

**A THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT FOR EVANGELICALS:
THE REIGN OF GOD AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

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To Sharon

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Definitions	2
Evangelicals	2
Types of Evangelicals	5
Fundamentalist Evangelicals.....	5
Neo-evangelicals	6
Social Engagement.....	7
Eschatology	9
Bebbington’s Quadrilateral as a Structural Framework	10
Towards an Evangelical Theology of Social Engagement.....	14
Outline of Thesis	15
CHAPTER 1: EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT TODAY	18
Evangelical Social Imperative.....	18
The Social Gospel (1890-1920)	19
Evangelical Response (1910-1940)	21
Tension in Academia (1910-1929)	22
The Fundamentalist Movement (1910-1930).....	25
Consequences of the Theology of Separatism (1925-1940)	27
Uneasy Evangelical Conscience (1940-1970)	28
What Still Needs to be Done.....	29
Eschatological Key to Evangelical Theologies	31
Eschatology	32
Eschatological Narratives.....	32
Apocalyptic Scenarios.....	35
Narratives of the Oppressed	37
Apocalypse and History	38
Apocalyptic Pessimism	40
Eschatology of Escape	42
Priority of Evangelism	43
Popular Theologies.....	45
Premillennialism	47
Dispensationalism	48
Popular Eschatologies and Social Engagement	50
Biblicism	51
Crucicentrism	55
Conversionism	61
Activism	66

CHAPTER 2: THE WITNESS OF THE NEO-EVANGELICALS	70
Evangelical Witness	73
1. Lack of Pragmatism and Witness.....	76
2. Fidelity and Witness.....	81
3. Social Pessimism and Witness	86
4. Eschatology and Witness	93
Carl Henry's Eschatological Concerns.....	95
Fundamentalist Understanding of the Kingdom	97
Historic Premillennialism	99
The Immanent Kingdom	100
The Transcendent Kingdom.....	102
Carl Henry's Understanding of the Kingdom	104
Neo-evangelicals and Social Engagement	105
Biblicism	106
Crucicentrism	111
Conversionism	114
Activism	118
CHAPTER 3: HOPE FOR EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT	123
Critical Examination of Evangelical Social Engagement	124
Social Pessimism.....	125
Ahistoricism	127
Apologetic Bias.....	130
Anthropocentrism.....	132
Critique.....	136
The Hope Theology of Jürgen Moltmann	137
Developing a Response to the Problems with Evangelical Theologies of Social	
Engagement.....	143
Biblicism	144
Anachronistic Reading.....	147
Private Reading.....	148
Moltmann and the Bible.....	149
Crucicentrism	152
Moltmann and the Cross	156
Conversionism	159
Moltmann and Conversion.....	162
Activism	166
Moltmann and Activism.....	168
CHAPTER 4: A PROPOSAL FOR EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT	172
Inaugurated-Enacted Proposal.....	173
Neo-evangelical Heritage of the Vineyard.....	174
Inaugurated-Enacted Eschatology and Social Engagement	175
Jesus as a Subversive Agent of God's Reign	177
Prolepsis of the Kingdom.....	180

Provisionality of the Kingdom	181
Tension as a Theological Resource of the Vineyard.....	182
Tension of the Kingdom.....	183
Participation in the Kingdom	186
A Proposal for Kingdom Participation.....	187
1. The Proleptic Participation of God	187
The Promises of God.....	188
Following the Promise Keeping God.....	190
Kingdom and History	191
2. Provisional Participation of Humanity.....	192
3. The Tension of Participation.....	195
Adjusting the Way Evangelicals See the World and See Themselves in the World.....	196
Proposals for Biblicism, Crucicentrism, Conversionism, and Activism.....	198
Biblicism	198
Functional Authority of the Bible	198
Conscientization.....	201
Crucicentrism	203
Evangelical Soteriology	203
Jesus' Gospel.....	205
The Cross and Sanctification	206
The Cross and Redemption	209
The Cross and Restoration	211
Conversionism.....	212
Conversions.....	213
Conversion and Conscientization.....	215
Activism	217
Evangelization of Conscientization.....	217
Social Action as Evangelical Activism	219
Evangelical Public Witness.....	220
Putting the Proposal into Action (Word and Deed)	221
CHAPTER 5: A THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT FOR EVANGELICALS	222
The Environmental Crisis and Evangelicals	222
The Environmental Crisis	223
Evangelical Response to the Environmental Crisis.....	224
Engaging with an Evangelical Environmentalist	225
The Environmental Theology of Stewardship	226
Understanding of the Causes of the Environmental Crisis	229
The Environmental Activism of Stewardship	230
The Need for a Means of Assessment.....	231
Improving Evangelical Environmental Theologies.....	232
Hope for Evangelical Social Engagement.....	233
Developing Environmental Activism.....	234

Convertive Piety for the Environmentalist.....	234
Removing the Limitations from Environmental Activism.....	236
Assessing Evangelical Environmental Activism	236
Evangelicals as Hope for the Environment.....	237
CONCLUSION	238
Evangelicals and Biblicism.....	238
Evangelicals and Crucicentrism.....	240
Evangelicals and Conversionism	241
Evangelicals and Activism.....	243
Evangelicals, Social Engagement, and Eschatology	243
WORKS CITED	245

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Introduction

MY CONCERN FOR EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

This thesis is concerned with three subjects: evangelicals, social engagement, and eschatology. The interconnection of this cluster of subjects is important to me as a minister and as a theologian. As a minister, having served a variety of evangelical denominations, I can testify that, in general, evangelicals have a tremendous capacity for adaptation and action.¹ This capacity is clear to me when, as a theologian, I research the ways in which evangelicals are engaging with the social issues of our day. My scholarly efforts at increasing my own awareness of the breadth of the social crises humanity faces today convince me that evangelicals, despite the vigor with which they respond to many social crises, can and must do a better job of being agents of social amelioration. As a theologian I am interested in how existing evangelical theologies can narrow the scope of evangelical social concern and limit the ways in which evangelicals engage in social transformation. Through my study of many of these theological issues I have come to realize the pivotal role that eschatologies play in (in)forming the imaginations and theologies of

1. I was actively pastoring a church in the Canadian Vineyard denomination during much of the writing of this thesis. The Vineyard is a post-pentecostal movement that is heavily influenced by the eschatological theology of George Eldon Ladd. Because of the Vineyard context for my theological questions, much of this thesis is focused on understanding and critiquing this specific movement. This focus impacted research decisions for this thesis in three ways. First, this decision oriented my research toward the specific aspects of evangelical theology that formed the theological foundations of the Vineyard. Second, this decision narrowed the scope of my investigation so that it does not include some of the recent evangelical contributions that were not formative for the Vineyard movement. And finally the theological architecture developed in this critique is used to critique a Vineyard contribution to environmental theology in Chapter 5 “A Theology of Social Engagement for Evangelicals.”

evangelicals. Therefore, the importance of eschatology for evangelical social engagement is the central preoccupation of this thesis. Before I begin, I will offer a few guiding definitions.

Definitions

Evangelicals

Historians, social scientists and theologians have often commented on the difficulty of defining evangelicalism.² In North America today, groups recognized as evangelical constitute a “complex kaleidoscope” of Protestant traditions.³ The image of a kaleidoscope is apt because the composition of the coalition of traditions, ministries and individuals that make up evangelicalism “has always been *diverse, flexible, adaptable*, and *multiform* (emphasis in original).”⁴ No one tradition or theology can credibly claim to be the definitive representation of evangelicalism.⁵ To further complicate matters, some of the groups ordinarily associated with evangelicalism dispute the applicability of being described by the appellation evangelical.⁶

2. John H. Gerstner, “The Theological Boundaries of Evangelical Faith,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 22; Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 53; Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 29; John G. Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1999), 7; Brantley W. Gasaway, “An Alternative Soul of Politics: The Rise of Contemporary Progressive Evangelicalism,” Ph.D. diss. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008), 83; James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3–4.

3. George A. Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, McGill-Queen’s Studies in the History of Religion (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), xiv.

4. Noll, *American Evangelical*, 14.

5. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 6; McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future*, 53.

6. Mark A. Noll, “What is ‘Evangelical’?” in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical*

Despite the problem of identifying which groups of Christians should best be named evangelical, the designation ‘evangelical’ is widely recognized as representing an adherence to a number of beliefs that have remained consistent since at least the nineteenth century. Historian George Marsden includes in these beliefs:

(1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible, (2) the real historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture, (3) salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ, (4) the importance of evangelism and missions, and (5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life.⁷

However, these beliefs are hardly unique to evangelicals, nor are they consistently interpreted or realized within their diverse theologies. The variety of ways these beliefs are expressed amongst Christian traditions makes it impossible to construct a list of evangelical doctrinal affirmations.

British historian David Bebbington proposes a four-fold schema to identify evangelicals. This schema consists of a set of characteristics that all evangelicals hold in common. Bebbington will call these characteristics “qualities” because they function as essential priorities for evangelicals. These “four qualities ... [are] ... *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and ... *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (emphasis in original).”⁸ While none of these characteristics are the exclusive domain of evangelicals, these are the elements of Christianity that evangelicals “champion ... in ways that other traditions do not.”⁹ In other words, evangelicals are those Christians who believe that these particular defining characteristics are indispensable priorities for their expressions of Christianity. Bebbington’s

Theology, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19.

7. Marsden, *Understanding*, 4–5.

8. David William Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain : History from the 1730s to 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1988), 2–3.

9. John G. Stackhouse, “Evangelical Theology Should Be Evangelical,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 42.

quadrilateral is broad enough to allow for the diversity of evangelicalism, yet precise enough, as a cluster of recognizable characteristics, to differentiate evangelicalism from other expressions of Christianity.¹⁰

Adopting Bebbington's quadrilateral as a definition of evangelical offers some distinct advantages to my project of constructing an evangelical theology of social engagement.

Bebbington's proposal provides a clear set of identifiable characteristics recognized by a wide range of historians, social scientists, and theologians.¹¹ Because these four priorities are recognized as being foundational to evangelical theology and practice, it follows then that any theological project offering a sustained reflection on this quadrilateral will resonate with evangelicals. In addition to being important to evangelicals, these four priorities are common concerns for most forms of Christianity. The commonality of these characteristics implies that they will be applicable to an audience wider than concerned evangelicals. The broad appeal of Bebbington's quadrilateral allows me to present this thesis as an evangelical contribution to the broader context of global Christian theologies.

10. While there have been suggested refinements to Bebbington's four-fold schema, such as John G. Stackhouse's addition of *transdenominationalism* and *orthodox and orthoprax* ("Defining 'Evangelical'," *Church & Faith Trends* 1, no. 1 [October 2007]: 3, [Http://files.efc-canada.net/min/rc/cft/V01I01/Defining_Evangelical.pdf](http://files.efc-canada.net/min/rc/cft/V01I01/Defining_Evangelical.pdf)), typically these modifications only serve to further constrain which groups their author believes should be named evangelical. Deciding who is and who is not an evangelical can easily become a subjective affair. Therefore, I want to signal that my reason for using Bebbington is not demographic but theological. I am less interested in defining who should be considered an evangelical as I am producing a contribution to global theology that represents evangelicals like myself.

11. A partial list of historians, social scientists, and theologians who use Bebbington's quadrilateral includes: Noll, "What is 'Evangelical'?" 21–22; Rawlyk, *Aspects*, xiii; Rick Hiemstra, "Counting Canadian Evangelicals," *Church & Faith Trends* 1, no. 1 (October 2007): 4, [Http://files.efc-canada.net/min/rc/CFT-1-1-CountingCanadianEvangelicals.pdf](http://files.efc-canada.net/min/rc/CFT-1-1-CountingCanadianEvangelicals.pdf); Stackhouse, "Evangelical Theology," 41–42; Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 23.

Types of Evangelicals

Evangelicals are often delimited between conservative and liberal, or progressive evangelicals. Conservative evangelicals tend to focus on the conservation of doctrines and practices unique to their particular traditions.¹² Liberal evangelicals are often those who are most influenced by theologies of higher criticism, and as such are often able to ask questions about the nature of scripture and the interpretation of doctrine that conservative evangelicals would not. The contemporary appellation of progressive evangelical illustrates the perceived distinction between conservative and liberal evangelicalisms. Progressive evangelicals is the name given to those evangelicals who conservative evangelicals believe have prioritized social action and political orientation over the conservation of their tradition's interpretations of doctrines. Progressive evangelicals are often looked at with suspicion by conservative evangelicals. Conservative evangelicals are concerned that progressive evangelicals too easily modify their beliefs and practices to accommodate their social values. For example, progressive evangelicals are apt to embrace alternative interpretations of the scriptures if those interpretations help support their views on those social justice issues they champion. Conservative evangelicals are troubled by what they understand to be a lack of fidelity to biblical and doctrinal interpretations amongst progressive evangelicals.

This thesis will focus on various conservative evangelical theologies. Within conservative evangelicalism I will further distinguish two important groups: fundamentalist evangelicals and neo-evangelicals.

Fundamentalist Evangelicals

Fundamentalist evangelicals trace their roots to the Fundamentalist movement, so named for a series of documents published from 1910 to 1915. I will describe this movement in detail in

12. Clark H. Pinnock, "Confessions of a Post-Conservative Evangelical Theologian," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 383.

the first chapter. The term fundamentalist has come to denote a subset of conservative evangelicals who defend a set of doctrines and practices which they believe are fundamental, or indisputable, to their faith traditions. When applied externally the designation fundamentalist usually indicates an inflexibility of doctrine coupled with a determination to aggressively promote those doctrines. When applied internally, by fundamentalist evangelicals, this term is used to speak of fidelity to doctrinal claims. Internally this term also speaks of a commitment to resist trends in society that are seen as eroding the fundamentalists' moral values. In this text I am primarily using the term fundamentalist to indicate those evangelicals who still identify with the Fundamentalist movement and who make a wholesale rejection of liberal and progressive evangelical theologies.

Neo-evangelicals

The second group, the neo-evangelicals, are direct descendants of the fundamentalists.¹³ Many early neo-evangelicals considered themselves fundamentalists and used the term fundamentalist and evangelical interchangeably. As the neo-evangelical movement progressed, it came to be identified with conservative evangelicals who were attempting to entertain progressive evangelical theologies without necessarily giving up their commitments to fundamental doctrines and practices. I will also describe this movement in detail in the first chapter.

The reason it is important to delimit these two groups of evangelicals is that the transition between them reveals an evangelical capacity for reformation. This transition serves as an

13. There are other subsequent forms, or subsets, of evangelicalism which could also be named here such as the younger evangelicals identified by Robert E. Webber in *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004). However, the subsets of fundamentalist evangelicals and neo-evangelicals still exist and continue to exert influence on evangelicals in North America. Additionally, many of the newer subsets of conservative evangelicals can trace their roots directly to the neo-evangelical movement.

example of the kind of theological evolution I would like to promote amongst contemporary conservative evangelicals.

Social Engagement

The idea of social engagement refers to the various ways in which individuals and groups interact with their larger social contexts. Social engagement can take on many different forms, including deliberately choosing not to participate with certain social contexts. Regardless of the kind of social engagement in which an individual or group participates, social engagement is an enactment of a particular understanding of its relationship with society. Relationships with society can be complex, constructed from a variety of personal, social, and religious narratives. For example, when religious narratives are understood as encouraging some sort of social good, an adherent of those narratives is more likely to work towards that social good. Unfortunately, the converse is also true. My core concern for this thesis is the ways in which social engagement is actually practiced by evangelicals. I approach this subject with the preconception that some forms of social engagement are more desirable than others.

Of particular interest to me are the ways in which social engagement is performed by evangelicals responding to various contemporary social crises. The crises I have in mind include, but are not limited to, poverty, slavery, discrimination, and the abuse of the environment. These specific issues of social injustice are not the only ones that demand some form of social engagement, but in the interest of putting reasonable limits on this thesis I focus my analysis to the environmental concern and subsequent response of evangelicals as representative of a larger group of social crises.

I am also encouraged that there is no homogeneity to the evangelical responses to various contemporary social crises. My previous research into emerging expressions of evangelical Christianity in North America established that there is a variety of ways evangelicals imagine their role in society.¹⁴ The dissonance evangelicals have in understanding their relationships with

society generates diverse responses to contemporary social crises.¹⁵ The disparity between various forms of evangelical social engagement evokes the question as to what theological resources are being employed by evangelicals to support their different responses. In chapter one of this thesis I will identify the role that theological resources play in shaping the character of evangelical social engagement. I propose that there are specific theological resources which readily inspire better forms of social engagement.

While there are many excellent examples of evangelicals and evangelical communities engaging in projects of social transformation, there continues to be a large number of evangelicals disdaining involvement in such projects. Even where evangelicals are actively at work addressing what they perceive to be injustices, there is a lack of critical reflection directed toward the social and historic roots that underlie the injustices with which they are engaged in ameliorating.¹⁶ Furthermore, there is often a lack of adequate reflection on and comprehension of the social context in which a particular crisis arises. Failing to critically examine the contextual and historical aspects of an injustice results in inadequate forms of social engagement.

14. Frank Emanuel, "An Incarnational Theology of the Emerging Church," unpublished Master's research paper (Ottawa: Saint Paul University, 2008).

15. The relationship between Christianity and society is what H. Richard Niebuhr called "the enduring problem." Niebuhr's five-fold typology, or even the contemporary four-fold typology of Leonard Sweet, provides helpful categories for evaluating the form of relationship evangelicals can have with society. However, my concern regards the theological resources that are used by evangelicals to (in)form their understandings of their relationships with society. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, reprint, 1951 (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1975), 1, 39–44; Leonard Sweet, ed., *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 18–20.

16. In a similar vein, Latin American Liberation theologians insisted on the need to reflect critically on the economic forces which undergirded the disparity between the poor and the rich. I will use strategies in this thesis comparable to the strategies of the Liberation theologians. However, I recognize that within the North American evangelical context, particularly in the United States, there is suspicion and apprehension towards Liberation Theology because of its use of Marxist economic theories. Therefore, this comment alone will suffice to acknowledge my debt to the work of these Latin American theologians.

Adequate forms of engagement must address the complex systemic issues that undergird contemporary social problems.¹⁷

Eschatology

My own exploration into the ways evangelicals construct their understanding of social engagement reveals a growing desire amongst evangelicals to engage more effectively in projects of social transformation.¹⁸ This desire to contribute to the transformation of society corresponds, in many ways, to a growing consensus on the nature of eschatology amongst the most socially engaged of evangelicals.¹⁹ In chapter two I will introduce the form of eschatology that is increasing in popularity amongst North American evangelicals, but for now a brief definition of eschatology is in order.

Eschatology is popularly defined by many contemporary evangelicals as what historian Paul Boyer calls ‘prophecy belief’. Prophecy belief is the idea “that the course of history, and the sequence of events that will herald the end of the world, are foretold in the Bible.”²⁰ Eschatology, in this popular mode, is used to interpret everything from wars to the environmental crisis as if such events and issues are simply part of a preordained historical trajectory leading towards an impending return of a God of judgment and wrath.²¹ In chapter one I will trace out specific

17. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study Revised and Expanded* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 118–19; Ronald J. Sider, “Toward an Evangelical Political Philosophy,” in *Christians and Politics Beyond the Culture Wars: An Agenda for Engagement*, ed. David P. Gushee (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 79.

18. The term social engagement is common in evangelical literature. In this literature social engagement is synonymous with social amelioration, or working for the betterment of society.

19. Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 25.

20. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 1992), ix.

21. Job Y. Jindo, “On Myth and History in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Eschatology,”

implications of such a view of eschatology.

Another way of understanding eschatology is as the study of ultimate things.²² This definition is broader than Boyer's notion of 'prophecy belief'. Eschatology takes as its subject those things that are final or ultimate, such as death, dying, judgment, eternity, heaven, and even hell. Beliefs about these ultimate things influence the conduct of various individuals and groups. Thus eschatology, for purposes of this thesis, is the study of the effect of beliefs about last things on how life is lived in the present.²³ I am most interested in the way evangelicals live out, in the present, their beliefs about the future of society.

Bebbington's Quadrilateral as a Structural Framework

Throughout the following chapters I rely on Bebbington's quadrilateral to lend a structural framework to this theological project. Each of his four characteristics guide the content of the following chapters by establishing boundaries as to what this thesis will address. Every chapter will conclude with a section discussing each priority as it relates to the content of the chapter. In order to utilize Bebbington's quadrilateral effectively I have reordered the traits as such: *biblicism*, *crucicentrism*, *conversionism*, and *activism*. While all of these priorities are interrelated, I use *biblicism* and *crucicentrism* to represent the central theological preoccupations of evangelicals. The final two characteristics, *conversionism* and *activism*, are employed to represent the practical expression of evangelical theologies, namely their praxis.

Bebbington intended the category of *biblicism* to indicate the preferential treatment that evangelicals give to the Bible.²⁴ This preferential treatment is most often expressed in terms of

Vetus Testamentum 55, no. 3 (2005): 414.

22. Trevor Hart, "Eschatology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 262.

23. Hart, "Eschatology," 263; Mark Saucy, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus: In 20th Century Theology* (Dallas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1997), 212.

24. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2–3.

authority, meaning that evangelicals affirm that the Bible is authoritative for all Christian theology and action.²⁵ However, there is considerable variance in how evangelicals imagine the Bible fulfills this authoritative role.²⁶ This variance depends on the concept of scripture each group possesses and how that group believes they should relate to their particular construal of scripture.²⁷ The relationship evangelicals have with scripture is not completely reducible to an interpretive framework although these groups will always have favoured methods of biblical interpretation. Regardless of what favoured methods a group espouses, each group is characterized by a set of theological priorities that act as presuppositions to their interpretation of the Bible.²⁸ While the Bible is purported to be the foundational partner for evangelical theologies, it is most often used merely to lend authority to a set of theological priorities that constitute the central theological preoccupation for the group. Yet, to the evangelical, because scripture is used to lend authority to theology, the common claim is that theirs is a biblical theology.

The relationships that evangelical groups create between scripture and theology are indicative of a larger methodological consideration about the relationship between evangelicals and their theologies. Rather than relying on particular formal theological methodologies, evangelicals tend to cluster around personalities. By personalities I mean individuals who have

25. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 63; Alister E. McGrath, “Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 20.

26. For example, David Kelsey’s *Proving Doctrine: The Use of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999) traces seven distinct understandings of biblical authority.

27. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 2.

28. Alister McGrath notes that “[t]here is widespread agreement within the evangelical theological community that evangelicals have not paid adequate attention to the issue of theological method” as evidenced by their lack of reflection on theological assumptions. See “Evangelical Theological Method,” 15–16.

strongly voiced opinions and command respect within a particular evangelical community or tradition. These personalities come from a wide array of theological formations, including those with no formal theological education or training. Using their own particular theological assumptions, these personalities set normative approaches to theological tasks such as interpreting scripture. Furthermore, as groups of evangelicals cluster around personalities their collective theological efforts are often primarily concerned with establishing their particular personality's theological assumptions. This reality makes it difficult to talk about evangelical method. Hence there is great value in using a framework of characteristics with wide interpretive potential, such as those provided by Bebbington, rather than try to identify a particular theological method as evangelical. Therefore, I do not propose a specific methodological relationship that evangelicals should have to scripture. Rather, in each chapter I attend to the ways in which evangelicals understand the dialectic relationship between their eschatologies and their already established relationships to scripture.

Bebbington intended *crucicentrism* to denote the primary place that Jesus' crucifixion has for evangelical theologies.²⁹ Most evangelicals are concerned with the relationship between the crucifixion and soteriology. Soteriology is the study of what salvation is and how it is appropriated. The most popular formulation of evangelical soteriology is crucifixion as the vicarious atonement for human sin.³⁰ However, atonement does not need to exhaust the implications of *crucicentrism* for evangelical theologies. For example, the crucifixion as an eschatological event allows for alternative perspectives to the usual evangelical soteriological interpretation.³¹ Through the characteristic of *crucicentrism* I delineate the influence of

29. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 14.

30. Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 96.

31. An example of how viewing the cross as an eschatological event can reshape soteriology can be found in John Howard Yoder's *John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Angus Noster*, reprint, 1972 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,

eschatologically shaped soteriology on evangelical social engagement.

Bebbington intends the priority of *conversionism* to denote an emphasis on the relationship that evangelicals believe they have with society.³² Having a ‘convertive piety’ means that the purpose or mission of evangelicals is to change society, or, at the very least to transform society through the religious conversion of individuals within that society.³³ I will argue that *conversionism* can be understood in ways that make it a resource for developing theologies that result in social amelioration. *Conversionism* is expressed practically through a final evangelical priority - *activism*.

Activism represents the ways in which evangelicals enact the relationship they understand they have with their social milieu.³⁴ For Bebbington this evangelical relationship with society is understood on soteriological grounds.³⁵ The change that evangelicals desire to bring about in society is often expressed in terms of individuals appropriating a salvific message which is formulated in an *evangel* (gospel message). The diversity of evangelicals includes a diversity of *evangels* as well.³⁶ Despite a variety of formulations of their message to society, evangelicals are so named because of their ubiquitous desire to communicate their *evangels*, an activity called evangelization. The dominance of soteriological concerns over *conversionism* and *activism* considerably narrows the ways in which evangelicals understand their relationships with society.

1994). While I do not find Yoder’s proposal sufficiently compelling, he does lay the foundation of rethinking an evangelical soteriology through an eschatological lens.

32. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 5.

33. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 25; James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9–10.

34. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 10.

35. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 5, 10.

36. Tim Keller, “The Gospel in All Its Forms: Like God, the Gospel is Both One and More Than That,” *Leadership* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 75–76.

These soteriological concerns characterize the eschatological expectations that evangelicals have for society. Does the evangelical's *evangel* imply that society is something to be 'saved' from or is society something to be 'saved'? What role, if any, are evangelicals to play in the redemption of society? Under the characteristics of *conversionism* and *activism* I explore influences that eschatology has on its adherents' relationships with society.

Towards an Evangelical Theology of Social Engagement

This thesis builds on Carl F. H. Henry's (1913-2003) concern over a lack of ameliorative evangelical social engagement. He first gave voice to his concerns in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (hereafter *Uneasy Conscience*) and carried them on throughout his writings.³⁷ Henry's unease with the lack of transformative evangelical social engagement will be the subject of chapter two. Additionally, Henry's approach to critiquing evangelical social engagement gives me a methodological model. Henry's method begins with investigating the historical and theological reasons why evangelicals developed what he considered to be inadequate responses to social issues. Henry's second step is to offer a theological proposal for constructing better evangelical responses. Finally, Henry's method calls for evangelicals to enact a theological proposal that will effectively construct a more adequate, that is engaged, relationship with society. I follow these same three steps by first investigating the historical and theological development of contemporary notions of evangelical social engagement. This task provides the foundational attention required to develop an adequate response to deficiencies in existing evangelical social engagement. Secondly, I develop a theological resource, focusing on eschatology, that targets the deficiencies in contemporary forms of evangelical social

37. David Lee Weeks, "The Political Thought of Carl F. H. Henry," doctoral thesis (Loyola University of Chicago, 1991), 12; Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, reprint, 1947 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

engagement. Finally, I propose an evangelical theology of social engagement which I call for evangelicals to enact.

Outline of Thesis

In chapter one, “Evangelical Social Engagement Today,” I investigate the roots of contemporary forms of evangelical social engagement. There are two parts to this chapter. The first part describes the historical context of social engagement for twentieth century North American evangelicalism. The second part establishes the need to address eschatology as the foundation of evangelical theologies of social engagement. Throughout this chapter the emphasis is on exposing the deficiencies in evangelical social engagement that I address in the third chapter. Therefore, chapter one identifies many of the challenges faced by evangelicals as they construct their theologies of social engagement.

The second chapter, “The Witness of the Neo-Evangelicals,” investigates the eschatological dimensions of Carl Henry’s critique of fundamentalist evangelical social engagement expressed in his landmark publication the *Uneasy Conscience*. This chapter examines the primary theological motivation that animated Henry’s concern over evangelical social engagement; inadequate evangelical response to social crises diminishes the evangelicals’ ability to effectively share their *evangels* outside of their own communities. I then turn my attention to exploring the implications of the eschatological dimension of Henry’s proposal on the evangelical priorities of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism. This chapter introduces the eschatological framework from which I construct my own proposal in chapter four.

The third chapter, “Hope for Evangelical Social Engagement,” investigates the use of eschatological theology to address theological deficiencies that became evident during the post-war reflection on the responses of various Christian churches and traditions to the Second World War. I will group these deficiencies into four categories: social pessimism, ahistoricism,

apologetic bias, and anthropocentrism.³⁸ Because there is a lack of conservative evangelical theological attention to how their own theological deficiencies hinder the development of adequate responses to social crises I will introduce a sympathetic dialogue partner. German political theologian Jürgen Moltmann's own uneasy conscience led to a critique of the inability of many contemporary European Christian theologies to generate socially transformational hope. Initially rooted in Ernst Bloch's attention to the capacity of eschatological narratives to generate socially transformative hope, Moltmann develops his theology of hope in a thoroughly eschatological manner.³⁹ In this chapter, I employ Moltmann as a dialogue partner with whom I can evaluate the possibilities of eschatology for how evangelicals understand and enact Bebbington's four evangelical characteristics.

The fourth chapter, "A Proposal for Evangelical Social Engagement," is my constructed eschatologically informed theological framework for projects of social engagement amongst contemporary evangelicals. I ground my theological proposal in the eschatology of George Eldon Ladd, thereby extending Carl Henry's project of further developing the social conscience and activities of evangelicals. Following the lead of Jürgen Moltmann, this proposed theological framework is thoroughly eschatological. By attending to Bebbington's fourfold evangelical concerns I make it, at the same time, deliberately evangelical. Throughout this chapter I will call on evangelicals to implement this framework in their engagement with projects of social amelioration. This proposed theological framework is applicable to any evangelical project of social transformation but in my fifth chapter I will demonstrate its efficacy on improving evangelical projects of environmental amelioration.

38. I will define and discuss in detail these deficiencies in chapter three.

39. Richard Bauckham, "Eschatology in the Coming of God," in *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1.

In the fifth chapter, “Implications of a Theology of Social Engagement for Evangelicals,” I identify the environmental crisis as an area of social concern evangelicals often respond to poorly. I briefly identify some of the important deficiencies common to evangelical environmental proposals. By employing the theological framework developed in chapter four, I demonstrate how my eschatological theology can be employed to address inadequacies in the ways that conservative evangelicals address environmental issues.

Following Henry’s methodology my conclusion will deliver a final exhortation to apply my eschatological theological proposal to evangelical responses to other issues of social importance today. I believe this project contributes to contemporary evangelicalism an evangelical theology that attends to more than apologetic self-affirmations or interpretations of scriptures. By attending to the deficiencies in existing evangelical theologies of social engagement I begin filling a gap to which systematic theological reflection is well suited. I also hope that this project provides an evangelical contribution to global Christian theologies as a sustained reflection on the role of eschatology in shaping the theology that is enacted when Christians engage with the social issues of our day.

CHAPTER 1

EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT TODAY

Evangelical Social Imperative

At the end of the nineteenth century, many North American evangelicals were actively engaged in projects of social transformation. The second half of the nineteenth century, sometimes referred to as the ‘third great awakening’, was a time for many evangelicals to cultivate a ‘Christian social vision’.¹ At this time, the popularity of Methodist perfectionist theologies that asserted the possibility of human and, by extension, social perfectibility, encouraged evangelicals to enact their optimistic visions for society.² Exemplified by the considerable activism exerted towards the cause of prohibition, evangelicals believed that they could make society better.³ The belief in the possibility of social amelioration inspired many evangelical humanitarian projects like the Young Men’s Christian Association and the Volunteers of America.⁴ This impulse towards social activism, what I call an ‘evangelical social

1. Thomas A. Askew and Richard V. Pierard, *The American Church Experience: A Concise History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 124; J. Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 10.

2. Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 304; Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 47.

3. Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 295.

4. Robert Linder claims that enacted social concern was normative for evangelicals before the early twentieth century. See Robert D. Linder, “The Resurgence of Evangelical Social Concern,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*,

imperative', found a theological voice in the late nineteenth century through the Social Gospel movement.

The Social Gospel (1890-1920)

At its best, the Social Gospel movement represented a growing awareness among Protestant Christians of the inadequacy of their “understanding of the sinfulness of the social order and [their] share in the sins of all individuals within it.”⁵ The best known American proponent of the Social Gospel was German-American Baptist Walter Rauschenbush (1861-1918). Rauschenbush’s contributions, including *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917), constituted a carefully constructed theology for an expanded locus of enacted Christian social concern. Rauschenbush insisted that the Social Gospel achieved this expanded locus by calling for a critical evaluation of the individualistic notion of private religion that dominated the North American evangelical theologies.⁶ His critique of what he called the “individualistic gospel” charged that in its worst forms it lacked adequate concern for the corporate or social reality of individuals.⁷ He asserted that theologies which narrowly focused on the individualistic, sometimes called the personal dimension of religion, were unable to inspire works of social amelioration.⁸

Proponents of the Social Gospel movement did not all share Rauschenbush’s deference to existing and tightly held evangelical beliefs.⁹ Many evangelicals felt uneasy about this new

ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 205; Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 1992), 80–81.

5. Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1945), 5; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 166.

6. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 272–73.

7. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 5.

8. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 5, 21.

theological movement and its use of liberal, that is non-evangelical, theologies.¹⁰ For these concerned evangelicals, the Social Gospel came to be seen as a liberal divergence from historically orthodox Christian beliefs.¹¹ These evangelicals feared that the Social Gospel replaced the doctrine of human sin with what they felt was an unwarranted optimism concerning humanity.¹² Likewise, they insisted that the Social Gospel supplanted the evangelical concern for individual salvation with an emphasis on humanity's ability to transform society.¹³ Hence, the social transformation proposed by the Social Gospel seemed to come at the expense of what evangelicals held to be the central feature of Christianity - private religious conversion.¹⁴ To many evangelicals the Social Gospel's optimistic faith in humanity represented an unnecessary accommodation to the sensibilities of culture because it chose not to focus on the doctrine of individual sinfulness that these evangelicals believed to be foundational to all social problems.¹⁵

9. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 29; James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 28.

10. Marsden, *Understanding*, 33–34.

11. Reginald E. O. White, *Christian Ethics: The Historical Development* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 268; John G. Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1999), 11; Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 37; Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 165; Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 30.

12. Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, reprint, 1947 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 15; Nicholas T. Pruitt, "Neo-Evangelical Realism: Reflections on the Sociopolitical Thought of Carl F. H. Henry," Thesis (Waco: Baylor University, 2009), 16.

13. Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 75.

14. Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 25; Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 9; Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 28.

15. James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: The

Their conclusion was that this new theology sacrificed orthodoxy in order to be socially acceptable. A large number of evangelicals found the neglect of private religious conversion an unacceptable compromise of orthodoxy.¹⁶

Evangelical Response (1910-1940)

Many Protestant evangelicals, at the turn of the twentieth century, responded by vociferously rejecting the liberal Social Gospel.¹⁷ These evangelicals decried all forms of liberal theology and biblical criticism; all theologies which they felt were undermining their fundamental beliefs.¹⁸ Biblical criticism referred to primarily European scripture scholarship that applied a historical critical methodology to the biblical texts. These evangelicals feared that subjecting biblical interpretation to modern understandings of history would undermine the veracity of the Bible itself.¹⁹ Lamenting the fact that these trends in theology were gaining popularity, the various universities and seminaries throughout North America felt it necessary to align themselves with either the liberals or the evangelicals, as illustrated by the Presbyterian schools of Union Theological Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary.²⁰ In New York, Union embraced liberal theologies while the Princeton school championed the cause of

University of Chicago Press, 1987), 20; Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 43.

16. Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 165.

17. Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 383.

18. Noll, *Scandal*, 102; Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olsen, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 287.

19. Grant R. Osborne, "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 2 (1 June 1999): 195.

20. Martin E. Marty, "Tensions Within Contemporary Evangelicalism: A Critical Appraisal," in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 172.

evangelical theologies.²¹ The polarization that played out with these seminaries was typical of the Protestant traditions from which the modern evangelical movements originate; from this point on it was possible to differentiate between liberal and conservative evangelicalism within the North American context.

Evangelicals who rejected the Social Gospel paid a great cost to protect their individualistic gospel.²² In rejecting the Social Gospel movement, these evangelicals retreated from their historical commitments to social amelioration.²³ Evangelicals who were suspicious of the Social Gospel found it difficult to separate the activity of social transformation from the socially active liberal evangelicals.²⁴ Conservative evangelicals believed that the Social Gospel's zeal for social transformation diminished the importance of the personal dimension of religion. Their suspicions about the Social Gospel served to erode the value these evangelicals had held for projects of social transformation.²⁵ A coalition of concerned evangelicals came to indiscriminately distrust almost all efforts to act for the betterment of society. Ultimately their suspicion led these evangelicals to the entrenchment of their theologies and practices in an effort to protect their fundamental convictions about the individualistic nature of Christianity.

Tension in Academia (1910-1929)

In addition to their growing frustration with liberal theologies, conservative evangelicals

21. Marsden, *Understanding*, 38.

22. Randall Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism: From Revivalism to Politics and Beyond* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 36; Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 7.

23. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 22; Marsden, *Understanding*, 30; John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 88–89.

24. Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 167.

25. Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 112.

felt pushed out of the educational institutions, even from the universities and seminaries that they had established to train their own ministers.²⁶ The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were a time of great change for North American universities. The increase in popularity of natural and social sciences as areas of academic study brought with it an epistemological shift.²⁷ This epistemological shift was a move from hard sciences that focused on absolutes and laws to the softer sciences that had a greater tolerance for informal theories.²⁸ Informal theories allowed for a great deal of conjecture and speculation, and they often called into question claims about reality that were previously held to be self-evidently true.²⁹ Theological claims, regardless of origin, became the subject of scrutiny in such studies. This development was painfully obvious to the evangelical scholars within these universities. In institutions like Princeton, the rise of the softer sciences and liberal theologies were perceived to be direct threats to the beliefs which these evangelicals understood to be ‘fundamentals’ of their faith.³⁰

The tension between the older formal epistemological framework and the new academic environment was typified by the response of evangelical scholars towards evolution. Evolutionary theories were constructed around evidence that shows “the world is of long duration and is forever changing.”³¹ At first the topic of evolution was greeted by many

26. Noll, *Scandal*, 110.

27. Noll, *Scandal*, 112; Irving Louis Horowitz, “Toward a History of Social Science Publishing in the United States,” *Publishing Research Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (June 1991): 60. Horowitz shows that the social sciences bloom in the twentieth century and Noll claims that the reason for this is an increase in the funding of social science research in American universities.

28. Noll, *Scandal*, 113.

29. John G. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 146.

30. Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 381.

31. Ernst Mayr, *What Evolution Is* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 7.

evangelical scholars without the alarms that characterized later responses.³² Creative approaches were employed by evangelical scholars in the mid to late 1800s that easily integrated evolution into their theologies.³³ Where this integration occurred, however, the operative assumption was that evolution provided a way to comprehend the world as God's handiwork and that understanding this handiwork contributed to the knowledge of God.³⁴ As evolution continued to grow in academic popularity, it became apparent that evolutionary theories made possible an understanding of the origin and development of life that did not require any reference to a Creator God. Research projects which set out to understand the world specifically as God's creation became less and less common amongst North American academics; no longer were hard sciences, for example geology, studied as the means of creating apologetic proofs of God. This shift away from an apologetic approach to academics, in universities like Princeton, allowed the softer natural and social sciences to shape its academic landscape. Many of the evangelicals at these universities blamed the evident erosion of the deistic presupposition of a Creator God on the teaching of evolution.³⁵ The net result is that by 1925, evolution was ensconced as the foremost evangelical concern, even greater than prohibition.³⁶

32. Some historians who note the decline in Christian influence within university education, such as James Hastings Nichols (see *History of Christianity 1650-1950: Secularization of the West* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1956), 260), have reported that evolution was immediately rejected by evangelicals. This claim contradicts more recent analyses which recognize a varied response from within the denominations that identified themselves as evangelical.

33. Noll, *Scandal*, 180. Of particular note is Congregationalist naturalist Asa Gray who "argued with Darwin himself that the theory of natural selection could be interpreted as supporting God's providential design and maintenance of the world." (Noll, *Scandal*, 179) This concern regarding evolution did not carry the same import in Canada. See Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism*, 86.

34. Marsden, *Understanding*, 124.

35. Noll, *American Evangelical*, 158.

36. Linder, "The Resurgence," 195; John A. D'Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon*

Many evangelicals felt less and less comfortable within North American universities and seminaries. Evangelicals no longer enjoyed their former privileged role as the custodians of orthodoxy within these institutions. Those evangelicals with connections to existing universities felt alienated by the changing academic milieu. Many evangelicals felt the need to protect their theologies from what they understood to be an increasingly hostile environment.³⁷ These evangelicals felt uncomfortable with the challenges a new academic atmosphere presented to their fixed understandings of God. Ultimately their response was to concretise what they considered to be fundamental theologies in an effort to build a coalition amongst like-minded evangelicals.³⁸

The Fundamentalist Movement (1910-1930)

The Fundamentalist movement is broadly an evangelical response to changes society experienced towards the end of the nineteenth century. The evangelicals who formed this movement did so in reaction to their discomfort with new developments within theology and academia. They feared the ramifications of adapting their approaches to better fit with the changing academic milieu. This fear resulted in Fundamentalist scholars losing influential roles within their own institutions when they departed over concerns that ministers trained by these universities would not share the same commitment to evangelical orthodoxy that these evangelicals considered to be foundational.³⁹ In order to defend their understanding of orthodoxy,

Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xiv.

37. Rick M. Nañez, *Full Gospel, Fractured Minds? : A Call to Use God's Gift of the Intellect* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 91.

38. Paul Hiebert helpfully describes this entrenching process that faith communities go through in responding to social discomfort as a “*revitalization of faith and life* [emphasis in original]” in *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 329–31.

39. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 31.

these evangelicals established a core set of theological assertions that they named as *The Fundamentals* of the faith. These assertions were widely distributed through a “set of booklets called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* [, which] were published between 1910 and 1915.”⁴⁰ The fundamentals covered claims such as:

assertions that the Bible is the inspired Word of God; that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for the salvation of men and women, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and would return at the end of the age in great glory; that sin is real and not the product of fevered imaginations; that God’s grace and not human effort is the source of salvation; and that the church is God’s institution designed to build up Christians and to spread the gospel.⁴¹

By delineating these fundamentals, evangelicals established a broad coalition against the forces that seemed to be pushing them towards the margins of the universities, churches, and ultimately mainstream society.

Advocates of *The Fundamentals*, often called fundamentalists, have been described as evangelicals who are “angry about something.”⁴² That ‘something’ was the loss of influence within society. Removed from their privileged place in society, they felt the only way to preserve their theology and identity was to separate themselves from the affairs of society.⁴³ The fundamentalists aggressively relocated their theology and identity away from the influence of the broader social context. To justify this position, fundamentalists vilified society and fostered a

40. Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 381; Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 22.

41. Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 381.

42. Marsden, *Understanding*, 1; Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 20. Fundamentalist has taken on a much broader meaning in contemporary discussions of religion. Unless otherwise indicated, the evangelicals described as fundamentalists in this thesis are named so because of their connection to *The Fundamentals* and the movements that were influenced by these documents. It is also useful to note that these fundamentalists are a subset of those Christians who would identify themselves as evangelicals.

43. Many fundamentalists enacted a ‘double separation’ both from society and from those evangelicals who refused to separate from society. John H. Gerstner, “The Theological Boundaries of Evangelical Faith,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 34

social pessimism amongst their followers. This strategy resulted in the development of a fundamentalist theology of separatism that convinced Christians to retreat from society in order to preserve their evangelical orthodoxy, and their salvation.⁴⁴

Consequences of the Theology of Separatism (1925-1940)

In a poignant critique of North American evangelicalism, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994), historian Mark Noll determined that at the beginning of the twentieth century the majority of evangelicals had abandoned their constructive engagement with North American society. These evangelicals had come to associate social activism with an undesired entanglement with society. Wary of the influence society might have on their theologies and practices, they turned inward relying exclusively on their self-exiled communities.⁴⁵ Amongst their ranks these evangelicals developed pessimistic views of society. Noll suggested that this pessimism expressed the alienation many evangelicals experienced from society, notably the decline in their ability to exercise social influence.⁴⁶ Failing to recognize their own complicity in

44. Fundamentalists develop a loyalty to their own culture adopting the task of maintaining and promoting that culture as the best option for society. In order to maintain the fundamentalists' culture a strong boundary is erected to prevent outside corruption. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, reprint, 1951 (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1975), 102; Bruce Shelley, L., *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 432.

