



Theology Built on Vapors: The Rise and Diffusion of Postliberal Theology

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Post-what? It's not all that long ago that we had to learn about postmodernism, and many of us found it to be a pretty wiggly idea. Now we're supposed to learn about postliberalism. Couldn't we just declare ourselves to be post-postliberal and spare ourselves the agony of learning the name of another theological label that only people in seminaries and universities will ever use anyway until it is replaced by the next fad?



Winfried Corduan

As understandable as this attitude may be, the truth is that the term "postliberal" refers to a way of thinking that is bringing about large-scale changes in today's church. Sometimes some of the most powerful ideas, whether for good or ill, come in obscure packages, and we ignore them at serious risk. For example, we may have heard about the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, but I suspect few of us have read him, and even fewer have been able to understand him. Hegel's writing is hard to follow and seems to be well suited for the ivory tower. Who would have thought back in the early 19th century that a hundred years later his ideas would contribute to events that changed the entire world. Hegel's philosophy was a crucial influence on Karl Marx, and the rest is history. So, we need to be very careful; sometimes an apparently meaningless and unnecessary label may conceal an idea that, without the label, is bringing about major changes in the world.

This is the case for postliberalism, an outwardly pretty empty term. Behind this label is an attitude that is influencing the church in many ways right now, and, sad to say, most of them are negative. Even though the name does not tell us much at first glance, it does reveal that a group of

theologians has decided that a new era in theology has come about, a notion that already should put us on alert, and many Christian leaders, both evangelical and non-evangelical, are becoming a part of the movement. Consequently, even though this article may be one of the few places that you encounter "postliberalism" by name, the nature of this theology may be influencing what you read in your Sunday School quarterly, what your pastor preaches, and in which ministries your home church does or does not engage. There is much talk today of the "Emergent Church" movement, and many of the traits of this school of thought are derived from postliberalism under a very thin guise. Most seriously, under the illusion of manifesting a greater appreciation for the Bible, it ultimately undercuts the assurance of the gospel.

The theology that we call "postliberalism" began with two well-known theologians at Yale University, Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. I met Hans Frei once when he gave the three-evening Rockwell Lectures at Rice University in 1974. This was the time when popular theology in the United States was just recovering a little more self-integrity from so-called "secular theology"—not to mention the disastrous "God-is-Dead" movement—and process theology was enjoying its years in the sun.

I called on Dr. Frei at his guest lodgings one afternoon just to chat, and I was impressed by the genuine interest he showed in the contemplations of an idealistic first-year Ph.D. student. I had just become engrossed in the philosophical underpinning of Karl Rahner's theology, and Dr. Frei manifested a lot of interest as I recounted what I had learned. Then he asked me a question that genuinely surprised me: "But how do you get from there to the incarnation?" Looking at it from a Rahnerian perspective, I did not have an answer at the time,¹ though as an evangelical Christian,

it did not bother me at the moment that I could not speak for Rahner in this respect. What really intrigued me was the fact that this impressive contemporary theologian would put the incarnation (a supernatural event if there ever was one, and one that would continue to be impeached by many other theologians²) ahead of philosophical speculation. I did not know at the time that Frei and his colleagues were in the process of delivering a whole new paradigm, which reversed many of the trends that had de-theologized theology for the previous fifteen years. This was the year in which his ground-breaking book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*,³ came out.

The Maze of Terminology

To understand the meaning of “postliberal” theology, we need to acquaint ourselves with a number of theological labels. Obviously, if it is **post**-liberal, we need to be clear on what “liberal” means in this context. In ordinary conversation, it is common for us to pit “conservatism” against “liberalism.” In such a general bifurcation, it is not really possible to say what those terms mean, other than that presumably conservatives hold on to more traditional beliefs than liberals. Thus, I need to specify my terms quite a bit more.

One term that will become crucial in this discussion is the word “orthodox,” by which I am not referring to the Eastern branch of the Christian Church, but to a basic adherence to the true doctrines of Christianity. Orthodoxy in this sense can span Christian groups ranging all the way from Roman Catholicism to Tennessee Mountain Charismatics. Perhaps a happy synonym for “orthodoxy” might be what C.S. Lewis had in mind when he talked about “mere Christianity.”

