

CARL F. H. HENRY'S EARLY APOLOGETIC FOR AN EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ETHIC, 1942-1956

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The period between the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942 and the launching of *Christianity Today* under the editorship of Carl F. H. Henry in 1956 were the watershed years in what has been called the renaissance of evangelical social concern.¹ Before the NAE was organized "to retrieve Christianity from a mere eddy of the mainstream into the full current of modern life," the fundamentalist evangelical movement was a socially marginalized and politically impotent subculture in American society.² Only fourteen years later the publication of *Christianity Today* symbolized the strength of a reinvigorated "new evangelicalism," postured and ready to engage modern American life and thought.³

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¹ D. G. Bloesch, *The Evangelical Renaissance* (Grand Rapids, 1973).

² The citation is from H. J. Ockenga, "Resurgent Evangelical Leadership," *Christianity Today* (October 10, 1960) 14. For an analysis of evangelicalism's marginalized status in the early twentieth century see R. Handy, *A Christian America* (2d ed.; New York, 1984) 57-158; J. Higham, "Hanging Together: Divergent Unities in American History," *Journal of American History* 61 (June 1974) 5-28; M. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York, 1970); G. M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York, 1980); G. Wacker, "The Demise of Biblical Civilization," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (ed. N. O. Hatch and M. A. Noll; New York, 1982) 121-138; J. D. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, 1983) 23-41; R. V. Pierard, *The Unequal Yoke* (Philadelphia, 1970) 28-37; D. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York, 1976); D. W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, 1986).

³ The editors and publishers concluded one of the editorials in the initial issue with a statement that both symbolized the postwar political and cultural coming of age of evangelicalism and expressed the magazine's founders' hopes and aspirations for the future of evangelicalism in America. The editors informed their readers that the magazine's headquarters were in the Washington Building where they could "daily look down Pennsylvania Avenue and glimpse the White House, Blair House, and other strategic centers of national life." "Thus *Christianity Today*," they suggested, "is a symbol of the place of the evangelical witness in the life of a republic" ("The Evangelical Witness in a Modern Medium" [October 15, 1956] 21). For an analysis of the evangelical resurgence see R. D. Linder, "The Resurgence of Evangelical Social Concern (1925-75)," *The Evangelicals* (ed. D. Wells and J. D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids, 1975) 189-210; M. E. Marty, *A Nation of Behavers* (Chicago, 1976) 80-105; R. K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse* (Atlanta, 1979) 77-112; E. Jorstad, *Evangelicals in the White House: The Cultural Maturation of Born Again Christianity, 1960-81* (New York, 1981) 11-19; R. B. Fowler, *A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought, 1966-1976* (Grand Rapids, 1982) 77-93; G. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, 1987).

During these formative years of evangelical renewal Carl F. H. Henry, more than any other individual, led the way in formulating the apologetic for a socially relevant evangelicalism. His early writings are routinely cited as the main instigators in the awakening of contemporary evangelical social concern, but they are rarely expounded in terms of their content. This essay seeks to fill that lacuna. First, it will examine Henry's activity and writings in the period from 1942 to 1952 when he sought to stir the uneasy conscience of fundamentalist evangelicalism to recognize the Biblical mandate for social involvement. Second, it will identify the contours of Henry's social ethic from his published works in the period 1952 to 1956. In conclusion, the essay will suggest the immediate and long-range significance of Henry's early apologetic for evangelical political and social concern.

I. CREATING A NEW EVANGELICAL SOCIAL PRESENCE, 1942-1952

1. *Mobilizing for social action.* During World War II and the immediate postwar years Henry and other evangelical leaders sought to reverse the declining fortunes of evangelicalism in American life and rebuild a social and political conscience within fundamentalism. They were aided in this effort by a growing societal openness to religion. Historian Joel Carpenter states that during the difficult days of the war the American people, faced with battlefield casualties, family disruptions and increased moral laxness, showed "more interest in things religious than they had for at least a decade."⁴ This national religious receptivity continued on in the immediate postwar years. Cold-war fear of communist aggression and a limited war in Korea combined with domestic economic and political crises to rob the American people of a sense of peace and wellbeing after their costly victory over the axis powers. Not surprisingly the Truman administration and the American people increasingly gave ear to those religious leaders—including not a few evangelicals—who were calling for personal and national spiritual renewal as an antidote to the political unrest.⁵

Henry and other politically-oriented evangelicals were further aided in their efforts to build a social conscience within fundamentalism by demographic and internal institutional developments, particularly the creation of the National Association of Evangelicals.⁶ NAE leaders used their new organization as a vehicle for ongoing political commentary and social action, even establishing in 1944 an office of public affairs in Washington, D. C., to

⁴ J. Carpenter, "From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition," *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (ed. G. Marsden; Grand Rapids, 1984) 3-16; the citation is on p. 15.

⁵ "Dr. Ockenga Goes to Europe," *United Evangelical Action* (June 15, 1947) 5; Carpenter, "Fundamentalism" 15-16; R. D. Linder and R. V. Pierard, *Twilight of the Saints* (Downers Grove, 1978) 90-93.