45. Mark Noll is among the first to acknowledge that the experience of Canadian evangelicals and their American counterparts differed considerably. Historically Canadian evangelicals have been more amenable to national religious bodies and liberal theologies such as the Social Gospel. In the 1960s national religious bodies, like the United Church of Canada, lost much of their traction in society. Amongst the more conservative evangelical movements there existed a tendency to import theology from their American neighbours. It is amongst those American influenced evangelical groups that my critique will have the strongest application for Canadian evangelicals. See Mark A. Noll, *What Happened to Christian Canada?* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2007), 19, 45–46; Robert Choquette, *Canada's Religions: An Historical Introduction*, reprint, 2004, Religion and Beliefs Series (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2008), 311–16; Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 186–87.

46. George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New*

their social exile, these evangelicals blamed society for refusing to conform to their expectations. Society, in turn, eventually began to think of these evangelicals as irrelevant and archaic, which only served to further encourage the fundamentalist call for separation from society.⁴⁷ Instead of finding a way to overcome these problems, these evangelicals allowed their pessimism to exile them to social irrelevance at the margins of society.⁴⁸ For evangelicals however, any proposed retreat from society will eventually have to contend with their need to evangelize.

Uneasy Evangelical Conscience (1940-1970)

Another shift in evangelical attitudes towards society occurred in the mid-twentieth century. The ubiquitous evangelical desire to communicate effectively to society some form of a gospel message spawned a critique of the socially separatist tendencies of the fundamentalists. Evangelicals who became aware of the credibility problem that was created by the fundamentalist abandonment of the evangelical social imperative experienced discomfort over the influence separatism had on their theologies and practices.⁴⁹ Carl F. H. Henry's critique of this abandonment, *Uneasy Conscience* (1947), gave voice to a new form of evangelicalism. This was a 'neo-evangelicalism,' that desired to participate constructively within society.

As neo-evangelicals critiqued the influence of fundamentalist theologies of separatism, they discovered the need both to realize the extent to which the theology of fundamentalist separatism had influenced their own theologies and to determine how these theologies could be

Evangelicalism (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 4.

47. Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 29.

48. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 250.

49. John G. Stackhouse, "'Who Whom?': Evangelicalism and Canadian Society," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George A. Rawlyk, McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 59; Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xi, xvii; Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 89.

reshaped in more socially responsible directions.⁵⁰ The result of this critical self-reflection amongst mid-twentieth century evangelicals was a redefined role for evangelicals in society.⁵¹ The realization of these evangelicals was that fundamentalism had gone too far to protect its orthodoxy. Fundamentalism had missed the important insight of nineteenth century socially conscious evangelicalism — namely, that the evangelical social imperative belonged as much to evangelical orthodoxy as did the need for private religious conversion.⁵²

What Still Needs to be Done

The influence of fundamentalism is still evident in contemporary evangelicalism.⁵³ Like the fundamentalists, often evangelicals maintain a separation of their theology and identity from the larger social context. This separation remains rooted in suspicion towards projects of social amelioration that do not emerge from the evangelicals themselves. When evangelicals do enact an evangelical social imperative it is often a means to obtain the ear of society with insufficient regard for the kind of social transformation they are attempting to enact. For example, environmental stewardship has become a popular subject for contemporary evangelicals. Yet, the motivation for environmental stewardship is not a conscientization to the environmental crisis,

50. In the wake of two world wars, support for the Social Gospel had waned. This opened the door for conservative evangelicals to re-appropriate the social programmes they had ceded to the proponents of the liberal Social Gospel. Aaron K. Ketchell, "Liberalism," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 281.

51. Linder traces the roots of this re-awakening to the social implications of religion to Carl Henry's 1947 wake-up call *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, see Linder, "The Resurgence," 201.

52. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 8.

53. It is worth noting that not all evangelical social pessimism is a product of fundamentalism. Suspicion towards the larger social context is also part of certain forms of mysticism and pietism, as well as Anabaptist traditions. Some of these forms of suspicion also have an eschatological component, but for the purposes of this thesis I will limit my analysis to conservative evangelicalism. See David B. Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 242; Noll, *Scandal*, 49; Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 56.

but rather a concern for building relationships with people in their larger social context in order to communicate a gospel message.⁵⁴ At its worst, these evangelicals are simply infiltrating the larger social context by feigning to have a common interest in saving the environment.⁵⁵ There is little interest in understanding the root causes of environmental crises. This failure to appreciate the depth and implications of the environmental crisis leads to ineffective, if not inappropriate, strategies of environmental activism.⁵⁶ Additionally, many evangelicals remain convinced that individual conversion is sufficient in and of itself to effect social amelioration.⁵⁷ Even though these outstanding issues present a considerable challenge to projects of social transformation carried out by evangelicals, there are encouraging signs that evangelicals are returning to the evangelical social imperative.

A survey of contemporary evangelical literature reveals numerous examples of evangelicals attempting to work out notions of social engagement that remains faithful to evangelical orthodoxy.⁵⁸ Today there are evangelicals attempting to chart a course back to the

54. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, "Theology of Development: A Guide to the Debate," in *Evangelicals and Development: Toward a Theology of Social Change*, ed. Ronald J. Sider (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 25–26; Hollinger, *Individualism*, 40.

55. Robert M. Price, "Evangelism for Young Evangelicals," *Religion And Intellectual Life* 2, no. 1 (September 1984): 97.

56. Brantley W. Gasaway, "An Alternative Soul of Politics: The Rise of Contemporary Progressive Evangelicalism," Ph.D. diss. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008), 67.

57. Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 295; Hollinger, *Individualism*, 39–40.

58. A sample list includes: William B. Badke, *Project Earth: Preserving the World God Created* (Portland: Multnomah, 1991); Tony Campolo and Gordon Aeschliman, *Everybody Wants to Change the World: Practical Ideas for Social Justice* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2006); Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crisis, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007); Brenda Salter McNeil, *A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism and Race* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008); Tri Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility to Environmental Stewardship* (Norcross: Ampelon Publishing, 2006); Chuck Smith Jr. and Whitlock Matt, *Frequently Avoided Questions: An Uncensored Dialogue on Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005).

social conscience of the liberal Social Gospel without sacrificing the evangelical orthodoxy of fundamentalism.⁵⁹ This trend is not usually a capitulation to the Social Gospel, but rather, an effort to find within their existing theologies resources for developing an evangelical social conscience.⁶⁰ These evangelicals realize that engaging in social transformation must be done without sacrificing the message of individual transformation.⁶¹ There are many approaches to how this might be accomplished, including the assessment of specific evangelical theologies, biblical hermeneutics, practices, and ethics. I will focus my thesis on one such approach, evaluating the beliefs and practices connected to evangelical doctrines of the eschatological kingdom. I believe, as I will demonstrate in the following section, that eschatology is an important key to renewing the evangelical social imperative.⁶²

Eschatological Key to Evangelical Theologies

Eschatology is a central preoccupation for North American Christianity.⁶³ As such, an eschatological preoccupation exerts a formative influence over the development of evangelical theologies. For instance, particular eschatological beliefs are the basis of the theology of separatism that I introduced in my comments on the Fundamentalist movement.⁶⁴ Likewise, eschatological beliefs are foundational for the neo-evangelical critique of this same theology of

59. Noll, *Scandal*, 238; Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 19–20; Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 138.

60. Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 19.

61. Richard J. Mouw, *Political Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 15–16.

62. Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 9.

63. Boyer, *When Time*, ix.

64. Marty, "Tensions," 181.

separatism.⁶⁵ It is critical to understand the role that eschatology plays in evangelical attitudes towards society in order to address adequately the problem of evangelical social engagement today. Within this section I will describe what these eschatological beliefs are and how they shape evangelicals' understanding of their relationship with society.

Eschatology

A popular definition of eschatology is the study of last things. The subjects of eschatology therefore include: “[h]eaven and hell, a final judgment, immortality and resurrection, and even reincarnation, purgatory, and the concept of a soul.”⁶⁶ However, eschatology as an area of theological study must also include “everything that is related to [the] end.”⁶⁷ This includes the influence that particular eschatological beliefs exert on the theological concerns of the living for life today.⁶⁸

Eschatological Narratives

The narrative form of eschatologies is the principle reason that eschatologies are so influential for evangelical theologies. There are a number of implications of formulating eschatology as narratives not the least of which are the formative influences such narratives have on an individual's self-identity, their understanding of history, and the relationship they expect to have with society.

Individuals, through eschatological narratives, are able to situate their own stories in relation to a larger story. Situating an individual's story into a larger narrative is a meaning

65. For example see Henry's critique of “apocalyptic entertainment” and its influence on popular evangelical attitudes toward society, Carl F. H. Henry, *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 86–87.

66. Hans Schwarz, “Eschatology,” in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, reprint, 1984 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 2:481.

67. Schwarz, “Eschatology,” 481.

68. Boyer, *When Time*, 3.

forming activity.⁶⁹ It is a way in which individuals makes sense of their lives.⁷⁰ These stories challenge and validate beliefs and practices which are formative for an individual.⁷¹ These narratives give individuals a sense of who they are in relation to the story they tell; that is, self-identity is shaped by how they relate themselves to the various individuals depicted in their stories.⁷² Additionally, always implicit in eschatological narratives is some sort of desirable outcome for an individual's life in relationship to the *eschaton*, that is the end of the story.⁷³ The expected end of the story informs the way adherents believe they should live today in order to achieve a desired end.

Eschatological narratives are employed as an interpretive framework for understanding history, and they allow adherents to order their experience of life.⁷⁴ The entire scope of history, from past to future, is mapped in an eschatological narrative. Eschatological narratives offer not only a prediction of the future, they also describe the time leading up to that predicted end. Historical events that seem to correspond to specific descriptions and predictions within the eschatological narrative are presented as evidence of an accurate interpretation of the narrative

69. Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality*, 136; James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 139.

70. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity*, 96.

71. Robert Cummings Neville, *On the Scope and Truth of Theology: Theology as Symbolic Engagement* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 140.

72. William A. Dyrness, "How Does the Bible Function in the Christian Life?" in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, ed. Robert K. Johnston (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 169.

73. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch, reprint, 1967 (New York: Harper, 1993), 154; Troy Bronsink, "The Art of Emergence: Being God's Handiwork," in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 62.

74. Boyer, *When Time*, xi; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 99–100; Paul Ricoeur, "The Narrative Function," *Semeia* 13 (1 January 1978): 193.

itself. Individuals situating their own stories in these eschatological narratives are able to feel that they are participating in something much larger than their own personal lives. Therefore, how an individual comes to understand their roles in society depends on the eschatological narratives they embrace.

Eschatological narratives can be formulated in ways that are either optimistic or pessimistic towards society. While the focus of eschatological narratives is the future, these narratives always include an orientation towards the present.⁷⁵ This orientation is dichotomized between hopefulness for the continual betterment of society and despair over religious tales of social decline.⁷⁶ While individuals may personally hold contradictory views of society, their eschatologies are never so ambiguous.⁷⁷ Alignment with a particular eschatological narrative influences the character of the relations an evangelical expects to have with society.⁷⁸ Socially optimistic eschatological narratives are often associated with constructive participation in society. Socially pessimistic eschatological narratives are associated with apathy towards social transformation and promote, at best, the provisional participation in society.

Through the adoption of socially pessimistic eschatological narratives the Fundamentalist movement was able to reshape the character of its social engagement. The larger social contexts in which the fundamentalists lived were understood to be hostile to faith and salvation. In its

75. Daniel Johnson, "Contrary Hopes: Evangelical Christianity and the Decline Narrative," in *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition Amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 32.

76. Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 36.

77. Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 37–38.

78. Martha Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 139; Boyer, *When Time*, 80. Himmelfarb demonstrates the capacity of eschatological narratives to shape communal identity and Boyer traces a strong connection between the character of apocalyptic narratives and the prevailing form of nationalism from the same historical moment.

extreme forms, social engagement was seen as sinful entanglement with the world.⁷⁹ Hence, any participation in society was fraught with hesitation and suspicion.⁸⁰ The apocalyptic form of these eschatological narratives communicated stories of a world under the judgment of God rather than a world in an unfolding narrative of redemption.

Apocalyptic Scenarios

Apocalyptic scenarios are the primary formulation of socially pessimistic eschatological narratives amongst evangelicals.⁸¹ The word *apocalypse* simply means “an unveiling of that which is hidden.”⁸² However, *apocalypse* takes on a whole other meaning in popular usage. It is used to articulate the notion that the world is heading towards a final goal in which history will come to a catastrophic end.⁸³ Drawn from an ancient genre of narrative writing, apocalyptic scenarios are often created in moments of crisis, such as historical moments when Israel faced exile or occupation. Although the crises which these narratives address lie in the distant past, evangelicals continue to retell them within their own contemporary communities, especially the apocalyptic narratives that are found in the Bible.

Apocalyptic narratives encompass the “the entire sweep of history as their subject” and are written to promote hope amongst the intended readers as a sort of “literature-of-the-

79. Michael L. Cromartie, “The Evangelical Kaleidoscope: A Survey of Recent Evangelical Political Engagement,” in *Christians and Politics Beyond the Culture Wars: An Agenda for Engagement*, ed. David P. Gushee (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 16.

80. Richard Mouw, following the neo-evangelical critique of Fundamentalism, informs us that talk about distrusting socio-political structures as a “necessary evil” of this sinful age destroys the ability to see socio-political structures as being a means of overcoming injustice or participating in God’s redemptive work. See *Political Evangelism*, 45.

81. Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square*, 45.

82. Boyer, *When Time*, 23.

83. Schwarz, “Eschatology,” 477.

oppressed.”⁸⁴ Prudence leads writers of apocalypses to use code language in these narratives so as not to raise the ire of the oppressors. The advantage of employing complex coding is that this form allows the meanings of such texts to be obscured from those readers who are not the intended audience. These codes consist of symbolic images meant to correspond to oppressive forces that are part of the lived experience of the original readers. However, this coding is later reinterpreted by the inheritors of the texts in an effort to anticipate the proximity of their own present historical moment to the predicted *eschaton*.⁸⁵

The complex coding of apocalypses demands interpretation. Yet, this interpretive exercise is most often done with insufficient knowledge of the original context to which the coding explicitly refers. Symbolic language meant to speak to the oppressed about the activities and predicted fate of their oppressors is transposed to whatever is considered to be oppressing the contemporary readers. For example, a classic, and unfortunate Protestant evangelical reading of Christian apocalypses places the Roman Catholic church in the role of the Antichrist, that is, the oppressor.⁸⁶ Such re-readings of apocalypses shape the attitudes that readers have toward others in their social contexts depending on what role the reading assigns to these other people. When society as a whole is cast in a negative apocalyptic role then pessimism towards society seems wholly justified. Because apocalyptic texts take on a wide range of meaning for later readers, a fact which is readily demonstrated by the diversity of eschatological narratives in use amongst the various Christian traditions, these readings need to be assessed in terms of their promotion of social optimism and social pessimism.

84. Boyer, *When Time*, 22, 24.

85. Paul Boyer comprehensively traces the efforts of evangelicals to match world events to eschatologically derived scenarios in *When Time*. Boyer describes the methodology used on pages 314-317. Stephen Orchard, “Evangelical Eschatology and the Missionary Awakening,” *The Journal of Religious History* 22, no. 2 (June 1998): 147; Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 44–45.

86. Orchard, “Missionary Awakening,” 147.

Apocalyptic narratives clearly differentiate between the people who obtain God's favour at the *eschaton* and those who do not. Apocalypses accomplish this differentiation through the prediction of a final judgement. A focus on final judgment was meant to instill a sense of hope in the original readers as they struggled with oppression. For Israel, final judgment meant that their current state of oppression would come to an end and that their oppressors would face the judgment of Israel's God.⁸⁷ For early Christians, the book of Revelation served a similar function, addressing the concerns of a marginalized sect of Judaism experiencing a time of intense religious persecution.⁸⁸ However, these same narratives are employed by later readers, who often read themselves into the role of the oppressed, even when they more rightfully belong socially with those who are oppressors.

Narratives of the Oppressed

For example, fundamentalist evangelicals read themselves into the role of the oppressed in their socially pessimistic readings of the apocalypses found in the Bible. Although the 1925 Scopes trial earned fundamentalist evangelicals ridicule in the press, we should be skeptical of the claim of their wide-spread social oppression.⁸⁹ Fundamentalist evangelicals saw this trial "as an opportunity to squelch the anti-Christian opposition to the faith."⁹⁰ The trial was initiated when school teacher John T. Scopes was accused of teaching evolution in the classroom. Even though the Fundamentalist movement's champion, William Jennings Bryan, won the case against the school teacher, Scopes' defense lawyer, Clarence Darrow, managed to make a fool of Bryan

87. Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 8.

88. Boyer, *When Time*, 36; Matthew Goff, "Apocalyptic Literature," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 33.

89. Marsden, *Understanding*, 60. Marsden also points out that there were, at that same time, new high profile and often bizarre Pentecostal movements which the press conflated with the Fundamentalists.

90. Mark A. Shibley, *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States: Mapping Cultural Change Since 1970* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 16.

in a highly publicized courtroom.⁹¹ In the wake of this trial, fundamentalist evangelicals began “withdrawing from culture, which they came to regard as Satan’s domain, to construct an alternative universe, an evangelical subculture.”⁹² Yet, this trial did not result in the kind of physical, social, or economic exile commensurate with the oppression experienced by any of the writers of the biblical apocalypses.⁹³

Regardless of how free from actual oppression fundamentalist evangelicals might be, the re-reading of the apocalyptic narratives of final judgment often generates anxiety regarding the readers’ own ultimate destination. By reading themselves into the role of the oppressed, later readers can resolve tensions between their social realities and how they believe they should relate to these social realities in a way that allows them to understand themselves as the ones that final judgment will vindicate. Such re-readings of apocalypses, as exemplified by post-Scopes trial fundamentalist readings of the apocalypses from the Bible, assured the fundamentalists that society fails to obtain God’s favour at the *eschaton*.

Apocalypse and History

Many modern readers of apocalyptic biblical texts work under the assumption that the Bible predicts, often in great detail, the major events of history that precede the *eschaton*.⁹⁴ History, when viewed through this apocalyptic lens, is understood as a linear movement through

91. Shibley, *Resurgent Evangelicalism*, 16–17; Noll, *American Evangelical*, 170–71; Marsden, *Understanding*, 60.

92. Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 49.

93. James Davidson Hunter even asserts that during the Great Depression of the 1930s the Fundamentalists evangelicals fared better, economically, than other religious groups. See *American Evangelicalism*, 39

94. Orchard, “Missionary Awakening,” 135. Guenther Haas contests the appropriateness of employing history to interpret apocalyptic texts or employing the combination of these texts and history to predict the future in “The Significance of Eschatology for Christian Ethics,” in *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 326.

time culminating in the end of history altogether.⁹⁵ Following this line of thinking, God's role in history is understood to be primarily as the rescuer of the oppressed from outside of history. Therefore, history itself is seen as a cipher that can be solved using an apocalyptic key which reveals how soon we should expect the *eschaton* to arrive.⁹⁶

Apocalypses emphasize the coming of a cataclysmic end over the importance of life lived in the here and now.⁹⁷ By making the *eschaton* the paramount concern, interpreters devalue social transformation projects that focus on structural or environmental amelioration.⁹⁸ With a belief that the world is heading towards destruction, building a better world seems to be a futile proposal. Apocalyptic narratives offer a bleak image of life here and now and do not offer any prospect of life getting better. Put bluntly, the *apocalypse* is often seen as the inevitable destruction of this planet and everything in it.⁹⁹ The pessimism that this view incites is extended to the realm of society. Society is vilified as a hardship to be endured until a future time when God will return to bring about the end. Society is predicted to decline continually until a future return of God in which a faithful few will escape the evils of this age.¹⁰⁰ As a result, the many

95. Boyer, *When Time*, 22.

96. Boyer, *When Time*, 127.

97. This emphasis on the coming *eschaton* is what Howard Snyder calls "The Future Kingdom Model" in "Models of the Kingdom: Sorting Out the Practical Meaning of God's Reign," *Transformation* 10, no. 1 (January 1993): 2.

98. Paul Boyer notes the current trend to incorporate environmental aspects into eschatological doomsday scenarios. Environmental destruction is simply seen as more evidence that the end is near. *When Time*, 336–37.

99. Boyer, *When Time*, 95.

100. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl, reprint, 1996 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 158–59; Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 69; John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 199.

present social crises are interpreted through a narrow set of negative apocalyptic expectations which can engender little concern for society or the planet.

Apocalyptic Pessimism

Through a pessimistic apocalyptic perspective, social crises can sometimes be understood as desirable. Social decline is even welcomed as an indication of and precondition for God's apocalyptic intervention.¹⁰¹ If, by happy chance, social issues line up with expectations derived from the apocalyptic narratives, then proponents of those narratives may encourage some form of social engagement but only as an effort to help speed along what is seen as an inevitable historical trajectory.¹⁰² There is no ameliorating motive behind such social engagement, rather such actions are entirely an effort to bring human history to an anticipated end.

A pessimist's view of society considers social decline as an indication of inevitable moral decay. Pessimistic interpreters of apocalyptic narratives use the idea of social decline to interpret shifting societal norms as the erosion of what they consider to be a proper moral grounding. Changes in social realities, such as broadened understandings of marriage or the availability of abortion, can be understood as harbingers of the coming *eschaton*. Many apocalyptic scenarios consider this trend of decline to be inevitable and so the proponents of these scenarios discount any form of religious imperative that would prompt them to contribute to the betterment of society. Social amelioration is simply beyond the ability of such apocalypticists to imagine, let alone imagine as a worthwhile project to undertake.¹⁰³ Embracing the notion of inevitable social

101. Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast: The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 11; Boyer, *When Time*, 90.

102. Haas, "The Significance of Eschatology," 326.

103. Robert Paul Doede and Paul Edward Hughes, "Wounded Vision and the Optics of Hope," in *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition Amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 171; Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 3; Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 11; David Ray Griffin, "Introduction: Postmodern Spirituality and Society," in *Spirituality and Society: Postmodern*

decline fosters pessimism towards society that manifests in an apathy towards the numerous challenges that confront society.¹⁰⁴

When proponents of an inevitable social decline encounter the great challenges of our day, they can also actively discourage participation in corresponding projects of social transformation. I have already discussed the motive of wanting to help history move towards its anticipated conclusion. However, discouragement of social amelioration is also fostered through deep suspicions that society will corrupt the moral life of the faithful, detrimentally affecting their salvation.¹⁰⁵ Entanglement in the affairs of society is seen as risky behaviour. This suspicion can extend to any form of action to promote social betterment, as such efforts are assumed to work against God's apocalyptic purposes and are, therefore, "at best misguided and at worst inspired by the devil."¹⁰⁶ Despite this there are some social issues to which neither apathy nor separation seem to be appropriate responses no matter how much the presence of these social issues validate the apocalypticists' social pessimism.

The areas of social amelioration that decline narrative proponents do engage in tend to be oriented towards personal morality.

Contemporary Evangelicalism has been widely accused of attending more closely to personal moral issues than social issues. Evangelicals, it is believed, care a great deal about abuses of alcohol, sex, gambling, cheating on income tax, and pornography, but have little concern about social issues relating to economic, domestic issues, foreign

Visions, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 7; Boyer, *When Time*, 92; Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 89.

104. As Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz insists, nothing short of outrage is an appropriate response to the insight that adopting a narrative of social decline promotes apathy in "Overcoming Apathy : The Church's Responsibilities in Face of the Threats to Human Survival," *Ecumenical Review* 27, no. 1 (Ja 1975): 53. Boyer, *When Time*, 92.

105. Michael Cromartie notes that political engagement is considered sinful by evangelicals who are fearful of the corrupting influence of society, see his introduction to Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square*, 10. See also Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 60; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Angus Noster*, reprint, 1972 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 154.

106. Boyer, *When Time*, 95.

affairs, social change, and social justice for minorities and the lower classes. When Evangelicals do address social issues, say their critics, they do so in an individualistic way, treating social ills as if they were personal ones.¹⁰⁷

The main reason personal moral issues provoke a more active response from conservative evangelicals is that they concern the ethos, or moral code, which is believed to be necessary for obtaining and maintaining personal salvation. Amongst the individuals motivated to engage actively and publicly with such 'moral issues' there is little effort to try to understand and address the social or structural dimensions of these issues.¹⁰⁸ Concern is not generated by the social issue itself, but rather, by the potential of the social issue to prevent individuals from appropriating salvation. In response to the various negative attitudes towards ameliorating social issues, the apocalypticists, amongst the conservative evangelicals, developed an eschatology of escape.

Eschatology of Escape

An eschatology of escape is constructed from the apocalyptic notion that the faithful few must preserve themselves from the evils of this present age in order to enjoy a favourable place in the next age. This futurist expectation anticipates God will rescue an elect from the coming *eschaton*. The role of the apocalypticist is to weather what they understand to be the present evil age.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the current social reality is seen largely as unimportant in light of the awaited spiritual reality.¹¹⁰ Political action, especially addressing the present social reality, is considered to be inconsequential and distinct from religious activity.¹¹¹ The exception is the belief that a

107. Hollinger, *Individualism*, 91.

108. Hollinger, *Individualism*, 132.

109. Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom*, 198.

110. Noll, *Scandal*, 32; Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 78; Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 74.

111. Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Countermove in a Decadent Culture* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1986), 116; Hollinger, *Individualism*, 132.

consequence of participation in society has the potential to corrupt the believer morally.

The focus of escapist eschatologies is the development of boundaries around a community to prevent the erosion of morals amongst its members. The supposedly lax morals of people outside of these socially bracketed communities are often perceived as a threat. In order to protect these communities from the feared influence of society, early twentieth century evangelicals gravitated towards escapist eschatologies to theologically support their separatism from society.¹¹²

Deeply held suspicions regarding the broader social context should not be taken to mean these apocalypticists never engage in social action. Certainly evangelical escapist eschatologies encourage a programme of actively rescuing people from the perceived evils of society. This evangelistic effort often directly confronts social policies which are perceived to hide the work of this mission of rescue.¹¹³ However, the problem with evangelistically motivated social engagement is that it is generated from a narrow range of social concerns. Evangelistic social engagement lacks the sophistication needed to actually constructively contribute to the betterment of society. Effective social amelioration requires an analysis of the systems and structures that need to be transformed in order to better society for all.¹¹⁴

Priority of Evangelism

This narrowing of the range of social concerns arises from the ulterior motives behind evangelistically driven social engagement. An example of a social concern for evangelicals is the issue of free speech. The loss of free speech potentially jeopardizes the evangelicals' ability to

112. Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 27–28; Marsden, *Understanding*, 39; McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future*, 30.

113. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, 65; Noll, *American Evangelical*, 190; Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square*, 46.

114. Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 205.

proclaim publicly the content of their gospel. Often this gospel message, or *evangel*, includes a definitive moral framework and a method by which salvation can be obtained.¹¹⁵ Even when socially pessimistic evangelicals engage with broader social issues, such as poverty, the motivation behind their action is improving public opinion about themselves and their evangelistic message.¹¹⁶ In neither case is there an actual sustained concern for the bettering of the social reality.

The prospect of losing the ability to evangelize within society leads to a form of social engagement that fails to reflect adequately on the social ills being addressed. Social amelioration is complex and to attend adequately to social transformation requires the development of carefully constructed long-term strategies. However, when the orienting narrative of a community idealizes the imminent destruction of this planet and everything on it, it makes embracing long-term strategies of social transformation difficult.¹¹⁷ For the proponents of escapist eschatologies, such long-term strategies are considered naive: merely efforts to patch up an already sinking ship. This socially pessimistic approach often defaults to maintaining the social *status quo* and hopes that the awaited end will come soon.

Apocalypticists consider the real task of their communities to be the creation of discrete social refuges. A life-boat metaphor aptly describes such communities. A life-boat cannot save a sinking vessel, but it can be used to rescue a few people.¹¹⁸ As individuals enter the life-boat community their attention is focused both on ensuring that others can and will also enter the life-

115. Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 33; Elisa Padilla, "A Just Emergency: Will Justice Become Central to the Emergent Conversation?" in *The Justice Project*, ed. Brian McLaren, Elisa Padilla, and Ashley Bunting Seeber (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 263.

116. Samuel and Sugden, "Theology of Development," 25; Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom*, 199.

117. Haas, "The Significance of Eschatology," 329.

118. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 30. In some Pentecostal versions of this story the divine intervention is seen as a coming revival, but the most pervasive imagining of this intervention is a rapture where the faithful are somehow transported to God.

boat and on maintaining their own position in that life-boat. Broader social contexts are devalued in light of the perceived importance of the tasks associated with preserving the life-boat character of the community. Metaphors, such as the image of a life-boat used to represent an evangelical community, are part of the stories which form the basis for popular theologies amongst evangelicals.¹¹⁹

Popular Theologies

Popular theologies are what I call those theologies which emerge organically from the conversations and reflections of a practicing religious community. Popular theologies are what James R. Cochrane calls incipient theologies. These theologies form “when ordinary believers, believers untrained in the formal canons or history of theological method, reflect upon their faith.”¹²⁰ Popular theologies are often informed by formal theologies. However, these theologies come into being regardless of the amount of formal theological training present in any particular group of practitioners. Popular theologies represent the interpretations that the practitioners make of their experiences, readings, conversations, and expectations. Because it is through implementing popular theologies that individuals and communities act within society, it is crucial that I articulate the relationships between popular theologies, eschatology, and evangelical social engagement.

An example of a popular theology can be found in the practice of healing prayer. There are similarities in how different traditions and communities offer prayers for the sick. However,

119. The origins of the lifeboat metaphor can be traced to the Dwight L. Moody’s famous late nineteenth century quote, “I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, “Moody, save all you can.”” James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 64; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 317.

120. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity*, 22. See also Jürgen Moltmann’s notion of “*the theology of the people*” from *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 5.

it is through conversations and personal reflection that the popular theology of healing prayer develops in a community. Individuals develop their theologies through the synthesis of an array of data that includes teachings on healing prayer from their tradition, established practices of praying for the sick that they have experienced or participated in, personal ideas about who gets to pray, as well as who and what can be prayed for, personal expectations on how prayer is answered (if at all), the exigency of the sick presenting themselves for healing prayer, and stories about healing prayer that are told within their community. The processing of this complex array of considerations largely happens unconsciously yet manifests visibly in how individuals within the community respond to the sick in their midst.¹²¹

Eschatological narratives are of primary importance in the conversations, readings, experiences and reflections that are constitutive for popular theologies.¹²² Eschatological stories contain the hopes and fears upon which the community continually reflects. Hence, it is the stories people share, within communities, that frame the character of each community's theological reflection.¹²³ In particular, popular theologies create an understanding of the expected role of God and the expected role of humanity. I will describe how expectations on God and humanity are shaped through a brief description of the most popular eschatological stories currently employed to develop the popular theologies of evangelical communities.

121. Cochrane draws our attention to the seriousness of this form of theological reflection by characterizing it as a struggle. Often the ideas and experience that contribute to the theological reflection do not neatly fit together and may even be at odds with one another. See *Circles of Dignity*, 23.

122. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, 19.

123. Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 45,47; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice of the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal About the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 73–74; Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 200.

Premillennialism

Premillennial narratives are the most common eschatological narratives used by contemporary evangelicals to develop their popular theologies. In its various forms, premillennialism anticipates a future millennium, that is, a thousand year reign of God. Despite the existence of both literal and figurative formulations of this expected reign, all forms of premillennialism understand this reign as, in some way, still belonging to the future. These futurist eschatologies anticipate that the reign of God is ‘not yet’ realized, as it still awaits the second coming of Christ.

Premillennialism rose in popularity amongst evangelicals in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century premillennial eschatologies seemed to present the strongest case against the overly realized postmillennial eschatologies of the liberal Social Gospel.¹²⁴ Contrary to premillennialism, postmillennialism “taught that Christ’s kingdom would grow out of the spiritual and moral progress of this age” and was employed by liberal evangelicals to foster the Social Gospel’s optimism towards society.¹²⁵ Conservative evangelicals were uncomfortable with the association that the Social Gospel made of God’s reign to humanitarian efforts at building a better society. These evangelicals saw the Social Gospel’s formulation of social transformation as the primary Christian mission to be an overemphasis of the ‘now’, or realized, aspect of God’s reign. Conservative evangelicals felt the need to contrast their eschatologies from the postmillennial eschatology that supported the liberal Social Gospel.¹²⁶ A socially pessimistic premillennialism offered an alternative to the more optimistic

124. Noll, *Scandal*, 24; Boyer, *When Time*, 80.

125. Marsden, *Understanding*, 39; Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 25 It should not be supposed that postmillennialism was always socially optimistic, it was not. However, the use of postmillennialism by proponents of the Social Gospel was decidedly optimistic towards society. See Boyer, *When Time*, 76, 83.

126. Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 74.

postmillennialism. As a result, conservative evangelicals in the early twentieth century flocked to premillennialism.¹²⁷ Even evangelicals from the reformed traditions, which were predominantly postmillennial, moved to premillennialism during this time.¹²⁸ Premillennialism offered conservative evangelicals an eschatological option that was not overly realized in its understanding of God's reign.

Dispensationalism

In the North American context at the turn of the twentieth century, most premillennialists adopted a dispensational form of premillennialism.¹²⁹ Dispensationalists divide history into discernible ages, called dispensations, each having its own characteristics. The present age is often characterized as a period of moral erosion culminating in a time of great tribulation which will immediately precede the coming millennial reign of God.¹³⁰ Even revivalistic versions of dispensationalism, which see this age leading up to a great move of God, possess an overarching idea that only God can make society better. God's chosen method of doing this will be to bring history to an abrupt end. In other words, dispensational premillennialists are particularly inclined to see social decline as a harbinger of the awaited moment of divine intervention that will mark their escape from society.¹³¹

Adoption of premillennial eschatologies, especially in their dispensational versions, shapes the popular theologies of twentieth century North American evangelicals. In these popular theologies God is expected to bring about an end to all existing socio-political realities. However,

127. Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 5.

128. Marsden, *Understanding*, 39.

129. D'Elia, *Place at the Table*, xxiii.

130. Versions of these scenarios vary greatly, but all have the common feature of a pessimistic outlook towards society and history. See Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 36–37.

131. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, 11.

this depiction describes God as having little or no interest in contemporary socio-political concerns.¹³² The narrative of a socially disinterested God also shapes how popular theologies view the role of humanity in history. Faced with an expectation of the immanent and abrupt judgment of God, these evangelicals emphasize the preparation of people for an impending manifestation of the God's wrath.¹³³ This preparation includes the fostering of theologies of separatism as well as eschatologies of escape. The net result of the socially pessimistic bias of these popular theologies is that social transformation is considered to be unimportant.¹³⁴

Overly futurist dispensational premillennialism is judged by scholars as being unable to inspire the optimism required to foster projects of social amelioration.¹³⁵ Social optimism is the product of 'hope'; hope that is reliant on the capacity to imagine a better society.¹³⁶ Social optimism not only hopes for social betterment, it actively works towards that goal. The impetus for participating in projects of social transformation needs to be rooted in a conviction that God

132. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 42; Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics: Some Basic Questions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 89.

133. It should be noted that post-cold war formulations of these narratives do seem to concede that those *left behind* can fight back against the wrath of God enacted upon the earth. Further, the narratives do positively describe the escape of the elect from all the struggles and challenges of this life which is meant to inspire religious conversion. All of these formulations fail to acknowledge any lasting value in social activism. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, 7.

134. Henry, *Christian Countermoves*, 116. It should not be supposed that such evangelicals had no answer to social sin. Unfortunately, those answers relied minimally on the direct action of individuals and most often only found positive resolution in a new heaven and earth. This fatalistic view is unable to generate any sense of responsibility for society, and therefore, as Daniel Johnson proposes, this view is unable to produce social hope. See "Contrary Hopes," 33.

135. Jonathan R. Baer, "American Dispensationalism's Perpetually Imminent End Times," *The Journal of Religion* 87, no. 2 (Ap 2007): 257; Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 73.

136. Doede and Hughes, "Wounded Vision," 171.

is already at work transforming society.¹³⁷ Unfortunately, social optimism is precisely the opposite of the more prevalent social pessimism inherent in dispensational premillennial eschatologies.

Socially pessimistic eschatologies may generate an otherworldly hope, but their so-called hope possesses little ability to effectively transform social reality. By otherworldly, I am referring to a view that understands God's activity as being primarily outside of or terminating history. In an otherworldly view, the sphere of God's activity in this present historical moment is restricted to the gathering, preparation and preservation of individuals for a future that does not include this world. Such a view does not entertain the idea that God might be actively at work transforming society. Therefore, an otherworldly view is unable to inspire its adherents to engage in works of social transformation for the sake of bettering this world for the future. The inability to effect social amelioration through socially pessimistic forms of premillennialism is well established by leading evangelical theologians.¹³⁸ Yet, it should not surprise us, as human participation in social transformation has never been the goal of these pessimistic eschatological narratives.

Popular Eschatologies and Social Engagement

In recent years a great deal of scrutiny has been brought to bear against the socially pessimistic forms of premillennialism that have dominated evangelical popular theologies. Baptist theologian Russell D. Moore writes extensively on an emerging consensus within contemporary evangelical theologies concerning an eschatology that supports constructive social engagement.¹³⁹ However, even where evangelicals are challenging their own socially pessimistic

137. Kenneth R. Melchin, *Living with Other People: An Introduction to Christian Ethics Based on Bernard Lonergan* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 97.

138. Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 35; Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 69; Mouw, *Political Evangelism*, 8; Pruitt, "Neo-Evangelical Realism," 64; Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 15; Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom*, 199.

139. Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 37; Russell D. Moore, "Till Every Foe is Vanquished: Emerging Sociopolitical Implications of Progressive Dispensational Eschatology," in *Looking*

eschatologies, the influence these bleak narratives continue to exert is not readily rectified. In this final section I will trace the relationship between current forms of socially pessimistic eschatology and Bebbington's four priorities of evangelicalism: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism. Through an examination of the relationship between eschatology and Bebbington's quadrilateral I will identify the abiding influence that socially pessimistic eschatological narratives assert over the character of the social engagement of North American evangelicals.

Biblicism

The Bible plays a very specific role in supporting the eschatologies of evangelicals. Most, if not all, evangelicals claim that their eschatological positions are grounded in their readings of the Bible, in particular their readings of its apocalyptic texts.¹⁴⁰ During the nineteenth and continuing through the twentieth century, many conservative North American evangelicals developed a pastoral concern over what appeared to be unfulfilled predictive prophecies within these apocalyptic texts.¹⁴¹ This pastoral concern is evidenced in the activity of evangelicals drawing connections between current world events and the biblical texts which are understood to be unfulfilled prophecies. Connecting current world events to prophecies enables evangelicals to

Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 344. See also Russell D. Moore, "What Hath Dallas to Do with Westminster? The Kingdom Concept in Contemporary Evangelical Theology," *Criswell Theological Review* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 35–49. Moore's tracking of this theological development amongst various evangelical traditions is a major contribution to evangelical eschatology so it is important to note his warning that more recent trends may be reversing the emerging theological consensus for evangelicals; see Russell D. Moore, "Leftward to Scofield: The Eclipse of the Kingdom in Post-Conservative Evangelical Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 3 (S 2004): 423–40.

140. Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square*, 20; Gerstner, "Theological Boundaries," 32.

141. Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 93.

insist that the Bible is not only a reliable text for today, but also, an authoritative guide for navigating their discomforts with the present moment in history.¹⁴²

The evangelical appeal to scripture as a reliable prophetic guide to world events depends on the evangelicals' ability to assert the authority and veracity of the Bible. It is the authority and veracity of scripture that is under challenge.¹⁴³ The ridicule of fundamentalism through the Scopes trial and the popularity of critical approaches to scripture in universities contributed to the evangelical discomfort with its larger social contexts. Evangelicals long for a restoration of what they believe was a historic prominence of the Christian scriptures in forming North American societal norms.¹⁴⁴ These evangelicals fear that a widespread erosion of confidence in the Bible has resulted from challenges over authenticity and inerrancy. It is telling that issues of biblical inerrancy were not even conceivable before the 1820s. The inerrancy debates only emerge as scholars, like

142. Tom Sine evokes an image of such apocalyptically oriented evangelicals busily matching up the chaotic events of recent history with end-times predictions in *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 18.

143. Bobby Hayes, "The Evangelical Doctrine of Inspiration and Inerrancy - Restated," in *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics: A Guide to the History and Practice of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000), 16.

144. Millennialists constitute one of the most acute forms of the desire for imposing a set of societal norms based upon a particular reading of the Bible. The influence of the growing public profile of such premillennialists in Canada is the subject of Marci McDonald's *The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2010) and Dennis Greunding's *Pulpit and Politics: Competing Religious Ideologies in Canadian Public Life* (Kingsley, 2011). Neither book is an adequate treatment of the subject, however, it is beyond the scope of this paper to delineate all the variations of premillennialism currently entertained by evangelicals. Restorationists anticipate an end times revival initiated by the construction of an almost theocratic nation state, but they do not always anticipate a complete destruction of this world. Restorationism is a complex phenomenon, full of conflicting views towards society. Restorationism is the driving force behind the original Christian homeschooling movement as well as many politically oriented lobby groups in North America. Doing justice to the intricacies of Restorationism could easily be the subject of an entire dissertation.

Princeton's Charles Hodge, begin to assess the influence of natural and social sciences on academic theology.¹⁴⁵

Fundamentalist evangelicals normalized the claims of biblical inerrancy turning them into the litmus test for conservative evangelicalism.¹⁴⁶ More than a third of the over ninety articles of *The Fundamentals* are directly related to discussing the veracity of the Bible, and the veracity of the Bible is never far from the concerns of the remaining articles. Fundamentalists continued the work of Princeton scholars such as Charles Hodge, Archibald A. Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield, in insisting that an inerrant Bible was key to establishing the Bible's authority.¹⁴⁷ Fundamentalists appealed to the authority of an inerrant Bible in constructing their critique of society.¹⁴⁸ By the end of World War II a fundamentalist view of biblical inerrancy became the dividing line between conservative and liberal evangelicals.¹⁴⁹

The inerrancy debates of the twentieth century focused on the problem of how the Bible was authoritative for both church and society. An authoritative Bible, according to Charles Hodge, must be understood as a storehouse of "truths which the theologian has to collect, authenticate, arrange, and exhibit in their internal relation to each other."¹⁵⁰ This view of scripture is echoed by the popular evangelical theologian Wayne A. Grudem who employs a

145. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 73.

146. Gabriel Fackre, "Biblical Inerrancy," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 70; Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 85.

147. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 79–81.

148. Wolfe, *Transformation*, 68.

149. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 74; Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester: Crossway, 1984), 51.

150. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, reprint, 1872 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005), 22, Online, [Http://www.ccel.org/ccel/hodge/theology1.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/hodge/theology1.html). See also D'Elia, *Place at the Table*, 25.

“jigsaw puzzle” approach to biblical interpretation.¹⁵¹ According to Grudem, one simply gathers all the biblical passages related to a topic and assembles and studies them in order to determine the correct biblical doctrine on that topic, much like solving a jigsaw puzzle.¹⁵² In Grudem’s approach “Biblical passages are treated as timeless and culture-free statements that can be assembled to yield a timeless and culture-free theology.”¹⁵³ Grudem’s system bases the Bible’s authority on a fundamentalist view of inerrancy “that does not permit a person to make a distinction between the human, fallible media of revelation and the divine, infallible truth Scripture [sic] contains.”¹⁵⁴

Alternative forms of biblical inerrancy that challenge the proposal of fundamentalist inerrancy have emerged amongst evangelicals.¹⁵⁵ While moderate forms of inerrancy continue to champion biblical authority as the bedrock of evangelical theology, they also manage to question the influence biblical authors and later redactors exert on the text.¹⁵⁶ Even though there are signs of evangelicals questioning the methodology of fundamentalist inerrancy, the legacy of these

151. Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 29 For Grudem Christian theology is properly understood as a process of biblical interpretation.

152. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 24; Alister E. McGrath, “Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 30.

153. McGrath, “Evangelical Theological Method,” 30.

154. Ramm, *After Fundamentalism*, 45.

155. In 1997 Fuller’s Robert K. Johnston edited a very helpful collection of articles *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options* describing many different conservative evangelical approaches to biblical interpretation.

156. Robert K. Johnston, “Introduction: Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Theology,” in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, ed. Robert K. Johnston (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 3. Modern evangelical approaches to biblical interpretation do not stop with questions of authorial intent, the interpretive function of the context of the Bible’s readers are also examined by many moderate inerrantists. See also Fackre, “Biblical Inerrancy,” 66.

inerrancy debates continues.¹⁵⁷ Making the narrow fundamentalist view of inerrancy the litmus test for conservative evangelicalism was necessary for supporting theologies of separation and by extension the evangelical abandonment of social amelioration.

Theologies of separation, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, were developed in response to the unease evangelicals felt with many of the changes occurring in their social contexts. Not only did this unease with social reality inspire a reassertion of the Bible's authority through the development of fundamentalist notions of inerrancy, this unease also paved the way for the popularity of 'prophecy belief' amongst evangelicals.¹⁵⁸ With a newfound respect for the timelessness of the Bible, inquisitive readers were encouraged to puzzle out what the cryptic apocalyptic texts might mean in light of current world events. Having a Bible that was believed to be "completely free from error of any kind" meant that current events, and by extension the social reality, must conform in some way to scripture. Fundamentalist inerrancy both supported and was supported by the socially pessimistic forms of premillennial eschatology.¹⁵⁹ These socially pessimistic forms of premillennial eschatology are foundational for evangelical theologies of separation.

Crucicentrism

For fundamentalists, the meaning and importance of the crucifixion is encompassed in assertions of Jesus vicariously dying for individuals in order to secure their salvation. An evangelical preoccupation with the personal soteriological dimension of the crucifixion predates

157. Fundamentalist inerrancy has reasserted itself recently as a key concern amongst those evangelicals who are fearful of the loss of the Bible's authority through emerging or younger evangelicals who embrace a postmodern critique. For example see R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 92.

158. Boyer, *When Time*, xi.

159. Robert K. Whalen, "Dispensationalism," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 135.

the fundamentalist movement. But with the fundamentalists' adoption of socially pessimistic premillennial eschatologies the cross becomes the means for individuals to be admitted into fundamentalist communities. The primary evangelistic activity of the fundamentalists is bringing individuals into their communities.

The combination of theologies of separation in concert with the conviction that the Bible's cryptic apocalyptic texts foretell an imminent catastrophic end effected the development of life-boat communities. Life-boat communities envision the purpose of their churches as being safe refuges from the corrupting influence of the declining social reality. The mission undertaken by life-boat communities is primarily one of rescuing people "from the sin and degradation of the culture."¹⁶⁰ In the following two sections I will examine some of the ways in which conservative evangelicals undertook a project of creating these refuges and of populating them with what they would consider to be social refugees, but first I will provide a brief examination of the eschatological soteriology that supported the life-boat project.

One aspect of the Social Gospel that conservative evangelicals found most troubling was its emphasis on God's immanence. As builders of the kingdom of God, proponents of the Social Gospel understood themselves as participating in God's present work in history. Moreover, building the kingdom was akin to expressing God's immanence in the world. "The social gospel is concerned about a progressive social incarnation of God."¹⁶¹ Although Rauschenbusch acknowledges that there is always a rightful tension between the historical immanence and the historical transcendence of God's reign, his project tends to resolve the tension towards the side of historical immanence.¹⁶² Resolving the theological tension in the direction of immanence

160. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 30.

161. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 148.

162. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 140–41, 165. The tension between divine immanence and divine transcendence constitutes a central concern for modern Western theology. In *Twentieth Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age*, Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olsen present an excellent overview of modern Western theology

simply follows the genesis of the Social Gospel movement as a theological response to a critique of overly transcendent theologies that Social Gospel proponents believed were unable to contribute to the betterment of society.¹⁶³ Transcendent theologies were accused of being, as the old saying goes, ‘too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good’.

Rauschenbusch’s critique of evangelical theology is that it emphasizes divine transcendence, the notion that God is primarily located outside of history. He charges that an overemphasis on transcendence is the result of a deficient theology of God’s reign. “When the doctrine of the Kingdom of God is lacking in theology; the salvation of the individual is seen in its relation to the Church and to the future of life, but not in its relation to the task of saving the social order.”¹⁶⁴ Neo-evangelicals, like Carl F. H. Henry, will echo Rauschenbusch’s concerns in their charge that fundamentalist evangelical theologies have not paid enough attention to a theology of God’s kingdom.¹⁶⁵ The reason fundamentalist theologians hesitate to talk of the kingdom of God has to do with the futurist orientation of dispensational eschatologies.¹⁶⁶

In the fundamentalist’s futurist eschatology, God, the transcendent other, will come in the historical future to take the faithful to another world or to destroy the present world, depending on the flavour of dispensationalism in question.¹⁶⁷ For fundamentalist evangelicals God is not

as a struggle to understand transcendence and immanence as they relate to God.

163. Grenz and Olsen, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 58.

164. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 137.

165. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 43.

166. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 42.

167. There seems to be an endless variety of end-time scenarios popular amongst dispensational premillennialists. Most would fall into general categories related to an anticipated period of tribulation or troubles. Detailing the endless varieties of such narratives is beyond the scope of this project, but for those interested, in *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent* biblical scholar George Eldon Ladd describes well the more popular scenarios and the exegetical issues that arise over how the Bible is used to support these various scenarios.

understood as being with or for this present world in any way. God is entirely other. God is otherworldly. Human destiny is otherworldly. This world will end. Transcendence, therefore, is where fundamentalists want to resolve the theological tension between divine immanence and transcendence.¹⁶⁸ Likewise, the kingdom of God is relegated to the ‘not yet’ of historical transcendence, and most often conflated with some version of an otherworldly heaven.¹⁶⁹ The emphasis on transcendence made by fundamentalist evangelicals has particular soteriological implications.

First, the transcendent God of futurist eschatologies is transcendent in person. The otherworldly God must be reached toward, in other words, there is an aspect of procuring salvation that must be initiated/enacted by the human person. Formulations of the gospel message for conservative evangelicals require certain efforts on the part of individuals in order to personally obtain God’s salvation. Gospel tracts, small pamphlets used as aids in communicating a group’s gospel message, convey popular theologies of salvation. A common tract illustration demonstrates the evangelical gospel formula by describing personal sin as a great chasm between God and humanity.¹⁷⁰ God has bridged the chasm, which separates humanity from God, with

168. This emphasis on transcendence is where the Fundamentalist movement is in disagreement with the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostals, on one hand, experienced the immanence of the transcendent God empowering them, often through ecstatic encounters, for service to God. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, were more often cessationists who believed that ecstatic encounters with God had ended in the previous dispensation, such encounters are unnecessary in this dispensation because the Bible is sufficient to guide and empower the Church. Although Pentecostals may be small ‘f’ fundamentalists, they were never part of the Fundamentalist movement. See Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal*, 207–08.

169. Snyder, “Models of the Kingdom,” 3; Noll, *Scandal*, 32; McLaren, *The Secret Message*, 78.

170. Tracts are an evangelistic tool employed by some evangelical groups as a means of succinctly communicating a gospel message, the illustration described here is sometimes called “the bridge illustration” because it depicts the cross as a bridge across an impassible chasm. Four of the seven best selling American tracts use the bridge illustration, the remainder present very similar analogies. These four include: The Navigators, *Bridge to Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1969); Bill Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* (San Bernardino:

Jesus' cross allowing salvation to be procured by individuals confessing that Jesus' death on the cross was ample substitution for the punishment they deserve on account of their own personal sin.¹⁷¹

Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self, (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives, to forgive our sins and to make us the kind of people He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of the will.¹⁷²

Usually the formula dictates the "act of the will" to be the repetition of some form of 'sinner's prayer' in which an individual assents to the message of Jesus' substitutionary atonement for their personal sin.¹⁷³ If such a prayer is effective, evangelicals believe that the individual who prayed this prayer is now one of "the kind of people" God wants him or her to be.¹⁷⁴ Usually this transformation is evidenced by the individual's adoption of the ethos of the group that presented the gospel message, an idea I will explore further in the next section.

Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1965); Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, *Steps to Peace with God* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, n.d.); North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Church, *Do You Know for Certain That You Have Eternal Life?* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, SBC, n.d.). David Lynn Bell, "Tracts to Christ: An Evaluation of American Gospel Tracts" (Kentucky: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 2.

171. Samuel R. Schutz, "The Truncated Gospel in Modern Evangelicalism: A Critique and Beginning Reconstruction," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 4 (2009): 299; Billy Graham, *Peace with God: Revised and Expanded*, reprint, 1953 (Waco: Word Publishing, 1989), 89–90.

172. Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, reprint, 1972 (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1986), 384.

173. Samuel R. Schutz identifies one of the earliest written proposals of this gospel formulation to be Austin Crouch's five-step plan in *The Plan of Salvation* (Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1924), see "Truncated Gospel," 292.

174. Sam Reimer, *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide: The Conservative Protestant Subculture in Canada and the United States* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 59.

A key problem with the formulaic conservative evangelical gospel is that such a view truncates evangelical crucicentrism to a single soteriology. By compressing the idea of salvation into a simple pragmatic presentation of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, evangelicals restrict God's redemptive work to humanity.¹⁷⁵ Substitutionary atonement is not concerned with social or environmental injustice, it is only concerned with the salvation of those people who hear and receive the gospel message. Though the "truncated gospel does resemble the biblical gospel it is not commensurate with the [biblical] gospel."¹⁷⁶ That is, the truncated gospel fails to exhaust the breadth of meaning of the term gospel as it is found within the Bible itself.¹⁷⁷ In the Bible Jesus' crucifixion has ramifications for more than just saving individuals from their personal sin. For example, the term gospel should be understood as being 'good news' for all of creation, not just for a few individuals who recite a simple prayer crafted in the early twentieth century.¹⁷⁸ By limiting the gospel to people the 'good news' is robbed of any implications it might have for environmentalism. Another example of how the truncated gospel narrows evangelical soteriology is that appropriating salvation in this manner is a conflation of what may be "the beginning of the faith journey with its entirety."¹⁷⁹ Too often, what follows in the life of

175. Schutz, "Truncated Gospel," 300; Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-Yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (El Cajon: Emergent YS, 2004), 110.

176. Schutz, "Truncated Gospel," 294.

177. Newton B. Fowler Jr., "The Many Voices Proclaiming: Considerations on Evangelism," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (April 1980): 35.

178. John 3:16, often employed within evangelical gospel formulas, actually uses the term *kosmos* to refer to the scope of God's enacted love. If the text were intended to refer only or even primarily to humanity then we would expect the word *oikoumenē* not *kosmos*. We may never know the author's actual intent, but I can insist that by using *kosmos* here a larger meaning for this text is made possible.

179. David P. Gushee, "Jesus and the Sinner's Prayer: What Jesus Says Doesn't Match

the individual who prays the ‘sinner’s prayer’, amounts to little more than adopting the ethos of the community in which he or she received the truncated gospel.¹⁸⁰

Secondly, the transcendent God of futurist eschatologies is also transcendent in history. The socially pessimistic eschatologies that came to dominate conservative evangelicalism in the early twentieth century generated amongst its adherents a sense of urgency. This urgency came from a conviction that history was coming to an imminent end, and therefore, people must appropriate salvation now.¹⁸¹ God who is outside of history will return to end history and bring the faithful into their eternal reward and relegate the remaining individuals to judgment and eternal separation. Life-boat communities understood their primary task as rescuing as many individuals as possible from the coming judgment.¹⁸² Spurred on by this eschatological urgency, conservative evangelicals set about gathering as many people as possible (conversionism) to populate the metaphorical ark they have been building (activism).

Conversionism

Many conservative evangelicals seem to cherish the image of Noah preaching to a world about to be destroyed by a great flood.¹⁸³ The idea of a lone herald of righteousness, desperately preaching to mocking crowds bears a greater resemblance to the fundamentalists’ understanding

What We Usually Say,” *Christianity Today* 51, no. 3 (March 2007): 72; Schutz, “Truncated Gospel,” 294; Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 130.

180. Donald G. Bloesch, “Evangelicalism,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 20.

181. Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 36.

182. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 30.

183. Usually attributed to 2 Peter 2:5 where Noah is called a herald of righteousness, but rarely excluded from the evangelical retelling of the flood narrative, complete with the common embellishment that Noah preached unsuccessfully for 120 years.

of their relationship to modern society than to anything to which the Bible attests.¹⁸⁴ After the debacle of the Scopes Trial, fundamentalists perpetuated the idea that society was antagonistic towards Christianity, even casting aspersions that society was bent on luring people away from the Christian faith.¹⁸⁵ The image of the preacher calling for the lost to come out of corrupted society represented one of the only legitimate social interactions conservative evangelicals believed they should have outside of their life-boat communities.

The gospel message, as the plan of salvation, became the main tool for populating ark like life-boat communities. In terms of convincing individuals of their need to be converted, the truncated gospel formula is an important innovation. This simple message can be communicated efficiently through a wide range of media.¹⁸⁶ The truncated gospel can be preached readily through everything from speeches on street corners to gospel themed movies.¹⁸⁷ This formulation of the gospel message is simple enough to be condensed into four easily communicated, and understood, propositions: 1) God loves you, 2) your sin separates you from God, 3) Jesus died to resolve this separation, and 4) you need to receive Jesus personally to obtain the salvation Jesus effected through his vicarious death on the cross.¹⁸⁸ Through the simplified gospel's focus on the

184. A story likely adopted from apocryphal sources as it seems to conflict with the absence of Noah preaching in flood narrative (Gen 6:9-8:22) and contradicts Jesus' own claim that the people of the earth "knew nothing until the flood came and took them all away." (Matt 24:39a NET) If there was a Noah who did preach verbally, he must not have been very loud. For an example of how Noah the herald has worked its way into evangelical theology see Wayne A. Grudem, "Christ Preaching Through Noah: 1 Peter 3:19–20 in the Light of Dominant Themes in Jewish Literature," *Trinity Journal* 7, no. 2 (1986): 3–31.

185. Graham, *Peace with God*, 158; Boyer, *When Time*, 135.

186. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 76.

187. The appropriateness of the various forms of packaging the truncated gospel is a matter of constant debate amongst evangelicals, see Ruth Moon, comp., "Are Tracts, Fliers, and Street Evangelism Effective Tools?" *Christianity Today* 55, no. 8 (1 August 2011): 14; Scott Lupo, "Media, Mass," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 295.

immediate situations of the potential converts, its propositions make an emotional appeal to individuals by claiming that accepting these propositions should alleviate any sense of guilt or shame they may currently possess. If the plan of salvation is accepted, then there is an expectation that the recipients of the gospel would detach themselves from their entanglements with society in order to participate almost exclusively in the life-boat community.¹⁸⁹

A selling point of the plan of salvation formulation of the gospel is the sense of urgency with which it is conveyed. Not only does this urgency emerge from the unpredictable quality of life; as it is rare for a person to know exactly when they will die, urgency also arises from the predictions of an imminent catastrophic end to the world.¹⁹⁰ The security that accepting the truncated gospel's propositions affords is a twofold certainty: if a convert dies he or she will go on to their eternal destination, usually some sort of heaven with God; and, if a convert lives to see the predicted return of Jesus, then they will also be delivered to some otherworldly reward. Because either event could happen at any moment, and both events are eschatologically charged, the recipient of the gospel is urged to accept the propositions or risk being left behind when the end happens, however it happens.¹⁹¹

188. This is adapted from the Bill Bright's "Four Spiritual Laws" tract, see McDowell, *Evidence*, 383–85.

189. Most tracts conclude with the exhortation that the recipient of the gospel should find themselves a 'good' church, by which is meant a conservative evangelical church, in which to become an active member, see McDowell, *Evidence*, 387 and Graham, *Peace with God*, 171–72. The one consistent exception to disentangling oneself from society is employment. Evangelicals recognize that the church depends on the giving of those who are gainfully employed if the church is to continue the work of spreading the truncated gospel. However, evangelicals who work outside of the church are often encouraged to be suspicious about their work environments. See also Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 64.

190. McDonald, *The Armageddon Factor*, 3.

191. Martin E. Marty, "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon," *Review & Expositor* 79, no. 1 (1982): 19; Graham, *Peace with God*, 213.

Moral urgency is sacrificed when socially pessimistic eschatologies are used to insist on the exigency of receiving the gospel message.¹⁹² The sense of urgency provoked by various pressing social crises is lost in the insistent need to attend to immediate personal concerns.¹⁹³ Responding to the gospel is responding to one's imminent demise rather than a call to participate with God in the betterment of society. For example, the practice of mapping current events to Bible prophecies lends credibility to the urgency of receiving the truncated gospel. But this practice creates a focus on eternal rewards and punishments that undermines the potential of evangelical faith to support concern for social amelioration. Even the propositional structure of the fundamentalists' gospel deliberately reduces conversion to the acceptance of a set of gospel propositions. Armed with these propositions, fundamentalists are able to be more concerned with having a convert accept their soteriology than with the urgent the need for social amelioration.

The reliance on a propositionally formulated gospel made it easy for evangelicals to judge the efficacy of their gospel presentations.¹⁹⁴ Gospel propositions are either true or false with no room for variance or degrees of difference. An easily judged schema, as seen in presentations of the truncated gospel, allows conservative evangelicals to enforce a dichotomous view of gospel reception: individuals are either in or out, saved or unsaved, one of 'us' or one of 'them'. The ease of assessing a simplified and polarized concern for personal salvation, as opposed to dealing with the complexities of modern social realities, has undermined the conservative evangelicals' capacity to value dealing with ambiguous fields of inquiry. Without a strong incentive to navigate ambiguity, conservative evangelicals often shy away from areas in their social milieu

192. George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 99; Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 60.

193. Hollinger, *Individualism*, 40.

194. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, reprint, 1984 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 33.

where conflicting views exist over what is right and what is wrong.¹⁹⁵ Yet, it is often the areas of moral ambiguity that require the most pressing work of social amelioration.

The potential of the convertive aspect of evangelical Christianity is lost when evangelicals fail to inspire the quality of social engagement that attempts to navigate the moral ambiguities which surround social injustices. Conversion is a fixture of evangelical Christian practice.¹⁹⁶ However, conversion, according to the truncated gospel, is conversion to the religious tradition from which the gospel message is communicated. Because conversion to a particular tradition is understood as the most important form of religious conversion for an individual, the convertive piety of evangelicalism is narrowed considerably.¹⁹⁷ Instead of seeing convertive piety as an invitation to continually encounter and be changed by God, a community focused on the truncated gospel instead takes up the task of maintaining the *status quo* of the initial conversion experience that brought the individual to the evangelical tradition.¹⁹⁸ Where further conversions are promoted, they most often amount to reassertions of the ethos into which the individual was initially converted.¹⁹⁹

A more robust understanding of convertive piety, such as a form of deliberate and ongoing conscientization, is eschewed in favour of forms of conversion that seem to have otherworldly ramifications. An expanded understanding of conversion is what social amelioration requires. A single convertive experience, no matter how profound, cannot bring

195. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes*, 146.

196. Noll, *American Evangelical*, 25; Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 65.

197. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 174; Reimer, *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide*, 43, 59.

198. Noll, *American Evangelical*, 47; Ramm, *After Fundamentalism*, 169.

199. Common to notions of renewal and revival amongst conservative evangelicals which ask the individuals to recommit to the ethos of the community, yet conveyed in the authoritative language of recommitting to God.

about the awareness of social crises required to effect social transformation.²⁰⁰ The oversimplification of the formulaic gospel has led to shallow notions of evangelical social engagement.²⁰¹

Activism

The construction of ark like life-boat communities is the most active form of conservative evangelical social engagement. The majority of evangelicals' time, energy, and money is used to build and support their ecclesial communities. Evangelical communities serve as launching bases for proselytization projects and media efforts designed to spread evangelical subcultures.²⁰² Life-boat communities provide safe refuges where evangelicals can simply wait out history. Commiserating over their discomfort with the larger social reality, conservative evangelicals construct and reinforce their popular theologies of social decline in order to encourage each other to remain faithful to the ethos to which they have been converted.

The notion of subculture is an important way of describing the consequences of the evangelical theologies of separation. The evangelical subculture exists within the larger social

200. Sider, *Good News*, 107; Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 73.

201. Presently there are many critiques of the truncated gospel emerging from within evangelicalism. *Christianity Today* collected nine different 250-300 word descriptions of the gospel from evangelical church and parachurch leaders and assembled them in a helpful article called "What's the Good News?: Nine Evangelical Leaders Define the Gospel," *Christianity Today* 44, no. 2 (7 February 2000): 46–51. Another noteworthy example of evangelical's rethinking the formulaic gospel is Robert E. Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Spire, 1994).

202. Reimer, *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide*, 6; Quentin J. Schultze, "Keeping the Faith: American Evangelicals and the Media," in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media: Perspectives on the Relationship Between American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*, ed. Quentin J. Schultze (Grand Rapids: Academia Books, 1990), 41.

reality and in many respects duplicates aspects of it albeit in ideologically sanctioned ways.²⁰³ For example, evangelicals who separated themselves from established universities and seminaries founded Bible colleges to take over the role of theological training.²⁰⁴ Bible colleges were expected to indoctrinate along confessional lines rather than encourage the unrestricted questioning that fueled the natural and social sciences so popular in existing liberal arts universities.²⁰⁵ Conservative evangelicals recreated, within their subcultures, as many of the common North American social structures as possible. Evangelicals created and produced radio shows, television shows, publishing houses, music of all genres, schools, social clubs, and more in order to create a shelter from the influence of the supposedly immoral world from which they await their rescue.²⁰⁶ Some of this social development is used to evangelistically communicate the gospel to those outside of the evangelical communities. However, the majority of these social structures targeted evangelicals so that they would not have to turn to non-evangelical sources for

203. Subcultures arise in response to a perceived inability of a group to express their ethos within a wider social context. See “Subculture,” in *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. George Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 518.

204. D’Elia, *Place at the Table*, xiv.

205. An interesting shift that is occurring today in Canada is the reinvention of traditional Bible colleges as liberal arts colleges. The model that evangelicals inherited of sending their children first to Bible College for a doctrinal formation before going to a liberal arts college to get a career formation is losing its appeal to younger students. However, many of the evangelical parents still want a confessional formation for their children, so colleges like Tyndale University College and Seminary (Toronto, ON) and Crandall University (Moncton, NB) were formed from Ontario Bible College and Atlantic Baptist College respectively. Students can now obtain a liberal arts education in a confessional setting. This shift in confessional education is not limited to evangelicals and was a major theme for a joint panel I organized and hosted for the Canadian Theological Society and the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association entitled: “Armageddon Factor and the Changing Role of Christianity in Canadian Politics”, Congress 2012, Waterloo, May 28, 2012.

206. Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 49; Randall Balmer: *On Evangelical Subculture*, Randall Balmer (2010), [Http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuTHeU2TyVY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuTHeU2TyVY); James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 29.

their social lives.

Conservative evangelicals do engage in political activism at times when they feel their evangelical subcultures are being interfered with. For example, the Religious New Right was born when, in 1976, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) revoked the tax exempt status of Bob Jones University due to its racially discriminate policies.²⁰⁷ Taking the case as far as the United States Supreme Court in 1982, and even with support from the Reagan administration, the IRS revocation was upheld.²⁰⁸ However, the Religious New Right continued to champion issues of personal morality, such as opposing legalized abortion and homosexuality, especially where the state rulings contradicted the conservative evangelical ethos.²⁰⁹ Hence, the previously politically apathetic fundamentalist evangelicals became a formidable voting bloc able to alter the landscape of American politics.²¹⁰

The focus of the social engagement that arises from the socially pessimistic decline narratives of conservative evangelicalism is creating and supporting evangelical subcultures that serve as a refuge from society. Certainly, conservative evangelicals do work for social change, but this work is always in service of the dual projects of building and populating their ark like life-boat communities. Any changes that conservative evangelicals work towards tend to focus on the preservation of the evangelical subculture's ethos as opposed to a genuine concern for

207. There exists a folklore about the Religious New Right movement being an evangelical response to *Roe vs. Wade* (1973) which resulted in the legalization of abortion in the United States. While opposition of abortion has been consistently championed by the Roman Catholic church, the legalization of abortion was initially heralded by conservative evangelical leaders as an appropriate state response to the thorny issue of the division "between personal morality and state regulation of individual behavior." Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 62–64. See also Ralph Reed, *Active Faith: How Christians Are Changing the Soul of American Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 105.

208. Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 65.

209. Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 70.

210. James L. Guth, "New Christian Right," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 338.

social amelioration.²¹¹ Thus the nature of the social engagement that is predominant amongst conservative evangelicals is narrowed in service to the life-boat community. It is this narrowed form of social engagement that the neo-evangelical movement will critique. Neo-evangelicals will specifically challenge the eschatological underpinnings of this narrowed evangelical social engagement which is indicative of the need to address eschatology when formulating a response to the problems with evangelical social engagement. I will take up the neo-evangelical critique of evangelical social engagement in the next chapter.

211. Phillip E. Hammond, "Evangelical Politics: Generalizations and Implications," *Review of Religious Research* 27, no. 2 (December 1985): 190.

CHAPTER 2

THE WITNESS OF THE NEO-EVANGELICALS

Following the Second World War, a number of prominent evangelicals began to express an unease with the Fundamentalist movement's abandonment of its social programmes.¹ The post-war critique of fundamentalism emerged most poignantly from within the movement itself. In the early twentieth century fundamentalism had become synonymous with conservative evangelicalism.² Fundamentalist evangelical theologians, like Carl F. H. Henry, put their energies into understanding and correcting "the cultural role of fundamentalism or evangelicalism."³ Henry's probing text, *Uneasy Conscience* (1947), exemplified the approach of his contemporaries not to attack fundamentalism so much as to suggest some needed corrective measures.⁴ The form of fundamentalism that Henry and his contemporaries experienced was

1. Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, reprint, 1947 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 2; Frank Emanuel, "An Incarnational Theology of the Emerging Church," unpublished Master's research paper (Ottawa: Saint Paul University, 2008), 10–11.

2. Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 16. Noll describes the persistent influence of the Fundamentalist movement on North American evangelicalism which was only strengthened by the 1925 Scopes Trial debacle.

3. George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 7. The term neo-evangelical does not emerge until the late 1950s. From the 1920s until the 1950s there is no real distinction between conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists, see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 3.

4. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 56; David Lee Weeks, "The Political Thought of Carl F. H. Henry," doctoral thesis (Loyola University of Chicago, 1991), 149.

unable to engage positively with society. Conservative evangelicals realized that the predominantly fundamentalist evangelicalism of their day would play no part in the post World War II reconstruction of American society. Through its self-protective project of separation from society, fundamentalism had become socially irrelevant. Therefore, Henry issued his *Uneasy Conscience* as a manifesto for evangelical reform. This was not to be yet another fundamentalist campaign to vilify people who disagreed with their ideologies.⁵ Rather, Henry identified the problems in fundamentalism as being specifically a set of beliefs and practices that contributed to its social irrelevance. Henry urged evangelicals to change their “world-resisting message” into a “world-changing message.”⁶ Social pessimism needs to be replaced with social concern. This chapter will explore how Henry believed that evangelicals should reclaim their social consciences and win back their historic role as key contributors in the shaping of society.

Henry’s critique was representative of a growing new evangelical voice in North American Christianity known as the neo-evangelical movement. As well as being one of the first books to tackle fundamentalist social pessimism, *Uneasy Conscience* set the stage for a renewal of evangelicalism as a whole. Neo-evangelicals became major players in evangelical thinking, by creating new institutions like Fuller Theological Seminary and launching new periodicals like *Christianity Today*. Henry was the first editor for *Christianity Today*, holding that position from 1956 to 1968. The periodical continues Henry’s legacy by attending to many of the same

5. John H. Gerstner, “The Theological Boundaries of Evangelical Faith,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 30. Noll recognizes this polemical tendency was less characteristic of Canadian evangelicals, although Reimer cautions us against discounting the influence that American evangelical culture has had on Canadian evangelicals. See Mark A. Noll, “Canadian Evangelicalism: A View from the United States,” in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George A. Rawlyk, McGill-Queen’s Studies in the History of Religion (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 4 and Sam Reimer, *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide: The Conservative Protestant Subculture in Canada and the United States* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 6.

6. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 19.

concerns that Henry expressed about conservative evangelicalism. It is important to recognize that neo-evangelicals are not attempting to eradicate evangelical fundamentalism. Rather, neo-evangelicals want to adjust fundamentalism's course back toward what they understood to be its original intentions. Specifically, neo-evangelicals are concerned about effective evangelical witness. Neo-evangelicals agree with the fundamentalist's desire that evangelical witness remain untainted by either cultural accommodation or by society's lack of appreciation for evangelical understandings of sin and grace. However, neo-evangelicals also acknowledge that social pessimism is responsible for eroding the fundamentalists' concerns for social amelioration.

Henry and other neo-evangelicals realize that addressing the socially pessimistic eschatologies that dominate fundamentalism is the key to renewing its social conscience. Henry called for fundamentalists to embrace eschatological study with a particular focus on the reign of God.⁷ More recently, Russell D. Moore situates *Uneasy Conscience* as an initial effort to address the disparity that Henry saw between the "Kingdom now" eschatologies of the liberal Social Gospel movement and the "Kingdom then" futurist eschatologies of the fundamentalists.⁸ "Until this matter could be theologically resolved, Henry believed, evangelical eschatology would remain kindling for the fires of a troubled social conscience."⁹ A renewed study of the reign of God is the necessary course correction that will enable fundamentalists, as conservative evangelicals, to engage with post-war society. But the form of fundamentalism that Henry experienced, shaped as it was by pessimistic eschatologies, was ill equipped to address the complexity of its larger social reality. Henry believed that by addressing the eschatological foundation of the Fundamentalist movement its evangelical witness would be improved.

7. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46.

8. Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 26.

9. Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 26.

I will begin by detailing Henry's critique of fundamentalist evangelical witness. This critique will address four main concerns found within Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*: lack of pragmatism, lack of doctrinal fidelity, social pessimism, and an inadequate eschatology. After outlining the influence these concerns have for evangelical witness, I will then focus my attention on Henry's proposed eschatological programme for restoring evangelical witness. To complete this chapter I will once again return to Bebbington's quadrilateral, addressing the implications of Henry's proposal for each of Bebbington's four evangelical characteristics: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism.

Evangelical Witness

As their name suggests, evangelicals have always been passionate about evangelism. Evangelism is envisioned in many different ways. Street preachers and door-to-door campaigners often see evangelism as confronting people with the propositions of their gospel message.¹⁰ Revivalists often rely on Christians to bring their friends and neighbours into emotionally charged environments where they can hear an evangelist.¹¹ Lifestyle and friendship evangelism strategies teach evangelicals systematic ways to share their gospel messages with family, friends and neighbours.¹² What is common about all evangelical understandings of evangelism is the

10. One of the most prominent popularizers of the confrontational approach today is television and internet personality Ray Comfort. See Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort, *The Way of the Master* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2004) and Ray Comfort, *Hell's Best Kept Secret: Expanded Edition with Study Guide*, reprint, 1989 (Bellflower, California: Whitaker House, 2004).

11. A contemporary example of the classic revivalist is Billy Graham. Evangelicals have been very adept at using modern communication strategies, from tent meetings to television, to convey their gospel messages.

12. Some examples include: Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker: Evangelism as a Way of Life* (Leicester, England: Inter-varsity Press, 1979); Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Spire, 1994); Nicky Gumbel, *The Alpha Course Leader's Guide* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries International, 1996), etc. These programmes justify their approaches by statistics that show the overwhelming majority of religious conversions occur through the influence of friends and family. When employment of

desire to communicate some form of a gospel message.¹³ The communication of this *evangel* is consistently the goal of the evangelical's witness.¹⁴

Witness is more than just hearing the gospel message itself.¹⁵ The idea of witness also captures the communication dynamics of the individual seeking to communicate their *evangel*. Witness includes the means of evangelical communication. The *evangel* can be communicated in ways that strongly confront peoples' religious commitments as well as in ways that gently invite people into the evangelical religion. Confrontational approaches to gospel communication include the classic 'turn or burn' message which presents individuals with the choice of either embracing salvation or spending eternity in hell.¹⁶ Invitational practices of presenting the gospel tend to use a soft-sell approach, allowing individuals to choose, often over time, the merits of

lifestyle evangelism approaches are resisted by evangelicals it is due to the concern for their adherents being influenced more than being influencers. Scott Bader-Saye notes that currently there is a shift in popular evangelicalism from confrontational approaches to more relational models of evangelism such as lifestyle evangelism in "Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 19. See also James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 88–89.

13. Quentin J. Schultze, "Keeping the Faith: American Evangelicals and the Media," in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media: Perspectives on the Relationship Between American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*, ed. Quentin J. Schultze (Grand Rapids: Academia Books, 1990), 25.

14. I presented my insights on the relationship between eschatology and evangelical witness at the *New Voices in Canadian Evangelical Theology* conference (McMaster University, October 20, 2012) as "Inaugurated-Enacted Eschatology and Witness." I am grateful for the feedback following my presentation.

15. The content of the gospel message is of great concern for evangelicals as well, however, delineating the various *evangel* forms is well beyond the scope of this thesis. For an articulation of the importance of *evangel* content for evangelicals see Samuel R. Schutz, "The Truncated Gospel in Modern Evangelicalism: A Critique and Beginning Reconstruction," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 4 (2009): 291 and John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), 36.

16. Comfort, *Hell's Best*, 32–33.

religious conversion.¹⁷ In both of these evangelistic strategies, and for the range of methods in between, the efficacy of the evangelism depends on the ability of the communicator. When the gospel communicator fails to connect with his or her target audience, for whatever reasons, evangelism breaks down.

The need for effective strategies for witnessing is an ongoing concern for evangelicals. Evangelical Christians understand evangelism to be “the key means of salvation” for all of humanity.¹⁸ Because of the importance placed on communicating their gospel messages, evangelicals possess a deep concern about the character and efficacy of their evangelistic practices. Henry is no exception. His concern over the effectiveness of evangelism is the driving motive behind *Uneasy Conscience*.

The central aspect of Henry’s concern for the effectiveness of evangelical evangelism is his claim that the lack of effort fundamentalists put into social amelioration harms their evangelical witness.¹⁹ Henry notes that fundamentalists are rightly disturbed by social evils, but too often they are unwilling to participate in “the elimination of such evils.”²⁰ Henry insists that unless evangelicals attend to their deficiencies with regard to social engagement he is “unsure that [they] shall get another hearing for the Gospel.”²¹ Henry feels that within their larger social

17. Brian D. McLaren, “Conversations,” *Missiology: An International Review* XXXIII, no. 3 (July 2005): 341; R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 58.

18. Daniel W. Draney, “Saved, The,” in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 436; John G. Stackhouse, “Evangelical Theology Should Be Evangelical,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 53.

19. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 2; Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian* (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 386. Although Henry acknowledged that the lack of unity amongst evangelicals was also a negative influence on witness, it is the lack of social conscience that he directly addresses in *Uneasy Conscience*. See Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 82.

20. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 3–4.

21. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xvii.

contexts the fundamentalists' apparent indifference to social betterment erodes their ability to communicate their gospel messages. In *Uneasy Conscience* Henry identifies several aspects of the fundamentalists' social indifference that undermine their evangelistic witness: 1) fundamentalists claim to have the answer to social evil but seem to offer no pragmatic solutions; 2) the generative purpose behind the Fundamentalist movement is to preserve the content of evangelical witness. Yet what good is content if no one is willing to listen?; 3) fundamentalists vilify the social programmes of others in their effort to maintain the particularities of the content of their gospel messages; and 4) manifestations of fundamentalist social indifference are grounded in eschatological pessimism. I will examine each of Henry's complaints in turn.

1. Lack of Pragmatism and Witness

Evangelism depends on pragmatism. Even though the truth claims of Christianity are presented as *a priori* to efficacy, it is only in assessing the actual results of applying these claims that one can judge their pragmatic agenda.²² Henry understands that the appeal to results as an indicator of what is pragmatically true is foundational in constructing a credible witness.²³ He asserts that the test of "negative pragmatism," namely that unless it works a thing cannot be true, applies to evangelicals' witness. The gospel messages of evangelicals are such that the salvation they offer to humanity is grandly presented as "the solution of [all] world problems."²⁴ Yet, despite claiming to have the answers, most fundamentalists are unable to explicate solutions to the most pressing needs of the world. The *evangelists* of the fundamentalists seem to lack any pragmatic agendas which could validate their truthfulness. With so many urgent social evils, it is

22. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 57.

23. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 56–57; Oz Lorentzen, "The Pragmatics of Spirit: A Centenary Celebration of Jame's Varieties," *Cross Currents* 53, no. 3 (2003): 337.

24. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xvii, 57.

hard to discern what is compelling about the fundamentalists' gospels, except maybe, as self-delusional escapes from their discomfort with reality.²⁵

Henry identified that, for fundamentalists, much of the problem of constructing a pragmatic program of social engagement results from the belief that secularism precludes any supernatural answers to social problems.²⁶ Secularism here means the alleged emptying of God, and other ultimate reality references, from the public life of the larger social reality.²⁷ Simply put, the activity of secularism that fundamentalists fear is the exclusion of Christianity from the public institutions of society. As fundamentalists accept the reality that secularism is now a normative aspect of post-war North American culture, they lament the resulting devaluation of references to the supernatural in public discourse.

Henry recognized that there are two sides to the problem of secularism. First, the fundamentalists, through their futurist biases, equate *supernatural* with *otherworldly*. Their pessimistic orientations towards the world generate little hope that God is actively transforming any social reality outside of their own Christian communities.²⁸ Rather than seeing “the potential for a just political order [as] one of the many gifts of God bestowed upon all humanity,” fundamentalists place their hope in an escape from a world they experience as hostile to their evangelical faith.²⁹ Therefore, fundamentalists do not expect the secular world to be anything but the arena of “a thoroughgoing naturalism.”³⁰

25. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 11.

26. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 18.

27. Charles Taylor describes the cultural and intellectual shifts that brought about the present secular reality where religious belief is no longer the expected norm for Westerners. This definition is the first understanding of secular he presents in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2007), 3–4.

28. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 11; Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 174.

29. Mark A. Noll, *Adding Cross to Crown: The Political Significance of Christ's Passion*

Henry shared the suspicion of naturalism with the fundamentalists. Naturalism represents a challenge to their understandings of divine revelation, which fittingly was the subject of much of Henry's later theological work.³¹ Naturalism is understood as the assertion that nature is the ultimate reality and leaves no room for supernatural revelation or an "eternal moral order."³² The naturalism that concerned Henry, and the fundamentalists, is one they believe "dilutes the living will and law of the living God into a mechanical law of nature."³³ Henry agreed with George E. Moore's naturalistic fallacy argument that ethical imperatives cannot be derived from empirical sciences like "mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, zoology, or [even] ... psychology."³⁴ Unlike the fundamentalists who simply retreat from secular society, Henry saw the activist aspect of evangelicalism as offering an alternative perspective to naturalism in public ethical discourse.³⁵ According to Henry evangelicals should speak and act in ameliorative ways in secular society as an expression of their evangelical witness.

(Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 17; Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 19; Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 30.

30. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 18; Howard A. Snyder, "Models of the Kingdom: Sorting Out the Practical Meaning of God's Reign," *Transformation* 10, no. 1 (January 1993): 3.

31. In particular see Henry's six volume magnum opus *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word Books, 1976–83).

32. Carl F. H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, reprint, 1946 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 21.

33. Carl F. H. Henry, *The God Who Stands and Stays: Part Two*, vol. 6 of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 424.

34. George E. Moore articulates his idea of "the naturalistic fallacy" in *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1903). The citation is from Vernon C. Grounds, "Naturalistic Ethics," in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 447. See also Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics: Some Basic Questions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 38.

35. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 68.

The second problem with secularism, that Henry identified, is that the secularizing tendency in the North American culture itself too readily equates the supernatural with superstitions or miracles.³⁶ Associating the supernatural exclusively with the miraculous is a way of disparaging supernatural beliefs. By deferring to naturalism, secular society judges supernaturalism as outdated and fanciful thinking.³⁷ Supernaturalism, when it is starkly contrasted with naturalism, loses its ability to participate in public discourse. Those who continue to hold supernatural views are seen as being merely superstitious by those championing naturalist views. The naturalist concern is often that supernaturalists naively want to apply fantasies to real world problems. The supernaturalist is often equally convinced of the naivety of the naturalists dismissal of the supernatural. Both the supernaturalists and the naturalists are left to assume that there is no legitimate space for a supernatural contribution to social betterment. Seeing no space for supernatural proposals for social amelioration leads to the fundamentalists' failure to develop adequate responses to social evil.³⁸

The fundamentalist refusal to embrace naturalism, believing it to be an abominable accretion of the modern age, is just as problematic as liberal efforts to recast Christianity as a purely naturalist religion.³⁹ Henry understood that it is precisely the supernatural resources from within their traditions that evangelicals need to integrate into their proposals for social engagement.⁴⁰ Henry saw the evangelical theologies of sin and redemptive grace as foundational

36. Raymond Moloney, "De Lubac and Lonergan on the Supernatural," *Theological Studies* 69, no. 3 (1 September 2008): 517.

37. This debate is not only common to evangelical theology, it has long inhabited the theological concerns across many Western Christian traditions. See Moloney, "De Lubac and Lonergan on the Supernatural" for a helpful description of this debate within the contemporary Roman Catholic theological context.

38. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 18.

39. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 18–19.

40. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 29.

to a pragmatic assessment of, and response to, human participation in social evil.⁴¹ Additionally, Henry recognized that the naturalists provided the necessary balance to counter the fundamentalists' tendency to reduce their theologies of sin and redemption to otherworldly proposals which can never be pragmatically assessed in an individual's lifetime.⁴² Simply believing one is saved from a future eternal damnation has little value for addressing present social evils.

Henry, and other neo-evangelicals, tackle the supernatural-natural debate in order to develop a theological underpinning for a proposal of evangelical social engagement. There is a realization that the secularizing devaluation of the supernatural needs to be overcome in a way that does not collapse into an otherworldly flight from reality or be reduced to a denatured religion that is unable to bring all of its theological resources to bear on the considerable social issues of its day.⁴³

The debate between the supernatural and the natural is also framed in terms of history. History here refers to the chronological account of the world and its peoples, what I call 'world history'.⁴⁴ Exclusively supernatural views usually understand God as acting primarily, if not entirely, outside of history. Overly naturalistic views see history entirely in terms of immanent reality; salvation is only available in and through world history. Both of these views take on

41. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 20.

42. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 8.

43. Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 122.

44. George Eldon Ladd also recognized the problem of history for evangelical theologies. In "Faith and History," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 6, no. 3 (1963): 86–91 he followed Martin Kahler's distinction of *Historie* and *Geschichte*. Where *Historie* is determinable through the science of historiography, but *Geschichte* is accessible only through faith. I will use the term 'world history' when I discuss *Historie*. However, evangelicals had a tendency to collapse both notions of history into a *Heilsgeschichte* or 'salvation history'. See Ladd, "Faith and History" for an introduction to the debate over history among evangelical theologies. I will take up a more robust discussion of the problem of history in chapter three.

utopic qualities, although they locate the anticipated utopia in the transcendent for the supernaturalist or the immanent for the naturalist. The supernaturalist dreams of a heaven ‘above’ while the naturalist dreams of a heaven on earth. Henry believed that this dichotomy is a false one and that evangelicalism needs an alternative to utopic thinking.⁴⁵ Henry wants an evangelicalism that views “the future with a sober optimism, grounded not only in the assurance of the ultimate triumph of righteousness, but also in the conviction that divine redemption can be a potent factor in any age.”⁴⁶ Henry’s God works “in history as well as above history.”⁴⁷ It is the work of God in history that provides an opportunity for the pragmatic evaluation of evangelical proposals for social engagement.