One orthodox subgroup is constituted by evangelicals, who are Protestants who emphasize the need for personal salvation in Jesus Christ, and who hold to the Bible as truthful in all that it affirms, frequently invoking the term “inerrancy.” For purposes of this essay, there is no need to distinguish between evangelicals and fundamentalists. In our context, evangelicals are the epitome of conservative Christians.

Now let us take a closer look at what “liberalism” means in this connection. In the history of theology, liberalism has a fairly specific meaning. It is closely tied to developments in

biblical studies that brought up serious questions concerning the reliability of the Bible, but ultimately is not dependent on it. In other words, you could be a theological liberal even if you affirmed an inerrant or infallible view of the Bible (though I must hasten to add that I do not think that you would excel in logical consistency if you took that route). The most central characteristic of theological liberalism is the reformulation of Christian doctrine into general moral exhortations, either for an individual or for society. Thus, liberalism sees the doctrine of the cross not as the reconciliation between God and the human person in a substitutionary atonement, but as an example of how people should live in self-sacrificial love. In this more specific delimitation, liberalism was a powerful presence in German theology in the late 19th century, and in American theology, particularly in the Northeast, in the early 20th century. The so-called “social gospel” is a typical representative of theological liberalism.

While liberalism was flourishing in many circles, evangelicals maintained their own identities and often went to great lengths to repudiate liberalism by scholarship that directly confronted the errors of liberal biblical criticism on its own ground. But liberalism also had its own problems. For one thing, the basic optimism necessary to advocate the moral betterment of the human race was devastated by the inhumanity and cruelty of World War I. Simultaneously, Karl Barth, coming out of the liberal theological world, called for a fresh look at the actual teachings of Scripture and thereby initiated the movement of neo-orthodoxy.

Neo-orthodoxy and postliberalism appear to be very similar, but postliberals wish to see themselves as quite different, and so we need to say a few more words about neo-orthodoxy. Neo-orthodoxy, as espoused by Karl Barth, tried to call the church back to the essential beliefs of historic Christianity, such as sin, the atonement, the Trinity, and salvation. But even though it promoted orthodoxy, its method was rather free-floating because it accepted the conclusions of negative biblical criticism, and thus—Barth’s own protests notwithstanding—constructed a set of beliefs based on an inadequate foundation. In other words, it may have been orthodox, but it was **neo-**

orthodox because there was no controlling authority. Consequently, neo-orthodoxy lost no time in redefining itself with every new theologian who somehow claimed that label, and it is utterly unsurprising that the “God is dead” movement had its roots in neo-orthodoxy. For example, Paul Van Buren earned his doctorate under Barth in Basel, writing his dissertation on the theology of Calvin, and then proceeded to publish a book that declared that, due to the philosophy of logical positivism, the word “God” is dead.⁴ The founders of post-liberalism looked at the fate of neo-orthodoxy and realized that a theology apart from biblical grounding bears the seed of its assured and hasty self-destruction.

Therefore, a more refined definition of “post-liberalism” is that it is a new method of doing theology that opposes the watered-down concepts of liberalism and embraces the content of the Bible. It attempts to be orthodox and biblical, but for reasons we will describe below, it repudiates evangelicalism as much as liberalism.

Back to the Story!

The above-described categories can now help us to establish a possible goal for postliberal theology: to find a way of doing theology that is true to the message of the Bible, remains orthodox in the general sense of the term, but does not fall into the various traps perceived by postliberal theologians in either liberal theology or evangelicalism. To expand on this goal and its implementation, let us invent a little story.

Imagine that you receive a document narrating certain events, which can be of great personal value for you. This document relates that a very wealthy man went to his bank and established an account in your name that contains \$1 million. All you have to do is to go to the bank, sign your name, and the million dollars are yours. Let us assume for the sake of this illustration that there is good reason to believe that the story is true, and that, consequently, all you need to do is respond to it. What difference this event would make in most of our lives! So, what would you do? Clearly, the rational option would be to go to the bank and to claim this benefit.

