

ABSTRACT

Neo-evangelical Realism: Reflections on the Sociopolitical Thought of Carl F. H. Henry

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Carl F. H. Henry served as a key leader within the neo-evangelical movement in America during the mid-twentieth century and continued to have a prominent role in the greater evangelical movement during the rest of the century. His sociopolitical thought is an important hallmark of his career. Beginning in 1947 with his *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Henry articulated a proactive evangelical approach to society and politics that avoided fundamentalism's former disregard for social reform while remaining distinct from mainline positions. This thesis identifies aspects of realism in Henry's sociopolitical thought over the course of his career by examining his treatment of individuals, groups, structures, and systems. To help provide context to Henry's thought, this study also incorporates ideas from J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* and Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. In the end, this thesis describes Henry's contribution of a "Neo-evangelical Realism."

Neo-evangelical Realism:
Reflections on the Sociopolitical Thought of Carl F. H. Henry

by

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A Thesis

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To My Parents

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Mr. Brownlow in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* believed certain Christians in nineteenth-century Britain were guilty of harboring pessimistic social views.

Concerning these Christians, Mr. Brownlow concluded, "A Turk turns his face, after washing it well, to the East, when he says his prayers; these good people, after giving their faces such a rub against the World as to take the smiles off, turn with no less regularity, to the darkest side of Heaven. Between the Mussulman and the Pharisee, commend me to the first!"¹ According to Dickens's character, some Christians during this period in Britain were simply "Pharisees" who avoided the socially disfavored in their midst.

A century later across the Atlantic Ocean, a similar accusation was leveled at fundamentalist Christians in America. Their attempt to separate themselves from the Social Gospel and its liberal theological implications invited criticism similar to Mr. Brownlow's observations.² Fundamentalism's disregard for social engagement, while a reaction to the Social Gospel, was also a product of the movement's deference to dispensational premillennialism and its pessimistic views of a fallen world.³ This

¹Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, Penguin Popular Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 430.

²George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 90-93; Carl F. H. Henry, "The Protest Against Foredoomed Failure," in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, (1947; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2003), 13-25.

³Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 100-101, 107.

approach to social matters in turn caused many Americans to believe that fundamentalists, “after giving their faces such a rub against the World as to take the smiles off, turn with no less regularity, to the darkest side of Heaven,” leaving the socially dispossessed helpless on the streets.

This perception led Carl F.H. Henry (1913-2003) to write the *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* published in 1947. Henry criticized his fellow Christians for not actively responding to the social and political ills of their day. Two devastating world wars compounded the American and global need for spiritual, ideological, and material assistance from Christians. While liberal Protestants actively sought to confront society’s injustices, Henry believed evangelical Christians had failed to voice solutions for the problems of their times.

Following his *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry continued to address sociopolitical issues throughout his career as a theologian, professor, speaker, writer, and editor for the evangelical movement in America during the twentieth century. Scholars of recent American evangelical history, however, have not thoroughly examined Henry’s significance in the realm of evangelical sociopolitical thought. While many note his importance to the historical movement, assessment of his thought on the evangelical response to social and political concerns is currently lacking. This thesis will strive to interact with this area of Henry’s thought by offering a specific interpretation of his sociopolitical reflections, their affinity with Christian Realism.

To help with this endeavor, this study will incorporate the prior contributions of Reinhold Niebuhr’s (1892-1971) *Moral Man and Immoral Society*⁴ and J. Gresham

⁴Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York, London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932).

Machen's (1881-1937) *Christianity and Liberalism*.⁵ Historically, Henry entered the evangelical scene during a time when certain evangelicals were attempting to separate from fundamentalism and engage mainline denominations and culture. Thus, Machen, a fundamentalist, and Niebuhr, a more mainline voice, aid this study, since Henry found himself in a mediating movement between their two groups. This approach, however, does not suggest that these three men directly influenced each other's work. Instead, all three at various moments dealt independently with similar aspects of Christian Realism. Machen and Niebuhr's contributions will be treated as supplemental material in an effort to better explain a "Neo-evangelical Realism" inherent in Henry's thought.

Certain life experiences and the influence of other Christian thinkers and contemporaries are key to understanding Henry and his convictions. After identifying these formative factors in Henry's life, this thesis will then address the realism inherent in Henry's sociopolitical thought in two parts. The first part will provide further historical context to Henry's realism, identify central emphases in Henry's thought, and address Henry's treatment of individuals and groups. The second part will consider Henry's approach to structures and systems by examining his treatment of the purpose of government, democracy, capitalism, welfare, and revolution. This thesis will conclude with an interpretation of the viability of Henry's evangelical contributions to realism while also defining the concept of "Neo-evangelical Realism" according to Henry's thought.

⁵J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977).

Sources

Over the course of his life, Henry produced numerous books, articles, and addresses on the proper orientation of evangelicals to society and politics. Thus, primary sources for this thesis abound. As already noted, Henry's earliest and most popular book pertaining to the Christian sociopolitical response was the *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.⁶ In it he confronted socially inactive fundamentalists who neglected social matters for an emphasis on individuals. Henry also considered the millennial implications and militant qualities of fundamentalist thought that encouraged the distance the movement placed between itself and social involvement. He also criticized fundamentalist inactivity since it led to liberal Protestants voicing the dominant sociopolitical position. Henry, however, did not rely solely on criticism to voice his ideas in the *Uneasy Conscience*. Instead, he also called for an evangelical social concern that maintained a biblical, supernatural, redemptive theology while also seeking social influence in America and around the world. This program would be flexible enough to work with liberal Protestant groups while also remaining distinct from any particular political or economic identification. This early book by Henry serves as a watershed in his life. While Henry associated with fundamentalists in their theology, their lack of a sociopolitical ethic identified in the *Uneasy Conscience* eventually drove a wedge between himself and the fundamentalist movement, leading Henry to team with the neo-evangelical movement instead.

Henry's other books that articulate an evangelical social response consist of compiled lectures or articles, falling short of his desire to write a book that

⁶Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2003).

systematically addressed Christian social ethics.⁷ Nevertheless, Henry's books containing collected essays and addresses offer extensive treatment of social and political topics. His *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*⁸ is an important source for understanding themes Henry considered important. In this book he recognized four different Christian social responses: revolution, reform, revaluation, and regeneration, the latter option being his preference. Henry's two chapters on the church's response to political legislation reveal his hopes for a church-state relationship based on separation. In this discussion Henry noted the failure of organized liberal Protestants in their advocacy of specific legislation, something Henry believed the institutional church should avoid. Instead, Henry suggested individual Christians devote attention to political legislation. In this source Henry also addressed the important role of love and justice in Christian social considerations. Finally, he concluded the book by criticizing the use of revolution as a means for evangelicals to promote social justice.

Another vital work that clarifies Henry's Christian sociopolitical thought is *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*.⁹ In it Henry strove to articulate a distinct evangelical approach to sociopolitical issues. Henry noted elsewhere that he intended *A Plea* to help Christians avoid being stereotyped as either violent or apathetic in their social response. Henry proposed instead a program that "affirms" social justice

⁷David L. Weeks, "Carl F. H. Henry on Civic Life," response to *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action*, by J. Budziszewski (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 126; Carl F.H. Henry, *Conversations with Carl Henry: Christianity for Today* (Lewiston, Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 176.

⁸Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964).

⁹Carl F. H. Henry, *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971).

causes.¹⁰ In *A Plea* Henry also criticized liberal Protestant approaches to social problems and identified three historical expressions of their response during the twentieth century: the Social Gospel, Reinhold Niebuhr's thought, and the revolutionary agenda. Henry also utilized his interpretation of the early church's precedent in this work and devoted a chapter each to evangelical theology and epistemology. As in *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, Henry again considered the viability of Christians using revolutionary means for social engagement. His last chapter, "Personal Evangelism and Social Justice," is imperative for understanding Henry's thought as he addressed two concepts many Christians hold in tension.

Henry's *Christian Mindset in a Secular Society*¹¹ provides further insight into his evangelical position on politics and society. While it reiterates certain themes Henry frequently addressed in earlier publications (flawed philosophies, the necessity of Scripture, Christian sociopolitical engagement), this book, published when Henry was seventy-one, offers the reader conclusions Henry refined over the course of his life. Several of the chapters in the *Christian Mindset* articulate Henry's position on specific issues and offer a more systematic approach towards defining what evangelical engagement in society and politics should look like.

Henry's six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority* also offers useful chapters on his sociopolitical thought, especially volume six.¹² In that particular volume, key

¹⁰Carl F. H. Henry, "Evangelicals and the Social Scene: God's Plan for Salvation and Justice," in *The Ministry of Development in Evangelical Perspective: A Symposium on the Social and Spiritual Mandate*, convened by Carl F. H. Henry, ed. Robert Lincoln Hancock (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1979), 101-2.

¹¹Carl F. H. Henry, *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society: Promoting Evangelical Renewal & National Righteousness* (Portland: Multnomah, 1984).

¹²Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 6 (Waco: Word Books, 1983).

chapters include “The God of Justice and Justification,” “Justice and the Kingdom of God,” and “Supplementary Note: The Christian and Political Duty.” Similar to the *Christian Mindset, God, Revelation and Authority* returns to subjects Henry already examined in prior works; but, it reemphasizes these themes (such as love and justice, the Christian sociopolitical response, and social justice) with additional perspective and greater precision.

Another imperative source is Henry’s *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography*.¹³ Not only is it helpful for studying twentieth-century evangelical history in America, but this book also provides historical context for Henry’s thought and reveals formative influences in his life. His final chapter, “The Evangelical Prospect in America,” is an important essay concerning Henry’s interpretation of the evangelical movement for which he toiled most of his life. Although his conclusions suggest disappointment, this chapter nonetheless is a vital source for understanding Henry’s hopes and assessment of the American evangelical enterprise’s past and future.

Several secondary sources are useful for this thesis. Published in 2006, *Evangelicals in the Public Square*¹⁴ reveals what is hopefully a growing interest in Henry’s sociopolitical thought. In this book J. Budziszewski addresses the contributions of not only Henry, but also Abraham Kuyper, Francis Schaeffer, and John Howard Yoder. Budziszewski provides an engaging introduction to evangelical political thought while also recognizing its shortcomings. His main premise is that evangelical political thought, including Henry’s, does not incorporate general revelation

¹³Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1986).

¹⁴J. Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

and natural law, an addition that would help evangelicalism communicate with nonbelievers on sociopolitical matters. Yet, Budziszewski balances his criticism with respect; he even dedicates the book to Henry.

A chapter by David L. Weeks in *Evangelicals in the Public Square* responds to Budziszewski's conclusions and further introduces Henry's thought while analyzing several of its emphases, including justice, redemption, and Scriptural directives.¹⁵ Weeks also agrees with Budziszewski that Henry should have incorporated natural law into his political theory. Weeks still recognizes, however, the importance of studying Henry's thought and comments on the subject's current treatment among scholars. He writes,

Nonetheless, Henry's political thought may be his most lasting contribution to evangelicalism. At many seminaries, the contemporary passion for narrative theology has superceded interest in Henry's more traditional theological approach. In the political realm, however, we are still talking about Henry's contributions, and in some respects, only now are we addressing the implications of his work.¹⁶

Dennis P. Hollinger's *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism*¹⁷ is another useful study for this thesis. Hollinger examines editions of *Christianity Today* from 1956 to 1976 in an effort to study the social agenda of evangelicals from that period and any individualistic tendencies in their approach. Hollinger concludes that while evangelicals from this time period articulated a social ethic, it was still very individualistic in its focus and method. Imperative to this thesis are Hollinger's observations concerning Henry's social concern and its similarities and

¹⁵Weeks, "Carl F. H. Henry on Civic Life," 123-39.

¹⁶Ibid., 126-27.

¹⁷Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983).

discrepancies with the predominant evangelical social ethic at that time. He identifies in Henry's thought a predominantly individualistic social awareness, but he does recognize certain elements of Henry's thinking that overcome individualism and relate to social justice.

Other secondary sources this study incorporates are books that provide an historical interpretation of the evangelical movement and its fundamentalist and neo-evangelical expressions during the twentieth century. George Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture*¹⁸ and Joel Carpenter's *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*¹⁹ are two seminal works written on Protestant fundamentalism and neo-evangelicalism in America during the first half of the twentieth century. Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*,²⁰ however, provides the best historical background for a study of Henry. It examines the general development of neo-evangelicalism as it distanced itself from fundamentalism beginning in the 1940s while also providing an institutional history of Fuller Theological Seminary. This book offers helpful analysis of the broader neo-evangelical movement Henry took part in and also provides surprisingly detailed treatment of Henry himself.

While published materials concerning Henry and his sociopolitical thought are few, graduate theses have helped make up for this deficiency. Larry Dean Sharp's 1972

¹⁸George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁹Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁰George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987).

dissertation, “Carl Henry: Neo-Evangelical Theologian,”²¹ offers helpful historical interpretation of fundamentalism and neo-evangelicalism while also devoting a chapter to Henry’s legacy in Christian ethics. His chapter duly notes Henry’s contribution to social ethics and identifies different “premises” in Henry’s work. Such premises include the church’s devotion to evangelism and Scriptural, moral proclamation and the responsibility of individual Christians to engage politics. Sharp also emphasizes the centrality of Scripture and redemption in Henry’s thought. In his conclusion, Sharp considers the future prospect of Henry’s legacy being studied. He states, “To the impartial observer, Henry cannot be dismissed, as the Anabaptists were dismissed by the reformers. The day will probably come when the study of Carl Henry and of neo-evangelicalism will be as necessary as the study of such Anabaptist figures as Conrad Grebel and Menno Simons are today.”²² Hopefully it will not take five hundred years, however, for the study of Henry to develop.

Besides Sharp other graduate students have also devoted their theses to studying aspects of Henry’s sociopolitical thought. Miroslav M. Kis’s dissertation, “Revelation and Ethics: Dependence, Interdependence, Independence?: A Comparative Study of Reinhold Niebuhr and Carl F.H. Henry,”²³ explores the relationship of Niebuhr and Henry’s treatment of God’s revelation and how this influenced their ethical considerations, concluding that their ethics were *dependent* on their treatment of revelation. Other relevant dissertations include David L. Weeks’s, “The Political

²¹Larry Dean Sharp, “Carl Henry: Neo-Evangelical Theologian” (DMin thesis, Vanderbilt University Divinity School, 1972); Henry commented on this thesis in *Confessions*, 340.

²²*Ibid.*, 151.

²³Miroslav M. Kis, “Revelation and Ethics: Dependence, Interdependence, Independence?: A Comparative Study of Reinhold Niebuhr and Carl F.H. Henry” (PhD diss., McGill University, 1983).

Thought of Carl F.H. Henry”²⁴ and Russell D. Moore’s, “Kingdom Theology and the American Evangelical Consensus.”²⁵ Michael Hammond’s masters thesis, “Conscience in Conflict,”²⁶ examines the greater neo-evangelical response to race issues during the 1950s. Hammond includes Henry in his assessment of *Christianity Today* and its failure to advocate racial equality adequately due to the competing positions of its editors and contributors.

Definitions

This study incorporates the following terms requiring definition: fundamentalism, neo-evangelicalism, evangelicalism, Christian Realism, and the adjective, sociopolitical. Defining fundamentalism is crucial for understanding Henry since the movement provided him with an education early in life and later became for Henry a branch of evangelicalism requiring reassessment.²⁷ This study will treat fundamentalism as the Protestant movement that coalesced at the beginning of the twentieth century generally among northern Baptists and Presbyterians in the United States as a reaction to liberal theology and the decline of evangelical Christianity’s prevailing influence in society due to secularization.²⁸ Fundamentalism inherited

²⁴David L. Weeks, “The Political Thought of Carl F.H. Henry” (PhD diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1991).

²⁵Russell D. Moore, “Kingdom Theology and the American Evangelical Consensus” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002).

²⁶Michael D. Hammond, “Conscience In Conflict: Neo-Evangelicals and Race in the 1950s” (master’s thesis, Wheaton College Graduate School, 2002).

²⁷Four sources responsible for this section’s treatment of “fundamentalism” are Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*; Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*; Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 1-4.

²⁸Concerning philosophies that most concerned fundamentalism, scholars commonly use interchangeably or in different combinations “naturalism,” “humanism,” “modernism,” and “secularism.”

nineteenth-century evangelicalism's public eminence as it fought against liberalism and secularism during the first few decades of the twentieth century, the 1925 Scopes trial being the most notable example. In the 1930s, however, fundamentalists began to recede from society as secularization progressed and to leave mainline denominations when they could no longer counter liberal theological trends. Between the 1930s and 60s, fundamentalists continued to separate themselves from culture and mainline denominations. Beginning in the 1960s and 70s, however, fundamentalists notably turned from their separatist position towards American society and began to reengage American politics.²⁹

Neo-evangelicalism originated in the 1940s from the efforts of several fundamentalists, including Henry, who wanted to regain denominational and cultural influence while still maintaining their conservative theology.³⁰ Three particular events are helpful for understanding its development. First, the neo-evangelical movement realized an identity in 1942 through the creation of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), an organization that offered membership to any church or individual, regardless of denominational affiliation, who shared similar doctrinal views. Second, neo-evangelicals developed an educational base in 1947 with the establishment of Fuller Theological Seminary. Finally, the movement gained a spokesman with

I find that "secularization" is a more helpful designation since it incorporates these different philosophies in a general recognition of Christianity's marginalized influence in the public sphere.

²⁹For later twentieth-century developments in fundamentalism, see Marsden, "Fundamentalism Yesterday and Today (2005)," in *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 229-57.

³⁰Three important sources for understanding "neo-evangelicalism" are Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism*, Carpenter's *Revive Us Again*, and Garth M. Rosell's *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

national clout during 1949 in Billy Graham.³¹ Besides Graham, the role Harold John Ockenga, pastor of Part Street Church in Boston, played in the development of neo-evangelicalism is noteworthy. Ockenga was instrumental in the establishment of the NAE, Fuller Seminary, and Graham's ministry. Any assessment of neo-evangelicalism that excludes either Graham or Ockenga is inadequate, as Garth M. Rosell clearly articulates in the *Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism*.³²

Ultimately, both fundamentalism and neo-evangelicalism were different expressions of a much broader historical movement within Protestant Christianity, evangelicalism.³³ The movement is often interpreted in terms of both its history and doctrine. Most scholars identify evangelicalism as a movement beginning with the transatlantic revivals of the eighteenth century, though tracing its doctrine back to the Reformation. Historians generally suggest that evangelicalism in America descended from the colonial Puritans, even though the movement did not fully develop until the revivals of the Great Awakening.³⁴ As it gathered momentum following the revivals of the eighteenth century, evangelicalism extended its influence into numerous denominations and various aspects of American culture, eventually becoming arguably the most influential religious conviction in America. Yet, despite its influence

³¹Henry, *Confessions*, 382.

³²Garth M. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). This book provides a history of neo-evangelicalism specifically through an examination of Ockenga and Graham's roles in the movement.

³³Sources inquired for this study's definition of "evangelicalism" include Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 1-6; Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God*, 19-35; Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 7-10.

³⁴Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

evangelicalism never became a uniform movement, especially in America where the democratic spirit instead encourages diversity.³⁵ Instead, this diversity has led historian Mark A. Noll to conclude that “‘evangelicalism’ has always been made up of shifting movements, temporary alliances, and the lengthened shadows of individuals.”³⁶ Marsden notes evangelicalism’s variety as well and considers the movement as both a general doctrinal conviction and a distinct transdenominational affiliation.³⁷

Despite the variety of historical expressions of evangelicalism, several scholars have attempted to define its common foundational doctrines. British historian David Bebbington suggests a “quadrilateral” of evangelical emphases that include conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism. While noting Bebbington’s conclusions, Rosell provides instead five tenets of evangelicalism based upon American revivalism beginning with the Great Awakening. His five precepts are “the centrality of Christ’s atoning work on the cross, the essential experience of religious conversion, the foundational authority of the Bible, the importance of spreading the gospel, and the possibility of individual and corporate renewal.” Rosell’s conclusion affirms Bebbington’s four attributes, but also expands Bebbington’s principle of activism so that national revivalist tendencies are included.³⁸

Sharp, in his dissertation on Henry’s neo-evangelical significance, provides a lucid interpretation of the overall relationship of these three movements. Sharp

³⁵An essential source for understanding the influence democratic principles have had on American Protestant Christianity is Nathan O. Hatch’s *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

³⁶Noll, 8.

