

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF
CARL F. H. HENRY: A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
EVANGELICAL REAPPRAISAL

RUSSELL D. MOORE*

I. INTRODUCTION

When I was told of theologian Carl F. H. Henry's death, the first thing I thought of was one of an unfinished conversation I had had with him. I was working on a dissertation on the kingdom of God and social ethics and eager to ask him questions about his views on the subject. His health was failing, and I was helping him along, holding his arm as he slowly walked down a corridor. "So are you still a premillennialist?" I asked him. He looked at me with confusion and, almost contempt, as though I had asked him, "So are you still opposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat?" He said, "Of course. I've always been a premillennialist, and for three important reasons." I waited to hear them.

First, he said, is the exegesis of Revelation 20. After he spent a few minutes speaking about the reasons he did not believe the text there could support an amillennial or postmillennial viewpoint, he moved to his second point: the hymnody of the church, which he said had always held the apocalypse to be a cataclysmic event after a time of historical tumult. He then paused, and said, "And the third reason ... well, I don't remember the third reason. But it is compelling." At the death of Henry, I reflected on the fact that I will now never know that third compelling reason until both Dr. Henry and I both know for certain what the future kingdom looks like.

When many contemporary evangelicals think of Carl Henry, they think of his prophetic call for evangelical social action: *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. What many fail to see, though, is why Henry thought the conscience was so uneasy in the first place: a deficient vision of the kingdom of God. It is easy to remember Henry for his work on issues of epistemology and theology proper, but not to consider his critical scholarship on the issues of the Kingdom. Whether the elderly Carl Henry could remember everything he believed about the Kingdom, the young Carl Henry certainly taught the evangelical movement much about the kingdom of God, both in its present and future manifestations.

This paper will offer a few reappraisals of Henry's understanding of the kingdom of God as it relates to his social ethics. While much could be said on this topic with the benefit of nearly a generation of backward glance, there are three

* Russell Moore is dean of the School of Theology and professor of Christian theology and ethics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40280.

important issues to be considered here: Henry's social ethics as it relates to the reign of God in evangelical eschatology, soteriology, and ecclesiology.

II. THE KINGDOM, SOCIAL ETHICS, AND THE *UNEASY CONSCIENCE*

Historians rightly identify the first visible rumblings of modern evangelical political engagement with Carl F. H. Henry's 1947 jeremiad, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.¹ Henry could not have foreseen the way this was going in the generation after *Uneasy Conscience*.

Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* was not first of all a socio-political tract. Instead, it served in many ways to define theologically much of what it meant to be a "new evangelical" in contrast to the older fundamentalism.² Along with Ramm, Carnell, and others, Henry pressed the theological case for evangelicalism in terms of a vigorous engagement with non-evangelical thought.³ As articulated by Henry and the early constellations of evangelical theology, such as Fuller Theological Seminary and the National Association of Evangelicals, evangelicalism would not differ with fundamentalism in the "fundamentals" of doctrinal conviction, but in the application of Christian truth claims on to all areas of human endeavor.⁴ Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*, which set the stage for evangelical differentiation from isolationist American fundamentalism, sought to be what Harold J. Ockenga called in his foreword to the monograph "a healthy antidote to fundamentalist aloofness in a distraught world."⁵

Thus, the call to socio-political engagement was not incidental to evangelical theological identity but was at the forefront of it. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*, and the movement it defined, sought to distinguish the post-war evangelical effort such that evangelical theologians, as one observer notes, "found themselves straddling the fence between two well-established positions: fundamentalist social detachment and the liberal Social Gospel."⁶

Such "straddling," however, is an inaccurate term if it carries the idea that Henry and his post-war colleagues sought to find a middle way between fundamentalism and the Social Gospel. The evangelicals charged the fundamentalists with misapplying their theological convictions, but they further

¹Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947).

²As the editor of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's *Decision* magazine would note, "The book dropped like a bomb into the peaceful summer Bible conference atmosphere of the postwar evangelical community." Sherwood Eliot Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 47.

³This was not only in the social and political arenas. Henry sought to form an evangelical movement that would engage robustly the current streams of philosophy, sociology, scientific thought, and political theory. See, e.g., Carl F. H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946).

⁴Evangelicalism was not a repudiation of fundamentalism but a reform movement within it. Henry, even in his most insistent criticisms of fundamentalism, asserted that he wished to "perform surgery" on fundamentalism, not to kill it. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* 9.

⁵Harold J. Ockenga, "Introduction," in Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* 14.

⁶Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 138.

charged the Social Gospel with having no explicit theology at all. "As Protestant liberalism lost a genuinely theological perspective, it substituted mainly a political program," Henry lamented.⁷ The new evangelical theologians maintained that their agenda was far from a capitulation to the Social Gospel, but was instead the conservative antidote to it.⁸ This was because, Henry argued, evangelicalism was a theology calling for engagement, not a program for engagement calling for a theology.

The Social Gospel theologians, Henry claimed, "exalt the social issue above the theological, and prize the Christian religion mainly as a tool for justifying an independently determined course of social action."⁹ Nevertheless, fundamentalism was also, in many ways, not theological enough for Henry and his cohorts, a fact that lay at the root of fundamentalist isolation as the evangelicals saw it. Henry commended fundamentalists for their defense of the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, and other major doctrines. This was not enough, however, he warned. "The norm by which liberal theology was gauged for soundness unhappily became the summary of fundamentalist doctrine," he wrote. "Complacency with fragmented doctrines meant increasing failure to comprehend the relationship of underlying theological principles."¹⁰

This meant, Henry argued, that although conservative Christians could apply the biblical witness to evangelistic endeavors and certain basic doctrinal affirmations, "they have neglected the philosophical, scientific, social, and political problems that agitate our century," such that those seeking to find a theoretical structure for making metaphysical sense of the current situation were forced to find it in Marxism or Roman Catholicism.¹¹

Among the primary threats to a cohesive evangelical movement were the skirmishes between Reformed and dispensational theologies, which Henry viewed as part of a larger trend of evangelical "navel-gazing."¹² This was, however, a real threat to evangelical theological cohesiveness, especially since the debates between

⁷Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 116.

⁸By segregating political concerns from the gospel, Henry asserted, the fundamentalist evacuation from the public square had conceded it to liberals such as Walter Rauschenbusch, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and their more radical successors. He lamented the fact that the inadequacies of the Social Gospel were not devastated by conservative orthodoxy, but instead by the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, which was "as destructive of certain essential elements of the biblical view as it was reconstructive of others." Carl F. H. Henry, *A Plea for Evangelical Engagement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971) 34–35.

⁹Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* 21. The language used by the Social Gospel pioneers themselves only bolsters Henry's critique. "We have a social gospel," Walter Rauschenbusch proclaimed. "We need a systematic theology large enough to match it and vital enough to back it." Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology of the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917; repr. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997) 1.

¹⁰Carl F. H. Henry, "Dare We Renew the Controversy? Part II: The Fundamentalist Reduction," *Christianity Today* (June 24, 1957) 23.

¹¹Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* 12. Henry's argument here would continue as he later argued that "only three formidable movements insist that man can know ultimate reality" in the context of modern Western thought. He identified these as communist materialism, Catholic Thomism, and evangelical Protestantism. Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis* (Waco, TX: Word, 1967) 7.