2. Fidelity and Witness

The Fundamentalist movement has always had a very clear purpose in its inception. As I explain in chapter one, conservative evangelicals feel marginalized from both the academic world and society. The goal of fundamentalism is to establish a clear definition of evangelical orthodoxy in order to ensure that the content of their witness will not be diminished. Henry felt that establishing the fundamentals of the faith was actually an important and helpful task.⁴⁸ However, Henry also voiced a strong concern that the efforts to preserve this evangelical orthodoxy leads fundamentalists away from the task of doctrinal fidelity.⁴⁹ Fundamentalists are distracted from their project of doctrinal conservation when they allow themselves to be embroiled in a culture war that some have called the fundamentalist-modernist crisis.⁵⁰ In

45. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 66; Henry, *Modern Mind*, 286.

46. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 67.

47. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 84.

48. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xviii.

49. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 80.

50. It is worth noting that in the Canadian context the fundamentalist-modernist crisis

explaining the parameters of this culture war I show how the fundamentalists fail to act on the very doctrines they seek to preserve. The social import of their doctrines is the real casualty in the fundamentalists' fight to argue for the truthfulness of those same doctrines. This failure to act undermines the ability to communicate effectively their gospel messages because the messages themselves, like their communicators, are deemed to be socially irrelevant.

Many commentators on the Fundamentalist movement, such as George Marsden, Mark Noll, Robert Linder, and others, identify the fundamentalist-modernist crisis as the primary preoccupation of fundamentalism from the time of the First World War until well into the 1980s.⁵¹ The aspect of the modern age that fundamentalists took the most umbrage with is the epistemological preference given to modern means of determining what is true and the assumption that these methods are “self-evidently superior to all pre-modern alternatives.”⁵² Most troubling for fundamentalists was the modernist's apparent “xenophobia toward past cultures.”⁵³ Fundamentalists championed what they believe to be historic understandings of the Christian religion.⁵⁴ Consequently, fundamentalists charged that modernist or liberal Christians

never took on the same character. There are notable Canadian evangelical opponents to modernist theologies, but it never took on “the deadly seriousness found in the United States.” See Noll, *American Evangelical*, 168.

51. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 56; Robert D. Linder, “The Resurgence of Evangelical Social Concern,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 194; Noll, *Scandal*, 110; Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 71; James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 5–6.

52. Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity... What?: Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 46.

53. Oden, *After Modernity*, 43.

54. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 56; Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 86.

propose a form of Christianity that is alien to the historic understandings that are championed by the fundamentalists. Irrespective of how faithful to historic Christianity any evangelical group might or might not be, it can be argued that they are all trying to express a faithfulness to the Christian religion as they understand it. As a result, both modernists and fundamentalists end up competing for the same goal — a “religious solution for the politico-economic and sociological context of modern life.”⁵⁵ However, for the fundamentalists, the epistemological issues overshadowed the development of a robust religious proposal for social engagement.⁵⁶

Fundamentalists were so concerned about preserving their identity that they retreated into a self-imposed social exile.⁵⁷ As previously noted, the Scopes trial brought about the devastating realization that fundamentalists were not going to be publicly vindicated in their opposition to modernism.⁵⁸ The Scopes trial proved to the fundamentalists that their voices will be actively opposed by society and, as a result, launched them into a determined program of separation from society at large.⁵⁹ As a protest of society, fundamentalists chose to withdraw from most of society’s social programmes thus ensuring their own continued social irrelevance.⁶⁰

In their opposition to modernity, the fundamentalists implemented a proof-oriented apologetics.⁶¹ Fundamentalist apologetics is surprisingly reliant on enlightenment epistemologies

55. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 83.

56. Jenell Williams Paris, “A Tradition of Justice: Snapshots of the Church Pursuing Justice Across the Major Periods of Church History,” in *The Justice Project*, ed. Brian McLaren, Elisa Padilla, and Ashley Bunting Seeber (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 54.

57. Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1986), 116.

58. Aaron K. Ketchell, “Liberalism,” in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 281.

59. Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey Into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 95; Noll, *Scandal*, 164.

60. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 28.

in the formulation of its claims concerning the veracity of its beliefs. The marriage of evangelicalism to enlightenment epistemologies takes shape in the eighteenth century as evangelicals seek to present a rational basis for their doctrinal commitments.⁶² For evangelicals the appeal, in particular, to the Scottish Enlightenment epistemology known as common sense realism is this epistemology's high commitment to objectivity and to the faculty of common sense.⁶³ Princeton theologian Charles Hodge extensively used common sense realism to support his "vast, polemical" theology.⁶⁴ Charles Hodge's theology provided the basis for the apologetic theologies of Archibald A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield.⁶⁵ This epistemological foundation shaped the theologies of early fundamentalists, like Warfield and R. A. Torrey,⁶⁶ and continues to have a

61. Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 15.

62. Noll, *Scandal*, 83; Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith," in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 47. Noll also cautions us to recognize that the intellectual history of North America differs considerably from that of continental Europe, see 84.

63. The Scottish Enlightenment is derived from the work of Sir Francis Bacon. Bacon's approach was inductive in that he believed "general laws could be inferred from observable facts." Scott Lupo, "Baconian Science," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 45; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, reprint, 1988 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 48–49. The classic example is that the proof of God's existence is inferred from our certainty that we exist and that our world exists. See Noll, *Scandal*, 93. The fundamentalist's loose appeal to Baconian common sense philosophy is contested by neo-evangelicals like Carl F. H. Henry.

64. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24, no. 3 (1955): 267.

65. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 112; Noll, *Scandal*, 103; Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christian Thought: The Fascinating Story of the Great Christian Thinkers and How They Helped Shape the World as We Know It Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 247. A good example of common sense realism being used apologetically can be read in Warfield's contribution to *The Fundamentals*, "The Deity of Christ," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 21–28.

lasting influence on North American evangelical theologies.⁶⁷ The fundamentalists' reliance on common sense realism is the reason that early exposure to the theory of evolution was not immediately repudiated by evangelical theologians and The Fundamentals contributors like Warfield and James Orr.⁶⁸ However, at the same time new epistemologies that contested common sense realism were gaining prominence in North America through various universities and liberal theologies. Fundamentalists remained committed to their use of the contested Scottish Enlightenment epistemology further contributing to their image as a socially irrelevant movement. Fundamentalist evangelicals refused to examine their beliefs in light of alternative epistemologies, instead they focused on attacking all epistemologies other than common sense realism. Henry claims that this epistemological commitment meant "Fundamentalists ... are usually more alert to what they oppose, than to what they propose."⁶⁹ The assumptions supporting this commitment are the assumed self-evident nature of fundamentalists' truth claims and the corresponding conviction that any epistemology that challenges this supposed self-evident nature is simply flawed.

When pressed to defend their truth claims, fundamentalists simply appeal to proofs which they claim that through common sense validate their beliefs. For example, the fact that injustice exists is considered irrefutable proof of the fundamentalist doctrine "that sin is real and not the product of fevered imaginations."⁷⁰ Proofs are the fundamentalists' means of interpreting their experience of the world within the purview of their doctrinal beliefs. The problem is that proof-oriented apologetics is not what was required to develop a strategy for social engagement. In fact,

66. Gerstner, "Theological Boundaries," 29; Noll, *Scandal*, 104.

67. Kantzer, "Unity and Diversity," 47; Ahlstrom, "Scottish Philosophy," 268.

68. Lupo, "Baconian Science," 45–46; Noll, *Scandal*, 189.

69. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 80.

70. Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 381.

the more that the fundamentalists' version of common sense realism was challenged, the more they felt marginalized from society. Meanwhile, fundamentalists were so busy creating an ideological ghetto to protect their beliefs that they rarely live out, within their larger social realities, the implications of those beliefs. The mistake fundamentalists made was to assume fidelity simply means having the right beliefs (orthodoxy) when fidelity equally means expressing a faithfulness to the enactment of those beliefs (orthopraxy).⁷¹ Witness has to account for what the individual embodies in order for it to be credible outside of an ideological ghetto.⁷²

After the Scopes trial, the fundamentalist-modernist crisis helped solidify a socially pessimistic eschatology for fundamentalists theologies.⁷³ Premillennial dispensationalism gained a notable surge in popularity precisely because it made sense of the opposition from society that conservative evangelicals felt whenever they asserted their fundamental beliefs.⁷⁴ Until the neo-evangelicals challenged the legitimacy of the resulting withdrawal from society — of which Henry represented an important initial voice — efforts to preserve evangelical orthodoxy overrode the fundamentalists' concern for orthopraxy.⁷⁵ More importantly for Henry, this effort to preserve orthodoxy overrode the fundamentalists' evangelical desire to have their messages heard. Instead of attempting to return from their self-imposed exile, fundamentalists let their pessimism reshape their beliefs to support their programmes of separation.

3. Social Pessimism and Witness

Henry's desire for an evangelical witness that will actually be listened to within the larger

71. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 30.

72. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 19.

73. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 26.

74. Noll, *Scandal*, 165.

75. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 60.

social context led him to critique the relationship between the fundamentalists' social pessimism and their ability to communicate their gospel messages outside of their immediate communities. In *Uneasy Conscience* Henry shared fundamentalist concerns over social engagement proposals that rule out supernatural redemption and grace.⁷⁶ The desire to maintain the particularity of the crucifixion for overcoming all forms of evil is an important distinctive quality of evangelical theologies. Somewhat reasonably, fundamentalist evangelicals are quite uncomfortable with social engagement proposals that do not begin with and sustain this particularity throughout. However, Henry identified three problematic ways that fundamentalists went about assessing and constructing their social engagement proposals. First, their social pessimism encouraged a suspicious attitude towards social engagement proposals that do not emerge from their own specific contexts. Second, when fundamentalists did construct social engagement proposals their myopic focus on the individuals' responses to the crucifixion blinded them to the depth and breadth of human and environmental need. Third, because society experienced fundamentalists as holding a pessimistic and narrowly focused set of concerns, their witness was diminished by the lack of concern it expresses for social betterment.

One of the most troubling aspects of fundamentalist social pessimism is its vilification of the larger social context. The programme of separatism is predicated on viewing the world as a hostile environment; "hostility the Fundamentalist refuses to minimize."⁷⁷ Ecological projects, for example, are often seen as having a hidden agenda of fostering a godless cosmology where personal sin is not a relevant concern.⁷⁸ Distrust of the larger social context is even extended to the work of non-fundamentalist Christian organizations. Henry reminded us of the

76. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 20.

77. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 14.

78. E. Raymond Grizzle, E. Paul Rothrock, and Christopher B. Barrett, "Evangelicals and Environmentalism: Past, Present, and Future," *Trinity Journal* 19, no. 1 (1998): 6. As noted in chapter one fundamentalists were disturbed by the potential they saw in the Social Gospel for devaluing of notions of individual sin and private religious conversion.

fundamentalists' "bitter criticism of, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and [of] the Federal Council of Churches (FCC)." ⁷⁹ For premillennial dispensationalist fundamentalists the WCC was harshly saddled with the end-time scenario role of "a satanic-Marxist conspiracy to form one church and one world under [an] Antichrist." ⁸⁰ The FCC earned the distrust of fundamentalists by actively opposing them through such luminaries as Harry Emerson Fosdick. ⁸¹ Fosdick's famous 1922 sermon, "Shall the fundamentalists win?," is identified as inciting the culture war aspect of the fundamentalist-modernist crisis. ⁸² Yet, it is the very organizations that fundamentalists so distrust that are most likely to be at the forefront of social amelioration projects. Fundamentalists are simply unable to cooperate with organizations or projects that they vilify. ⁸³

Too often fundamentalists assume that unless a social engagement proposal is developed within their own theological community, it cannot adequately value evangelical particularities. ⁸⁴ The concern fundamentalists have is that the actual social issue being addressed might divert attention from, and challenge the necessity of distinctly evangelical strategies, such as evangelization. For example, concern for the environment is perceived as less important than concern over individualistic salvation. Moreover, for the fundamentalists, being unable to adequately consider the impact of personal sinfulness reflects "a superficial view of reality." ⁸⁵ Hence, the fundamentalist feels justified in critiquing non-fundamentalist projects of social

79. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 3.

80. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 98.

81. Ketchell, "Liberalism," 281. The Federal Council of Churches, founded in 1908, was renamed the National Council of Churches in 1950.

82. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 14.

83. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 3.

84. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 14.

85. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 15.

engagement as possessing an insufficient social analysis. "Only an anthropology and a soteriology that insists upon man's [sic] sinful lostness and the ability of God to restore the responsive sinner is the adequate key to the door of Fundamentalist world betterment."⁸⁶

Yet, for fundamentalists, the hyper-emphasis on individualistic salvation prevents them from appreciating a wider range of social implications for the crucifixion. While the focus on individualistic notions of salvation supports a programme of rescuing people out of the world, it generates little concern for the situation of those people who are left behind in the world. When fundamentalists do enact projects of social engagement to address situations of social injustice, they feel a need to justify their involvement in worldly affairs by emphasizing the utility of their programmes as a means of furthering what they consider to be the more important activity of evangelization.⁸⁷ For instance, the singular emphasis on the soteriology of substitutionary atonement seems to demand that social analysis always begin with the individual. "[V]iewing social sin as a mere aggregate of personal sin is inadequate in expressing the real, though mysterious, human solidarity in sin."⁸⁸ The fundamentalists' myopia towards the particularity of private individual salvation results in their inattention to the social dimension of the urgent needs of our world.⁸⁹ The failure to give the social dimension of present world crises sufficient consideration leads to inadequate projects of social engagement.

86. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 15.

87. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, "Theology of Development: A Guide to the Debate," in *Evangelicals and Development: Toward a Theology of Social Change*, ed. Ronald J. Sider (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 25; Greg Russinger and Alex Field, eds., *Practitioners: Voices Within the Emerging Church* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2005), 108. An interesting trend in evangelical social engagement books is their inevitable "biblical justification" section(s) which usually amount to an extended proof-texting exercise attempting to justify why an evangelical should actually care about the issue(s) that the book seeks to engage.

88. Mark O'Keefe, *What Are They Saying About Social Sin?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 18.

89. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 5, 60.

Henry acknowledged that the problems of our world are complex and require robust solutions.⁹⁰ Present ecological concerns, for example, are such that they cannot be sufficiently addressed by human-engineered technological solutions.⁹¹ While the evangelical emphasis on personal religious conversion is a necessary component to evangelical projects of social amelioration, conversion alone is not sufficient. As I insist in chapter one, appropriating personal salvation is the beginning, not the entirety, of a life of faith.⁹² Henry did not specifically focus on the need for engaging secular social analysis. Instead, Henry pled for fundamentalists to recognize the resources within the theological idea of the crucifixion that were important to developing an evangelical response to current world crises.

The resources that Henry identified as part of evangelical crucicentrism include the following: a critique of non-evangelical methods of social engagement; a sober understanding of the human condition; an emphasis on God's redemptive work within history to which we are called to participate; and doctrinal enactment as the foundation for a social ethic. For Henry there was a need for evangelicals to evaluate how the last three identified resources are implemented in their social engagement proposals.⁹³ First, an adequate anthropology must account for human culpability in social evil.⁹⁴ According to Henry, this anthropology does not need to see humanity

90. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 74.

91. Ben Lowe, *Green Revolution: Coming Together to Care for Creation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 26; Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 89–90; Calvin B. DeWitt, "Eco-Crisis: Fact or Fiction?" *Christianity Today* 38, no. 4 (April 1994): 80; *Scientific Spin Doctors* (Films Media Group, 2000), [Http://digital.films.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?aid=14541&xtid=10914](http://digital.films.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?aid=14541&xtid=10914); Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 67; Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 67.

92. David P. Gushee, "Jesus and the Sinner's Prayer: What Jesus Says Doesn't Match What We Usually Say," *Christianity Today* 51, no. 3 (March 2007): 72; Stackhouse, "Evangelical Theology," 52.

93. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 20.

as primarily sinful — but rather as fallen “from primal perfection;” Henry believed that the seeds of betterment are still within humanity.⁹⁵ Second, an adequate theology of redemption insists that God is always at work in history addressing the results of humanity’s fall as well as calling for human participation in God’s redemptive works.⁹⁶ Thus, the “redemptive message has implications for all of life” and not just for the individual.⁹⁷ Third, Henry insisted that all of these emphases are already present in the doctrines of Christianity and are evidenced whenever Christian doctrinal beliefs lead to ameliorative action. Therefore, enacted Christian doctrines provide the foundation of a social ethic.⁹⁸ For Henry, these resources were indispensable to developing an adequate evangelical social programme.⁹⁹

The success of the witness of a religion relies on its social programme.¹⁰⁰ Henry was less than optimistic for the future of a fundamentalism that refused to make the changes he proposed.¹⁰¹ Already society was less than impressed by what it has experienced of the attitudes and actions of fundamentalists. “The average Fundamentalist’s indifference to social implications of his [sic] religious message has been so marked, however, that the non-evangelicals have sometimes classified him [sic] with the pessimist in his [sic] attitude toward world conditions.”¹⁰² The attitudes towards society that an expression of religion display through their

94. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 7,13,15,77.

95. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 66.

96. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xv,32,35.

97. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 65.

98. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 30,32,81.

99. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 16; Carl F. H. Henry, *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 65.

100. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 16.

101. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xv.

public witness inform the public's opinion of that expression of religion. For evangelicals, having a witness that society will consider worth hearing requires them to express a tangible concern for social amelioration.¹⁰³ Unfortunately, too many fundamentalists are not prepared to do the work required to determine what actually is ameliorative, let alone develop and enact a programme of social engagement based on what social betterment might require.

Fundamentalists should be encouraged that Henry insisted that they need to be firm in their evangelical commitments when working within secular contexts.¹⁰⁴ Constructing an effective witness does not mean adopting the prevailing cultural ethic.¹⁰⁵ However, Henry did insist that the evangelical is obligated to work alongside compatible projects of social amelioration. Henry puts it this way, “[w]e join with [society] in battle, seeking all the while more clearly to delineate the enemy, and more precisely to state the redemptive formula.”¹⁰⁶ Battle imagery was apt here because most fundamentalists consider themselves at war with the world outside the boundaries of their communities. Rather than fighting the more appropriate enemy — social evils — too often fundamentalists end up fighting against the very groups that they should be working alongside. Henry believed that society interprets the unwillingness of fundamentalists to cooperate with existing social programmes as an undesirable social pessimism.¹⁰⁷ Henry suggested that by choosing the wrong enemy to fight — the world outside their boundaries — fundamentalists diminished the effectiveness of their evangelical witness.

102. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 6.

103. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 74.

104. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 80–81.

105. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 81.

106. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 86.

107. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 6.

People outside of the fundamentalist communities are just not interested in hearing what the fundamentalists have to say.

4. Eschatology and Witness

A cornerstone of *Uneasy Conscience* is Henry's understanding of the role that the fundamentalists' eschatologies played in negatively shaping their commitment to social amelioration undermining the effectiveness of their evangelical witness.¹⁰⁸ In chapter one I explain the complex relationship between eschatological beliefs and social pessimism. While it is true that fundamentalists derived their social pessimism from their eschatological beliefs, it is also true that they allowed their social pessimism to shape these same beliefs. My assessment agrees with Henry's charge that fundamentalists experienced a reciprocal relationship between their eschatological expectations and their anxiety toward their larger social contexts.¹⁰⁹

Henry criticized fundamentalists for letting sensationalism over prophecy beliefs be more prominent than their social concern.¹¹⁰ Fundamentalists often view social issues through a set of end time scenarios which encourage the fundamentalists to engage only with those political movements that correspond to their particular interpretations of those scenarios. Fundamentalists support such political movements regardless of any consequences they may have for the people and groups involved. A prime example of how prophecy belief supports political commitments is the fundamentalists' uncritical support for the complicated Jewish occupation of Palestine.¹¹¹

108. Chapters two and four are distinctly about the eschatology of fundamentalists. The remainder of the eight chapters in *Uneasy Conscience* concern the witness of the fundamentalists and the role eschatology seems to play some role in most, if not all of them.

109. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 45.

110. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 44 In the introduction I introduced the term 'prophecy belief' to denote the popular belief in various end time scenario.

111. Christian Zionism is more concerned about the re-establishment of Israel so that apocalyptic scenarios can come to pass than about the actual welfare of the Jewish or Palestinian peoples. See Noll, *Scandal*, 167.

According to some interpretations of biblical prophecies, present-day Palestine will be the location of much expected eschatological drama.¹¹² Yet, in those scenarios Israel is understood to be required to possess the land that fundamentalists believe God has promised. Evidence of this is nowhere more acute than in the declarations that followed “Israel’s recapture of the Old City of Jerusalem on June 8, 1967, apparently confirming centuries of prophetic speculation.”¹¹³ In their support of Israel, many fundamentalists make no consideration for United Nations resolutions, the human toll of the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as unlawful land settlement practices.¹¹⁴

By focusing on decline narratives, socially pessimistic end time scenarios, fundamentalists turn eschatology into a theological support and justification for their disinterest in social amelioration. Henry intended to shift the focus from these sensationalized end time scenarios to the eschatological theme of the kingdom of God. Henry charged that fundamentalists failed to place a kingdom (eschatological) ethic at the heart of their beliefs and practices.¹¹⁵ Henry believed that the only way to restore the effectiveness of fundamentalist evangelical witness is to renovate their eschatological beliefs. Because Henry’s concerns were so central to both his project, as well as to my own, I will now discuss these concerns in detail.

112. John F. Walvoord, *The Nations in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 145–46; Russell D. Moore, “Till Every Foe is Vanquished: Emerging Sociopolitical Implications of Progressive Dispensational Eschatology,” in *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 353; Jonathan Kirsch, *A History of the End of the World: How the Most Controversial Book in the Bible Changed the Course of Western Civilization* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2006), 196–98.

113. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 1992), 188.

114. Boyer, *When Time*, 203, 206; Elizabeth Rachel Phillips, “Adopt a Settlement: Christian Zionists and the West Bank,” *Christian Century* 128, no. 26 (27 December 2011): 30.

115. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 48.

Carl Henry's Eschatological Concerns

Amongst fundamentalists, the increase in popularity of the socially pessimistic premillennial dispensationalism corresponds to the rise in their feelings of social marginalization.¹¹⁶ The attraction fundamentalists feel toward futurist eschatologies is rooted in their social pessimism. The idea that the world is degrading morally and physically into a chaos, that perhaps only God could hope to sort out, makes sense of how the fundamentalists' see their lives in the North American social context. Futurist premillennialism, however, is not without its fundamentalist critics. For example, B. B. Warfield expressed anxiety over the "far-reaching consequences" that millennialism had for evangelicals.¹¹⁷ However, Warfield's concern, which is common for evangelical critiques of eschatologies, had more to do with the negative effect millennialism could have on evangelism than it did with restoring an evangelical interest in social amelioration. Warfield's fears were realized when millennial eschatologies generated as much sensationalism as they did confusion when they took hold of the imaginations of fundamentalists in a way that diminished all other social concerns.¹¹⁸

At the time Henry shared his *Uneasy Conscience*, there was already a growing number of evangelicals who had lost their zeal for sensational end-time scenarios.¹¹⁹ Prophecy belief seems to ebb and flow all throughout the history of North American evangelicalism.¹²⁰ For example, the outbreak of World War I inspired a deluge of "books, articles, and pamphlets [that] speculated

116. Boyer, *When Time*, 93.

117. Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Gospel and the Second Coming," in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 1, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), 1:349.

118. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 45.

119. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 44.

120. Paul Boyer presents a very concise exploration of prophecy belief trends in *When Time*.

about the war's meaning and likely outcome in the light of prophecy."¹²¹ But after World War II, disillusionment came as "dogmatic predictions, such as that concerning a revived Roman empire," failed to come to pass as prophesied.¹²² Henry pointed to the emergence of a "more conservative type of premillennialism" that focuses on the grand themes of eschatology, such as kingdom proclamation, the second coming of Christ, resurrection, and judgment, and that has less interest in the intricacies of hypothetical end-time scenarios.¹²³ It is in this return to the grand themes of eschatology, especially to the study of God's reign, that Henry located hope for restoring the evangelical social conscience.¹²⁴

Henry wrote *Uneasy Conscience* at a time of renewed interest in the kingdom of God tradition of theology in North America. Biblical scholars, both European and North American, led the expedition into this theological tradition of acknowledging Jesus' message as thoroughly eschatological.¹²⁵ Henry echoed this awareness of the centrality of the theme of God's reign when he claimed that "[t]o delete [Jesus'] kingdom references, parabolic and nonparabolic, would be to excise most of His words. The concept "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven" is heard repeatedly from His lips, and it colors all of His works."¹²⁶ Henry was convinced that the

121. Boyer, *When Time*, 101.

122. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 44.

123. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 45 A simple Google image search of the phrase "end times charts" will reveal a vast array of confusing, yet, elaborate charts mapping biblical passages to actual historic and predicted future events. It is not hard to see why critics of dispensationalism accuse it of being a form of gnosticism or the sharing of esoteric knowledge amongst an elite elect group of people. The esoteric nature of the various end times scenarios reinforced the fundamentalists' separatist agenda; fundamentalists did not expect anyone else to understand the special knowledge they possessed.

124. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46.

125. Darrell L. Bock, "The Kingdom of God in New Testament Theology," in *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 28.

126. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46–47. Henry will later join forces with American

kingdom theme is the most important aspect of eschatology, with everything else being secondary.¹²⁷ Yet, within fundamentalism there is a deeply held apprehension over talk of the kingdom.¹²⁸

Fundamentalist Understanding of the Kingdom

The fundamentalists' apprehension over employing the theological language of kingdom is grounded in the relationship they assume that the kingdom has with history. By adopting dispensationalism, fundamentalists inherited a postponement theory of the kingdom where the kingdom is delayed or postponed until a future time. They believe that the kingdom will certainly come in the future, but it will never be something that can be forced or manufactured before the end of history.¹²⁹ The idea that the kingdom is reducible to a human project is what concerned the fundamentalists most about the eschatologies of liberal theologies. The fundamentalists' unease with conflating God's kingdom and human politics is expressed through a marked hesitation over employing the kingdom theme.¹³⁰ Though fundamentalists do believe that one day the kingdom will overcome all of the evil in the world, it is equally clear to them that this will not happen due to any effort or action of human initiative.¹³¹ Henry agreed with the fundamentalists' critique that the Social Gospel's use of kingdom imagery was merely a "liberal confidence in a new social order of human making only."¹³² However, Henry also felt that

biblical scholar George Eldon Ladd to contest both dispensational premillennialism and covenantal amillennialism, see Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 22.

127. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46.

128. Henry mentions that a fundamentalist writer friend even tried to dissuade him from taking up the notion of Kingdom in his book, see Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46.

129. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 42.

130. There is also a fear of revolution that is evident even in Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*, 50. See also Henry, *The God Who Stands and Stays: Part Two*, 418.

131. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 42–43.

fundamentalists went too far in their reaction to the Social Gospel. In adopting a postponement theory, fundamentalists emptied their understandings of the kingdom of all socio-political import.

As fundamentalists observed their own social marginalization, the growing secularism of society, and two world wars, they grew increasingly convinced that their postponement theory of the kingdom is the correct one.¹³³ Fundamentalists attribute their experience of a decline in their social relevance to the deferment of God's kingdom. As a response, fundamentalists are encouraged to focus on what they consider to be a more germane eschatological theme - mapping end time scenarios to historical events. As a result, fundamentalists are more apt to declare the end is coming soon rather than that the kingdom is near.

The fundamentalists' kingdom is also exclusively a supernatural kingdom. If the kingdom is present anywhere in history it is in the private salvation of individuals. Therefore, the kingdom for the fundamentalists is not one that usually invites human participation in God's redemptive purposes.¹³⁴ The fundamentalist simply does not anticipate God redeeming anything of this world, with the obvious exception of the elect people who will be rescued by God to some destination outside of this world.¹³⁵ For these fundamentalists the evil in this world will only be overcome when God cosmically wipes out and completely rebuilds this world at the end. This

132. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 43.

133. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 42.

134. It is helpful to understand that Henry is commenting on his experience as an insider to the Fundamentalist movement. He notes that these attitudes about the kingdom and about social responsibility are deviations from the early fundamentalists like J. Gresham Machen and James Orr. The fact that there are no clear interlocutors, other than general references to Fundamentalist preachers and Fundamentalist groups, speaks of the loss of intellectual spokespersons within fundamentalism.

135. Randall Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism: From Revivalism to Politics and Beyond* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 34.

otherworldly, or supernatural, understanding of the kingdom distinctly shapes the expected relationships between fundamentalists and the world in which they live.

According to Henry, the net result of adopting the fundamentalist apprehensive attitudes toward the theme of the kingdom is that conservative evangelicals are “trained enlightened spectators, rather than empowered ambassadors.”¹³⁶ The social role of the fundamentalist is not as an agent of change in society, but as an observer watching for signs that this world is ending and occasionally attempting to convince others to join them in their vigil. Because Henry judged this approach as inadequate, he was looking for a better way for evangelicals to understand the kingdom of God. Henry wanted to restore the kingdom theme to prominence in evangelical discourse. Hence, both Henry’s and my own project take this renewed focus on the kingdom as an essential building block for a evangelical theology of social engagement.

Historic Premillennialism

Henry was hesitant about entering into the debates over various eschatological proposals.¹³⁷ However, Henry did express a clear affinity towards non-dispensational premillennialism. This form of millennialism is often referred to as historic premillennialism.¹³⁸ Claiming that his position was ‘historic’ demonstrates that Henry did not see himself as building a new kingdom theology or theory of God’s reign.¹³⁹ Rather, Henry attempted to highlight a movement within conservative evangelicalism that is re-examining dispensational eschatology by drawing on forms of premillennialism from the mid to late 1800s, from before dispensationalism

136. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 44–45.

137. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46.

138. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46. The label ‘historic premillennialism’ is used in relationship to George Eldon Ladd’s work on eschatology, see George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 31; Derek Morpheu, *Breakthrough: Discovering the Kingdom* (Cape Town: Vineyard International Publishing, 1991), 256ff.

139. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 47.

captured the conservative evangelical imagination.¹⁴⁰ Henry did not take this opportunity to challenge prevailing dispensational notions of rapture or tribulation as did other proponents of historic premillennialism, such as George Eldon Ladd.¹⁴¹ Henry focused his energy on proposing a third way between the overly immanent kingdom of the liberal Social Gospel movement and the overly transcendent kingdom of dispensationalist fundamentalism. Henry's understanding of the kingdom was that it is not a choice between being transcendent or immanent, but that the kingdom of God is at the same time both transcendent and immanent.¹⁴²

The Immanent Kingdom

Immanence is requisite to ensuring that the theme of the kingdom has implications for life in the present.¹⁴³ The meaning of the kingdom of God is not exhausted by a futurist kingdom. The kingdom is not just an awaited heaven.¹⁴⁴ Henry understood the kingdom to be an actualized leavening force in the world.¹⁴⁵ As a leavening force, the kingdom is socially, as well as

140. Henry mentions the influence of biblical commentators Henry Alford (1810-1871) and Richard Chenevix Trench (1807-1886), who were shaping evangelical thinking in the 1940s. It is notable that *Uneasy Conscience* began as a series of lectures (1946) at Gordon College where at that same time George Eldon Ladd was part of the teaching staff. See John A. D'Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24; Henry, *Confessions*, 112.

141. The debates between historic premillennialist George Eldon Ladd and dispensational premillennialist John Walvoord serve as an indication of how foundational and deeply held eschatology was for evangelical theologians. See D'Elia, *Place at the Table*, 78ff.

142. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 48–49 One of the ideas of a historic premillennialism is that pre-modern Christianity by and large held that the kingdom was both now and not yet at the same time. George Eldon Ladd traces premillennial themes throughout early Christian writings as support for his own historic premillennialism. See *Blessed Hope*, 19–31. However, such a view is not without its critics, see Richard Bauckham, “The Millennium,” in *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 129–31.

143. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 50.

144. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 48.

personally, transformative. Therefore, the immanence of the kingdom, the actual experience and enactment of God's reign, is what makes the kingdom relevant to our world today.¹⁴⁶

One way the immanent kingdom is enacted is as an ethical force in this world.¹⁴⁷ To the evangelical the immanent kingdom is:

an interim world program. That contemporary program in evangelicalism is (1) predicated upon an all-inclusive redemptive context for its assault upon global ills; (2) involves total opposition to all moral evils, whether societal or personal; (3) offers not only a higher ethical standard than any other system of thought, but provides also in Christ a dynamic to lift humanity to its highest level of moral achievement.¹⁴⁸

The location of the ethical kingdom is the world in which humanity lives. Additionally, the kingdom ethic opposes all forms of evil in this world.¹⁴⁹ The kingdom is not simply an ethical utopia that humanity strives towards; it is rather the invitation to participate in the ongoing activity of God in redeeming the whole world that humanity inhabits.¹⁵⁰

Another way in which the immanent kingdom is enacted is in its relationship to political structures. Henry claimed that the kingdom of God is compatible with earthly governments, but is never identifiable with them.¹⁵¹ While political structures can and do cooperate with kingdom purposes, Henry wanted to acknowledge that all governments, no matter how well-intentioned, can also actively oppose the kingdom.¹⁵² There is the hope that eventually all governments will

145. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 50.

146. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 48.

147. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xxi.

148. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 75.

149. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 40.

150. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 52, 77, 84; Henry, *Aspects*, 96.

151. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 49.

152. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 50.

be subsumed into the reign of God, but until that time, the relationship between the kingdom and this world's political structures is always provisional in nature.¹⁵³

Three goals are accomplished by acknowledging the provisional nature of the relationship between the kingdom itself and the efforts to actualize that kingdom. First, a provisional understanding of the kingdom furnishes evangelicals with the responsibility to develop a critique of every action that claims to be an implementation of the kingdom. For example, politically the kingdom operates as a set of social ideals by which existing governments and social structures must be measured.¹⁵⁴ Second, this provisional understanding of the kingdom encourages evangelicals to work towards emulating their kingdom ideals within the social structures in which they live.¹⁵⁵ Henry insisted that these ideals call for action on the part of the evangelical; “[t]he redemptive message has implications for all of life.”¹⁵⁶ Finally, by excluding the possibility of conflating human social structures with God's kingdom, the immanent kingdom is able to retain its simultaneous transcendence.

The Transcendent Kingdom

Transcendence is required to maintain the supernatural aspect of God's reign. By insisting that the kingdom is supernatural in nature, Henry was able to maintain the distinction between socio-political structures and God's expressed reign.¹⁵⁷ One consistent aversion for Henry, and other neo-evangelicals, is the political idea of revolution.¹⁵⁸ Henry defined revolution as a change

153. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 49.

154. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 31–32.

155. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 65–66.

156. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 65, 78, 86.

157. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 49–50.

158. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 22, 50; Henry, *The God Who Stands and Stays: Part Two*, 418; Henry, *Aspects*, 17; Hollinger, *Individualism*, 109.

in social patterns brought about through violence and compulsion.¹⁵⁹ Henry believed that even though revolution seeks to address “social evils,” revolution also “denies the existence of divinely given structures in history and society.”¹⁶⁰ Henry was concerned that revolution destroys our understanding and appreciation of the past.¹⁶¹ As an alternative to revolution Henry presented the notion of “supernatural regeneration.”¹⁶²

“Supernatural regeneration,” for Henry, was “transformation by supernatural impulse in individual lives whereby the social scene is renewed through divine spiritual motivation.”¹⁶³ The primary arena for addressing all sin must include the supernatural transformation of the individual. While Henry also suggested a range of other solutions to social ills, such as reforming or revaluing aspects of society, the “supernatural regeneration” of individuals and, by extension, social structures is something he was not willing to relinquish.¹⁶⁴ For Henry only a programme that includes “supernatural regeneration” is capable of dealing with the supernatural aspect of sin, including social sin.

Henry’s insistence on a supernatural aspect of sin is rooted in his soteriology. Henry’s soteriology proposed that sinfulness cannot be remedied by human effort; sin is not simply overcome through adjusting one’s behaviour. Sin is not a matter of violating a personal ethic, but rather, for Henry, sin means the violation of a divine or transcendent ethic. Therefore, Henry’s response to the question of sin requires the vicarious atonement which he believed is only

159. Henry, *Aspects*, 17.

160. Henry, *Aspects*, 17.

161. Henry, *Aspects*, 17.

162. Henry, *Aspects*, 18, 26.

163. Henry, *Aspects*, 17.

164. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 13; Henry, *Aspects*, 107.

provided for by the crucifixion of Christ.¹⁶⁵ Atonement is here understood to be “the divine answer to a problem incapable of solution on the merely human level.”¹⁶⁶

Sin, for Henry, is deviation from the redemptive purposes of God.

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.¹⁶⁷

Sin is the failure to participate with God’s regenerative grace in one’s own life as well as in society.

Carl Henry’s Understanding of the Kingdom

Henry’s conviction is that social amelioration rests on participation with God’s redemptive activity. For Henry, God desires for Christians to participate in building a just and good society. This participation ensures that precluding the association of the kingdom with human-initiated social concerns does not eliminate the evangelicals’ social responsibility. The transcendent “kingdom is a present spiritual reality in the lives of believers, being coextensive with the outworked redemptive and regenerative plan of God.”¹⁶⁸ The transcendent kingdom is the immanent kingdom; it is the immanent kingdom in which humanity must participate as part of God’s own redemptive and regenerative plan.¹⁶⁹ The immanent kingdom does not exhaust the meaning of the kingdom any more than the transcendent kingdom did. For Henry, the immanent kingdom is simultaneously the transcendent kingdom in that it is only God that can initiate and ultimately accomplish the redemptive unravelling of the effects of social and personal sin.

165. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 20.

166. Leon Morris, “Atonement,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 44.

167. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 66.

168. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 52.

169. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 31.

Henry used the phrases “here” and “not here” to describe the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God’s kingdom.¹⁷⁰ The immanent kingdom that is experienced as here is the incompletely realized transcendent kingdom which is still yet to come. This simultaneous aspect of the kingdom is quite often expressed in the language of the now and the not yet of God’s enacted reign.¹⁷¹ The reality of the experience of the kingdom is in the form of a tension between the here and not here, the now and the not yet. In Henry’s proposal, maintaining that tension - refusing to resolve this tension as either a completely future kingdom or a completely present kingdom - was essential for creating a socially responsible kingdom theology.

Neo-evangelicals and Social Engagement

Henry is representative of the neo-evangelical renewal of social conscience within evangelical fundamentalism. *Uneasy Conscience* contains the essential ingredients and considerations for future neo-evangelical projects of social engagement. Central to the neo-evangelical project of renewing the evangelical social conscience is the need for a clear and effective evangelical witness. After the Second World War, neo-evangelicals realized that a divisive, pessimistic fundamentalism will not be given a public hearing. In order to continue communicating their gospel messages, neo-evangelicals believed they would also have to be active participants in society. Responding to Henry’s critique of fundamentalism, neo-evangelicals set out to determine what it means to be both evangelical and socially responsible. I will now turn to how this neo-evangelical theological proposal was worked out in relation to Bebbington’s four distinct characteristics of evangelicalism: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism.¹⁷²

170. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 48.

171. This formulation of now and not yet is most often credited to Geerhardus Vos in *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (New York: American Tract Society, 1903).

172. David William Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain : History from the*

Biblicism

In the first chapter I discuss how fundamentalists use the Bible to support their socially pessimistic eschatologies. Henry's proposal was for fundamentalists to find a way to read the biblical texts so that they eschew their social pessimism without losing their distinct claims about the authority of scripture. Can fundamentalists read scripture in a way that renews their social conscience? Henry believed that if they can, then this might very well be the necessary path back to the social relevance that will allow them to communicate their gospel messages.¹⁷³ What Henry proposed is a considerable challenge because it involves rethinking some of the most deeply held beliefs for the fundamentalists, including how they view their relationship to the Bible.

The fundamentalist-modernist crisis cast a spotlight on the question of how evangelicals read the Bible.¹⁷⁴ As I articulate in the first chapter, fundamentalism is a conservative evangelical response to the challenge that liberal theologies made to the way these evangelicals read their sacred texts. The core generative idea of fundamentalism was the articulation and defense of an evangelical orthodoxy.¹⁷⁵ However, the modernists' remonstrance of the fundamentalists' biblical hermeneutic brought the basis of their evangelical orthodoxy under scrutiny. As far as the fundamentalists were concerned, the modernist act of questioning evangelical orthodoxy, including the hermeneutic lens by which it is established, was tantamount to challenging the Bible's authority.

1730s to 1980s (London: Routledge, 1988), 2–3.

173. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xvii.

174. James Aho, "Anti-Modernism," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 18.

175. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xviii.

The fundamentalists' hermeneutic is at odds with advances in biblical scholarship, such as historical and literary criticism. The more fundamentalists separate from society and the rest of evangelicalism the less apt they are to engage with modern biblical scholarship.¹⁷⁶ In turn, modern biblical scholarship shows little appreciation for the fundamentalists' biblical hermeneutics.¹⁷⁷ Recognizing that the fundamentalists' approach to scripture is also foundational to their claim of possessing a rational faith, it is easy to understand the angst they feel when their methods are critiqued. Yet, neo-evangelicals realize that in order to maintain a claim of rationality, evangelicals must engage with modern biblical scholarship, even if they are to do so in a highly critical manner.

Henry also embraced the fundamentalists' concern for developing a rational biblical basis for evangelical beliefs and practices. Henry affirmed the Bible as "the central authority for theology."¹⁷⁸ "For him, true theology could be based only on the self-disclosure of God found in the Bible, for here alone can true knowledge of God be found."¹⁷⁹ Therefore, Henry did not stray far from his fundamentalist roots on the authoritative role of scripture.¹⁸⁰ While Henry adhered to the fundamentalist view of biblical inerrancy, his unwillingness to make inerrancy the test of

176. A notable exception was that during World War II a lack of students led to relaxed entrance requirements in universities which opened their doors to fundamentalists like Henry, Ladd, and others who are responsible for reshaping evangelicalism after the war. See D'Elia, *Place at the Table*, 21–23.

177. David H. Wenkel provides an excellent survey of the critique of fundamentalist hermeneutics in "A Survey of Evangelical Criticisms of Protestant Fundamentalist Hermeneutics: 1994–2004," *Didaskalia* 19, no. 1 (1 December 2008): 113–26.

178. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 105; Carl F. H. Henry, *The God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part Three*, vol. 4 of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word Books, 1979), 41.

179. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 104; Carl F. H. Henry, *The God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part Two*, vol. 3 of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word Books, 1979), 19.

180. Henry, *Christian Countermoves*, 119.

evangelical fidelity gives us a glimpse of the shift for fundamentalist hermeneutics that he was attempting.¹⁸¹

Henry denied that the Bible itself teaches its own inerrancy, but affirms that inerrancy is the logical conclusion of believing that the Bible's inspiration and authority are established by God.¹⁸² This view calls for a shift in the way fundamentalists insist on biblical fidelity. Fundamentalists tend to canonize their interpretations by extending the claim of inerrancy to their particular readings of scripture in addition to the scriptural texts. Henry readily identified an example of this practice with the apprehension fundamentalists had concerning the theme of the kingdom of God, despite this theme being prevalent in the New Testament itself.¹⁸³ By canonizing an almost exclusively futurist understanding of the kingdom, fundamentalists neglect the immanent themes of the kingdom that are also presented in the biblical texts. Some of the blame for this oversight must be placed on the fundamentalists' complete rejection of the liberal Social Gospel with its focus on an immanent kingdom.¹⁸⁴ Regardless of how this futurist presupposition came to be, it prevents fundamentalists from developing a theology of God's kingdom that has any kind of social relevance. By canonizing their interpretation of a futurist kingdom, fundamentalists imbue their hermeneutic with an ideological blinder towards the immanent kingdom.

