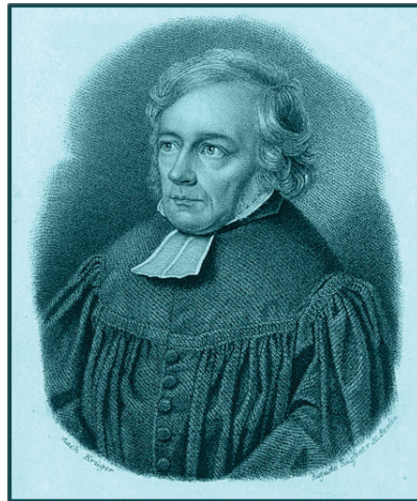


With the end of the Exodus series, I have decided to do a short church history series, a brief summer diversion. My thought was to take significant figures from our heritage as Christians and highlight one each week, men and women who have very much shaped our present understanding of the teachings of the Bible (both negatively and positively). My thought is to survey their lives, tell their stories, and then explain how they have shaped Christian understanding.

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher
(21 November 1768- 12 February 1834)



Friedrich Schleiermacher
(1768-1834)

“He did not found a school, but an era.” Karl Barth

I. The Outline of Schleiermacher’s Life

1768: Schleiermacher was born in Breslau, Prussia (now Poland), into a Christian family. His grandfather, Daniel, was a pastor and his father, Gottlieb, a chaplain in the Prussian army of the Reformed Tradition of Protestantism though the family was attracted to the Moravian Pietist tradition as well.

(Daniel was a founder of the Zionist Movement [1730], a radical apocalyptic premillennial movement that emphasized extra-biblical revelation, visions, and prophecy. A co-founders wife claimed to be the bearer of the Christ when she became pregnant [she had a girl!]. Daniel left the movement in 1744 when Eller's wife died. Daniel confessed his error.)

1783-1786: He was sent to a Moravian boarding school to prepare for college. It was there that his initial doubts his Christian heritage emerged.

1787-1790: He studied at the University of Halle, formerly a pietistic school (the location of the founding of the Danish-Halle Mission, and the center of German Pietism), but by that time deeply rationalistic in approach. Here he was introduced to Higher Criticism of the Bible under Johann Semler and the epistemology of Immanuel Kant.

There his doubts of the authenticity of Christian Faith emerged. On 21 January 1787, he wrote his father, "Faith is the regalia of the Godhead, you say. Alas! dearest father, if you believe that without this faith no one can attain to salvation in the next world, nor to tranquility in this—and such, I know, is your belief—oh! then pray to God to grant it to me, for to me it is now lost. I cannot believe that he who called himself the Son of Man was the true, eternal God; I cannot believe that his death was a vicarious atonement."

1790's: He assumed several posts after Halle (a private tutor for the children of a wealthy family and chaplaincy in a Berlin hospital).

1802-1804: He pastored a small Reformed church in Pomerania.

1804-1807: He was employed as a university preacher and professor of theology at Halle.

1808: He returned to Berlin (caused by Napoleon's occupation of Halle) and subsequently married the widow of a friend, Henrietta von Muhlenfels. They had a son (he died at age nine [1820-1829]).

1810-1834: He moved to Berlin and was one of the founders of the university where he lectured until his retirement; he also served as Dean of the

Faculty. In 1821-22, also, he published *The Christian Faith*, a systematic theology. During those years, he served as pastor of Holy Trinity Church. There he earned the titles, “Father of Modern Protestant Theology.”

