

## 17.11.04 *Friedrich Schleiermacher*

### **Wikipedia:**

**Friedrich Schleiermacher** (November 21, **1768** – February 12, **1834**) was a German **theologian**, **philosopher**, and **biblical scholar** known for his attempt to reconcile the criticisms of the **Enlightenment** with traditional **Protestant Christianity**. He also became influential in the evolution of **Higher Criticism**, and his work forms part of the foundation of the modern field of **hermeneutics**. Because of his profound effect on subsequent Christian thought, he is often called the "**Father of Modern Liberal Theology**" and is considered an early leader in **liberal Christianity**.

### **Protestants** by Alec Ryrie, p241-243

Schleiermacher was a young minister who had passed through a Moravian upbringing, a revelatory encounter with Enlightenment skepticism, and enthusiasm for and then disillusionment with the French Revolution, all filtered through a first-rate theological education. His 1799 book ***On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*** laid out the territory that liberal Protestants would claim for centuries. Schleiermacher's flowery, arch writing style has aged badly and can nowadays be hard going. But it repays the effort.

The basic rhetorical maneuver of ***On Religion*** is the disarming feint. Having laid out his readers' contempt for religion, Schleiermacher proceeds to agree with them. ***The idea that religion's purpose is to inculcate morality insults both religion and morality.*** As for the "cold argumentation" and "calculating proofs" of theology, they are no more than the burned-out ashes of religion's fire. ***Religion, he insists, is not about how we act or think but how we feel: the "heavenly sparks that arise when a holy soul is stirred by the universe."*** Philosophical speculation is futile unless ***grounded on "an original beam of the inner light."*** The philosophers imagine that they are God, sitting in detached judgment over creation, not limited and contingent creatures who can only see from their own perspective. ***It is only in feeling the power of those limited, contingent intuitions, and sharing them humbly with one another, that any true religion can be found.*** Schleiermacher did not defend miracle claims or revelations, but argued that ***the truly religious see miracles and revelations everywhere.*** He did not call on the reader to accept specific doctrines but rather to ***"become conscious of the call of your innermost nature . . . and follow it."*** He did not even urge the reader to believe, but rather to ***"see with his own eyes."***

A pretty peculiar defense of Christianity, then. Schleiermacher's orthodox critics felt that this pantheist mush conceded virtually everything to the skeptics. Yet in his second great book, ***The Christian Faith*** (1821), Schleiermacher demonstrated that you could get to a more or less orthodox Christianity from this

unpromising starting point. This unusual route was a way to *revive Protestantism's experiential power for his post-Enlightenment contemporaries, rescuing its original love affair with God from dead formulae and a "mania for systematization."* He insisted that *true religion is a matter of the heart, of longing to be "grasped and filled," of "feelings . . . like a holy music."*

Schleiermacher was, in fact, trying not to argue a case, but to *awaken his readers' intuitions and to reveal the Reformation's original emotional power to the new, Romantic age. If your soul does not long "to drink in the beauty of the world and be permeated in its spirit," if you have never sensed something beyond yourself, then, he says despairingly, you have no religion. "Any further word about it would be an incomprehensible speech."* 8

*Most professed Christians of his own time, he feared, were stone-hearted, secondhand believers.* Almost two decades before *Frankenstein* was written, Schleiermacher compared this kind of religion to trying to assemble and bring life to a corpse. *For the truly religious, by contrast, the church is about not structures and dogmas but a community for sharing intuitions and for mutual caring, like the Pietist collegia pietatis.* Schleiermacher admitted, wryly, that in a sense he had come full circle back to his Moravian upbringing. *He had found a way of embracing the new philosophies while still feeling the classic Protestant encounter with God burning in his heart.*

*By insisting that Christianity be approached experientially, from the unshakable starting point of our own humanity rather than from historical claims or abstract doctrines, Schleiermacher offered the prospect of a Protestantism that nineteenth-century skepticism could not assault and that could rekindle some of its smoldering fire.*

But could it work? Schleiermacherian liberalism instead led some believers to self-centered transcendentalism and off the Christian map entirely. **Channing**, the American liberal pioneer, claimed that "God is another name for human intelligence raised above all error and imperfection, and extended to all possible truth"; in other words, he had deified his own moral convictions. **Theodore Parker**, an avid reader of Schleiermacher, claimed that *"each man must be his own Christ, or he is no Christian."* He at least remained a Unitarian minister. **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, who insisted that as a believer you must *"make your own Bible,"* left the ministry in 1832; despising all outward forms and rituals, he could no longer bring himself to celebrate the Lord's Supper. 9 *Following your religious intuitions wherever they led could mean leaving historic Christianity behind entirely.*