In *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry proposed that the biblical theme of God's kingdom should be an area of study that fundamentalists be open to exploring anew. "The task of the Bible student is to discover (1) in what sense [the kingdom] is here; (2) in what sense it is to be further realized before the advent of Christ; and (3) in what sense it will be fully realized at the advent of

181. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 106–07.

182. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 107–08.

183. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46.

184. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 22.

Christ.”¹⁸⁵ Rather than remaining entrenched in their socially pessimistic, overly transcendent, notions of the kingdom, fundamentalists need to consider the ways in which the kingdom is immanent and the ways in which it is to be enacted. Henry was confident that such a re-examination would highlight both what God is doing in the world (supernatural) and how evangelicals can participate with God in that work (pragmatic).¹⁸⁶

As I show in this chapter, Henry called for a fidelity to the Bible that goes beyond a militant dogmatism. Henry revealed an obvious commitment to the fundamentals of an evangelical orthodoxy. But rather than being locked into an aggressive apologetic for his particular interpretation of scripture, Henry adhered to the fundamentals which gave him the courage to trust that God will reveal the truths he needs to know and to put into practice. For example, when Henry affirmed inerrancy, he did not start with the presupposition of inerrancy; he started with the presupposition that scripture is divinely inspired and authoritative. Regardless of how adequate Henry’s presupposition may or may not be, he demonstrated a willingness to adjust his theological starting points. It is exactly this kind of presuppositional shift that Henry called fundamentalists to entertain in their study of the kingdom of God.

The other reason Henry wanted fundamentalists to be more flexible in their theological starting points is that *what* fundamentalists believe is more important to them than *how* they live out those beliefs. For example, to fundamentalists, what they believe to be true about the nature of scripture (presuppositions) is of greater concern than the actual content of scripture. Fundamentalist interpretations of scripture are conditioned by their expectations about the nature of scripture. Additionally these expectations are reflected in what they choose to see and not see in their readings of scripture, as Henry’s critique about Fundamentalist avoidance of the kingdom motif suggests.¹⁸⁷ Another instance of this problem is found in evangelical apologetics such as

185. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 48.

186. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xvii.

187. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 46.

Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* books which deny conflicting biblical accounts for the sake of a presumed historical character of the biblical texts.¹⁸⁸ The need for the texts to be historically accurate is more important than determining why there might be conflicting accounts in the Bible. Mark Noll also recognized this problem when he insisted that biblical study must include some critical engagement with its own presuppositions if it is going to be a reasonable basis for faith and practice.¹⁸⁹ The fundamentalists' inability to challenge their own presuppositions represents an emphasis on evangelical orthodoxy (having the right beliefs) that overrides the need for an intelligent and critical application of beliefs (orthopraxy). Evangelical orthodoxy must also have a corresponding evangelical orthopraxy.

In their zeal for evangelical orthodoxy, fundamentalists have developed apologetic arguments for their theological presuppositions. For example fundamentalists develop arguments to defend their presuppositions about the nature of scripture, such as the claim of its inerrancy. Yet, relying on arguments for the rationality or veracity of evangelical truth claims has proven to be an ineffective witnessing tool.¹⁹⁰ At its worst, fundamentalist apologetics is akin to confrontational evangelism that forces its hearers to accept or reject a proposition, like the inerrancy of scripture, with no room for debate.¹⁹¹ Most often, apologetics are presented with a

188. McDowell's books are still popular amongst conservative evangelicals and demonstrate that zeal for apologetic proofs short circuits the desire for historical accuracy. See *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, reprint, 1972 (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1986) and *More Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, reprint, 1975 (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1981).

189. Noll, *Scandal*, 167.

190. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 36; Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 59.

191. An interesting contemporary example of this is seen in the Ken Ham and Bill Nye debate over young earth creationism. Ken Ham is at least honest when he says that nothing is going to dissuade him from his belief that the Bible is true. For Ham that means literally true in a way that the Genesis story trumps natural science. See

set of unverifiable consequences, such as eternal damnation, for those who would reject the proposition. Such approaches to evangelism amount to little more than coercion and any converts from these approaches gain little regard for the world in which they live. In this approach converts are convinced by a set of propositions which they then need to champion to validate their own experience of conversion. Because these propositions often rely on vilifying life in this world, they do not encourage work that would concretely better this world. Instead these new converts simply continue the process of trying to make more converts using the same arguments that they found compelling. Consequently this form of evangelical apologetics alone, even at its best, lacks the social relevance that is required to be an effective means of witnessing.¹⁹²

Henry challenged evangelicals to produce evidence that the fundamentalists' beliefs actually do present pragmatic solutions to real world problems. Henry was not challenging the content of fundamentalist beliefs so much as the inability of fundamentalists to apply those beliefs to a programme of social amelioration.¹⁹³ The problem, for Henry, is not the beliefs so much as the socially pessimistic presuppositions that frame those beliefs. For example, the presupposition that this world is beyond redemption produces a soteriology of escape from this world and not a soteriology of hope for this world. A soteriology of escape does retain essential aspects of evangelical orthodoxy, but fails to encourage projects of world betterment. Henry believed that orthopraxy is essential to an effective biblical fidelity and the way for evangelicals to reclaim their public witness.

Crucicentrism

Like Henry, fundamentalists insist on a crucicentric soteriology.¹⁹⁴ The crucifixion of

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/2014/02/what-would-change-your-mind-exact-quotes-from-hammonye.html> (Accessed Feb. 6, 2014).

192. Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 23.

193. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 56.

Christ on the cross is understood as God's definitive answer to sin. Sin is anything that is destructive to human relationships, including human relationships with God. Personal sin is an individual's failure to live according to the morality of the community. Henry, like other fundamentalists, sees social sin as the aggregate of personal sins.¹⁹⁵ Because personal sins are central to Henry's understanding of social sin, he believed that all responses to sin must begin with addressing the sinfulness of the individual.

Because sin is destructive to relationships, especially an individual's relationship with God, fundamentalists believe that only God can overcome the damage sin does to the human-divine relationship. This supernatural aspect of sin is why Henry insisted that no programme of social amelioration is adequate without the regenerative work of God on behalf of the sinner.¹⁹⁶ Without the crucifixion, Henry was unable to imagine an adequate response to the problem of sin, personal or social.¹⁹⁷ Henry affirmed that the cross not only offers a vicarious substitution for the sinner, it also reveals God's active redemptive role in transforming the sinner's life. Unlike fundamentalists, who might reduce their crucicentrism to the articulation of substitutionary atonement, Henry expanded his theology of the cross to include the reparation of sin's effects.¹⁹⁸ Henry in no way attempted to remove substitutionary atonement from the meanings of the crucifixion but he added the pragmatic component of an ongoing reparative process of redemption.¹⁹⁹ Christ's cross not only marks the beginning of what God is doing, but also

194. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 15; Matthews A. Ojo, "Salvation," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 429.

195. Calvin D. Linton, "Sin," in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 620.

196. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 40.

197. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 13.

198. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 16.

199. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 13,36.

announces the commitment of God to continue the transformative work in and through an individual.

Henry's theology of social sin necessitates his championing the possibility of redemption.²⁰⁰ In this context, redemption means both "breaking the stranglehold of sin and the possibility of new life."²⁰¹ The underlying focus is redemption for individuals, bound as they are by personal sin, which by extension is understood to address the aggregate social aspect of personal sin. "The corrupting power of sin does not only manifest itself in one-to-one relationships. It also comes to be reflected in the patterns and procedures that govern our social, economic, and political lives."²⁰² Redemption for Henry is understood as God destroying the power of personal sin in the lives of individuals.

Redemption is an implication of salvation and represents the ongoing work of God wherever sin is found.²⁰³ Henry specifically sees the social dimension of sin as a resistance to the redemptive work of God. For example, the only reason which Henry considers legitimate for not cooperating with non-evangelical social projects is when those projects reject the possibility of redemption as an option for achieving social amelioration.²⁰⁴ Any effort at social amelioration that precludes redemption is a "luxurious dream" based on an unrealistic assessment of humanity.²⁰⁵ Therefore articulating and enacting God's redemptive purposes has to be a central

200. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 14–15.

201. Donald Guthrie, "Salvation," in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 599.

202. Richard J. Mouw, *Political Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 44.

203. To reject the socially active aspect of redemption is, for Henry, the truncation of evangelicalism into a "moralism" that fails to reflect "the Biblical "good news."" *Uneasy Conscience*, 22.

204. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 14,81.

205. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 20.

part of any evangelical social engagement proposal.

By rooting this redemptive purpose in a kingdom eschatology, Henry was able to introduce a social and historical aspect to his soteriology. Here the transcendent kingdom that is immanently experienced offers more than simply a human social project. The kingdom is evidenced in the supernatural work of God transforming the world. The kingdom began, or was inaugurated, by the cross. Just as the cross is followed by resurrection life, the kingdom also continues to bring the life God intends for the future into the present. Yet, the kingdom still awaits its final consummation at the end of history, just as humanity awaits its future resurrection.

This form of kingdom theology is known as an inaugurated-enacted eschatology. What this kingdom theology testifies to is the experience of a God who acts in history (crucifixion) to inaugurate a hope for the end to all that is not right in this world. Further this kingdom theology attests that this hoped-for end continues to be enacted by God and experienced by humanity in history. This theology declares the inbreaking in history of God's expressed reign that redemptively transforms the world in which we live. An inaugurated-enacted eschatology has implications for the socio-political context because it insists that God acts both in history and, at the same time, above (outside of) history. When such a view of the kingdom is made part of the gospel messages that are being presented, the focus is no longer some awaited future reward (heaven), but rather an open invitation to participate with God in the repairing of this present world.

Conversionism

Henry used the term "supernatural regeneration" to name the personal conversion process that is accomplished as part of God's ongoing redemptive work.²⁰⁶ Conversion, for Henry, is not

206. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 21, 31. The issue of whether conversion was completed in a singular event or worked out as the regenerated life is lived, was never directly addressed in *Uneasy Conscience*. In *Uneasy Conscience* there was an intimation that the regenerated life

simply a rescue operation, but rather it is a transformation of the individual.²⁰⁷ This transformation is understood to be supernatural in that it is a self-transcendence that is primarily attributable to the working of God in the life of an individual. Many evangelicals opt to describe conversion with a language of transformation such as being born-again or born-from-above.²⁰⁸ Using such dramatic language emphasizes the all-encompassing scope of the evangelicals' expectations for the transformation that happens at conversion. Evangelicals tend to celebrate their more sensational conversion stories where individuals express a tangible experience of receiving God's forgiveness. This emphasis on the sensational underscores the expectation that conversion is transformative. For Henry, as well as other evangelicals, this transformative aspect of God's redemptive work presents "supernatural regeneration" as the restoration and/or reparation of the individuals who had been affected by sin, their own and that of others.²⁰⁹

In Richard J. Mouw's forward to the 1947 edition of *Uneasy Conscience*, he stated that Henry's book is "a call to renewal."²¹⁰ To renew means to be brought to new life by a reinvigoration of an original or primal state. Similarly, regeneration also implies a reconstitution of a previous state of being. Not only did Henry call fundamentalists to renew the core evangelical orthodoxy out of which their movement emerged, he also reminded these conservative evangelicals that this orthodoxy insists on the primal goodness of humanity.²¹¹

needed to be lived out; individuals grow into the fullness of their conversions. I will take up this aspect of conversion in chapter four through the Vineyard's notion of multiple Spirit infillings and in chapter five through the use of conversion as a theological tool for understanding the provisional and proleptic notions of the kingdom in relationship to the individual.

207. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 50.

208. Ojo, "Salvation," 430; Bader-Saye, "Improvising Church," 19.

209. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 34–35, 88–89; Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 174; Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 199; Henry, *Aspects*, 23–24; Ojo, "Salvation," 429.

210. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, x.

The Fundamentalist holds that primal man [sic] was a divine creation, endowed with moral righteousness, so that man [sic] is not a sinner by a necessity of his [sic] 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.²¹²

As regeneration renews primal humanity, it also creates the expectation that individual conversion is not only personally transformative, but socially transformative as well. As individuals are transformed through personal conversion Henry believed that the net effect is the betterment of society.

Henry, like most conservative evangelicals, was convinced that social amelioration is not possible without individual conversion.²¹³ “Supernatural regeneration therefore is the peculiar mainspring for the social metamorphosis latent in the Christian movement.”²¹⁴ Yet, individual conversion is not a guarantee of social change; otherwise Henry’s book would have little to complain about. Social amelioration is not simply the product of individual conversion; even conversion to the staunchest personal morality evangelicalism can muster does not reliably produce social betterment.²¹⁵ Contemporary social conditions are complex and demand a degree of social analysis that is not innate in any evangelical understandings of conversion. The problem was not that fundamentalists did not value transformative conversion, or even that they did not

211. Daniel W. Draney, “Sin and Sinners,” in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 455.

212. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 66.

213. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 71; Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 96; Nicholas T. Pruitt, “Neo-Evangelical Realism: Reflections on the Sociopolitical Thought of Carl F. H. Henry,” Thesis (Waco: Baylor University, 2009), 59; Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 28; Hollinger, *Individualism*, 17; Sider, *Good News*, 102, 174; Wendy Murray Zoba, *The Beliefnet Guide to Evangelical Christianity* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2005), xix-xx.

214. Henry, *Aspects*, 26.

215. Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 53.

value social change; rather, they had ceased connecting conversion with the necessity of social amelioration.

For fundamentalists there is no explicit connection between personal conversion and social transformation. One of the reasons for this disconnect is the narrative framework in which evangelistic conversion is promoted. In chapter one I discussed the function of socially pessimistic decline narratives. Because these pessimistic narratives dominated fundamentalist popular theology, they shaped the character of the fundamentalist converts' disposition toward society and toward history.²¹⁶ Their only social hope was the expected eschaton which is anticipated to end both society and history. To address the effect of decline narratives, Henry proposed that fundamentalists revisit their eschatologies. Henry promoted an examination of the ways in which eschatologies support the fundamentalists' pessimistic views of society and history.²¹⁷

Henry insisted that fundamentalists need to reconnect conversion with social context. The disconnect between evangelical conversion and social amelioration is what Henry called "The Most Embarrassing Evangelical Divorce."²¹⁸ Historically, as I discussed in chapter one, evangelicalism has produced a great many projects of social change. However, fundamentalists actively and deliberately removed themselves from involvement with socially concerned organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association, the Volunteers of America, and the Federal Council of Churches. Pointing to this history of evangelical social concern, Henry called for a reawakening of "the relevance of [evangelicalism's] redemptive message to the global predicament."²¹⁹

216. Brian D. McLaren, "The Method, the Message, and the Ongoing Story," in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 227.

217. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 54.

218. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 27.

Henry also insisted that the regenerate life must be lived out in every area of human activity as a witness to God's redemptive purposes.²²⁰ Evangelical conversion, according to Henry, has the implicit social dimension of deliberately shaping the public witness of evangelicals. The call to conversion itself, as it reaches individuals embedded in their various social contexts, expresses God's constructive work in history which includes the drawing of humanity to God's self. "The Christian message has a salting effect upon the earth. It aims at a re-created society."²²¹ In order for this message to have any effect "upon the earth" it must be presented to the earth's inhabitants. As gospel messages are presented and individuals are converted they are intended to become the visible, audible, and practical witness to God's redemptive work in the world.

Activism

Henry presented two imperatives to guide evangelical activism.²²² The first imperative is that gospel messages must be communicated. The desire that evangelism enable individuals to have convertive encounters with the redemptive grace of God is a ubiquitous concern for evangelicals.²²³ *Uneasy Conscience* did not critique the apologetic nature of contemporary gospel communication. It did, however, highlight the disconnect between preaching a message that is intended to be good news for the whole world and failing to oppose all that stands in the way of social amelioration.²²⁴ In order to overcome this disconnection, Henry offered evangelicals a

219. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 53–54.

220. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 71.

221. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 84.

222. In his introduction, Harold J. Ockenga claims that both of these imperatives emerge equally from the same great commission (Mt 28:18-21). *Uneasy Conscience*, xxi.

223. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 22.

224. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xvii See also George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing,

second imperative: evangelicals must oppose all evil. Henry bemoaned the fact that:

Modern Fundamentalism does not explicitly sketch the social implications of its message for the non-Christian world; it does not challenge the injustices of the totalitarianisms, the secularisms of modern education, the evils of racial hatred, the wrongs of current labor-management relations, the inadequate bases of international dealings. It has ceased to challenge Caesar and Rome, as though in futile resignation and submission to the triumphant Renaissance mood. The apostolic Gospel stands divorced from a passion to right the world.²²⁵

Henry understood that the credibility and effectiveness of evangelical witness depends on the pragmatism of the evangelicals' programmes of social engagement. Evangelicals need to make an explicit connection between their beliefs and their social action. Specifically their beliefs must be demonstrated by action for the betterment of society. Evangelicals are denied an audience for their gospel messages when they fail to oppose any and all forms of evil within their larger social contexts.

Evangelicals, by engaging in projects of social amelioration, are able to fulfill both of Henry's imperatives. As evangelicals appropriate personal regeneration they enter into what Henry called the "superlife."²²⁶ This is the life that Henry believed to only be available to the evangelical convert through God's supernatural regeneration. The superlife is recognizable by its evangelical impulse: "[p]art of that superlife is a passion to bring men [sic] everywhere to a knowledge of Jesus Christ."²²⁷ Superlife is also evidenced by the character of human conduct that it enables; the conduct that it fosters in the lives of individuals after they came "to a knowledge of Christ."²²⁸ The conduct promoted by the superlife correlates to the morality of the community in which an individual is converted. This concept of superlife readily meets Henry's two

1974), 173.

225. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 39.

226. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 29, 56.

227. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 56.

228. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 29.

evangelical imperatives. For Henry's second imperative he relates the superlife to the promotion of "superhope."²²⁹

Henry's concept of superhope is evangelical social optimism.²³⁰ Evangelical social optimism emerges from the conviction that evangelicalism can have an influence on society by virtue of extending an invitation to everyone to participate with God in the redemption of the world.²³¹ The superhope concept fits well with the inaugurated enacted eschatology favoured by Henry. Henry was realistic that the *eschaton* is not within the ability of evangelicals to bring about, which is in contrast with the proposition of the Social Gospel.²³² Rather, superhope is what the evangelicals impart to their larger social contexts. Evangelicals proclaim the enacted kingdom of God at work through God's salvation and redemption of the world. Evangelicals also demonstrate this enacted kingdom through their own actions as they participate with the work of redemption that they proclaim. However, in this understanding of the concept of superhope, God's redemptive work does not depend on the evangelicals' participation.²³³ Redemption, as the exclusive purview of God, does not detract from evangelical social responsibility.²³⁴ There is a special exigency for the regenerate, who have personally experienced God's grace, to participate in God's redemptive plans for the world. For as much as the evangelicals participate in God's redemptive work, they also offer a pragmatic witness to the world.²³⁵

229. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 29.

230. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 29, 67.

231. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 29–30.

232. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 84.

233. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 84.

234. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 76, 85.

235. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 81, 83.

Henry encouraged thoughtful engagement even with non-evangelical projects of social amelioration.²³⁶ While evangelical activism includes the proclamation of redemption as God's answer to evil, it does not also preclude cooperation with projects that employ other approaches to social amelioration.²³⁷ However, when evangelicals engage with projects of social amelioration their primary loyalty is to their superhope.²³⁸ Henry charged evangelicals to present alternative responses and take leadership in implementing these alternatives where existing projects of social amelioration reject the legitimacy of redemption.²³⁹ Activism is not an optional aspect of evangelicalism; evangelicals must oppose all evil. Further, Henry insisted that evangelicals must act if they are "to recapture the spirit of [their] *evangel* (emphasis mine)."²⁴⁰

Henry connected the efficacy of evangelism to the evangelicals' activism. "To the extent that any society is leavened with Christian conviction, it becomes a more hospitable environment for Christian expansion."²⁴¹ A property of leaven is that it must be present in order to have an effect. According to Henry the leaven of Christian conviction is the superlife enacted. "The Christian life must be lived out, among the regenerate, in every area of activity, until even the unregenerate are moved by Christian standards, acknowledging their force."²⁴²

Henry called for an evangelical social activism. "It [is] an invitation to an evangelical cultural involvement that [is] based solidly on the kind of profound theological reflection that could only be sustained by a social program that [is] closely linked to a systematic commitment

236. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xii-xiii, 76–77.

237. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 80.

238. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 80.

239. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 77–78.

240. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 81.

241. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 71.

242. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 71.

to the nurturing of the life of the mind.”²⁴³ He acknowledged that social realities are complex and demanding.²⁴⁴ Henry lamented that the fundamentalists’ approach of creating protective inwardly-focused life-boat communities meant their “sacrifice of social vision.”²⁴⁵ Henry believed that evangelicals can, and must, do better. What remains to be seen is how evangelicals can improve their theologies of social engagement. In the next chapter I will define four critiques of evangelical theologies — social pessimism, ahistoricism, apologetic bias, and anthropocentrism — that I will address as I offer an improved theology of social engagement to evangelicals. I will now turn to the task of delineating the necessary features of what will be a more adequate theology of evangelical social engagement. To do this I will bring German political theology into the conversation through the work of Jurgen Moltmann.

243. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xii-xiii.

244. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 89.

245. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 81.

CHAPTER 3

HOPE FOR EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Neo-evangelicals are challenged by Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* to improve their theologies of social engagement. However, their conservative nature restricts their ability to consciously adapt their theologies in a timely manner.¹ This does not mean that evangelical theologies are static. In *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus: In 20th Century Theology*, Mark Saucy traces shifts in Christian eschatological theologies throughout the twentieth century. In discussing evangelicals, Saucy observes that many of the adaptations in evangelical eschatologies are similar to those that have occurred in other Christian traditions.² All Christian traditions adjust their theologies over time despite their conserving tendencies. However, it is the evangelical commitment to Bebbington's four priorities that exerts conserving pressure on the reformation of evangelical theologies.

As I described in chapter two, each of Bebbington's four priorities is implicated in the evangelicals' witness. When evangelicals do critically examine their theologies, primary consideration is given to the effect those theologies have for their witness. Among evangelicals, there is a common understanding, often unstated, that change undermines the credibility of their witness by calling into question the veracity of their religious claims. This apprehension toward damaging the credibility of their witness complicates the process of theological adaptation. The emphasis on witness ensures that change will happen, however, for evangelicals, slowly.

1. Mark Saucy, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus: In 20th Century Theology* (Dallas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1997), 295.

2. Saucy, *The Kingdom*, 299.

Therefore, while Henry does encourage a reformation of evangelical theologies, this work is complex and fraught with opposition.

Critical Examination of Evangelical Social Engagement

The first step in reforming evangelical theologies of social engagement is the critical examination of how neo-evangelical theologies address, or fail to address, the problems that they set out to resolve. The neo-evangelical movement followed Henry's lead in confronting problems with evangelical social engagement in the middle of the twentieth century. The first section of this chapter explores the problems with evangelical social engagement that were introduced and contextualized in the first chapter of this thesis; the same problems faced by the neo-evangelicals. I group these problems under the four categories of social pessimism, ahistoricism, apologetic bias, and anthropocentrism. Social pessimism arises both from an apocalyptic view of the world that welcomes its end and from a dissatisfaction with liberal theologies of social engagement such as the Social Gospel. Ahistoricism often accompanies social pessimism. Ahistoricism is an unwillingness or inability to view human or earth history as an important source of knowledge. Apologetic bias refers to the modern evangelical notions of apologetics that insist on sources of knowledge being validated primarily by the extent to which they provide proofs for evangelical truth claims. The final category, anthropocentrism, identifies a set of problems that arise from evangelical social engagement proposals which myopically focus on humanity as the locus of social concern. In this chapter I argue that all of these problems are addressed, in some way, by the eschatologies of evangelicals.

In the second section of this chapter I introduce a sympathetic dialogue partner to assist in assessing evangelical theologies of social engagement. The process of critical examination benefits greatly from an outside perspective. I will draw this perspective from German political theologian Jürgen Moltmann. By way of introducing Moltmann's thought, I outline reasons that Moltmann is an important dialogue partner for evangelicals.³ I also note reasons why

evangelicals would be unwilling to uncritically adopt Moltmann's thoroughgoing eschatological theology. In the final sections of this chapter I bring Moltmann's approach in dialogue with the problems of existing evangelical social engagement under the now familiar headings of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism.

Social Pessimism

The primary reason for many evangelicals holding a pessimistic attitude towards society is their zeal for apocalypticism. North Americans are attracted to apocalyptic narratives.⁴ Not only do these narratives present a coherent view of reality, they do so in an exciting way.⁵ In evangelical versions of these narratives the end of the world is often portrayed as an ultimate triumph for Christians and the fitting end to all who oppose them.⁶ For socially pessimistic evangelicals, history is described as the decline of society before the end. These attitudes toward society permeate the popular theologies and literature of evangelicals. Even those evangelicals who do not share in the excitement over apocalyptic narratives are not immune from their influence.⁷ Due to their pervasiveness, these narratives covertly and overtly shape the evangelical's expectations about society.⁸

3. For example, Carl Henry expressed misgivings about Moltmann's notions of revelation and history. See *The God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part One*, vol. 2 of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word Books, 1976), 294–310. and *The God Who Stands and Stays: Part Two*, vol. 6 of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 17–18.

4. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 1992), 5. Not all apocalyptic narratives are religious.

5. Daniel Johnson, "Contrary Hopes: Evangelical Christianity and the Decline Narrative," in *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition Amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 36.

6. Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 35.

7. Boyer, *When Time*, 3, 13.

A particular manifestation of the pessimistic evangelical's expectations about society is their perception of the world as a hostile place. This is the idea that outside of the evangelical environment people are generally antagonistic towards faith and Christian religious faith in particular. This perception is not without some merit.⁹ The secularization of society means that "[b]elief in God is no longer axiomatic."¹⁰ Further, there appears to be more social tolerance for "do-it-yourself" spiritualities than for established religions.¹¹ Individualized understandings of God have less of a tendency to assert themselves on the general public. Such understandings of God are more likely to be tolerated by a secular society because they are seen as innocuous.¹² Yet this toleration is not extended as easily to established religions. In secular society, there is a general resistance to established religious authorities promoting particular understandings of God and other exclusive religious claims. Evangelicals living in such a society often find themselves marginalized when they try to exert social influence from a religious basis.

The loss of the privilege of being an authoritative voice in society fuels the evangelical's social pessimism. To understand this loss, socially pessimistic evangelicals turn to their apocalyptic narratives. By these narratives evangelicals are convinced that hostility is what they should expect from a secular society. In their apocalyptic narratives, evangelicals are also able to determine how to respond to their antagonistic social contexts.¹³ The example I gave in the first

8. Boyer argues that this influence extends well into popular secular culture.

9. However, many evangelicals tend to overstate examples of evangelical Christianity being censored or marginalized within North American society. See James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 117–18.

10. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2007), 3.

11. John G. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 189.

12. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 769.

13. Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 35.

chapter is the fundamentalists' use of apocalyptic narratives to support a systematic withdrawal from society in order to protect their fundamental beliefs.¹⁴ However, the most poignant result of relying on apocalyptic narratives to navigate secularization is the erosion of confidence in any form of long term social betterment.

Social amelioration requires a sustained focus on the immanent affairs of this world. The Social Gospel's emphasis on our present reality is what allows it to maintain the evangelical social imperative. However, many evangelicals believe that this emphasis of the Social Gospel comes at the expense of missing the bigger, apocalyptic, picture. For these evangelicals their apocalyptic narratives depict this world only in an intermediary fashion. These narratives present a story arc that describes the flight from this world to another world, be it heaven or some other transcendent location.¹⁵ When such narratives do generate social concern, it is often with a commitment to the apocalyptic undoing of the secular society.¹⁶ Social amelioration is hard work at the best of times. The difficulty of this work is amplified by perceived antagonism from the larger social context. To make society better one has to actually want to make society better.

Ahistoricism

Ahistoricism is encouraged by overly transcendent apocalyptic narratives. The ahistoricist is unwilling or unable to differentiate between different interpretations of history. As a pejorative term ahistoricism is a judgment about attitudes towards history. Calling evangelicals ahistoricists does not mean that these evangelicals are anti-historical. The problem of ahistoricism is one of how history is understood. For most evangelicals their particular apocalyptic narratives dominate

14. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 51.

15. Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 31.

16. Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 37.

any other construals of history. When history is interpreted, it is always interpreted through the apocalyptic story arc.¹⁷ History is made servant to eschatology.

History interpreted through an apocalyptic narrative is subject to the biases of that narrative. The apocalyptic narratives that are dominant within contemporary evangelicalism are pessimistic towards both history and society.¹⁸ These narratives frame history as the story of the struggle to endure the hardships of an increasingly secular world that is hostile to evangelicals. Because individuals read themselves into the narratives of history, pessimistic evangelicals are able to map history to their own struggles with a secular society.¹⁹ Social amelioration is not even a secondary concern for apocalyptically preoccupied evangelicals. Ultimately the history of the world and of humanity is seen as unimportant in light of the larger apocalyptic story.

A common trope amongst evangelicals underscores this devaluation of historical immanence: “I’ve read the back of the book and we win.”²⁰ This expression represents an eschatological confidence amongst evangelicals and refers to a particular reading of the book of Revelation as being a clear road map to the end of time. This apocalyptic confidence reveals a belief that history is largely pre-determined and therefore humanity is unable to make it better or worse unless changing it is part of the story that God wants to tell. This is not to say that evangelicals are actively or intentionally trying to make the world a worse place, but rather that evangelicals expect that the impact of their action or their inaction will be of no lasting significance. This ahistoricism releases evangelicals from temporal concerns so that they can

17. Guenther Haas, “The Significance of Eschatology for Christian Ethics,” in *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 326.

18. Johnson, “Contrary Hopes,” 36.

19. Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, reprint, 1949 (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1954), 18.

20. This phrase can be found in songs, sermons, and even on a t-shirt available from the internet store Zazzle (http://www.zazzle.ca/ive_read_the_back_of_the_book_and_we_win_shirt-235046179442488442).

focus on what seems to them to be of greater importance: where they will find themselves after this world ends. Socially pessimistic evangelicals come to view themselves as transients, passing through this present world on the way to the next one.²¹ This present life is at best a rehearsal for the life to come.²² Any concerns for the present historical moment are unable to compete with concerns for the transcendent future.²³ Historical immanence is swallowed up in historical transcendence.

History is valued when it can be used as a tool for validating religious claims. Many evangelical apologists proof-text history as support for their particular beliefs.²⁴ Through the presupposition that history is an apologetic tool, these evangelicals introduce a bias into their readings of history. Their concern is not the veracity of a particular reading of history, but proving their religious claims. In their attempts to bolster their evangelical witness, socially pessimistic evangelicals employ a sloppy approach to history that ignores socio-political realities and competing construals of historical accounts. A prime example of this is the already mentioned uncritical support for the establishment of Israel in Palestine.²⁵ The lack of attention

21. Thomas Kinsell Carr, "Hell, Heaven, and Purgatory," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 214.

22. A larger debate on the influence of determinism on one hand and free will on the other could be flagged at this point. At their worst both of these much debated ideas generate the same hopelessness for making the world a better place. I am not convinced the answer to social pessimism is found in this debate and therefore focus my attention on the eschatology of evangelicals.

23. Stanley J. Grenz, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method After the Demise of Foundationalism," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 134.

24. Josh McDowell's already mentioned volumes *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict* are a classic example of the use of a biased reading of history that seems to validate various evangelical truth claims. These books are a veritable smörgåsbord of proof texts from disparate theologians, historians, and the Bible.

25. Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 167.

to historical context and details is simply the by-product of an attitude of ahistoricism. The ahistoricist evangelical generally believes that one interpretation of history is as reasonable as another provided it does not challenge the evangelicals' beliefs.

Apologetic Bias

The evangelical gravitation toward proof-oriented apologetics is illustrated by their ahistoricism, but also extends to their engagement with other epistemological concerns. Every source of knowledge is judged by its ability to support evangelical apologetics. Sources of knowledge are either subsumed into apologetic arguments in order to prove a set of truth claims or they are dismissed as at best irrelevant and at worst dangerous. Nowhere can this dynamic be better described than through the evangelical's tenuous relationship to science.

Evangelicals are engaged in the sciences, at least in specific fields of science.²⁶ Canadian evangelical theologian John G. Stackhouse Jr. notes that evangelicals "show up in the natural sciences, in engineering schools and colleges of medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and rehabilitation therapy."²⁷ The commonality for evangelical theologies and these hard sciences is that both can tend towards what Stackhouse calls "dogmatism."²⁸ Dogmatism is the unwillingness to debate particularities of interpretation. In terms of religion, dogmatism precludes questioning and challenging fundamental beliefs.²⁹ Much hard science work employs certain dogmatically held truth claims which are understood as universal laws.³⁰ Stackhouse claims that the presence of

26. Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 149.

27. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes*, 146.

28. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes*, 145.

29. Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 143.

30. John G. Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1999), 115; Roger Forster and Paul Marston, *Reason and Faith: Do Modern Science and Christian Faith Really Conflict?* (Eastbourne: Monarch Publications,

evangelicals in a field of science is “in inverse proportion to the amount of ... ambiguity and ... ideological conflict present in that discipline.”³¹ This does not mean there are no evangelicals in other scientific fields, simply that there are markedly less evangelicals than can be found in the hard sciences. The evangelical prefers the sciences of hard facts to other more nuanced fields of inquiry. Evangelicals also readily appreciate hard science’s model of objective universal laws as they often see their own fundamental truth claims as also being objective universal laws.

Despite their involvement with sciences, evangelicals do have a problem with scientism. Scientism is a term of judgment about attitudes toward the scientific method. Scientism is the belief that the only valid method of acquiring knowledge is through the use of the scientific method.³² Evangelicals have little tolerance for the scientific method when it is at odds with evangelical proof-oriented apologetics. Yet to say this, is not meant to over-simplify the diverse understandings of how the scientific method is used in scientific inquiry. Regardless of how the scientific method is employed, what concerns evangelicals is the fact that science is given the epistemological privilege. The evangelical conviction is that science, like other epistemological pursuits, should primarily serve an apologetic aim and verify what evangelicals believe God has already revealed about the world. To the evangelical then, science done without reference to God or God’s creation is inadequate and possibly even misleading. When evangelicals do employ science it is when the science seems to collaborate their propositions.³³ As Noll puts it, “evangelicals [have a] tendency to talk about science while thinking about something else.”³⁴

1989), 258; Walter Truett Anderson, “Four Different Ways to Be Absolutely Right,” in *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World*, ed. Walter Truett Anderson (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1995), 113; Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, publishers, 1971), 127.

31. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes*, 146.

32. Paul Noordhof, “Scientism,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 814.

33. Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism*, 115 Young Earth Creationist and Creation Science literature exhibits this tendency to celebrate some scientific proposals while ignoring

This intolerance for scientism is compounded by the antagonism evangelicals often feel from secular universities. Science, it seems to the evangelicals, is encouraged to divorce itself from religious claims. In universities, the rise of softer social sciences coincided with academic currents that were questioning religious presuppositions. While religion lost its once privileged role in academic formation, science seems to have remain unchallenged. Evangelicals fear that without religion, science and other higher education pursuits will distract humanity from what they consider as more important issues, such as the centrality of the human person as actor and beneficiary of God's salvific plan. This may be a valid criticism. However, the way that evangelicals tend to understand God's salvific plan also needs to be critiqued.

Anthropocentrism

Evangelicals tend to emphasize the idea that humanity is central to God's plan for creation. Humanity is considered to be distinct from the rest of the natural world. In some instances humanity alone is seen as the object of God's concern and salvific works. Anthropocentric biases, like these, place the human being at the center of all concerns. For example "[a]n anthropocentric ethic claims that people are both the subject and object of ethics."³⁵ Anthropocentric ethics is a human pursuit done for the sake of humanity. This anthropocentrism is a dominant theme in Western Christianity. To use Lynn White Jr's often quoted phrase: "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen."³⁶

contradictory claims. Science is used only to bolster their apologetic arguments. By way of example, in order to be considered as a peer reviewer for Answers in Genesis, one must already share the same assumptions about creation as the ministry. See "Scientist Inclusion Procedure" [answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/bios/scientist_inclusion.asp) http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/bios/scientist_inclusion.asp (accessed January, 28, 2014).

34. Noll, *American Evangelical*, 153.

35. Holmes Rolston III, "Environmental Ethics," in *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Nicholas Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James, reprint, 1996 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 519.

Evangelicals, especially through their focus on soteriology, simply affirm White's enduring critique.

As with all soteriologically focused traditions, evangelicalism makes the salvation of individuals its primary theological concern. For many evangelicals, the specific locus of God's salvation is the individual human person. Salvation is often communicated³⁷ as an invitation to a personal relationship with God.³⁸ This notion of a personal relationship is quite attractive in the North American context where, through the atomization of society, attention is focused on individual, rather than societal, needs and desires.³⁹ This orientation towards the individual permeates evangelic theologies. What evangelicals imply in their theologies is that God does not save planets, cities, or societies — God saves people. To restrict the scope of salvation to individuals narrows the range of social concerns that evangelicals will engage with, and narrows the types of responses that evangelicals will employ.

Evangelicals are motivated to address social concerns primarily when those concerns interfere with the evangelicals' aims within society. I described this dynamic in the first chapter when discussing the effect of evangelistic motivations on evangelical social engagement. Issues such as freedom of speech attract the attention of evangelicals who want to communicate their messages to their wider social contexts. Other issues, such as the environmental crisis, are often of much lower importance to evangelicals.

36. Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (10 March 1967): 1205.

37. White Jr., "The Historical Roots."

38. Johnson, "Contrary Hopes," 33; Alan J. Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1993), 105; Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, reprint, 1958 (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 357.

39. Charles Taylor describes briefly the development of personal religion as a dominant idea in Western Christianity in Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 9–12.

When evangelicals do acknowledge the environmental crisis, their response is usually an encouragement simply to be good stewards. Stewardship is the idea that even though the world is meant for human use and consumption, we are required to take care of it as a God-given resource.⁴⁰ “Environmental stewardship is the idea that we should care for, manage, and nurture what we have been given.”⁴¹ A stewardship model can encourage positive change in the way that evangelicals respond to the environmental crisis.⁴² However, the stewardship approach does little to challenge the anthropocentric notions that led to the human exploitation of a world believed to be meant for human consumption and enjoyment. These attitudes are actually central to human involvement in producing the environmental crisis.⁴³

When evangelicals do respond to social concerns, their methods are also affected by their anthropocentric bias. Because their theologies locate sin entirely within the individual, evangelicals tend to understand social sin as the aggregate of personal sins.⁴⁴ This view of social

40. Tri Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility to Environmental Stewardship* (Norcross: Ampelton Publishing, 2006), 20; Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecofeminism and Theology - Challenges, Confrontations, and Reconstructions,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 104; Lyndsay Moseley, “Just Ecology: What Demands of Justice Does the Planet Make Upon Followers of Christ?” in *The Justice Project*, ed. Brian McLaren, Elisa Padilla, and Ashley Bunting Seeber (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 169.

41. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 19.

42. Heather Eaton, “Response to Rosemary Radford Ruether: Ecofeminism and Theology - Challenges, Confrontations, and Reconstructions,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 116. For a great example of practical suggestions for environmental stewardship see “The Environment: Tending God's Creation” in Tony Campolo and Gordon Aeschliman, *Everybody Wants to Change the World: Practical Ideas for Social Justice* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2006), 47–71.

43. Katherine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley, *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions* (New York: Faith Words, 2009), 26.

44. Randall Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism: From Revivalism to Politics and Beyond* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 28; Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 129.

sin is not exclusive to evangelicals; it is found wherever Christianity is framed as primarily a personal religion.⁴⁵ The idea of resolving social sin through the conversion of individuals persists within evangelical theologies.⁴⁶

Another result of locating sin entirely within the individual is the reduction of salvation to a personal experience. In situations where salvation is seen as basically a secured passage to a better next world, there is little empirical evidence with which to anchor this personal experience. Therefore, salvation becomes primarily a thought exercise rather than an encounter with the redemptive action of God.⁴⁷ Salvation is not a dynamic reordering of life, but rather a compliance with the community's ethos, with little thought as to the social implications of that ethos.⁴⁸ Framing salvation in this way led to the fundamentalist theology of separatism. By maintaining a separation between themselves and society at large, fundamentalists felt assured of retaining God's saving grace until the end of their lives. Entanglement with the affairs of society was seen as having the potential to corrupt the fundamentalist, or at least distract him or her from the 'higher calling' of defending the faith and living according to the ethos of the community. This individualistic view of salvation continues to influence theological development within contemporary evangelicalism.

45. Mark O'Keefe, *What Are They Saying About Social Sin?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 9.

46. Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics: Some Basic Questions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 100–01; Richard Mouw, "Evangelical Ethics," in *Where Shall My Wond'ring Soul Begin?: The Landscape of Evangelical Piety and Thought*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Ronald F. Thiemann (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 71.

47. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 301.

48. Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 322–23.

Critique

I am not alone in recognizing these problems with evangelical theologies or even the eschatological implications surrounding these problems. Many evangelicals have followed the neo-evangelical lead to critique their traditions from within. Daniel Johnson denounces social pessimism as undermining the ability of evangelicals to act on their social consciences.⁴⁹ Stackhouse suggests that evangelicals need to return to the universities and critically examine their own theologies and practices.⁵⁰ Ronald J. Sider recognizes that how evangelicals understand salvation is crucial for “understanding ... the relationship between evangelism and social concern.”⁵¹ Richard Mouw acknowledges that social problems are not sufficiently addressed through individual conversions.⁵² Stanley J. Grenz goes further and calls for the development of a “relational ethic” situated in a larger cosmological vision than a personal religion can ever provide.⁵³ I have already detailed the eschatological nature of Carl Henry’s critique in the second chapter, and many of the evangelical theologians I mention here acknowledge Henry’s important contribution to this conversation. If Grenz’s conviction that evangelicals need “an eschatological ethic of transformation” is true then evangelicals need to develop a thoroughgoing eschatological theology. One of the most significant modern attempts at such a project is in the work of German political theologian Jürgen Moltmann.

49. Johnson, “Contrary Hopes,” 48.

50. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes*, 156.

51. Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 85.

52. Richard J. Mouw, *Political Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 15–16. Although I do not find Mouw adequately addressing this problem in *Political Evangelism* and he seems to revert to a notion of social sin as an aggregate of personal sins in later works. See “Where Shall My Wond’ring Soul,” 71.

53. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 202–03.

The Hope Theology of Jürgen Moltmann

Moltmann published *Theology of Hope* in 1964, marking the beginning of his project of producing a thoroughgoing eschatological Christian theology.⁵⁴ Hope theology represents a theological method through which Moltmann “trie[s] to see *the whole of theology in a single focus*.”⁵⁵ The corpus of his work continues to apply systematically an attention to eschatology and its implications on various Christian doctrines and beliefs.⁵⁶ His recent book, *Ethics of Hope* (2010), represents a completion of Moltmann’s main theological project and is comprised of a lifetime of reflecting on the social and political implications of his eschatologically anchored theology.⁵⁷ These two volumes provide bookends to Moltmann’s offering of larger systematic texts and smaller books that capture the implications for the practical theology of his larger texts. By dividing his theological works this way, Moltmann is able to express an appreciation for two necessary modes of theology: academic and practical theology. His pastoral work in the 1950s augmented Moltmann’s academic formation. Through this pastoral work, Moltmann came to value both academic theology and what he calls “*the theology of the people*.”⁵⁸ His smaller books

54. Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 7. The English translation arrived in 1967 which dovetailed with theological renovations occurring in North America at that time. Because the majority of the evangelical interaction with Moltmann’s work is with the English editions I will engage primarily with those editions throughout this thesis.

55. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch, reprint, 1967 (New York: Harper, 1993), 11.

