

Theological Conservatism and Liberalism

Traditional/Conservative Theology

Basis of Authority:

General revelation as mediated through God's creation and the moral truths inherent in natural law, and special revelation as mediated through the Bible (as properly interpreted).

John Chrysostom: "A Christian is one who agrees with Holy Scripture, and he who does not agree with it has deviated from the one true faith."

Conservatives accept the core doctrines of the historic Christian faith as summarized in the early creeds.

Philosophy of the Bible:

Divinely-inspired.

Historically reliable.

Doctrinally authoritative.

Morally authoritative.

The Bible has been accurately preserved and transmitted through the centuries.

If the Bible seems to contradict our current understanding of history or science, either...

(1) our biblical hermeneutic is wrong; or

(2) current historical or scientific theories are incorrect.

Doctrine of the Trinity:

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are three co-equal and co-eternal Persons who share a single divine nature.

Christology:

Jesus Christ is God incarnate and the spiritual Savior of humanity who died an atoning death on the cross for the sins of humanity and was raised from the dead.

The Human Condition:

Due to the effects of the Fall, human beings are naturally sinful, alienated from God, and in need of salvific grace.

Human Destiny:

Human beings will live in a conscious state of existence for all eternity either in Heaven or Hell.

Basic Christianity:

The true essence of Christianity is the salvific mission of Jesus Christ who reconciles us to God and who is the sole Mediator between God and mankind.

Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy are indivisible, symbiotic and synergistic.

Liberal/Progressive Theology

Basis of Authority:

Rationalism – Knowledge gained through the natural sciences, the social sciences, and human experience.

William Ellery Channing: "I am surer that my rational nature is from God than that any book is an expression of his will."

Liberals question or reject core biblical doctrines including God's active involvement in human affairs, the divine inspiration of the Bible, the Fall, the reality of miracles, the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the deity of Christ, the Atonement, and the physical/bodily Resurrection of Christ.

Philosophy of the Bible:

An ancient religious text of mostly human origins.

A mix of history, myth and legend.

There are no doctrinal absolutes; beliefs are subjective and relative.

Morality is relative; the Bible contains some profound wisdom but also many outdated moral and social values.

The biblical text has been corrupted in the transmission process through the centuries.

If the Bible contradicts current theories in the natural and social sciences, the Bible is out-dated and wrong.

Doctrine of the Trinity:

There is one God. Jesus Christ was certainly a unique man who in some sense became the adopted "Son of God," but the doctrine of the Trinity is an irrational superstition.

Christology:

Jesus Christ, although merely a man, was a gifted rabbi, social prophet and spiritual leader who lived an exemplary life and taught some profound moral and ethical truths.

The Human Condition:

Human beings are basically good. Evil is the product of biological abnormalities and/or unjust social and political systems.

Human Destiny:

Human beings will live in a conscious state of existence for all eternity in Heaven (universalism), or perhaps some will exist for a time (or for all eternity) in Hell, or perhaps otherwise cease to exist (annihilationism).

Basic Christianity:

The essence of Christianity is ethical humanitarianism based on the moral teachings of Jesus as summarized in the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount.

What truly matters is orthopraxy, not orthodoxy.