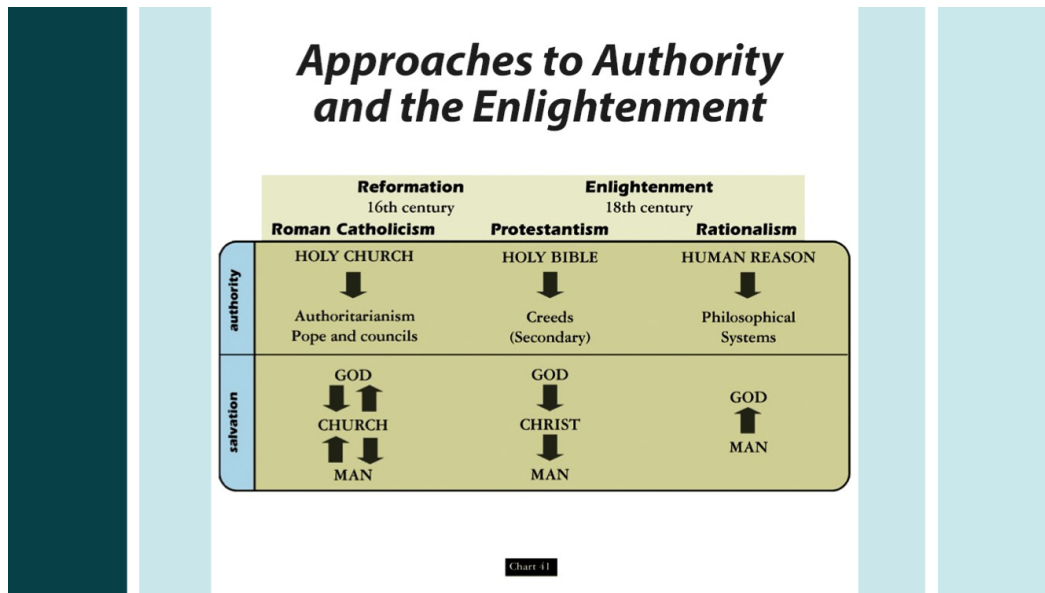
Summarizing his life and contribution, one writer noted: “Friedrich Schleiermacher was a brilliant scholar, but unfortunately, he could not accept what his intellect and reason could not master. As a result, he rejected true Christianity even as he purported to try to save it. He opened the door for others to question or reject the most basic Christian doctrines while still claiming to be faithful Christians. This trend is still popular today as is the idea that, if Christianity is to survive, it must change with the times.”

II. The Assumptions of Schleiermacher in the revision of Christian Faith

A. The Context: The Thirty-Years War (1618-1648)

The Reformation brought crisis. If the church is not to be trusted, a false truth revealed after a millennium, where do we find it?

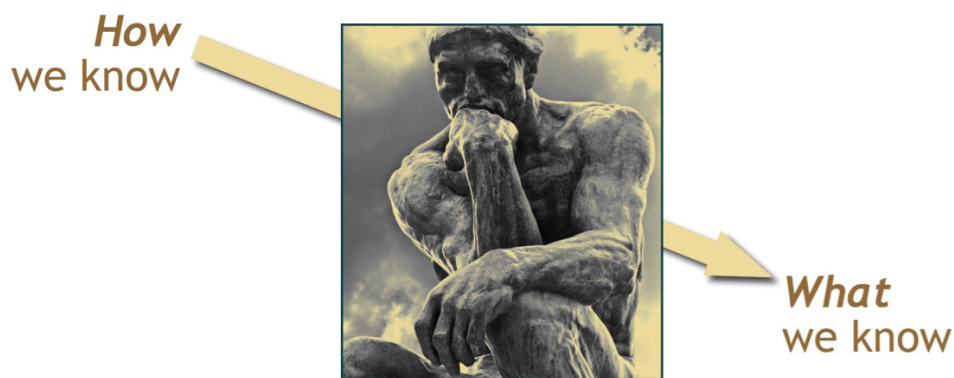
The Roman Church said, “Trust the church which has been the citadel of truth forever.” The reformers argued, “Trust the Bible as revealed through the Spirit of God to the conscience informed by the revelation of God.”



The Thirty-Years War demonstrated, it appeared, that neither was a safe refuge as Germany was ravished by war destroying 1/3 of its people.