To continue with this fable just a little more, let us suppose that this event has happened to numerous people over several generations. During

the first few generations, people simply accepted the story, went to the bank, and rejoiced in their good fortune. However, several generations later, people started to ask questions about this story. They wanted to know:

1. Is this story really true?
2. Who first came up with this story?
3. Is this really \$1 million or does the expression “\$1 million” merely refer to some good fortune that makes us feel good but is not constituted by a genuine amount of legal currency?
4. Where is this bank?
5. Is the bank a genuine bank or is it a symbol for something else?
6. Is this rich benefactor a genuine person, and if so, who was he, or is he possibly a symbol for something else?
7. Is this story a report of an actual event, or is it perhaps a composite of several earlier stories that have been brought together?

Now, let us say that many people spend time trying to find the answers to these questions, but the one thing that they do not do is to go to the bank and claim their money.

On the other hand, there are a number of people who take this story extremely seriously. They insist that this story is true, and they spend a lot of time defending all of its components. They prove the authenticity of the story, the reality of the amount, the identity of the bank and the rich benefactor, and why going to the bank and claiming your money is the most rational thing to do. But again, the one thing that these folks do not do is simply go to the bank and claim the money.

In a nutshell, this story illustrates Hans Frei’s perception of the fate of Scripture in the scholarship of the last 500 years. There was a time, such as during the Reformation, when people, such as Luther and Calvin and their followers, accepted the accounts of Scripture as true. Despite the variations found between, say, the Old and New Testaments, or certain apparent difficulties in reconciling all of the content of the Bible, they believed that the Bible was one coherent narrative and that a person could bring the entire story together and live according to it. The story was true; therefore, it referred to something that was real; and thus, rather than questioning the story, it was their obligation to live in the light of the story.

But biblical scholarship started to raise questions about the nature of the biblical story. Beginning with Baruch Spinoza and continuing through the Enlightenment, deism, the 19th century, and right into the present, more and more questions were brought up and received negative answers concerning the truth of the story that is related in the Bible. As a result, it became impossible to live according to this story, though theologians found alternatives for the biblical message and, as we observed earlier, in classical liberalism the teachings of the incarnation, sin, and atonement were replaced by moral platitudes.

On the other hand, there were those who resisted this negative assault on the Bible. Evangelicals and conservative Catholics, for example, went to great lengths to prove the authenticity and the trustworthiness of the Bible. But again, their preoccupation with defending the truths of Scripture substituted for actually living according to Scripture. Their second-order defense of the Bible had supplanted the first-order biblical narrative.⁵

Let me give you a specific example. I mentioned earlier that at the time of the Reformers Christians accepted the Bible as true. Using a simple correspondence theory of truth, this acceptance implied that the facts to which the Bible refers are real. Does this conclusion then imply that the events of the Bible are historical? Frei says no, not necessarily, because historicity is not the same thing as reality. "History" is a scholarly endeavor, based on scholarly principles and methods and, consequently, as soon as we raise the question of historicity, whether we are trying to provide a positive or negative answer, we are already undercutting the authenticity of the story. Thus, evangelicals, who take their cue from liberals and respond to liberals on their home ground, are missing the point just as much as liberals.

This, then, becomes the essence of postliberalism: to take the narrative of the Bible as it is given, not to subject it to our criteria of truth or acceptability, but to subject ourselves to the story of the Bible as the overarching paradigm for our lives. In this way postliberalism appears to have achieved the goals of early neo-orthodoxy, namely to repudiate liberal misconstruals of the biblical message, but to retain a solid foundation in the Bible. As opposed to evangelicalism, postliberalism sees itself as avoiding the red herrings

of defending a story that does not need to be defended by human beings, and placing ourselves under its authority.

So, to give a simple example of how this way of doing theology works itself out, in a book entitled *The Identity of Jesus Christ*,⁶ Hans Frei does not engage in the customary so-called search for the historical Jesus, but he studies what we can learn about Christ's character by means of the gospel stories. The actual details of the accounts are not crucial; Frei is still open to the critical conclusions of biblical research. He concludes by making a somewhat unkind reference to Albert Schweitzer's *Quest*,⁷ but then quotes with approval Schweitzer's own assessment: "to know this story is to adopt a way of life consequent upon hearing it and shaped by it."⁸

Thus, postliberalism presents us with a story, and our obligation is to subordinate our lives to the biblical story rather than to sit in judgment upon it. It becomes obvious, then, that in this respect postliberalism is heading in the opposite direction from postmodernism. Postmodernism, according to some of its advocates, such as Lyotard,⁹ distinguishes itself from other thought forms by denying that there is any single overarching story (metanarrative) for all people at all times. What Frei appears to be saying is that there is indeed such a story, namely the narrative of the Bible.

