

Liberals, believing that sincerity, integrity, and impartiality characterized both true science and true religion, could not bring themselves to reject one or the other, but felt that there were traditional elements in religious orthodoxy that perhaps were not essential to a true and living religion. They felt that these non-essentials were the only ones really threatened by the findings of science.

Believing also that the empirical method of obtaining knowledge via sense experience (according to Hume and Kant) was the only possible one, they sought to reconstruct religion and theology on the basis of the empirical approach. Human experience, and especially religious experience, thus became the source and touchstone of theology. And since all empirical concepts were viewed as subject to revision, all theological definitions became relative to ongoing experience.

Because of its emphasis on religious experience rather than on a supernatural revelation, Liberalism has often been accused of turning theology into anthropology. Theology became the study of the religious consciousness, and called into active participation such disciplines as Philosophy of Religion, History of Religions, Study of Comparative Religions, and Psychology of Religion.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is called the "father of modern theology". He was the first to attempt to construct an empirical approach to religion via specifically Christian experience. He was influenced by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, with two modifications. Schleiermacher believed that although religious experience does not give us knowledge of God in Himself, yet it does give us real knowledge of God's relation to us. And he believed that theology does not deal merely with the phenomenal, but also with the noumenal (i.e., not only with things as they appear, but also with things as they are).

Schleiermacher was also influenced by Hegel's philosophy of continuity and its emphasis on the divinity of man. He found the real revelation of God in the inner life of man, and particularly in Jesus Christ, who Schleiermacher felt enjoyed a greater measure of God-consciousness than any other man.

Religion in its essence is "the feeling of absolute dependence". When we reflect on our consciousness, we discover a realm in which we have a sense of being absolutely dependent, as being ultimately derived from and sustained by something beyond us. The being whom we experience in this relationship is God.

Schleiermacher felt that the basic task of theology is that of careful analysis and description of the religious consciousness (the feeling of absolute dependence) to determine what doctrines can be discovered in it. Such analysis yields three basic aspects of religious (or more specifically, Christian) consciousness: (a) consciousness of dependence; (b) consciousness of sin; and (c) consciousness of grace. Further analysis of these aspects yields certain attributes of God, as follows:

- (1) Consciousness of dependence
 - (a) Omnipotence (the basic attribute)
 - (b) Eternity
 - (c) Omnipresence
 - (d) Omniscience
- (2) Consciousness of sin
 - (a) Holiness
 - (b) Righteousness
 - (c) Mercy