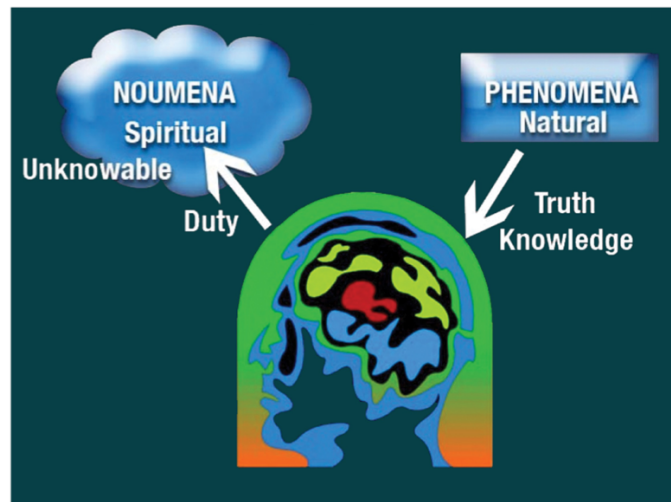
- B. The Influence of Immanuel Kant: How and What can be known.
This gave rise to the Enlightenment, a turning inward as opposed to something beyond us for rescue. If so, what is the place of God and the church? How do you find a place for it?

“How” Determines “What” (Epistemology)



The answer is found in the attempt to place authority within, not through external sources. Divorced from the church as well as the authority of the Bible, the rise of philosophy found a hopeful answer in either the conscience (Romanticism, the individual self in communion with self and nature) or the intellect (the rise of the sciences and advancement in technology) to improve not only life itself but failure in the quest to improve human nature.

Philosophy of Immanuel Kant



Since how you know determines what you know, the formula of the philosopher/logician Kant dominated subsequent centuries mandating how truth is formulated and religion finds its new place.

III. The Reconstruction of Christian Faith by Schleiermacher

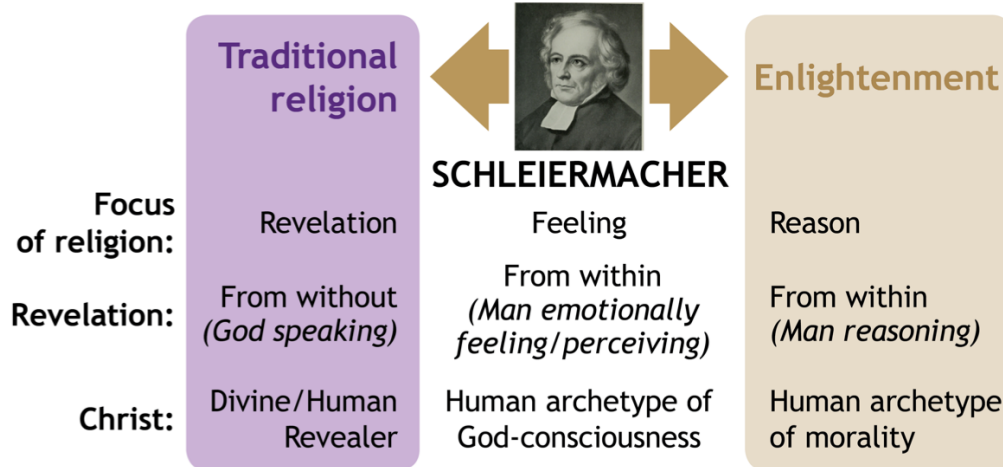
“It would be roughly true to say that he has put discovery in the place of revelation, religious consciousness in the place of the Word of God, and the mere ‘not yet’ of imperfection in the place of sin” (MackIntosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, 100).

If Kant is correct in his understanding of what we can know and how we do so, the old foundations of Christian faith must be abandoned, but abandoned to what? How do you preserve a place for Christianity, a dominate place, and yet reject the past? This endeavor, at least at its rebellious inception, is found in Friedrich Schleiermacher.