¹²Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976) 29.

the groups predated the postwar evangelical movement itself.¹³ This lack of cohesion was even more important given that the bone of contention between evangelical covenantalists and evangelical dispensationalists was the concept Henry identified in *Uneasy Conscience* as most fundamental to an articulation of Christian sociopolitical engagement: the kingdom of God.¹⁴

The evangelical movement could not dismiss the covenant/dispensational controversies over the Kingdom as mere quibbling over secondary matters; nor could these concerns be divorced from the rest of the doctrinal synthesis as though the differences were tantamount to the timing of the Rapture. Dispensationalists charged covenant theologians with shackling the biblical witness to a unitary understanding centered on the justification of individuals rather than the larger cosmic purposes of God. Covenant theologians accused dispensationalists of denying the present reality of the kingdom of Christ, divorcing the relevance of the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount from this age, and with denigrating the centrality of the church by considering it a "parenthesis" in the plan of God. These Kingdom-oriented differences were multitudinous; and none of them could be resolved by an umbrella statement on last things appended to the conclusion of the National Association of Evangelicals statement of faith.

Indeed, Henry set forth his manifesto for sociopolitical engagement, as, above all, a theological statement; more specifically, it was a plea for an evangelical Kingdom theology.¹⁵ For Henry, the urgency of such a Kingdom theology was not rooted only in the theological fragmentation of evangelicals over the Kingdom question, but also because only a Kingdom theology could address the specific theological reasons behind fundamentalist disengagement:

Contemporary evangelicalism needs (1) to reawaken the relevance of its redemptive message to the global predicament; (2) to stress the great evangelical agreements in a common world front; (3) to discard elements of its message which cut the nerve of world compassion as contradictory to the inherent genius of Christianity; (4) to restudy eschatological convictions for a proper perspective which will not unnecessarily dissipate evangelical strength in controversy over

¹³This is seen in the contentious battles within the Presbyterian communion over the 1941 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States controversy over whether dispensationalism was within the bounds of the Westminster Confession of Faith. This move was denounced by Dallas Seminary president Lewis Sperry Chafer in "Dispensational Distinctions Challenged," *BibSac* 100 (1943) 337–43.

¹⁴As Sydney Ahlstrom observes: "[Dispensationalism] aroused strong resistance among American Protestants by denying what most evangelicals and all liberals firmly believed—that the Kingdom of God would come as part of the historical process. They could not accept the dispensationalist claim that all Christian history was a kind of meaningless 'parenthesis' between the setting aside of the Jews and the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom. This claim aroused violent reactions because it provided a rationale for destructive attitudes and encouraged secession from existing denominations. Especially objectionable was the tendency of dispensationalists to look for the Antichrist among the 'apostate churches' of this 'present age.'" Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 811.

¹⁵So Henry contended that *Uneasy Conscience* was written in order "to urge upon evangelicals the necessity for a deliberate restudy of the whole kingdom question, that the great evangelical agreements may be set effectively over against the modern mind, with the least dissipation of energy on secondary issues." Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* 51.

secondary positions, in a day when the significance of the primary insistences is international.¹⁶

The formation of such a Kingdom consensus was, however, easier proposed than accomplished; not only because of the internal theological Kingdom tensions within evangelicalism, but also because of the role of Kingdom theology in non-evangelical American Christianity. After all, a Kingdom consensus had indeed been achieved within the ranks of Protestant liberalism by the onset of the early twentieth century.¹⁷

In the years since *The Uneasy Conscience*, however, evangelical theology's "Cold War" over the Kingdom has thawed dramatically. Remarkably, the move toward a consensus Kingdom theology has come most markedly not from the broad center of the evangelical coalition, as represented by Henry or Ladd, but from the rival streams of dispensationalism and covenant theology themselves. This growing consensus did not come through joint "manifestos," but through sustained theological reflection. Nor, has the consensus come through a doctrinal "cease-fire" in order to skirt the issue of the relationship of the Kingdom to the present mission of the people of God. Instead, it came as both traditions sought to relate their doctrinal distinctives to the overarching theme of the kingdom of God as an integrative motif for their respective systems.

Thus, the move toward an evangelical Kingdom theology is not simply the construction of a broad, comprehensive center for evangelical theological reflection. As the Kingdom idea has been explored within evangelical theology, and within the sub-traditions of dispensationalism and covenantalism, specific points of contention have been addressed, especially in terms of the way in which the Kingdom concept relates to the consummation of all things, the salvation of the world, and the mission of the church. In so doing, this emerging Kingdom theology addresses the very same stumbling blocks to an evangelical witness in the public square that were once identified as the roots of conservative Christianity's "uneasy conscience."

III. THE KINGDOM, SOCIAL ETHICS, AND ESCHATOLOGY

It is not much of an overstatement to say that Carl F. H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* is first and foremost a tract on eschatology. In it, Henry tried to "triangulate" theologically between the Kingdom eschatologies of the Social Gospel left and the fundamentalist right. It would be mistaken to assume

¹⁶Ibid. 57.

¹⁷For a discussion of the varying conceptions of the Kingdom in American Protestant theology and biblical scholarship, see Gösta Lundström, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus: A History of Interpretation from the Last Decades of the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, trans. J. Bulman (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963); Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963); Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 3-42; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 54-67; and Mark Saucy, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus in 20th Century Theology* (Dallas: Word, 1997). Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof traced the "new emphasis" on the Kingdom of God from Immanuel Kant through Friedrich Schleiermacher to the contemporary scene of theology and biblical scholarship, largely due to its popularization by Albrecht Ritschl.

that Henry considered the two eschatological positions to be equal and opposite errors.

Instead, he pointedly asserted that Protestant liberalism had more than a troubled conscience, but had in fact abandoned the gospel itself.¹⁸ For Henry, the challenge for conservative Protestants was somehow to synthesize theologically the relationship between the biblical teachings on the “Kingdom then” of the future, visible reign of Christ and the “Kingdom now” of the present, spiritual reign of Christ. Until this matter could be theologically resolved, Henry believed, evangelical eschatology would remain kindling for the fires of a troubled social conscience.

In the background of fundamentalist eschatological pronouncements stood the ghost of Walter Rauschenbusch. With a full ballast of “Kingdom now” rhetoric, for example, Rauschenbusch had called upon socialist organizers in the United States to welcome Christians into their ranks for the good of a common effort to “Christianize the social order.”¹⁹ Rauschenbusch employed the language of Christian eschatology, even of millennialism, to no small controversy within his own Northern Baptist ranks.²⁰ He redefined, however, the prophetic hope of a “millennium” to mean an imminent possibility of a Kingdom of social justice in the present age.²¹ It was this view of the present reality of the Kingdom, Henry argued, that had led to the fundamentalist eschatological backlash that lay behind the “uneasy conscience.” Fundamentalist political isolationism was, at least in one sense, an attempt to defend the future hope of the Kingdom from anti-supernaturalism of the modernists. Henry may have warned evangelicals that they

¹⁸This is not the only time that Henry would make clear that he did not equate the errors of fundamentalism with the errors of liberalism. Henry corresponded with Billy Graham in June of 1950 with reservations about whether Henry would be the best choice for the editorship of *Christianity Today* because of his firm convictions on this very matter. “I was convinced that liberalism and evangelicalism do not have equal right and dignity in the true church.” Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian* (Waco, TX: Word, 1986) 142. “It is quite popular at the moment to crucify the fundamentalist,” he wrote earlier. “That is not the object of this series of articles; there is no sympathy here for the distorted attack on fundamentalism so often pressed by liberals and humanists.... The fundamentalist is placed on the cross, while the liberal goes scot-free in a forest of weasel words.” Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* 60–61.

