

EDITORIAL

Our well-attended twenty-first meeting devoted to "Futurology and Eschatology" provided a timely stimulant to those present. Not least among those who provided invigorative thought was Dr. Carl F. H. Henry who in 1949 had addressed an assembly of Evangelical scholars meeting also in Cincinnati, who organized the Evangelical Theological Society. His presidential address is offered to our readers in this current issue of our Journal.

In the course of moderating a panel on the subject "The Evangelical Christian, Social Concern and a Theology of Hope," Dr. Henry shared with the E.T.S. assembly some of his pertinent convictions regarding the current tension concerning social action and the evangelical community.

What is the most effective way to change society—change the individual or change the environment? At the Berlin conference on Evangelism, asserted Dr. Henry, he rang the changes on two great principles: the *God of Justice* who demands righteousness in personal life and in the social order and the *God of Justification* who offers the forgiveness of sins to a broken and fallen humanity, who offers a new life in Christ, and expects dedication and devotion of the human heart through the righteousness that He desires in personal life and in the social order. Today Dr. Henry is troubled when he sees the evangelical community breaking ranks either simply for the *God of Justice* or the *God of Justification*. They must be held together.

Serious misunderstanding seems to prevail currently. Some interpreted the Minneapolis Congress on Evangelism as making a pronouncement that the radical revolution on the social ethics is not authentically Christian. Others hailed it as a merger of the old liberal gospel—which was essentially humanitarian and humanistic—with the evangelical personal gospel.

Responsible evangelical social action does not fulfill its task by saying what is not Christianity. We must gain the biblical perspective. If we have forfeited the initiative to humanistic agencies—Foulkes Jackson says in his history of the west that all the humanitarian movements in western culture have their well springs in the evangelical theology of the cross—that is a great tragedy for the Evangelical movement. In altering the world it is the one alternative for personal life and for survival of civilization; the only foundation upon which civilization can rest.

The early Christians gave no encouragement to the world it addressed by the Gospel that this life is the arena of achieving the climax of human life, asserted Dr. Henry. They did not as the theologian puts it "immanentize the eschaton." And never was it in doubt that "to be with Christ is far better" under any circumstance.

Never in their proclamation to their generation, continued Dr. Henry, did the early Christians encourage society in general to think that the *fulness* of human life could be found outside of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Now, however much my enthusiasm for social ethics and social action, I don't want to "criticize the eschaton" and I don't want to give one second's comfort to anyone that I address, in terms of the Saviorhood, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, in thinking that he can find the fulness of life outside a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Nor did the early Christians encourage society in general to think that the fulness of human life could be brought about by any dynamic other than a divine redemptive dynamic, supernatural grace.

With great appreciation those present for this panel discussion listened to this significant analysis by Dr. Henry who over two decades ago stimulated a renewed interest among Evangelicals in social responsibility through his publication *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.

—S. J. Schultz