³⁷Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 4-6.

³⁸Rosell, 26, 35.

identifies “historic fundamentalism” as a militant expression of evangelicalism that existed from 1874 to 1935. He notes 1935 as the year when fundamentalism’s enemy, modernism, began losing cultural influence and mainline denominations began excluding historic fundamentalists. Without a common enemy and influence in mainline denominations, historic fundamentalism split after 1935 into “neo-fundamentalists” who took a separatist stance and “neo-evangelicals” who favored reengagement with society and mainline denominations.³⁹

In order to understand Henry’s realism, the concept of Christian Realism must also be addressed. Christian Realism is the system of thought that developed most notably after World War I that sought to reconcile a Christian worldview with the complexities of politics and society, its primary proponent being Reinhold Niebuhr.⁴⁰

Concerning the ethos of Christian Realism, Robin W. Lovin states,

During the first half of the twentieth century, Protestant theologians in the United States gave new attention to the social forces that shape and limit human possibilities. Like the leaders of the Social Gospel movement before them, these writers were concerned with the gap between the biblical vision of God’s rule and the realities of modern industrial society. For the new generation, however, a Christian conscience informed by scientific study would not suffice to close the gap. The biblical ideal stands in judgment not only on the social reality, but also on every attempt to formulate the ideal itself.

Therefore, social achievements provide no final goal. The dynamics of history are driven by the human capacity always to imagine life beyond existing limitations. Biblical faith gives vision and direction to that capacity for self-transcendence, but we are best able to challenge and channel our powers when we also understand what is really going on.⁴¹

³⁹Sharp, 4-13, 18-27.

⁴⁰For a helpful introduction to Christian Realism and Reinhold Niebuhr’s contributions to the concept, see James C. Livingston et al, *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 165-67, 175-91.

⁴¹Robin W. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.

Lovin concludes Christian Realism is a combination of political, moral, and theological realisms.⁴² In general, Christian Realists criticized the naiveté of the former Social Gospel and its optimistic treatment of human nature and sought instead to articulate and work for the ideal of social justice while acknowledging the debilitating effects of sin in a fallen world.

While Christian Realism lay within the domain of mainline theologians during the twentieth century, this thesis will introduce an alternative expression of realism found in the sociopolitical thought of Henry, a neo-evangelical theologian. While Henry did not advocate Christian Realism, he did consider the Christian's response to political structures and economic systems with realistic expectations. Henry also believed, as did Christian Realists, the Social Gospel failed to come to terms with the reality of sinful man. Yet, Henry was not willing to address sociopolitical issues at the expense of emphasizing the centrality of evangelism, a tendency he noted among mainline theologians. Henry also maintained a biblical perspective that provided him a more definite perspective on sociopolitical issues where Christian Realists acknowledged nuance with dialectical thinking. Thus, Henry's realism was separate from that of Christian Realists; nevertheless, both grappled with articulating Christianity's social and political purpose in a complex world.

Finally, "sociopolitical" is a necessary adjective this study will frequently use when describing Henry's thought. Henry's contributions to Christian thought addressed both political systems and broader social matters, including economic systems and various philosophies. The American Cold War era and its concern over communism, a

⁴²Lovin, 28.

truly “sociopolitical” term, led Henry to address contemporary affairs from a vantage point that studied both social and political factors. Henry’s holistic worldview that redefined and broadened evangelicalism’s mission in the world also necessitates use of the more expansive term “sociopolitical.” Ultimately, addressing Henry’s contributions relevant to this study as “sociopolitical” provides the best leverage for examining realism in his thought.

Timeline of Henry’s Life

Henry’s life is really an account of two stories, his own personal experiences and the development of twentieth-century American evangelicalism.⁴³ His earlier years, however, did not indicate any future role Henry would later have as an influential evangelical. Born on January 22, 1913, in Manhattan, Henry was the oldest of eight children born to German immigrants, Karl and Johanna Heinrich. During World War I the family changed their name from Heinrich to Henry in the wake of anti-German sentiments in America. While growing up, Henry’s family did not participate regularly in church; Henry, however, attended and was confirmed in an Episcopal church on Long Island.

During his senior year in high school, Henry began a lifelong commitment to writing. He started working for a local newspaper by reporting on high school sports. Henry quickly advanced in the journalistic arena and reported for various New York papers. By the early age of nineteen, he became editor of a newspaper in Suffolk County, New York. Commenting on his early journalistic career, Henry stated,

⁴³The following section is based primarily on Henry’s *Confessions*.

“Writing had now become, as it were, not only my bread and butter, but my very being.”⁴⁴

In 1933 Henry had an experience even more influential to his being than writing, conversion through Jesus Christ. Two years later Henry left his editorial work and pursued an education at Wheaton College in Illinois. Wheaton not only introduced Henry to Christian education, but also to his future wife, Helga Bender. Upon finishing his undergraduate studies, Henry stayed at Wheaton and began graduate studies in theology while also studying at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. While at Northern Henry and Helga were married on August 17, 1940. Henry finished his studies at Northern in 1942, earning a Th.D. Henry then continued his education at Boston University, earning a doctorate in philosophy in 1949.

With evangelical roots from both Wheaton and Northern Baptist and polished academic credentials from Boston University, Henry was poised for involvement in the mid-century evangelical developments that began with the neo-evangelical shift away from fundamentalism. In 1947 Henry inserted himself into the neo-evangelical movement in two primary ways. First, his *Uneasy Conscience* was published. While Henry did not write it in order to separate himself from conservative theology, it nevertheless reveals Henry’s reluctance over affiliating himself with the social apathy of the fundamentalist movement. Second, 1947 found Henry on faculty at the newly established Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

Henry taught at Fuller between 1947 and 1956. He then left teaching and once again became an editor. This time he worked for the infant evangelical publication

⁴⁴Henry, *Confessions*, 40.

promoted by Billy Graham, *Christianity Today*. As its first editor, Henry incurred tremendous responsibilities in striving to develop an evangelical publication that would successfully vie with liberal Protestantism's *Christian Century*. During his time with the magazine, Henry also served as chairman for the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin. Henry tirelessly labored for *Christianity Today* until 1968 when he left the magazine due to a controversial miscommunication with Harold J. Ockenga, chairman of *Christianity Today*'s board of directors at the time.⁴⁵ Henry once more took on teaching responsibilities in 1969 at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He continued at Eastern until 1974 when he joined with World Vision International in a career that took him around the world as a lecturer. Speaking for World Vision also allowed him a schedule conducive for completion of his six-volume theological text, *God, Revelation and Authority*. Henry remained an active writer, teacher, and speaker as he later served as a visiting professor at Hillsdale College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, gave the 1989 Rutherford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, and served with Prison Fellowship. Henry passed away in 2003.

Henry's Worldview

In his autobiography, Henry credited James Orr's *The Christian View of God and the World* for his own development of a "cogently comprehensive view of reality

⁴⁵Henry, *Confessions*, 271-87. According to his autobiography, Henry considered applying for a research grant during 1967, though he was not planning on leaving the magazine permanently. Ockenga, however, assumed Henry intended to resign. Thus, Ockenga encouraged the board of directors to pass a resolution relieving Henry of his editorial position after a set period of time. Once he found out what had happened, a disgruntled Henry chose to follow through with the board's resolution and leave the magazine, even though the misunderstanding was recognized and offers were made that would have allowed him to keep his job. This was not, however, the first controversy Henry had while working as editor of *Christianity Today*. Differences with certain individuals, such as influential board member J. Howard Pew, and other organizational issues plagued Henry's time as editor. See *ibid.*, 151-52, 160-63, 182-83, 196, 203-6, 250-51, 264-73.

and life in a Christian context.”⁴⁶ Instead of following fundamentalism’s severance from the world, Henry applied his Christian faith by addressing “this-worldly” concerns, especially sociopolitical and intellectual matters. Henry continued to articulate this holistic worldview in his autobiography while reflecting on his time at Wheaton and evangelical education as a whole. He stated, “Unless evangelical education understands Christianity’s salvific witness in terms of the whole self—intellect, volition, emotion, conscience, imagination—and of the world in its total need—justice, peace, stewardship and much else—it cannot adequately confront a planet that has sagged out of moral and spiritual orbit.”⁴⁷ This quote is a telling description of Henry’s worldview. His observance of the “whole self” and “total (world) need” reveals both individual and social concerns. While typical fundamentalists prioritized individual evangelism, Henry envisioned a much broader approach to helping a fallen world. Marsden refers to this as Henry’s “comprehensive worldview.”⁴⁸ While Henry’s particular worldview departed from fundamentalism’s narrow vision, it still remained loyal to an evangelical identity in its respect for individual redemption and Scripture. Concerning Scripture, Henry observed, “Here alone are to be found a worthy life-view, a coherent world-view, a joyful end-view.”⁴⁹ Ultimately, Henry’s comprehensive worldview helped propel the neo-evangelical movement towards social and intellectual concern while still adhering to conservative Protestant theology.

⁴⁶Henry, *Confessions*, 75.

⁴⁷Ibid., 76.

⁴⁸Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 80.

⁴⁹Henry, *A Plea*, 88.

Henry's worldview led to a nuanced treatment of the secular world. In his autobiography Henry mentioned that while attending Wheaton his "newspaper work constantly linked [him] to the secular world, and precluded confinement within an evangelical ghetto, so to speak."⁵⁰ Henry incorporated this desire to engage secular spheres of life throughout his career while considering other scholars and philosophies outside his Christian tradition. This extensive worldview even led Henry to reaffirm Luther and Calvin's recognition that the Christian's vocation is a divine calling and not simply a secular profession.⁵¹

Acknowledging Henry's holistic worldview is crucial for understanding his thought and his penchant for prodding evangelicals to work within a fallen world. Reflecting on Henry's *Remaking the Modern Mind* and *Uneasy Conscience*, Marsden concludes, "Henry's response to the cultural challenges was two-pronged."⁵² While Henry encouraged both intellectual and sociopolitical engagement on the part of evangelicals, Marsden notes, however, that Henry still emphasized the primary importance of evangelism.⁵³ Together, Henry's emphasis on evangelism, the intellect, and sociopolitical concerns resembles the mechanics of a unicycle. Representing the wheel, evangelism was central. A unicycle, however, moves forward only while also incorporating its two pedals. For Henry, evangelicalism needed to utilize intellectual and sociopolitical endeavors as well as emphasize evangelism in order for the movement to successfully aid a world in need.

⁵⁰Henry, *Confessions*, 75.

⁵¹Henry, "The Christian View of Work," in *Aspects*, 31-71.

⁵²Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 78.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 82.

Henry's devotion to evangelism, the intellect, and sociopolitical concerns led him to grapple with how best to orient the three areas and engage the world. Out of this consideration came a unique program for evangelical action in society. Yet, without his holistic worldview, Henry would not have had the foresight for such a proposal.

CHAPTER TWO

Understanding Carl F. H. Henry

Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* indicates a distinct turning point in the history of conservative Protestantism in America. Fundamentalists opposed the Social Gospel during the early twentieth century and subsequently shunned sociopolitical engagement. Then in 1947 Henry's book confronted fundamentalism's social disregard and inspired other evangelicals to once again address society and politics. Yet, Henry did not contribute to this development within American evangelicalism *ex nihilo*. Henry definitely spoke from the platform of a prophet; even prophets, however, are shaped by prior experiences and their historical context. Henry developed as an evangelical thinker and leader through specific experiences early in life, the influence of contemporaries and forbearers, and an affinity with certain religious traditions. Early experiences, such as his conversion, newspaper career, and college education, are vital to understanding Henry's development. In addition, several important people, contemporaries and past thinkers, either directly influenced Henry's thought and career or help provide historical context to his sociopolitical voice within evangelicalism. During his career Henry also reconciled two religious traditions. Reformed thought and the fundamentalist movement both helped mold Henry's perspective. Together, these factors help clarify Henry's development as an evangelical who inspired conservative Protestants to once more become socially active.

Experiences

No account of an evangelical theologian is complete without recognizing his conversion experience. For Henry, the combination of a fellow employee's prodding and several unique encounters helped lead him to faith. While working as a newspaper reporter after high school, Henry befriended a widow he called "Mother Christy." Besides helping Henry with proofreading, Mother Christy also shared her faith with Henry. After arriving to pick up Mother Christy from a church gathering one evening, she introduced Henry to the speaker, Gene Bedford, a participant in the Oxford Group movement.¹ Another acquaintance of Henry's had previously asked him for three straight weeks to also meet with Bedford. Henry finally agreed to talk with Bedford at a later date. On June 10, 1933, while meeting with Bedford, Henry prayed and began a redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ.² In retrospect Henry concluded,

In the incomparable providence of God I had found redemption through a plurality of contributory factors that included a pilfered Bible, fragmentary memories of the Episcopal prayer book, a Methodist friend's [Mother Christy's] insistence on the new birth, an Oxford Grouper's daring call for changed lives, all coalescing around my need for vocational direction and crowned by the Holy Spirit's work of grace and inner assurance.³

¹The Oxford Group movement began during the early 1920s in America under the leadership of Frank Buchman. It was a vaguely Christian, nondenominational movement that emphasized individual development through certain practices, including confession and meditation, among its members at "houseparties." An important tenet of the Oxford Group was its belief that the world would only be changed through the reformation of individuals, not society and politics. The movement was later called Moral Rearmament. Walter Houston Clark, "Introduction" and "What Is the Oxford Group?," in *The Oxford Group: Its History and Significance* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), 15-36.

Henry attended several Oxford Group meetings during this time and mentioned that the speakers addressed "the theme that changed lives are the raw material for a new world order." Perhaps this helped influence Henry's later emphasis on individual redemption in his evangelical sociopolitical approach in the *Uneasy Conscience*. Nevertheless, in his autobiography, Henry recognized that the Oxford Group's treatment of Christ and interpreting God's will were suspect. *Confessions*, 40, 42-44, 49, 53. See also Carl F. H. Henry, "Moral Rearmament," in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 433.

²Henry, *Confessions*, 33, 36, 39-40, 42-47.

³*Ibid.*, 47.

Henry's devotion to journalism provides another important aspect of his life. His early introduction to writing helps explain his substantial literary output later in his career. Yet, working as a reporter also helped Henry view the world. His early work as a journalist kept him abreast of secular society and encouraged his later commentary on it. Following his conversion, Henry noted in his autobiography that "spiritual experience and moral sensitivity added new dimensions to my understanding of life and human events."⁴ He followed this statement with a long list of the events he had to report on with his new Christian outlook. Instead of avoiding the secular world, Henry applied his new faith to journalism. Later Henry also conceded that newspaper reporting helped him avoid being sheltered in the "evangelical ghetto" at Wheaton and instead remain informed about the secular world.⁵ Henry's early journalistic career during the time of his conversion and while at Wheaton not only developed his writing ability, but also brought Henry face to face with the "real" world, necessary ingredients for a man who later would criticize fellow Christians for avoiding secular culture.⁶

Attending Wheaton solidified Henry's future in evangelical circles. Joel Carpenter's account of Wheaton during Henry's attendance is telling. He states, "Indeed, the Wheaton of the 1930s and 1940s was something of a throwback to an earlier era, with a pervasively evangelical emphasis and atmosphere, an accent on

⁴Later, Henry remarked, "After becoming a believer I wanted to learn more about the ultimately real world and a truly rewarding life, about human history and the role of science, and especially about the nature of God and his purpose for me and for the world." Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word Books, 1977), 1:9.

⁵Henry, *Confessions*, 51, 75.

⁶Kenneth S. Kantzer also recognizes the influence journalism had on Henry. "Carl Henry knew what was going on in the world. Perhaps that was a part of his heritage from his newspaper days." "Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry: An Appreciation," in *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry*, ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 372.

Christian service, and a strong penchant for training young apologists to defend the faith.”⁷ With an education from Wheaton, Henry not only received a conservative, even fundamentalist, theological foundation that he remained loyal to for the rest of his life, but he also attended the same college as did such “young apologists” as Billy Graham, Harold Lindsell, and Edward J. Carnell, all future role players in the neo-evangelical movement who would eventually work alongside one another. It was the education he received, however, that made his time at Wheaton such a formative experience for Henry. Without a theological education that supplied Henry with the fundamentals of the evangelical faith, Henry never would have achieved what he did for the evangelical movement during the rest of the century. Concerning his time at Wheaton, Henry concluded, “The life friendship of godly classmates, the focus on Christian truth during a cognitively confused era, the meeting of a devout life companion, daily chapel services that introduced me to globally respected evangelical leaders, the emphasis on faithful vocational service for Christ, are part of that inheritance.”⁸

Contemporaries

Gordon H. Clark

While at Wheaton Henry was a student of Gordon H. Clark, a philosophy professor who previously taught at the University of Pennsylvania. While teaching at Wheaton, Clark influenced a host of key figures in the budding neo-evangelical

⁷Carpenter, 21.

⁸Henry, *Confessions*, 75.

movement.⁹ In the case of Henry, Clark became his “revered former professor and astute philosopher-friend.”¹⁰ After graduating from Wheaton, Henry kept close ties with Clark as they supported each other’s literary work. Clark wrote the introduction to Henry’s *Remaking the Modern Mind*, the same book Henry also dedicated to Clark. Later, Henry penned the introduction to *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark: A Festschrift*.¹¹ Henry also acknowledged Clark’s editorial assistance in *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* and *God, Revelation and Authority*.¹² Understanding Clark’s influence on Henry is vital. According to R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Clark “was to become perhaps the most important intellectual influence on Henry’s thought.”¹³

Henry’s treatment of Clark in the introduction to *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark* helps reveal Clark’s specific influence on Henry. Henry identified Clark as a “professional philosopher, examining the questions that secular thinkers have raised about the nature of ultimate reality, assessing the answers, and exhibiting the unsolved problems.”¹⁴ Henry followed Clark’s example in his own engagement with secular philosophies during his career. Henry also noted Clark’s treatment of God’s revelation and the role of human reason, topics Henry heavily emphasized in his own writing.

⁹Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 45. Marsden lists future Fuller faculty members Harold Lindsell, Edward J. Carnell, Paul Jewett, and Lars Granberg; Carl F. H. Henry, “A Wide and Deep Swath,” in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark: A Festschrift*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1968), 16. Henry also mentioned Edmund P. Clowney, Clair Davis, Billy Graham, and Robert K. Rudolph.

¹⁰Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:7.

¹¹Henry, “A Wide and Deep Swath,” 9-21.

¹²Henry, *Aspects*, 14; *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:10, 6:7.

¹³R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Carl F.H. Henry,” in *Baptist Theologians*, eds. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 520.

¹⁴Henry, “A Wide and Deep Swath,” 11.

The importance Clark assigned to the intellect resonated with Henry. Henry reminisced, “He taught us to exercise our minds, and, in a day when colleges were aspiring to great football and basketball teams, that was a refreshing type of exercise from which the cause of Christ stood to profit much.”¹⁵ Henry also mentioned Clark’s concern that Wheaton emphasized the Christian’s responsibility to evangelism as an alternative to getting a theological education, a tendency Henry also found misguided. Both Clark and Henry believed a theological education reinforced evangelism and should not be dismissed as a secondary concern. Ultimately, Henry considered Clark “not only one of the profoundest evangelical Protestant philosophers of our time, but he has also blessed the Church of Christ and particularly young scholars seeking to relate Christianity and contemporary thought with a rich legacy of disciplined thought and writing.”¹⁶ Both Clark and Henry dedicated themselves tirelessly to promoting Christian thought throughout their lives.

