

## European Protestantism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

### Friedrich Schleiermacher



**Romanticism** was a movement of the arts and literature in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that asserted that what was most important in the composition of a beautiful work of art was **feeling** (not thought), what came directly from the **heart** (and not from the head). What you **experience** is very important (not necessarily what you *think*). The romantic idea also had a significant influence on the study of Protestant theology.

**Friedrich Schleiermacher** (1768-1834) was a seminal theologian, who had an enormous impact on Protestant theology and biblical studies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was much influenced by the evangelical **religion of the heart** popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Wesley and the Pietists in Germany). Schleiermacher stayed away from dogmatic formulations. His understanding of religion was that it was a

**feeling/consciousness/ experience of a relationship with God**, that we are part of a greater unity in the universe, that we are **dependent upon God**, a powerful and loving entity. His idea of **church** was a community of like-feeling people expressing together their common experience of God. His understanding of **scripture** was that it is a record of a people’s experience of God: the Old Testament expresses the religious experience/vision of the ancient Hebrew people; the New Testament expresses the experience of the early Christian community; both Protestant and Catholic communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century express their own experience of religious reality in the modern era. He was obviously very **ecumenical** – all religions have their own unique dignity and validity (a typical Romantic idea) – and by any standard pretty relativistic; there doesn’t seem to be any one true religion, but they all have their own truth and are in some way close to God. His ideas were generally atypical of Protestant thought throughout the centuries.

### Protestant Biblical Scholarship

One of the main events in the history of **Protestantism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century** was the development of a new biblical scholarship that reflected the cultural and historical orientation of Schleiermacher and other Romantic theologians. This research took place primarily in the research-oriented **German universities**, which were clearly the best and the freest in the world until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (they were the models used by American reformers reorganizing American universities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century). David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach were notable proponents of historical criticism in mid-century.

The great Protestant leaders, Luther and Calvin, were in some sense precursors of modern biblical scholarship, since they broke cleanly with the complex, often allegorical, interpretation of scripture practiced by medieval Catholic scholars, and they advocated focusing on the “plain meaning of the scripture” (not to be confused with a “fundamentalist” literal interpretation of it).



The University of Heidelberg

19<sup>th</sup> century biblical scholars broke with previous traditions of study of the Bible, and sought to apply the procedures of literary criticism (derived in part from the study of Homer in the previous century) and

**historical scholarship** (exemplified by Leopold von Ranke’s “scientific history,” “wie es eigentlich geschehen” – “as it really happened”) to the study of the scripture. **Evolutionary ideas** were also generally in the air in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; in England, France and Germany, scholars tended to study biology, history, and religion from an evolutionary perspective – one period evolves organically and gradually out of another; the best way to understand something is to trace it back to its roots and find out where it came from.

Biblical criticism is the scholarly investigation of Biblical writings. German scholars studied both **lower criticism** (a search for the best, most reliable biblical texts that are closest to their Christian and Hebrew sources), and **higher criticism** (the **historical and critical approach** to the interpretation of the Bible).

Biblical scholars considered biblical texts to have human rather than merely supernatural origins. Rather than treat the texts as sources of orthodox formulations of dogma or personal inspiration to Christians of any era, they sought to place the biblical texts in their own historical and cultural contexts so as better to understand them; they treated the biblical writings as ancient texts that should be investigated so as to understand “the world behind the text”. They sought to discover the **true human authors** of the biblical texts, the conditions under which they wrote their pieces, the cultural and historical influences on their texts, the sources they used in their composition, and what message they were intended to convey; they were interested also in the relations among the writers of these texts, and the relationship of the biblical texts to other writings and histories of ancient times.



**Leopold von Ranke**

The German scholars thought that they had to go back to basics: for the time being abstract themselves from the spiritual weight of the texts and be “purely factual and descriptive”. Once the facts had been established, then scholars could return to religious and spiritual issues in the text; the assumption was that then the Christian message could be better understood and that Christians open to secular and liberal influences would have a better chance of remaining believers.



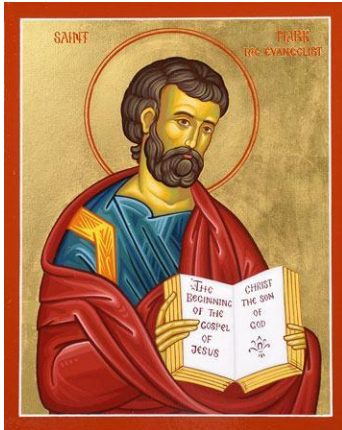
**Michelangelo's  
Moses**

These critics applied their methods to the **Old (Hebrew) Testament**. They discovered that *Isaiah* was not composed by a single author, but probably by two. Most startling was the reconstruction of the authorship of the **Pentateuch** (the first five books of the Old Testament) that tradition had believed to be composed exclusively by Moses. Several generations of scholars concluded that there were probably four different authors, whose work was brought together by two editors, the J Editor, and the E Editor, who worked sometime later after the Hebrew Exile. These scholars focused on reconstructing the history of Israel through the Old Testament record.

They also compared Old Testament narratives with others from the Ancient Near East. For example, the stories of the Garden of Eden and the Flood are contained in both *Genesis* and the Babylonian epic *Gilgamesh*. Although the details of the myths contained in these accounts are similar, their distinctive world views (**experiences**) are quite different: in contrast to the unreliability, impulsiveness, and jealousy toward humans of the Babylonian gods, the Hebrew God is loving, consistent, and a fellow who will never break his word

(he is faithful to his covenant). A modern reading of Genesis does not take it as an objective historical or scientific record, but as a record of the Hebrews' self-understanding; once you understand that, you can tease out the spiritual message (the loving and faithful God).

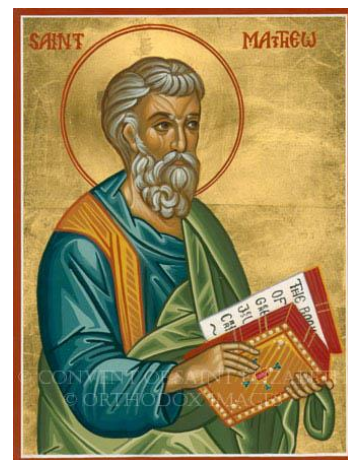
In such a context, the famous **“prophecy” of Isaiah 7:14** (“A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son, and will call him Immanuel”) would be interpreted as not being a prophecy of the coming of Jesus, as Matthew claimed in Mt 1:22, but as pointing to a more imminent political Messiah who would deliver the Hebrews from their contemporary tribulations.