¹⁹Rauschenbusch wrote: “Why should they erect a barbwire fence between the field of Socialism and Christianity which makes it hard to pass from one to the other? Organized Christianity represents the largest fund of sobriety, moral health, good will, moral aspiration, teaching ability, and capacity to sacrifice for higher ends, which can be found in America. If Socialists will count up the writers, lecturers, and organizers who acquired their power of agitation and moral appeal through the training they got in church life, they will realize what an equipment for propaganda lies stored in the Christian churches.” Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1912) 398–99.

²⁰See, for example, the discussion of Rauschenbusch’s debate with premillennialist critic James Willmarth, an influential Northern Baptist pastor, in Philadelphia. Paul M. Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch: American Reformer* (New York: Macmillan, 1988) 90–91.

²¹Rauschenbusch argued therefore: “Our chief interest in any millennium is the desire for a social order in which the worth and freedom of every least human being will be honored and protected; in which the brotherhood of man will be expressed in the common possession of economic resources of society; and in which the spiritual good of humanity will be set high above the private profit interests of all materialistic groups. We hope for such an order for humanity as we hope for heaven for ourselves.” Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel* 224.

had overreacted, but he did not tell them their fears had been unfounded.²² This was true especially in the area of eschatology.

Nevertheless, *The Uneasy Conscience* pressed the claim that fundamentalists had overreacted as they tried to avoid the “tendency to identify the kingdom with any present social order, however modified in a democratic or communistic direction.”²³ In so doing, however, the fundamentalists had strictly relegated the Kingdom to the age to come, thereby cutting off its relevance to contemporary sociopolitical concerns. Moreover, Henry complained, fundamentalism’s pessimistic view of history informed by dispensationalist eschatology fueled an attitude of “protest against foredoomed failure.”²⁴ Fundamentalism “in revolting against the Social Gospel seemed also to revolt against the Christian social imperative,” he argued. “It was the failure of fundamentalism to work out a positive message within its own framework, and its tendency instead to take further refuge in a despairing view of world history that cut off the pertinence of evangelicalism to the modern global crisis.”²⁵

The result, Henry concluded, “non-evangelical spokesmen” were left to pick up the task of socio-political reflection “in a non-redemptive context.”²⁶ Henry did not level all of the blame for this otherworldly flight from the public square on fundamentalist dispensationalism, but he did suggest that dispensationalism carried a disproportionate share of the blame, both in terms of political engagement and personal ethics.²⁷

Henry proposed that fundamentalists did not need to co-opt the Social Gospel vision of the Kingdom in order to answer the social and political dilemmas they faced. Instead, he argued that the post-war evangelical renaissance should capitalize on the theological strengths of both its premillennial and its amillennial eschatologies. He viewed both groups as the inheritors of the evangelical

²²Forty years after the publication of *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry explained: “I had no inclination whatever to commend the modernist agenda, for its soft and sentimental theology could not sustain its ‘millennial fanaticism.’ Discarding historic doctrinal convictions and moving in the direction of liberalism would not revitalize fundamentalism.” Carl F. H. Henry, *Twilight of a Great Civilization: The Drift toward Neo-Paganism* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988) 165.

²³Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* 49.

²⁴Ibid. 26.

²⁵Ibid. 32.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Thus, Henry explained: “Dispensational theology resisted the dismissal of biblical eschatology and its import for ethics. But in its extreme forms it also evaporates the present-day relevance of much of the ethics of Jesus. Eschatology is invoked to postpone the significance of the Sermon and other segments of New Testament moral teaching to a later Kingdom age. Dispensationalism erects a cleavage in biblical ethics in the interest of debatable eschatological theory. Dispensationalism holds that Christ’s Kingdom has been postponed until the end of the Church age, and that Kingdom-ethics will become dramatically relevant again only in the future eschatological era. Liberalism destroyed biblical eschatology and secularized Christian ethics; and the interim ethic school abandoned the literal relevance of Jesus’ eschatology and ethics alike; and extreme dispensationalism holds literally to both eschatology and ethics, but moves both into the future. New Testament theology will not sustain this radical repudiation of any present form of the Kingdom of heaven.” Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 550–51.

eschatological task following the dissipation of postmillennialism, even the more orthodox strands held by relatively evangelical theologians such as James Orr.

Henry argued evangelical eschatology had the responsibility to provide a biblical and theological alternative to the utopian visions of both evolutionary secularism and Protestant liberalism.²⁸ Thus, Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* did more than sound the alarm that fundamentalists had neglected "Kingdom now" preaching. Henry also indicted fundamentalists for abandoning "Kingdom then" preaching. It was not only that fundamentalists were too future-oriented to care about socio-political engagement, but also that, in the most important ways, they were not future-oriented enough. Henry focused the key reason for this "apprehension over *Kingdom then* preaching" on what he considered to be the overheated zeal of the earlier generations of dispensationalist popularizers. It was true, Henry asserted, that World War II had demolished the postmillennial predictions of a "Christian century" of world peace and harmony. But the war had demolished just as surely the prophetic predictions of a revived Roman Empire, along with various efforts to identify the Antichrist on the world scene.²⁹

Having diagnosed the eschatological impediments to a theology of evangelical engagement, Henry reassured evangelicals that his purpose in the *Uneasy Conscience* was not "to project any new kingdom theory; exegetical novelty so late in church history may well be suspect."³⁰ It would seem, however, that a "new" (at least for American evangelicals) Kingdom theology was precisely what he was proposing. In calling on evangelicals to abandon the extremes of the Social Gospel and fundamentalist withdrawal, Henry simultaneously exhorted evangelical theology to underpin its eschatological convictions with a broader understanding of the kingdom of God. He contrasted the Kingdom reticence of American evangelicals with the Kingdom exuberance of the apostolic witness of the NT. "The apostolic view of the kingdom should likewise be definitive for contemporary evangelicalism," Henry asserted. "There does not seem much apostolic apprehension over kingdom preaching."³¹

²⁸And so he argued: "In the aftermath of the second World War, evangelical postmillennialism almost wholly abandoned the field of kingdom preaching to premillennialism and amillennialism, united in the common conviction that the return of Christ is a prerequisite for the future golden age, but divided over whether it will involve an earthly millennium. Assured of the ultimate triumph of right, contemporary evangelicalism also avoids a minimizing of earthly hostility to the gospel, as well as rejects the naturalistic optimism centering in evolutionary automatic progress. The bright hope of the imminent return of Christ is not minimized, and the kingdom hope is clearly distinguishable from the liberal confidence in a new social order of human making only." Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* 134.

²⁹Ibid. 50.

³⁰Henry charged, therefore: "The fact that the West surrendered the radical biblical judgment on history and took Hegel and Darwin rather than Jesus and Paul as its guides, and substituted the optimistic 'social gospel' for the redemptive good news, opened this door for a radical critique of the social order from the Marxist rather than Christian sources. There was plenty to criticize in the sphere of economics a century ago, even as there is today, even if the Marxists overstate and distort the situation. Christianity holds out no hope for the achievement of absolute economic and social righteousness in present history." Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* 52.