For Clark and Henry, combining an evangelical faith with intellectual pursuits led to confrontation with secular ideas. Clark’s stress on countering secular philosophies with Christianity’s tenets encouraged Henry’s approach to the subjects he addressed during his career. In the preface to his first volume of *God, Revelation and Authority*, Henry acknowledged,

To no contemporary do I owe a profounder debt, however, than to Gordon Clark, as numerous index references will attest. Since the thirties when he taught me medieval and modern philosophy at Wheaton, I have considered him the peer of evangelical philosophers in identifying the logical inconsistencies that beset nonevangelical alternatives and in exhibiting the intellectual superiority of Christian theism.¹⁷

¹⁵Henry, “A Wide and Deep Swath,” 17.

¹⁶Ibid., 21.

¹⁷Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:10.

Clark's aggressive approach to secular philosophies whose premises denied a biblical, rational theism left a lasting mark on Henry. Henry followed in Clark's footsteps with a similar fervency for articulating an evangelical response that met secular ideas with the revelation of Scripture.

Edgar S. Brightman

While pursuing a doctorate in philosophy at Boston University, Henry studied under Edgar S. Brightman. Despite Brightman's affiliation with personal idealism, Henry considered studying under him at Boston University an opportunity where he could "interact with the contemporary clash of ideas." Henry also implied in his autobiography that Brightman's teaching encouraged in part his writing of *Remaking the Modern Mind* published in 1946. Two years later, Henry's *Protestant Dilemma* also acknowledged Brightman's aid in its preface. By graduation in 1949, Henry had earned Brightman's respect, despite their theological differences.¹⁸ While Brightman provided intellectual stimulation, historian Joel Carpenter suggests another possible influence. Since Brightman and other Boston University theologians were proponents of the Social Gospel, Carpenter believes Henry's exposure to their teaching could have helped inspire his criticism of fundamentalism's social apathy since his studies under Brightman and his writing the *Uneasy Conscience* coincided. Carpenter does concede that Henry denied Brightman's inspiration in this area; nevertheless, Carpenter still considers

¹⁸Henry, *Confessions*, 107, 111, 120, 122; Carl F.H. Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma: An Analysis of the Current Impasse in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 11; See also Carl F. H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1946), 8; *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:10.

Brightman a possible influence on Henry and his sociopolitical critique of fundamentalism.¹⁹

Fellow Evangelicals

As an evangelical theologian, Henry inspired fellow Christians to once again engage society and think about political concerns. Nevertheless, Henry was not a lone maverick. His standing within the greater neo-evangelical movement must be considered. While Henry provided a prominent voice for evangelical sociopolitical concerns, he worked alongside other neo-evangelicals who also sought to correct fundamentalism's excessive separatism and reenter the public arena. While neo-evangelicals shared similar goals, many also worked closely with one another. Henry's relationship to four notable neo-evangelicals, Harold Lindsell, Edward Carnell, Harold Ockenga, and Billy Graham, provides context to his career.²⁰

The relationship between Lindsell and Henry reveals how the lives and work of key neo-evangelicals coincided frequently. They first met as undergraduate students at Wheaton where during Henry's final year they resided at the same address. Henry noted in his autobiography that Lindsell's example provided academic motivation during this time. Typical of other neo-evangelicals, after finishing undergraduate studies at a fundamentalist institution, both Lindsell and Henry went on to do graduate work at prominent American institutions. After his seminary studies, Henry earned a Ph.D. at Boston University; Lindsell earned a masters degree from the University of

¹⁹Carpenter, 193.

²⁰Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism* is a helpful source for its account of all four men and their time together as they developed, worked for, and in some case, presided over Fuller Theological Seminary.

California at Berkeley and completed a doctorate in history at New York University. During their graduate studies, Lindsell also served as Henry's best man at his wedding in 1940. Following their education, both men shared similar paths as professors. Henry and Lindsell both taught at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary before going to California in 1947 to work for Fuller Theological Seminary. Though Lindsell remained at Fuller after Henry became editor of *Christianity Today* in 1956, Lindsell eventually joined Henry at *Christianity Today* in 1964 as associate editor. After Henry left the magazine in 1968, Lindsell was given Henry's job as editor. Despite their friendship, Henry later disagreed with Lindsell's stance on making inerrancy an indicator of evangelical loyalty, a position Lindsell articulated during the late 1970s in *The Battle for the Bible* and *The Bible in the Balance*. Nevertheless, Henry and Lindsell reveal just how close certain neo-evangelicals worked with each other over the course of their careers.²¹

Edward Carnell, another key neo-evangelical, shared with Henry a respect for the intellect evident in their articulation and defense of the evangelical faith. Like Henry and Lindsell, Carnell also attended Wheaton as an undergraduate where he furthermore learned philosophy from Henry's mentor, Gordon Clark. After Wheaton, Carnell went to Westminster Theological Seminary and then attended Harvard University where he earned a Th.D. with a dissertation on Reinhold Niebuhr. Following Harvard, Carnell studied at Boston University during the same time as Henry, though they did not share much class time. Nevertheless, Carnell and Henry's passion for the Christian intellect and philosophy brought the two men together while

²¹Henry, *Confessions*, 71, 96, 112; *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), s.v. "Lindsell, Harold."

they attended the same university. Henry noted, “Periodically we walked the Boston streets and talked philosophy.” During their graduate studies at Boston University, both men also concurrently taught at Fuller in California, Henry beginning in 1947 and Carnell in 1948, and both traveled back to Boston during the summer of 1949 to defend their Ph.D. dissertations.²²

Over the course of their careers, Henry and Carnell both defended Christianity and promoted evangelicalism through intellectual pursuits. Even by the time they graduated from Boston University in 1949, they had already published works demonstrating their scholastic capabilities, Henry’s *Remaking the Modern Mind* and Carnell’s *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*. As they continued their careers, both remained predominant intellectual voices within the neo-evangelical movement.²³ Looking back at their relationship in his autobiography, Henry concluded, “Carnell and I were in some ways utterly different and in others remarkably alike. . . . But I came to respect Carnell from the very first as a gifted young scholar and in time as a cherished friend.”²⁴

One of the key leaders of the neo-evangelical movement was Harold Ockenga. Despite remaining for most of his life the pastor of Park Street Church, a Congregationalist church that borders the Boston Common, his influence and leadership within neo-evangelicalism was national. Ockenga’s neo-evangelical résumé included

²²Henry, *Confessions*, 120-22; *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, s.v. “Carnell, Edward John.”

²³Henry, *Confessions*, 121-22; *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, s.v. “Carnell, Edward John”; Rosell, 188. See also Marsden’s treatment of Carnell in *Reforming Fundamentalism*, esp. 180-85.

²⁴Henry, *Confessions*, 120-21. Henry demonstrated this respect when he later referenced Carnell’s Harvard dissertation, published as *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, in his own treatment of Niebuhr. Henry, *A Plea*, 36.

helping organize the National Association of Evangelicals, being Fuller Seminary's first president, and serving as a board member for *Christianity Today*. Keeping with the neo-evangelical trend, Ockenga gained an early fundamentalist education at Westminster Theological Seminary, before doing graduate work at a secular academic institution. Ockenga attended the University of Pittsburgh where he earned a masters and Ph.D. Ockenga's early concern for sociopolitical issues is evident in the titles of his two theses. He wrote his masters thesis on "The Role of Competition in Marx" and his doctoral dissertation on "Poverty as a Theoretical and Practical Problem of Government in the Writings of Jeremy Bentham and the Marxian Alternative."²⁵

Both Ockenga and Henry agreed that evangelicals must engage both the intellect and society.²⁶ Ockenga's support for Henry and their shared concerns are evident in Ockenga's introduction to Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*. There Ockenga observed, "Dr. Henry has put his finger on what is troubling us. May this brief thesis be the harbinger of a new articulation of the growing revolt in evangelical circles on ethic indifferentism."²⁷ Both Henry and Ockenga toiled as neo-evangelicals to confront the lingering effects of "indifferentism" inherited from the fundamentalist movement.

Graham was yet another figure in the neo-evangelical movement who attended Wheaton. Even though Graham went to Wheaton after Henry had already graduated, both men eventually worked alongside one another on several occasions. In 1950 Henry helped coordinate the Mid-Century Rose Bowl Rally where Graham spoke to 50,000 people. Henry reflected on this event in his autobiography and noted its ability

²⁵Rosell, 58-59, 63.

²⁶Ibid., 162-74, 185, 187-88.

²⁷Harold J. Ockenga, "Introduction," in *The Uneasy Conscience*, xxi.

to join “academic and evangelistic forces.”²⁸ Neo-evangelicalism’s overall propensity to combine intellectual and evangelistic endeavors is a hallmark of the movement. These two emphases also best relate Henry to Graham. Some observers have even remarked that Henry was “the thinking man’s Billy Graham.”²⁹ Henry’s calling centered on an intellectual articulation of the evangelical faith while Graham’s contributions were clearly evangelistic. Graham admired both Henry’s theological and evangelistic propensities when considering Henry for the editorial position for *Christianity Today*; but, Graham also wondered whether Henry was too intellectual for *Christianity Today*’s targeted audience. Nevertheless, Henry eventually was named the publication’s editor.³⁰

Henry recounted, somewhat humorously, in his autobiography how his calling was separate from Graham’s. While in London Henry visited an area of Hyde Park that served as an open forum where Graham had weeks earlier preached to a crowd of thousands. Henry decided to take the opportunity himself to proclaim the Gospel. Henry, however, only encouraged several hecklers. Henry noted, “I disengaged myself from my lofty perch as discreetly as possible. . . . I paid no attention to two men walking nearby until I overheard one of them remark, ‘That blooming American didn’t have very much to say, did he?’ Graham’s calling and mine, I mused, are very different, and I was willing to leave it that way.”³¹ Nonetheless, their different roles coincided to meet the evangelistic and intellectual needs of the greater neo-evangelical movement.

²⁸Henry, *Confessions*, 125.

²⁹Ibid., 134.

³⁰Ibid., 141-42.

³¹Ibid., 133.

Instead of a lone evangelical, Henry worked with other Christians who shared his convictions. Neo-evangelicalism provided him the opportunity to channel his intellectual and sociopolitical contributions into a particular movement whose followers sought similar objectives. By the 1970s, neo-evangelicalism had successfully reintroduced evangelicalism back into the American public sphere. *Time* magazine in 1977 acknowledged Henry's role, referring to him as "the leading theologian of the nation's growing Evangelical flank."³²

Theological Disagreements

In 1962 Carnell and Henry each crossed paths with neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth on separate occasions. Carnell questioned Barth on the inerrancy of Scripture at a conference held at the University of Chicago.³³ That same year Henry had a similar opportunity to challenge Barth at George Washington University. Henry prodded Barth about Christ's resurrection being an historical event. Referring to Henry's affiliation with *Christianity Today*, Barth responded, "Did you say *Christianity Today* or *Christianity Yesterday?*," to which Henry replied, "*Yesterday, today and forever.*"³⁴ During his career Henry was a critic of Barth, but a sympathetic one nonetheless. After having later spoken with Barth in Germany, Henry noted that "whenever I conversed with Karl Barth I had the clear sense that, however flawed was Barth's dialectical theology, I was in the presence of a believer in the gospel."³⁵

³²"Theology for the Tent Meeting," *Time*, February 14, 1977, 82.

³³Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 194-95.

³⁴Henry, *Confessions*, 210-11.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 243.

Understanding Henry's role as an evangelical theologian requires examining the nuanced consideration he gave certain Christian thinkers outside the evangelical fold.³⁶ While scholars differ over the exact relationship between neo-orthodox theologians and Reinhold Niebuhr, Henry grouped Barth and Niebuhr together as proponents of "neo-supernaturalism."³⁷ Henry noted their criticism of Protestant liberalism but criticized their dialectical and existential thought that consequently skewed not only their theology, but their sociopolitical thought as well.³⁸

Henry gave Barth's thought balanced consideration. He appreciated Barth's conviction that the church must avoid promoting itself through the state.³⁹ Similarly, Henry acknowledged Barth's fear that nationalism and the church would converge once the church saw its mission as simply political.⁴⁰ Henry also agreed with Barth that the church should encourage the government to fulfill its divine purpose.⁴¹ Yet, Henry also found Barth's sociopolitical considerations lacking in other areas. Ultimately, Henry believed Barth's understanding of the state's divine purpose was misplaced. Since, according to Henry, Barth did not separate God's love and justice, Barth consequently did not identify justice as God's sole purpose for government. For Henry, Barth instead identified justice within grace and love; consequently, Barth confused the Kingdom of

³⁶Bob E. Patterson, *Carl F.H. Henry, Makers of the Modern Theological Mind*, ed. Bob E. Patterson (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 45-50; Mohler, 523-24.

³⁷Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, 134.

³⁸Henry, *Aspects*, 146-47.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 78-79.

⁴⁰Carl F.H. Henry, "Liberation Theology and the Scriptures," in *Liberation Theology*, ed. Ronald Nash (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1984), 191-92.

⁴¹Henry, *Aspects*, 81-82, 95.

God and the role of the gospel with the progress of government. Henry considered this approach too utopian and believed instead that government is simply an expedient for social justice until Christ's return.⁴²

Niebuhr was another Christian thinker whose ideas Henry both favored and criticized in his writing. In *Remaking the Modern Mind* published in 1946, Henry acknowledged Niebuhr's contributions toward a Judeo-Christian critique of liberalism's optimistic, progressive spirit⁴³ and failure to recognize man's sin nature.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, two years later in the *Protestant Dilemma*, Henry more thoroughly examined Niebuhr's analysis of human nature and found it lacking in its neglect of a biblical understanding of history and sin.⁴⁵

Later, in *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* published in 1971, Henry continued to consider Niebuhr's earlier role in the development of "neo-Protestant" social thought following the decline of the Social Gospel up until the development of revolution theology during the 1960s. Henry acknowledged that Niebuhr affirmed government's purpose in implementing justice and that man is sinful; nevertheless, Henry offered several criticisms of Niebuhr's earlier thought. Foremost, Henry found Niebuhr's dialectical treatment of "the ideal and the historical" lacking. For Henry, Niebuhr unfortunately worked outside the "ontological categories of Biblical Christianity" and held history and eternity in dialectical tension. Consequently, Henry

⁴²Henry, *Aspects*, 95-96, 146-52, 159.

⁴³Henry, "The Inevitability of Progress," in *Remaking the Modern Mind*, 34, 36, 40, 42.

⁴⁴Henry, "The Inherent Goodness of Man," in *Remaking the Modern Mind*, 55, 58, 64, 67, 68. Henry, however, alluded to the inadequacy of Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* in its soft treatment of individual man's sin nature. See 66, 69.

⁴⁵Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, 134-60.

believed Niebuhr's interpretation of love and justice was skewed since justice through force was elevated as the only historical option for society, the opposite problem Henry found in Barth's thinking. Henry argued that since Niebuhr dismissed the principle of love in society, Niebuhr also did not consider the potential of personal redemption and its ability to transform individuals as an alternative to a singular emphasis on justice. In addition to his criticism of Niebuhr's dialectical thought, Henry also briefly suggested *Moral Man and Immoral Society* had the potential to encourage revolutionaries to use violence rather than "persuasion and judicial processes" in their efforts for justice.⁴⁶ Yet, based upon Niebuhr's extensive treatment of coercion and revolution as means for achieving justice in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, it is surprising that Henry did not carry this argument further.

Henry's arguments against Niebuhr were manifold, but they also addressed only a segment of Niebuhr's career and thought. In his treatment of Niebuhr, Henry addressed Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*,⁴⁷ but he also incorporated Niebuhr's *Reflections on the End of an Era*, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, and *Beyond Tragedy*,⁴⁸ with extensive consideration given to Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* and its conclusions concerning man's sin nature.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, however, Henry's treatment of Niebuhr limited itself to these earlier works of Niebuhr's

⁴⁶Henry, *A Plea*, 30-37, 38.

⁴⁷Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, 66, 69; *The Protestant Dilemma*, 135-36, 137; *A Plea*, 31-34, 35.

⁴⁸Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, 138ff.

⁴⁹Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, 55, 58, 64, 67, 68; *The Protestant Dilemma*, 135ff.; *A Plea*, 32.

from the 1930s and early 1940s and did not engage the later modifications Niebuhr made in his thought.⁵⁰

Henry was a vigorous opponent of liberal theology, and his evangelical sociopolitical thought reflects this disdain. His uneasiness with the thought of Barth and Niebuhr, also critics of liberal Protestant thought, provides further definition to his distinct evangelical considerations.⁵¹ With his responses to Barth and Niebuhr, Henry articulated an evangelical program that replaced dialectical ambiguity with Scripture's objective solutions for the realities of this world.

Forbearers

Augustine

Augustine's theology left an important impression on Henry's thought. Perhaps it was no coincidence that Henry titled his autobiography *Confessions of a Theologian*, a possible allusion to Augustine's own autobiographical *Confessions*. As Marsden has noted, Henry's convictions concerning the Christian's purpose here on earth reflect Augustine's recognition of the two cities, one heaven and the other earth, and the Christian's commitment to both. In devoting his life to formulating an evangelical response to contemporary sociopolitical affairs, Henry applied Augustine's holistic vision to his own thought.⁵² In his *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry criticized

⁵⁰Henry did recognize, however, Niebuhr's shift away from socialism; nevertheless, Henry argued that Niebuhr's thought continued to be in many ways "pro-socialist." Henry, *A Plea*, 31-32.

⁵¹"Henry reserved his most forceful theological analyses for those systems which by their compromising nature posed a threat to evangelicalism itself. Thus, though Bultmann was far less orthodox than Barth, it was Barth who represented the greater danger to evangelicals, many of whom found hope in Barth's apparent conservatism." Mohler, 524; Patterson, 45.

⁵²Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 81-82.

fundamentalism's "world-resisting message," a deviation he felt ignored Augustine's *City of God*.⁵³ Henry also believed his *Uneasy Conscience* was a success among Reformed thinkers because it affirmed the Christian's dual citizenship.⁵⁴ Twenty-four years later, Augustine's ideas continued to prod Henry's sociopolitical considerations. In *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*, Henry concluded, "The Christian prays daily, and ought to work daily, for God's will to be done on earth, as in heaven. As a citizen of two worlds he will engage actively wherever possible in the struggle for social righteousness."⁵⁵

J. Gresham Machen

While at Wheaton, Gordon Clark taught some of neo-evangelicalism's future leaders. Yet, not all key neo-evangelicals were former students of Clark. Another fellow Presbyterian, J. Gresham Machen, taught still others who would guide the movement.⁵⁶ Prior to the separatist position he took later in life in relation to denominations, Machen set an example neo-evangelicals would eventually follow in their quest to reengage theologically crippled denominations and a faltering culture while still adhering to conservative theology. As a seminary professor at Princeton and later Westminster, Machen influenced several of his students who later became role-

⁵³Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 19, see also 38.

⁵⁴Henry, *Confessions*, 113.

⁵⁵Henry, *A Plea*, 122. See also 65-69.

⁵⁶Marsden notes Clark's relation to Machen. "Clark was intensely devoted to Machen and in 1936 had the honor of nominating him moderator of their new denomination." Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 45. Regarding Machen's legacy, see Marsden, "Understanding J. Gresham Machen," in *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 182-201.

players within neo-evangelicalism, most notably Harold J. Ockenga.⁵⁷ Together, both Clark and Machen supplied subtle impetus to the neo-evangelical movement as they taught at fundamentalist educational institutions.