Ryrie, Alec. *Protestants: The Faith That Made the Modern World* (pp. 241-243). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

# ***Freidrich Schleiermacher (Making of Modern Theology series)*** (bought 11/5/17 – used) –

Reviewed by Fr. Kurt Messick

## ***Bio of Fr. Kurt Messick***

I've had the good fortune in my life to have many interesting experiences and know many wonderful people. Owing to my father's career with the military/foreign office, I travelled quite a lot from the beginning. I have studied political science, religious studies, Jewish studies, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy and history in North America and Europe, and am continuing my education. I am currently the chaplain at Bell Trace Senior Living Community in Bloomington, Indiana, where I conduct weekly services and Bible studies in addition to providing ministry of presence and pastoral care. I am in my fourteenth year of service there. I am a priest in the Anglican/Old Catholic tradition. I have worked in different administrative and teaching positions at the American Military University, Christian Theological Seminary, Ivy Tech Community College Bloomington, Indiana University, School-to-Career, Bibliogem Software Development Company, and General Business Systems. I served for three years in Parliament as a researcher, legal assistant, office manager and campaign assistant. I work regularly with the local and state literacy programmes, and have served on the local, regional and national boards of church and nonprofit organisations related to homelessness, hunger, poverty, social justice, and ministry issues.

## ***Review***

This volume on the works of Freidrich Schleiermacher is part of a series by Fortress Press entitled 'the Making of Modern Theology: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Texts'. Each of the volumes in the series focuses upon one particular theologian of note. These volumes are of use to students, seminarians, ministers and other readers interested in the development of theological ideas in the modern and postmodern world. Each volume is a reader of key texts from the theologian highlighted - the text entries are annotated a bit by the editors, and the editor of each volume provides an introduction setting the general stage for context and understanding.

Editor Keith Clements describes Schleiermacher as being a pioneer of modern theology. Working in the early nineteenth century, Schleiermacher recrafted the discipline of theology in the wake of Kant's radical revision of metaphysics and philosophy. The Enlightenment had taken hold in various ways: in science, in anti-clerical attitude, in philosophy. In Germany, it took a decidedly historical aspect -- religion along with other disciplines were cast in various methods of historical analysis. Interest in ancient cultures, languages, historical studies, politics and more took strong hold in the German academy, meanwhile belittling overtly and covertly the religious establishments Catholic and Protestant.

Schleiermacher was a preacher and minister for a time; his lifestyle did not accord well with a typical ministerial prudence, and he soon developed a distaste for the traditional dogmatism of the religious establishment. He gravitated more toward the academic, becoming part of the founding group of the University of Berlin. He was editor of a politically radical newspaper for a time, and involved officially in politics, particularly where the cause of education is involved. His extra-theological career was nearly as impressive as his theological vocation, but it is for this latter that he is remembered today.

Schleiermacher's theology turns on various points. He believed strongly that ***religion is based on feeling, on an immediate consciousness involving the religious person. Theology involves reflection and communication of self and others -- this is epistemologically different from 'knowing'***. His methods of reading the Bible, understanding the role of Jesus, and understanding God are ***deeply relational and emotional, turning strongly on the relationship of humanity through history***. Schleiermacher looked for a general 'religiosity' in humanity, and thus discounted the all-important and unique nature of Christianity in favour of a ***more general sense of religious sentiment in the people***.

Clements draws passages, arranged topically, from several of Schleiermacher's key works: On Religion, Speeches; The Christian Faith; Brief Outline of the Study of Theology; Hermeneutics - the Handwritten Manuscripts; Christmas Eve Dialogue on the Incarnation; The Life of Jesus; and Selected Sermons.

Love him or hate him, no theologian since Schleiermacher has been able to write without in some manner responding to or reacting to him. As the father of liberal theology (not liberal in the political sense), for a time the dominant theological school in Christianity, ***Schleiermacher's influence is destined to remain strong for a very long time.***

Each volume in this series also has a selected bibliography section -- this one for Schleiermacher is divided into works by Schleiermacher (primary sources in English, including journal articles as well as books), and works about Schleiermacher (secondary sources in English), and finally a few works containing relevant material on Schleiermacher. The book also has several indexes -- a place and subject index, and a names index. This is a very good book for scholarship. The translations of the works from the original German is new, preserving some of the language uses (masculine pronouns for God) while modifying others (gender neutral translations for terms such as Mensch, Menschen).