⁶ H. J. Ockenga, "From Fundamentalism, through New Evangelicalism, to Evangelicalism," *Evangelical Roots* (ed. K. Kantzer; Nashville, 1978) 35-46; Carpenter, "Fundamentalism" 12-16; Hunter, *American Evangelicalism* 41-44; L. Gaspar, *The Fundamentalist Movement, 1930-1956* (Grand Rapids, 1963) 21-30; J. D. Murch, *Cooperation Without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, 1956).

serve as an informal political lobby for Christian concerns.⁷ As a charter member of the NAE Henry handled publicity for and spoke at the Association's annual conventions, wrote for its newsmagazine (*United Evangelical Action*) and enthusiastically promoted the NAE's goals of evangelical unity and positive witness to the larger society. In 1951 Henry spearheaded the creation of a standing commission on social action, which sponsored forums at the NAE's subsequent annual conventions. The purpose of these forums, he announced, was to prod that organization's constituency to engage "in a discussion of social and cultural problems and to help define authentic involvement." The time had come, Henry believed, "for evangelical teachers of Christian ethics and social science to move in and carry forward a more technical approach to these problems from the theoretical side."⁸

2. *Developing an apologetic for social involvement.* More important than Henry's NAE involvement for the long-term resurgence of social and political concern among evangelicals was his scholarly work. As a professor of theology first at his alma mater, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary (1942-47), and then at Fuller Theological Seminary (1947-56), where he was one of the founding faculty members, Henry gave "formative intellectual direction to the evangelical cause."⁹ Appalled that the Biblical world-life view no longer shaped modern cultural, intellectual and political thought, Henry in 1946 wrote *Remaking the Modern Mind* to confront the naturalistic and humanistic assumptions underlying much of modern life. He incisively and brilliantly laid bare the philosophic and practical inadequacies of modern belief in the ultimate reality of nature, man's inherent goodness and the inevitability of progress. Further energized by his belief that the generation of the 1930s and 1940s was witnessing the "midnight of modern culture," Henry sought nothing less than for evangelicals to remake the modern mind by pressing for massive spiritual conversions, articulating a Christian world-life view and thrusting Biblical values into the mainstream of all dimensions of American life.¹⁰

⁷ Murch, *Cooperation*, 44-71, 205; R. V. Pierard, "Cacophony on Capital Hill: Evangelical Voices in Politics," *The Political Role of Religion in the United States* (ed. S. D. Johnson and J. B. Tamney; Boulder, 1986).

⁸ Henry, "Evangelicals United for Action," *United Evangelical Action* (April 1, 1950) 6-8, 16; "Three Threats to Our American Way of Life" (January 1, 1952) 3-4; "Conservative or Liberal—What Is the Difference?" (January 15, 1949) 3-4; cf. also "The NAE Faces Issues in National Crisis (A Report of the Ninth Annual Convention in Chicago)" (May 1, 1951) 3-6, 14-16; "Report of the NAE's 10th Annual Convention" (May 1, 1952) 30-31; and subsequent yearly reports of the annual NAE conventions carried in *United Evangelical Action*; Murch, *Cooperation* 50-70, 161-168; Henry, *The Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco, 1986) 105-106, 128. The citation is from "NAE Faces Issues" 16.

⁹ "Fuller Seminary to Open," *United Evangelical Action* (October 1, 1947) 9; Henry, *Confessions* 89-143.

¹⁰ C. F. H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids, 1946). For Henry's early attempts to engage modern culture see also *The Drift of Western Thought* (Grand Rapids, 1951); "Christianity at the Epistemological Divide," *Watchman-Examiner* (February 3, 1944) 108-109;

If in *Remaking the Modern Mind* Henry challenged the philosophic assumptions of modern thought, in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947) he summoned his fellow evangelicals to develop a Biblically-based, contemporary worldview and social ethic. "This volume covets for the whole evangelical movement," Henry wrote, "a new life and vigor on the destitute world front."¹¹ His political manifesto of less than ninety pages provided the ideological blueprint for a vanguard of politically-inclined evangelicals. Together with *Remaking the Modern Mind* the book outlined an intellectual agenda for much of Henry's own subsequent journalistic and scholarly work.