³¹Ibid. 53.

For Henry, this would mean that evangelical theology would have to recognize the centrality of the Kingdom message to the NT, and adapt both their elaborate prophecy timetables and their reluctance to proclaim a present role for the kingdom of God to it. This is because, Henry counseled, “no subject was more frequently on the lips of Jesus Christ than the kingdom.”³² And so, Henry maintained, evangelical theology must deal with the biblical data, which seems to indicate a Kingdom that has already been inaugurated and yet awaits a future consummation.³³ “No study of the kingdom teaching of Jesus is adequate unless it recognizes His implication both that the kingdom is here and that it is not here.”³⁴

In other words, it is not simply the Kingdom theme that speaks to sociopolitical realities. It is also the way in which the Scripture speaks of the Kingdom as both present and future. Thus, Jesus confronts the political authorities in passages such as Matt 26:63–64 by quoting the “not yet” messianic Kingdom references of Daniel 7 while submitting in the “already” to crucifixion, all the while maintaining that the political powers are temporal and derivative in authority. Jesus’ words to “render unto Caesar” are almost immediately put to the test in the early church as Christ-appointed apostles are indicted for acting “contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:7). Jesus speaks of the Kingdom “in your midst” (Luke 17:20–21) that it is given not only to him but to his followers (Luke 22:29), while the apostle Paul mocks the Corinthian followers of Jesus for thinking themselves to be “kings” already (1 Cor 4:8). The writer of Hebrews contrasts the “not yet” of all things in subjection to Christ with the “already” of his incarnation and atonement (Heb 2:5–18).

In grappling with these biblical realities, the task of constructing an evangelical theology of socio-political engagement has been greatly aided by a growing consensus that evangelical eschatology must focus first, not on the sound and fury of millennial meanings, but on the invasion of the eschatological, Davidic Kingdom into the present age, thus dividing bringing the eschaton into the history of the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. By advocating an “already/not yet” model of this fulfillment, evangelical eschatology faces the challenge of integrating these interpretive issues into an understanding of how the present/future reign of Christ impacts contemporary problems of social and political concern.

For Henry, then, a Kingdom-oriented, inaugurated eschatology can inform evangelicalism by reminding the movement that all secularist and evolutionary models of utopian progress have “borrowed the biblical doctrine of the coming

³²Henry argued: “He proclaimed kingdom truth with a constant, exuberant joy. It appears as the central theme of His preaching. To delete His kingdom references, parabolic and non-parabolic, would be to excise most of His words. The concept ‘kingdom of God’ or ‘kingdom of heaven’ is heard repeatedly from His lips, and it colors all of His works.” *Ibid.* 52.

³³For evidence of this reality in the NT, Henry surveyed the preaching of the apostles in Acts, the references both to a present manifestation of the Kingdom and to a future consummation in the epistles of Paul and the writer of Hebrews, and the Apocalypse of John.

³⁴*Ibid.* 53.

kingdom of God but cannibalized it.”³⁵ Any theology of evangelical engagement needs such an emphasis so that future generations may recognize, as did Karl Barth and his theologian colleagues in the face of the Third Reich, these “cannibalized” Kingdom theologies when they rear their heads.³⁶

At the same time, it tempers evangelical theology’s temptation to “cannibalize” the Kingdom for its own ends. With the adoption of inaugurated eschatology, rooted in an overall commitment to a Kingdom-focused theology, evangelicalism has in many ways provided the foundation for the kind of “third way” ethic of sociopolitical engagement that Henry and others were seeking to define against mainline triumphalism and fundamentalist isolationism in the postwar era. In short, the commitment to an “already” of the Kingdom protects against an otherworldly flight from political and social responsibility while the “not yet” chastens the prospects of such activity.

The inaugurated eschatological view of the Kingdom that has gained consensus thus addresses the concerns laid out by the post-war evangelical movement, especially in Henry’s *Uneasy Conscience*, and provides a starting point for evangelical theological reflection on the relationship between the kingdoms of this temporal age and the eschatological kingdom of God in Christ. Furthermore, this view of inaugurated eschatology has provided the foundation for reexamining some of the implications of two other points of theological and political controversy for the post-war evangelical movement, namely the doctrines of salvation and the church.

IV. THE KINGDOM, SOCIAL ETHICS, AND SOTERIOLOGY

From the publication of *Uneasy Conscience* and throughout the formative years of post-war evangelicalism, Henry and his allies maintained that an evangelical concern for social and political structures is not, in fact, the first step toward Social Gospel modernism. “If evangelicals came to stress evangelism over social concern, it was because of liberalism’s skepticism over supernatural redemptive dynamisms and its pursuit of the kingdom of God by sociological techniques only,” Henry framed the debate in retrospect. “Hence a sharp and costly disjunction arose, whereby many evangelicals made the mistake of relying on evangelism alone to preserve world order and many liberals made the mistake of relying wholly on sociopolitical action to solve world problems.”³⁷

The evangelical dilemma over the relationship of redemption to sociopolitical engagement, however, was about more than the priorities given to

³⁵Carl F. H. Henry, *Gods of This Age or God of the Ages?* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 81.

³⁶Barth and his colleagues struggled against the Nazi regime precisely because the “German Christian” movement attempted to recast German identity and historical progress with the kingdom of God. Against this, the confessing church maintained the sole and unrivaled place of Christ as the Head of His Kingdom. For an analysis, see Rolf Ahlers, *The Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934: The Archaeology of a Confessional Text* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1986).

³⁷Carl F. H. Henry, “Evangelicals in the Social Struggle,” in *Salt and Light: Evangelical Political Thought in Modern America* (ed. Augustus Cerillo Jr. and Murray W. Dempster; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 31.

personal regeneration and public justice. Instead, it was about differing understandings of the present and future realities of the kingdom of God. As such, the question of relating evangelical soteriology to evangelical engagement was interrelated with the prior question of evangelical eschatology.

This was, Henry maintained, a problem of Kingdom definition. “The globe-changing passion of the modern reformers who operate without a biblical context is, from this vantage point, an ignoring of Jesus’ insistence that ‘all these things shall be added’ only after man has sought first ‘the kingdom of God and His righteousness,’” Henry charged, citing Matt 6:33. “Non-evangelicals tend to equate ‘kingdom’ and ‘these things,’ reflecting a blindness to the significance of the vicarious atonement of Christ.”³⁸ Thus, Henry contended, the Social Gospel could not construct a biblical, Kingdom-oriented soteriology because of its Hegelian, evolutionary view of the Kingdom.³⁹ It likewise needed an optimistic view of humanity in order to justify the immanence of the Kingdom in the historical process.⁴⁰ Moreover, Protestant liberalism desperately sought to replace penal substitutionary atonement with social justice primarily because of the Social Gospel’s prior eschatological commitments to a Kingdom without a Christ.⁴¹

Likewise, Henry found the fundamentalist dismissal of the relevance of social and political engagement as a hindrance to the priority of personal evangelism to be a similar issue of Kingdom definition. American conservative Protestantism’s social and political isolationism reflected its essentially otherworldly view of the Kingdom of God, resulting in a view of salvation that concentrated almost solely on the rescue of souls from the imminent cataclysmic world judgment.⁴² Henry was in essential agreement with this priority of personal evangelism because this soteriology sought to recognize the Christocentric nature of the biblical kingdom of God.⁴³ Even so, Henry indicted the otherworldly soteriology of the fundamentalist right for failing to take into account the holistic fabric of the biblical portrayal of the messianic accomplishment of salvation. If personal salvation means a transfer into the Kingdom (present, future, or already/not yet), then the content of the

³⁸Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* 27–28.