A. How do we know truth about religion according to Schleiermacher?

God has placed in us a category called “God consciousness” that sits in authority over and gives credibility to the Word of God! Thus, inward feelings about a subject determines the structure and meaning of it. Schleiermacher assumed the fallacy of past constructions of the Faith but saw limits to the use of reason. He placed authority in subjective feeling, rather than reason alone

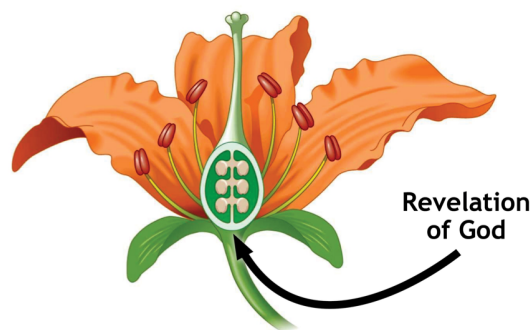
The Enlightenment and Traditional Religion: Schleiermacher's attempt to preserve True Religion



B. What is the Bible to Schleiermacher?

Following Kant, as have theologians since to reconstruct Christianity, he sought to re-envision Christian Faith to make it attractive to the rational mind embracing the notion that the Scriptures are not authority because it makes the claim, but is only so to the extent that we believe it to be so. "Such authority we do not ascribe uniformly to every part of our Holy Scriptures, but only in proportion as the writers attained to the condition just described, so that casual expressions and what are merely side-thoughts do not possess the same degree of normativeness as belongs to whatever may at each point be the main subject."

The "New Theology" and the Bible



picture credit: Pearson Education, Inc

C. Who is Jesus to Schleiermacher?

To Schleiermacher, Jesus was a man, yet more than that; he was an inspiring example of a life filled with “God consciousness.” The “Mystery of the Trinity” is resolved by attributing to Jesus the supremacy of being the ideal exemplar of God. He denied the Trinity of God!

If not God, who was Jesus? Schleiermacher asserted the “divinity of Christ” and stressed that he was the “ideal of humanity” in that He possessed true god-consciousness. Mackintosh wrote (*Thoughts*. II, 385): “The Redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature but distinguished from them all by the constancy of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him.”

He redefined “divinity” to mean “likeness.” Jesus is divine, but not deity because of the depth of his awareness of God consciously. He had great feeling for God!

He redefined the Virgin Birth to mean that he was born with the greatest level of god-consciousness. Thus, he defined sinlessness as the absence of the awareness of the emotion of dependence on God. He simply redefined the terms!! Thus, Schleiermacher has a two-natured Christ which in reality is one. His humanness is swallowed in godness. Godness is not actual, but implanted at his “supernatural” birth. His Christ is a god-intoxicated, deeply dependent man; an example for men to follow!

D. What did Christ accomplish for us according to Schleiermacher?

According to Schleiermacher, Christ’s death provided for us an inspiring model of devotion to God, an example of the true meaning of human consciousness. He viewed the atonement as an act of sympathy