56. Richard Bauckham, “Eschatology in the Coming of God,” in *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1.

57. Moltmann tried unsuccessfully to write a “detailed description of the specific relationship between eschatology and ethics” in the mid-60s. Timothy Harvie, *Jürgen Moltmann’s Ethics of Hope: Eschatological Possibilities for Moral Action* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 2; Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), xi.

always deal with the living out of his theological insights in practical ways. It is perhaps this attention to practical theology that makes Moltmann accessible and attractive to evangelicals.

Throughout his works, Moltmann consistently expresses a concern for the social implications of Christian theologies. He develops his theology as a contribution to the renewing of the Christian church. This specific concern “for the renewal of the church” is further evidenced by the interest Moltmann takes in evangelical movements in North America.⁵⁹ I witnessed this interest first hand in Chicago at the “2009 Emergent Theological Conversation” where Moltmann was the guest speaker addressing and encouraging a diverse group of evangelical church leaders.⁶⁰ In addition, Moltmann continues to attract scholarly attention among up and coming pentecostal and evangelical academics and leaders.⁶¹

Although Moltmann demonstrates an interest in the North American evangelical movement, his theological work is developed in a very different context. Moltmann is a German who spent much of World War II in Allied prison camps. His experiences, both during the war

58. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 5.

59. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl, reprint, 1977 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xiii. Note that I have chosen to follow James K. Smith’s use of the uncapitalized “small-p” pentecostal to denote inclusion of the diversity of Pentecostal/charismatic movements. See James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), xvi-xvii.

60. This conference occurred in September and was put on by JoPa Productions, a spin off from Emergent Village.

61. I continually encounter evangelicals studying Moltmann at academic conferences and through online conversations. For example, PhD student Patrick Oden of Fuller University has just submitted his dissertation on Pneumatology and Moltmann is a primary dialogue partner. He has also published “An Emerging Pneumatology: Jürgen Moltmann and the Emerging Church in Conversation,” in the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (Jan. 1, 2009). Also the already mentioned *Moltmann’s Ethics of Hope* is the doctoral dissertation of Timothy Harvie, an evangelical who has since converted to Roman Catholicism. See also Brian McLaren, Elisa Padilla, and Ashley Bunting Seeber, eds., *The Justice Project* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 17; Brian D. McLaren and Anthony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel* (El Cajon: Emergent YS, 2003), 258.

and after, give him a unique set of theological priorities. For instance, Moltmann does not champion Bebbington's four evangelical qualities in the same way that North American evangelicals do. While Moltmann does seem to work with biblical texts in a similar way to evangelicals, he is not at all concerned with the debates around the nature of the text itself.⁶² The crucifixion of Jesus takes a central role in Moltmann's theology, but his image of a God who suffers (passability) is challenging for those evangelicals who emphasize the sovereignty of God and the triumph of the cross. Moltmann's own religious conversion colours his theological pursuits, but his understanding of conversion is much wider than the personal appropriation of salvation.⁶³ Likewise, his notions of activism have broader import than evangelism. His understanding of Christian witness has none of the modern evangelical apologetic concerns nor is it impeded by an eschatologically rooted attitude of social pessimism. Additionally, Moltmann fearlessly draws from a wide range of sources including Jewish mysticism and other world religions; a practice rare amongst evangelicals.⁶⁴ Despite all of these differences, Moltmann's sustained reflection on eschatology is most likely what attracts evangelicals to his work.

Even within Moltmann's eschatology there are different aims than what is typical to North American evangelicals. Moltmann has little interest in mapping national narratives to apocalyptic timetables. Moltmann is deeply suspicious about overly transcendent North American "pop-apocalyptic" narratives, even calling them a form of "especially dramatic

62. Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 210; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, reprint, 1974 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 20.

63. Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 23.

64. A great example of this is Moltmann's book *In the End, the Beginning: The Life of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) which interacts with afterlife narratives from many different religious traditions. See also Harvie, *Moltmann's Ethics of Hope*, 5.

escapism.”⁶⁵ Yet Moltmann does agree with evangelicals that eschatology is about describing an unfolding of God’s story in history. “Christian eschatology has to include the expectation of a millennium for the transition from the time of history to the eternity of the new creation.”⁶⁶ Yet for Moltmann, eschatological narrative is meant to orient us within history, not to cause us to lament or to shrink back from history. “Christian hope is founded on the promise of God given in a particular place in history, which creates and secures a new trajectory for history and human existence within history.”⁶⁷ Eschatology articulates the Christian hope, which is hope not just for the future, but for the present. Eschatological hope inspires courage in us to face the past and act in the present to build a better future predicated on the promises of God.⁶⁸

Moltmann’s understanding of eschatology is neither overly transcendent, nor is it overly immanent. Moltmann holds the ideas of “[p]resent and future, experience and hope,” in tension with each other as paradoxical concepts.⁶⁹ By insisting that eschatology is a means of generating Christian hope, holding the tension of paradox ensures that the character of that hope is not divorced from history. What is said about the future is said for those who are living in the present.

For Moltmann, eschatology is essentially the narrative of God’s promises for the future such that “[t]hose who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it.”⁷⁰ Hope for Moltmann is a protest against the way things are in light of

65. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 53.

66. Jürgen Moltmann, “The Hope of Israel and the Anabaptist Alternative: Response to Richard Bauckham,” in *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 149.

67. Harvie, *Moltmann’s Ethics of Hope*, 13.

68. Harvie, *Moltmann’s Ethics of Hope*, 13.

69. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

70. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16, 21.

what God has promised about the future.⁷¹ Christian hope opens up possibilities in the present by articulating the orientation of God's transformative work in history which will one day culminate in the future God has promised.

Moltmann's understanding of hope is the reason for his focus on eschatology. While on vacation in Switzerland in 1960, Moltmann became fascinated with the notion of hope presented in Ernst Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.⁷² Bloch decries escapist notions of hope as fraudulent offerings that rob humanity of the energy it needs to make the world a better place.⁷³ He contrasts this escapist hope, which he compares to daydreams, with another way of dreaming described as:

provocative, is not content just to accept the bad which exists, does not accept renunciation. This other part has hoping at its core, and is teachable. It can be extricated from the unregulated daydream and from its sly misuse, can be activated undimmed. Nobody has ever lived without daydreams, but it is a question of knowing them deeper and deeper and in this way keeping them trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right.⁷⁴

Bloch then proceeds to present an "encyclopedia of hopes," that is, a catalogue of utopic narratives from art, religion, and literature.⁷⁵ For Moltmann, reading Bloch left him wondering what had happened to hope in Christian theology.⁷⁶ It is from this very question that Moltmann's theology developed its own unique voice. Moltmann began to articulate his hope theology with the claim that "eschatology means the doctrine of Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it."⁷⁷

71. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 21.

72. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 9; Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 79.

73. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), I:3, 5.

74. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 3.

75. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 17.

76. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 9.

77. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16.

Moltmann's understanding of hope is that it is inseparable from faith. "Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith believed to have been truly promised by God."⁷⁸ Eschatological narratives articulate hope in ways that can inspire our thoughtful engagement in social amelioration. For Moltmann, faith depends on hope. Hope is that which enables us to act in faith.⁷⁹ "It is through faith that man [sic] finds the path of true life, but it is only hope that keeps him [sic] on that path."⁸⁰ Just as eschatological narratives can articulate hope, faith in those eschatological promises can animate Christian social engagement.

Hope for Moltmann can never be an anticipated escape from the sufferings of this world. Hope does not mitigate our suffering in this world with fanciful stories of an eternity in heaven.⁸¹ Hope sees a future for this planet and opens one up to the possibility of amelioration because of the tension between what really is and what God has promised will be.⁸² It is through embracing the tension between the promise of God and the reality of life that the Christian is pushed towards action. For Moltmann the promise of God is the foundation of the mission of the church in the world.⁸³ The *promissio* becomes the *pro-missio* and "[t]he *pro-missio* of the kingdom is the ground of the *missio* of love to the world."⁸⁴ Hope is not usually framed this way by evangelicals.

It is perhaps all of these differences that make Moltmann a much misunderstood but necessary dialogue partner for evangelicals. Moltmann demands a lot from his readers; he "is a

78. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 20.

79. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 22.

80. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 20.

81. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 21.

82. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

83. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 225.

84. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 44, 224.

complex and creative” writer requiring patient and attentive study.⁸⁵ Moltmann’s nuanced eschatology and ethics make engaging with his work challenging and worthwhile. Evangelicals will benefit from Moltmann’s deliberate ethical reflection. Moltmann can help them rediscover their own evangelical social imperative.

As a political theologian, Moltmann’s preoccupations have to do with the way that Christians act in the world. During World War II, the church in Europe did very little to stem the tide of tyranny. Political theologies emerged in the European post-World War II context as a response to the failure of the Christian church to stand up to injustice. Moltmann is concerned that the Christian church should help ensure that the atrocities of that war never again go unanswered. To do that, Moltmann proposes a renewed understanding of the Christian life as one that is actively involved in working to build a better future for this world: “Hope awakens our sense of potentiality - for what could be. In concrete action we always relate the potentiality to what exists, the present to the future.”⁸⁶

Developing a Response to the Problems with Evangelical Theologies of Social Engagement

In the final section of this chapter I will connect the four previously identified problems with evangelical social engagement - ahistoricism, apologetic bias, anthropocentrism, and social pessimism - with Bebbington’s quadrilateral: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism.⁸⁷ Secondly I will present selected aspects of Moltmann’s approach to each of these problems in order to identify useful ways to assist my construction of an evangelical theology of social engagement which I will present in the next chapter. Under Bebbington’s category of

85. Harvie, *Moltmann’s Ethics of Hope*, 5–6.

86. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 3.

87. I moved social pessimism to the end of the list here to correspond to the links I make between Bebbington’s four qualities. Social pessimism is presented first in this chapter simply because it contributes significantly the other three problems: ahistoricism, apologetic bias, and anthropocentrism.

biblicism I will look at the problem of ahistoricism as it relates to evangelical approaches to scripture. For the category of crucicentrism I will look at how the evangelical apologetic bias has narrowed the focus and construction of evangelical theologies. For conversionism I will address the problematic influence of anthropocentrism on evangelical theologies of evangelism. And finally, I will discuss how evangelical activism is weakened by social pessimism. I recognize that these connections are a necessary simplification of the complexities of evangelicalism and by no means exhaust the possible ways these connections could be construed. I propose these specific connections as a way of addressing the problems with evangelical social engagement while attending to distinctive evangelical values reflected in Bebbington's quadrilateral.

Biblicism

Although the use of scripture among evangelicals is far from monolithic, there is a common commitment to the authority of the Bible for establishing doctrines and ethical norms.⁸⁸ How this commitment is normally understood is that any doctrine, belief, or ethical claim can be derived directly from the Biblical texts.⁸⁹ The primary example of this is the use of proof texts to support doctrinal statements and position papers.⁹⁰ This use of proof texts is also a ubiquitous feature of popular evangelical literature. Biblical texts are even cited by evangelical authors with little explanation as to how they relate to or prove their points or claims. Treating scripture as a

88. Robert K. Johnston, ed., *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 3.

89. Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 4.

90. I did a simple Internet search for "baptist statement of faith" and the first statement of faith I found, for the group North American Baptists, Inc., is typical of what one can expect to find within evangelical statements of faith (<http://www.nabconference.org/about-us/our-beliefs>): A series of truth claims followed by one or more scripture references with no explanation given as to how the passages referenced support the claim let alone a contextual evaluation of those passages. The goal of this strategy is the assertion that theirs is a "biblical" or correct statement of faith.

prop for the particularities of a tradition compels the evangelical to advocate strongly for the reliability of the Biblical texts.⁹¹

To emphasize scripture as the proof for the tenets of a religious tradition demands that the evangelical act as an ardent defender of the Bible. If the Bible is the linchpin for the particularities of a tradition, then its reliability is of paramount concern. The defense of the Bible is therefore a familiar apologetic goal for evangelicals. Many evangelicals believe that defending the Bible is an all or nothing prospect where “if Scripture cannot be trusted in some areas, it cannot be trusted in any area.”⁹² Great lengths are taken to establish that the Bible is an accurate account of history, and even science, because if the Bible is proven inaccurate in any area then the whole of the tradition can then be called into question.⁹³ The intense debates around inerrancy arose from understanding the role of the Bible in this way.⁹⁴ As a result, the development of a robust apologetic theology by evangelicals is waylaid by arguments over the nature of scripture. They often fail to develop an apologetic that is much more than an assertion of their certitude that the Bible is reliable, and therefore, authoritative.

Additionally, evangelicals who focus on an apologetic for the Bible do so at the expense of their ability to engage critically with the biblical texts. Evangelicals gain certainty about their assertions concerning the Bible by elevating it to an almost untouchable position. Some even

91. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 115; Wendy Murray Zoba, *The Beliefnet Guide to Evangelical Christianity* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2005), 5.

92. Bobby Hayes, “The Evangelical Doctrine of Inspiration and Inerrancy - Restated,” in *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics: A Guide to the History and Practice of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000), 16; Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 81; Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 103.

93. James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 62; Hayes, “Inspiration and Inerrancy,” 17.

94. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 74–88, 116–17; Gabriel Fackre, “Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher (New York: Routledge, 2001), 66.

assert that there is no external evidence that contradicts their claims to the Bible's inerrancy.⁹⁵ As a result, such evangelicals have difficulty tolerating critical readings of the Bible. Evidence of this intolerance is the evangelical suspicion about higher or historical criticism.

Since toward the end of the nineteenth century, conservative evangelicals became apprehensive about the application of "both 'textual criticism' (comparative study of the manuscript evidence for the original words of the Old and New Testaments) and 'higher criticism' (the application of modern philosophical notions to the Bible)" because these biblical study methods "were calling settled opinions into question."⁹⁶ The felt need for Biblical inerrancy continues to overshadow evangelicalism in its various contemporary forms. Conservative evangelicals tend to lump biblical criticism in with liberal theologies, which makes it difficult for these evangelicals to see such approaches to biblical study as not being tainted by association.⁹⁷ The favoured approach of biblical study for evangelicals is a 'plain' or 'common sense literalism' reading which fails to examine adequately scriptural context or the social context of the reader.⁹⁸ The benefits of this approach are that a plain reading requires no special education and usually does not challenge the presuppositions of a reader's tradition. The reader simply reads the texts in private and draws his or her own conclusions about what it says. Yet this simplification is not without significant problems. Two of the problems with a plain reading of scripture are that it promotes an anachronistic reading of the Bible and it provides support for extensive private interpretation.

95. Hayes, "Inspiration and Inerrancy," 31.

96. Noll, *Scandal*, 102; Henry H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook: An Abbreviated Bible Commentary*, reprint, 1924 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 853.

97. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, reprint, 1974 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 5.

98. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 61; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 30. This is not precisely a strict literal reading of scripture, but interpretations are often seen as the only legitimate literal readings of the texts.

Anachronistic Reading

An anachronistic reading of scripture obfuscates the historical and cultural differences between the historical moment the reader inhabits and the context of the text. The text is made to speak to situations that in all likelihood are completely alien to the text itself. In order to facilitate this ahistoricism, concessions are made in the interpretation of the biblical texts.⁹⁹ For example, slavery is generally understood to be prohibited by scripture, but in the past slavery has been both endorsed by and denounced by various interpreters of the Bible.¹⁰⁰ Evangelicals wrapped up in defending the Bible ignore the fact that the Bible was never intended to be, nor does it provide, a comprehensive articulation of ethical concerns.¹⁰¹ It is true that ethical concerns are amply present in scripture. But the Bible is not an ethical manual that covers all the vagaries of contemporary, or even of ancient, life. The Bible can make a legitimate contribution to ethical discourse. But this contribution requires more than simply the stringing together of Bible verses that seem to talk about the situation in question in order to puzzle out what the Bible's answer might be.¹⁰² Yet this puzzling is exactly what evangelicals are encouraged to do, which leads to the second problem, that of private interpretation.

99. Scott McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 11.

100. Laura Rominger, "The Bible, Commonsense, and Interpretive Context: A Case Study in the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery," *Fides Et Historia* 38, no. 2 (June 2006): 35.

101. J. Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 23; Adam Russell Taylor, "Just Son: What Does Jesus' Message of the Kingdom Have to Do with Justice?" in *The Justice Project*, ed. Brian McLaren, Elisa Padilla, and Ashley Bunting Seeber (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 39.

102. Clark H. Pinnock, "How I Use the Bible in Doing Theology," in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, ed. Robert K. Johnston (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 22.

Private Reading

An apologetic for the Bible, that is in defense of the Bible, too easily turns into an apologetic for a particular reading of the Bible.¹⁰³ The obfuscation of context in a plain reading of scripture makes ample room for the theologies of personalities to thrive in evangelicalism. Personalities represent particular clusters of presuppositions and biases that are normative for a group of evangelicals and usually originate from an individual who is respected by the group. The evidence of this gravitation towards theologies of personalities is seen in the sheer number of evangelical denominations that arise from private interpretations fostering discomfort with other private interpretations.¹⁰⁴ All of these groups champion similar values and assert the authority of scripture - yet the fact remains that they still have differences in their interpretations of the Bible and these differences are significant enough that the cooperation required to keep a denomination together is difficult to maintain.

A plain reading of the Bible does not have enough depth to overcome the presuppositions a reader brings to the text. By eschewing critical readings of the text evangelicals limit their capacity to challenge assumptions within their theologies that might be wrong or even harmful. It often requires a crisis to get evangelicals to budge from their presuppositional commitments.¹⁰⁵ Such shallow readings of scripture actually decrease the possibility of the Bible making helpful

103. Alister E. McGrath, "Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 31.

104. Mark Noll notes that on this score Canadians fare better than their counterparts to the south. See *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 471.

105. An example of this can be seen in Millard J. Erickson's article "Evangelical Christology and Soteriology Today," *Interpretation* 49, no. 3 (July 1995): 257, in which Erickson expresses evangelical concerns over the presuppositions inherent in historical-critical methods, yet shows no concern for presuppositions possessed by the evangelical scholars who hesitantly use such methods.

contributions to ethics, because interaction with the text is only done through a narrow range of apologetic concerns. “It is clear to even the most casual observer that a commitment to biblical authority is not in itself a sufficient guarantee of biblical faithfulness.”¹⁰⁶ Even when scripture does have something to say regarding an ethical situation, its words can be obscured by or misinterpreted due to the biases of the reader. Evangelicals end up defending the Bible when they should be interpreting it.¹⁰⁷

Moltmann and the Bible

Moltmann also uses scripture in an apologetic manner, strategically referencing texts in order to support theological points.¹⁰⁸ Moltmann deliberately employs this approach because he sees himself “as a systematic theologian of ‘salvation history’” and not a biblical exegete.¹⁰⁹ Moltmann sees theological reflection as a separate activity from biblical exegesis, even though biblical texts are often his subject of theological reflection. “[F]or theology is not a commentary on the biblical writings, and commentaries on the biblical writings are not a substitute for theological reflection.”¹¹⁰ Evangelicals may take issue with this understanding of theology, but in actuality Moltmann employs scripture as loosely as many evangelical theologians do, even if for different reasons. Moltmann’s use of scripture is not going to offer much help to this project. However, Moltmann’s theory of scripture provides an interesting corrective to the evangelical preoccupation with defending the Bible.

106. Johnston, *The Use of the Bible*, 10.

107. Robert K. Johnston, “Introduction: Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Theology,” in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, ed. Robert K. Johnston (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 10.

108. Harvie, *Moltmann’s Ethics of Hope*, 67.

109. Jürgen Moltmann, “The Bible, the Exegete and the Theologian,” in *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 229.

110. Moltmann, “The Bible,” 230.

Moltmann argues for the witness of the Bible as opposed to the evangelical's apologetic for the Bible. While Moltmann consistently gives the biblical texts a place of preference in his theology, he is never a defender of the Bible.¹¹¹ Rather, he is a reader and interpreter of scripture in the context of the challenges of contemporary life.¹¹² The reason he turns to scripture is because Moltmann expects the Bible to articulate, as a witness for, the promises of God. Moltmann reads "scripture as the one undivided foundation document of God's unswerving faithfulness."¹¹³

The key to the hermeneutics of the historic witness of the Bible is the 'future of scripture'. The question as to the correct exposition of the Old and New Testament scriptures cannot be addressed to the 'heart of scripture'. The biblical scriptures are not a closed organism with a heart, or a closed circle with a center. On the contrary, all the biblical scriptures are open towards the future fulfillment of the divine promise whose history they relate. The center of the New Testament scriptures is the future of the risen Christ, which they announce, point forward to and promise. Thus if we are to understand the biblical scriptures in their proclamation, their understanding of existence and their understanding of the world, then we must look in the same direction as they themselves do. The scriptures, as historic witnesses, are open towards the future, as all promises are open towards the future.¹¹⁴

Moltmann's theory of scripture is primarily functional. Moltmann does not see scripture as a closed reference manual that can be distilled into an easily packaged central message. Rather, he sees scripture as an open narrative that witnesses to humanity of the promises of God. He believes that the Bible goes further than just describing these promises; scripture invites our participation in the future of these promises of God.¹¹⁵ Scripture is not something to be defended, but something to be proclaimed. Scripture is not something that exists outside of history, but

111. Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 21.

112. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 5.

113. Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 21.

114. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 283.

115. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 284.

articulates a promise that will be realized in history. Scripture is not prophecy that can be validated, but promise which will come to be.¹¹⁶

This last point about the difference between prophecy and promise is a key distinction between Moltmann's theory and typical evangelical theories of scripture. Moltmann notes that prophecy and promise are easily confused, but the key difference is that unlike prophecies, the promise is implicated in its own fulfillment.¹¹⁷ Moltmann says that "[s]oothsayers are not made responsible for the happening or failure to happen of what they have prophesied, for they only prophesy the event; they do not make it."¹¹⁸ But the promise is a special kind of speech: "[t]he person who promises keeps his [sic] word and performs what he [sic] has promised."¹¹⁹ The Bible articulates the promises of God, and God keeps those promises so as to not break God's word. For Moltmann the promise of God is the orientation of Christian faith.

As a witness, the Bible "is not the ground on which faith stands, but it is the object at which it aims."¹²⁰ Moltmann's understanding of scripture is contrasted to the way in which the authority of scripture is formulated amongst most evangelicals. He is not concerned with the historical accuracy or inner consistency of scripture; he does not need to perform ahistorical maneuvers to assert scripture's authority. Moltmann sees scripture's authority as established through its capacity to proclaim a future: "[f]rom the standpoint of the fulfilment [sic], every promise is therefore literally a *pro-missio*, a sending-ahead of what is to come, in the way that the daybreak takes its colours from the rising sun of the new day."¹²¹ The proclamation of the

116. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 93.

117. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 93.

118. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 93.

119. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 94.

120. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 282.

121. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 102.

promise through scripture gives purpose to faith as a participation in “the future of salvation in Christ and to the present labour of hope in the service of reconciliation.”¹²² This is not the passive promise of another world. Nor is it the assertion of theological certainty. Rather, the proclaimed promise is a call to actively participate in the redemptive purposes of God as witnessed to by scripture.

Moltmann’s proposal begs the question of how evangelicals construct and understand their relationship to the Bible. What kind of authority does the Bible have for the evangelical? Is scripture’s authority based on an assertion of legitimacy that demands allegiance? Or is the authority of the Bible a functional reality that invites our participation in the construction of a better future? Moltmann invites a re-examination of biblicism without sacrificing the desire for the Bible to play a central authoritative role in Christian theology. In the next chapter I will construct a biblicism for evangelicals based on the functional authority of the Bible.

Crucicentrism

The narrowing of evangelical soteriology is a widely recognized problem.¹²³ While an evangelical soteriology cannot be expected to bypass the centrality of Jesus’ salvific work on the cross, it must not necessarily also reduce the implications of the crucifixion merely to personal salvation.¹²⁴ To understand this narrowing trend, it is helpful to explain the connection between the apologetic bias of evangelicals and the way they want to communicate their gospel messages.

122. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 284.

123. Balmer, *Making of Evangelicalism*, 4; Noll, *Scandal*, 241–42; Richard J. Mouw, *Political Evangelism*, 13; Sider, *Good News*, 196; Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 64; Samuel R. Schutz, “The Truncated Gospel in Modern Evangelicalism: A Critique and Beginning Reconstruction,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 4 (2009): 292.

124. John G. Stackhouse, “Evangelical Theology Should Be Evangelical,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 41.

The apologetics of evangelicals is almost always an assertion of the veracity of their theological propositions. Just as with the apologetic penchant for claiming the authority of the Bible, the impetus behind most evangelical apologetics is the desire to establish or assert theological certainty for their beliefs. For example, fundamentalists, in the face of criticism from society, academy, and much of the rest of the Christian church, sought to make their fundamental beliefs unassailable.¹²⁵ It is this theological certainty that fundamentalists felt would create a safe space for the preservation of their traditions. It was also this certainty that fundamentalists believed would be the foundation of a credible witness.¹²⁶ Yet, it is this need for certitude that is responsible for focusing many evangelicals on a select few theological claims. Evangelicals choose certain theological propositions to champion based on at least two criteria: the ability of the evangelical to launch a coherent defense of their claim, and the notion that their claim expresses a unique characteristic of conservative evangelicalism.

The theological proposition of personal salvation is easy to make assertive claims for because it deals largely with unmeasurable ideas. Being saved from one's own sin often makes for great story telling. The experience of feeling that one's sins have been forgiven can even inspire a radical change in the recipient. But it is not possible to empirically validate the claims that one is free from suffering a penalty for one's own sinfulness at the end of one's life. Evangelical communities have different ways of trying to measure the validity of such salvation claims. Typically the evidence of salvation is supposed to be demonstrated by the individual adopting the community's ethos. Sometimes evidence includes efforts to make amends for past wrongdoings. It is hard to simply attribute such changes as being evidence of Christian salvation because they are not uniquely Christian traits. While such actions may be desirable, they only

125. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 13; George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, reprint, 1984 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 35.

126. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 76–77.

prove that the individual has established his or her acceptance by the group. Yet it is hard to deny salvation claims simply because they are rooted in subjective human experiences.¹²⁷ The problem is that the referent for salvation claims, namely a sin distorted relationship with God, makes no unique empirical demands on the recipient. Despite the personal nature of salvation experiences, from pietistic history of evangelicals, there comes both an expectation that such subjective experiences are normative and that these experiences should be promoted by evangelicals as a distinct aspect of evangelicalism.¹²⁸

Another problem with narrowing evangelical soteriology to personal salvation, is that it offers no easy framework for dealing with social concerns. Personal sin may be more readily relatable than social concepts of sin but, as I have already explained, evangelicals fixated on personal salvation tend to understand social sin as merely an aggregate of personal sins.¹²⁹ The evangelical's offer of salvation is always pointed to the individual; Jesus is never convincingly presented as having died for social sin.¹³⁰ Social amelioration, when it is presented, is often an afterthought as maybe something good to do while history is endured. Personal sin becomes a primary preoccupation for believers, obscuring the social context in which they live. It is

127. David B. Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 8; William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991), 3.

128. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 250.

129. O'Keefe, *About Social Sin?* 18.

130. One of the most common formulations of the soteriological implications of Jesus is "GOD **LOVES** YOU, AND OFFERS A WONDERFUL **PLAN** FOR YOUR LIFE (emphasis in original)." which is based on a simplistic reading of John 3:16. The so-called 'wonderful plan' has nothing to do with making the world a better place but everything to do with making individuals feel like God takes a personal interest in them freeing them from their concerns about this present life. Quote from Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, reprint, 1972 (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1986), 383. See also Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 86.

therefore not reasonable to assume that primarily addressing personal sin will provide a sufficient response to the social crises of our time.

Furthermore, those evangelicals who become excessively focused on their own personal salvation tend to experience the world as a hostile environment. Social realities, such as the ecological crisis, are seen by many evangelicals as competing for attention with the priority of personal salvation. As a result, society outside of evangelical religious communities can even be seen as actively working against the salvific purposes of God. While evangelicals undeniably do engage with social issues, their approaches reveal a deeper concern for their own personal freedoms, especially freedoms of expression, than actually seeing justice prevail.¹³¹ Social issues beyond this are often merely inconveniences that threaten to distract evangelicals from the more important issue of securing their personal eternal destination. Thus evangelicals can be largely unconcerned with what happens in the hostile world around them.

The evangelicals' inability to focus on social issues, apart from how those issues might interfere with evangelism, contributes to any actual hostility that they experience from their larger social contexts. Ironically, by contributing to the negative attitudes towards evangelicals, their ability to evangelize is curtailed. This inability to see and be concerned about their own complicity in social sin is evident to those around them and undermines claims of the goodness of the evangelical's so-called good news.

The gospel message of personal salvation is not good news for the world at large. The truncated gospel becomes good news only to those few who take it personally, but remains distinctly irrelevant to the rest of the planet's population let alone offering any hope for their present social and environmental crises.¹³² Since the evangelical understandings of salvation are

131. John G. Stackhouse, "'Who Whom?' : Evangelicalism and Canadian Society," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George A. Rawlyk, McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 68; Hollinger, *Individualism*, 94. Hollinger's point is that evangelicals in dealing with social issues are really dealing with the personal issues they believe are behind the social issues.

of paramount concern for social engagement, any proposal for an adequate theology of evangelical social engagement must deal with soteriology.¹³³ Fortunately, the relationship of the good news to the larger social context is one of Moltmann's overarching theological concerns. The gospel is good news only when it is good news for everyone: "None of us are given hope just for ourselves. The hope of Christians is always hope for Israel too; the hope of the Jews and Christians is always hope for the peoples of the world as well; the hope of the peoples of the world is always hope for this earth and everything that lives in it."¹³⁴

Moltmann and the Cross

Like most evangelicals, Moltmann makes the crucifixion a central component of his theology.¹³⁵ However, unlike evangelicals, Moltmann's soteriological concerns are much larger than personal salvation.¹³⁶ Moltmann charges that aligning the significance of the cross with "one's own salvation, one's own faith, and one's own theory of reality" emerges from trying to make the cross more palatable.¹³⁷ For Moltmann, the cross is not something to be cherished, but something that should disturb us deeply — so deeply in fact, that it re-orientes the whole of life for those who come to embrace it.¹³⁸ "This means that to be crucified with Christ is no longer a purely private and spiritualized matter, but develops into a political theology of the following of

132. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 64.

133. Sider, *Good News*, 85.

134. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl, reprint, 1996 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), xiii.

135. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 204.

136. Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society*, 253.

137. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 41.

138. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 32–33; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 26–27.

the crucified Christ.”¹³⁹ Moltmann’s crucicentric theology is a call to follow Jesus in the way of the cross where the cross is God’s response to the comprehensive needs of our world.¹⁴⁰ Most evangelicals affirm that the cross is God’s response to the needs of the world, but define those needs and the nature of the response of God quite differently than Moltmann.

Moltmann’s understanding of “a political theology of the following of the crucified Christ” is the needed corrective to many evangelical theologies of the cross.¹⁴¹ For Moltmann the cross is planted into the ground of this world, implying that it is an act of God in history.¹⁴² The cross asserts that God’s activity in history is not a historical process, but a supernatural breaking in of the promise of God.¹⁴³ The cross is supernatural because it is God’s very entrance into the suffering that injustice brings into this world.¹⁴⁴ In contrast, for apologetically biased evangelicals, the location of the cross is really only relevant for asserting that the crucifixion was a historical event. Moltmann has little trouble asserting the historicity of the cross, but does not do so for apologetic reasons.¹⁴⁵ Moltmann is instead concerned about the theological significance of the cross as a historical event.

The cross, for Moltmann, represents a unique and unrepeatable event in history. “[T]he cross of Christ comes to stand at the apocalyptic end of world history.”¹⁴⁶ The cross is historical

139. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 63. See also Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 191.

140. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 204.

141. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 63.

142. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl, reprint, 1990 (London: SCM Press, 1993), 214.

143. Moltmann shares the legitimate evangelical complaint about liberal theologies losing sight of the supernatural aspect of God’s redemptive activity in history. I deal with this issue in the previous chapter.

144. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 207.

145. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus*, 215.

not because it is just another event in history, but it is the end of history, what Moltmann will insist is a “full stop” before something “qualitatively different: the eschatological statements about Christ.”¹⁴⁷ Moltmann has an interest in interpreting the relationship between the cross and resurrection: “[f]or cross and resurrection are not facts on the same level; the first expression denotes a historical happening to Jesus, the second an eschatological event.”¹⁴⁸ This differentiation is the basis for Moltmann’s insistence that the cross is the other side of hope in Christian theology.¹⁴⁹ The contradiction between cross and resurrection is the ground “out of which ... hope itself is born.”¹⁵⁰

When evangelicals flatten the cross and resurrection into apologetic claims for historical happenings, they impoverish their theologies. Even though the cross is important to evangelicals, as the triumph of God over the hostility of the world, their preoccupation is with establishing historical facts and not exploring theological or even social implications.¹⁵¹ As an alternative, Moltmann contrasts the historical character of the cross with the eschatological character of the resurrection.¹⁵² He insists that the resurrection really has no precedence in history, rather it is the proleptic expression of God’s promise. Asking if the resurrection is historical is the wrong question. Moltmann insists that “[b]elief in resurrection is not summed up by assent to a dogma and the registering of a historical fact.”¹⁵³ This does not make the resurrection less true, it simply

146. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus*, 214.

147. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus*, 214.

148. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 204.

149. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, ix.

150. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

151. Richard J. Mouw, *Political Evangelism*, 29.

152. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 214.

153. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus*, 240–41.

means that it is revelatory, not historical, in nature. Historical events belong to a chronology, but the resurrection is not bound by the constraints of history. Revelatory events come from God who exists outside of time in the chronological sense. Resurrection reveals the future of the promises of God as a reality that breaks into history and utterly re-orient those who hear and embrace it. Resurrection is the guarantee of God's promise.

Soteriologically, salvation is not something humanity needs to acquire, but something that God promises and invites humanity to enter into as the promises are enacted redemptively in the world. This soteriology is the basis of a more socially responsible gospel message because it is truly good news for the whole world. For Moltmann greater certainty is not a more effective apologetic, a better version of the gospel is.

Moltmann calls the cross of Christ a critique of Christian theology.¹⁵⁴ He invites his readers to re-examine the cross as a central aspect of Christian theology. When evangelicals assess their own theologies of the cross, do they find an answer comprehensive enough for the needs of the whole world? Or do evangelicals, in their desire to communicate effectively their gospel messages, settle for a truncated, less meaningful gospel message? Has the message of the cross lost its ability to disarm completely and re-orient an evangelical's life? Can a crucicentric gospel truly be a socially responsible gospel? In the next chapter I insist that the cross remain a central fixture of evangelical theology, not a cross denatured by apologetic bias, but the scandalous cross of Jesus.

Conversionism

Evangelicals champion religious conversion as a cornerstone of their spiritualities. While there are a number of subsequent conversion experiences promoted by different evangelical traditions, these traditions all emphasize a primary religious conversion as the moment when an

154. Jürgen Moltmann, "Jürgen Moltmann," in *How I Have Changed: Reflections on Thirty Years of Theology*, ed. Jürgen Moltmann (London: SCM Press, 1997), 18.

individual obtains salvation.¹⁵⁵ Because this experience is seen as foundational, it is often the requirement for acceptance in the community. Subsequently, within the community's favoured narratives the most dramatic of such conversion experiences are given a place of honour.¹⁵⁶ These 'testimonies' often describe a subject as being "nailed on the cross of natural despair and agony, and then in the twinkling of an eye be[ing] miraculously released."¹⁵⁷ Employing the language of being "saved" or "born again" creates for the evangelical a strong reminder of the normative nature of such experiences.

One the greatest difficulties with evangelical conversion experiences is that through their connection to moments of personal or existential crisis - "despair and agony" - they are perceived as miraculous events.¹⁵⁸ Miraculous experiences are often self-legitimizing and not readily available for interpretation or critical analysis. For the subject, questioning the interpretation of such an experience can feel like an affront to God. Much of this inability to examine critically these experiences is due to the evangelical apologetic concern that conversion experiences must be based on absolute certainty.¹⁵⁹ Because of the inability to reflect critically on such personal and subjective experiences, it is very difficult to appreciate the influence of theological assumptions on how these experiences are mediated.

155. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 52.

156. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 77.

157. James, *Varieties*, 252. Invoking William James is deliberate. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* James describes two ways in which people experience conversion or personal transformation. Evangelicals often feel like outsiders when they do not have a significant moment of conversion. Those evangelicals correlate to James' "once-born" personality type while "twice-born" personalities tend to have more dramatic personal conversion experiences. This phenomenon would make an interesting topic for a future research project.

158. James, *Varieties*, 252; Billy Graham, *Peace with God: Revised and Expanded*, reprint, 1953 (Waco: Word Publishing, 1989), 109.

159. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 76–77.

Religious conversion for evangelicals is primarily understood as an appropriation of personal salvation. An individual is converted by accepting God's forgiveness as now being a part of their self-identity. As a result, evangelical convertive piety is as individualistic as is their crucicentrism. This is not always a bad thing. Certainly there is a need for individuals to experience profound personal transformations.¹⁶⁰ But the spectre of anthropocentrism prevents the language and value of conversion from better serving evangelicals as they engage with their larger social contexts. Being 'born again' or 'saved', as the foundational experience of an evangelical, is entirely about an individual and personal experience. Even when talking about subsequent transformative experiences, the language most common amongst evangelicals, 'spirit baptism' and 'renewal', still refers to individual and personal experiences.

Alternatively, one of the strengths of evangelical religious conversion is its comprehensive expectation.¹⁶¹ The convert is assumed to undertake a radical adoption of the evangelical ethos into which they are converted. This includes a complete reversal of many ethical choices, aligning an individual with the norms of the group.¹⁶² This transformation is expected to encompass the entirety of the convert's understandings about life. Such a convertive experience also includes obtaining a clear conscience from which they are able to build their new lives as evangelicals. In this new life, their old lives are theoretically no longer held against them, although often the reality of each individual's situation is much more complicated.

Because evangelical religious conversion is intensely focused on the personal life of the individual, it contributes to a preoccupation with personal religious life. While there is merit in fostering much of evangelical personal morality, the focus on self tends to leave little room for larger social concerns. The net result is that evangelicals can be intensely concerned about keeping their own lives in line with the ethos of their communities while being completely

160. Noll, *American Evangelical*, 25; Graham, *Peace with God*, 145.

161. Graham, *Peace with God*, 114.

162. Sider, *Good News*, 102.

oblivious to the need for wider ethical reflection; either critically reflecting on their adopted evangelical ethos or examining the social implications of their ethical stances.

Evangelical conversion does not need to be so narrow. Progressive evangelicals such as Ronald Sider insist that both the notions of salvation (what is one saved from/for) and conversion need to be extended to restore an evangelical social conscience.¹⁶³ There are two aspects of Sider's critique that need to be highlighted here. First, the idea that salvation needs to have broader consideration than merely the individual's relationship with God.¹⁶⁴ Second, any understanding of conversion that only deals with repentance and relief from personal sin short-circuits the evangelical's social conscience.¹⁶⁵ Moltmann takes up the need for a broader understanding of salvation, what one is saved into, in *Ethics of Hope*. Additionally, Moltmann addresses the language of conversion in *The Source of Life* where he will insist that the language around conversion is theologically important.¹⁶⁶

Moltmann and Conversion

Moltmann's own theology begins with his conversion experience. His own "despair and agony" occurs in the prisoner of war camp where Moltmann spent over three years thinking "about the horrors of war ... and the German crimes against humanity in Auschwitz."¹⁶⁷ From the beginning, Moltmann's conversion story deviates from those of evangelicals. Moltmann does not convert through religious certainty. Nor does he experience an eradication of guilt and shame.¹⁶⁸ Nor is Moltmann converted through a sense of personal sin, rather he feels the weight of the

163. Sider, *Good News*, 84, 102–05.

164. Sider, *Good News*, 89.

165. Sider, *Good News*, 104–05.

166. Moltmann, *Source of Life*, 26–30.

167. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 4; Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 29.

168. Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 29.

sinful actions of his country. In the face of the overwhelming reality of his awakening to these “crimes against humanity,” Moltmann describes an encounter with a God who understands and meets him in his pain.¹⁶⁹ This convertive experience of God plays a formative role in all of Moltmann’s theological reflections.¹⁷⁰

It is prudent to be careful to delineate some variances between North American evangelical notions of conversion and Moltmann’s own understanding. Moltmann is free to have a larger understanding of conversion simply because his conversion occurs in a different context. The character of North American evangelicalism, despite being exported throughout the world, is different than conversionism in the European or even in the British context. As a result, Moltmann does not ever really seem to be focused on his own personal sin or relationship with God, but neither does he preclude the need for personal salvation. This difference is a key one, because by starting as they do from a personal soteriology, evangelicals have trouble moving to the social dimensions of salvation. Salvation, when it does have social implications for evangelicals, does so as an aggregate effect of personal moral transformation. From the start, Moltmann’s conversion is a response to the broad implications of having fought as a German soldier in World War II.

In *Ethics of Hope* Moltmann lists four ways that salvation should be understood:

1. Salvation takes effect in the struggle for economic justice and against the exploitation of human beings by human beings;
2. Salvation takes effect in the struggle for human dignity against political oppression by other human beings;
3. Salvation takes effect in the struggle for solidarity against the alienation of human beings;
4. Salvation takes effect in the struggle for hope against despair in individual life.¹⁷¹

Only Moltmann’s last point deals with an individual’s salvation. Additionally the concern in that

169. Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 30.

170. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 1–2.

171. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 37.

fourth point is not specifically dealing with personal sin as much as it is about restoring hope to the individual.

Salvation for Moltmann is fundamentally a social concept. Salvation “encompasses the whole of life.”¹⁷² The personal dimension of salvation for Moltmann is always about a re-orientation of the individual in “[a]n ethics of hope [that] sees the future in the light of Christ’s resurrection.”¹⁷³ Hence, Moltmann considers conversion, the alignment of an individual’s life with the ethics of hope, an eschatological category.¹⁷⁴ Religious conversion is about taking on a new identity; an identity of those who get a glimpse of God’s hope for the world and “work for a corresponding re-evaluation of this world’s values, so that they may be in conformity with the coming world of God.”¹⁷⁵ Reconciling such a view of salvation with the evangelical ‘born again’ experience will prove to be challenging.

Moltmann offers some helpful commentary on the language of conversion in *The Source of Life*. First he notes that the common evangelical language of ‘born again’ is not particularly helpful. His main complaint is that it is too grounded in the personal life of the individual. The conversion experience really “has nothing to do with a ‘rebirth’ into this mortal life.”¹⁷⁶ Rather, conversion is the transformation to a wider horizon of hope. Moltmann will insist that a better reading of John 3:3 is being ‘born anew’ or ‘born of the spirit’.¹⁷⁷ Both of these understandings call for a conversion to a different way of understanding the world and the convert’s role in that

172. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 37.

173. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 41.

174. Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 22.

175. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 39.

176. Moltmann, *Source of Life*, 28.

177. Moltmann, *Source of Life*, 28.

world.¹⁷⁸ Moltmann insists that this new understanding is social and eschatological, which he bases on the explicit connection between baptism and conversion.

By linking baptism and conversion, Moltmann is insisting that salvation, from the onset, is a community event.¹⁷⁹ By glorifying the personal decision of the individual, evangelicals have undermined this essential connection. Conversion is not simply a personal religious experience. Conversion is celebrated through “the social experience of the Christian community.”¹⁸⁰ Evangelicals have the opportunity to make this connection because of their value of baptism and of converts being integrated into their communities.¹⁸¹ However, present evangelical formulations of baptism and membership tend to be oriented toward reinforcing the private dimension of conversion rather than inviting the convert into a larger social awareness rooted in an eschatology of hope.¹⁸²

Another benefit to reframing of conversion as an eschatological category is that it offers new resources to overcoming the anthropocentric assumptions within evangelical theologies. Shifting emphasis from the personal to the social is an important development, but salvation is not just about people. Moltmann’s understanding of the coming world of God is a comprehensive

178. Moltmann, *Source of Life*, 30.

179. Moltmann, *Source of Life*, 29.

180. Moltmann, *Source of Life*, 29.

181. Graham, *Peace with God*, 171–72; McDowell, *Evidence*, 387. Both of these examples point to the value of converts finding a ‘good’ church. A cite of renewed interest in propagating a more socially rooted understanding of salvation is in the Ancient-Future movement championed by the late Robert E. Webber. See *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 151–52.