From inside the evangelical camp Henry lamented that today, unlike in apostolic days and other periods of Church history,

Protestant Fundamentalism, although heir-apparent to the supernaturalist gospel of the Biblical and Reformation minds, is a stranger, in its predominant spirit, to the vigorous social interest of its ideological forbears. Modern Fundamentalism does not explicitly sketch the social implications of its message for the non-Christian world; it does not challenge the injustices of the totalitarianisms, the secularisms of modern education, the evils of racial hatred, the wrongs of current labor-management relations, the inadequate bases of international dealings.¹²

In contrast to this contemporary development Henry explained to his readers: "Hebrew-Christian thought, historically, has stood as a closely-knit world and life view. Metaphysics and ethics went everywhere together, in Biblical intent. The great doctrines implied a divinely related social order with intimations for all humanity . . . for the redemptive message was to light the world and salt the earth." He admonished his fellow evangelicals, therefore, to apply "the great Biblical verities . . . effectively to crucial problems confronting the modern mind" and to "offer a formula for a new world mind with spiritual ends, involving evangelical affirmations in political, economic, sociological, and educational realms." Should they not do so, he solemnly warned, postwar fundamentalism would remain politically and socially marginalized, risk being reduced "to a tolerated cult status," and possibly forfeit a last chance to "get another world hearing for the Gospel."¹³

Henry noted that evangelicals, fearful of compromising the gospel, stayed clear of alignments with creative nonevangelical reform movements. Yet they refused to mount their own campaigns against social evil from a "distinctly supernaturalist framework." Even their limited charity

"Is Christianity Worth Trying," *Moody Monthly* (March 1945) 378-379, 398; "God and the Modern Mind," *Watchman-Examiner* (March 29, 1945) 300-301; "The Mid-Twentieth Century Crossroads," *Philosophical Forum* 6 (Spring 1948) 22-28; "The Heresy of Fundamentalism," *Watchman-Examiner* (September 15, 1949) 918-919; "Christianity and Modern Emptiness," *Watchman-Examiner* (July 20, 1950) 725-726.

¹¹ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, 1947) 61.

¹² *Ibid.* 44-45.

¹³ *Ibid.* 9-11, 38, 68.

work, he observed, tended to be "spotty and usually of the emergency type."¹⁴

Such evangelical indifference to the social relevance of the gospel Henry blamed on two developments within twentieth-century fundamentalism. One was the rise to dominance of premillennial dispensationalism and amillennialism, rival eschatologies, both of which exuded prophetic despair about either converting the world's masses or significantly improving the social order short of the second advent of Christ. A second was the identification of Christian social reform with the liberal Protestant social-gospel movement. In rejecting the social gospel because it identified the Biblical kingdom of God with contemporary social progress and endorsed nonredemptive strategies of change based on naturalistic assumptions, fundamentalists unwittingly rejected all forms of social reform.¹⁵

Evangelicalism's reluctance to confront social problems, Henry contended, was apologetically fatal. If evangelicals were to get a hearing for the gospel and the Biblical worldview they had no choice but to demonstrate the social implications of Christianity. The modern mind, Henry believed, simply would not seriously consider "a viewpoint which it suspects has no world program." Moreover, Henry insisted, only the Biblical doctrine of man's sinfulness provided a realistic anthropology for erecting a truly effective reform strategy and program. Nonevangelical reformers floundered on precisely this point. They understated the depth of evil in man and the world and overestimated the natural ability of man, apart from supernatural redemption in Jesus Christ, to solve social problems. Personal spiritual regeneration, Henry argued, was the necessary, Biblically-taught first step toward the reformation of society and provided "a dynamic to lift humanity to its highest level of moral achievement." A reform strategy that precluded a recognition of sinful humanity's need of God's salvation in Christ could only offer a "bubble and froth cure" and, worse yet, was "a needless waste of effort and in effect an attack on the exclusive relevance, if not on any relevance, of the historic redemptive Gospel."¹⁶

Henry's attack on nonevangelical reform methods boldly challenged much of the thrust of twentieth-century progressive social thought that stressed environmental change as the key to human betterment. Pressing further he even argued positively for the social utility of an attack on personal sin and immorality. He claimed attacking drunkenness constituted an assault on the liquor traffic, boycotting the theater contributed to the resistance against the spread of secular values, and opposing divorce strengthened the integrity of the family and reduced juvenile delinquency.¹⁷

Henry thought that nonevangelicals not only had a faulty reform methodology but also strove for "inadequate ends." For Henry "a just and durable peace" was "but a luxurious dream," and "the brotherhood of man" impossible,

¹⁴ Ibid. 17-18.

¹⁵ Ibid. 28-34.

¹⁶ Ibid. 23-28, 68-69, 76.

¹⁷ Ibid. 21-22.

without spiritual regeneration through Christ. "Democracy," which early in American history had meant "the right to worship God as patterned in the Scriptures, without the obstruction of earthly powers," Henry noted, had sadly shrunk to "the four freedoms, including the right to worship God any way and if one wanted to do so." Labor-management relations assessed along "leftist precepts of political Socialism or Communism" precluded consideration of such economic issues within a context of "regeneration-conditioned submission to the divine will." Concluded Henry: "It was implied in the doctrinal genius of evangelicalism that it must resist such non-evangelical ends, as well as a non-redemptive methodology."¹⁸

Quite daring for the time, Henry suggested that what also disturbed his "uneasy conscience" was the potentially fatal flaw in fundamentalism's almost exclusive focus on individual rather than social evils. Was it possible, Henry wondered, to "be perpetually indifferent to the problems of social justice and international order, and develop a wholesome personal ethic"?¹⁹ Henry's insight into the reciprocal relationship between personal and social ethics directly challenged fundamentalism's indifference to the social relevance of the gospel and by implication the nonevangelical reformers' rejection of personal redemption in their efforts to create a better society. On the next-to-the-last page of his book he argued for the inextricable link between personal and social ethics:

The evangelical task primarily is the preaching of the Gospel, in the interest of individual regeneration by the supernatural grace of God, in such a way that divine redemption can be recognized as the best solution of our problems, individual and social. This produces within history, through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, a divine society that transcends national and international lines. The corporate testimony of believers, in their purity of life, should provide for the world an example of the divine dynamic to overcome evils in every realm.²⁰

Although critical in tone, Henry's volume nevertheless was optimistic about the future. "The uneasy conscience of modern fundamentalism was stirring," he boldly claimed. "The conviction mounts that the relationship of the church to world conditions must be reappraised." Evangelicals, he observed, were "discerning anew that an assault on global evils is not only consistent with, but rather is demanded by, its proper world-life view."²¹ He passionately challenged his fellow evangelicals:

The troubled conscience of the modern liberal, growing out of his superficial optimism, is a deep thing in modern times. But so is the uneasy conscience of the modern Fundamentalist, that no voice is speaking today as Paul would, either at the United Nations sessions, or at labor-management disputes, or in strategic university classrooms whether in Japan or Germany or America.²²

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 30–31; see also p. 86.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 88.

²¹ *Ibid.* 26, 33, 45.

²² *Ibid.* 34.

In the context of an anxious postwar America, Henry envisioned a day when evangelicalism's world-life view would again be a living option in society, when it would reform Protestantism and lead to "a global renaissance within modern secularism."²³

Based upon his critique in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* Henry, in a little known but tightly argued essay, "The Vigor of the New Evangelicalism," spelled out a five-point agenda by which evangelicalism could reinvigorate its own life and its engagement with American society. Henry utilized the term "new evangelicalism"—a phrase originally coined by Harold John Ockenga—to distinguish a socially and politically resurgent evangelicalism from the culturally narrow fundamentalism that he indicted in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.²⁴ Once again he criticized those fundamentalist leaders who for more than a generation allowed the philosophical implications of Christian faith to become obscured, minimized the social relevance of the gospel, divided evangelicals over minute prophetic details, and promoted a cultural isolationism that blunted the Church's global mission.²⁵

Henry's five-point agenda identified the essential character of "the new evangelicalism" as a movement whose aim it was to overcome these deficiencies of fundamentalism while maintaining fundamentalism's continuity with the historic Christian faith. Henry summarized his fivefold vision for a revitalized evangelical movement as follows: (1) The new evangelicalism aims to clarify the philosophic implications of Biblical theism; (2) the new evangelicalism relates Christianity to the pressing social issues of the day, as well as to individual salvation; (3) the new evangelicalism reacts against the division of evangelicals over secondary and tertiary points of prophetic detail; (4) the new evangelicalism is alert to the possibility of a Biblical ecumenicity; (5) the new evangelicalism is finding its way back from systematic theology to Biblical theology.²⁶ In Henry's view the entire agenda needed to develop simultaneously if evangelicalism was to recover "the vigor" it needed to reintroduce Judeo-Christian values into western culture and to confront the pressing social evils of the time: "the political and economic oppression of smaller nations, race tensions, the struggle between capitalism and the leftist economies, the communist bid for world supremacy, the tension between management and labor, the widespread longing for world peace, the growing fear of the inevitability of another war."²⁷

²³ Ibid. 64.

²⁴ Henry, "The Vigor of the New Evangelicalism," *Christian Life and Times* 3 (January 1948) 30–32; 3 (March 1948) 35–38, 85; 3 (April 1948) 32–35, 65–69. In differentiating the "new evangelicalism" from the "older fundamentalism" Henry emphasized that the new evangelicalism stood in "historical continuity" with the older fundamentalism, particularly in its opposition to all renditions of theological liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, which Henry identified at this time by the label "neo-supernaturalism." For Ockenga's claim to have coined the phrase "the new evangelicalism" see his "From Fundamentalism" 38–40.

²⁵ Henry, "Vigor," *Christian Life and Times* 3 (March 1948) 35.

²⁶ Ibid. 3 (April 1948) 32, 34, 67.

²⁷ Ibid. 3 (January 1948) 32.