³⁹“Infected with Hegelian speculation Protestant liberalism not only surrendered the Biblical redemptive-regenerative view of man and the world to optimistic evolutionary expectations about the future, but also lost all transcendent and eschatological elements of the Kingdom of God,” Henry asserted. “It promulgated, rather, a wholly immanent and essentially politico-economic conception of the Kingdom.” Henry, *Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* 117.

⁴⁰Henry complained that, for those who “shared the glow of Dean Shailer Mathews’ prospect for a better world,” the fundamentalists “who stood with the Hebrew-Christian tradition in a more pessimistic view of contemporary culture were accused of not having any social program.” In fact, Henry countered, many of these fundamentalists did indeed have no social program, “though modernism was unjustified in assuming they could have none since they were not optimistic about man.” Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* 41.

⁴¹Henry, *Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* 92.

⁴²Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis: The Significance of the World Congress on Evangelism* (Waco, TX: Word, 1967) 68.

⁴³“The evangelical vision of the new society, or the Kingdom on earth, is therefore messianic, and is tied to the expectation of the return of Christ in glory,” Henry concluded. “It is distrustful of world power, of attempts to derive a just society from unregenerate human nature. And this verdict on human affairs is fully supportive of the biblical verdict on fallen history” (ibid.).

Kingdom must inform the redemptive priorities of Christianity. Indeed, Henry noted, the very idea of the kingdom of God, especially given its centrality in the gospel proclamation of Jesus, means that the Kingdom has “a social aspect, as well as an individual aspect” since “redemption is nothing if it not an ethical redemption, and as such it comprehends more than the restoration of the individual to the image of God.”⁴⁴

In the more than fifty years since Henry’s jeremiad, evangelical theology has assembled a near consensus on the view that salvation is to be related to the broader picture of the kingdom of God, and thus must be conceived from a holistic vantage point, not limited to the individualistic, pietistic, and otherworldly notions of much of earlier fundamentalist revivalism. This consensus soteriology in many cases has grown out of, and has been linked to, the growing evangelical consensus on the inaugurated nature of eschatology. Like the eschatological consensus, it has been articulated both by traditionalist evangelicals on the right and reformist evangelicals on the left of the ideological spectrum of the movement.

Indeed, contemporary evangelical theology must recognize that attention to the doctrinal content of soteriology is the first priority in any effort at a pan-evangelical witness in the social and political arenas. As Henry argued in the 1960s, a reprioritization or redefinition of the evangelistic message of Christian theology skews the very nature of Christian public witness because the evangelical gospel of a forensic justification based on the alien righteousness and substitutionary sacrifice of Christ maintains the centrality of justice in the order of the universe.⁴⁵ Henry is largely correct in this emphasis since, as he recognized, a government committed to justice unintentionally aids the church’s evangelistic task by inculcating into the culture the importance of justice, righteousness, and certain judgment, thus preparing the way, as it were, for the conviction of sin through the proclamation of the kerygma. Henry’s point is bolstered in light of the impact of a Social Gospel Protestant liberalism that sought to redefine both the atonement and public philosophy in terms of the centrality of love rather than the centrality of justice.⁴⁶

In examining the philosophically troublesome “love ethic” of American liberalism, Henry rightly tied the socio-political difficulties to prior soteriological concessions:

To misstate the biblical view of the equal status of righteousness and love in God’s being brings only continuing problems in dogmatics. Redemption soon loses its voluntary character as divine election and becomes an inevitable if not necessary divine provision. Discussion of Christ’s death and atonement in modernism is uncomfortable in the presence of such themes as satisfaction and propitiation. Future punishment of the wicked is revised to conform to benevo-

⁴⁴Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 234.

⁴⁵Henry actually argues that a government commitment to justice unintentionally aids the church’s evangelistic task by inculcating into the culture the importance of justice and righteousness, therefore preparing the way, as it were, for the conviction of sin through the proclamation of the gospel. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* 94–95.

⁴⁶This thus necessitated the neo-orthodox critique of liberal Christian social and political ethics, chiefly in the person of Reinhold Niebuhr.

lent rather than punitive motivations, and hell is emptied of its terrors by man-made theories of universal salvation. The state is no longer dedicated to justice and order, encouraging and enforcing human rights and responsibilities under God, but is benevolently bent toward people's socio-economic wants.⁴⁷

Much of the so-called "emerging church" is recovering Henry's understanding of the Kingdom meaning a holistic salvation in which social ministry is part of the church's larger task of announcing the reign of Jesus. There are elements of the left wing of the movement, however, that have moved beyond Henry to a recapitulation of the old Social Gospel. The same could be said of some elements of the right wing of American evangelicalism, whenever it is animated by political concerns rather than the gospel. A decisive stance on the core issues of the Christian gospel, as Henry warned mid-century, will be the key to keeping evangelical engagement both evangelical and engaged.⁴⁸

The key to understanding this kind of Kingdom-oriented salvation is a developed Christology that takes into account the unity of Christ's person and work along with an eschatology that sees both a present and future element to the reign of Christ. Thus, evangelical theology has grappled with, and come to some consensus, on the relationship between salvation and the Kingdom, and the relationship of both to the social and political task of the regenerate community. Because Christ is simultaneously the covenant God who pledged to create a people for himself and the anointed ruler of that people, the Messiah offers a salvation that cannot be truncated into bare spiritual blessings in one dispensation or mere political authority in another. Therefore, although the church does not yet wield political authority over the nations, it must recognize that the redemption it offers has a social and political element that is intrinsically tied to the gospel itself. Matters of socio-political engagement cannot therefore be dismissed or reformulated as "unspiritual" or irrelevant to present Kingdom activity. If the Kingdom is to be understood as having a present reality, and that reality is essentially soteriological, then the Kingdom agenda of evangelical theology must focus on the biblical fulcrum of these eschatological, salvific blessings: the church.

V. SOCIAL ETHICS AND ECCLESIOLOGY

Henry recognized that a sustainable theology of evangelical engagement could not be achieved without some form of consensus on the church. The new evangelical concern over the doctrine of the church was inextricably linked to related soteriological concerns. It was not simply that the denominational church structures had neglected preaching the gospel of individual salvation that galled

⁴⁷Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* 169

⁴⁸Henry brilliantly noted this truth when he asserted in the anti-authoritarian tumult of the 1960s: "Those who know that God deals with men justly and not arbitrarily, and who also have a share in the justification that reinforces His justice in the grace of Golgotha, stand today at the crossroads of a crisis in modern civilization. If they find vision for our day, they can put the world on notice regarding God's claim in creation and redemption, by calling men everywhere to behold anew the demand for justice and the need for justification." Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis* 72.

conservative Protestants. It was also that the liberals had succeeded in turning the denominations into the equivalent of political action committees, addressing a laundry list of social and political issues.⁴⁹ The problem with the Social Gospel ecclesiology, Henry concluded, was the same anti-supernaturalism that destroyed its soteriology; Protestant liberalism had replaced a regenerate church over which the resurrected Messiah ruled as Head with a largely unregenerate visible church.⁵⁰ Henry thereby tied the liberal Protestant view of the church and political action directly to a theologically problematic view of salvation, a “neo-Protestant view” that “substitutes the notion of corporate salvation for individual salvation.”⁵¹ Thus, even while maintaining the need for individual action in the public square, Henry maintained that the endless political pronouncements of the churches were an affront to the purpose of the church. “The Church as a corporate body has no spiritual mandate to sponsor economic, social, and political programs,” he argued in the midst of the omni-political 1960s. “Nowhere does the New Testament authorize the Church to endorse specific legislative proposals as part of its ecclesiastical mission in the world.”⁵² In so doing, Henry pointed out the irony of church officials proclaiming the certitudes of redemption with less and less certainty while simultaneously making socio-political statements that seemed to come with their own self-attesting authority.