Even though Henry did not study under Machen, in many ways Henry followed Machen's legacy. Henry acknowledged Machen's significance in the *Uneasy Conscience*. He commended Machen as one "who vigorously insisted that Christianity has a message relevant to the world crisis, however staggering the issues."⁵⁸ Both Machen and Henry emphasized the significance of ideas and called for Christianity's engagement in the mix of philosophical trends. Both men believed civilization depended on Christianity's spiritual, intellectual, and social guidance. Henry began a lifelong commitment to articulating these ideas in *Remaking the Modern Mind*. Machen earlier spelled out similar concerns in *Christianity and Liberalism*,⁵⁹ where he concluded, "The change is nothing less than the substitution of paganism for Christianity as the dominant view of life. Seventy-five years ago, Western civilization, despite inconsistencies, was still predominantly Christian; to-day it is predominantly pagan."⁶⁰ Henry proclaimed this conclusion with equal, if not greater concern, throughout his career. Thus, Henry shared with Machen a common zeal for applying Christianity, as revealed through Scripture, to a world crumbling under flawed spiritual, intellectual, and moral systems. Their ability to expand the conservative Protestant

⁵⁷Sharp, 18-27; Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 26-28. See also Rosell, 55.

⁵⁸Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 6.

⁵⁹Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 31, 51-52, 61-62, 77-79

⁶⁰Machen, 65.

vision beyond simply a focus on evangelism indicates the influence of a shared worldview that included intellectual and cultural engagement.⁶¹

Besides secular philosophies, Machen and Henry were also concerned about theological deviance among fellow Christians. For both Henry and Machen, liberal theological trends frustrated true Christianity; subtract Christ and his supernatural, redemptive mission within history, and Christianity ceases to exist.⁶² In the process of confronting liberal Protestantism, Machen and Henry also attacked the Social Gospel's theological implications. Both dedicated their careers to maintaining an evangelical Christianity where personal redemption through Christ and the objective truth of Scripture provided hope and clear direction in a tumultuous world.

The description of the early church included in Acts 4:32 provides the best explanation for the relationship between Machen and Henry. The author of Acts observed, "All the believers were one in heart and mind."⁶³ These two theologians worked from similar principles, perspectives, and aspirations. Even though a decade separated the end of Machen's life and the beginning of Henry's career as a neo-evangelical, both men were "one in mind" concerning Christianity's relevance in a fallen world. In their efforts to counter liberal Protestant trends and articulate what they believed to be true Christianity, both men also grappled with how Christians should

⁶¹Machen's allowance for the responsible consumption of alcohol and his idea of "Christian humanism" are two products of his holistic worldview. For his treatment of "Christian humanism," see Machen, 66.

⁶²Henry, "Evangelical," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J.D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 358-59; Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*. See also Henry, *A Plea*, 24.

⁶³Acts 4:32a (New International Version).

confront the realities of this world. Their sociopolitical thought and its realism will be examined in further detail as this study progresses.

Religious Traditions

A distinct tenet of Dutch Reformed thought is its ability to apply Christianity to all aspects of life. Marsden explores in *Reforming Fundamentalism* the connection between Henry in his *Remaking the Modern Mind* and *Uneasy Conscience* and the Dutch Calvinist thought of Abraham Kuyper and other Christian thinkers Henry respected. Marsden concludes that Henry shared some affinity with Dutch Reformed thought and its “broadly Calvinistic vision that the Christian’s mission involves not only evangelism but also a cultural task, both remaking the mind of an era and transforming society.” A distinct worldview emanates from this broad application of Christianity, and Marsden notices its presence in Henry’s recurring reference to a “world and life view” in the *Uneasy Conscience*, a concept that, according to Marsden, was a “cliché in the Dutch-American community.” While Marsden concedes that Henry did not associate with Dutch Reformed thought entirely, the similarities are noteworthy between it and Henry’s own worldview that addressed all areas of life in this world.⁶⁴ Together with the classic Reformed position Henry received while at Wheaton from Gordon Clark,⁶⁵ a Reformed theological perspective (either Dutch or traditional) definitely influenced Henry and helps explain his broad, “this-worldly” application of the Christian faith.

⁶⁴Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 78-80. Later in his career, Henry continued to acknowledge Kuyper’s Dutch Reformed worldview. Henry observed that Kuyper “effectively stressed the relevance of an ethic of revelation for all realms of life.” Henry, *A Plea*, 31.

⁶⁵Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 45, 79.

Henry attributed the development of his worldview to having read *The Christian View of God and the World*, a book written by the late nineteenth-century Scottish theologian James Orr.⁶⁶ In his writing, however, Henry periodically referred to a “world-life view” or stressed a Christian understanding of life and the world together.⁶⁷ This particular emphasis reveals the influence of the Dutch Reformed thought of Abraham Kuyper, a prominent theologian and politician in the Netherlands during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, given at Princeton University in 1898, Kuyper commented in a footnote that he believed the German word, *weltanschauung*, should be translated as “life- and worldview,” in opposition to Orr’s belief that it meant “view of the world.”⁶⁸ While Henry acknowledged Orr’s influence, Kuyper’s thought evidently also helped Henry construct his holistic “world-life view,” and consequently, his neo-evangelical impetus for engaging sociopolitical concerns.

Closely linked to Henry’s worldview was his emphasis on God’s sovereignty, another notable Reformed tenet. The importance of this concept for Henry is no clearer than when in a convocation address given in 1989, Henry stated, “We are motivated in a mission to a world that God the Creator made and sustains. We sing ‘This is *my* Father’s world’ and well we may. Day after day it mirrors the Creator’s glory. . . . We glory in God’s sovereign rule over the universe.” Within this passage of praise to a

⁶⁶Henry, *Confessions*, 75.

⁶⁷Henry incorporates this idea repeatedly in the *Uneasy Conscience*. For further examples, see also Henry, *A Plea*, 88; *God, Revelation and Authority* 1:9; *Confessions*, 121; Carl F. H. Henry, “Strife over Social Concerns,” in *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Waco: Word Books, 1976), 61; Carl F. H. Henry, “The Uneasy Conscience Revisited: Current Theological, Ethical, and Social Concerns,” *Theology, New and Notes* (December 1987): 4.

⁶⁸Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Hendrickson Christian Classics (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 3n1.

sovereign God, Henry also acknowledged God's influential role in history and Christ's second coming that will defeat evil.⁶⁹

Ultimately, Henry's panoramic worldview and understanding of God's sovereignty helped him transcend the fences of fundamentalism that obstructed a more comprehensive perspective of the world. The influence of Reformed thought and its acknowledgment of God's reign and earth's goodness, however, did not transform Henry into an excessive optimist. Following his admission of God's sovereignty, Henry stated, "The world obtrudes as a ghastly reality. . . . We agree with Browning that 'God's in his heaven,' but we are far less sure that 'all's right with the world.'"⁷⁰

Henry uniquely blended fundamentalist concern with Reformed hopefulness. While fundamentalists were adept critics of American culture, Henry believed Christians must move from simply censuring society and try to help alleviate its problems. Nevertheless, Henry frequently pointed to the moral breakdown of culture with fundamentalist alarm. Henry also referred regularly to Christ's final judgment at the end of time and its ability to establish justice permanently in the world. While Henry avoided dispensational premillennialism,⁷¹ he still emphasized Christ's return and the judgment of nations. Thus, Henry's fundamentalist heritage led him to view society critically and stress an eschatological vision.

Nevertheless, his Reformed inheritance, received from influences such as Clark and Kuyper, and the inspiration of Augustine's thought kept him from assigning the

⁶⁹Carl F. H. Henry, *gods of this age or God of The Ages?*, ed. R. Albert Mohler (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 286.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 286.

⁷¹Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46-48; Budziszewski, 45; Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 76.

world to doom and preaching a gospel predicated on individual salvation alone. While Henry believed Christ's second coming was the world's only hope for utopia, he believed Christians must still confront social issues in the meantime.⁷² During the course of his life, Henry affirmed God's sovereignty demonstrated in the hymn, "This is my Father's world." Yet, his ideas also paralleled the hymn's third verse with its realistic understanding of earthly power and its expectation of the coming Christ.

This is my Father's world,
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world,
The battle is not done;
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and heaven be one.⁷³

The realism in Henry's thought observed with fundamentalist indignation the injustice of the "strong" and also emphasized Christ's future return. These elements, however, did not deter Henry from articulating a Christian response for social justice in the present world. Instead, Henry combined in his evangelical sociopolitical thought sober fundamentalist convictions with a Reformed worldview.

⁷²Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 76-77; Budziszewski, 45.

⁷³*Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1975), no. 155.

CHAPTER THREE

The Realism of Carl F. H. Henry: Part I

Introduction

Christianity has had to grapple with its social relevance throughout its history. Christ denounced the Jewish community's messianic political expectations, announcing instead that his kingdom was "not of this world." Augustine considered the Christian's role as a citizen of two worlds, and during the Reformation, Martin Luther had to confront the Peasant's Revolt that translated his theological dissent into social disorder. The twentieth century, however, was arguably the most dynamic period for the interaction of theology and society. Pierced by two world wars, genocide, continued industrialization, and ideological foment, the twentieth century led many Christians to reconsider their role in a world scenario without precedent. Realism was one option for Christian's trying to comprehend this social upheaval and articulate an appropriate response.

Protestant fundamentalists during the early twentieth century incorporated realism into their social outlook when they recognized America's faltering morals and reacted to the Social Gospel's utopian expectations. Henry acknowledged fundamentalism's realistic perspective in the *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. He noted fundamentalism's jeremiad against the optimistic spirit of

liberal Protestants and concluded that “the judgment of the two world wars stands now with the appraisal of the Fundamentalist.”¹

Historian Joel Carpenter describes the connection between fundamentalism and realism in *Revive Us Again* under a section titled, “A Plain Person’s Religious Realism.”² Carpenter recognizes fundamentalism’s contempt for the social optimism of its day, but concludes the movement did not act on its criticism. Carpenter suggests that while fundamentalism offered a “plain person’s parallel to the ‘realism’ of the neo-orthodox ideological movement,” it failed to engage the sociopolitical arena. Carpenter believes fundamentalism’s biblical interpretation, dispensational premillennialism, and recent public failures led to its inaction; he finds instead fundamentalists devoting their sole attention to evangelism by the 1930s.

J. Gresham Machen provided an important voice within the fundamentalist movement, and his thought offers relevant themes for this study. Published in 1923, Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism* argued liberal Protestants removed from Christianity its essence, a supernatural, redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ. According to Machen, liberal Protestants who ignored the historical Christ and personal redemption as revealed through Scripture followed a religion separate from Christianity.³ While most historians consider Machen in terms of his articulate reproach of liberal Protestants, certain arguments in *Christianity and Liberalism* offer a conservative expression of social realism as well. In his diatribe against liberal

¹Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 24. See also “The Uneasy Conscience Revisited,” 4.

²Carpenter, 105-7.

³Machen, 7. Machen, however, did qualify this conclusion by stating that even though liberal Protestantism as a movement promoted a different faith from Christianity, “individuals” following liberal theology may still be Christians, God being the final judge. *Ibid.*, 160.

theological trends, Machen addressed Christianity's individual and social implications. Machen also demonstrated realistic views of political structures and urged Christians to not expect unbelievers in the general public to follow Christian principles considered beneficial for society by liberal Protestants, such as the Golden Rule.

While fundamentalism's realism was innate, mainline Protestants articulated a distinct theory known as Christian Realism. Reinhold Niebuhr has become synonymous with this area of Christian thought. While duly noting the profundity of Niebuhr's contributions to Christian Realism, this study will limit its treatment of Niebuhr's thought to the realism he expressed in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, while including Henry's responses to Niebuhr's other works as well. Published in 1932, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* argues that corruption escalates along a continuum between individuals and groups. While the book is not a definitive source for Niebuhr's contributions to Christian Realism, Niebuhr's identification of the inherent tension between individuals, collective man, and injustice provides key themes for this study that help frame Henry's own realism.

Both twentieth-century fundamentalists, especially Machen, and mainline Protestants, particularly Niebuhr, had already expressed realism in their sociopolitical thought by the time Henry began articulating his own considerations of society and politics. Beginning in his *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* published in 1947, Henry provided another Christian perspective that expressed realism, but from a neo-evangelical viewpoint. While Henry never addressed realism as systematically as did Niebuhr, Henry's conservative theology, like Machen's, did not preclude a realistic approach to sociopolitical issues. Chapters three and four will address in further detail

both Machen and Niebuhr's treatment of certain aspects of realism prior to examining Henry's own thought.

While it is necessary to consider the historical context of Henry's thought, any examination of Henry's consideration of society and politics must also recognize two central emphases and an important modification that took place during his career. As Henry encouraged Christians to reengage sociopolitical issues in the *Uneasy Conscience*, he stressed the importance of personal redemption and its ability to effect change in the social and political realms. Later, however, Henry altered his position in order to emphasize social justice as well.⁴ Together, the importance Henry attached to both redemption and social justice are critical for any understanding of his treatment of society and politics.

One of the primary tenets of Henry's evangelical sociopolitical thought is his "redemptive" or "regeneration strategy." Henry first articulated his redemptive approach in the *Uneasy Conscience* where he stressed the importance of individual conversion for the reformation of society.⁵ Henry argued, "The divine order involves a supernatural principle, a creative force that enters society from outside its natural sources of uplift, and regenerates humanity. In that divine reversal of the self-defeating sinfulness of man is the only real answer to our problems—of whatever political, economic, or sociological nature."⁶ Nevertheless, even though personal conversion was

⁴Henry, "The Uneasy Conscience Revisited," 4; Budziszewski, 47-48; Weeks, "Carl F. H. Henry on Civic Life," 136; David L. Weeks, "Carl F. H. Henry's Moral Arguments for Evangelical Political Activism," *Journal of Church and State* 40, no.1 (1998): 94.

⁵While Henry addressed this concept throughout the *Uneasy Conscience*, chapter three, "The Most Embarrassing Evangelical Divorce," 27-40, specifically addresses redemption's social application.

⁶*Ibid.*, 84.

central to his thought, Henry suggested Christianity had more to offer society than simply converted individuals.⁷

Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*, however, did not specify exactly how redemption alters society through individuals.⁸ Instead, it was simply understood that personal redemption and Christianity's social influence depend upon one another. Throughout the rest of his career, Henry filled in this "gap" with an emphasis on transcendent principles provided by God for society's wellbeing and the role of the church in articulating divine purposes for society and politics. Ultimately, Henry's emphasis on redemption included both individual conversion and God's intent and direction for society proclaimed by redeemed Christians.⁹

In his *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* published in 1964, Henry continued to address the potential of redemption in his treatment of a "regeneration strategy." Henry defined this approach as "transformation by supernatural impulse in individual lives whereby the social scene is renewed through a divine spiritual motivation."¹⁰ Henry continued to emphasize that while Christianity is not primarily a sociopolitical program, it is relevant to society and government.¹¹ Yet, Henry still acknowledged Christianity's individualism in his "regeneration strategy." He concluded that "what the social order needs is a new race of men—men equipped not simply with new textbooks and new

⁷Budziszewski believes the *Uneasy Conscience* suggests that "redemption flies on two wings, one individual, the other social; a gospel without the kingdom has only one wing." Budziszewski, 44.

⁸Ibid., 47; Hollinger, 111.

⁹Weeks, "Carl F. H. Henry on Civic Life," 132-33; Henry, *Aspects*, 133; Sharp, 106.

¹⁰Henry, *Aspects*, 17.

¹¹Ibid., 19-21.

laws, but with new hearts.”¹² Nevertheless, in the same book, Henry also began to couple with his “regeneration strategy” an emphasis on justice.

Henry admitted in an article published in 1987, “The Uneasy Conscience Revisited,” that his book forty years earlier advocated “regenerative forces” at the expense of government’s application of justice. He suggested that both the threat of totalitarianism and evangelical trends at the time led him to overlook the importance of government and its promotion of justice. He observed, however, that while teaching at Fuller he began to readjust his evangelical political considerations to include social justice. Yet, Henry still acknowledged the ultimate importance of “redemptive vitalities” for society.¹³

Henry emphasized both redemption and justice in his sociopolitical thought during his career. Henry never strayed from his loyalty to the evangelical faith and the importance it ascribes to evangelism. Yet, Henry did not let the importance of individual redemption detract from social concern. Instead, Henry incorporated both redemption and the divine mandate for government to employ justice. Noting Henry’s attention to redemption and social justice is foundational for examining his sociopolitical thought.

Having now provided historical context to Henry’s realism and two central emphases of his sociopolitical approach, the rest of this chapter will examine individual and groups aspects of his thought in order to better understand Henry’s neo-evangelical

¹²Henry, *Aspects*, 30.

¹³Henry, “The Uneasy Conscience Revisited,” 4.

realism. Chapter four will then examine Henry's treatment of political structures and economic systems.

Individuals and Groups

Introduction

In *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr made the recognition of individual and group identities imperative for any understanding of Christian Realism. Evangelicals, too, consider both the micro and macro elements of humanity. They primarily interpret individuals and groups through a spiritual lens, but this does not deter them from realistic social analysis as well. Consequently, Henry's treatment of individuals and collective man provides an imperative framework for contemplating his realistic evangelical considerations. Prior to Henry, however, both Machen and Niebuhr grappled with the relevance of individuals and groups in society.

Machen was aware in *Christianity and Liberalism* of contemporary accusations made against his movement that claimed fundamentalists were only concerned about individual conversion. Nevertheless, he defended Christian individualism for its emphasis on personal redemption and the deference it gave individuals in contrast to political and philosophical systems that challenged individual autonomy.¹⁴

Machen also argued, "Human institutions are really to be molded, not by Christian principles accepted by the unsaved, but by Christian men; the true transformation of society will come by the influence of those who have themselves been

¹⁴Machen, 152-53, 10-11.

redeemed.”¹⁵ In other sections of his book, Machen acknowledged it is important that Christians help others in need, but he still recognized that Christians should give evangelism precedence.¹⁶ For Machen optimistic considerations of society must acknowledge the redemption of individuals. He also proclaimed, “It is upon this brotherhood of twice-born sinners, this brotherhood of the redeemed, that the Christian founds the hope of society.”¹⁷ Thus, Machen’s social considerations relied heavily on the salvation of individuals.

Nevertheless, while holding to the primary importance of personal salvation, Machen neither avoided broader sociopolitical concerns nor relinquished hope for society’s recovery. For Machen, the Christian’s worldview is unavoidably social. While referring to industrialization as a relevant issue for Christians to address, Machen surmised,

The “otherworldliness” of Christianity involves no withdrawal from the battle of this world; our Lord Himself, with His stupendous mission, lived in the midst of life’s throng and press. Plainly, then, the Christian man may not simplify his problem by withdrawing from the business of the world, but must learn to apply the principles of Jesus even to the complex problems of modern industrial life. At this point Christian teaching is in full accord with the modern liberal Church; the evangelical Christian is not true to his profession if he leaves his Christianity behind him on Monday morning. On the contrary, the whole of life, including business and all of social relations, must be made obedient to the law of love.¹⁸

From this comprehensive application of his faith, Machen believed Christianity had social significance outside a singular emphasis on evangelism. Machen considered the family unit as a key element of Christianity’s relationship to society, a facet he felt the

¹⁵Machen, 158.

¹⁶Ibid., 158; see also 153.

¹⁷Ibid., 158.

¹⁸Ibid., 155.

state was subsuming. The government was another social construct Machen identified. He called Christianity to “support” the state, regardless of whether the government was Christian or not, and also acknowledged the “necessity of government.”¹⁹ Finally, Machen considered the church as the “highest Christian answer to the social needs of man.”²⁰ Thus, Machen accommodated treatment of both individuals (Christians) and groups (families, churches, governments) in his treatment of society.

Niebuhr’s differentiation between individuals and collective man forms his primary thesis in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. He argued that individual people are capable of transcending self-interest and of contributing to the wellbeing of others in society. Social groups (nations, races, or economic classes), however, are not able to overcome their own group’s interests and security. Niebuhr did not believe rational or religious forces could overcome an oppressive group’s self-interest on their own terms; instead, political force was the only viable tool for seeking social justice. For Niebuhr religion’s only hope for confronting social injustice relied upon religious followers who put their individualism aside and united in a forceful effort for justice.²¹ According to Niebuhr a group’s self-interest, however, explains both the actions of an unjust group and those of a dispossessed segment of society; the middle class seeks stability for its perpetuation while the proletariat justifies using force for its survival.²² Niebuhr also concluded that the principle of love was necessary for relationships between individuals; but, he argued, “This social validity of a moral ideal which transcends

¹⁹Machen, 153-55.