To understand a little more of what it means to have such a grand narrative, we can look at the work of Frei's colleague George Lindbeck.¹⁰ In attempting to clarify the nature of this story and its function in the Christian community, Lindbeck takes recourse to Ludwig Wittgenstein's analysis of "language games" as they are maintained in their respective forms of life. There are many ways of living and many aspects to our lives, and each of these compartments of life comes with its own "language game." The term "language game" is not meant to imply that life is frivolous, but that, just as each game that we might play has different rules (soccer has different rules from chess; Twister has different rules from Bridge, etc.), so each form of life comes with its own idiomatic language in its own "grammar," which is to say, its rules for what is and what is not proper use of language in that particular context. So, Lindbeck states that,

Any religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework and medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought.... It is not primarily an array of beliefs about the true and good (though it may involve these), or symbolism expressive of basic attitudes, feelings, or sentiments (though these will be generated). Rather, it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments. Like culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities.¹¹

Christianity does not constitute an exception. The Christian story provides a conceptual framework that guides us into the correct ways of interpretation and living what we consider to be a proper Christian life.

To sum up this part of my exposition, postliberalism has attempted to repudiate the arbitrary reinterpretation of Christianity of liberalism, and it has avoided the instability of neo-orthodoxy by clinging to the biblical narrative. Or so it would seem.

The Problem of History

The apparent success of postliberalism is due to a large extent to the fact that it sidesteps certain questions, which other forms of theology consider to be crucial. Thus, for example, Hans Frei thinks that it is a mistake to consider the biblical narratives to be historical. He concedes that they are very much like history insofar as they depict what really happened a long time ago, but being real and true does not amount to historical in his eyes. He claims that,

historical accounting, by almost universal modern consent, involves that the narrative... must consist of events, and reasons for their occurrence, whose connections may be rendered without recourse to supernatural agency. By contrast in the biblical stories, of course, non-miraculous and miraculous accounts and explanations are constantly intermingled.... Even such miraculous accounts are history-like or realistic if the depicted action is indispensable to the rendering of a particular character, divine or human, or a particular story.¹²

But they are not historical. To apply the tests of historicity to the biblical narrative is to compromise it and to miss its meaning.

But is this a realistic distinction? First of all, it seems as though the assumption that history by its very nature must exclude reference to divine intervention is arbitrary. It is only a gratuitous definition that prevents one from finding evidence for the miraculous in history. Second, it would appear that making an end run around the question of history in the 21st century is to concede the truth of the narrative. During Luther's and Calvin's day, the academic discipline of history was not what it is today, when the historical reality of an event is considered to be synonymous with the truth of its account. It does not make sense to say that the event really happened in the past, but that it is not historical. Once the question of historicity has been raised, it becomes impossible to put that proverbial genie back into the bottle. Evangelicals are not insisting on the historicity of the biblical narratives because they have an aberrant fascination with the topic, but because the culture at large questions the truth of the narrative by means of historical criteria.

Furthermore, when Frei concedes that the biblical accounts are frequently "history-like," he is invoking a nonexistent category. What does it mean for a true story to be "history-like"? It would seem that, other than inventing a word that invokes an irresolvable ambiguity, the term does not contribute anything. If there is an actual event in the past, it is a part of history. If it is not actual, then it cannot be historical, though it can be history-like. But to say that it is actual and history-like without being historical is to invent a meaningless category. The biblical writers certainly saw themselves as penning what we would consider to be history. For example, Luke includes in his gospel specific contemporary references to the rulers of Jesus' day (e.g., 1:5; 2:1-2; 3:1), and if these are supposed to be true, but do not enjoy at least purported historical status, I, for one, would be lost as to the meaning of "historical."

The apostle Peter emphasized the factual grounding of the Christian message by stating, "For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty"¹³ (2 Peter 1:16). Given

his restrictive understanding of the nature of history, I would be tempted to turn Dr. Frei's question back on him: "But how do you get from there to the incarnation?"