**St. Mark, the Evangelist**

a lot about Himself and his relation to the Father – Who am I (Jesus)? (He is the Word!) What is my relation to the Father? Is Jesus God in the same sense as the Father, etc. The biblical scholars concluded that the gospel of John was a later theological interpretation of Jesus and his ministry, not as close to the source as the other three gospels.

The **order of composition** departs from the traditional interpretation, in which Matthew was thought to have been written first (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). Most scholars concluded that **Mark came first**, followed by Matthew and Luke, who were writing at more or less the same time. The latter two probably had the narrative of Mark in front of them as they wrote; even the language they use is often almost identical to that of Mark – in writing about the abomination of desolation both Mark and Matthew use the parenthetical phrase “let the reader take notice of this” (Mark 13:14 and Matt 24:15-16) indicating that Matthew had a written copy of Mark in front of him. Mark however emphasizes the actions, particularly the miracles, of Jesus and has him speaking very little. To explain the presence of many passages in Matthew and Luke where Jesus is teaching (Sermon on the Mount, the Prodigal Son, “Lilies of the Valley...,” etc.), scholars concluded that both of these authors must have had another common source, **“Q”** (‘Quelle’ or ‘source’ in German), in front of them that contained the sayings of Jesus; they also thought the two authors each had a third separate source that accounted for some of their differences. (None of these putative sources have ever been discovered.) John was in a different line with major differences in focus, narrative, geography and writing style; if he was consulting the other gospels, he didn’t pay much attention to them.



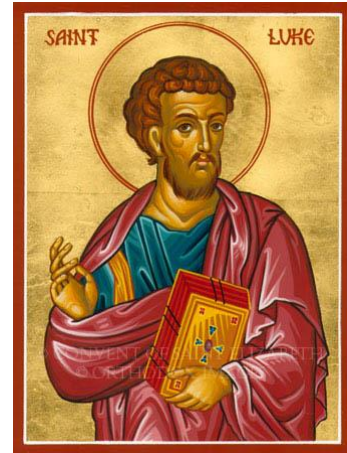
Perhaps the main reason for the differences in emphasis and point of view among the gospels is that they were thought to be written for **different faith communities**. Most

scholars believe that **Mark** was writing for the community of **Roman Christians**. His emphasis on Jesus' wonderworking and his eschatological predictions of the **imminent end of the world** ("The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent, and believe the Gospel." Mark 1:15) were meant to encourage the Roman Christians in the midst of their isolation and persecution in perhaps the 60s AD; they should be steadfast and patient, they could expect relief to come soon.

**Matthew** appears to be writing to the community of **Jewish Christians**. He often makes the point that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Hebrew law and that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah.

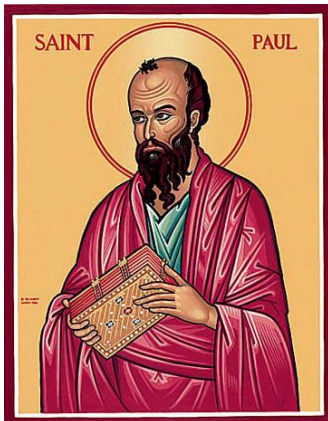
"Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete. I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law until all that must happen has happened." Mt 5: 17-20

According to Matthew, the prophecy in Isaiah 9:6-7 that "a boy has been born for us, a son given to us to bear the symbol of dominion on his shoulder; and he shall be called...Prince of peace" is a prophecy of the ministry of Jesus and not a prediction of an imminent earthly messiah in the time of Isaiah, as was presumably the intention of the writer of Isaiah.



**St. Luke the Evangelist**

On the other hand, **Luke** is writing for the benefit of **gentile Christians**. In Luke Jesus does not emphasize his connection with the Hebrew law, but he makes it clear that Jesus' message was valid for *all* men and not just Jews. In **Acts** (also written by Luke) the author's hero is Paul, the author of *Romans* and the great preacher of the good news to the Greeks and Romans, who did not warm to the prospect of adhering to every small aspect of the Jewish law (e.g., dietary laws and circumcision). Remember too that according to Paul in 'Romans' Abraham was not saved by the Jewish law – by the act of being circumcised – but by faith, which would be presumably open to all men and not just the Jews. When Peter while preaching was challenged by Jewish Christians about gentiles also converting to Christianity, he described how the Holy Spirit came down upon them at Pentecost just as they had to the [Jewish] disciples:



**Saint Paul**

God gave them [the gentiles] no less a gift than he gave us when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; how could I possibly stand in God's way?  
Acts 11:17

The gospels of Matthew, Luke and John also differed from Mark in that overall they did not give the impression that the end of the world was imminent, but that Christians should make plans for living and preaching in the world for some time (Mark 1:15 – 'The kingdom of God is near'; Mark 9: 1: ...there are some standing here that will not taste death until they have seen the kingdom of God come in power.") In the gospel of Luke Jesus tells his disciples just before his Ascension that "repentance...should be preached in His (Jesus') names to all nations beginning at Jerusalem", (Lk 24:47) presumably something not necessary if Jesus' second coming was imminent.

These scholars also concluded that **Paul** was not the author of all of the epistles traditionally attributed to him: he certainly or probably wrote 1 Thessalonians, both Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon and

Philippians, but probably not the rest, which were probably composed by authors who were associates or disciples of Paul. **Hebrews** is a good example. Although most traditions ascribed its authorship to Paul, there were doubts as early as the second century. Modern scholars however almost unanimously reject Paul's authorship, citing the lack of any claim of authorship within the text (Paul almost always did this) and important stylistic and theological differences between Paul's authentic letters and Hebrews.

The pioneer scholars agreed that Paul's epistles were the first composed of all the New Testament sacred writings.

Thus, secular ideas of scholarship and research challenge traditional ways of looking at the Bible: they aligned the study of the Bible to the methods and approaches then being developed in history and literary studies.