²⁰Ibid., 159.

²¹Niebuhr, 81.

²²Ibid., 175-76.

social considerations in its purest heights, is progressively weakened as it is applied to more and more intricate, indirect and collective human relations.”²³ Thus, the instrument of love fails in group relations; only force can achieve justice in the political world.

Individuals

Critics of fundamentalism argued that the movement cared only for individuals and the wellbeing of their souls while giving up concern for social justice and the impoverished masses. Henry agreed with fundamentalism’s emphasis on personal redemption and ethics predicated on Scriptural standards, but he also believed they were too concerned with individuals and overlooked the social relevance of their faith. In the *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry observed, “Of all modern viewpoints, when measured against the black background of human nature disclosed by the generation of two world wars, Fundamentalism provided the most realistic appraisal of the condition of man. . . . But the sin against which Fundamentalism has inveighed, almost exclusively, was individual sin rather than social evil.”²⁴ Consequently, “Fundamentalism is wondering just how it is that a world changing message narrowed its scope to the changing of isolated individuals.”²⁵

Even though Henry and fellow neo-evangelicals disagreed with fundamentalism’s extreme individualism, they continued to emphasize the individual from both a spiritual and social perspective. Evangelicals have historically grappled

²³Niebuhr, 266-67.

²⁴Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 7.

²⁵Ibid., 14.

with three different categories of individual man. With a Scriptural underpinning, evangelicals have understood human beings as either guilty individuals, needy individuals, or redeemed individuals. Each of these three perceptions of the individual's condition offers different implications for an evangelical response to society's dilemmas, and each of these three considerations is evident in Henry's thought.

Important to Henry's assessment of the individual within society is his conviction that human beings are guilty individuals who have a sin nature inherited from the original fall of Adam as recorded in Genesis. For Henry, acknowledging humanity's fall is crucial for evangelical sociopolitical considerations.²⁶ In the *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Henry stated, "Indeed, conservative Protestantism insists, *only* this estimate of the sinfulness of man and his need of regeneration is sufficiently realistic to make at all possible any securely-grounded optimism in world affairs."²⁷ In *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, Henry also believed a "regeneration strategy" acknowledged "the social crisis viewed within man's larger problem of created dignity and sinful corruption."²⁸ For Henry, sociopolitical thought must take into account human beings and their inherited sin nature; it is because of guilty individuals that God instituted government in the first place. Henry concluded, "God wills civil government as an institution for preserving justice and promoting peace and order in a fallen society."²⁹

²⁶Budziszewski, 41, 119; Weeks, "Carl F. H. Henry on Civic Life," 135.

²⁷Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 13.

²⁸Henry, *Aspects*, 21.

²⁹Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 100.

In *Remaking the Modern Mind*, Henry valued Niebuhr's acknowledgement of the human sin condition in the *Nature and Destiny of Man* since it challenged prior liberal optimism.³⁰ Even in Henry's admiration, however, he alluded to his dissatisfaction with Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Henry argued, "In every successive human attempt, it is immoral man and immoral society that has frustrated dreams of a moral utopia."³¹

Two years later in the *Protestant Dilemma*, Henry reexamined Niebuhr's overall treatment of human nature in his earlier works and found it lacking. According to Henry, Niebuhr's emphasis on the "inevitability" of sin disregards Scripture's account of a "moral revolt" where Adam chose to defy God and give up his original perfection. For Henry, Scripture describes man's sin nature as a result of his choice to disobey God, not an "inevitability" of human nature.³² In turn, Henry argued, "The attempt to take sin seriously while regarding it as normal, as inevitable, cannot sustain itself, for it works itself around to the denial of the seriousness of sin."³³ Henry believed instead that "man is not a sinner in virtue of his humanity, as though sin were a normal inevitability, but rather we are instructed that all men are implicated in a primal moral revolt against the Creator. . . . Though no original righteousness remains, the divine image is not obliterated, however distorted."³⁴

³⁰Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, 55, 58, 64, 67, 68.

³¹Ibid., 66. See also 69.

³²Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, 151, 138-39.

³³Ibid., 151.

³⁴Ibid., 159-60.

Henry never distinguished between the moral potential of individuals and unjust nature of groups as did Niebuhr in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. While Henry was aware of the evils of collective man, he never argued that corruption is greater in groups than among individuals. Instead, Henry emphasized that human beings adhere to a definite sin nature that binds their potential.³⁵ Nevertheless, Henry believed this sin condition is not intrinsic to being human; it is not simply an “inevitability” of human nature that must be accepted as Henry believed Niebuhr argued. Instead, once redeemed, Henry believed Christians are able to resist their sin natures and make right choices, even though the sin nature is not eliminated entirely.³⁶ Henry’s adherence to redemption and the ability it produces to overcome sin fueled his redemptive sociopolitical hopes. Thus, once redeemed, humans are capable of improving society.³⁷ Henry’s sociopolitical thought combined a realistic interpretation of human nature with hope for man’s spiritual, and then social, improvement, a hope Niebuhr would have disagreed with due to the emphasis he placed on the presence of sin and love’s inability to sway society and politics.³⁸

³⁵See Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 14.

³⁶See Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, 154-56.

³⁷“The Fundamentalist holds that primal man was a divine creation, endowed with moral righteousness, so that man is not a sinner by a necessity of his original nature, but rather by voluntary choice; consequently, the hope for a better order is directly proportionate to the appropriation of redemptive grace in human society.” Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 66. See also Weeks, “Carl F. H. Henry on Civic Life,” 133.

³⁸“Protestant orthodoxy must nonetheless bring driving criticism to bear upon the existing social orders by insisting both on the social consequences of the fall and on the need of supernatural divine redemption ‘far as the curse is found.’” Henry, *A Plea*, 42.

Yet, Henry was not willing to suggest that the presence of redeemed Christians diminishes the need for government to promote law and order.³⁹ His realistic assessment of human nature and emphasis on social justice kept him from placing too much hope in his “redemptive strategy.” Later in life, Henry observed, “Christians and non-Christians alike need legal constraints on volitions that have yet to fully escape their rebel propensities.”⁴⁰

While guilty individuals encouraged Henry’s understanding of the role of government, needy individuals explain his admonition to fellow evangelicals. He worked tirelessly during his career to persuade Christians to rethink their consideration of evangelism and social concern as diametrically opposed agendas. Henry affirmed the individual’s need for redemption, but Henry also promoted social justice, human rights, and religious liberty. For Henry, evangelicalism had prior to fundamentalism balanced its social and evangelistic duties. Thus, Henry set out to mend this breach with a holistic worldview that understood man’s total problem. Henry, however, never addressed man’s temporal needs at the expense of emphasizing humanity’s foremost need, spiritual redemption.

In 1947, Henry began to recognize both evangelism and sociopolitical engagement in the *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* where he noted, “The evangelical missionary message cannot be measured for success by the number of converts only. The Christian message has a salting effect upon the earth.”⁴¹ Henry also

³⁹Weeks, “Carl F. H. Henry on Civic Life,” 136.

⁴⁰Carl F.H. Henry, “Dismantling a Noble Heritage,” in *In Search of a National Morality: A Manifesto for Evangelicals and Catholics*, ed. William Bentley Ball (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 28. See also “The Uneasy Conscience Revisited,” 4; *The Christian Mindset*, 14.

⁴¹Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 84.

demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding of human needs. Commenting on Christ's example in Scripture, Henry concluded that "it is difficult to find room for a gospel cut loose entirely from non-spiritual needs. . . . There is no room here for a gospel that is indifferent to the needs of the total man."⁴²

In *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* published in 1964, Henry identified the church's purpose as sharing the Gospel foremost, but also as promoting social justice.⁴³ Henry disagreed with churches whose "sole preoccupation is private saintliness, preaching 'Christ crucified' in absolute isolation from socio-political affairs, and promoting the piety of the local church in total unconcern over social disorders and evils."⁴⁴ Henry made it clear in *Aspects*, however, that social action on the part of the church was not enough by itself. Henry observed that "the Church has often turned aside from its evangelistic and missionary priorities, attempting to chart a socio-political thrust *alongside* rather than *in* and *through* the evangelistic thrust."⁴⁵ Thus, while Henry called the church to confront social issues, it must do so as an extension of its calling to spread the Gospel.

In 1971, Henry continued to address the relationship of evangelism and social action in *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*, especially in a chapter titled, "Personal

⁴²Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 34-35. See also 83.

⁴³"The Christian view of society does not require forcing the fruits of regeneration upon unregenerate men. Rather, the Christian view seeks public recognition, in theory and life, of those principles of justice necessary to national stability. With this distinction in mind, Christian believers will know that their primary mission is to win individuals to Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Lord, a task not to be confused with misguided attempts to Christianize the world order." Henry, *Aspects*, 120-21.

⁴⁴Ibid., 16.

⁴⁵Ibid., 27.

Evangelism and Social Justice.”⁴⁶ He stated that “the Biblical view declares both individual conversion and social justice to be alike indispensable.”⁴⁷ Henry also acknowledged, “If a man’s material possessions are an extension of his very personality and life, as Christian stewardship emphasizes, then evangelistic concern for the new man must concentrate not only on internal spiritual decision but also on outward material interests.”⁴⁸

Henry did not let his evangelical predilection for individual conversion deter his vision for sociopolitical engagement. His concern for individuals was primarily spiritual; nevertheless, Henry also understood individuals in terms of their temporal needs. For Henry, his “redemptive strategy” included “this-worldly” concerns. His emphasis on justice, religious liberty, and human rights encouraged evangelicals to see the individual’s need as being more than just spiritual salvation.

Henry’s recognition of needy people also led him to insist that Christians consider the social and political wellbeing of those outside their own members. Christians must do more than just advocate religious liberty for themselves; Christians need to speak on behalf of all human beings. Henry argued,

All human beings are duty bound to advance justice and to protest injustice. Whether others do so or not, Christians should identify themselves with the whole body of humanity and speak up in the name of transcendent right and justice. They should do so not simply when Christians suffer discrimination or oppression but also when any people so suffer.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Henry, “Personal Evangelism and Social Justice,” in *A Plea*, 107-24.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁹Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 101.

Henry saved his most poignant treatment of individuals for those who are already Christians. One of Henry's lasting achievements was his prodding fellow evangelicals to consider once more society and politics. While Henry frequently addressed the church, he addressed the individual Christian's sociopolitical responsibilities as well.⁵⁰ For Henry, individual Christian engagement provided the best means for respecting the separation of church and state while still exerting a Christian influence.⁵¹

An important source of Henry's hopes for Christian political engagement is found in the section, "The Individual and Civic Duty" in his *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*.⁵² There, Henry stated, "Freedom to participate in national political decision goes hand in hand with duty to do so responsibly." For Henry, Christians must reconsider their role as citizens. Henry affirmed the importance of Christian political involvement but challenged common practices. Christians must not just vote, but vote outside "selfish interest or political prejudice." Henry also instructed Christian citizens to vote not simply according to the candidate's personal moral record, but for the candidate who is most capable politically. Henry also urged Christians to develop civic skills that do not settle for minimal influence, but that seek to consider and engage the whole political process. Neglecting civic responsibility was not an option for Henry. Concerning the citizen's need to stay informed, Henry remarked, "Anyone who excuses himself from the need of understanding political issues, and foregoes an intelligent opinion of them, is not really worthy of the privileges of citizenship; he cannot escape a

⁵⁰Weeks, "Carl F. H. Henry on Civic Life," 132.

⁵¹Henry, *Aspects*, 105.

⁵²Henry, "The Individual and Civic Duty," in *Aspects*, 130-33.

measure of the blame for the political injustices and human misery that follow ill-judged legislation.”⁵³ Henry concluded by noting society’s ultimate source of morality, its people rather than its government. Thus, it is imperative that individual Christians are active citizens.

Henry also believed Christians could serve as statesmen.⁵⁴ Christian statesmanship for Henry was a personal topic; his son, Paul B. Henry, served as a Michigan congressman between 1984 and 1993. While commenting on the political aspirations of his son, Henry noted that Christian statesmen “could address community and national issues in a context of public moral concern with high visibility, while at the same time working actively for better alternatives.”⁵⁵ While Henry considered the potential of a Christian politician,⁵⁶ he still acknowledged the reality of politics. He observed, “The political statesman who seeks the ideal knows that he must cast his vote (if he is also a realist) for the best approximation of that ideal among the surviving options.”⁵⁷ Concerning Christian statesmanship, Henry concluded, “And it will be registered most conspicuously in a democratic society if young Christians, instead of being taught to avoid politics like alcoholism and adultery, are encouraged to regard a

⁵³Henry, “The Individual and Civic Duty,” in *Aspects*, 132.

⁵⁴For Henry, Christian statesmanship did not necessarily negate the separation of church and state. See *The Uneasy Conscience*, 72.

⁵⁵Henry, *Confessions*, 370.

⁵⁶“It is apparent how great nations are keyed to powerful leaders; a single statesman with the convictions of Paul would echo the great evangelical affirmations throughout world politics.” Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 68.

⁵⁷Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 140.

career in government fully as legitimate a Christian vocation as medicine and missions.”⁵⁸

Groups

An emphasis on individuals and their spiritual wellbeing has been a central focus for evangelicalism. Even their sociopolitical concerns have been influenced by an individualistic perspective.⁵⁹ Yet, evangelicals have also understood human beings collectively as well, most notably in their stress on the church and the wellbeing of the nation. Henry’s consideration of collective man addressed both the potential of Christian groups and the responsibility of nations. Concerning Christian groups and their potential to help improve society, Henry’s reflections on the Social Gospel, the church, and collaborative efforts between secular and religious groups are important. Henry also expressed concern for group responsibility when it came to God’s judgment of nations.

Henry’s “redemptive strategy” did not exclude consideration of Christian group responses to social issues. Henry’s interpretation of the Social Gospel helps disclose his understanding of Christian group efforts and their ability to effect social change. Ultimately, Henry believed the Social Gospel lacked a sufficient theological, biblical foundation to confront sociopolitical issues. Thus, the Social Gospel’s agenda was skewed. Henry stated concisely his criticism of the Social Gospel as such: “But the ‘social gospelers,’ in contrast to socially concerned evangelicals, dispensed with the need for personal conversion, promoted socialism (and sometimes communism) as a

⁵⁸Henry, *Aspects*, 132.

⁵⁹Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics*.

divine alternative to capitalism, and considered legislation the instrument for orchestrating the Kingdom of God.”⁶⁰

When considering the Social Gospel’s primary founder, Walter Rauschenbusch, Henry made sure to distinguish his contributions from later Social Gospel tendencies, while still acknowledging Rauschenbusch’s shortcomings. Henry believed Rauschenbusch acknowledged “transcendent divine redemption,” an antidote to “optimistic views of human nature.”⁶¹ Rauschenbusch, for Henry, maintained due respect for individual redemption and social engagement. Henry criticized, however, Rauschenbusch’s ultimate legacy in liberal Protestant circles. According to Henry, Rauschenbusch “encouraged new political attitudes hitherto alien to American Protestantism.” Henry deemed Rauschenbusch responsible for encouraging the notion of social transformation, instead of social preservation. Rauschenbusch’s hope for social transformation through political means conflicted with Henry’s conviction that government must simply maintain justice.⁶²

Henry’s philosophical interpretation of the Social Gospel provides further clarity for understanding his opposition to it. Henry identified the Social Gospel’s intellectual heritage as both Hegelian and Darwinian. The former encouraged “intensive divine immanence” while the latter proposed “progressive natural evolution.” Henry found the optimism that emanated from such a philosophical alignment rather naïve and vulnerable to socialism and communism.⁶³

⁶⁰Henry, “Strife over Social Concerns,” 62-63.

⁶¹Henry, *A Plea*, 29

⁶²Henry, *Aspects*, 109-10.

⁶³Henry, *A Plea*, 28-29, 117; Henry, *Conversations*, 181.

Henry linked his philosophical misgivings with grave theological deviations he detected in the Social Gospel. For Henry, the Social Gospel challenged the evangelical conviction of personal redemption through a supernatural God. Thus, he considered it “an anti-miraculous philosophy of religion which ignored transcendent revelation and divinely-provided salvation.”⁶⁴ Henry also believed the Social Gospel did not account for the human sin nature in its utopian agenda.⁶⁵ Henry argued that the “Social Gospel regarded neither the bent of man’s nature nor his corporate activities nor the social structures as an obstacle to the progressive manifestation of the Kingdom of God.”⁶⁶ In the end, Henry believed the Social Gospel lacked Scriptural underpinning.⁶⁷

Along with its failure to affirm Christ’s redemption, Henry also found its methods lacking. First, the Social Gospel made the mistake of promoting a “universal love-ethic.” It supplanted the church’s love mandate and gave it over to the government. Consequently, Social Gospellers muddled the government’s responsibility to justice, a product of the Social Gospel’s interpretation of the state “as a corporate extension of individual relationships.”⁶⁸ Second, Henry claimed the Social Gospel maintained an “essentially politico-economic conception of the Kingdom.” This resulted in “an ecumenical elite (who) demanded specific legislative and political changes in the name of the church as the bearer of a divine ethic.”⁶⁹ While the Moral

⁶⁴Henry, *Conversations*, 181; see also Henry, *A Plea*, 28-29, 117.

⁶⁵Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 102.

⁶⁶Henry, *A Plea*, 29.

⁶⁷Ibid., 115, 118.

⁶⁸Ibid., 28-29

⁶⁹Ibid., 117.

Majority has been accused of being a threat to the separation of church and state, Henry believed liberal Protestants were violating this principle earlier in the twentieth century.⁷⁰

Even though Henry criticized the Social Gospel, he still maintained a vision for Christian groups sponsoring social reform. This anticipation involved primarily the church. Henry's conclusion concerning the church and its social potential paralleled Machen's earlier considerations. Both men envisioned the church as a model society that provided feeble culture a more enduring example.⁷¹ For Henry, "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."⁷²

Henry believed the early church's example helps clarify the role of the modern church in society. He traced the idea of the church as a "new society" to early Christianity, though this notion "soon gave way to the larger ecclesiastical ambition to Christianize the outside world."⁷³ Henry maintained that the early church effectively communicated Christ's redemption as the sole solution for fallen mankind and that it focused on the transformation of individuals before any consideration of social engagement. Yet, the early church still declared the revealed will of God for society

⁷⁰Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 98, 114.

⁷¹For Henry's identification of the church as a society in its own right, see *The Uneasy Conscience*, 88-89; *A Plea*, 67; *The Christian Mindset*, 106-7; "Liberation Theology and the Scriptures," 191, 193, 195.

⁷²Henry, "Liberation Theology and the Scriptures," 195.

⁷³Henry, *Aspects*, 72.

and government, though its message did not advocate using revolution or forceful measures to achieve social change.⁷⁴

Henry opposed the idea that the church or organized Christian groups (denominations, ecumenical movements) should promote specific legislation. He criticized ecumenical Protestant groups, such as the National Council of Churches, for advocating legislation and applying political pressure. Henry also opposed strongly any Christian group that made decisions that claimed to represent individual churches and Christians.⁷⁵ Instead, Henry argued, “The Church’s primary duty is to expound the revealed Gospel and the divine principles of social duty, and to constrain individual Christians to fulfill their evangelistic and civic responsibilities.”⁷⁶ Instead of defining specific positions on political issues, Henry believed the church must provide general Scriptural principles for Christians, and instead of interfering with the political process, the church must instruct society through “proclamation.”⁷⁷

While it must avoid direct political involvement, Henry still believed the church has a message for society and politics. He stated,

It has a joyful good word to speak in the sphere of politics: that God is the true King; that God’s faithful and gracious action toward man puts his seal on the dignity of the individual; that the coming kingdom is not merely a future possibility but is already in some sense actual; that even in the political arena

⁷⁴Henry, *A Plea*, 45-49.