Identifying the Story

And thus, by cutting off its anchor to history, postliberalism has not really made progress over neo-orthodoxy, despite its claim of faithfulness to the biblical message. The problem is that the assertion of truths while deliberately dismissing accepted criteria for the testing of these truths becomes meaningless. I do not mean to invoke the verifiability principle of logical positivism, which maintained that only those statements that are potentially empirically verifiable are allowed to count as meaningful. But postliberalism has put itself into a very different position because its assertions can clearly not only be confirmed, but even expanded by conventional historical means. By disallowing a rigorous examination, postliberalism not only makes the truth claim arbitrary, but also leaves us ultimately hanging with regard to the actual content of the narrative.

To give a brief illustration of what I mean, let us say that we have prepared a surprise birthday party for a coworker. She has been asked to come to a certain room in our building, but she does not show up. Someone claims that he knows for sure that she is in the building. Still, after she has not shown up for quite a while, it is legitimate to question how our colleague knows that she is in the building. Did he see her? Has he spoken with her? Is there circumstantial evidence of her presence because her purse is on her desk or her computer is switched on? For our colleague to keep insisting that she is in the building without making any attempt at justifying this assertion becomes irrational. In the same way, Frei's assertion that the narrative is true without allowing the normal tests for the truths of such an assertion becomes just as gratuitous.

Let us return to Lindbeck's analysis of religious narrative as similar to Wittgenstein's language games. The point about these language games is that none of them is fundamental. Every language game has its own integrity, and none of them is accountable to any others. Thus, in this context, it would make sense to say that a religious language game is different from a historical

language game, and so one ought not to expect the religious language game to conform its statements to the grammar of a historical language game. Consequently the language game of biblical religion has its own integrity and can be "played" without regard to its competitors or critics. Inside of the language game, we can claim the truths of the narrative without apology.¹⁴

The problem is that there is no independent standard of truth. Frei may think that the efforts by evangelicals to nail down the exact meaning of propositions and to harmonize apparent discrepancies are artificial, but not to do so leaves us guessing as to which version of the story is the correct one. Frei's response is to be content with a "generous orthodoxy," but this is another meaningless term, which has been rapidly assimilated by numerous theologians. "Orthodoxy," as we observed at the outset, refers to a basic adherence to the true doctrines of Christianity. We may not agree on exactly which doctrines belong to essential Christianity, but, whatever those beliefs may be, you either are orthodox or you are not. The very word makes it impossible for there to be gradations in orthodoxy. If the set of belief becomes flexible, "orthodoxy" is simply not an appropriate term.

Thus it turns out that, just as with neo-orthodoxy, since postliberalism has no controlling authority, and since it does not accept the biblical texts as necessarily flawless, and since the biblical language game is not accountable to other conceptual reference points, the question of what exactly constitutes the story is left open. How precisely we construe the meaning of the narrative is left to the interpreter, and thus, despite all good intentions to the contrary, we find ourselves all of a sudden side by side with postmodernism after all. George Lindbeck, though denying the charge of relativity, let alone irrationality, asserts:

The sense of what is real or unreal is in large part socially constructed, and what seems credible or incredible to contemporary theologians is likely to be more the product of their milieu and intellectual conditioning than of their science, philosophy, or theological argumentation.¹⁵

It is not that Lindbeck promotes this postmodern understanding of the theologian's work;

in fact, he might consider it to be undesirable, but since he presents it as undeniable reality, it becomes an unavoidable factor.

A fascinating negative example of this problem is illustrated in an article by Robert P. Jones and Melissa C. Stewart. They raise the point that it is all very well to call for a return to the Christian's self-identity by being faithful within the Christian paradigm, but what if your understanding of the paradigm is faulty from the outset? Their case in point is dubious, but that fact only enhances their contention. Jones and Stewart argue that, when one applies postliberal strategy to the Christianity of the American South, one winds up bolstering the flawed theology of Southern Baptists and related movements, which these authors consider to be wrongheaded. So, they contend, postliberalism is helpful as a corrective to liberalism, but potentially harmful in other contexts. Regardless of what one may think of their example, it makes it clear that, without external standards of correctness, postliberalism's appeal to simply live by the biblical narrative is naïve because it does not provide sufficient ways of identifying which interpretation of the narrative is the correct one.