### **Liberal Protestantism and the Historical Jesus, 1860-1940**

By the middle of the century scholars became interested in the **historical Jesus** – using reliable historical sources to go behind the Jesus of faith, behind the Jesus of the early Christian faith community in, say, the 4<sup>th</sup> century, to determine the circumstances and events of Jesus' life and his statements: who was this human being who walked the roads of ancient Israel, recruited disciples, apparently performed miracles, and was executed by the Romans? The New Testament documents were an important source, but especially in more recent decades scholars also used extra canonical texts like the Gnostic Gospels, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Qumran scriptures (all discovered later) as additional sources, which were not generally available to scholars before the Second World War.



**Ernest Renan**

The fascination with the historical Jesus is still alive in the contemporary world. Dozens of books have been published on the subject in past decades. For example, the **Jesus Seminar**, which was centered in Santa Rosa, California, focused on extracting the real sayings and action of Jesus from the gospel accounts, and they depicted him as “a colorful sort, more given to feasting than fasting and hanging around with disreputable types of which his family probably disapproved.” (Claudia Setzer)

1) **Ernest Renan** (1823-1892) in his *Vie de Jésus* (1863) applied contemporary principles of “scientific” historical investigation to Jesus' life. He was also a secular liberal, a skeptic and a descendant of the Enlightenment that one could not expect to take seriously the supernatural aspect of Jesus' life, and there can be little doubt that the conclusions of his study were influenced by his philosophical bias.

He focused on the circumstances of Jesus' family and upbringing that he insisted were **ordinary**; he had brothers and sisters like other children. He sometimes asserts that the young Jesus had an “amiable character” and “extraordinary sweetness” from whom an “infinite charm was exhaled.”

According to Renan, Jesus proclaimed the imminence of the apocalyptic “**the kingdom of God**” in the later part of his public ministry before he decided to emphasize his teachings through parables. But he **never claimed that he was God** (the term ‘Son of God’ in the context of Jewish tradition does not necessarily imply divinity; and in any case the term is used only in John, which is too far from Jesus' actual life to be considered accurate). Jesus' Davidic genealogy contained in the beginning of Matthew's gospel was inserted by his followers and not him; “none of them [the genealogies] were sanctioned by Jesus.”

The author goes to particular length to discredit the **miracle** stories associated with Jesus, whom he describes as a gentle-minded man of the people and a preacher of ethics. Renan indicates that the evidence for true miracles is skimpy, and that in any case, Jesus attached little importance to them: they were merely “performances” to establish his preaching credibility alongside the other thaumaturges of the day. In most cases they were credited to him by his followers – “The miracles of Jesus were a violence done to him by his age.”



**Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead**

**Rumor and credulity** are perhaps most important in explaining why Jesus’ wonderworking was so famous. When the scholar eliminates the miracle stories and the undocumented claims that Jesus was God, one is left with the traditional Protestant liberal assertion that what matters in Jesus’ life is his ethical teaching that brought a moral revolution to the ancient Mediterranean world. “The exorcist and the thaumaturgus [wonderworker] have alike passed away; but the religious reformer will live eternally....”

Renan’s account of the **Resurrection** emphasizes the empty tomb and the rumors that Christ was risen; he attributes the origin of the rumors to the enthusiasm (hysteria?) of his followers, particularly the love-obsessed **Mary Magdalen** (and perhaps other women followers of Jesus) who had a “strong imagination”. Stories about the Resurrection of Jesus were a “legend”; “For the historian, the life of Jesus finishes with his last breath.” He asserts that Jesus’ body was stolen from the tomb, but doesn’t explain to us who did it or why. A movie scenario based on Renan would not show the risen Christ, but only a shot of the empty tomb followed by a scene establishing the *rumor* that he was risen. His denial of the Resurrection undercuts further Jesus’ status as the Savior of humanity.

Aside from making the (partially successful) effort to depict the character of Jesus and his social and cultural surroundings, Renan’s conclusions about Jesus were not much different from those of the **Enlightenment writers** such as Voltaire and Thomas Jefferson.

**2) Liberal Protestantism** was very influential in western Protestant circles at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Most European and North American Protestants were influenced by liberal Protestant theology in this period. The liberal Protestants differed from the secular liberals such as Renan in that the former were committed Christians.



The German religious historian **Adolf Harnack** (1851-1930) was one of its most illustrious proponents. Harnack is not much interested in the historical Jesus, but in what Jesus is saying to us about our lives in 1890; Jesus speaks loud and clear to us across the centuries; the essence of his mission was to give a **universal moral and ethical message to all humanity**.

In his *What is Christianity?* he emphasizes several main concepts:

1) the **loving protection of God the Father** toward all of us; all Christians should feel **safe** and secure under the protection of the Father; when we pray to the Father, we are certain of being heard. Jesus tells us that the Father will care for us as He cares for the sparrows and flowers (Mt 6:26). We should have “a joyous certainty of the possession of eternal blessings and protection from evil.”

**Adolf Von Harnack**

2) an **optimistic** (untraditional since most Christian thinkers have emphasized original sin) understanding of human nature – he teaches that each individual human soul has an “infinite value”, that God is in us; it



**The Sermon on the Mount**

seems that we are already half-saved even before we confront Jesus Christ. God says to us “You are the children of the living God, and not only better than many sparrows but of **more value than the whole world.**” Jesus tells us all that we are worthy individuals, who have **infinite value** in his eyes. We should recognize the essential brotherhood of all human beings, and our essential **equality** in the eyes of the loving God. As Harnack puts it, “...the value of our race is enhanced; human lives, nay, we ourselves, have become dearer to one another.... a real reverence for humanity follows from the practical recognition of God as the Father of us all.”

3) the **ethical teachings** of Jesus, who brought us a **spiritual** insight into ordering our lives within the world, and who commanded us to **love** God and our fellow human beings and to live a life of (moderate) humility. His vision of Jesus is that he is primarily a **moralist** – His central message is “the service of one’s neighbor.” “Morality is the body of religion.” He is something like the highest manifestation of humanity, who is very close to God, who somehow elevates the rest of us humans to a realm that is influenced by God’s divine nature.

**The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount** (Mt 5) is Jesus’ parabolically expressed instructions on our behavior in our lives (a **parabolic** interpretation; sure, Jesus’ words are very challenging, but that is the way he talks – he states his teachings in uncompromising universal and spiritual terms; he does not expect us to take everything he says literally). The kingdom (Mk 1) is interpreted metaphorically as being the spiritual **kingdom within us**, in our own souls right now in this life, not a social/cultural kingdom in this world with its own king (Jesus), or the kingdom of God in the other world after the *parousia* (the Second Coming of Jesus). He preaches an **ethical kingdom of God** (in our hearts and in this world); he sees Jesus as “an ethical personality who established the Kingdom of God (in our hearts).”