At the same time, Henry denied that this position was inconsistent with his call for evangelicals to move beyond the “uneasy conscience” toward a holistic view of redemption and the responsibility toward society. “We do not support the position that the Christian’s only concern is the saving of men’s souls and that, for the rest, he may abandon the world to the power of evil,” he wrote. “Nor do we deny the Church’s scriptural right through the pulpit and through its synods, assemblies and councils to emphasize the divinely revealed principles of a social

⁴⁹Thus, the rationale for the formation of a National Association of Evangelicals as an orthodox alternative to the ecumenical Federal Council of Churches included the particular complaint about the FCC: “It indicated both in pronouncements and practice that it considered man’s need and not God’s grace as the impelling motive to Christian action and that the amelioration of the social order is of primary concern to the Church. In this connection it attacked capitalism, condoned communism and lent its influence toward the creation of a new social order.” James Deforest Murch, *Cooperation without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 47.

⁵⁰Insofar as the professing Church is unregenerate and hence a stranger to the power of true love, it should surprise no one that it conceives its mission to be the Christianizing of the world rather than the evangelizing of mankind, and that it relies on other than supernatural dynamic for its mission in the world,” Henry noted. “Even ecclesiastical leaders cannot rely on a power they have never experienced.” Henry, *The God Who Shows Himself* (Waco, TX: Word, 1966) 15.

⁵¹Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis: The Significance of the World Congress on Evangelism* (Waco, TX: Word, 1967) 74. Henry therefore summed up the defective political ecclesiology of the Protestant left by noting: “The authentic mission of the church is thus asserted to be that of changing the structures of society and not that of winning individual converts to Christ as the means of renewing society. The ‘gospel’ is said to be addressed not to individuals but to the community. This theory is connected with a further assumption, that individuals as such are not lost in the traditional sense, and that the mission of the Church in the world is therefore no longer to be viewed as the regeneration of a doomed world, but the Church is rather to use the secular structures (political, economic, and cultural) as already on the way to fulfillment of God’s will in Christ.” *Ibid.* 74–75.

⁵²Carl F. H. Henry, “The Church and Political Pronouncements,” *Christianity Today* (August 28, 1964) 29.

order and to speak out publicly against the great moral evils that arise in community life.”⁵³ Still, finding an alternative to the politicized churchmanship of the Protestant left was increasingly difficult for a transdenominational evangelical movement. Evangelicals across the United States did indeed have an identity, Henry editorialized in *Christianity Today*, because their “common ground is belief in biblical authority and in individual spiritual regeneration as being of the very essence of Christianity.”⁵⁴ Nevertheless, he warned, this common ground was “crisscrossed by many fences” since evangelicals “differ not only on secondary issues but also on ecclesiology, the role of the Church in society, politics, and cultural mores.”⁵⁵

From Henry’s vantage point, a retarded ecclesiology was an inheritance from fundamentalism, a vestige that evangelicals must address if they were to emerge from “Amish evangelicalism” and provide an alternative to the Protestant mainline. In short, the lack of a coherent evangelical ecclesiology meant the lack of a cohesive evangelical movement.⁵⁶ Long after the post-war era, Henry reflected that “the Jesus movement, the Chicago Declaration of young evangelicals, independent fundamentalist churches and even the so-called evangelical establishment, no less than the ecumenical movement which promoted structural church unity, all suffer a basic lack, namely a public identity as a ‘people,’ a conspicuously unified body of regenerate believers.”⁵⁷

With Henry, certain segments of the evangelical conscience were also a bit uneasy about its lack of a coherent understanding of the ecclesiology. Almost from the very beginning of the movement, some evangelicals worried that the parachurch nature of evangelicalism represented a problematic individualism that reflected the culture of mid-century America more than the revealed imperatives of the first-century apostolic mandate.⁵⁸

In calling evangelicals to a more theologically workable understanding of the role of the church in social and political engagement, Henry and his post-war evangelical colleagues faced the titanic task of more than simply resolving

⁵³Henry, “Church and Political Pronouncements” 29.

⁵⁴Carl F. H. Henry, “Somehow, Let’s Get Together!” *Christianity Today* (June 9, 1957) 24.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶“Neglect of the doctrine of the Church, except in defining separation as a special area of concern, proved to be another vulnerable feature of the fundamentalist forces. This failure to elaborate the biblical doctrine of the Church comprehensively and convincingly not only contributes to the fragmenting spirit of the movement but actually hands the initiative to the ecumenical enterprise in defining the nature and relations of the churches. Whereas the ecumenical movement has busied itself with the question of the visible and invisible Church, the fundamentalist movement has often been preoccupied with distinguishing churches as vocal or silent against modernism.” Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelical Responsibility in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 35.

⁵⁷Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976) 1:133.

⁵⁸Ironically, one of the early voices to address this problem was the editor of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s *Decision* magazine, Sherwood Wirt. Wirt feared that the evangelical movement’s commitment to “the stance of the pristine rugged individualist” would undercut any call to evangelical public engagement. Redemption could not be merely about rescuing individuals, Wirt maintained, but instead meant the creation of a new community, the church. Sherwood Eliot Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 76, 149.

internecine differences over baptism, church government, and other ecclesiological issues, as daunting as that project alone would have been. Instead, post-war evangelical theology had to confront the question of the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God in order to differentiate their view of evangelical engagement from that of the Social Gospel, and to guard against the isolationism of fundamentalism.

Henry argued that a Kingdom theology of evangelical engagement was made necessary by the way in which the relationship between church and Kingdom was delineated both on the left and the right of the spectrum of American Protestantism. This was especially true given the low view of the church assigned by the Social Gospel, in which the primary focus was not the regenerate community, but “the Kingdom.” Henry complained that this definition of the Kingdom could not help but lead to politicized church structures because the “universalistic view that the social order is to be considered as a direct anticipation of the Kingdom of God, whose cosmic rescue and redemption is held to embrace the totality of mankind, regards Christians as the vanguard of a New Society to be achieved through politico-economic dynamisms.”⁵⁹

Thus, Henry concluded, conservative Protestantism’s lack of an ecclesiological counter-proposal had left the theological landscape with two politically problematic alternatives: Roman Catholicism and Protestant liberalism.⁶⁰ An evangelical alternative, however, was rendered almost impossible by the evangelical debate over the nature of the Kingdom. Henry especially fingered the dispensational stream of fundamentalist theology at this point. The construction of an evangelical theology of the role of the church in the world was hindered, Henry concluded, since dispensational ecclesiology virtually severed the NT *ekklesia* from the Kingdom purposes. This was the result, he explained, of the dispensationalist “postponement theory” in which Jesus’ Davidic reign is rejected by the nation of Israel at His first advent. “As a consequence, the divine plan during this church age is concerned, it is said, only with ‘calling out’ believers,” Henry noted. “This theory has gained wide support in the north during the past two generations; many persons automatically identify it not only with all premillennialism, but with all fundamentalism.”⁶¹

Nevertheless, Henry was not therefore resigned to a Reformed position that would see the Kingdom simply in terms of the spiritual blessings offered through the church.⁶² In the place of these two options, he called for an evangelical ecclesiological appropriation of inaugurated eschatology. In terms of an evangelical

⁵⁹Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis* 75.

