-called “Restorationist” government, which in fact established a new political order under the trappings of the old one. The “Restoration” of 1815 had little to do with the absolutism of eighteenth-century princes and everything to do with the rise of state absolutism.

In this historical and political context, cautious reformers like Schleiermacher and Hegel were sometimes called liberals, but ownership of the term was usually reserved for pushy types like biblical scholar Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette and philosopher Jakob Friedrich Fries. Old-style rationalists such as Carl Gottlieb Bretschneider, Wilhelm Traugott Krug and H. G. Tzschirner also held out for freethinking religious liberalism. Hans-Joachim Birkner and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, countering the myth of a homogeneous German liberal tradition, rightly stress that the self-identifying liberals of Hegel's time fought as hard for human rights, freedom of opinion, and freedom of the press as they fought for their right to academic freedom in interpreting Christianity. The willingness of liberals to cause trouble on these topics was a cautionary specter to Schleiermacher, and, to Hegel in his later life, an odious one.⁸

Formally, Schleiermacher and Hegel were both liberals in religion and politics. But Schleiermacher was a moderate reformer in politics, Hegel grew cynical and conservative about politics in his later life, and in their time, “liberal theology” meant freethinking religious thought removed from the ongoing life of the Christian church. This radical idea of liberal theology, a Kantian notion, was a non-starter for Schleiermacher. He was an every-week preacher who sharply separated his philosophy from his theology. Though Schleiermacher was a Romantic and a post-Kantian, his crowning work was a liberal dogmatics – an oxymoron to freethinking liberals.

Schleiermacher saw no reason to renounce the church's tradition of dogmatic theology; what was needed was a thoroughly modern refashioning of it. Good theology held no bias against the church or its dogmatic tradition. It was completely at home in Christian communities that broke free from the old houses of authority, as long as they held out for the right to do so.

The association of liberal theology with freethinking Kantianism was sufficiently strong that even most of Schleiermacher's disciples did not call themselves liberal theologians after Schleiermacher was gone. "Mediating theology," a form of church theology holding a secure place in the academy, suited them perfectly. Only as the legacy of Schleiermacher expanded through his disciples (Carl Ullmann, C. I. Nitzsch, August Twisten, Willibald Beyschlag), and a leading Pietist (Friedrich August Tholuck), and two blenders of Schleiermacher and Hegel (Richard Rothe and Isaak August Dorner) did "liberal theology" begin to be used in a broader sense than the usual one of freethinking or scientific criticism, and even then, the name belonged mostly to freethinkers and culture-religionists.⁹

Advocates of freethinking liberal theology did not surrender the category without a fight. In the 1840s they called themselves "friends of light," espousing a radical democratic ideology often linked with democratic nationalism. Mediating theologians like Rothe and Dorner replied that they, too, believed in intellectual freedom, human rights, and liberal theology. They opposed the mid-century alliance between confessional orthodoxy and the German police state. They wanted a liberalized, united state church that held together Germany's disparate populations in a common religious culture. Germany could not be a successful empire if it lacked a unifying religion, they warned. Liberal theology as

represented by later mediating theology and the movement that overtook it, Ritschlian theology, underwrote the civil religion of an expanding German empire - culture Protestantism. In that form it achieved its greatest influence and power, on degraded terms.¹⁰

The Ritschlian movement led by Ritschl, Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, and (before and after he morphed away) Ernst Troeltsch got some important things right; otherwise it would have lacked the power to overtake a distinguished intellectual tradition. It made an advance in modern theology by accentuating the social and historical character of religion. It was the vehicle that lifted Kant to a prominent place in church-based modern theology. It produced unsurpassed historical scholarship on Christianity, in the works of Harnack. Its Troeltschian offshoot established the history of religions approach to religion, a major achievement. But the Ritschlian School also set up German liberal theology for a mighty fall, at the very moment when Britain belatedly acquired a liberal movement.

Ironically, even the Ritschlians usually did not call themselves liberals, although they were eventually blamed for ruining liberal theology. In Ritschl's time, bourgeois optimists like Otto Pfleiderer claimed the liberal name, asserting their belief in the progress of modern culture. Pfleiderer, a religious philosopher and professor of theology at the University of Berlin, wrote influential works on the philosophy and history of religion, conceiving his perspective as a straightforward outgrowth of Kantian, Schleiermacherian, and Hegelian idealism. At Berlin, he was the only member of the theological faculty to vote against Harnack's invitation to teach there. German theology had no need of a Ritschlian corrective, Pfleiderer believed; thus, Berlin had no need of Harnack,