⁷⁵Henry, “The Church and Social Legislation,” “The Christian Stake in Legislation: Practical Considerations,” in *Aspects*, 77-79, 105-45; *A Plea*, 30, 46-47, 23; *The Christian Mindset*, 98, 114; Carl F. H. Henry, “Politics and the Church,” in *Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture* (Portland: Multnomah, 1986), 115-19; Carl F. H. Henry, “Has Democracy Had Its Day?,” Occasional Paper No. 6 (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, 1996), 7.

⁷⁶Henry, *Aspects*, 10.

⁷⁷Sharp, 106.

God's main concern is not ideology, isms or ideals, but rather persons and their relationships to God and one another.⁷⁸

In the end, Henry called the church to “proclaim the whole counsel of God and to seek by persuasion to evoke universal committal to his commands.”⁷⁹ Henry noted, “The early church faced the world of its day by bold proclamation of the standards by which God will judge men and nations, of the gospel of Christ’s redemptive rescue, and by exemplary obedience to the will of God, including devotion to justice in the public realm to the limit of their competence.”⁸⁰ For Henry the twentieth-century church must do likewise.

Machen adamantly opposed the liberal theology he found taking over denominations in *Christianity and Liberalism*. Yet, he also concluded, “That does not mean that conservatives and liberals must live in personal animosity. . . . Many ties—ties of blood, of citizenship, of ethical aims, of humanitarian endeavor—unite us to those who have abandoned the gospel.”⁸¹ Henry also considered the possibility of evangelical Christians working with liberal Protestants and even nonbelievers on social issues. Henry’s realism comes to the fore when he considered whether Christians could unite with other liberal or secular groups in a common effort to support human rights and social justice. Henry concluded that cooperation is a necessary course of action for Christians. In his *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Henry suggested evangelicals should be willing to work with liberal Protestants as long as evangelicals

⁷⁸Henry, “Liberation Theology and the Scriptures,” 191.

⁷⁹Henry, *A Plea*, 67.

⁸⁰Ibid., 46.

⁸¹Machen, 52.

were still able to articulate their redemptive convictions. Henry concluded that “it remains true that the evangelical, in the very proportion that the culture in which he lives is not actually Christian, must unite with non-evangelicals for social betterment if it is to be achieved at all, simply because the evangelical forces do not predominate.”⁸²

Nearly forty years later when evangelicals began to “predominate” in America, Henry even encouraged cooperation with secular groups. He suggested that “whenever humanists unwittingly champion fragments of revealed morality we should welcome their support.”⁸³ Thus, while he remained critical of secular humanism’s metaphysical foundations, Henry was still willing to work with humanists and other groups outside Christianity for human rights and social justice.⁸⁴

When Henry addressed collective efforts for engaging society and politics, he usually addressed Christian groups. Nevertheless, Henry also considered nations as groups. Henry observed, “National life always has a distinctive character. The State is not merely an impersonal conglomeration of individual interests wherein personal rights are simply balanced and adjusted. The religious man believes that God’s governance of the world includes civil government, and that through the nations God achieves certain of his purposes for mankind.”⁸⁵ Together, both a nation’s government and its people are responsible for abiding by God’s moral, social, and political standards. Henry believed the Bible outlined these standards as general principles, but he did not argue

⁸²Henry, “The Evangelical ‘Formula of Protest,’” in *The Uneasy Conscience*, 75-82, quote from 80. See also 85-88.

⁸³Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:422.

⁸⁴Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 80, 126; *A Plea*, 68; “Evangelicals and the Social Scene,” 101-2.

⁸⁵Henry, *Aspects*, 88.

that Scripture offers counsel for specific legislation. While Henry discouraged Scriptural mandates being forced on society in a theocratic fashion, he did argue that nations are held accountable to a transcendent, theistic framework for law and conduct conveyed in Scripture⁸⁶ and even general revelation.⁸⁷

At the top of Henry's list of God's purposes for a nation is justice. Concerning a nation's people, Henry believed, "Christians and non-Christians alike have the same right to seek and the same duty to promote justice throughout the political order."⁸⁸ Yet, while Christians must "promote" justice, Henry considered it ultimately the responsibility of government to enforce justice.⁸⁹ Besides justice, however, Henry also related morality,⁹⁰ religious freedom,⁹¹ and human rights⁹² with what he understood to be transcendent standards for nations. Henry catalogued some of the Scriptural tenets he believed nations must acknowledge; he included "the divine source and sanction of human rights; the accountability of men and nations to objective justice and

⁸⁶"The biblical truths and values still remain the great moving forces of history; either they will capture us or we shall be judged by them." Henry, *Conversations*, 140; *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:442-52; *The Christian Mindset*, 100, 109, 112-15, 132-34, 34-38; *Aspects*, 90-92, 97-99, 121-25; Weeks, "Carl F. H. Henry on Civic Life," 136.

⁸⁷Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 105, 124. See also 121-22 where Henry acknowledged the *imago Dei* as a moral reference point.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 100-101; *Aspects*, 88-99; "Justice and the Kingdom of God," in *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:418-35.

⁹⁰Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 99; *Aspects*, 101.

⁹¹"Repression of religious freedom not only soon strips away the possibility of openly preaching the gospel but it otherwise also impedes voluntary fulfillment of the will of God in society. Christians should support legislation that includes individual freedom to persuade others voluntarily to recognize the transcendent nature of justice." Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 101-2. See also "Religious Freedom: Cornerstone of Human Rights," in *ibid.*, 63-80.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 65-68, 72-73, 76; *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:426, 429; Carl F. H. Henry, "Facing a New Day in Evangelism," in *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, vol. 1, eds. Carl F. H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1967), 15.

transcendent moral law, and the servant-role of the State as a minister of justice and order in a fallen society; the permanent significance of the social commandments of the Decalogue; the inclusion of property rights as a human right.”⁹³ Throughout his writing, Henry demonstrated an historical understanding of theocratic precedents that must be avoided; nevertheless, he still argued that nations must follow transcendent standards.

For Henry, judgment awaits those nations who disregard God’s purposes for society and government. This judgment, however, could come at the end of time with Christ’s return or much sooner.⁹⁴ Henry believed history provided examples of nations who ignored God’s purposes for society and experienced subsequent judgment.⁹⁵ When it came to national judgment, however, Henry did not pronounce its coming with hopefulness. Instead, Henry believed nations should strive to implement justice responsibly and avoid divine punishment.⁹⁶ Thus, alongside his emphasis on national judgment was attention to national responsibility. Henry argued, “Whether Christian or not, all men and all nations as well, are accountable for social righteousness; God has willed civil government in this fallen world to preserve justice and to promote order.”⁹⁷ For Henry the potential for future judgment should motivate nations, not build up fear

⁹³Henry, *Aspects*, 124.

⁹⁴Henry, *A Plea*, 68.

⁹⁵“If modern culture is to escape the oblivion that has engulfed the earlier civilizations of man, the recovery of the will of the self-revealed God in the realm of justice and law is critically imperative.” Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:454.

⁹⁶“That they [men and nations] must come to terms with Him later is always a timely insistence, but not as timely right now as the emphasis that God works in history as well as in superhistory.” Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 62.

⁹⁷Henry, *A Plea*, 67.

and hopelessness over impending doom. As the twentieth century progressed, however, Henry frequently demonstrated fundamentalism's concern over the future of America. Henry observed, "Despite all the good things we may say about our own most-favored country, national and individual judgment are both near."⁹⁸

Henry's emphasis on God's transcendent purposes for nations helped him avoid the individualism of former fundamentalists who considered "individual sin" at the expense of "social evil."⁹⁹ Henry's thought on God's judgment reveals an ability to balance individual and social perspectives, most notably when he declared,

The Biblical view exposes the whole of human history to God's searching and searing judgment. The Decalogue sweeps both individual and social relationships into its commanding purview, and the stern prophetic warnings remind us that unrighteousness pervades man's social life no less than his personal life and brings into sharp focus God's displeasure over a distressing range of public iniquity and social injustice.¹⁰⁰

Acknowledging God's judgment, while somewhat ominous, in the end enhanced Henry's sociopolitical thought and encouraged a passion for social justice.

Conclusion

Henry observed in *God, Revelation and Authority* that various translations of the Bible have treated "righteousness" and "justice" differently. Henry noted that earlier translations, such as the King James Version, emphasized "righteousness" and its individual implications. He then noted how more contemporary translations stressed "justice" and its social context instead. For Henry, these translations treated the individual and social connotations of righteousness and justice as mutually exclusive.

⁹⁸Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 55.

⁹⁹Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 7.

¹⁰⁰Henry, *A Plea*, 92.

Throughout his career, Henry encouraged instead an appreciation for both. He concluded, “The fact is that the God of the Bible requires attention to both individual righteousness and social justice.”¹⁰¹ Throughout his career, Henry emphasized man’s need for spiritual redemption; nevertheless, he did not allow his spiritual priorities to obstruct social concern. Instead, he argued that both areas, spiritual and social, were interrelated. In the end, Henry incorporated both individuals and groups into his sociopolitical thought. While his thought is frequently individualistic, it offers perspectives on groups as well.

Still, certain scholars find aspects of Henry’s thought too individualistic. Budziszewski expresses concern over Henry’s redemptive approach to sociopolitical issues mentioned in the *Uneasy Conscience*. Budziszewski notes that while Henry’s essay was meant as an “*approach* to social activism,” it could also be interpreted as a “*substitute* for it.” While Budziszewski is correct that “Henry never reveals how evangelism and social activism can work together,”¹⁰² Budziszewski’s interpretation is too simplistic when he states,

[Henry] never makes clear how his approach to social reform is different from saying, ‘Make people Christians and their problems will take care of themselves.’ Are nuclear weapons proliferating? Convert the national leaders. Are there inequities in the relationship between management and labor? Convert the bosses and workers. Is juvenile delinquency on the rise? Convert the parents and kids.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:404.

¹⁰²Henry conceded this as well. “[An evangelical] must give unlimited expression to his condemnation of all social evils, coupled with an insistence that a self-sustaining solution can be found only on a redemptive foundation. . . . This appears to the writer to be the true evangelical methodology; to fill this form with content, in its application, is the difficult task which remains undone.” Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 78.

¹⁰³Budziszewski, 47.

Henry's thesis in the *Uneasy Conscience* was definitely individualistic and placed great faith in the power of personal conversion, but Henry's argument for redemption was much more complex than Budziszewski describes it. In the end, Budziszewski is right that Henry did not specify how redemption alleviates social engagement and that Henry later adjusted his strategy to include justice and law;¹⁰⁴ nevertheless, Henry's redemptive approach should be given due treatment. Henry's "redemptive strategy" entailed an approach much more developed than simply relying on individual conversion to set society straight. In his later writing, Henry described transcendent principles that Christians and the church are to encourage society to follow.

Historian Mark Noll identifies Henry as the "most visible figure in reawakening a concern for social and political thought" for evangelicals. Yet, Noll also briefly suggests, "Henry's own political thought may have been more straitjacketed by the social reflexes of fundamentalism than he realized."¹⁰⁵ Noll bases this conclusion on Dennis P. Hollinger's *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism*.¹⁰⁶ Hollinger's main premise is that the "mainstream" evangelical movement, as represented in *Christianity Today* between 1956 and 1976, reveals a social ethic grounded in individualism. Yet, he acknowledges the contributions of "new breed" evangelicals who, beginning in the 1960s, have challenged evangelical individualism

¹⁰⁴Budziszewski, 47-48.

¹⁰⁵Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 221-22.

¹⁰⁶Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983).

and have promoted a more capable social ethic that comprehends structures and communitarian social elements.

Hollinger hesitates, however, over how to describe Henry and his relation to evangelical individualism. He includes Henry's thought in his examination of several evangelical expressions of individualism, but notes as well that Henry's position changed during his career. Concerning Henry's individualistic tendencies, Hollinger identifies the argument Henry and other evangelicals made concerning the duty of the individual, rather than institutional church, to engage politics.¹⁰⁷ Hollinger also briefly uses Henry in his section on how evangelicals treat "social problems as magnified personal problems."¹⁰⁸ Hollinger then mentions the importance Henry assigned individual regeneration.¹⁰⁹ Finally, Hollinger believes Henry's incorporation of the "two kingdoms" theory encourages the church to avoid political involvement and focus on its ministry to individuals instead. According to Hollinger, even advocating justice does not necessarily exempt an individualistic perspective. He observes Henry's emphasis on justice, but notes that Henry left justice with the state and argued that the church's purpose is simply love.¹¹⁰

Yet, Hollinger also recognizes that Henry eventually modified his sociopolitical thought in a way that tempered earlier individualistic perspectives.¹¹¹ Hollinger identifies Henry as an early proponent of "mainstream" evangelical individualism, but

¹⁰⁷Hollinger, 72, 101-3, 106-7, 110-11.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 108.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 72, 110-11.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 111-13.

¹¹¹Ibid., 104, 108, 202-3. Hollinger even recognizes Henry's presence at the conference that produced the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern in 1973. Ibid., 73, 115.

suggests Henry moved from this position later in his career. He acknowledges Henry's later emphasis on both redemption and social justice, treatment of groups, and tempered patriotism. Unfortunately for Hollinger, his book came four years before Henry's own admission that he altered his position so that justice and law were emphasized alongside evangelism.¹¹²

Had Henry simply emphasized redemption throughout his career, his social thought would have definitely been individualistic, but Henry later modified his position so that government's enforcement of justice and law was given due attention. Thus, Henry was able to break out of the "straitjacket" of individualism that Noll describes. But was Henry's individualism something to be avoided? Machen previously defended Christian individualism because it respects the individual at a level society cannot. Henry's individualism, too, has positive aspects.

Henry's treatment of fallen, needy, and redeemed individuals did not lead to excessive individualism. Instead, Henry's consideration of the fallen individual influenced his expectations for social reform; Henry argued for society's "preservation" and avoided the utopian optimism of the earlier Social Gospel that hoped for society's "transformation." Henry also advocated religious liberty and human rights for oppressed people and encouraged Christians to reconsider social engagement for those ends. And finally, his treatment of the redeemed individual deserves due consideration.

Despite Budziszewski's concerns over Henry's emphasis on redemption, it is difficult to challenge the idea implied in the *Uneasy Conscience*, and later articulated

¹¹²Henry, "The Uneasy Conscience Revisited," 4.

more clearly,¹¹³ that an individual's spiritual transformation can encourage civic virtue at a level laws and structures cannot. Henry's understanding of human nature further qualifies his redemptive approach; Henry argued, "No framework is really relevant today unless it has an answer to the problem of sin and death in every area of human activity."¹¹⁴ In addition, Henry's emphasis on an individual's political participation should be welcomed rather than cause alarm; this position encourages the separation of church and state and religious liberty, rather than an institutional church that meddles in politics. Even Hollinger acknowledges that the "regenerational perspective does manage to include secondary notions of social reform."¹¹⁵

Therefore, did Henry's sociopolitical thought include elements of individualism? Yes. Did these elements impair his social perception? No. In the end, Henry's social ethic was certainly individualistic; but, his emphasis of the individual did not obstruct his social agenda nor, as the next chapter will show, his ability to grapple with sociopolitical structures.¹¹⁶

Henry's later emphasis on social justice tempered his individualism, but his treatment of groups also broadened his sociopolitical thought. His assessment of the Social Gospel, the church, and evangelical collaboration with liberal Protestants and humanists reveals an appreciation for collective social engagement. In addition, his

¹¹³"In the last analysis, a good society is one that seeks the good not because it is legally coerced to do so but because it is inwardly motivated. Christians cannot hope to reshape the world by political crusades; they must address attitudes and motives as well as structures." Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 127-28.

¹¹⁴Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 77.

¹¹⁵Hollinger, 113.

¹¹⁶"Henry's position is neither strictly communitarian nor narrowly individualistic." Weeks, "The Political Thought of Carl F. H. Henry," 300. Weeks defends Henry in response to critics who argue that Henry was too individualistic.

belief that God holds nations accountable to transcendent criteria further demonstrates Henry's ability to blend spiritual and social perspectives to produce realistic results. A belief that nations answer to divine principles has the potential to challenge numerous forms of social injustice within both domestic and foreign policy.

By the time Henry finished the sixth volume of his *God, Revelation and Authority*, he recognized the individualistic tendencies of past evangelicals and believed Christians must consider structures and systems. He concluded,

The references to public structures, policies and programs should not be considered secondary to interpersonal concerns. Much evangelical discussion of justice/love tensions is overweighted by individualistic orientations of issues. Because politics involves an ordering of social behavior according to objective regulations and corresponding obligations it must therefore face questions that go beyond private morality and duty.¹¹⁷

While Henry's treatment of nations and Christian groups helped safeguard against an overly individualistic perspective, his consideration of political structures and economic systems also reveals the depth of his sociopolitical thought.

¹¹⁷Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:436.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Realism of Carl F. H. Henry: Part II

Structures and Systems

Introduction

In 1958 Henry spoke at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. In his autobiography, Henry recalled, “The chapel was in fact filled to overflowing, and in the rear section I could make out the visage of a few Union professors, most prominently Reinhold Niebuhr.”¹ While Henry was aware of Niebuhr’s presence at this speaking engagement, in his writing, Henry was also responsive to the “visage” of Niebuhr’s thought. Both men addressed sociopolitical issues from a Christian perspective at the same point in history, but both theologians also worked from different vantage points and with different conclusions. Their divergent emphases are clearly seen in their treatment of political structures and economic systems.

In *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr’s treatment of political structures mostly entailed their inability to foster justice. Consequently, Niebuhr advocated the balance of power for achieving justice in society. Revolution, for Niebuhr, was a plausible option for challenging social oppression, though he recognized the dangers inherent in the process.² Concerning the state, Niebuhr recognized its ability to regulate power, but also acknowledged its tendency to yield to the most powerful groups. In the

¹Henry, *Confessions*, 177-78.

²Niebuhr, 167, 220.

end, Niebuhr believed the use of force was equally valid for both governments and subjugated groups of people.³

Niebuhr concluded in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, however, that “economic power is more basic than political power.”⁴ Thus, for Niebuhr an economic assessment of society is more realistic. Concerning industrialization, Niebuhr noted, “By making human relations mechanical it [industrialization] increased, and more clearly revealed, the economic motive of human activity.”⁵ Consequently, Niebuhr, in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, specifically empathized with the proletarian cause and its indication of a world where economic power struggles are predominant, though later in his career Niebuhr tempered his affinity for socialism.

Machen’s treatment of political structures in *Christianity and Liberalism* reflected his libertarian political views.⁶ Machen expressed concern over the expanding influence of the modern state in society. In addition, he believed utilitarian and majoritarian trends in government policy threatened the autonomy of education, families, and individuals. Machen’s emphasis on individual liberty also led him to criticize socialism, though he suggested that societies run by a utilitarian majority are just as unwelcome as a socialist state.⁷ For Machen, the government had a divine

³Niebuhr, 179.

⁴Ibid., 210.

⁵Ibid., 143.

⁶Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 196.

⁷Machen, 10-15, 154. These concerns also translated into apprehension over the welfare state. “It never seems to occur to modern legislatures that although ‘welfare’ is good, forced welfare may be bad. In other words, utilitarianism is being carried out to its logical conclusions; in the interests of physical well-being the great principles of liberty are being thrown ruthlessly to the winds.” Ibid., 10-11.

prerogative,⁸ but not a divine license to collect more power than was its due and consequently negate individual freedom.

