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What is “Progressive” Christianity?

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One of the benefits of studying church history is that you realize that Solomon was right: “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9).

This proverb has certainly been proven true when it comes to different “versions” of Christianity that have popped up throughout the life of the church. In every generation it seems there’s a new group that comes along insisting that their new and improved Christianity beats all predecessors hands down.

But, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that this new version isn’t new at all. It’s simply a microwaved version of some other alternate brand of Christianity that the church has faced (and rejected) before.

This is not to suggest, of course, that the modern church has no room for change or growth. Just like individuals need sanctification, so does the institutional church. Christ wants to purify his bride, and so we should expect that, this side of glory, there will always be places that need reformation and improvement.

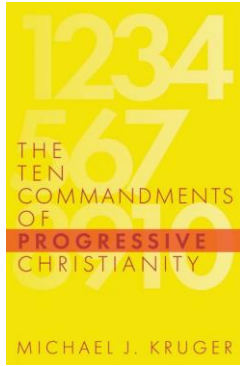
But wanting to reform the church is not the same thing as wanting an entirely new version of the Christian faith.

And that brings us to the theme of “progressive” Christianity. While it might look like a new and shiny version of the faith—Christianity 2.0 if you will—it turns out to be something the church has faced, and rejected, before.

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So, what are the tenets of progressive Christianity? Well, I wrote a whole book on it! In *The 10 Commandments of Progressive Christianity* (Cruciform, 2019), I laid out ten beliefs of progressive Christians (in their own words), and then offered a response.

The framework of my book came from (of all things) a daily devotional from Richard Rohr which listed 10 principles that he thinks modern Christianity needs to embody. Rohr's ten principles are actually drawn from Philip Gulley's book, *If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus* (HarperOne, 2010).

Although ironically entitled, "[Returning to Essentials](#)," the ten principles are essentially a confessional statement of modern liberalism (while, at the same time, pretending to deplore confessionals statements). It is, more or less, a "10 commandments" for progressive Christianity.

Indeed, these ten commandments sound like they were gathered not so much on the mountain top but in the university classroom. It's less about God revealing his desires, but more about man expressing his. It's less Moses, more Oprah.

But take note: each of these commandments is *partially* true. Indeed, that is what makes progressive Christianity as a whole, so challenging. It is a master class in half-truths which sound appealing on the surface until you dig down deeper and really explore their foundations and implications.

So, for further reflection, here are the ten tenets of progressive Christianity:

- 1. *Jesus Is a Model for Living More Than an Object for Worship***
(Translation: Jesus isn't divine but just a good moral teacher)
- 2. *Affirming People's Potential Is More Important Than Reminding Them of Their Brokenness***
(Translation: Sin is not a problem; people are basically good)
- 3. *The Work of Reconciliation Should Be Valued over Making Judgments***
(Translation: Christians should stop being so judgmental)
- 4. *Gracious Behavior Is More Important Than Right Belief***
(Translation: Theology doesn't matter; Just be a good person)
- 5. *Inviting Questions Is More Valuable Than Supplying Answers***
(Translation: We cannot be certain about what we believe; truth is not accessible)

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6. *Encouraging the Personal Search Is More Important Than Group Uniformity*
(Translation: The church is just about protecting its authority and squashing dissent)
7. *Meeting Actual Needs Is More Important Than Maintaining Institutions*
(Translation: Too much focus on the Church gets in the way of God's mission)
8. *Peacemaking Is More Important Than Power*
(Translation: Since the church abuses its power, that power should be taken away entirely)
9. *We Should Care More about Love and Less about Sex*
(Translation: God doesn't care what you do in the bedroom if your hearts in the right place)
10. *Life in This World Is More Important Than the Afterlife*
(Translation: No one knows what happens after you die, so just focus on fixing the present world)

Of course, this is just a list of the ten commandments. For my rebuttals, check out [my book](#). In the meantime, I think one thing is clear: this particular version of Christianity is not really Christianity. It is a man-made system of morality that lacks any real hope or vision for the future.

Put differently, it is *not* good news. It is not good news to tell someone that it is all up to their good works, and that there is no eternal value to what they do, and that you can't be certain it matters because we cannot be certain of anything.

What we need, then, is not to go forward to Christianity 2.0, but to go back to the original, historic Christian faith. And that faith is, indeed, good news.

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