⁶⁰“Today the wrong understanding of the Christian view of the State is compounded both by the Roman Catholic theory of union of Church and State and the Protestant liberal attempt to spawn the Kingdom of God as an earthly politico-economic development. Neither scheme has escaped the notice of totalitarian rulers who want to manipulate the Church for their own political objectives.” Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* 83.

⁶¹Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* 52.

⁶²*Ibid.* 53.

doctrine of the church, he argued, the teachings of Jesus must be highlighted “both that the kingdom is here, and that it is not here.”⁶³

For Henry, the doctrine of the church is the fulcrum in which eschatology and soteriology meet in the Kingdom purposes of God. As such, a Kingdom-oriented ecclesiology would be essential to the development of a theology of evangelical engagement. Therefore, the doctrine of the church must be understood biblically in terms of the redemptive progress of the Kingdom and the inaugurated reign of Christ over the regenerate community.⁶⁴ Only a Kingdom-oriented ecclesiology, he argued, could rescue Christianity from the unbiblical and unbalanced futurism he called them to discard.⁶⁵

This effort toward a Kingdom ecclesiology is seen explicitly in the later, systematic writings of Carl Henry.⁶⁶ Henry’s later work sketches out an incipient ecclesiology, though such seems to be constructed largely as a series of *ad hoc* responses to specific issues troubling the evangelical movement and its interaction with rival cognitive systems. Whereas Henry’s early statements on the church seemed to focus on the political relationships of the church contra the claims of politicized ecumenicalism, the later, more systematic treatment does so contra the claims of liberation theology and other revolutionary movements. As such, Henry self-consciously develops his ecclesiology within the context of his commitments to inaugurated eschatology and holistic soteriology. “When Christianity discusses the new society it speaks not of some intangible future reality whose specific features it cannot as yet identify, but of the regenerate church called to live by the standards of the coming King and which in some respects already approximates the kingdom of God in present history,” Henry asserts.⁶⁷

Therefore, he concludes, a distinctively evangelical view of the church emerges from a prior commitment to Kingdom theology.⁶⁸ With such the case,

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴“From his throne in the eternal order the Living Head mediated to the Body an earnest of the powers that belong to the age to come.” Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* 28.

⁶⁵So Henry wrote: “Christ founded neither a party of revolutionaries, nor a movement of reformers, nor a remnant of reevaluators. He ‘called out a people.’ The twice-born fellowship of his redeemed Church, in vital company with its Lord, alone mirrored the realities of the new social order. This new order was no mere distant dream, waiting for the proletariat to triumph, or the evolutionary process to reach its pinnacle or truth to win its circuitous way throughout the world. In a promissory way the new order had come *already* in Jesus Christ and in the regenerate fellowship of his Church. The Lord was ascended; he reigned over all. Hence the apostolic church would not yield to other rulers or other social visions” (ibid.).

⁶⁶This is ironic given the relatively scant attention given by Henry to the doctrine of the church, and the criticism he has received from more confessional evangelicals at this very point. For an analysis of this, specifically in light of Henry’s contribution to Baptist ecclesiology, see Russell D. Moore, “God, Revelation, and Community: Ecclesiology and Baptist Identity in the Thought of Carl F. H. Henry,” *SBJT* 8/4 (2004) 26–43.

⁶⁷Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* 4:522.

⁶⁸Marxist exegesis is notably vague in stating what precise form the socialist utopia is to take, and where in history it has been concretely realized. Radical neo-Protestant theologians needlessly accommodate much of this Marxist obscurity over the new man and the new society. For they fail to identify Jesus Christ as the ideal man, fail to emphasize the new covenant that Scripture associates with messianic fulfillment and fail to center the content of the new society in the regenerate church’s reflection of the kingdom of God” (ibid.).

Henry emphasizes that neither personal redemption nor inaugurated eschatology can be understood without a concept of the church as an initial manifestation of the Kingdom of God, the focus of the “already” of the Kingdom in the present age.⁶⁹

And yet, as many even among Henry’s most ardent supporters admit, the plastic nature of the parachurch coalition he envisioned spelled the doom of the evangelical “movement” itself.⁷⁰ This is seen in the fact that Henry’s theological and apologetic legacy is maintained, not within the broad mainstream of parachurch evangelicalism, but instead within the conservative wing of the Southern Baptist Convention, whose commitment to “denominational distinctives” would no doubt have been labeled “sectarian” by the early evangelical theologians, Henry included. “It would not be going too far to say that Henry has been a mentor for nearly the whole SBC conservative movement,” observes one historian, citing Henry’s influence on Baptist conservatives such as R. Albert Mohler Jr., Richard Land, and Mark T. Coppenger.⁷¹ When Henry’s *God, Revelation and Authority* volumes were republished near the end of the twentieth century, it was the result of cooperative efforts between an evangelical publisher and a think tank led by confessional Southern Baptists.⁷²

A confessional evangelicalism, informed at crucial points by Henry’s theological contributions, therefore, must confront an evangelical left that is now even more “parachurch” than Henry and his postwar colleagues. With this “uneasy conscience” of evangelical ecclesiology, the renewed attention to the doctrine of the church offered by the various expressions of Kingdom theology should be welcomed. It is this problem that prompts theologians such as Richard Lints to suggest that the movement needs fewer “evangelical theologians” and more “Baptist theologians, Presbyterian theologians, and so on.”⁷³

⁶⁹The role of the church as covenant community, therefore, “is not to forcibly demote alien powers” but “to demonstrate what it means to live in ultimate loyalty not to worldly powers but to the risen Lord in a corporate life of truth, righteousness, and mercy” (*ibid.*, 529).

⁷⁰R. Albert Mohler Jr., perhaps Henry’s closest theological successor, cites Henry’s goal to create “an international multi-denominational corps of scholars articulating conservative theology,” and concludes that Henry emphasized the movement more than the church, thereby destabilizing the movement itself. R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Reformist Evangelicalism: A Center without a Circumference,” in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, ed. Michael S. Horton (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000) 133. John Muether, for instance, rightly notes that Henry’s “indifference to ecclesiology and confessionalism may explain the failures of the evangelical movement, failures he so candidly describes.” Muether, “Contemporary Evangelicalism and the Triumph of the New School” 342.

⁷¹Barry Hankins, “The Evangelical Accommodationism of Southern Baptist Convention Conservatives,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 33 (1998) 59.