Harnack favored the **synoptic gospels**, and kept at arm’s length **John** with his theology of the divinity of Jesus (John separates Jesus too much from humanity) and **Paul** with his theology of Jesus’ blood sacrifice for our salvation (Paul has a pessimistic interpretation of the sinfulness of human nature by which humans are in dire need of divine intervention to save them from themselves).

Liberal Protestantism is a fairly extreme version of the tendency of Protestants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to adapt to or **accommodate modern secular culture**. What matters to Harnack are Jesus’ sayings in which he teaches us the Christian ethic – whether by parables (synoptics) or discourses (John) – , which in fact had been adapted by the secular liberals and their offshoots. Harnack does not care much about the historical of Jesus’ cultural environment, his actions, his movements, etc. One can again recognize his findings as derived from the Enlightenment. His treatment of Jesus is not a thoroughgoing attempt to be historical; his treatment is less historical than Renan’s – he at least attempted to place Jesus in his historical and cultural context.



**Christ Preaching by Rembrandt**

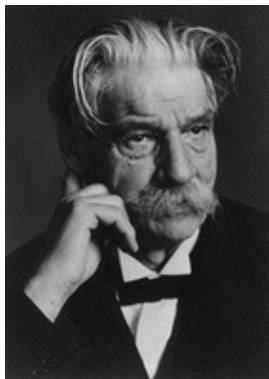
**Reinhold Niebuhr's criticism**, though unfair, had much truth: Protestantism liberalism taught that “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” Luther would undoubtedly have been puzzled, even shocked, at the main assertions of the Liberal Protestants (he probably would have lost his temper). The Liberal Protestants were a long way from the core theological ideas of classical (Luther and Calvin) Protestantism. What has happened to the transcendence and (awful) sovereignty of God that Luther experienced until his death, the depravity of human nature that motivated Calvin to proclaim predestination, the redemptive shedding of the blood of the divine Jesus Christ on the cross to save human beings from their perversity, the interpretation of the kingdom as being not of this world but as the destiny of the elect? To many committed Christians, it seemed as if Christianity was dissolving into **the woodwork of the humanistic philosophy of the Enlightenment or of 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism.**



**Reinhold Niebuhr on the Cover of Time, 1948**

**3) Albert Schweitzer** (1875-1965) was one of the most famous Christian personalities of his time. He was known for his devoted missionary work in Africa: after finishing his career in theology, he went as a **medical missionary** in response to Jesus' call to become "fishers of men" and also as a small recompense for what he saw as the historic guilt of European colonizers; he proclaimed a “reverence for life” that drove him to his humanitarian mission. He was also an accomplished organist, who wrote a well-regarded biography of Johann Sebastian Bach in French (1905). He is perhaps best known for his theological work in the tradition of German theology.

His most famous book, **The Quest for the Historical Jesus** (1906), put forth a bold and influential new interpretation of the historical Jesus. He claimed that the **liberal biblical exegetes** of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had not penetrated through the liberal and modern fog of the gospels and of the church's traditions to find **who Jesus really was** – the historical Jesus. They had interpreted the texts to create a limp and lifeless Jesus of faith, who matched their contemporary liberal and humanitarian presuppositions and who was merely a reflection of the humanitarian values of the scholars examining his life (he was obviously



**Albert Schweitzer**

thinking of theologians like Harnack and of Ernest Renan's Jesus, whom he thought was lifeless and unhistorical); Schweitzer wrote that the traditional liberal scholars peered down to the bottom of a well looking for Jesus, and they saw their own faces reflected in the water. Jesus was certainly something other than a kindly teacher of ethics who proclaimed the Kingdom of God within us all. Schweitzer thought that the liberals had failed to look objectively at the “**bare text**” and to take in its plain meaning.

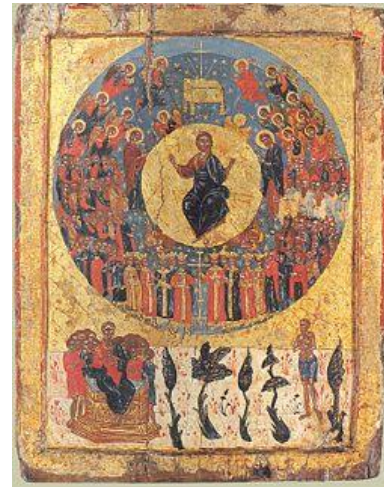
He proposed to discard the infancy narratives, the gospel of John, and resurrection accounts and focus on the **three synoptic gospels' accounts** of the life of Jesus from the beginning of his ministry to his death. He had the most confidence in the gospel of Mark, where Jesus is most consistently apocalyptic. But his apocalyptic saying also appear in the other synoptics, and in Paul's and Peter's epistles.

In contrast to the Liberal Protestants, who emphasized the compassionate ethical teaching of Jesus, Schweitzer relentlessly pursued the **Jesus of history**; he sought to locate Jesus within his **first century historical context of apocalyptic Judaism**. He placed Jesus squarely in the context of **eschatology** (the study concerning last, or final, matters, as death or the afterlife).



Schweitzer wrote that "the Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the kingdom of God, who founded the kingdom of heaven upon earth and died to give his work its final consecration never existed." He thought that the real Jesus was not "sympathetic and universally intelligible to the multitude" of modern people, but that "the historical Jesus will be to our time **a stranger and an enigma.**"

He asserted that Jesus was a self-styled prophet, who called himself the "**Son of Man**" (king, authoritative ruler in the Hebrew tradition first revealed in the Book of Daniel). Jesus' apocalyptic style was derived from his early experience with the fiery preaching of John the Baptist; he appears to have performed miracles, but it does not appear that he considered himself to be God, but as favored by God.