182. Evangelicals do not typically use service manuals and individual pastors are expected to generate their own baptismal liturgies. Most of these liturgies provide a time for the candidate to share their own conversion story. But there is little sense that this is an event the community participates in, the service is focused on the individuals being baptized. Membership requirements follow a similar pattern and often involve affirming that one has had a personal conversion experience and is willing to personally follow the ethos of the community.

eschatological reality. “Conversion means turning away from the old world and turning towards the new one; it is a turn to the future.”¹⁸³ In this new world “[I]t is not the human being that is at the centre of the earth; it is life.”¹⁸⁴ But the journey to this wider understanding of salvation necessarily begins by moving beyond exclusively personal notions of salvation.

Moltmann invites evangelicals to reflect on the social dimension of salvation. Can evangelical evangelism shake off its myopia toward personal salvation? Can evangelicals recognize and attend to the ways that language and practice serve to orient a convert? Conversion, especially with its comprehensive transformative nature, is a powerful tool for evangelical theologies. The conviction that people can and must change in order to become better versions of themselves is foundational to social amelioration. However, to develop an adequate evangelical theology of social engagement, there needs to be a more socially responsible understanding of conversion than just personal salvation. In the next chapter I will detail a conversionism that attends to both individual and social betterment.

Activism

Bebbington correctly identifies the evangelical understanding of activism as evangelism.¹⁸⁵ Bebbington suggests that evangelism is, essentially, proselytising.¹⁸⁶ In narrowing evangelical activism to evangelism, conservative evangelicals often hinder their ability to engage their larger social contexts in any way other than as a field of potential converts. Evangelism, as the great work for evangelicals, requires that all social engagement needs to be filtered through

183. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 55.

184. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 61–62.

185. David William Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain : History from the 1730s to 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1988), 10.

186. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 12.

the priority of evangelism. Two important ramifications of the prioritizing of evangelism are the over-simplification of social engagement and the promotion of social pessimism.

One of the first casualties of the narrowing of activism to evangelism is the devaluation of education and intellectual enquiry. Bebbington proposes that the impulse to be actively engaged in evangelism renders learning “a dispensable luxury.”¹⁸⁷ Winning converts is thought to be a relatively straightforward undertaking. Evangelists require little knowledge outside of the gospel message which their evangelical community promotes, their own personal testimony, possibly a list of prerequisite proof texts to lend authority to their gospel presentation, and some basic conversational skills.¹⁸⁸ Education, when it is pursued, is either completely disconnected from religious commitments or relegated to the clergy.¹⁸⁹ Even when clergy are trained in theology and ministry, the educational expectations revolve around maintaining the primacy of evangelism within their churches. Excluded is the expectation that clergy will challenge their congregations to value other important social issues such as systemic injustices and environmentalism. Intellectual engagement with social issues outside of the need to proselytize is not often encouraged. And when the training of evangelicals does cross into wider social issues, the underlying motivation remains the communication of a gospel message of personal salvation.

Any positive attitudes evangelicals might hold toward society are also victims of the narrowing of activism to evangelism. Nothing is a better motivator for evangelism than a sense of urgency and the commitment to social pessimism provides this urgency.¹⁹⁰ The idea that God

187. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 11–12.

188. A typical explanation of evangelism can be seen in Rebecca Manley Pippert’s *Out of the Saltshaker: Evangelism as a Way of Life* (Leicester, England: Inter-varsity Press, 1979), where the emphasis is on the conversation because the content is assumed to be basic and natural to the evangelist.

189. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes*, 146; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 11–12.

190. Marci McDonald, *The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2010), 3; Johnson, “Contrary Hopes,” 37–38.

wants to save people from a world that is falling apart is an attractive idea. Many evangelicals are simply not encouraged to participate wholeheartedly in projects of social amelioration because to make the world a better place may make their basic message of a rescuer God seem less necessary to potential converts.

Activism, in any form, reveals the capacity to act. Evangelicals actually have a lot of energy and good will that they could put behind social amelioration. However, reforming evangelical theologies of social engagement requires evangelicals to consider activism as something more than evangelism. This does not mean activism needs to be thought of as something less than evangelism, but evangelism cannot be the only worthwhile pursuit for the evangelical.

Despite these hurdles, the desire for a better world does break through in evangelicalism. Even in popular evangelical literature, like the *Left Behind* series, stories that are as escapist as the dispensationalism they depict, there is a recognition that evangelicals play a role in the state of the world we live in and that they have some sort of responsibility and ability to effect change in this world.¹⁹¹ The problem is that inherited ideas about how conservative evangelicals should be active in the world have stunted their social awareness. As evangelicals recognize their need for praxis, enacting their religion in their larger social contexts, they require guides that are not hindered by the same socially pessimistic assumptions that hold back their works of social amelioration.

Moltmann and Activism

Moltmann's theology is a political theology, meaning it is always concerned with praxis. His theology takes as true the foundational claim that "[t]here is no such thing as a nonpolitical Christianity."¹⁹² In *Ethics of Hope*, Moltmann carefully delineates an informed theological

191. Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast: The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 3.

192. Jürgen Moltmann, "Progress and Abyss: Remembrances of the Future of the Modern

approach to which he can appeal “to Christians in order to make suggestions for action with hope as its horizon.”¹⁹³ Such a task requires both an in-depth understanding of the crisis being addressed, as well as a similarly engaged understanding of theology. Moltmann brings both of these things together in a dialectic way. His dialectic approach encompasses a mutually informative conversation between theology and the educated understandings about a crisis being addressed. Moltmann demonstrates his alertness to the need of an informed response when he first begins to plan out an ethics of hope. It was then that he “became painfully aware of the limits of [his] knowledge” about specific social injustices to which he would apply his theological insights.¹⁹⁴ A simple, or even one sided, response is not adequate to the challenge of today’s crises. Moltmann is able to recognize the quality of response that is required because he is not hindered by a programmatic priority of evangelism.

Moltmann’s theology is the underpinning for an ethics of hope that could have traction in evangelical contexts. His approach is thoroughly eschatological because he is convinced that “[e]very Christian ethics is determined by a presupposed eschatology.”¹⁹⁵ Hope is important for Moltmann because it is an eschatological orientation for living life in a world that is capable of producing such horrors as Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Moltmann intends hope to be realistic: “Today our hopes will have to be cautious hopes, and hopes that count the costs.”¹⁹⁶ Hope is not a flight from this world but something that “strains after the future.”¹⁹⁷ It is in this informed, yet cautious, hope that Moltmann roots his activism, not in the evangelism of evangelicals.¹⁹⁸

World,” in *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition Amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 22.

193. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, xi-xii.

194. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, xi.

195. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 9.

196. Moltmann, “Progress and Abyss,” 16.

The evangelical caution at this point is to ask: “Where does evangelism fit into Moltmann’s project? Is the theology of hope just another social gospel that swallows up evangelical orthodoxy in its quest for social amelioration?” The answer is found in Moltmann’s understanding of mission: “Evangelization is mission, but mission is not merely evangelization.”¹⁹⁹ By stating this, Moltmann means that the activism of the church must not be narrowed by a priority of evangelism. Every ethical action, simple or grand, is equally as important and as necessary as evangelism.²⁰⁰ It is not surprising then that Moltmann does not clearly articulate a programme of evangelism. What he does articulate well though, is the place of witness in his theology of hope.

The notion of promise and *promissio* are foundational to Moltmann’s theological reflections on witness. The content of witness is essentially the testifying to the promises of God. Testifying is more than just articulating these promises. Witness is also the action that is provoked by the tension between the reality one lives in and the promises of God.²⁰¹ The notion of tension as a theological resource will be taken up in the next chapter. For Moltmann, the church does not create or bring the Kingdom for that is God’s role. Rather, the church announces the promises of God. The gospel is a message of hope that is enacted and articulated. This is a corrective for conservative evangelicals who have too often reduce the gospel message to an apologetic for their own traditions of Christianity. In the next chapter I will present a socially ameliorative and personally transformational gospel message to be both articulated and enacted.

197. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 19.

198. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 21.

199. Moltmann, *The Church*, 10.

200. Moltmann, *The Church*, 10–11, 206; Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 22.

201. Moltmann, *The Church*, 10.

From Moltmann evangelicals can learn that social optimism does not have to sacrifice realism. Hope can be rooted in the promises of God and generate a response that is capable of meeting the significant challenges of our time. But in order to do this, evangelicals will need to contest their ahistoricism. Evangelicals need to recognize that history does matter and that God is concerned about the world they inhabit. Evangelicals will need to find a better way to articulate their gospel messages than through apologetic arguments. Evangelicals will need to refocus their theologies away from their anthropocentric personal religions that do not have the capacity to animate the kind of hope Moltmann is calling for. And evangelicals will need to find their optimism in the promises of God in order to overcome the social pessimism that nullifies their activism. In the next chapter I explore a way that evangelicals can accomplish these tasks in order to construct an ameliorative evangelical theology of social engagement.

CHAPTER 4

A PROPOSAL FOR EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Throughout this thesis I have insisted that there is need for a renewal of evangelical theologies of social engagement. I also argue that, in the past when there has been such a renewal, the impetus for change came from the evangelicals' concern for an effective witness. While, as an evangelical, I share their concerns, I am also hesitant because many of the problems with evangelical theologies of social engagement are difficult to address when the primary motivation for theological renewal is simply effective evangelism. The myopic focus on evangelism obscures the importance of the actual social and environmental issues themselves. The renewal I am calling for involves nothing less than adjusting the way that evangelicals view their relationships to their larger social and environmental contexts. Evangelicals need to recognize that how they relate to their socio-political contexts is at least as important as the call to evangelize within those same contexts. I believe that a by-product of this work will be a more credible public witness, but only if the goal of this work is to become an ameliorative force in the world.

I am also convinced that evangelicals primarily view the world through various eschatological lenses. Their eschatological narratives are the reason evangelicals conclude that effective witness is important. For example, by depicting the church as a lifeboat for rescuing people from an imminent destruction of the world, evangelicals are readily animated to participate in projects of evangelism. Additionally, evangelicals' eschatologies often have an anthropocentric emphasis: the ultimate fate of humanity is distinct from the ultimate fate of the world they live in. Such views do not encourage evangelicals from engaging in projects of social

betterment. This is especially true of the kind of long term social amelioration projects that are required by the significant challenges of our moment in the history of our world. The formative role that eschatology takes for evangelicals means that any sufficient response to problems with evangelical social engagement must address evangelical theologies of the end.

Inaugurated-Enacted Proposal

I propose using an inaugurated-enacted eschatology for the promotion of the renewal of evangelical theologies of social engagement. There are other eschatological frameworks that could be employed, but this particular form of eschatology offers certain advantages to an evangelical theology of social engagement.¹

First, an inaugurated-enacted eschatology animated Henry's foundational work on evangelical social engagement.² Henry demonstrated that without forgoing the premillennial narratives ubiquitous amongst contemporary evangelicals, there are better choices of premillennialisms than the predominantly socially pessimistic dispensationalism. An inaugurated-enacted eschatology acknowledges both the futurist aspect of God's coming reign and, at the same time, the realized aspect of God's reign.

Secondly, an inaugurated-enacted eschatology garners considerable interest from evangelicals under the name of historical premillennialism.³ There are many different understandings of historical premillennialism. However, it is relatively straightforward to differentiate the form of historical premillennialism I am proposing by referencing it to the kingdom theology of George Eldon Ladd. Ladd provided the biblical scholarship behind Henry's understanding of an inaugurated-enacted eschatology.

1. Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, reprint, 1947 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 46.

2. Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 31.

3. Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 38,58.

Thirdly, an inaugurated-enacted eschatology resonates with Moltmann's own eschatological theology. Moltmann emphasizes certain theological aspects of an inaugurated-enacted eschatology that correspond precisely to the theological resources I want to highlight for renewing evangelical theologies of social engagement: prolepsis, provisionality, tension, and participation. This chapter explores in detail each of these complex and interrelated theological concepts as a means of proposing an eschatological framework for renewed evangelical theologies of social engagement.

Neo-evangelical Heritage of the Vineyard

I am also inclined to employ this form of eschatology, because within my own Christian tradition (Vineyard) there is a historical connection to Ladd's inaugurated-enacted kingdom theology.⁴ Vineyard leader John Wimber connected charismatic practices, such as healing prayer, to an inaugurated-enacted kingdom as described by Ladd.⁵ This connection is significant because, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, Wimber's approach to healing prayer was healthier than that of other pentecostal groups. My contention, however, is that the implications of this kingdom theology are not always consistently worked out by Vineyard scholars and leaders. Some Vineyard leaders project the implications of their eschatology onto theological concerns other than healing prayer. For example, South African Vineyard scholar Alexander Venter effectively connected an inaugurated-enacted kingdom eschatological framework with his

4. Bill Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle: A History of the Vineyard* (Cape Town: Vineyard International Publishing, 1999), 54. A great contemporary description of this connection between Ladd's kingdom theology and the Vineyard can be found in Derek Morphew's description of the curriculum for the Vineyard Institutes, see http://pdl.vimeocdn.com/67522/927/174514079.mp4?token2=1393246853_505cc458e6ae95edd92f4d776669ddac&aksessionid=a7c950c443241454 (accessed Feb 24, 2014).

5. John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 157. This is a clear innovation as traditionally Pentecostal and charismatic theologies connect healing to covenantal theologies.

theological and enacted response to apartheid in South Africa.⁶ However, many Vineyard leaders do not make the connection between their eschatology and other theological concerns. For example, American Vineyard leader, Tri Robinson, who demonstrates great concern for environmental issues, does not convincingly connect his movement's kingdom eschatology to his environmental theology.⁷ My conviction is that an evangelical environmental theology, like Robinson's, would greatly benefit from an application of the Vineyard's kingdom eschatology. In the next chapter of this thesis I will explore how such a kingdom eschatology can be used to improve an environmentalist proposal.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the implications of an inaugurated-enacted eschatology that should be used to improve evangelical theologies of social engagement. To accomplish this I will now investigate the inaugurated-enacted eschatology I am proposing.

Inaugurated-Enacted Eschatology and Social Engagement

Ladd's eschatological proposal consists of three significant claims: (1) the kingdom of God is the central concept in Jesus' teachings;⁸ (2) the New Testament tradition asserts that the kingdom of God is a coming or a future reality while being, at the same time a present or an enacted reality;⁹ and, (3) the kingdom of God, as presented in the Bible, is primarily the

6. Alexander Venter, *Doing Reconciliation: Racism, Reconciliation and Transformation in the Church and World* (Cape Town: Vineyard International Press, 2004), 139ff.

7. Robinson's environmental theology is found in his book *Saving God's Green Earth: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility to Environmental Stewardship* (Norcross: Ampelon Publishing, 2006), *Small Footprint Big Handprint: How to Live Simply and Love Extravagantly* (Boise: Ampelon publishing, 2008) and, to a lesser extent, in *Rooted in Good Soil: Cultivating and Sustaining Authentic Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010).

8. George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 27, 45; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, reprint, 1974 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 65.

9. George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God*, reprint, 1959 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 22; Ladd,

expressed reign or presence of God as opposed to a geographical concept or political state.¹⁰

Ladd's work belongs to an established tradition of kingdom theologies that follow from the insight of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer that the kingdom is "fundamental in Jesus' teaching."¹¹ After Schweitzer, the emphasis on the kingdom of God became the subject of much theological inquiry amongst biblical scholars. These scholars either followed Schweitzer's futurist, or transcendent, understanding of the kingdom or they argued for a realized, or immanent, understanding of the kingdom.¹² However, Ladd refused to resolve the kingdom as being either a realized or a future reality; he argued that it is both simultaneously. In doing so, Ladd aligned his theology of the kingdom with the theologies of Joachim Jeremias (a notable interlocutor for Moltmann), W. G. Kümmel, A. M. Hunter, and Oscar Cullmann.¹³ Ladd consistently attempted to maintain the tension between an understanding of kingdom that is now and is also not yet; "a present fulfillment in the setting of future consummation."¹⁴

Presence of the Future, 172.

10. Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, 18–19; Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 123.

11. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 4. This trend in kingdom theologies correlates with the various quests for the historical Jesus which was also inaugurated by Schweitzer in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, reprint, 1968 (New York: Macmillan Pub., 1975).

12. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 5, 10.

13. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 26, 29, 33; Ladd, *New Testament*, 9. For Jeremias the Kingdom is "an eschatology that is in process of realization" in *The Parables of Jesus: Second Revised Edition* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 230. Kümmel argues that the Kingdom is the eschaton but is present in the person of Jesus in *Promise and Fulfilment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus* (Naperville, Ill: Allenson, 1957), 105. Hunter sees the Kingdom as the unifying theme of the New Testament, however he emphasizes the immanence of the Kingdom in his theology, see *Introducing New Testament Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 47. Ladd seems to highly respect Cullmann's emphasis on the tension between the now and not yet of the kingdom while at the same time being critical of his christology, see John A. D'Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85.

14. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 123.

For Ladd, this notion of “present fulfillment” is analogous to an inaugurated kingdom. The kingdom is inaugurated by the incarnation of Jesus. This inauguration is the proleptic arrival in history of the future reign of God, embodied in the person of Jesus. A prolepsis contains within it all the potential of the fullness of what is referenced by the prolepsis. For example, in the incarnation of Jesus, there arrived all the potential of the eschatological kingdom of God. The incarnation is the proleptic reference to the eschatological kingdom of God. The proleptic nature of the Jesus’ incarnation was evidenced by the healing of the sick, the casting out of demons, and even the resuscitation of Lazarus.¹⁵ While these themes are important, more relevant to my purposes here is the assertion that the kingdom’s present fulfillment in history is equally demonstrated through the Bible’s descriptions of the subversive ways that Jesus taught and acted.

Jesus as a Subversive Agent of God’s Reign

In *The Presence of the Future*, Ladd uses the gospel narratives of scripture to present Jesus as a subversive agent of the kingdom.¹⁶ There are two aspects to this portrayal of Jesus: Jesus’ teachings and Jesus’ actions. Ladd believes that these two aspects are inseparable.¹⁷ I will briefly examine two examples from the gospel portrayals of Jesus: the use of parables in Jesus’ teachings, and Jesus’ interaction with Jewish religious leaders.

Ladd favours the view that it is through the parables that Jesus taught about the kingdom of God.¹⁸ Yet by using parables to teach, Jesus opened up the possibility of being misunderstood by those who heard him.¹⁹ Jesus’ parables used imagery that was familiar to his audiences.²⁰

15. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 111–12, 139, 183; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl, reprint, 1990 (London: SCM Press, 1993), 107–08.

16. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 220.

17. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 167.

18. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 242.

19. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 222. This claim is based on Mark 4:11-12 where Jesus

However, within the imagery of these parables, Jesus also introduced a disruption of the hearers' expectations. For example, anyone familiar with sheep herding will realize that a competent shepherd does not risk the whole flock for the sake of one sheep on the off chance that the sheep has just wandered off and not suffered a more nefarious fate. Yet, Jesus is depicted as implying that going after the one lost sheep as a reasonable action.²¹ Parables are intended to challenge or undermine the way that their hearers understand the reality that they live in.²² They are a rhetorical device that invite their hearers to see the world through a vantage that is not restricted by the expected social, economic, and, in this case, agricultural norms. It is also pertinent that Jesus' parable of the lost sheep is situated in the Lukan text as a response to Jewish religious leaders.²³ The gospel records of Jesus' actions and teachings are often accompanied by Jesus' interaction with the Jewish religious leaders of his day.

Matthew's gospel describes many subversive ways that Jesus interacts dialectically with Jewish religious leaders. The common narrative backdrop for Jesus' actions is his contention with the Jewish religious leaders of his day. For instance, when, in Matthew's gospel, Jesus forgave and healed the paralytic in Capernaum, his actions form a critique of "the experts in the law."²⁴ Jesus' actions are portrayed as "blasphemous" by these religious leaders. In the text, these leaders are offended, because Jesus' actions and words subvert the expectations of these religious leaders. Jesus is seen as acting out of a proleptic capacity to address everything that was afflicting

explains to his disciples why he uses parables.

20. Ladd, *New Testament*, 90; John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 72.

21. Luke 15:3-7.

22. William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 13; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 156.

23. Luke 15:1-2.

24. Matthew 9:1-8.

the paralytic. In his historical and cultural context, the paralytic has more than just a physical problem. Being so afflicted meant he would be socially marginalized, seen as a religious pariah, as well as physically debilitated. In the Biblical account, Jesus addresses all three of these afflictions. In verse two, we infer that Jesus affirms the acceptance of the paralytic by his community when we read his acknowledgement of the corporate faith of those who brought the man to him.²⁵ In that same verse, Jesus is depicted as declaring the paralytic's forgiveness as a demonstration of God's favour and blessing.²⁶ And finally, the account of Jesus healing the man's paralysis demonstrates, in a tangible way, that the kingdom of God has indeed broken in through Jesus' words and actions. Through none of these recorded actions does Jesus affirm the religious and social expectations held by the Jewish religious leaders.²⁷ Rather, Jesus demonstrates that "the Kingdom of God and its blessings are present and dynamically active," despite the religious leaders' reservations.²⁸

Jesus' teachings and actions depict a prolepsis of the kingdom. Insights from our interpretations of the parables have the potential to completely upend our view of the world and to bring that view in line with the aims of God's kingdom. In a similar way, the biblical accounts of Jesus' actions portray the arrival of those same enacted kingdom aims. The gospels describe Jesus as the exemplar of this proleptic inbreaking of God's future reign. As Ladd claims, the kingdom "is God's supernatural breaking into history in the person of Jesus."²⁹

25. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 272–73.

26. N. T. Wright also acknowledges that forgiveness is "an eschatological blessing" in that it signals the return from exile back to God, see *Jesus and the Victory*, 434.

27. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 174.

28. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 170.

29. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 189.

Prolepsis of the Kingdom

Ladd's proposal, that the nature of the kingdom is the expressed reign of God, means that the kingdom is the proleptic experience of God's activity in history. Calling it proleptic indicates that the experience of the kingdom has within it the entire possibility of all that the kingdom can and will be. Proleptic experiences are therefore, always full of great potentiality. In the case of the kingdom, that potential is the future as promised by God. Ladd insists that even though we experience this proleptic kingdom as a taste; the "taste is real."³⁰ The potentiality is not that of an abstract ideal, but rather the present fulfillment of the future reign of God. Moltmann's theology of the resurrection of Jesus provides a fitting example of what is meant here by prolepsis.

Through the event of the resurrection, the Christian is invited to see the eschatological future breaking into history in anticipation of a general resurrection from the dead.³¹ The experience of the resurrection is not historical in nature, but eschatological, because it is a foretaste of the end of history (eschaton). The heart of prolepsis is the idea that the not yet is experienced in the now without ceasing to be the not yet.³² This is why both Ladd and Moltmann will challenge the evangelical insistence on the resurrection of Jesus as necessarily being a historical happening.³³ The resurrection is an event, albeit an eschatological event, not necessarily a historical event. The resurrection event rightly belongs outside of history, yet its

30. Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, 41.

31. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch, reprint, 1967 (New York: Harper, 1993), 77; Jürgen Moltmann, "Religion, Revolution, and the Future," in *The Future of Hope*, ed. Walter H. Capps (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 214; Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 36.

32. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 38.

33. George Eldon Ladd, "Faith and History," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 6, no. 3 (1963): 86; Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus*, 240–41.

influence is experienced tangibly within history.³⁴ The resurrection event, breaking into history, is the principle demonstration of the inaugurated-enacted future reign of God.³⁵

Provisionality of the Kingdom

There is also a provisionality to the inaugurated-enacted kingdom in Ladd's theology. Central to his proposal is the claim that we presently occupy the interim time between the inauguration of God's kingdom and its final consummation at the end of history. Like the resurrection event, the kingdom comes from beyond history, but its effects are felt within history. Yet, the proleptic kingdom does not entirely overcome history, rather it breaks into history pointing ever toward its future fulfillment.³⁶ While the experience of the kingdom is a 'real taste', in the temporal reality (history) that humanity occupies, this 'taste' is realized in a provisional way.

One way this notion of the provisionality of the kingdom is demonstrated is by the reality of human mediation and enactment. Action is preceded by interpretation. As individuals and groups gain insight into the trajectory of God's kingdom activity, they act according to their own understandings of how this trajectory might be best accomplished. It is not the reign of God that is restricted by provisionality, it is rather a problem of human interpretation and subsequent participation. So that even when justice is enacted, there is always more that needs to be done.

Provisionality implies that the reign of God is carried out in the context of a world that still awaits the coming consummation of the kingdom as the moment when this present history will be swallowed up by the future of God.³⁷ As Moltmann is fond of saying: "When God will be

34. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 37–38.

35. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 33.

36. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 292.

37. Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, 39.

all in all.”³⁸ The provisionality of the kingdom means that, although it is experienced now in its proleptic fullness, the experience of the kingdom is always in tension with the reality that history still awaits the ultimate fulfillment of all of God’s promises.

Tension as a Theological Resource of the Vineyard

In order to see how eschatological tension provides a resource for reforming evangelical theologies, I will briefly look at Vineyard leader John Wimber’s teachings on healing prayer. Typically, in pentecostal theologies, physical and other supernatural healings are connected with these traditions’ theologies of salvation.³⁹ Divine healing is understood to be provided for by the salvific work of God. The problem with asserting that such healings are an aspect of salvation is that when individuals do not experience healing, their salvation also comes into question. Wimber deftly avoided this theological minefield by connecting supernatural healings with the eschatological kingdom of God.⁴⁰ Wimber reformed pentecostal theologies of healing by insisting that healing was not something guaranteed through salvation, but, rather, an aspect of the proleptic, yet provisional, experience of the kingdom. One example of how such a reform improves evangelical theology is that by making healings a part of the eschatological kingdom, individuals are relieved of the ‘burden of results’.

The burden of results comes from placing the onus for the effectiveness of healing prayers on either the recipient or the praying individual. When the onus of efficacy is placed on the recipient, failure to receive healing is associated with a defect in that recipient’s moral or spiritual state. The unhealed individual’s rightness with God, or assurance of salvation, is brought into question.⁴¹ In this scenario, the blame for failed prayers is shouldered by the person

38. 1 Corinthians 15:28b as it is often paraphrased by Moltmann.

39. Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing*, 154.

40. Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing*, 157.

41. Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing*, 156.

who is already victim to sickness. Alternatively, when the burden of results is placed on the individual praying for the sick, only the bold or foolish will dare to pray. Both sources of the burden of results provide ineffective theologies for inviting individuals to participate in the activity of praying for the sick. However, through connecting healing to the eschatological kingdom, Wimber asserted that the burden of results belongs to neither the recipient nor to the one praying. Wimber stated that “we have no right to presume that unless God heals in every instance there is something wrong with our faith or his [*sic*] faithfulness.”⁴²

By tying the efficacy of healing prayers to the proleptic (yet provisional) breaking in of God’s reign, the burden of results is lifted from both the ones praying and the ones being prayed for. The effect for the Vineyard, as documented by historian Bill Jackson, was the creation of an environment where most individuals felt confident praying for the healing of others without placing an additional burden on those who did not receive healing.⁴³ By removing the burden of results, Wimber was able to effectively invite whole congregations to take on the pastoral care of the sick, including avidly praying for healing.⁴⁴ Regardless of our own understandings of the efficacy of healing prayers, this example reveals a connection between eschatological tension and participatory action. Participating in praying for the sick is analogous to other forms of action in which evangelicals should also engage, including the amelioration of society and of the environment.

Tension of the Kingdom

Eschatological tension occurs when two irreconcilable ideas about the eschatological

42. Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing*, 157.

43. *Quest*, 112–26 See Margaret M. Poloma and Lynette F. Hoelter, “The ‘Toronto Blessing’: A Holistic Model of Healing,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 2 (June 1998): 257–72 for documentation on the practice of healing prayer in the Toronto Airport Vineyard. See also Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing* and Carol Wimber, *John Wimber: The Way It Was* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999) for anecdotal accounts.

44. Poloma and Hoelter, “‘Toronto Blessing’,” 259.

kingdom are posited as being true. The claim that the kingdom is now and at the same time is not yet invokes the specific tension I am proposing. Many scholars have tried to resolve this eschatological tension by emphasizing either the realized (immanent) or the future (transcendent) attribution of the kingdom.⁴⁵ Realized or immanent eschatologies (Bultmann, Kümmel) emphasize the historical reality of the kingdom; the kingdom is now. While future or transcendent eschatologies (Weiss, Schweitzer, Dodd) understand the kingdom as existing outside of history, the kingdom is not yet. Still many other theologians (Jeremias, Cullmann, Ladd, Perrin, Hunter, Moltmann, Fuellenbach) maintain, albeit in different ways, the tension between a realized and a futurist eschatology.

By maintaining the tension between these two eschatological proposals, theology gains a resource for understanding injustice and for recognizing the possibility, or the hope, that things can get better.⁴⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx makes it clear that our examination of history might be enough to help us understand injustice, but it is not, in itself, enough to generate the kind of hope needed to work towards amelioration.⁴⁷ However, when eschatological tension shapes our interpretation of our experience of history, we can become aware of the contrast between experience and our desires for the future. There is a hope that emerges from these contrast experiences where our *desiderium* “demands a future and opens it up.”⁴⁸ Hope is not something that history thrusts onto us.⁴⁹ Hope, rather, is an orientation in history toward the future of our

45. Two excellent surveys of the theological debates around realized and futurist eschatologies can be found in the first chapter of Ladd, *Presence of the Future* and the fifteenth chapter of Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom*.

46. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 120–21.

47. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 620.

48. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 622.

49. Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 55.

longing. When that future is interpreted through the hermeneutic lens of God's promises, the resulting eschatological tension prescribes a theological orientation toward life in the present.

For Moltmann, this eschatological tension between the now and not yet provides the primary theological motivation for his ethics of hope.⁵⁰ This form of tension has within it the potential to animate participation in projects of amelioration. As Moltmann explains, "[t]he word of promise therefore always creates an interval of tension between the uttering and the redeeming of the promise. In so doing it provides man [*sic*] with a peculiar area of freedom to obey or disobey, to be hopeful or resigned."⁵¹ The primary way eschatological tension is experienced is in the becoming aware of existing lacunae between eschatological promises and one's present lived reality.⁵² Consider the experience of injustices that are incommensurate with the promises given by God.⁵³ Moltmann understands that this experience of tension is one that evokes a response - hope or resignation. In his words, "[p]resent and future, experience and hope, stand in contradiction to each other in Christian eschatology, with the result that man [*sic*] is not brought into harmony and agreement with the given situation, but is drawn into the conflict between hope and experience."⁵⁴ Living, as we are, in the interim time means that our experience of the kingdom is governed by eschatological tension.

Because Moltmann admits that tension can provoke either a passive resignation or an active hoping, he introduces the idea that Christian faith is faith, or confidence, in the promises of God. Moltmann tells us that, "[f]aith binds man [*sic*] to Christ. Hope orients faith toward an

50. Timothy Harvie, *Jürgen Moltmann's Ethics of Hope: Eschatological Possibilities for Moral Action* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 151.

51. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 104.

52. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 338.

53. Harvie, *Moltmann's Ethics of Hope*, 151.

54. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

openness to the comprehensive future of Christ.⁵⁵ Hope is therefore the ‘inseparable companion’ of faith.”⁵⁶ Faith is commitment to the promises of God where the promises of God are God’s ultimate intentions for the earth and all that is in it. The promises create new possibilities within history, just as the event of the resurrection of Christ represented an entirely new possibility within history.⁵⁷ Moltmann’s idea of faith can be extended even further into a conviction that God’s promises indicate God’s active work of bettering the world. As Moltmann puts it, faith believes that “the world can be changed by the God of [the person with faith’s] hope, and to that extent also by obedience to which this hope moves” such a person.⁵⁸ Therefore, faith functions as an orientation toward an active form of hoping. A hoping that sees God at work fulfilling God’s promises. A hoping that compels the person of faith to obediently participate in God’s ameliorative activity in the world. So, while faith promotes tension by asserting the promises of God in contrast to the experience of life; tension in turn engenders action.

Participation in the Kingdom

In this proposed eschatological theology, the notion of participation builds on the resources of prolepsis, provisionality, and tension. Participation that is unconvinced of the proleptic nature of God’s promises will have difficulty connecting social and environmental amelioration with God’s kingdom activity. However, without the balance of provisionality, there is danger that those participating in social projects will be unable to reflect critically on their social engagement. Finally, without tension there can be little motivation to act. Motivation comes through the awareness of the distance, or interval, between the promises of God and the

55. Jürgen Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!: God’s Future for Humanity and the Earth*, Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 47.

56. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 20.

57. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 226.

58. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 290.

reality of life.⁵⁹ Our response to this interval has the potential of promoting participation in social amelioration. To act, we need to be convinced that something is really wrong and that things can and should get better. To participate, we need to have a sense that God, through God's own desires, is presently at work making things better.

A Proposal for Kingdom Participation

Most socially concerned eschatological theologies emphasize the realized aspect of God's reign. The Social Gospel, for example, insists that we cooperate with God in building the kingdom. Conservative evangelicals reject this Social Gospel on eschatological grounds. I will explore my own rejection of this kingdom building idea in due course. However, conservative evangelicals rightly reject the conflation of any political structure of human design and construction with the kingdom of God. These evangelicals are concerned that overly realized eschatologies reduce kingdom activity to human works projects. Yet, a similar problem arises when these same conservative evangelicals fail to emphasize sufficiently the realized kingdom in their own theologies. An emphasis on a delayed, or futurist, kingdom proves unable to inspire adequate projects of social amelioration. Rather than trying to reform either side of this theological debate, I am proposing a model of kingdom participation grounded in an inaugurated-enacted eschatology. This model begins with the proleptic nature of the enacted promises of God by claiming that God is actively bettering the world. In addition to the proleptic activity of God, kingdom participation is also manifest through the provisional actions of those who believe in these promises of God. Such believers are motivated by the tension they experience when they reflect upon the contrast between the real social and environmental conditions of this world and the promises of God. I will now detail each aspect of this three-fold model of participation.

1. The Proleptic Participation of God

There are two aspects of the relationship between prolepsis and participation that I will

59. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 104; Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, 39.

explore. On the one hand we have the proleptic nature of God's promises. On the other, we have the proleptic nature of participation in the kingdom by those who have faith in God's promises. Through examining these ideas I will also challenge the Social Gospel's notion of building the kingdom and instead propose employing Moltmann's idea that God's promises create history through the actions of believers. Moltmann's approach is a preferable theological strategy for developing evangelical theologies of social engagement.

God's participatory role is best described as God's faithfulness to fulfilling God's promises. It is necessary to explain how I understand God's promises and how these promises connect to God's participation in social amelioration. I assert that God's promises are commissive, eschatological, and supernatural.

The Promises of God

Promises are themselves a special kind of speech. A promise implies that the one promising will act to fulfill what is promised. Promises are what John Austin calls commissives. Austin explains that "[t]he whole point of a commissive is to commit the speaker to a certain course of action."⁶⁰ When God is described as the one who makes promises, implicit in this description is the understanding that God will also bring about the fulfillment of those promises. God, as promise keeper, is understood as being actively committed to an eschatological future.

God's promises are eschatological. When I claim that these promises are eschatological, I am invoking Moltmann's understanding of eschatology. Eschatology is not a timetable of the future, nor is it a collection of doctrines of the end. Rather, eschatology is the promise of something entirely new. For Moltmann, "Christian eschatology does not speak of the future as such. It sets out from a definite reality in history and announces the future of that reality, its future possibilities and its power over the future."⁶¹ That power over the future is the creation of

60. John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, reprint, 1962 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 157.

61. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 17. See also pages 40-41.

new possibilities for the future of history.⁶² The proleptic aspects of the eschatological kingdom are the immanent possibilities implicit in God's promises for the future. These promises delineate the trajectory of God's ongoing work in history.

Defining the promises of God as eschatological also situates them temporally as part of the future. God's promises announce the future in the present. Through God's promise keeping activity, the promised future breaks into the present. This inbreaking of God's promises into the present is not the result of human activity. This insistence informs my rejection of the Social Gospel's notion of humanity as kingdom builders. The kingdom is never a construction within the present, rather it is the eschatological future that is experienced in tension with the now.⁶³ The kingdom then is a supernatural response to all social and environmental crises.⁶⁴ This does not eschew human activity as part of the enactment of the kingdom, rather it is the acknowledgement that social and environmental amelioration is God's idea, in which humanity is invited to participate. However, there is a further reason to insist on God's promise keeping activity as a supernatural response.

It is important to invoke the supernatural aspect of the kingdom when claiming that the root problem in all social and environmental crises is sin. I deliberately invoke the language of sin because sin is primarily a religious problem.⁶⁵ When we name an injustice as sin we are insisting that the response to that injustice requires more than just a human course correction. Being a religious problem implies that God must play an indispensable role in addressing the problem. Conversely, this claim does not mean that sin can never be addressed by human efforts, rather that it cannot be fully resolved, except through the supernatural action of God fulfilling

62. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

63. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 165, 189.

64. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 188, 192.

65. Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, 31.

God's promises.⁶⁶ Therefore, the most effective course of action for human participation is always in response to the leading of God's promises.

Following the Promise Keeping God

The authors and redactors of the gospels seem to recognize the necessity of following God's initiative in the activity of social engagement. In John's gospel, Jesus often referenced the participatory and responsive nature of his ministry. For example, it is written that Jesus said: "the Son can do nothing on his own initiative, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise."⁶⁷ The response of Jesus was to speak and to do (participation) what he recognized that God was already at work doing. Jesus' orientation towards acting was shaped by his understanding of the promises of God. In the gospels, Jesus acted and spoke with the confidence that he was participating in, and cooperating with, God's supernatural work. Jesus proclaimed, with words and deeds, the inbreaking, into the present, of God's future reign.

Participation denotes that God's activity is experienced in cooperation with humanity. We are not passively awaiting a future fulfillment of God's promises. Rather, we are invited to join with the activity of God in the project of transforming the world in which we live. Through this participation, we experience what Ladd called, the 'leavening' of society by the kingdom or promises of God: "So is the Kingdom of God to transform the world by slow and gradual permeation."⁶⁸ The enacted promises of God are that leaven which constitutes God's active participation in amelioration. God, therefore, is more than an abstract ideal. The idea that God is partner to amelioration is based on the claims that God is at work fulfilling God's promises and

66. Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics: Some Basic Questions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 24–26.

67. John 5:19c NET. See also John 5:30, 6:38, 8:28, 12:49, 14:10-11. John 5:19c. See also John 5:30, 6:38, 8:28, 12:49, 14:10-11.

68. Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, 16.

that God's kingdom is breaking into history in redemptive ways. As much as we see the ameliorative action of God, we are invited to participate in that action.

The gospels depict Jesus as the exemplar of this form of participation with God. Jesus did not build the kingdom, as was expected by his followers. Rather Jesus proclaimed the kingdom as having proleptically broken into history and Jesus acted on the implications of the words he preached.⁶⁹ Ladd also points out that erecting and building are not among the verbs used in the gospels to indicate how we relate to the kingdom.⁷⁰ Ladd tells us that we "can do things for the sake of the Kingdom ..., but [we] are not said to act upon the Kingdom itself."⁷¹ Thus the Social Gospel's project of cooperatively building the kingdom fails to describe accurately the participation we should have with the kingdom.

Kingdom and History

My rejection of the Social Gospel's idea of kingdom building raises an important question about the relationship between history and the kingdom of God. Does our participation build a future or does it build something that is only temporary? Certainly the idea of building something temporary is incompatible with the long term strategies required to address social and environmental crises. Yet, God's reign is not something that is built. Rather, God's reign is the enacted future of the promises of God. When God's reign breaks into the present, it does so proleptically, that is, it breaks in, in ways that are charged with God's full intentions for the future of this world. It is these intentions in which we are called to participate.

When we participate with God's intentions for the future of the world, we act as agents of, what Ladd called, the leavening effect of the kingdom. Because the aims of God are to fulfill

69. The expectation that Jesus would establish a political reign is found throughout the gospels and Acts. For just a few examples see: Luke 19:11, Luke 24:19-21, and Acts 1:6. It is also worth noting that this eschatological proposal rejects the conflation of church and kingdom.

70. Ladd, *New Testament*, 101–02.

71. Ladd, *New Testament*, 102.

God's promises for the future, our participation, so much as it is guided by these intentions, also contributes to bringing about this promised future. The fullness of this promised future, however, is not dependent upon our participation even though our participation can be a significant part of how God's promises are realized in history. We are not given the burden of results, which frees us up to focus on the responsibility to interpret and to act. Therefore, our interpretations of the aims of God form the basis for our ethical way of living as believers in God's promises.

The majority of Jesus' teachings are distinctly ethical.⁷² Yet Jesus does not simply propose a list of ethical behaviors or imperatives. Rather, Jesus proclaims an event, the inbreaking of the kingdom, as that which makes possible an ethical orientation toward the world.⁷³ Implicit in the teachings of Jesus is the idea that God is not some "indifferent spectator of human affairs" but rather one who acts in history in concert with us to fulfill God's promises for the future.⁷⁴ This call to participate requires human decision that is, according to Moltmann, proleptically "pregnant with future."⁷⁵ Jesus' ethics do not stand apart from the kingdom, rather they inhabit the kingdom bringing about the redemptive work of God in history, even if they do so presently, only in a provisional way.

2. Provisional Participation of Humanity

The provisionality of participation means that the stewardship of the kingdom belongs to God alone. I am arguing that humanity is not enlisted to build the kingdom. Rather, humanity is invited to participate with God in the works of the kingdom. These kingdom works are the activities of God that are already inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Jesus. These kingdom works are the continuation of the ongoing redemptive work of God in history as history

72. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 278.

73. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 216–17.

74. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 332.

75. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 97.

itself awaits eschatological consummation through the promised return of God. As Moltmann tells us, “God is not somewhere in the Beyond, but he [sic] is coming and as the coming One he [sic] is present.”⁷⁶ Such an understanding of the kingdom clearly distinguishes humanity’s actions from those God is expected to undertake. Humanity is called to act provisionally, meaning to the best of its understanding, in cooperation with God’s kingdom works; just as God is fully expected to remain faithful to bringing about the fulfillment of God’s promises.

The role of humanity as provisional participants in kingdom works implies that human action is always subject to refinement. The ability to refine activism is important because, as I claimed in chapter three, social and environmental amelioration requires flexibility in order to generate adequate responses to the crises of today. As individuals and movements become aware of the implications of their actions, then adjustments must be made to ensure that society, and the world at large, are actually being made better. Framing participation as provisional avoids two potential discomforts that evangelicals have with social engagement proposals. First, maintaining the centrality of the kingdom as the motivating idea in social engagement means that God remains a central referent in the evolution of social and environmental ethics. Secondly, such a proposal keeps the integrity of God’s promises intact.

In their zeal to maintain the claim that their choices of social engagements are directed by God, too often evangelicals limit the amount of attention paid to understanding the crises their engagements are meant to address. This narrowness is unnecessary. With a provisional understanding of participation, the goal of social and environmental engagement always remains oriented around the understood promises of God. The integral role of human interpretation, however, is acknowledged as being the responsibility of endeavoring to understand the interval between the promises of God and the present reality. God’s promises, are therefore, distinct resources for developing and evaluating proposals of social and environmental engagement.

76. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 164. The idea that God, as the coming One, is integral to God’s nature is also prevalent in the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg, see *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 40.

Evangelicals need to bring their understandings of God's promises into the dialogues surrounding humanity's responses to social and environmental crises.

An example of this problem is found in the evangelical reliance on stewardship as a response to the environmental crisis. Evangelicals often defend stewardship as God's mandate for how they relate to the environment.⁷⁷ Stewardship, as a course of action, is presented as scripturally prescribed.⁷⁸ Yet it is not acknowledged that stewardship is an interpreted response that emerges from an interpretation of the Bible. Because stewardship is treated as sacrosanct, neither the efficacy of activities associated with stewarding the environment nor the complexities of the environmental crisis are used to evaluate evangelical environmental action.