A Final Admonition

There is something intrinsically appealing in the idea that we dispense with critical issues and merely focus on the biblical narrative and live according to it, and thus it is not surprising that it has lapped over from those who originally were at home in a liberal context, to authors who still accept the label of "evangelical." A current fashion among evangelicals is the so-called "Emergent Church." One of its leaders is Brian McLaren,¹⁶ who has achieved a great deal of popularity by teaching that we need to focus on the story of Christ, and that doctrines and standards may only stand in the way of living an authentic Christian life. In fact, one of his more recent books is entitled *A Generous Orthodoxy*.¹⁷

McLaren asks his readers in the Christian church to get beyond their preoccupations with irrelevant doctrines, labels, and categories that only serve to exclude people and to empower our pride. Instead, we need to learn to accept the fact that the Church is filled with sinners, and that by judging them, we are erecting barriers between people and between us and God. He claims that

the mission of Jesus was one of inclusiveness; after all, he welcomed even the woman caught in adultery. The church's mission is to serve the kingdom of God in the world, which is not synonymous with the church, and that means to leave behind all obstacles. What difference does it make what specific attributes we believe about God, Christ, Scripture, or salvation? Furthermore, he declares that it is a serious mistake to divide the world into those who are saved and those who are not; we do not have the right to think that any human beings, including people of different religions, are lost. Even though McLaren is still called "evangelical" by many people, it appears to me that the two originators of postliberalism have greater respect for doctrines than McLaren, for whom they are not much more than obstacles.

Sadly, whether we are talking about the original form of postliberalism or its even more watered-down pseudo-evangelical version, its ultimate fate can only be the opposite of its intent. By robbing the gospel of its objective content, there can no longer be true grace. The good news is good only because it is preceded by the bad news of our sin and its fatal consequences. What McLaren gives us is not a God of grace or mercy, but a god of indulgence, a god who overlooks our sin because, after all, no one is perfect. But if this were the case, then there could be no rejoicing in the fact of salvation and no assurance of being accepted by God because indulgence is subjective. I can be sure of my salvation because I know that, even though I am a sinner who deserves only condemnation, God gave his word that if I trust in Christ, who died on the cross for me, I will be saved. If all I have left is a vague notion that God abhors categories, I have nothing left to celebrate. I cannot know either when I may have overstepped the bounds, or that Christ's atonement is applicable to me because I have abandoned rational thought (which would still be true, even if I picked and chose among doctrines based on whether they appeal to me). Historically, when the church lost its affirmative voice, such as just prior to the Reformation, the result was not a time of freedom and happiness, but a time of fear and uncertainty.

It is not the calling of the servant of God to teach what makes him feel good about himself. The Bible exhorts us in 2 Timothy 2:15:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.

and in James 3:1

Not many should become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment.

Whether we consider ourselves postliberal or evangelical, or we eschew labels, there is no shortcut permitted for those who wish to expound the truth of God's revelation.

Notes

¹ I would be able to give a detailed answer a few months later. See my article, "Hegel in Rahner: A Study in Philosophical Hermeneutics." *Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978):285-298.

² E.g., John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977).

³ Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale, 1974).

⁴ Paul van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: MacMillan, 1963).

⁵ Frei seems to imply that it is not possible to do both: live according to the first-order story and supply a second-order defense of the text. It would appear to me that they are logically and experientially compatible.

⁶ Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (orig. 1975, reprint: Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1997).

⁷ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London: A.&C. Black, 1954).

⁸ Frei, *Identity*, 200.

⁹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984).

¹⁰ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1984).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹² Frei, *Eclipse*, 14.

¹³ Quotations from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version*. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

¹⁴ See the work of another postliberal theologian, William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989).

¹⁵ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 63.

¹⁶ Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

¹⁷ Or, more specifically, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a missionary, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, fundamentalist/calvinist, anabaptist/anglican, methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, depressed-yet-hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Nobody can be all of those things since they are contradictory. What McLaren may think of as cute and inclusive is offensive to anyone who takes maturity in faith seriously. Even so-called postmodern Christians are not brain-dead.

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