**Greek depiction of the parousia, about 1700.**

When he says in Mk 1 (and Mk 9) that the "**kingdom of God is upon us,**" he is literally saying that the end of the world (the **eschaton**) is going to happen soon, and it will be dramatic, catastrophic, and decisive. This prediction is also present in the other synoptic gospels: In Mt 16:28 Jesus says : "I assure you, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom". Paul shows himself in agreement in 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17:

For with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, the Lord Himself will descend from heaven, and those who died in Christ will rise first. Afterward we, the living who remain, will be caught along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

It is for this reason that Jesus says "Thy [i.e., the Father's] Kingdom come" in the 'Our Father' prayer. In the midst of signs and wonders God will intervene in history and through his supernatural power put an end to it; and he will send Jesus to the world in the **parousia** on a cloud to judge humanity, and his spiritual reign in the **kingdom** will follow. In this "tremendous cosmic drama" it will be revealed that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews. Until then the disciples must tell no one; they must keep the **messianic secret**, since he will become the messiah only after the parousia..

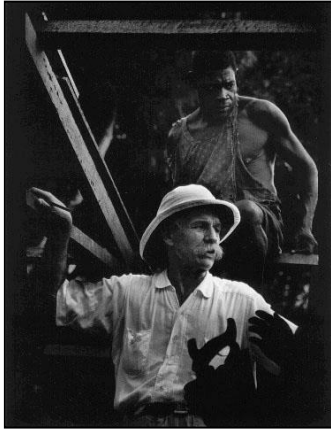


**Jesus separating just from the damned:  
Michelangelo, 'Last Judgment'**

In the meantime, we are commanded to practice a **radical ethic of love** illustrated in Mt 5 – take seriously the extreme commands about peacemaking and humility of the Sermon on the Mount, and really do turn the other cheek if you are slapped, walk the extra mile with the person who asks you to walk one, loan money to the man who asks for it, under no circumstances divorce your wife; and since Jesus' said that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be received into heaven, we should consider giving away our wealth. When Jesus makes these statements, he is not being parabolic (or symbolic), as Harnack and other Liberals had asserted; he really meant them to be **taken literally** so as to prepare ourselves for the **parousia**

in the short remaining time before the sudden and violent end of the physical earth, the revelation of Jesus' messianic secret, and the realization of a supernatural Kingdom of God.

Obviously, **Jesus was mistaken**: God did not intervene, the end of the world did not occur. The early Christians, including it seems the other three evangelists, had to reinterpret the idea of the kingdom, and to postpone the expected date of the *parousia*, organizing the Christian Church in this world that prepares us all for the Second Coming when God decides it will happen; such is the meaning of Augustine's City of God and the function of the Christian Church.



**Albert Schweitzer in Africa**

His conclusion about Jesus and his ministry is **disturbing** to Christians:

There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man, lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and **crushes** Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has **destroyed** them. The wheel rolls onward, and the **mangled body** of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign. (*Quest for the Historical Jesus*)

Schweitzer seems to be saying that Jesus was a **disquieting prophet who was wrong**; it would seem that Jesus as an historical figure seems has little to say to us in 1906 or 2008. This did not however much bother Schweitzer, who had a deep faith and confidence in the **Christ of faith** that he thought had been released from his Jewish roots by the failure of his mission to the Jews. The real miracle of Christianity is not the Resurrection, but that the small and timid movement that Jesus left behind him turned into a great spiritual and ecclesiastical force that changed the world.

Schweitzer spent the rest of his life immersed in what he styled "Christ mysticism", which provided for him the spiritual basis for his charitable activity in Africa.

Jesus [still] means something to our world because a **mighty spiritual force streams forth from Him** and flows through our time also. This fact can neither be shaken nor confirmed by any historical discovery. It is the solid foundation of Christianity." (*Quest*)

This spiritual force drives the author to devote himself entirely to a life of ethical service alleviating human suffering in Africa:

Who can describe the injustice and cruelties that in the course of centuries they [the coloured peoples] have suffered at the hands of Europeans? ... If a record could be compiled of all that has happened between the white and the coloured races, it would make a book containing numbers of pages which the reader would have to turn over unread because their contents would be too horrible.

For his consistent devotion to the preservation and promotion of **life**, Schweitzer was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952.

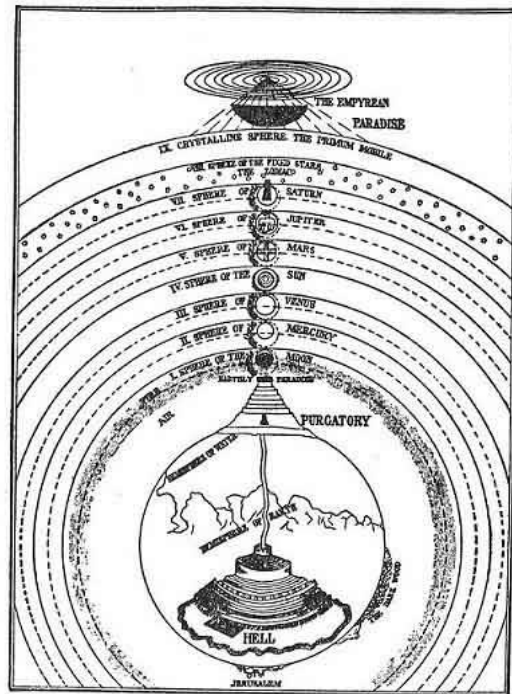
Schweitzer's arresting interpretation put an end to the first liberal phase of the quest for the historical Jesus; no longer would scholars depict Jesus as just ordinary, kind and loving and preaching the reality of the Kingdom of God within each of us. His theory, which is partly discredited in 2008, was the most popular one in German universities until the beginning of World War II.

4) Now the scene shifts to 30 or forty years later, still in the theological faculty of German universities. **Rudolf Bultmann** (1884-1976) was a German Lutheran theologian living in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. He was concerned to find the significance of Jesus' ministry for the modern world, to discover how Jesus' ministry can be made relevant to the lives of men and women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Like the Protestant Liberals, he retained the importance of the ethical teachings of Jesus. But unlike them, who tended to ignore Jesus' historical person and the events of his life, Bultmann refused to jettison **the story and the actions of Jesus** and set out to infuse spiritual meaning into them. His major interest was not the study of the Jesus of history in itself, but he was convinced that if interpreted properly the events and ideas of the gospels could shed a **bright light on Jesus' significance for the modern world**.

