

## Liberalism

A free way of thinking and acting in private and public life.

### I. DEFINITION:

The word *liberal* is derived from the Latin *liber*, free, and up to the end of the eighteenth century signified only “worthy of a free man”, so that people spoke of “liberal arts”, or “liberal occupations”. Later the term was applied also to those qualities of intellect and of character, which were considered an ornament becoming those who occupied a higher social position on account of their wealth and education. Thus *liberal* got the meaning of intellectually independent, broad-minded, magnanimous, frank, open, and genial.

Modern Liberalism adopts and propagates the deceiving mask of Liberalism in the true sense.

### II. DEVELOPMENT AND PRINCIPAL TYPES OF MODERN LIBERALISM:

Since the so-called Liberal principles of 1789 are based upon a wrong notion of human liberty and are and must forever be contradictory and indefinite in themselves, it is an impossibility in practical life to carry them into effect with much consistency.

#### (A) Anti-ecclesiastical Liberalism:

(1) The old Liberalism may be described as the drawing-room Liberalism of the free-thinking educated classes, who, however, did not condescend to become practical politicians or statesmen; they were superior observers, infallible critics, standing above all parties. In later days some few of these old Liberals, animated by a truly liberal chivalry, stood up for the rights of suppressed minorities...

(2) Doctrinaire Liberalism was the Liberalism of the practical politicians and statesmen, who intended to re-establish, maintain, and develop, in the different states, the constitutional form of government.

(3) Bourgeois Liberalism, was the natural outgrowth of doctrinaire Liberalism. It adapted itself more to the interests of the propertied and moneyed classes; for the clergy and nobility having been dispossessed of their political power, these were the only classes which could make use of the new institutions, the people not being sufficiently instructed and organized to do so. The rich industrialist classes, therefore, were from the very beginning and in all countries the mainstay of Liberalism, and Liberalism for its part was forced to further their interests.

Its characteristic traits are materialistic, sordid ideals, which care only for unrestrained enjoyment of life, egoism in exploiting the economically weak by means of tariffs which are for the interests of the classes, a systematic persecution of Christianity and especially the Catholic Church and her institutions, a frivolous disregard and even a mocking contempt of the Divine moral order, a cynical indifference in the choice and use of means-----slander, corruption, fraud, etc.-----in fighting one's opponents and in acquiring an absolute mastery and control of everything.

(4) The Liberal “parties of progress” are in opposition to the Conservatives and the Liberals of the bourgeois classes, in so far as these, when once in power, usually care little or nothing for further improvements according to their Liberal principles, whereas the former lay more stress on the fundamental tenets of Liberalism themselves and fight against a cynical one-sided policy of self-interest.

(5) Liberal Radicals are adherents of progressive modern ideas, which they try to realize without consideration for the existing order or for other people's rights, ideas, and feelings.

(6) The Liberal Democrats want to make the masses of the common people the deciding factor in public affairs. They rely especially on the middle classes, whose interests they pretend to have at heart.

(7) Socialism is the Liberalism of self-interest nurtured by all classes of Liberals described above, and espoused by the members of the fourth estate and the proletariat. It is at the same time nothing but the natural reaction against a one-sided policy of self-interest.

Its main branches are:

\*Communism, which tries to reorganize the social conditions by abolishing all private ownership;

\*Radical Social Democracy of Marx (founded 1848), common in Germany and Austria;

\*Moderate Socialism (Democratic Socialistic Federation in England, Possibilists in France, etc.);

\*Anarchist parties...as a system is relatively the most logical and radical development of the Liberal Principles.

#### (B) Ecclesiastical Liberalism (Liberal Catholicism)

(1) The prevailing political form of modern Liberal Catholicism, is that which would regulate the relations of the Church to the State and modern society in accordance with the Liberal principles.

(2) The more theological and religious form of Liberal Catholicism aims at certain reforms in ecclesiastical doctrine and discipline in accordance with the anti-ecclesiastical liberal Protestant theory and atheistical “science and enlightenment” prevailing at the time. The newest phases of this Liberalism were condemned by Pius X as Modernism.

### III. CONDEMNATION OF LIBERALISM BY THE CHURCH

By proclaiming man's absolute autonomy in the intellectual, moral and social order, Liberalism denies, at least practically, God and supernatural religion. If carried out logically, it leads even to a theoretical denial of God, by putting deified mankind in place of God. It has been censured in the condemnations of Rationalism and Naturalism.

[www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org) listed under “L” for “Liberalism”.