⁷²This describes the 1999 collaboration between Crossway Books and the Carl F. H. Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This is especially significant given Fuller Seminary’s almost complete repudiation of the epistemological and apologetic contributions of Henry. See, for instance, the counterproposal on issues of theological prolegomena offered by Fuller Seminary philosopher Nancey Murphey, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

⁷³Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 321.

For the only structure which can cultivate the revelational atmosphere in which biblically-ordered families can thrive is the church. It is this aspect of a claim to authority that likewise protects evangelical ecclesiology from the self-conscious sectarianism of communitarians such as Stanley Hauerwas. Carl Henry is correct in maintaining that the difference between an engaged evangelical ecclesiology and the post-liberal communitarian vision of the church is the nature of the truth.⁷⁴ The church's internal counterculture is not enough, Henry rightly asserts, if "truth—universally valid truth" is "a concern as vital to the Church's public involvement as are forgiveness, hope and peace."⁷⁵ Such resonates with a Protestant commitment to a NT teaching basing the community of the church on a prior commitment to prophetic/apostolic authority.⁷⁶

This means, therefore, that evangelicals ought not abandon the public square for the sake of the church. This is precisely the isolationist stance described and denounced in Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*. Contrary to this position, the orientation of the church as a manifestation of the Kingdom means that evangelicals cannot be concerned only about the "counterculture" of the churches, because the scope of the Kingdom informs the scope of evangelical concern. As such, the concerns of the community itself at times require attention to matters of political concern, including electoral politics.⁷⁷ Some civil society theorists, and a traditionalist conservative political theorist, are right that culture informs politics, and is therefore the more important of the two. Nevertheless, history bears out that treacherous cultural movements are given teeth through political processes.⁷⁸

At the same time, the developments toward a Kingdom ecclesiology remind evangelicals of the limits of political activity. Political solutions are first implemented within the community of the local church. When political solutions are offered to the outside world, they must always be couched in language that

⁷⁴It is this lack of an ability to articulate an objective moral standard that unravels the communitarian project. See, for example, the devastating critique of theorists such as Amitai Etzioni in J. Budziszewski, "The Problem with Communitarianism," *First Things* (March 1995) 22–26.

⁷⁵Carl F. H. Henry, "The Church in the World or the Word in the Church? A Review Article," *JETS* 34 (1991) 382. Henry similarly devastates Hauerwas's claim to a distinction between the church and the world, when Hauerwas is unwilling to draw the distinction "between the faithful Church and the pseudo-church or apostate church" (*ibid.* 383). It would appear that Henry's critique of Hauerwas keeps in mind the similar problems with Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel.

⁷⁶Such that, for instance, the apostle Paul claims that "it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved" (2 Cor 12:19). The issue of apostolic biblical authority is directly correlated to the structuring of the life of the community. This is consistent with the canonical witness. It is the authority of revelation that shapes and defines the OT community (Exod 19:5–6; Deut 27:9; 29:13). Likewise, the NT *ekklesia* is built on the authoritative revelation of the identity of Jesus as the Messiah (Matt 16:13–19).

⁷⁷This means that a commitment to civil society generically, or to ecclesiology particularly, does not reduce the need for direct political engagement, a mistaken emphasis sometimes implied by civil society theorists. For a more balanced view, see Christopher Been, *The Necessity of Politics: Reclaiming American Public Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁷⁸Thus William F. Buckley Jr. rightly warns: "Our principal afflictions are the result of ideology backed by the power of government. It takes government to translate individual vices into universal afflictions. It was government that translated *Mein Kampf* into concentration camps." William F. Buckley Jr., *Let Us Talk of Many Things: The Collected Speeches* (New York: Random House, 2000) 107.

recognizes the futility of cultural reform without personal regeneration and baptism into the Body of Christ. The church as a multinational Spirit-body has been forbidden the power of the sword by the Son of David himself (John 18:11). The church, understanding its place in the Kingdom program, cannot then proclaim itself or any national government to be a “new Israel” with the authority to enforce belief in Christ or any conformity to revealed religion.⁷⁹ It recognizes the inherent distinction between the church and the state. Realizing that the church is not the full consummation of the Kingdom prevents the church from seizing the Constantinian sword, as did the application of Augustinian Kingdom theology early in the history of the church.⁸⁰

As evangelicals move toward a coherent Kingdom ecclesiology, it becomes clearer that the church is inherently eschatological and soteriological. In an inaugurationist Kingdom theology, the church is reminded that, as Henry argues, the people of God live “with renewable visas” on earth, even as they live out their heavenly citizenship in the counter-culture of the church.⁸¹ At the same time, every church building represents by its very existence a latent political challenge to the powers that be. Because the evangelical consensus at this point recognizes the church as an initial form of a coming global monarchy, they proclaim by their very presence on the landscape that the *status quo* will one day be shaken apart in one decisive act of sovereign authority. As such, the evangelical conscience remains always a bit “uneasy” even as it engages vigorously the social and political structures. This is because the doctrine of the church is, after all, the concrete display of the “already/not yet” of the Kingdom. As such, it reminds evangelicals that, although they are to submit to the governing authorities, they are claimed by no transient political entity, but by a coming messianic Kingdom, which they see even now breaking in around them through Spirit-propelled reconciliation, peace, and unity.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the generation after Carl Henry, dispensationalist apocalypticism is still around. Contracts are being signed as we speak for more end-times novels. And the evangelical “market” will buy them. The social gospel is also still with us—on the Left and on the Right—and so is the sectarian isolationist model—again on the

⁷⁹As did some efforts at Puritan church/state alliances. For an analysis of this phenomenon, see Conrad Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (rev. and exp. ed.; Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). For a theological interpretation of the conflict between the political theories of Puritan New England with that of dissenter Roger Williams, see A. J. Beitzinger, *A History of American Political Thought* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1972) 51–60.

⁸⁰Michael J. Scanlon convincingly argues that it is Augustine's recapitulation of Cyprian's understanding of the church as the Kingdom of Christ on earth, which led to Charlemagne's appropriation of *The City of God* in the construction of the “Holy Roman Empire” and “the identification by medieval Christendom of the church with the kingdom of God.” Michael J. Scanlon, “Eschatology,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 317.

⁸¹Henry, “The Church in the World or the Word in the Church? A Review Article” 383.

Left and on the Right. Nevertheless, Carl Henry's integration of the kingdom of God with evangelical social ethics is more fruitful than ever.

The relevance of the kingdom of God for social ethics is assumed, even among evangelicals who disagree about the theological or practical particulars. Conservative evangelicals are not simply speaking to issues of personal morality or religious liberty but are addressing issues of the global AIDS crisis, orphan care, environmental protection, and human trafficking, as well as the questions of what expanding technologies mean for human nature and human flourishing. In the whole, such activism is not placed in opposition to gospel preaching, but put in a context of the very kind of holistic redemption matrix Henry called for a half-century ago. Evangelical Christianity is, in many places of the world—perhaps especially through the Pentecostal movements in Latin America and Africa—addressing the “uneasy conscience” of evangelicalism, and the “uneasy consciences” of unbelievers.

As evangelicals engage such issues, very few recall the role of Henry in building a framework for such activism in a Kingdom understanding of eschatology, soteriology, and ecclesiology. In the long run, that does not matter. What matters is that evangelical Christianity embrace a Kingdom vision that leads to the mystery of Christ and the love of his church. Along the way, we might do well to remember Henry's place in reminding of us of Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom, and that it was compelling.