

1800s History of Liberals and Evangelicals

Both the American Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789) led the Western world into the 1800s. But it was the **Industrial Revolution**, which began in England in the late 1700s and then spread to Germany, France, and the USA, that presented Christianity with its greatest challenge. The industrial machine brought the population from the farm to the city and shifted dependence from God to man. By the mid-1800s, popular Western thought believed that natural science, man's reasoning, and the physical world would solve all our problems. Belief in the supernatural was considered medieval, naïve, and out-of-date.

In the 1830s, **Charles Darwin** (1809-1882) sailed to South America and concluded that all life evolved from a common ancestor via the survival of the fittest. T.H. Huxley added credibility to the theory of evolution by coining the word "agnosticism" (truth cannot be known), Karl Marx depended upon evolution to create communism, and J.D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie used evolution to explain the growth of Big Business.

Even before Darwin, **Voltaire** (1694-1778) inspired not only the French Revolution but also atheism, and **Immanuel Kant** (1724-1804) declared that man's reason, not God's existence, is the center of the universe. But it was the scientific, political, and social evolution theories that opened the door for Christian liberalism. The Germans led the way. **Fredrich Schleiermacher** (1768-1834) can be thought of as the first true Christian liberal. He pioneered biblical criticism and declared experience, not Scripture as the basis of religion. Meanwhile, **Soren Kierkegaard** (1813-1855) coining the phrase "leap of faith" claimed God is known by an experiential existential leap. **Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844-1900) said, "God is dead." He later became Hitler's prophet of Nazism as Karl Marx has been for Communism. Then **Julius Wellhausen** (1844-1910) declared that the Bible (especially the Old Testament) was merely an evolution of old Hebrew stories and thus was myth, not actual history.

Three groups emerged from the evangelical revival of the 1700s: the Methodists, the Calvinists, and the Evangelical Anglicans. They were joined in the 1800s by several great preachers and crusade evangelists as well as independent missionary societies and Bible societies.

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) pronounced the theory of evolution to be a monstrous error. Spurgeon attracted a congregation of over 6000 in his London Baptist Church as well as starting a pastor's collage, an orphanage, and a literature distribution society.

In 1865 **William Booth** started the Salvation Army to reach the new poor created by the industrial ghettos.

D.L. Moody (1837-1899) after a tour of Great Britain, became an evangelist of mass crusades in America.

Expressing the priesthood of all believers by having no formal clergy, the **Brethren** emphasized the authority of the Bible and soon return of Christ. Some clear leaders of the Brethren movement were J. Darby, George Mueller and Hudson Taylor. Darby, although not the originator of dispensationalism, is certainly one of the greatest early writers of it. Mueller's orphanages in Bristol, England and his refusal to publicly appeal for money gained great credibility for the Gospel. Hudson Taylor went to China as a missionary in 1853 and returned to England due to ill health in 1860. Brethren influence helped him to found the China Inland Mission, a prototype of future "Faith" missions.

With all the liberal criticism, one might think this was a low time for the **Bible**. Quite the opposite is true. Work on ancient manuscripts proved the reliability of the ancient text. The late dating of the New Testament claimed by the liberals was disproved by Cambridge scholars Westcott, Hort, and Lightfoot. But equally significant is the massive amount of Bible translation and Bible distribution done during the 1800s. William Carey alone translated six complete and 24 partial translations of the Bible. The British and Foreign Bible Society reported in 1907 that since its founding in 1804 it distributed 203,931,768 Bibles, Testaments and portions of Scripture.

For more information see study book **History of Christianity** on Relational Concepts web page: <https://relationalconcepts.org/>

P.O. Box 141456 • Grand Rapids, MI 49514 • relationalconcepts.org