When Henry dealt directly with the recovered sense of social concern that marked the identity of "the new evangelicalism," he remarked that it was still "quite easy to arouse fundamentalists to a fighting mood on this matter." Henry continued to be puzzled by this militant resistance to social concern. "Christ is the answer" to every problem was the message thundered by fundamentalist preachers from their pulpits, Henry noted. Yet when the topic arose of Christ's answer to crucial social ills, fundamentalists "suddenly fall all over each other in the rush to make it clear that they have no message which is relevant to modern political, sociological, economic and educational tensions." Fundamentalist denial of the social implications of the gospel also embodied a "considerable irony" for Henry. Fundamentalist churches worked to change the world through missionary outreach, building rescue missions and churches in remote regions of the world at great personal sacrifice, all of which, Henry noted, resulted in making the world a better place in which to live.²⁸

Conscious of the threat of the "atom-bomb environment" to the future of western civilization, Henry called on evangelicalism to propose solutions to this modern predicament from the logic of its own faith. If evangelicalism did not address this and other pressing social issues from the vantage point of the gospel message, then the evangelical movement stood indicted. The answer to this challenge was to be found for Henry in a vigorous new evangelicalism that "voices its plea for a vital presentation of redemptive Christianity which does not obscure its philosophic implications, its social imperatives, its eschatological challenge, its ecumenical opportunity and its revelational base."²⁹

3. *Confronting the threats to the American way of life.* During the early postwar years Henry did more than develop a theoretical apologetic in support of an evangelical social ethic. In various evangelical periodicals and in his work with the NAE's social action commission and other groups he also commented on several political issues and social trends that he believed to be threats to the American way of life: the impact of secularism on modern society, especially the public schools; the communist challenge at home and abroad; corruption in the upper echelons of the Truman administration; and growing Roman Catholic political power.

"The biggest threat to the American Way of Life," Henry wrote, "is constituted by the profound moral and spiritual indefiniteness of the public school system." Speaking on behalf of evangelicals who were concerned about the growing secularization of the public schools, Henry stated:

We issue a plea to educators for a restoration of the Bible to its proper place in our schools; for a halt on teachers workshops and institutes conducted on the basis of that naturalistic philosophy of Dewey and Kilpatrick which renounces all absolutes in advance; for at least the same emphasis on our historic Hebrew-Christian tradition as on non-Christian and anti-Christian

²⁸ Ibid. 3 (April 1948) 32.

²⁹ Ibid. 33, 69.

speculative views; for greater definiteness in classroom instruction concerning the moral and spiritual realm; for more teachers personally identified with our great Christian heritage; for an end to the preference shown on public occasions to clergymen aligned with theologically inclusive and syncretistic organizations over evangelical Protestant clergymen whose theological convictions do not go out of fashion every fifty years.³⁰

For Henry, the battle to rescue American education from the grip of naturalistic educators was a necessary prerequisite for a United States victory in the cold war against global communism. How could the United States successfully expect to fight "naturalistic communism" in Korea and elsewhere, he questioned, when its own fighting youth had been habitually indoctrinated in "other species of naturalism" in the public school system? "Some ardent defenders of naturalism in American education," Henry pointed out, shared "the anti-God, anti-absolute, anti-supernatural outlook of the barbarous Nazi leaders and their contemporary Russian successors."³¹

Henry shared with other NAE leaders and much of official Washington a cold-war fear of Soviet global expansionism. There is a "mighty Soviet hand," he wrote in 1949, "whose power moves in China, in Czechoslovakia, in the Balkans, in Finland, in Poland, and whose threats to Scandinavia, to Italy, to Greece and Turkey today fill us with alarm."³² In April 1951, at the NAE's annual convention, Henry and the other members of the convention's resolutions committee, concerned about American soldiers fighting communism in Korea, sponsored a resolution imploring God "to aid His people in their desires for peace, justice, and moral order for mankind, granting that the war shall cease, that aggressors be restrained and defeated."³³

When this same NAE convention received news of President Truman's firing of General Douglas MacArthur as commander of United States troops in Korea, the delegates were shocked. The convention's commission on social action, co-chaired by Henry, called for a special session of the convention to consider the incident. With their "moral indignation . . . at the bursting point" they adopted a resolution praising MacArthur for his "Christian character," "personal integrity" and "opposition to communism" and in a second resolution called for a special day of prayer and a congressional investigation into the circumstances surrounding the firing of the general.

The resolution contrasted MacArthur's "personal integrity" with "the lack of integrity and widespread corruption and graft in high places," an obvious reference to the scandals then rocking the Truman administration. It further accused "others in high places" of having "displayed their lack of

³⁰ Henry, "Three Threats" 3.

³¹ Henry, "Modern Education and the Secularistic Tide," *Watchman-Examiner* (October 11, 1951) 965; see also "Religion and the Crisis in Education," *Watchman-Examiner* (March 6, 1952) 228-229.

³² Henry, "Evangelicals and the Ecumenical Movement," *Moody Monthly* 49 (May 1949) 629.