It was his contention that, to make the Christian message of the Bible relevant and convincing to Christians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we must "**demythologize**" the Old and the New Testament. Studies of the historical Jesus (Weiss and Schweitzer) show that Jesus and the writers of the Bible lived in a world infused with **myths** ("a story or belief that attempts to express or explain a basic truth;" myths are not necessarily untrue) that differ from those of other societies including the modern world. His task is to find the tools for finding the meaning in the ministry and sayings of Jesus for the modern world in the **20<sup>th</sup> century**, to prove that the "preaching of the Kingdom ... and ... of the New Testament is still important for modern man".

## Demythologizing

2000 years ago Jesus and the authors of the gospels lived in a world where people imaged the universe (**their myth**) as divided into **three stories** – heaven, earth and hell – all spatially separated: hell was a more or less spiritual realm of evil and suffering under the surface of the earth, and heaven was a spiritual world of good and bliss beyond the visible heavens. **God** was the all-powerful, all-knowing divine being who lived in heaven (up there) **spatially separated** from the human world. Christ is a divine being – God – too; preexisting with the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven, he was sent by a wrathful God into the world ("**perforation**" of the world by divine action), where he was "**incarnated**" (clothed in flesh) to save mankind by dying on the cross so as to satisfy his Father's wrath; using his divine, otherworldly powers, he performed **miracles** on earth; having accomplished his mission, he left the world and "**ascended**" back up to heaven to be with the Father. Christ's Church on earth has survived through the constant intervention of the **Holy Spirit**, also operating out of heaven. Christ will come once again literally into the world to judge the living and dead in the **parousia**. **Satan** is a spirit person with great power; ruler of the underworld, he and his minions literally roam the earth seeking to promote among humans his cause of sin, death and destruction; his world is below the earth and shrouded in terrible darkness.



**The universe according to Dante.**

This mythological picture drawn in the Bible has become **difficult to accept** for modern people because we now interpret events in a naturalistic and scientific manner (“the cause and effect nexus”) – it is hard for us to believe in miracles, casting out of devils, hell being somewhere underground and heaven



somehow up in the sky or beyond it, miracles being performed, and Jesus being raised from the dead; scientists and secularists teach us that these stories have natural or scientific explanations. The Liberal Protestants dealt with the dilemma (how to make Jesus relevant to us) by ignoring Jesus' eschatological sayings and his miracles and exorcisms, and they focused on his message – his ethical teachings (love, humility, service, etc.). In his *Vie de Jesus* Renan downplays and tends to avoid the miracle accounts, and he gives a skeptical, naturalistic explanation of the Resurrection.

**'The Creation of Adam' by Michelangelo**

Bultmann says that we must indeed accept Jesus' teachings of love, truthfulness and service as brought out by the Protestant Liberals:

He [Jesus] proclaimed also the will of God, which is God's demand, the demand for the good. Jesus demands truthfulness and purity, readiness to sacrifice and to loves. He demands that the whole man be obedient to God. ... (Bultmann)

But we must dig down and **also** look for the **deeper, demythologized meaning** contained in the stories, the biblical myths. “[T]he New Testament talks about an *event* [kerygma] through which God has brought about our salvation. It does not proclaim Jesus primarily as a teacher. ...” Bultmann says that we must “abandon [a literal acceptance of] the mythological conceptions precisely because we want to *retain their deeper meaning*.” He believed that the stories contained in the myths of the Old and New Testament really are **theology expressed in story form**, and that it is the mission of the theologian to penetrate the significance of the myths and interpret them in a form that makes them relevant to people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, Bultmann's aim is “not to eliminate the mythological statements but to interpret them.”

Bultmann is thus **not** primarily interested in the **historical Jesus**, since what is important for us in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not the historical facts of Jesus' life and actions but the demythologized meaning of them.

For example, we don't have to believe literally in the mythical picture of God as the old man in the sky; the demythologized meaning of the image is that **God**, although he may be present in the midst of us, is (spiritually) separate from us and transcendent – as far from us as the most distant stars in the sky, and that he is the irresistible power for good in the universe. The **creation story** (God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh) is also mythical and points to the power of God as expressed in the creation of the world and his providence in the affairs of humankind. The doctrine of the **virgin birth** need not be taken literally, but interpreted as expressing the utter singularity and uniqueness of the presence of Jesus in our world. The **Incarnation** (Jesus being a human being of flesh and blood while remaining God) expresses the providential concern of God for us and the closeness of Jesus to us since He made Jesus one of us. The significance of **Jesus** does not lie in a blood sacrifice to placate an angry God (this is the **Pauline myth**), but that through him “our authentic life becomes a possibility in fact for us only when



**Jesus leaves the physical earth to return to spiritual heaven.**

we are freed from ourselves.” The Last Judgment or *parousia* that Scripture refers to “is not a cosmic event that is still to happen but is the fact that Jesus has come into the world and issued the call to faith.”

The “deeper meaning” of the **myth of Satan** as ruler over the world is that “evil is not only to be found here and there in the world, but that all particular evils make up one single power which in the last analysis...form...a spiritual tradition that overwhelms every man” and “mysteriously enslaves every member of the human race.” It seems that Bultmann is here making reference to Germany’s Nazi experience, which was so destructive that it convinces even the most optimistic among us of the **reality of evil** in the world.

These mythological conceptions of heaven and hell are no longer acceptable for modern men since for scientific thinking to speak of “above” and “below” in the universe has lost all meaning, but the idea of the **transcendence of God and of evil** is still significant.



Bultmann’s ideas tie in fairly clearly with an **existentialist theology**. The mysterious enslaving power of evil promotes the Angst of the modern individual; the existence of a transcendent God opens up a **choice** for overcoming that anxiety. Humans are “ever in the moment of decision between the past and future,” which gives us the option to live out our lives “authentically” or to “lose ourselves” to the variety of outside pressures that seek to deny our freedom. For Bultmann the Christian gospel proclaims that God has liberated humanity from our “fallenness” so that we can **live authentically** as human beings.

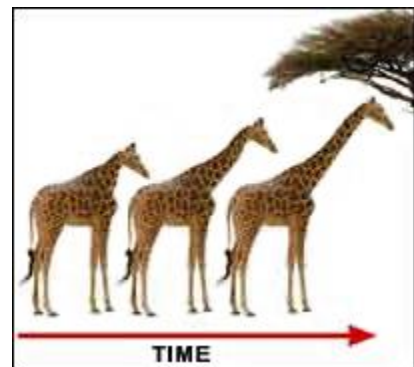
Needless to say, Bultmann has been criticized for his extreme **skepticism** about the reality of Jesus’ historical life and the importance of the facts of the life of the historical Jesus for our faith life. He has however been praised for addressing in a powerful and imaginative manner questions such as the transcendence of God and the continued power of evil in the world that deeply concern modern humanity.