In keeping with his conviction that the spiritual regeneration of man and the example of the church are key to social reform, Machen's hope for society in terms of political structures was tenuous. Machen concluded that "evil can only be held in check and not destroyed by human institutions, and that there must be a transformation of the human materials before any new building can be produced."⁹ Machen's limited expectations for political structures provide an important aspect of his realism and are amplified in his treatment of the Golden Rule. For Machen implementing the Golden Rule in society was futile; Christians should not expect unbelievers to acknowledge standards only Christians were capable of following.¹⁰ While Machen conceded that elements of "good" are evident in unredeemed people and that they do contribute to society, he still emphasized the "disease of sin" as humanity's "root" problem.¹¹ Thus, instituting Christian standards, such as the Golden Rule, in order to reform society will ultimately be ineffective without the presence of Christians. Machen concluded,

It is upon this brotherhood of twice-born sinners, this brotherhood of the redeemed, that the Christian finds the hope of society. He finds no solid hope in the improvement of earthly conditions, or the molding of human institutions under the influence of the Golden Rule. These things indeed are to be welcomed. They may so palliate the symptoms of sin that there may be time to apply the true remedy; they may serve to produce conditions upon the earth favorable to the propagation of the gospel message; they are even valuable for their own sake. But in themselves their value, to the Christian, is certainly small. A solid building cannot be constructed when all the materials are faulty;

⁸Machen, 154-55.

⁹Ibid., 156.

¹⁰Ibid., 35, 37-38, 155-56.

¹¹Ibid., 136-38.

a blessed society cannot be formed out of men who are still under the curse of sin. Human institutions are really to be molded, not by Christian principles accepted by the unsaved, but by Christian men; the true transformation of society will come by the influence of those who have themselves been redeemed.¹²

Throughout *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen never advocated a spiritual perspective that denied social concern.¹³ Instead, his spiritual emphasis on the regeneration of man served as the guiding principle for his social considerations.

Over the course of his life, Henry affirmed the divine necessity of government and consistently supported both democracy and capitalism. Yet, for society's transformation, he emphasized, like Machen, that addressing political structures and economic systems is not enough; Christians must emphasize individual regeneration foremost. In a bold conclusion in the *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry stated, "No political or economic system has utopian promise if the essential redemptive ingredient is missing from it. A redemptive totalitarianism is far preferable to an unredemptive democracy; a redemptive Communism far more advantageous than an unredemptive Capitalism, and vice versa."¹⁴ In the end, Henry did not worship any sociopolitical institution or system. Henry admitted, "Someone like myself, who believes that the representative form of government has much to commend it, even that it incorporates political virtues and blessings to an exceptional degree, must nonetheless guard against overadulating or uncritically supporting some particular form of government."¹⁵ Over

¹²Machen, 158.

¹³For an example of Machen's ability to advocate spiritual, "material," and intellectual awareness, see *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 73.

¹⁵Henry, *Aspects*, 73.

the course of his career, Henry consistently avoided affixing the Christian label to any earthly institution. He understood the inherent shortcomings of all sociopolitical structures. Ultimately, Henry considered himself a citizen of the kingdom of God before any particular system. Nevertheless, this aloofness did not deter Henry from making value judgments on contemporary sociopolitical options. Thus, he found democracy and capitalism, more so than communism and socialism, agreeing with the principles of Christianity. Yet, for Henry even democracy and capitalism could overreach themselves.

For Henry working for social justice meant evangelicals must consider political structures and their ability to foster justice.¹⁶ Yet, for Henry any consideration of social structures must also recognize humanity's spiritual needs. Henry believed Reinhold Niebuhr failed in this area. While Henry acknowledged the evangelical propensity to affirm evangelism at the expense of social justice, Niebuhr went too far in the opposite direction. Henry commented, "Yet Niebuhr's one-sided expectation of social justice mainly from public structures was no less a serious miscalculation. Hell is the only society now possible where all structures are sound but all citizens are unconverted; requisite to an ideal society on earth are both personal religion and social justice."¹⁷ Thus, one aspect of Henry's enduring legacy in terms of his evangelical sociopolitical thought was his ability to balance "heavenly" and "earthly" concerns with a proficiency true to his Reformed and Augustinian affinities.

¹⁶Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:436.

¹⁷Henry, Preface to *Baker's Dictionary*, vii.

Understanding Henry's realism requires a general examination of Henry's treatment of structures and systems. To accomplish this, this chapter will examine Henry's expectations and reservations concerning structures, systems, and how Christians relate to them. Henry had certain expectations when he considered structures and systems. Henry believed the government had a divine mandate to enforce justice; nevertheless, Henry never entertained utopian expectations. His tempered expectations also influenced his treatment of democracy and capitalism. In addition, Henry disagreed with the welfare state and revolution. This chapter will extract from Henry's treatment of these subjects his general thought on political structures and economic systems.

Expectations

Government's purpose. Henry identified the state as God's instrument for enforcing justice and order in society. He stated, "God's establishment of civil government presupposes a fallen world in which God wills human civil authority for the preservation of justice and order."¹⁸ While he held the government responsible for abiding by transcendent standards of justice, he argued that metaphysical specifics were not part of its scope.¹⁹ Henry was a firm supporter of the separation of church and state and considered the government an earthly institution with a secular purpose.²⁰

¹⁸Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:414.

¹⁹Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 114-15; Henry, "Has Democracy," 10.

²⁰Carl F. H. Henry, "Church and State: Why the Marriage Must Be Saved," in *The Christian as Citizen* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1985), 9.

Henry believed the justice governments are responsible for implementing should be based upon divine revelation instead of natural law. Concerning natural law, Henry acknowledged its existence, but ultimately considered it insufficient as a foundation for sociopolitical thought.²¹ Both Budziszewski and Weeks criticize Henry for not incorporating natural law into his sociopolitical thought.²² Nevertheless, Henry's concerns over natural law deserve some credit. Henry considered natural law too vague to be used as a source for political decisions. In the end, Henry's hesitation over natural law reflects an important theme in his thought, certitude.

An important distinctive in Henry's assessment of government was his optimism, or at least lack of pessimism. Henry avoided the cynical approach to government of the Anabaptist tradition. Henry argued, "This view seems to distrust divine providence in the life and history of the nations; it also seems to question God's entrustment of power to civil government to preserve justice and order in fallen history."²³ Instead, Henry and his Reformed mindset recognized God's remaining sovereignty here on earth and affirmed the divine purpose of government in enforcing justice, even if it failed at times.²⁴

Henry's optimism, however, was tempered by realistic expectations. Henry never expected utopian results from political structures and economic systems. Instead, Henry believed Christians should advocate the "preservation" of society, instead of its "transformation." Attempting to transform society through the political process was the

²¹Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 117-18; *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:423-24.

²²Budziszewski, 50-54; Weeks, "The Political Thought of Carl F. H. Henry," 280-96.

²³Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:439.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 436-37.

Social Gospel's mistake; only redeemed individuals could contribute to actual social transformation. Thus, the church must instead encourage society's preservation in terms of social order and justice.²⁵ Henry observed, "Many social problems today arise as much from attaching extravagant expectations to legislative reforms as from misuse of political power." Henry argued that while laws are necessary, they do not transform people who can in turn contribute to society.²⁶

As a witness to the travesties of the twentieth century, Henry's affirmation of government was balanced with an understanding that governments are capable of tyranny. "We have been appropriately reminded that human depravity often translates the centralization of power into tyrannical oppression of the governed."²⁷ Henry feared that once a government or society disregarded justice's divine origins, "the powerful" would only seek to serve themselves.²⁸ Henry argued for an "ultimate standard of justice" that holds the government accountable and not vice versa; for if a state believes it creates law without looking to a higher, external source, totalitarianism soon follows.²⁹ This emphasis on a transcendent source of justice is also apparent in his understanding of the constitutional state. Henry observed,

²⁵Henry, *Aspects*, 72, 110.

²⁶Ibid., 108-9. See also 9-10, 30; *The Christian Mindset*, 127-28; "The Uneasy Conscience Revisited," 4.

²⁷Henry, "Has Democracy," 1.

²⁸"The clouding of divine justice soon deprives external justice of lucent transcendent supports. Human justice, when elaborated as an alternative by state or society, soon fades into special preferences for the powerful. By rejecting the God of justice we not only disavow divine salvation as well, but also and inevitably fracture the struggling remnants of righteousness in the social order. Then all that surely looms ahead is divine judgment by the God of justice and justification." Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:417.

²⁹Ibid., 421-22.

A civil government truly devoted to justice will reflect at least two basic concerns: first, that its civil laws conform to the constitutional guarantees that span successive regimes and thus provide a relatively objective standard of justice, and second, that its constitutional criteria conform to transcendent criteria that will ultimately judge all rulers and constitutions. In fallen human history no political document can be presumed to fully elucidate what divine justice implies.³⁰

Thus, Henry expected government to abide by a “higher” standard, though he realized such efforts will still fall short.

Democracy. Henry’s appreciation for democracy and capitalism reflected certain foundational beliefs. He stated, “Christians insist that love of neighbor, religious freedom, a free market, and private property are not merely matters of majority opinion but affirm rights and duties that are prior to the state, rather than established by the state.”³¹ Henry believed democracy serves as a viable alternative to a totalitarian state and is capable of affirming the principles listed. Nevertheless, for Henry democracy is favorable, but not perfect. He acknowledged, “True though it may be that no better system of government than democracy has been devised by a sinful society, political self-determination not only is a great blessing but also holds great potential for miscarriage of justice.”³² Henry also warned Christians not to idolize democracy; he announced, “Americans rightfully treasure the United States

³⁰Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:422.

³¹Henry, “Has Democracy,” 9.

³²Henry, “Dismantling a Noble Heritage,” 26.

Constitution and esteem democratic processes, but to exalt these symbols to highest rank among human values would be rendering to Caesar what belongs only to God.”³³

While Henry favored democracy, he was cautious when considering the political influence of a majority. Part of his concern with majority rule is its ability to make choices contrary to God’s transcendent purposes for society. If the majority held absolute sway, an objective treatment of justice was in danger.³⁴ For Henry, majority rule has no accountability. He argued, “A majority—even a majority of Americans—can be wrong. Majority rule is preferable to minority rule in that it provides a shelter against tyrants, but it does not of itself guarantee the rule of justice.”³⁵

One of Henry’s more thorough treatments of democracy came in a paper published by the Acton Institute in 1996 titled “Has Democracy Had Its Day?”.³⁶ Henry argued foremost in this essay that democracy requires a religious underpinning. Henry also concluded that inherent in democracy is a level of freedom that allows a nation’s citizenry to do as it pleases. For Henry this meant that democracy “is not flawless, far from it. It has the potential for great good and for great evil.”³⁷ Henry identified moral relativism and the “privatization of religion” as potential abuses of this freedom democracy offered. Thus, democracy’s success ultimately depends on religion’s ability to convince the state to adhere to sturdy transcendent social principles

³³Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:435. “While sovereignty of the democratic state is in principle just as objectionable as ultimacy of the dictatorial state, yet modern democratic ideals have often received unqualified ecclesiastical commendation.” Henry, *Aspects*, 87-88.

³⁴Henry, *Aspects*, 87, 91.

³⁵Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 120.

³⁶Carl F. H. Henry, “Has Democracy Had Its Day?,” Occasional Paper No. 6 (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, 1996).

³⁷*Ibid.*, 1.

without letting its freedom go unchecked. Henry believed, “The alternatives facing democracy are either self-restraint and self-discipline or chaos and authoritarian repression.”³⁸

Henry also considered in this essay how religion is to provide the foundation needed for a democratic society. For Henry respecting the separation of church and state was vital since the church’s involvement in the political process could both “politicize” its message and ultimately be unproductive. Instead, Christianity must acknowledge that “resolutions do not automatically change society. Inculcation of the love of God and neighbor will best alter the sociopolitical arena.”³⁹ Yet, Henry also argued that a democratic society must acknowledge transcendent principles.

Freedom is more than deliverance from authoritarian rulers and military dangers. It is not reducible to hostility to totalitarian communism and repressive worldviews. It concerns shared beliefs and values. The surest way to lose democracy is to take it for granted. No nation or culture can long survive the absence of transcendent values and absolutes.⁴⁰

In the end, Henry acknowledged, “Democracy does not require a specifically Christian citizenry, but it does function best when it acknowledges God’s creation and judgment and is reinforced by Christian character.”⁴¹

Within this essay, Henry also briefly addressed certain critics of democracy outside America. In his treatment of Latin American liberation theologians, Henry makes an interesting conclusion that is telling of his treatment of structures and systems. He suggested Latin American revolutionaries emphasized only economic reform.

³⁸Henry, “Has Democracy,” 2.

³⁹Ibid., 7.

⁴⁰Ibid., 9.

⁴¹Ibid., 10.

While Henry disagreed with their revolutionary tactics, he also opposed their economic myopia. Henry argued, “But we should not let their argument obscure the fact that nations that embrace only economic reforms while rejecting democratic political processes have often failed, while those practicing democratic capitalism generally speaking do better.”⁴² Thus Henry recognized the complexity inherent in social problems and how certain groups lack a comprehensive agenda.

Henry believed a democracy must be supported by transcendent values voluntarily agreed upon by the people. Henry’s tempered treatment of democracy reflects his conviction that its ultimate success relies on whether or not the nation adheres to God’s principles for society. In the end, Henry expected democracy to not simply reflect the will of the people, but the purposes of a transcendent God. But since democracy allows a large amount of freedom for its citizens, its triumph or failure ultimately depends on whether or not its people acknowledge God’s instruction for society.

Capitalism. When being considered for the editorial position for *Christianity Today*, Henry mentioned three convictions of his that could conflict with Billy Graham’s intentions for the publication. The first two dealt with theological positions, but his last conviction was more social: “I was convinced that American capitalism is not beyond Christian criticism.”⁴³ Similar to his views on democracy, Henry argued that capitalism and free enterprise were credible systems, but his support never kept him from considering their faults as well.

⁴²Henry, “Has Democracy,” 3. See also 9, where Henry makes a similar observation concerning China and its economic focus.

⁴³Henry, *Confessions*, 142.

Capitalism, according to Henry, is founded on several principles that agree with Scripture and are beneficial to society, most notably private property and work. Henry noted, “The Bible encourages labor for reward as well as for survival and insists upon fair wages; it approves private property, albeit not in terms of absolute right but rather of stewardship. It provides no basis for acclaiming a controlled economy as superior to a free market, as though bureaucracy is endowed with omniscience.”⁴⁴ Along with private property and labor, Henry even believed self-interest was supported by Scripture. Yet, for Henry the Bible “neither absolutizes these principles nor isolates them from other moral criteria. . . . The Bible approves of self-love, but not at the cost of neighbor-love. It approves private property but only as others’ property rights are respected. It approves profit but not exploitation.”⁴⁵ Henry believed that if capitalism is not checked by Christian ethical standards, it will result in “material excess and indulgence.”⁴⁶

While Henry conceded that capitalism is not perfect, he disagreed with its critics who simply disregarded the system and considered communism or socialism as the proper alternative. Henry argued, “To say that material greed is what motivates capitalism while humanistic impulses are what motivate Marxism is more propaganda than truth.”⁴⁷ Henry’s treatment of both capitalism and democracy reveals a balanced regard for both systems. Polarizing perspectives that demanded either capitalism or

⁴⁴Henry, *Christian Countermoves*, 28. See also Carl F. H. Henry, “Moral Issues Must Be Distinguished From Civic Matters,” *Christian Life*, October 1981, 51.

⁴⁵Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 16-17.

⁴⁶Ibid., 22. See also Henry, *Christian Countermoves*, 33-34.

⁴⁷Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 11. See also Henry, *Christian Countermoves*, 34-35.

socialism and disregarded the nuances and dangers inherent in both systems frustrated Henry. Henry was not above “self-criticism” when it came to his nation’s structures and systems. Nevertheless, he suggested, “But as a reaction to possibly valid Marxist criticism of economic wrongs, one need not espouse either an uncritical defense of secular capitalism or secular socialist alternatives.”⁴⁸

Reservations

Henry’s thought reflects realistic expectations in his consideration of government’s purpose, democracy, and capitalism. Henry also articulated two reservations that provide even further definition to his understanding of structures and systems. He adamantly opposed both the welfare state and revolution and argued against their legitimacy.

Welfare. Henry was a strong proponent of work and based this emphasis on Scripture. With work, people are not only able to provide food for themselves, but also develop a sense of self-respect. Thus, Henry stressed the importance of employment opportunities in society. Yet, he did not believe the state should create jobs under a welfare system. Instead, “voluntary agencies” must strive to increase employment opportunities in society.⁴⁹ Henry concluded, “In a healthy society joblessness is as great a concern as the plight of the needy. But a society that responds voluntarily to its needs is superior to one in which the welfare of humanity becomes the sole responsibility of government.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 136.

⁴⁹Ibid., 23, 104, 137-38. See also “The Christian View of Work,” in *Aspects*, 31-71.

⁵⁰Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 23.

The relationship between love and justice is crucial to understanding Henry's treatment of welfare. Henry believed "benevolence" was a matter of the church, while justice is the responsibility of the state. The state's implementing welfare on the love principle muddles its responsibility to justice. Henry even argued that this confusion led to injustice since the state monopolized both love and justice. Henry did concede, however, that crises, such as the Great Depression, require government intervention, but this should not be the norm. Henry also argued that the state's responsibility to implement justice is not preferential. Conversely, Henry believed love is preferential and can be "discriminatory."⁵¹ Henry concluded, "If civil government is expected to be completely paternalistic in its concerns we shall need to look outside the Bible for its rationale. No one can improve on a wholly just state; indeed, such a state would be messianic in character."⁵²

In 1962 the *Christian Herald* printed responses by Henry and Niebuhr on state welfare under the title "Who Is My Brother's Keeper?" Niebuhr addressed state welfare favorably and argued that it expressed love through justice by implementing through the state what can not be expected voluntarily.⁵³ Henry's piece on state welfare was considerably longer than Niebuhr's and is a key source for understanding Henry's position on the subject.⁵⁴ Henry's primary argument in this article was that state welfare minimizes opportunities for voluntary benevolence and perpetuates the decline

⁵¹Henry, "The Nature of God and Social Ideals," in *Aspects*, 146-71; *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:407-9; Carl F. H. Henry, "What Social Structures?," *The Reformed Journal* 16, no. 5 (1966): 7.

⁵²Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:408.

⁵³Reinhold Niebuhr, "Who is My Brother's Keeper?," *Christian Herald*, January 1962, 14-16.

⁵⁴Carl F. H. Henry, "Who is My Brother's Keeper?," *Christian Herald*, January 1962, 14-17, 57-58.

in voluntary service. Henry acknowledged temporary government welfare during the Great Depression, but argued that following that crisis government continued to focus on “social welfare” at the expense of “social justice.” Henry’s list of specific grievances included the following: the state welfare system “undermines self-reliance,” “pre-empts the opportunities for voluntarism in a free society,” “caters not to genuine ‘needs’ but to the exaggerated ‘wants’ of the many,” “promotes bureaucratic government,” “siphons off and dries up the reservoirs of voluntary philanthropy and benevolence,” and “not only detach[es] social welfare from compassion, but also hinder[s] the Christian Church, with its compassionate concern, from fulfilling legitimate aspects of her mission in the world.”⁵⁵ Henry felt that state welfare not only challenges Christianity’s emphasis on “individual responsibility to use personal possessions for the compassionate care of loved ones and of the needy,” but also threatens America’s freedoms. Furthermore, Henry believed state welfare lacks “moral fiber” since it encourages recipients to continue in immoral lifestyles that require financial aid. Finally, Henry believed welfare is beyond the scope of justice that government is supposed to implement. Henry concluded, “The Santa Claus state which penalizes solvent taxpayers to preserve the insolvent inevitably undermines many of the Judeo-Christian virtues that underlie the majesty of Western culture. Among these ideals are the dignity and duty of work; personal responsibility and integrity; individual initiative; equal justice before the law.”⁵⁶ When this occurs, according to Henry, totalitarianism is at the nation’s doorstep.

⁵⁵Henry, “Who is My Brother’s Keeper?,” 16.

⁵⁶Ibid., 58.