³³ "NAE Convention Resolutions," *United Evangelical Action* (May 1, 1951) 6.

understanding by their record of appeasement and failure to oppose Communist aggressors." It characterized American postwar foreign policy "as vacillating, impatient, and culpable" and deplored the nation's "lack of a stable and well-developed foreign policy," which, they asserted, "had resulted in immeasurable bewilderment."³⁴

The MacArthur incident obviously provided the occasion for Henry and the other NAE leaders to voice their dislike of President Truman's domestic and foreign policies, particularly his reliance on the essentially negative strategy of containment to combat communism. Henry and his NAE contemporaries also believed that the American way of life was threatened by subversive communistic activity within the nation. Henry therefore lauded the NAE's active involvement in the All-American Conference to Combat Communism.³⁵

Communism was no more imperialistic in Henry's view than was Roman Catholicism. Both, he claimed, "aim at imperial world dominion and oppose the free proclamation of a saving gospel." In almost apocalyptic tones Henry warned:

There is Roman Catholic imperialism, from whose despotic power over men's souls the Protestant Reformation rescued countless thousands in Europe, and which today wields the scepter over Central and South America, reaches for western Europe, and works relentlessly for its own ends in the United States of America, having never renounced its mass idea that the Roman Church is supreme over the nations of the globe.³⁶

Henry further thought that growing Roman Catholic political power threatened American freedom and democracy, the public school system and the time-honored principle of Church-state separation. As a staunch defender of Protestantism's place in American life and an opponent of what he labeled "papal ambitions with regard to America," Henry opposed Truman's attempt to extend diplomatic relations to the Vatican, opposed government aid to parochial schools, and viewed with suspicion the growing "solidarity" among Roman Catholic "Congressmen, newspaper editors" and other lay leaders.³⁷

II. IDENTIFYING THE PRINCIPLES OF AN EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ETHIC, 1952-1956

Never very pleased with President Truman's feisty presidential style and liberal political agenda, Henry and other politically-minded evangelical leaders were overjoyed when the Republican presidential candidate Dwight David Eisenhower trounced Democratic opponent Adlai E. Stevenson in the presidential election of 1952, thus ending twenty years of Democratic party

³⁴ Henry, "NAE Faces Issues" 3-4, 6, 13.

³⁵ Henry, "Three Threats" 3.

³⁶ Henry, "Ecumenical Movement" 629.

³⁷ Henry, "Three Threats" 3-4; see also "NAE's Tenth Annual Convention" 30-31; "The Great Issue," *Watchman-Examiner* (September 11, 1952) 840-842.

control of the White House.³⁸ They resonated with the new president's attack on welfare statism and his tough talk about rolling back atheistic communism in Asia and eastern Europe. They saw in Eisenhower's traditional stress on patriotism, individualism, self-reliance, voluntarism, free enterprise and states' rights an opportunity to remake the modern American mind and political system in the image of long-held evangelical values.

Henry's formative work in encouraging evangelicals to interject their moral and social values into the political arena was further aided during the Eisenhower 1950s by both a continued "resurgence of religiosity in public life" and the rapid growth of evangelicalism.³⁹ Within this politically and religiously congenial national climate Henry, through his research and writing, continued to prod evangelical thought toward the frontiers of modern intellectual and social concerns. Determined not to be a cloistered intellectual at Fuller Seminary he maintained links with the NAE, other evangelical leaders and the larger evangelical constituency. For several years he continued to chair the NAE's commission on social action, to serve as contributing editor of *United Evangelical Action* and to publish essays in popular evangelical magazines.⁴⁰

In contrast to his earlier ad-hoc political and social commentary, Henry sought during the early 1950s to develop a social ethic based upon Biblical principles from which to analyze specific contemporary issues. "The Bible may not deal with many particular problems of modern social life," he wrote, "but it exhibits the only framework in which they may be permanently unravelled, and our main modern embarrassment is that we have lost that framework for solution."⁴¹

Henry identified the constitutive principles of the Biblical framework for social ethics as follows: "the solidarity of the human race," "the equality of all men in view of divine creation," "the offer of pardon for sin," "the responsibility for personal purity," "the use of wealth as a stewardship," and "the duty of work as part of an earthly existence which is a discipline and preparation for eternity." From within this Biblical framework Henry constructed a social ethic based upon individual responsibility and a conception of social structures grounded in God's "created orders." He placed responsibility for social and political transformation on the spiritually regenerated individual. In Henry's thought, the Bible provided God's

³⁸ Henry, "Evangelicals United for Action!", *United Evangelical Action* (April 1, 1950) 8, 16; "NAE Faces Issues" 6, 14-16; G. H. Williams and R. Peterson, "Evangelicals: Society, the State, the Nation (1925-1975)," in *The Evangelicals* (ed. Wells and Woodbridge) 221-225.

³⁹ On evangelicals during the Eisenhower years see S. E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New York, 1975), 2, 444-461; Pierard, "Cacophony" 81-83; Linder and Pierard, *Twilight* 93-100; Jorstad, *Evangelicals* 12-19; Williams and Peterson, "Evangelicals" 225-228.

⁴⁰ For Henry's role as chairman of the NAE's commission on social action see the yearly reports of the annual NAE conventions covered each year in *United Evangelical Action* (1953-56); Murch, *Cooperation* 166; Henry, *Confessions* 128-143.