## Darwinism, Evolution and the Fundamentalist Reaction

The traditional Christian view of humanity and the world was further challenged by another 19<sup>th</sup> century bearer of secularism, **science** and in particular the idea of evolution in biology.

The issue of **evolution** concerns whether the panoply of life on earth is static (it was created that way and has not substantially changed) or whether it is dynamic (the present array of species evolved dynamically by some mechanism from one or a small number of original life forms).

The idea of the **evolution of species** was in the air in Europe and North America in the early and mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the study of history was very popular. But evolution was not very popular among professional biologists for a couple of reasons. For one, a belief in evolution contradicted Scripture, which stated clearly in *Genesis* that God created each species individually and separately, and did not indicate that there had been change since then. For another, the only scientific theory of evolution at the time was that of the Frenchman **Jean Lamarck**, whose idea was discredited by his advocacy of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Even before the development of the science of genetics, it was clear that in living organisms,



**Lamarck believed that the long necks of giraffes evolved as generations of giraffes reached for ever higher leaves.**

acquired characteristics (longer necks, one instead of two arms, well-developed biceps) were not passed on to children.

**Charles Darwin**, a non-Christian Victorian naturalist (biologist), collected much of the data to support his theory of evolution in his famous voyage in the H.M.S. Beagle between 1831 and 1836. His publication of the **Origin of Species** in 1859 caused quite an outcry.



Darwin had a more acceptable theory than Lamarck, that he called “**natural selection.**” Essentially, it is composed of three parts:

1) Nature is a very **competitive** arena, where there are more individual organisms than means of subsistence available and where individual organisms are therefore in competition for food, water, air, etc. According to poet Alfred Lloyd Tennyson, “nature is red in tooth and claw”.

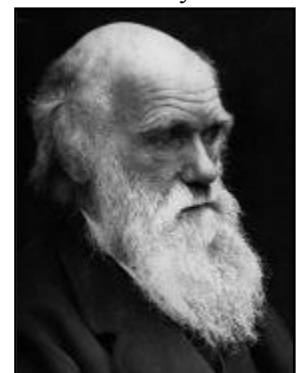
2) In this context there is considerable **variation** in individuals in the process of reproduction (look at the difference among different breeds of dogs) where some individuals have adaptations (longer claws, sharper teeth, running faster, or better social cooperation skills) that favor their hunt for the means of subsistence;

3) There is then a “struggle” for existence among the individuals of a given generation, in which one sees the “**survival of the fittest,**” in which better adapted individuals prosper and reproduce more; over a period of time this process can lead to the formation of a new species. Darwin left human beings out of his 1859 work, but explicitly applied his ideas to the origins of the human race in his *Descent of Man* published in 1870.

Although he never denied the existence of God in his work, a divine power or guiding hand played no role in his theory; natural forces (mutations, reproductive variety, competition for the means of survival, differential reproduction, etc.) accounted for his hypothesis. The mechanism devised by Darwin does not seem to have any goal or overriding purpose.

**Reactions of religious people** were not at first very favorable. After all, the idea of evolution contradicted a literal reading of *Genesis*, and in any case Christians were reluctant to apply the idea to human beings (“our unsuspected kinship with the mushrooms!” or “Was it on your mother’s or your father’s side of the family that you are related to the monkeys?”); it was somehow insulting to humans to be told that we are subject to exactly the same forces and laws as rocks, plants and animals.

Thoughtful people also objected to Darwin’s theory of natural selection: it was seen as a **materialist and mechanistic theory** that subjected human beings and other aspects of nature to chance and brute force, thus undermining traditional ethical considerations and the idea of divine Providence. Darwin’s theory of natural selection appears to exclude God and God’s plan from nature by emphasizing that the purpose of life is survival and that that is achieved through struggle and competition.



**Charles Darwin**

The initial controversy however **died down** within a couple of decades. The great majority of Christians – both Catholic and Protestant – at this time seemed willing to abandon *Genesis* as a literal scientific authority, and to accept an idea of evolution that was not natural selection. Christians could **come to terms with it** if: evolution was seen as providential

and **teleological** – i.e., evolution was under God’s guidance and tended toward a goal or purpose; it took **a lot longer than six days** in the Bible, whose account could be interpreted metaphorically; God intervened personally in the process in order to create man (and breathe a soul into him, said the Catholics). The main point was to realize that the Bible was not intended to be a scientific document that makes pronouncements on evolution, geology, etc., but as a repository of spiritual and ethical truths and insights (i.e., we are talking about liberal Protestantism).

## The Fundamentalist and Evangelical Revival

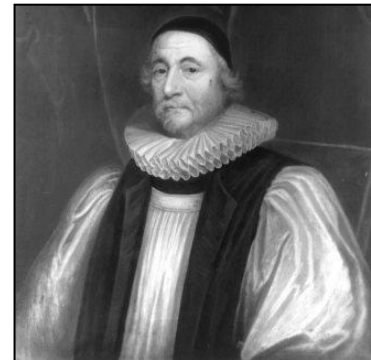
In 2007 the term ‘**Fundamentalist**’ has a confusing meaning with often a pejorative connotation. Fundamentalists (whether Protestant, Catholic, or Muslim) are usually traditionally minded people alienated from modern (western) culture; they are looking for certainty in what they see as a world dominated by instability, change and material values. Protestant Fundamentalists find that bedrock of



certainty in a literal interpretation of the Bible; Catholic Fundamentalists find it in the teaching authority of the Church, usually the Pope; Muslim Fundamentalists in a literal interpretation of the Koran and in their spiritual authorities.

There was beginning in the 1890s a **Fundamentalist** reaction against the main trends in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Protestantism. Traditional Christians, often living in small towns or rural areas in the USA, were alienated from the higher biblical criticism affecting most US Protestant churches (e.g., the assertion that the miracles and exorcisms recounted in the New Testament never really happened; or that there are myths in the Bible that we need not take literally; or that Jesus was nothing more than a failed prophet); they were also alienated from the prevalence of the scientific world view, particularly in regard to evolution (man’s genetic relation to animal species), which was accepted by most Protestant biblical scholars.