Despite his heavy criticism of welfare and emphasis on work, the student of Henry must not assume he lacked concern for the poor. In the *Christian Herald* article, Henry stated, “Poverty, chronic unemployment, human misfortune of any kind are not matters of indifference; they must stir social conscience to action.”⁵⁷ Henry recognized the temporal needs of man and believed Christians must address poverty.⁵⁸ Later in life, Henry even worked for World Vision, an organization bent on confronting global poverty. Nevertheless, the needs Henry addressed over the course of his career were more metaphysical and theoretical than physical.⁵⁹ Thus, redemption, justice, religious liberty, and human rights garnered more attention from Henry than did poverty. Yet, his legacy in guiding evangelicals back into the sociopolitical arena cleared the way for later evangelicals to more specifically address poverty.

Revolution. Henry addressed revolutionary thought in both *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* and *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*.⁶⁰ In *Aspects*, Henry addressed revolution as one of four options for social change. He defined it as the “radical change of social patterns, in their essential constitution, through violence and compulsion.” For Henry, revolution “denies the existence of divinely given structures in history and society.” Henry used communism as his primary example for the revolutionary ethic.⁶¹

⁵⁷Henry, “Who is My Brother’s Keeper?,” 16.

⁵⁸Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 104; *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:409; *Christian Countermoves*, 34.

⁵⁹For example, see Henry, *Christian Countermoves*, 34-35.

⁶⁰Henry, “Christianity and Social Transformation,” “Appendix: Christianity and Revolution,” in *Aspects*, 15-30, 172-86; “Revolutionary Ethics: Secular Theology,” “The Theology of Revolution,” in *A Plea*, 35-43, 91-106. See also “Liberation Theology and the Scriptures,” 187-202.

⁶¹Henry, *Aspects*, 17-18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 27.

At the end of *Aspects*, Henry included an appendix, titled “Christianity and Revolution,” where he gave revolution additional consideration. Henry argued that revolution disregards “inner renewal” in favor of “external readjustments.” Revolution simply perpetuates totalitarianism and threatens to create further disorder. For Henry, God’s intent for government as an instrument for social order precludes Christians overthrowing it.⁶²

Yet, Henry understood that revolution can help alter unjust governments, even though it is still not an option for Christians. Henry even suggested Christians could “indirectly contribute to revolution” when the present government defies God’s social principles. Nevertheless, Henry maintained his conviction that Christians must not “initiate” the overthrow of government.⁶³ In the end, Henry concluded, “While under some conditions Christian conscience may indeed approve certain *consequences* of revolution, Christian social theory neither promotes nor approves revolution itself as a method of social transformation.”⁶⁴

Henry also addressed revolution in *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*. Early in the book, Henry identified the historical progression of “neo-Protestant” sociopolitical thought. He traced its evolution from the Social Gospel to the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and then to revolutionary thought. Henry believed this revolutionary ethic dismisses “the traditional evangelical confidence in divine regeneration and its expectation of end-time judgment for inverting man and society.” Henry also argued that the revolutionary approach lacks a “theistic rationale for social action” and instead

⁶²Henry, “Appendix: Christianity and Revolution,” in *Aspects*, 172-86.

⁶³Ibid., 178-79.

⁶⁴Ibid., 176.

focuses on “economic inequality.” Henry criticized revolution’s use of violence and suggested such an approach treats government and society too flippantly. In the end, Henry argued that revolutionary thought threatens to turn “institutional Christianity into a political mechanism.”⁶⁵

Later in *A Plea*, Henry continued to address revolutionary thought in a chapter titled “The Theology of Revolution.” Here, in his treatment of revolution, Henry also further revealed his understanding of structures. First, Henry believed force is necessary in the political realm. Henry noted, “To assign force a legitimate role in securing justice recognizes that social and political problems are more complex than mere individual or neighbor-relationships.” As with welfare, Henry’s distinction between love and justice is key. Henry concluded that “the New Testament approves a just use of power in the public realm alongside an ethic of love in personal neighbor-relationships.”⁶⁶ In a sense, Henry argued the same point Niebuhr made in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, but with a biblical rationale. Yet, Niebuhr did not stipulate that force was limited to the state as did Henry.

Henry also noted that the revolutionary agenda placed too much emphasis on structures. Though Henry never encouraged Christians to ignore structures, he felt that the “theology of revolution errs by viewing socio-political structures as finally determinative.” For Henry structures are important since they “exert vast power in the public arena and carry staggering influence either for good or evil.” Yet, Henry also recognized that “man’s goodwill is even more fundamental than external structures and

⁶⁵Henry, *A Plea*, 39-43.

⁶⁶Ibid., 93.

that a new heart is indispensable for realizing any approximately ideal society in a fallen world.”⁶⁷

Henry identified three tenets of revolutionary thought that distinguish it from evangelical social thought. Henry argued that revolutionary theology affirms “first, that existing social orders are beyond evangelical rectification as instruments of justice and peace; second, that Christians should and must use whatever force is necessary to change these existing orders; and third, that revolutionary overthrow of existing structures will inaugurate a just society.”⁶⁸ Henry also recognized a flawed interpretation of the human sin nature. While the theology of revolution suggests sin is so pervasive that only violent revolution will prove effective, it is also too optimistic in its belief that overthrowing political structures will actually bring peace and justice.⁶⁹

For Henry in *A Plea*, Christians must not let the social scene deteriorate to the point that revolution has to be considered. Instead, Christians must protest injustice earlier on.⁷⁰ Once again, however, Henry does leave room for Christians to consider revolution if the circumstances are right; ultimately, however, Henry remains unconvinced that revolution is the answer Christians should advocate for social injustice.

⁶⁷Henry, *A Plea*, 93-94.

⁶⁸Ibid., 94-95.

⁶⁹Ibid., 95-97.

⁷⁰“The only valid alternative to a theology of revolution is an evangelical commitment to earnest and energetic social involvement.” Ibid., 106.

Conclusion

Henry recognized that Christians must emphasize social justice alongside redemption. Consequently, Henry's dedication to justice encouraged his assessment of structures and systems.⁷¹ Central to his estimation of specific structures and systems was his conviction that they ultimately fall short of transcendent criteria; no structure or system is capable of producing the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, this did not discourage Henry from appraising specific structures and systems and finding democracy and capitalism favorable. Henry concluded,

Many evangelicals channel too much legitimate political concern into the morality-evangelistic sphere. They imply that God is interested only in personal relationships, not in socio-economic-political structures. Doubtless Christianity can survive in almost every milieu, but bare survival does not define our public duty. . . . Christianity, to be sure, does not depend upon representative government or upon capitalism. But some systems are surely more compatible with Biblical principles than others, though they constantly need to be judged by those principles."⁷²

In the end, Henry's realism asserted that even democracy and capitalism's credibility is not necessarily guaranteed.

Henry believed Christians must consider structures and systems, but he cautioned believers to not translate the Gospel into a political message. Reforming structures and systems was not enough; a spiritual agenda is also needed.⁷³ Henry

⁷¹See Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:436.

⁷²Henry, "Moral Issues," 51.

⁷³"I carry no flag for discrimination or for destitution, and readily acknowledge the importance of structural changes in society. But altered social conditions do not necessarily advance social justice. Insightful cultural concern, on the other hand, . . . will offer a spiritual alternative to ethical emptiness." Carl F. H. Henry, "American Evangelicals in a Turning Time," in *Theologians in Transition*, The Christian Century "How My Mind Has Changed" Series, ed. James M. Wall (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 42. See also "Liberation Theology and the Scriptures," 191-92.

urged Christians to balance spiritual and structural concerns so that neither concern would encroach on the other. In an essay published in 1981, Henry recognized,

Ten years ago I put less emphasis on the requisite indictment of unjust structures. I remain less confident than social activists that any of us will achieve ideal alternatives, or even better structures. History beset by human perversity will find ideal alternatives only when the Messiah ushers in the new heaven and new earth. We must nonetheless try, guarding all the while against prejudicial and propagandistic notions of what is “better.” To truncate the Christian mission simply to the changing of social structures profoundly misunderstands the biblical view of human nature and divine redemption. Yet we also truncate the gospel if we limit or circumvent the expectation that divine deliverance will extend “far as the curse is found.”⁷⁴

Henry limited his expectations for structures and systems. He believed God established government for preserving law and order and that democracy and capitalism were capable of adhering to transcendent principles for politics and society, though they are still vulnerable to social evil. In addition, his reservations over the welfare state and revolution reveal both realism and careful consideration on the part of Henry.

Concerning welfare, expecting the state to abide by the principle of love is unrealistic and encourages government to neglect its responsibility to enforce justice. And when it comes to revolution, Henry understood that such an approach can perpetuate injustice and that Christians are not called to implement a violent overthrow of the government. Instead, Christians must respect the legal process and work through it to effect change.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Henry, “American Evangelicals,” 48-49.

⁷⁵This is evident in Henry’s treatment of the civil rights movement. See Henry, “The Uneasy Conscience Revisited,” 4; *Aspects*, 122-23.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Henry was a key leader within the neo-evangelical movement during its short history. He published his influential *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* in 1947 when the movement was just taking shape and continued to offer theological and sociopolitical guidance as it dissolved into the broader evangelical movement during the 1960s and 70s. David L. Weeks concludes Henry successfully spurred evangelicals back to sociopolitical engagement and is responsible for their continued activism during the twentieth century.¹ Yet, as both Henry and Dennis P. Hollinger note, evangelical sociopolitical thought divided as the century progressed.² Thus, Henry's realism cannot be regarded as representative of evangelicalism as a whole during the last century; instead, it should be considered neo-evangelical.³ Henry's "Neo-evangelical Realism" is in some ways a continuation of and in other ways a departure from fundamentalist thought, particularly that of J. Gresham Machen. Henry's sociopolitical thought is also distinct from that of the mainline Christian Realists, most notably Reinhold Niebuhr.

¹Weeks, "Carl F. H. Henry's Moral Arguments," 84

²Henry, "Strife Over Social Concerns," 57-64; Carl F. H. Henry, "Reflections: Carl F.H. Henry," in *The Chicago Declaration*, ed. Ronald J. Sider (Carol Stream, Illinois: Creation House, 1974), 127; Hollinger, 6, 248-54. Hollinger differentiates between "mainstream" and "new breed" evangelicals.

³Even neo-evangelicalism, however, consisted of many figures who did not always promote a consistent position. The greater question, lying beyond the scope of this study, is whether or not Henry's thought was representative of neo-evangelicals.

Machen and Henry

The most striking similarity between Machen and Henry is their emphasis on redemption as a means to social reform. Both men argued that society's hope rests in transformed individuals. According to Machen and Henry, while society has its political problems, its primary problem is spiritual. Machen and Henry also shared similar concerns over the state. Though Henry was not a libertarian like Machen, both men were suspicious of the increasing size of government.⁴ Finally, their expectations for society's improvement also reveal realistic similarities. Neither Machen nor Henry expected a utopian society prior to Christ's return, though neither man advocated that Christians avoid social issues either.

Nevertheless, when Henry wrote the *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, he began to separate himself from fundamentalism with a more proactive sociopolitical position. When Henry then adjusted his social agenda to emphasize political justice in addition to redemption, his thought became distinctly neo-evangelical. Instead of simply focusing on converted individuals, Henry also argued that Christians and the church must proclaim God's transcendent principles for society and the state. In his *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry stated that "while we are pilgrims here, we are ambassadors also."⁵ This is a telling statement concerning Henry's relationship to fundamentalism. Fundamentalists believed Christians were "pilgrims" in a fallen world and looked with anticipation to Christ's return. Henry, however, while

⁴For Henry's view on libertarians, see *The Christian Mindset*, 109-13.

⁵Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, xix.

acknowledging the “pilgrim” analogy, argued that Christians had social responsibilities while they live on earth. Henry believed Christians must be “ambassadors” in society.

Niebuhr and Henry

In *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr outlined several tenets of an “adequate political morality.” Niebuhr suggested,

An adequate political morality must do justice to the insights of both moralists and political realists. It will recognize that human society will probably never escape social conflict, even though it extends the areas of social co-operation. It will try to save society from being involved in endless cycles of futile conflict, not by an effort to abolish coercion in the life of collective man, but by reducing it to a minimum, by counseling the use of such types of coercion as are most compatible with the moral and rational factors in human society and by discriminating between the purposes and ends for which coercion is used.⁶

Henry’s sociopolitical thought met some of Niebuhr’s criteria. Henry’s realism acknowledged “society will probably never escape social conflict.” Henry also affirmed the need for “coercion in the life of collective man” and that it should be used responsibly. In many ways, Henry was both a “moralist” and a “political realist.”

Ultimately, both Niebuhr and Henry shared concern over social injustice. They even agreed that a perfect society awaited future, eschatological fulfillment.⁷ Yet, Henry separated himself from Niebuhr in several ways. Henry’s primary criticism of Niebuhr involved Niebuhr’s decision not to emphasize spiritual aspects, primarily redemption, when addressing sociopolitical issues. For Henry “the modern crisis is not basically political, economic or social—fundamentally it is religious.”⁸ Niebuhr in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, however, interpreted society’s problems as being

⁶Niebuhr, 233-34.

⁷Sharp, 111; Niebuhr, 82.

⁸Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 83.

primarily the result of economics. In 1956 Niebuhr criticized Billy Graham for not actively working alongside the civil rights movement.⁹ For Henry the question was “whether the evangelist by his emphasis on spiritual decision and dedication offers a solution too simple for presumably insoluble social problems, and whether the professor by his reliance on legislation and compulsion as the means of social betterment minimizes and neglects the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ Henry, too, believed legislation is a proper way of responding to social issues, but he did not advocate a social agenda based solely on legislation. For Henry man’s redemption and God’s principles for society must remain central ingredients for social reform.

Niebuhr’s treatment of force also set his ideas apart from Henry’s. Niebuhr argued that justice is only possible through the use of force. Henry also agreed with this conclusion. They parted ways when it came to who could legitimately use force to effect justice. Niebuhr believed oppressed groups will use force to achieve justice; a revolutionary response was a viable option for Niebuhr. Yet, for Henry revolution is not an option for Christians, though they can acknowledge the results of revolution if justice is restored. While Henry advocated social justice, he was not willing to advocate violent, politically subversive methods for achieving justice. Revolution not only ignores God’s intentions for the state as an instrument for justice and social order, but it also fails due to more practical reasons. Revolution does not guarantee that injustice will be eliminated and not simply perpetuated.

⁹See Michael D. Hammond, “Conscience in Conflict: Neo-evangelicals and Race in the 1950s,” (master’s thesis, Wheaton College Graduate School, 2002), 26, 30.

¹⁰Henry, *Aspects*, 15.

In his dissertation, Miroslav M. Kis compares Niebuhr and Henry's understanding of God's revelation and concludes that their separate views on revelation had a direct influence on their social ethics. Kis finds that Niebuhr emphasized mystery, paradox, and the dialectical; thus, Niebuhr worked with an "impossible ideal." Kis suggests, however, that Henry stressed order, coherency, and logic; thus, Henry promoted a "possible ideal."¹¹ In the end, Kis concludes, "We can survey the previous criteria and say that it appears that Niebuhr's system of revelation is highly flexible and fairly definite, while Henry's is more definite and fairly accommodating to ethical exigencies and creative flexibilities of life."¹² Consequently, Henry's social ethics were predicated on distinct, Scriptural principles that offered a more straightforward social agenda for Christians than did Niebuhr's dialectical approach. Kis's conclusion concerning the relationship between Niebuhr and Henry's social ethics and their understanding of revelation has profound implications for an interpretation of Henry's realism.

Neo-evangelical Realism

In light of Kis's conclusion and the material already covered in this thesis, one of the most important elements of Henry's neo-evangelical realism is its certitude. With his convictions grounded in Scripture, Henry dismissed Niebuhr's dialecticism as a "playground of paradox and mysticism, but not of clear concepts."¹³ Henry's

¹¹Miroslav M. Kis, "Revelation and Ethics: Dependence, Interdependence, Independence?: A Comparative Study of Reinhold Niebuhr and Carl F.H. Henry" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1983), 329, 333-34.

¹²Ibid., 342.

¹³Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, 150.

evangelical realism, however, clung to a propensity for certainty. This certainty offered to leave behind Niebuhr's seeming indecision and instead promote definite social principles based upon Scriptural principles. This does not imply that Henry did not recognize the complexities of sociopolitical issues, but simply that he felt there are divine, objective criteria for the social order. In the *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry stated, "The social problems of our day are much more complex than in apostolic times, but they do not on that account differ in principle."¹⁴ Henry did not suggest, however, that every political issue has a ready-made transcendent answer, but he did argue that there are "fixed" standards for society.¹⁵ Henry combined both religious ideals with a realistic comprehension of the political realm. Henry observed, "Many Christians are reluctant to engage in political affairs because they feel they should concern themselves only with changeless absolutes. But in a pluralistic society legislation is essentially a matter of compromise; in the absence of a clear majority consensus, the political outlook is shaped by coordinating coalitions that share common concerns."¹⁶ Henry's neo-evangelical realism allows for sociopolitical complexities and compromises while still offering an objective position.

This emphasis on certainty also explains Henry's hesitation with using natural law as a foundation for politics; for Henry, natural law is too vague. Yet this same argument could be made concerning aspects of Henry's social thought. Henry believed

¹⁴Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 89.

¹⁵"In inferring particulars from general principles a variety of legislative options is possible, and not all differences in formulating alternatives are necessarily fallible. No less than changing majority views, changing cultures and times often require reviewing, revising, supplementing, or canceling particular statutes." Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 126. See also 140-41.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 126.

nations answer to divine law, but he also argued Scripture does not reveal legislative specifics. Thus, if transcendent law only provides general principles for government, how is government to define statute law? Interestingly, Henry intentionally avoided stipulating a religious foundation for specific legislation. His convictions concerning religious liberty and the separation of church and state discourages a religious basis for statute law. Yet, Henry did argue that the transcendent principle of justice must still apply to particular legislation.¹⁷ Beyond justice, however, Henry conceded that political compromise will occur. Thus, the certainty of Henry's realism has self-imposed limits.

Henry's realism also demonstrates balance. Perhaps the most realistic aspect of Henry's thought was his eventual recognition that redemption was not a valid social agenda by itself. In his autobiography, Henry conceded, "During the past generation, many evangelicals expected from evangelism more than evangelism alone can deliver."¹⁸ Elsewhere, Henry identified himself with this group.¹⁹ For Henry, evangelism is essential to the church's purpose in society; nevertheless, redeemed individuals will not curb injustice on their own. Thus, Christians must work for social justice while they also evangelize. In the end, Henry's ability to balance the spiritual principle of individual renewal and the social principle of justice is probably his most enduring legacy in the area of evangelical sociopolitical thought.

Henry provided a mediating position in several other areas as well. First, Henry acknowledged both patriotism and criticism. He noted, "While our country is great among the modern nations—great in resources, in power, in benevolence, and in

¹⁷Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 125.

¹⁸Henry, *Confessions*, 394.

¹⁹Henry, "The Uneasy Conscience Revisited," 4.

performance—it nonetheless accommodates grave sin and great injustice.”²⁰ Similarly, Henry approved of democracy and capitalism, but was still willing to recognize their faults. Finally, Henry demonstrated a balanced position on the use of force. While he acknowledged government’s use of coercion, he avoided revolutionary thought.

Henry’s sociopolitical thought provides a balanced, realistic framework for Christians, either on the left or right, to consider. His realism incorporated individual, group, and structural aspects in careful amounts. The depth and volume of Henry’s thought hopefully guarantees that it will be given continued treatment. In the end, the spiritual elements of Henry’s sociopolitical thought did not deter his sociopolitical considerations, but rather encouraged his emphasis on social justice, religious liberty, and concern for the political wellbeing of others even outside of Christianity. Henry’s neo-evangelical realism provides a carefully considered ethic that maintains spiritual integrity while acknowledging sociopolitical realities.

²⁰Henry, *The Christian Mindset*, 10.

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