⁴¹ Henry, "The Ominous Drift from Christian Ideals," *United Evangelical Action* (February 1, 1953) 18.

objective pattern for a just society and the Holy Spirit provided the twice-born person the subjective moral empowerment to pursue God's will for every sphere of human existence.⁴² While Henry located the source of social change in the spiritually regenerated individual, he did not have an individualistic view of society. Rather he viewed marriage and the home, labor and work, the state and government, and the Church as structures designed by God to order and harmonize human life and to provide the avenues for Christians to pursue a free and just society. In his view each of these divine orders was in a state of crisis in the 1950s.⁴³

The crisis in marriage and the family was particularly troubling to Henry. At the 1953 NAE convention Henry's commission on evangelical social action sponsored a forum on "The Crisis in the Home." At this forum and in his published essays Henry cited the rising divorce rate, increasing juvenile delinquency, and growing marital unhappiness as evidence of the serious crisis of the family. "Undermine the stability of the home," he wrote, "and you undermine the stability of the nation." He blamed this deplorable condition on "the paganization of family life" due to the erosion of Christian influence on public values. "We are breaking with the conviction that God sanctions marriage, that He intends the lifelong union of one man and one woman, that marriage is ideally monogamous." This erosion of the Christian view of marriage and the home Henry was convinced prepared the way for the erroneous idea that the state ultimately sanctions marriage and "for the communist attack on the sanctity of marriage."⁴⁴

Labor and economics represented a second crisis from Henry's perspective, made more so by the global challenge of Soviet collectivism to American democratic capitalism. Vocational emptiness, increasing welfare cases, the refusal of able-bodied persons to work, management's exploitation of labor, corporate monopolizing and profiteering and the distribution of wealth, Henry claimed, were symptoms of a "revolt against the sphere of labor as a divine order of creation, a revolt against the dignity of labor."⁴⁵ For Henry therefore the real crisis was the divorce of economic thought and behavior from the spiritual realm. "Economic activity, which is not in the service of God," he wrote, gravitates to the service "of the demonic." From the perspective of Henry's Christian theism "the spiritual-moral dimension is the primary one, and by it all the economic theories will be judged—Capitalism and Socialism and Communism alike."⁴⁶

Although Henry viewed a capitalistic, free-enterprise system as preferable to a communist or socialist controlled economy, he was unconvinced that capitalism divorced from Biblical principles could achieve economic

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Henry, "Christianity and the American Heritage," *United Evangelical Action* (July 1, 1954) 3-5, 8, 10, 23; "Christianity and the Economic Crisis," *Eternity* 6 (June 1955) 14-15, 43-45; "The Dignity of Work: The Christian Concept," *Vital Speeches of the Day* (1954) 665-671.

⁴⁴ Henry, "American Heritage" 4; for a report on the forum see "Report of the 11th Annual NAE Convention," *United Evangelical Action* (May 15, 1953) 6.

⁴⁵ Henry, "American Heritage" 4.

⁴⁶ Henry, "Economic Crisis" 14-15.

justice. The Christian gospel on the one hand supported the profit motive, the principles of thrift and reward, and the private ownership of property, but on the other hand it condemned profiteering and the exploitation of the poor. Henry thought employer and employee alike were responsible to God for the proper stewardship of their time, talent and resources.⁴⁷ In particular Henry viewed work as "the realm which catches up the believer in the social task. . . . The vocational call is the point at which Christianity penetrates into the social structure." The Christian worker, therefore, was to view his job as more than just a way to earn a paycheck. It was a God-given vocation through which the Christian was to worship God, to serve his neighbor and to transform the social order.⁴⁸

Henry saw not only a crisis of the home and a crisis in economics but also a crisis of the state. The crisis, as he saw it, was the challenge to American democracy of totalitarian and anarchistic political thought. In contrast to totalitarian theory, which viewed the state as absolute, and anarchistic theory, which denied the legitimacy of the state altogether, a Christian political theory, Henry argued, established the origin of the state in the will of God. "It is because God wills the state to restrain evil in a sinful order that civil government has come into existence." Such a government, responsible first and foremost to God, Henry wrote, ruled on behalf of God and possessed only divinely-limited rights.⁴⁹

With John Locke, who Henry believed gave "an essentially Christian answer" to Hobbes' view that the state had absolute power, Henry agreed that individuals must be critically obedient to the state. On the one hand individuals had a duty to obey the state when its laws did not conflict with God's will. On the other hand individuals had a right to challenge government in the name of God when the state's ordinances conflicted with God's will. "Lose the will of God for man, lose the Christian view of the state and society, and you lose your effective ground of protest against state sovereignty," Henry wrote. "That is why Christianity is the birthplace of democracy—because it champions the dignity and freedom of the individual by emphasizing rights which the state cannot remove, and in terms of which he may even protest against the will of the state."⁵⁰ Hence Henry lauded President Eisenhower's reaffirmation that "supernatural religion" was essential for the survival of American democracy. At the same time Henry voiced concern that in recent years in America state control had grown inordinately, not only endangering liberty and democracy at home but also jeopardizing America's role as leader of the free world.⁵¹

In light of Henry's stress on the ideological answer to communism, he found particularly disturbing the adoption of John Dewey's progressive philosophy of education by the nation's public schools. "What is necessary

⁴⁷ Henry, "American Heritage" 5; "Economic Crisis" 15, 43-45.