Conservative anti-modernist Christians began holding Bible conferences in the 1870s, and the movement began really to coalesce in the 1890s. The founding of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago in 1886, the establishment of the Los Angeles Bible Institute in 1908 (later to become Biola University), and the publication in Los Angeles in 1917 of ‘The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth’ were all landmarks in the formation of the movement. The **Scotfield Bible**, which was first published in 1909 became known as “the handbook of Fundamentalism”. It popularized the theory of Archbishop **James Ussher** (17<sup>th</sup> century) that the world was created in 4004 BC; it placed greater emphasis on eschatological expectations than had previously been the case among American Fundamentalists; and it promoted dispensationalism, which stated in dogmatic fashion that there were between creation and the Last Judgment seven ages of human history that are the key to understanding God’s purpose in the world.



**By his study of biblical genealogies, Archbishop Ussher (17<sup>th</sup> century) calculated that creation occurred in 4004 BC.**

Although not under a single organization, the Fundamentalist movement coalesced by about 1910. It had a dogmatic ideology. Fundamentalists were hostile to most aspects of modern science (particularly evolution), and against the values of “secular humanism”. They insisted on the **inerrancy of the Bible**, i.e. the Bible was virtually “dictated” by the Holy Spirit, could not contain errors even in non-spiritual matters such as the account of the Creation of the world, and it must be interpreted according to literal rules. God was seen as radically separate and transcendent; He intervened in nature to create the human race, to send us His only son for sacrifice, to perform miracles. Fundamentalists insisted on several **traditional**

**beliefs:** Christ's true deity; the Virgin Birth; the reality of miracles; the physical resurrection of Jesus in his earthly body; Jesus' expected return at the Last Judgment, again in his physical body; the resurrection of humanity in the flesh. Fundamentalists also insisted on the Pauline idea of atonement (mankind rescued from sin and death by the sacrifice – shedding of blood – of Jesus Christ). Fundamentalists also tended to be socially conservative and anti-Catholic; they denounced Catholics as “Romanists”.

## The Scopes Trial 1925



**Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan in the Trial.**

Fundamentalists gained much momentum in the USA under leaders like the American statesman, **William Jennings Bryan**; they were particularly important in California, Border States, and the South. They persuaded about 15 states to consider laws forbidding the teaching of evolution in public schools; **Tennessee** was one of two states that had enacted such a law at the time of the **Scopes Trial in 1925**.

John Scopes' trial in 1925 was concocted by opponents of the anti-

evolution law in the town of Dayton, Tennessee; they had help from local businessmen who wanted to put their sleepy town back on the map. Bryan came to help the state prosecute the offender; famous lawyer and agnostic **Clarence Darrow** arrived to lead the defense. The atmosphere was circus like, and the confrontations between the two lawyers fascinated the media and public opinion. Legally, the prosecution was an open and shut case: Scopes admitted to teaching evolution in his biology high school class. The defense's strategy was to seek a 'guilty' verdict, and then **appeal the case** – all the way to the US Supreme Court if necessary – to have the law declared unconstitutional. Darrow and others also wanted to bring the issue before public opinion, and subject the Fundamentalist cause to ridicule. The jury returned the guilty verdict, but the appeal to the Tennessee Supreme Court resulted in reversal (thus in favor of Scopes) on a technicality thus thwarting possibility of further appeal; it is possible that the God-fearing Tennessee justices overturned the verdict to prevent it from being appealed further.

For an excellent film treatment of the Scopes Trial, it would be hard to beat Stanley Kramer's 'Inherit the Wind' 1960 with Spencer Tracy playing Clarence Darrow and Fredric March playing Bryan. The film takes some liberties with historical accuracy./

The general outcome of the case was a victory for the proponents of 'science and progress.' Into the 1930s the Fundamentalist position was subject to widespread **public ridicule**; it appears that most of American public opinion did not accept the anti-scientific bias of the Fundamentalist position. Very few states passed anti-evolution statutes. The strength of the Fundamentalist movement declined seriously in the following decades. The last anti-evolution law was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967.

## Contemporary American Fundamentalism

The issue of evolution in the schools came up again with the rise in the **1970s** of the **Creationist** movement associated with conservative **evangelical** movements in the USA.

There were however a couple of differences from the Fundamentalist movement earlier in the century. 1) Anti-evolutionary forces now styled themselves as '**scientific**,' and instead of basing themselves entirely on the Bible, they claim they had done scientific research to refute the evolutionary point of view; the current creationist proponents label their theory "Intelligent Design", and realizing that mainstream academic circles are closed to their theories, they have founded their own institutes of higher education to propagate their idea, e.g., Biola University in Los Angeles.



2) They are also now calling for ‘**equal time**’ in biology class for the creationist theory instead of forbidding the teaching of evolution. Although the subject is much discussed in the media, no states have so far complied with the demands of the creationists; their propaganda appears however to have been successful, since currently a large proportion of American public opinion says it does not believe in evolution.

3) Modern day evangelicals also differ from the earlier Fundamentalists in that they are overtly **political**. **Jerry Falwell**, the TV evangelist and organizer of the “moral majority,” is an example of a rather extreme leader of the evangelical revival (Billy Graham is a more typical, mainstream example). In his book ‘Listen America!’ (1980) he asserts that America is in a serious spiritual and moral crisis issuing from a lack of good male leadership and a departure from the biblical values that he asserts the United States was founded on. He has a biblically based American patriotism, wherein he asserts the “the land of the free and the home of the brave” is a country favored in God’s eyes. He appears to have a conspiracy view of the crisis – the “**secular humanism**” movement that advocates equal rights for men and women (embodied in the **Equal Rights Amendment** that was passed by Congress in the 1970s but subsequently failed to secure ratification), world government, evolution, feminism, and homosexuality are the organizing forces behind the campaign against godly values. He wants America to fight back by recognizing the reality of sin in their world and their lives, by returning to the principles of Bible morality, and by organizing themselves into a political movement/electoral bloc (the “moral majority”) to lead America back to its roots. The conservative evangelical politics of Falwell and his allies played a major role in the presidential victories of Ronald Reagan and the two Bushes. Unlike Falwell who makes no bones about his political orientation, the early 20th century Fundamentalist movement did not generally get involved in politics.



**Jerry Falwell**