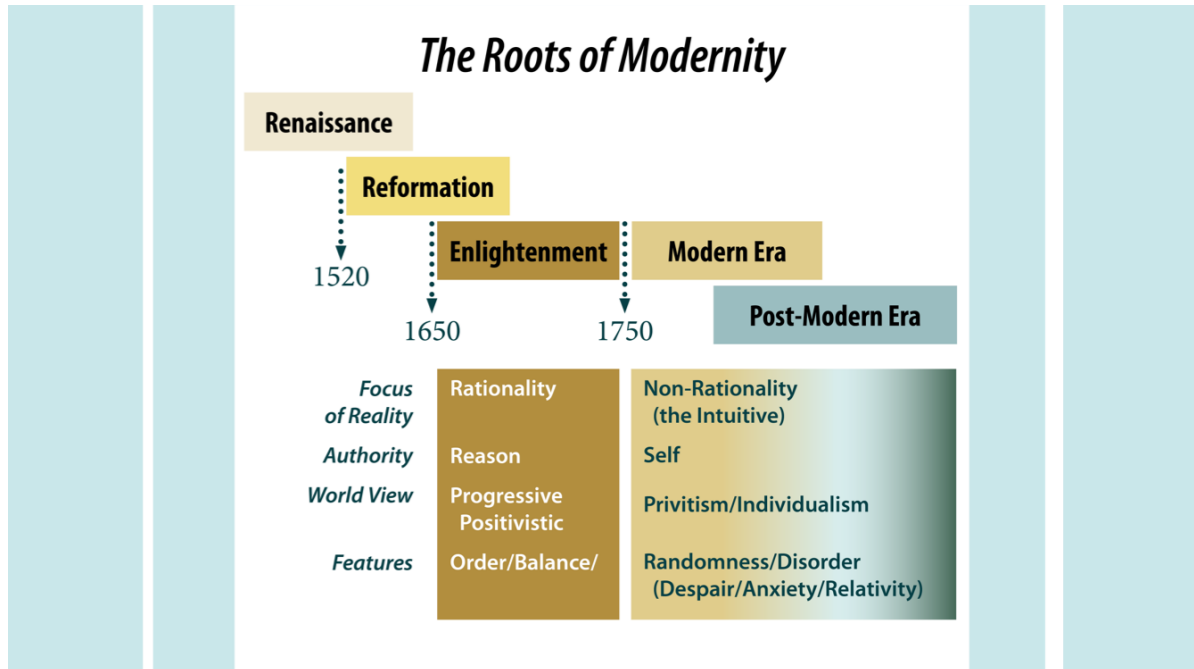
Thus, the incarnation is the mystery of the love of God to man, which really is the love of man for himself. The resurrection of Christ is “the fulfilled wtnence after death.”

E. What is salvation according to Schleiermacher?

Redemption is the state on living one’s life in dependence on God as exemplified by Jesus. He reduced salvation to a psychological mind-set. He saw Christ as an example to following, a moral guide!

IV. The Collapse of the Enlightenment Endeavor to Rationalize Christianity

The 350-year endeavor to create a safe world by marginalizing and reinterpreting Christian Faith ended in the rise of the radical individualism and tribalism of post-Modernism. The attempt to accommodate the meaning of Christianity to the wisdom of natural revelation has failed bringing us a world on the brink of self-destruction.



“Dancing House,” Prague, Czech Republic

architects: Vlado Milunić & Frank Gehry, 1996



Applications:

1. I wonder the Moravian pietistic emphasis, which helped Wesley embrace the true Christ, drove Schleiermacher away from Him. We can really never know the answer in this case, but I think past experiences, delights and revulsions, are formative in shaping us into adulthood. Schleiermacher recoiled at the Moravian emphasis on the “wounds of Christ” graphically delineated. Perhaps the overemphasis on the horror of Jesus’ death led him to desire to run from it.
2. Schleiermacher was gifted to be born into a Christian home with godly parents, yet he never experienced the wonder of what his parents taught him. The redemption of our children is not a product of inheritance or DNA. We must be careful to teach, live, and pray for them that God would make Jesus truly real to them.
3. With the virulent, intellectual assault on the Christian Faith of the last several centuries, our Lord’s kingdom has suffered no loss. There are more of us today than at any other time. Though tragic things have slammed into the visible church, it has not and will not fail. The devil is alive and well, but his doom is sure! John tells us that “many antichrists have gone into the world (I John 2:18),” yet their blight has been and will be overcome through the blood of the cross.
4. These are great days to be living as Christians, not only because we are secure in Christ, but the world around us increasingly is provided evidence that it has lost its way, that the retreat into selfishness only precipitates more of the pain

they are seeking to avoid. We have been called to be people of hope and peace for a people only now realizing on a culture level the emptiness of the soul they sought to deny within them. It is out time to “Lift High the Cross.”

5. We should all rejoice and praise God that he allowed us through the provision of His own son to know true forgiveness and peace. The adage goes like this, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” Are you not glad that God lead you to such beautiful, thirst-quenching water that you could not resist any longer from drinking it? I am!! Jesus said to the lady at Sychar’s well, “Everyone who drinks of this water shall never thirst again...” (John 4:13).