⁴⁸ Henry, "Dignity" 668.

⁴⁹ Henry, "American Heritage" 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 5, 8, 10, 23; the citations are from p. 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 23; see also "The Faith of the Nation," *Moody Monthly* 55 (July 1955) 25, 31-32.

for the survival of democracy is not common schools," Henry argued, "but *common values*, and more than that, a *common dedication to unchanging truth and ethical principles*."⁵² In several essays written in the mid-1950s Henry decried as a "Progressive myth" Dewey's view that values are relative rather than absolute, evolving rather than fixed, and rooted in nature rather than in the transcendent will of God. The American public education system must return to its basis in the Hebrew-Christian tradition, which alone, in Henry's judgment, could preserve individual liberty, a democratic society and western cultural values against totalitarian communism.⁵³

Like many other evangelicals and other Americans in the postwar years, Henry viewed the United States as having a special role to play in the world. In a moving passage in 1953 he wrote:

In the mysterious moving of divine providence, the United States of America . . . has emerged as the leading power of the so-called "free world," arrayed against the monstrous forces of Soviet Communism flanked by an imposing strength of satellite powers. In the midst of the totalitarian suppression of human rights and the totalitarian discard of human dignity, our nation, our beloved land, with its vast economic resources and its productive military efficiency, and even more basic, its regard for a democratic way of life, has become a guardian of men's souls.⁵⁴

The best way to answer the communist threat or any other political tyrant, according to Henry, was not "book burning, but book reading." Read "the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights, and the Bible alongside them," he suggested, and you have the "remedy for Communism" as well as the foundations of democracy.⁵⁵

III. CONCLUSION

Carl Henry's work in constructing an evangelical social ethic and in activating grassroots evangelical political and social involvement was to enter a new phase in 1956 when he became founding editor of *Christianity Today*. It also marked the end of the formative phase of the politicization of a reinigorated postwar evangelicalism.⁵⁶ From 1942 to 1956 Henry had worked tirelessly to promote the political and social resurgence of evangelicalism in American life. He had pricked the intellectual and social conscience of evangelicals with his scholarly and popular writings. He had placed political issues regularly on the agendas of the NAE's national conventions, had chaired the NAE's permanent commission on social action,

⁵² Henry, "Christian Education and Our American Public Schools," *United Evangelical Action* (December 1, 1955) 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 3-5, 10, 31; "Faith of Nation" 25, 31-32; "Moral Values in Public Education," *Eternity* 5 (September 1954) 14-15, 42.

⁵⁴ "American Heritage" 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 10.

⁵⁶ B. E. Patterson, *Carl F. H. Henry* (Waco, 1983) 23. For Henry's views and interpretations of the founding and the impact of *Christianity Today* see his *Confessions* 141-219.

and had legitimated the study of social ethics in evangelical seminaries. In addition Henry had sought to shape the evangelical political mind according to his understanding of Biblical principles. Always concerned about broad issues of public policy he had provided evangelical commentary on social and political problems from a Biblical perspective. Always more the philosopher than the political analyst, he had moved beyond specific issues to begin constructing a coherent evangelical social ethic that sought to fuse Biblical theology with political theory.

The early apologetic work of Henry on behalf of evangelical social concern also had significant long-term results. Many of the themes, concepts and principles that he touched upon in his early writings established the agenda for his own lifelong scholarly and popular efforts to confront the modern mind, formulate a rational Christian worldview, and construct an evangelical social ethic. He inspired two subsequent generations of evangelicals to work at creating a Biblically-informed political philosophy capable of grappling with the concrete issues of public policy. Although many of today's younger evangelicals find themselves politically to the left or right of Henry, they have not abandoned his longstanding call to identify a unified set of Biblical principles as the basis of evangelical social engagement.⁵⁷ Moreover many evangelical political conservatives joined with the fundamentalist new right during the 1980s in promoting a social agenda that echoes the concerns the young Henry identified over thirty years ago. They, like Henry and his NAE allies during the 1940s and early 1950s, are concerned about such issues as the diminishing influence of Judeo-Christian values in America's pluralistic society, the secularization of public education, the erosion of the family, the decline of American power abroad, and the intrusion of the state into the domain of the Church and home. Whatever Henry's final legacy to modern evangelical political and social thought turns out to be, there is no doubt that the forcefulness and the cogency of his early apologetic on behalf of a renewed evangelical social concern pricked the "uneasy" conscience of evangelicals, challenged them to identify the social implications of a Biblical theology, and provided them with a rationale for remaking American society.

⁵⁷ For an analysis of the proliferation of evangelicalism into politically conservative, liberal, radical and new-right camps see A. Cerillo, Jr., and M. Dempster, *Salt and Light: Evangelical Political Thought in Modern America* (Grand Rapids and Washington, 1989).