When the emphasis is placed on our provisional application of our understandings of the promises of God, then these promises are able to orient our ethical engagement while remaining, at the same time, a telos for God. Freed from the burden of results, we are enabled to critically evaluate our enacted social and environmental engagements. Also, the promises of God retain their integrity because they are neither challenged directly nor are they expected to be completely fulfilled in the present. This claim is not meant to imply that the interpretations of God's promises are free from being contested, as should be the case when evangelicals conflate their interpretations with the actual promises. Rightly, the challenge to these promises should be focused on the interpretations of the promises rather than the promises themselves. When we read in the Bible a promise that God's reign will bring justice, we are left to interpret what is meant by justice.⁷⁹ Our interpretations of these promises are challenged when they are brought

77. In the next chapter I will look at this problem in depth through the stewardship proposal of Tri Robinson as found in his book *Saving God's Green Earth*.

78. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 13; Katherine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley, *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions* (New York: Faith Words, 2009), 130–32; William B. Badke, *Project Earth: Preserving the World God Created* (Portland: Multnomah, 1991), 124.

79. For example see Heb. 1:8.

into dialogue with the analysis of the social and environmental contexts in which these promises are invoked. Naming this process a dialogue implies the capacity for reorientation of the interpretations involved, both to the promises and to understanding of the context itself. So while the promises may come to be understood in new ways, the promises themselves persist. By way of my example, the promise of justice remains even if our understanding of what justice is changes.

3. The Tension of Participation

Key to understanding the promises as an orientation for human activity is the tension experienced when the promises of God are contrasted to the social and environmental conditions in which we live. The promises are not only meant to lead us into a discomfort with the state of the world we live in, they are also avenues for generating hope. This hope is *proleptic* so much as the promises create real possibilities of a better future for this world. These promises are commissive in that they commit God to the process of bringing about the conditions of their fulfillment. But these promises are also *pro-missio* in that they invite our participation with God in the task of social and environmental amelioration.

Tension is maintained by insisting on the provisional nature of our participation with God in the *pro-missio*. The resulting tension is a tool with which we can both orient our action and measure our efficacy. Where we notice the tension most, in the contrast between promise and lived reality, is also where we are directed to act in participation, moving in the directionality (trajectory) of the promises. When we examine social or environmental injustice, it is our faith in and interpretation of the promises of God that help us to determine an appropriate course of action. Simply responding without sufficient reflection is one of the problems I have identified with programmes of conservative evangelical social engagement. Tension also helps to address this deficiency.

Tension is the tool by which we can evaluate our present social and environmental engagement. Because tension is both directive and evaluative, it constitutes the animating force

for a hermeneutic circle.⁸⁰ A hermeneutic circle is a dialogical process by which we move from analysis to evaluation to action and then back to analysis. Analysis, in this dialogical process, consists of conscientization through sustained reflection on social and environmental conditions. We are conscientized as we scrutinize the conditions of our lived reality, including our own complicity in that reality.⁸¹ This type of analysis is often deficient in conservative evangelical proposals for social engagement. However, a sustained analysis of social and environmental conditions is required to develop adequate responses to the crises of our present day. Evaluation brings the promises of God into the conversation so that the disparity between the promise and the lived reality can be judged. That judgement orients a participant in their subsequent actions.⁸² Because action is maintained, in this proposal, as being provisional, the process is free to cycle back to the beginning, assessing the social or environmental impact of the current course of action. By not conflating our actions with a constructed kingdom, we are free to continually evaluate our actions and our analysis in order to move towards real social and environmental betterment.

Adjusting the Way Evangelicals See the World and See Themselves in the World

As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the eschatologies that fundamentalist evangelicals adopted let them reframe their understandings of their relationship with their larger social contexts. The justification for ceasing to engage in projects of social amelioration was precipitated by a negative view of society as actively trying to undermine the essentials, what

80. An astute reader will recognize here the influence of Latin American Liberation Theology. While the political theology known as Liberation Theology is fairly well understood in global Christian theologies, it is often overlooked by evangelicals. The notion of a hermeneutic circle was initially defined by Juan Luis Segundo in *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1977), 8.

81. Paulo Freire's understanding of conscientization includes consideration of the complicity of the subject reflecting on the social condition. See "Conscientisation and Liberation," *Communio Viatorum* 17, no. 3 (1 June 1974): 118.

82. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 120.

they called fundamentals, of their Christian traditions. The notion of ameliorative participation with the world became an absurdity. Why would anyone participate with the very milieu that wanted to rob them of their faith?

With Carl Henry, I highlighted an important challenge to the fundamentalists' suspicion of its larger social contexts. Not all projects of social amelioration were opposed to evangelical priorities, even if they did not share those priorities. Henry sought to promote conscientious involvement with such projects by challenging the pessimism that saturated fundamentalist eschatologies. Henry represents the beginnings of a renewed understanding of the relationship between evangelicals and the world in which they live.

Moltmann also offers a contribution to the renewal of the way that evangelicals see themselves in the world they live. Moltmann's convictions emerged when he was faced with his unintentional complicity in the atrocities of the Second World War. Moltmann's critique of Christianity's response to the atrocities of the war was largely that Christianity should never remain passive in the face of injustice. Moltmann locates the theological resources for developing his political theology in Christian eschatology. His central claim is that eschatology has the capacity to orient the Christian towards active hoping in this world.

My final interlocutor, George Eldon Ladd, provided an eschatological foundation for the renewal of the evangelicals' relationships with their larger socio-political contexts. Ladd countered the escapist and pessimistic dispensational premillennialisms with his inaugurated-enacted eschatology. This eschatology is the basis of my own proposal. Ladd's eschatology depicts an ongoing drama of God's redemptive action transforming the world by the inbreaking of God's kingdom reign. This drama is active in that neither God nor humanity are understood as being merely passive agents. This drama is hopeful in that it depicts God and humanity working together toward a better future for this world. This eschatological proposal is comprehensive, as the leaven of the kingdom works its way through all social and earthly concerns leading to a promised renewal of the entire planet.

Proposals for Biblicism, Crucicentrism, Conversionism, and Activism

In this proposed theology of social engagement, I am calling on evangelicals to be active participants in God's kingdom works by taking on an ameliorative role in the world. This proposal aims to convince evangelicals that God is actively working toward the betterment of this world. I am insisting that evangelicals must choose an active form of hoping, rooted in the promises of God and conscientized towards the social and environmental crises of our moment in history. To flesh out this proposal, I will once again invoke Bebbington's quadrilateral. First, I propose a biblicism that emphasizes God's promises as its hermeneutic key. Secondly, I advocate a crucicentrism rooted in the recorded life of Jesus, as exemplar of kingdom participation. Thirdly, I promote a conversionism that insists we are continually converted by our conscientization to both God's promises and to our lived contexts. And finally, I exhort evangelicals to take up an activism that is more comprehensive than evangelism alone.

Biblicism

Bebbington's category of biblicism describes a particular place of pride that the Christian scriptures hold for evangelicals. The claim that the Bible plays an authoritative role for evangelicals glosses over the fact that how evangelicals understand this authoritative role differs for various groups and traditions. In this section, I am proposing a functional formulation of the authority of scripture as a way of maintaining the central role of the Bible, without succumbing to the private and anachronistic readings identified in the third chapter of this thesis.⁸³ I will then show how formulating authority in this way allows the Bible a special place in the process of conscientization.

Functional Authority of the Bible

For evangelicals, the Bible is most often seen as a *de facto* authority with too little

83. Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 130.

attention paid to how it might be a functional authority.⁸⁴ A functional approach does not belittle the importance of the authority of the content of scripture. Rather, a functional approach claims that the content of scripture gains, or reveals, its authority through its application (reading) to an actual lived situation. The claim of the authority of scripture is not based on a tautological argument, but rather, grounded in the ability of the texts themselves to be interpreted in ways that help the readers navigate their lives and their social contexts.

The functional approach asserts more than merely the authority of the prescriptive text. Prescriptive texts are important, but only in companionship with the narrative (and other) texts in the bible. The narrative form of the texts, for example, give critical insight into the formulation of prescriptions within the texts. The fact that the narrative texts themselves reveal the efforts of individuals and groups at navigating their own social contexts, helps validate the readers' own process of bringing the texts into conversation with their lived contexts. The scriptural texts are not alien to the complexities of life. Rather, they are essential partners in the process of navigating life's complexities. As partners in this process, the biblical texts are demonstrably authoritative in as much as they offer guidance relative to the context in which they are read.

A functional approach is an accurate evaluation of how many evangelicals actually already interact with their sacred texts. Evangelicals read their texts with an expectation that the texts will be a faithful guide in navigating the vagaries of life. However, because evangelicals subscribe to a *de facto* formulation of authority, they often do not recognize that they are asserting scripture's authority functionally. This inability to recognize how authority is constructed makes it difficult for evangelicals to critically evaluate truth claims made from interpretations of scriptural texts.

In the *de facto* model, interpretations of the texts often get conflated with the texts themselves. Because the texts are considered authoritative, even before they are applied to a lived

84. David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Use of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 30, 97–98; Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 130.

context, the interpretations are treated as authoritative and unquestionable. Treating texts as sacrosanct prohibits dialogue between the text and the reader's lived context. Thus, despite the insistence on the *a priori* authority of scripture, evangelicals do not actually hold a consistent foundational interpretation of these scriptures. Evangelicals champion a diversity of interpretations of various scriptural texts. Additionally, evangelicals are adaptable, adjusting their interpretations to fit their contexts. However, they are also expert at justifying their interpretative shifts in order to maintain their claims of textual authority.⁸⁵ Ultimately, evangelicals appeal to scripture in a manner that obscures their own process, mistaking confident claims for the authoritative voice of the texts themselves. Evangelicals could easily adopt a functional approach to scriptural authority if they could first challenge the dominance of the *de facto* approach.

The *de facto* approach to scriptural authority became a primary evangelical approach with the Fundamentalist movement. This approach was a response to a felt need to assert the authority of the Bible when textual criticism and liberal theologies seemed to undermine that authority. Under the nomenclature of 'plain readings', a *de facto* approach obfuscates the fact that evangelicals actually champion varied, private interpretations of scripture. As a result, evangelicals often debate the authority of their Bible without considering how they actually interpret and apply the biblical texts. The Bible is enshrined in such a way that it is treated as a comprehensive and easily accessible manual for navigating all the complexities of life, despite

85. By way of example of the kind of interpretive shift consider the chapter "The Remarriage Dilemma, Another Turning Point" from Ken Wilson's *A Letter to My Congregation: An Evangelical Pastor's Path to Embracing People Who are Gay, Lesbian and Transgender in the Company of Jesus* (Read the Spirit Books, 2014). In that chapter, Wilson argues that evangelicals have shifted their interpretation of scriptural passages on divorce and, subsequently, altered their view of remarriage. As a result evangelicals now have a greater willingness to remarry and allow remarried people to minister in their churches. Both those arguing for and against this leniency base their arguments on interpretations of the biblical prohibitions. It is these interpretations that are actually used authoritatively by evangelicals, not the texts themselves.

the fact that this ‘same’ manual seems to give conflicting advice to the many different groups and traditions that appeal to the Bible in this manner.

Moltmann’s theory of scripture, as defined in the previous chapter, helps us move from a *de facto* approach to a functional approach on the authority of scripture. For Moltmann the authority of the Bible is found in the articulation of God’s promises, specifically in the way that these promises open up possibilities for the future. This means that the Bible’s authority is not established by fiercely defended presupposition about the nature of the text. Rather, its authority is demonstrated as the Bible is read in the context of living and wrestling with the conditions of the world its readers inhabit. This is a functional authority that comes from scripture’s capacity to generate active hoping in those who turn to its pages for guidance and insight.

Conscientization

Focusing on a functional basis of authority requires evangelicals to attend to the contextual implications of their readings of scripture. In addition to the usual mechanics of interpreting scripture, evangelicals need also ask questions about how their interpretations affect their larger social and environmental contexts. Do their readings promote social and environmental amelioration? Along with whatever other tests they use to measure the fidelity of biblical interpretation, a functional approach also demands that evangelicals measure the efficacy of those interpretations at contributing to solutions to social and environmental crises.

Central to Moltmann’s theology of scripture is the idea that the Bible primarily articulates the promises of God. In its narrative forms, the Bible presents the story of the peoples of God’s promises. And the theme of promise is further elucidated by the other literary forms found in the Bible’s pages. This focus on promise is an interpretive key. Attending to the promises of God is a lens by which individual texts can be interpreted. For Moltmann the attention to God’s promises is central to generating the theological resource of tension. Promises articulate the aims of God to a world that often misses the mark.

Promises are meant to speak to a lived situation. This aspect of promises is readily seen in the narratives within the Bible. Much of the biblical text is narrative in form or inspired by narratives. For the First Testament, the primary orienting narrative is the exodus event, as told in the book of Exodus. For the New Testament, everything is fixed upon the Christ event, as articulated in the canonical gospels. Both of these narratives show God actively working to fulfill God's promises. They also explore the human efforts and failings at participating with God's promise keeping works. It is through these narratives that we actually see examples of individuals and groups, experiencing the tension between God's promises and their lived realities. In the Bible we read the stories of how tension helps orient the actions of individuals and groups. And finally, through our readings, we are exhorted to continue the story in our own lives, as we witness to God's promises in the context of our crises-addled world.

Functional authority, as I am proposing it, also demands that evangelicals be attentive to their larger social and environmental contexts. In order to experience theological tension, one must be educated in the actual conditions of life in this world. Acknowledging God's promises of justice must be put in stark contrast with the depths of injustice found in our world. Locating sites of amelioration is also necessary for recognizing where one might participate with God in the betterment of our world.

Biblicism must be a combination of the functional authority of scripture, expressed through focusing on the promises of God, and the frank acknowledgment of the realities of our social and environmental contexts. Such a biblicism can generate a distinct orientation toward the world in which the evangelical lives. The Bible is read as referent to the world in which we live, and as relevant to the navigation of the complexities of life in this world. Evangelicals, informed by such a biblicism, can evolve from doomsaying prophets to participants in God's promise keeping activity. Evangelicals can leave behind the pessimistic narratives that often guide their interpretations of scripture. Instead, evangelicals can embrace an emphasis on the *pro missio* promises of God and participate with God in the work of fulfilling God's promises for social and environmental amelioration.

Crucicentrism

The evangelical priority of crucicentrism indicates the centrality of soteriology for evangelical theologies. In particular, crucicentrism focuses on Jesus' role in salvation. For evangelicals, soteriology and salvation are often narrowly defined as concerning an individual and his or her relationship with God. To be 'saved', in the evangelical vernacular, is to have accepted Jesus personally as one's saviour. While there are merits to a theological emphasis on personal conversion experiences (I will explore some of these merits under my proposal for conversionism) this narrowed focus restricts evangelical soteriologies in several ways.

Evangelical Soteriology

In evangelical soteriology, salvation is typically reduced to an individual (personal) experience. Further, salvation is reduced to the particular individual experience of a human person. It is difficult to move from a myopically personal notion of salvation to an understanding of salvation that also promotes social and environmental amelioration. The difficulty here comes from the lack of emphasis on the communal and non-human implications of salvation. Where salvation is understood to have implications for anything beyond the individual, it is merely an aggregate effect of individual salvation experiences. Social and environmental concerns are always only peripheral to the concerns of the individual.

Also, salvation is tied to a presented argument — a gospel presentation. For evangelicals this gospel presentation is often simplified as a formulaic pitch for proselytizing non-evangelicals. Such a gospel formulation is entirely focused on the immediacy of the individual being targeted. The emphasis is on how the hearer can better his or her own personal life by redressing their relationship with God. The needs to better social and environmental conditions rarely enter into the gospel presentation which is focused on getting the individual 'saved'. Therefore, there is little possibility that such a message will promote hope for the complex social and environmental crises of our day.

Additionally, the content of the gospel message itself as typically presented by evangelicals is also malformed eschatologically. The truncated gospel only deals with the futurist aspect of salvation by promising the recipient a place in a future heaven. An eternal destination in either heaven or hell are the perceived stakes for most evangelical soteriologies. Little if any concern is shown for the future of society or of the planet.

Ron Sider is another sympathetic (evangelical) critic of evangelical soteriologies. Sider posits that evangelicals diminish their gospel messages when they focus exclusively on personal salvation. Sider claims that

[c]heap grace results when we reduce the gospel to forgiveness of sins; limit salvation to personal fire insurance against hell; misunderstand persons as primarily souls; at best, grasp only half of what the Bible says about sin; embrace the individualism, materialism, and relativism of our current culture; lack a biblical understanding and practice of the church; and fail to teach a biblical worldview.⁸⁶

Sider is convinced that the problem consists in the way that evangelicals frame their gospel messages. The evangelical gospel is formulated as what he calls “fire insurance;” salvation is a guarantee that the individual can avoid spending their afterlife in the fires of an eternal hell. By pitching “fire insurance,” the weightier concerns of personal and social transformation are too often ignored.⁸⁷ Salvation is reduced to a personal negotiation between the individual and God. Further, this negotiation is often fixated on the singular moment when a person becomes ‘saved’. This singular moment is considered more important than any other decision or action an individual can make. Neglected are the ongoing processes of sanctification, redemption, and “the ultimate cosmic restoration of all things in Christ.”⁸⁸

86. Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 56.

87. Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 85.

88. Sider, *Good News*, 89.

Jesus' Gospel

Jesus preached a different gospel. In the gospels, Jesus is portrayed as explicitly linking his good news (gospel) to the eschatological kingdom of God.⁸⁹ Jesus is also described as enacting that gospel by modelling a life that demonstrated the immanent efficacy of his message. In the texts the lame walked, the blind saw, and the deaf were made to hear. The recorded message of Jesus went much deeper than simply addressing the physical reality of individuals. I have already acknowledged the comprehensiveness of Jesus' message through my brief exploration of his interaction with the paralytic in the ninth chapter of Matthew's gospel. The message of the kingdom, that Jesus of the Bible proclaimed, has a proleptic aspect in that it has the potential of so much more than merely securing for an individual a place in a future heaven. The good news, in the gospels, has a commissive quality in that it is first shown to be uttered by God, through the person of Jesus, and then actively set into motion for the sake of the world.⁹⁰ World here, as interpreted by the author of John's gospel, is the entirety of all things that God has created.

The words from John's gospel, that "God so loved the world,"⁹¹ stand at the heart of a gospel message that has efficacy for social and environmental amelioration. Unfortunately, the word for "world" in this passage is often understood, anthropocentrically by evangelicals, to simply mean 'a people'. But the Greek term, *kosmon* is the root for our English word cosmos, which is not reducible to just the people on our planet. The *kosmon* that God so loves "is not an abstraction and not a 'savable' part of the whole, but the real world in its inseparableness and interrelatedness. God is firmly committed to the life of this world as that cross was planted in the

89. Sider, *Good News*, 86.

90. Even the protoevangelium, Genesis 3:15, is a promise spoken by God.

91. John 3:16a NET.

ground.”⁹² In the Bible we read that the gospel that Jesus proclaimed is not restricted to individuals who recite a sinner’s prayer, but, rather, has implications for the sanctification, redemption, and restoration of all things.

The Cross and Sanctification

I claimed that the paralytic described in the ninth chapter of Matthew was likely considered as a religious pariah. Jesus addressed this aspect of the paralytic’s predicament when he pronounced the man’s sins forgiven. This declaration was depicted as scandalous to the religious leaders who were present; it was scandalous precisely because Jesus declared God’s blessing on something, or rather someone, who was considered to be profane.

There is a similar reaction that can be observed in those evangelicals who insist on seeing the world as irredeemably profane and not a place where we should expect to see God’s blessings and activity. The need to sharply distinguish the profane from the sacred has even become divisive for evangelicals who wrestle with the tension between the ideas of a culturally relevant witness and maintaining the purity of their gospel formulations and their truth claims.⁹³ For most evangelicals the world is not understood as a sacred space.

This evangelical negativity toward the world comes from pessimistic interpretations of the Bible. Often evangelicals, especially those with pessimistic eschatologies, have little hope for the future of the world. Further, these evangelicals understand the world as a hostile, corrupt, and potentially corrupting place.⁹⁴ In reality, these negative interpretations of the world are

92. Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 36.

93. A great case example is the emerging church movement. At its best this movement was an attempt to incarnate a Christian witness in rapidly changing urban contexts. The idea of taking church out of the traditional structures (physical and otherwise) has been met with a fair degree of suspicion and derision. D. A. Carson’s book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implication* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), is a great example of the evangelical reaction. For Carson, a respected evangelical biblical scholar, this work is an embarrassingly ill informed reaction to the emerging church movement.

corroborated by the experience of a social context that can be highly critical toward religious faith. Reading scripture in the light of such experiences simply reinforces evangelical negativity. However, this is not the only understanding of the world to found in the scriptures.

The claim that the world is irredeemable stands in contrast with the recorded confession of Jesus that, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him.”⁹⁵ Regardless of the complexity with which the world is portrayed, in the Bible the world is consistently described as the location of God’s redemptive activity. It is in the world we inhabit that we should expect to see the activity and blessings of God. In the biblical text there can also be found optimistic attitudes toward the world.

However, expecting to see God’s blessing and activity in the world does not mean that evangelicals should simply acquiesce to the norms of their larger social contexts. Evangelicals must instead follow the example of Jesus, whose subversive influence was depicted as being directed both toward the established religious traditions and toward his larger social context. Where evangelicals can begin their participation, as subversive agents of the kingdom, is with the acknowledgement that the arena of sanctification is larger than merely the individual - it is the whole of creation (*kosmon*).

Sanctification, that process by which something (or someone) profane is made sacred, describes something about God’s response to the effects of sin. Sin, in this case, is any action or attitude that removes the sacredness of a person or object. Sin causes a separation between that person or object and God. Sin is a denaturing act, an attitude that undermines the ways in which the sacred can be experienced. In scripture, sin is first described as the rejection of God’s affirmation of inherent goodness; “is it really true that God said?”⁹⁶ The second described sin is

94. For example 1 John 2:15 describes the world as a potentially corrupting influence.

95. John 3:17 NET.

96. Gen. 3:1-7 NET. In both the previous creation story (Gen. 1:12) and earlier in this second narrative (Gen. 2:9) the vegetation that gives life-giving food is described by God as

murder, which is the ultimate denial of the sacredness of an individual.⁹⁷ As I have stated already, sin is at its core a religious problem. It is the problem of invoking a state of godforsakenness.

Moltmann provides theological tools for understanding godforsakenness and God's response to godforsakenness. First, Moltmann insists that we need to reflect on the implications of the cross on God's self, rather than just thinking about the cross in terms of personal salvation.⁹⁸ The cross is scandalous because it represents God's entrance, through the death of Jesus, into the godforsaken state that results from sin. Moltmann explains that, "[w]hen one uses the phrase 'God in Christ', does it refer only to the Father, who abandons him and gives him up, or does it also refer to the Son who is abandoned and forsaken?"⁹⁹ Moltmann scandalously insists that God enters into godforsakenness in solidarity with humanity. God enters into human suffering, human injustice, human sin - but those things are not permitted to have the last word. That last word belongs to God and will echo the event of the resurrection as the hope to overcome sin in all its manifest forms.

The cross, according to Moltmann, is the center of all Christian theology. He tells us that the cross "is not the only theme of theology, but it is in effect the entry to its problems and answers on earth."¹⁰⁰ The crucified God is more than just a propitiation for the sins of humanity -

being good. Adam is instructed to "not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:17 NET) because it would bring death, not life. It is the serpent's tactic to challenge God's ability to assess what is truly good. Sin is not joining in this questioning, but rather acting contrary to the promise of God. When Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil she was testing the promise of God that eating such fruit would result not in life, but in death.

97. Gen. 4:7-8.

98. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, reprint, 1974 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 201.

99. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 204.

100. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 204.

it is a condescension of God into godforsakenness. In the face of the very worst that sin can bring, namely abandonment in death, we encounter the Jesus who cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”¹⁰¹ Through the cross the sacred becomes the profane, so that the profane might be made sacred. When the apostle Paul describes the ministry of Christians to the world (*kosmon*) he roots their message of reconciliation with: “God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him [Christ] we would become the righteousness of God.”¹⁰²

The Cross and Redemption

The cross reveals the Christian God as the one who enters into the messiness and injustice of our present world in unexpected ways. Even Jesus’ disciples had a hard time coming to terms with the idea that Jesus would be crucified rather than establish an earthly kingdom. The expectation of the messiah was the restoration of Israel and the establishment of God’s reign on earth. For example, the disciples of Jesus did not expect a messiah who would encourage them to continue paying taxes.¹⁰³ However, rather than pushing aside the socio-political realities, Jesus worked redemptively within his social context and transformed the lives of people around him.

Redemption is that process by which the broken and the worthless are made useful and valuable. Redemption is, then, a way of describing the overcoming of missteps, mistakes, and overwhelming flaws. Redemption constitutes something more than simply making restitution for past wrongs; redemption transforms the very situations created by those past wrongs. Redemption does not constitute a denial of these past wrongs, but rather brings forth something good from what was decidedly not good. As Carl Henry insists, redemption is God’s response to all that is wrong with the world.¹⁰⁴

101. Matt 27:46 NET.

102. 2 Cor 5:18-21 NET.

103. Mark 12:17.

104. Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 35.

God's promises commissively orient God toward the redemption of the world in which we live. Jesus demonstrated these promises when he found value in the outcasts and the broken, unexpectedly attending to the needs of lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, adulterers, and others. Through his words and actions, Jesus amelioratively transformed the lives of people around him. Consider again the paralytic from Matthew's gospel. As a religious pariah and a physical burden, the paralytic would be expected to have had a broken, or at least strained, relationship with his family. Yet, it is the ones who bring the paralytic to Jesus that are affirmed as his real family; those people with the faith to believe something better for this broken man. We have no clues in the text to reveal their motives for bringing the paralytic to Jesus. Were they doting fans of the paralytic? Were they desperate friends and family? Were they simply the ones the paralytic pestered into carrying him to Jesus? The text simply tells us that they had faith and Jesus recognized that faith publicly as a way of transforming the state of the paralytic from a burdensome weight on his family to one who was valued enough to those who brought him that they had faith to see him healed. Regardless of their actual relationship to the paralytic, through redemption they were made into his family.

Redemption describes God's orientation toward the whole world.¹⁰⁵ The redemptive trajectory is an eschatological category by which God promises to redeem what is broken and worthless in our world. The aims of God for the amelioration of our social and environmental context are rooted in the idea that God is a redeemer. Redemption works with what is to bring about something beautiful and good. I propose this understanding of God in contrast to the belief that God wants to tear down the world and start afresh. God is not pessimistic toward the world because God can, and will, redeem the world we inhabit.

Evangelicals must be participants in God's redemptive aims and promises for this world. This however, means rejecting the pessimistic notions that undermine any expectation that God

105. George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 15.

wants to work redemptively in the world. Evangelicals need to look for the unexpected ways in which God is already working to transform our broken world by undoing the negative effects of sin, wherever it is found.

The Cross and Restoration

The cross is the divine protest of all that is wrong in this world. It represents the end of history that must come before that which is new can break into history in ameliorative ways. The cross always comes before the resurrection and its significance is defined in relationship to the resurrection. Without the resurrection the cross becomes nonsensical. In speaking about the importance of the resurrection, the apostle Paul says that “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins.”¹⁰⁶ Resurrection hope is the hope that death, as the ultimate wages of sin, does not have the last word. Resurrection is then the assurance that God is committed to God’s promises. And those promises insist on the restoration of all that has been damaged by sin, both personal and social.

It is the cross of the risen Jesus that represents our eschatological hope.¹⁰⁷ The resurrection is God’s answer to the protest of the cross. There is in the resurrection both a restoration of life, and the inbreaking of something entirely new. New possibilities for the future of the whole of creation. The cross opens the way for something new to come and sanctify, redeem, and restore history.

Moltmann extends this idea even further when he critiques pessimistic eschatological narratives that depict a “struggle between the lordship of Christ and the power of the devil.”¹⁰⁸ Moltmann questions how such narratives square with the eschatological announcements of the victory of God and the immanence of God’s kingdom. The emphasis in the pessimistic narratives

106. 1 Cor 15:17 NET.

107. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 204.

108. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 12.

can only be futurist. And as I have argued, futurist eschatologies are insufficient to encourage the development of adequate programmes of social and environmental amelioration. As Moltmann puts it, this “[a]pocalyptic eschatology sees Christ in the light of God’s struggle against the devil at the end of history, but it does not see history and the end of history in the light of Christ.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, the very power of a crucicentric gospel message is its announcement of God’s victory over sin and all of the harmful effects sin has produced, including death.

Evangelicals need to see the cross as God’s comprehensive response to the many crises of our world. Evangelicals should understand the cross as the divine protest against all that is wrong in the world in which we live. The cross is never the final word; the cross must always be defined in relationship to the resurrection. In the resurrection, the perishable body of Jesus “put on the imperishable” as a demonstration of the new possibilities God has opened up in history through the cross prompting the epistle’s question: “Death, where is your victory?”¹¹⁰ The cross speaks of the proleptic fullness that is present when God’s promised victory is announced. When the religious leaders questioned Jesus’ right to bless the paralytic in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus responded by completing the broken man’s healing, restoring his physical body. It is fitting then than the Pauline eschatological hymn which I have been citing, culminates in an exhortation for Christians to be at work in the world, “knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”¹¹¹

Conversionism

Throughout this thesis I argue that the convertive piety of evangelicals is a tremendous theological resource. Promoting the need for personally transformative convertive experiences is a ubiquitous feature of North American evangelicalism. However, the scope of expectations surrounding conversion is unnecessarily narrowed by evangelical soteriologies. And even though,

109. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 12.

110. 1 Cor 15:53,55 NET.

111. 1 Cor 15:58 NET.

as discussed in the second chapter, conversion is understood to be the basis of social transformation, this social transformation is only an aggregate effect of individual evangelicals adopting the ethos of the communities into which they are converted. I am proposing that evangelicals expand their convertive piety in two directions. First, that conversion be seen as multiple instead of singular. That evangelicals adopt a convertive piety that values and encourages a multiplicity of conversions. Second, that evangelicals champion multiple conversion experiences that are intended to result in both greater understandings of God's promises and increased conscientization towards the world they inhabit.

Conversions

In addition to narrowing the scope of conversion to personal salvation, evangelicals often focus on a singular biographical moment — when the individual is 'born again'. This is the event to which everything else in the evangelical's religious life is referent. Conversions after this event are often seen as merely renewals of the singular conversion event. There is no sense of progression or maturation that can be readily fostered by this propensity to view romantically the 'born again' experience. Nor is there an invitation to reflect critically on the individual's personal salvation experience itself. This stasis around conversion is best suited to a life-boat type theology where the goal is simply to await a coming rescue from the discomforts of this world, secure in the knowledge that one's conversion experience has secured for him or her a place in that coming rescue. In such an eschatological framework there is no real impetus for thinking of conversion as anything but a singular event.

A notion of continuing convertive experiences, however, actually enjoys a rich presence in Methodist and pentecostal theologies.¹¹² For example, the notion of spirit baptisms, especially in the Methodist formulation as sanctification and empowerment for ministry, provides a

112. L. Thomas Holdcroft, *The Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Interpretation*, reprint, 1962 (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1979), 129–30.

precedent for the continual conversion of the evangelical.¹¹³ Spirit baptism is understood to be an event contiguous with (charismatic view) or subsequent to (classic Pentecostal view) the salvation, or ‘born again’ experience.¹¹⁴ While the Methodist and pentecostal traditions often insisted that this event occurred a finite amount of times, most often singular, later neo-pentecostal traditions would insist on numerous such experiences.¹¹⁵ However frequent these experiences are envisioned, they are always meant to constitute a personally transformative encounter with God’s Spirit. The initial salvation experience is not denied or devalued, but rather is augmented by the expectation that the encounter with God’s Spirit effectively continues to transform an individual’s attitudes and understandings.¹¹⁶

Leveraging the idea that encounters with God are personally transformative and spiritually empowering, I am proposing that such experiences are best understood as signs of encountering the proleptic promise-keeping work of God. Such experiences gain their transformative power by revealing something of God’s present activity in history. For early

113. Donald Dayton traces the theological roots of spirit baptisms in his helpful book, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 24ff. The early Pentecostal understandings of spirit baptism were closer to the Methodist views of empowerment than later understandings. Many newly spirit baptized individuals believed they received xenolalia, not merely glossolalia, as an empowerment to speak in the foreign languages they were supposed to evangelize. However, this view did not persist. See Charles S. Gaede, “Glossolalia at Azusa Street : A Hidden Presupposition?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 51, no. 1 (1 March 1989): 82–83.

114. Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 87, 254.

115. Jackson, *Quest*, 120–21. Vineyard, a neo-pentecostal movement, leaders Rich Nathan and Ken Wilson discuss a multidimensional aspect of the infillings of the Spirit, likening them to “‘watershed experiences’ that amount to quantum leaps forward” in their maturation as believers. See *Empowered Evangelicals: Bringing Together the Best of the Evangelical and Charismatic Worlds* (Ann Arbor: Vine Books, 1995), 212–14.

116. For an outsider’s perspective on the efficacy of spirit baptisms see Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading: Perseus Books, 1995), 70–71.

(classic) Pentecostals, that activity was believed to be the preparation for a worldwide revival movement.¹¹⁷ This belief matched the Pentecostals' optimistic brand of premillennial eschatology which anticipated that such a revival was heralded by the supposed restoration of spiritual gifts such as glossolalia.¹¹⁸ This belief flourished, as most often Pentecostal spiritual encounters were accompanied by expressions of glossolalia. While Pentecostal eschatology tends to be simply an adaptation of dispensationalist premillennialism, Ladd's eschatological proposal can help shape the character of the multiple convertive experiences that I insist evangelicals need to champion.

In an inaugurated-enacted eschatology, the goal of God's manifest reign is the transformation of history. Ladd's insistence that the kingdom of God slowly transforms history also implies that the experience of this kingdom can also transform the one who encounters it. These moments of encountering the expressed reign of God are best understood as conversion experiences. They reveal something of God's promises. And, like spirit baptisms, they change our expectations about what God can and does do in the world. Also, like spirit baptisms, such convertive experiences empower their recipient to participate with God in the amelioration of the world.

Conversion and Conscientization

The convertive piety of evangelical traditions tends to emphasize the urgency of convertive experiences. In chapter one, I discussed how evangelicals promoted spiritual conversions with a sense of urgency. The formulation of the gospel presentations of evangelicals are designed to evoke an awareness of an individual's imminent spiritual need for conversion. These presentations often state, quite bluntly, that the individual is separated from God by their sins and that accepting Jesus as saviour will overcome that separation. The urgency arises from

117. Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal*, 130.

118. Dayton, *Theological Roots*, 145; Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 1992), 93.

the sense that unless an individual makes this choice they will die in their sins, forever separated from God. At this point, the fragility of life is often exploited to justify the need for expediency. For too many evangelical traditions, this is where the experience ends. An individual may be encouraged to attend a church and even evangelize others, but the primary emphasis remains on the initial convertive moment. I insist that, rather than simply focusing on God's promises in only one single, albeit important, area, evangelicals should look at conversion as also being a product of conscientization.

The first form of conscientization (although both really work in tandem) is conversion to the comprehensive promises of God. As evangelicals mine the richness of their scriptures and traditions, the promises of God are brought into stark contrast with the state of the world they live in. The tension produced becomes the moral urgency that can be employed to promote further convertive experiences as well as projects of social engagement (activism).

The second form of conscientization comes from developing adequate understandings of the nature of social and environmental crises. Evangelicals need to be converted by their ever-growing understandings of the social and the environmental crises they face today. This form of conscientization must also include the evaluation of existing projects of social engagement. As evangelicals assess how their engagements contribute to or impede amelioration, they are able to make informed modifications to their participative strategies. In both of these forms of conscientization conversions, the existing evangelical pattern for proselytization is maintained.

In the evangelical pattern for proselytization, a gospel presentation is used to bring about awareness of a spiritual need. The first step in all of these proposed conversions is awareness. In evangelical gospel presentations the emphasis is on becoming aware of one's own personal sin. Becoming aware of one's own personal sin is akin to becoming aware of one's complicity with social and environmental sin. Evangelical gospel presentations then declare that God has made provisions to overcome one's personal sin. Becoming attuned to God's response to our need for a saviour is akin to becoming aware of God's commissive promises to sanctify, redeem, and restore the world in which we live. And finally, in the evangelical gospel presentations, the hearer is

presented with an opportunity to respond, usually by making a declaration of their newfound faith in Jesus. In the conscientization model, the opportunity to respond is to actively participate in God's promise keeping activity in the world.

Activism

My proposal for expanding evangelical activism follows the same logic as iterated for expanding conversionism. While existing evangelical piety narrowly concerns the personal salvation of individuals, my proposed expanded view champions a convertive piety that includes the transformation of an individual's attitudes and understandings about the world in which he or she lives. Following this expanded scope of concerns, my proposed activism includes deliberately promoting conscientization conversions as a form of evangelism. But my main contention in this section is that activism must be more than just a form of evangelism. Evangelical activism must include social engagement as participation in the kingdom works of God. It is the combination of words (calling individuals to conversion) and deeds (participating in the ameliorative activity of God) that constitutes the public witness of evangelicals.

Evangelization of Conscientization

For Bebbington, activism is evangelism. Evangelism is most often narrowly defined by evangelicals as the activity of leading individuals to a convertive moment where they are made aware of their personal need for God and God's provision for that need, and then encouraged to respond to this new awareness. As I have explained in chapter two, evangelism is strategized in a range of ways, from immediate confrontations to long term projects of relationship building. No matter what strategy is employed, evangelism is primarily about leading individuals to a moment of conversion. Evangelicals can readily leverage this existing form of activism to promote the possibilities of conversions that result from an increased awareness of the socio-political needs of the world and from an increased awareness of God's promises as provision for such needs.

In evangelism, awareness leads to a moment of decision as the moment where conversion becomes possible. This moment of decision is also a call to action. Often this action is defined as

repenting and believing.¹¹⁹ Repentance is described as the act of taking ownership for one's own complicity in one's personal sin.¹²⁰ Believing is understood as being convinced about one's need of God's provision for salvation, as well as being convinced of the reality of that provision for that salvation. The efficacy of believing is demonstrated through a change in the individual's personal actions which include the individual adjusting or abandoning behaviours that they are convinced constitute complicity in sin. Likewise, conscientization also follows this pattern of repenting and demonstrated believing.

The evangelism of conscientization begins by revealing the existence of, and an individual's complicity in, social and environmental sin. Sin here is defined as action, as well as inaction, which prevents social amelioration or environmental amelioration or both. For example, we can become conscientized to our participation in the patterns of consumerism that produce huge amounts of waste, such as is the case with the endless pursuit of the latest electronic gadget. The evangelist is not limited by a gospel message that is narrowly focused on the salvation of the individual. Here the evangelist can promote repentance as a response to an awareness of sinful structures and patterns that hinder amelioration. Repentance, in this case, means taking ownership of one's complicity, directly and indirectly, in such sins. For our example, this means accepting our own complicity in the wasteful consumption of electronic devices. In this conscientization model, believing also necessarily follows repentance; specifically, believing that God's promises constitute God's commissive action in response to the injustice of the identified social and environmental sins. Such belief is subsequently demonstrated by the convert's participation in God's ameliorative action. Following our example, this participation can include

119. See Mark 1:15 where the message of the eschatological kingdom is the impetus for an imperative to "repent and believe".

120. The scriptural term for repentance also includes a sense of turning away from the activity that is deemed sinful. However, evangelicals use this term for a diversity of responses to personal sin. These responses range from simply feeling remorseful for one's sin to making a willful choice to no longer participate in sinful activities.

any number of responses, such as the diligent conscientious selection of any future electronics purchased, the identification and rejection of products from manufacturers who build disposability into their products, and even the pursuit of alternative disposal methods for their electronics waste. However, whatever actions are undertaken by conscientized evangelicals must also continue to be brought into the conscientization process allowing for our provisional participation to be taken up into God's proleptic activity.

Social Action as Evangelical Activism

Evangelical social action must be understood as a valid form of evangelical activism. This is an expansion of Bebbington's narrow definition of activism. However, this claim is grounded in the conviction that God is already actively engaged in bettering the world in which we live. The whole purpose of conscientization, in this proposal, is to equip the evangelical with the tools necessary to participate with God in the work of amelioration. Conscientization to the promises of God establishes the central conviction - the assertion of God's ameliorative activity. Conscientization to the actual social and environmental conditions of the world in which we live allows evangelicals to develop informed responses to the crises of their world. Attending to the lacunae between promise and reality provides the tension needed to promote the pursuit of social and environmental justice. Further, the consent that our actual engagements are always provisional implementations of our best understandings of God's proleptic aims allows our actions to also be scrutinized and adjusted as our conscientization deepens.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that social action is not a form of evangelism. Social action does not have as its end the proselytization of non-evangelicals. Rather, social action, as participation in God's activity in the world, is an end unto itself. Often evangelicals will insist on making social action part of their strategies of evangelism, yet doing so creates a problem. As an extension of evangelism, social action is often treated as a secondary concern. In addition to being a pretense for proselytization, the anthropocentric focus on individuals interferes with the development of adequate responses to social and environmental

concerns. Adequate forms of social and environmental engagement necessarily require sustained attention to the details of the crises being addressed. Evangelicals attempting to do social engagement merely as a tool of evangelism will most likely neither do evangelism nor social engagement well.

When evangelicals do social and environmental amelioration well, the benefit is that their public witness is enhanced. The motivation for doing social engagement well is that it will increase the opportunity and ability of evangelicals to share their *evangels*. By keeping these activities as distinct, yet complimentary, areas of evangelical activism, the evangelical is better enabled to do both well. In order to illustrate the complementary nature of these two areas of activism I will look at the differentiation between words and deeds in the Biblical presentation of Jesus.

Evangelical Public Witness

In the gospels we read that Jesus went about everywhere preaching the gospel of the kingdom and doing good works. This is a central way that Jesus' ministry is described in the book of Acts, and in the three synoptic gospels.¹²¹ In these texts, the preached message, and the actions of Jesus are not accidental companions. Proclaiming that the kingdom is near identifies a recognition that in Jesus' world something requiring God's action was necessary, and that in the promised kingdom, that needed action of God had arrived. Often in these texts Jesus is described as preaching the kingdom and then doing works that include supernaturally healing the sick. But his actions, as recorded in the gospels, go well beyond meeting the needs of physical healings for individuals. Jesus also welcomed and included the marginalized, identified systemic injustices, and even overturned such injustices as was the case in his famous driving out from the temple the moneychangers and the merchants.¹²² The message that Jesus proclaimed led to a demonstration

121. By way of examples see Acts 10:38, Matt 4:23, Luke 24:19, and many other passages that talk about what Jesus said and did during his earthly ministry.

122. Jesus' clearing of the temple is recorded in Matt 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17, Luke

of his belief that God's *pro-missio* was at work.

This pairing of word and deed is also echoed in the canonical epistles.¹²³ Christians are exhorted to match their actions to their beliefs. Beliefs are what make actions deliberate.¹²⁴ The gospel then, is that message that describes God's promises in relation to the needs of a socio-political context. The evangelist declares these promises, that the kingdom has come, in the situation of these needs and invites a response. What we come to believe about our world and God's desire to make our world a better place informs our participation in social and environmental amelioration. The message of amelioration is then a distinct form of evangelical activism. The actions informed by this evangelical activism demonstrate publicly that this gospel is actually good news for the whole world.

Putting the Proposal into Action (Word and Deed)

Drawing on the resources of an optimistic premillennial eschatology I have described: a biblicism that emphasizes God's promises as its hermeneutic key; a crucicentrism rooted in the recorded life of Jesus, as exemplar of kingdom participation; a conversionism that insists we are converted by our conscientization to both God's promises and to our lived contexts; and an activism that is more comprehensive than personal evangelism alone. To demonstrate the effectiveness of my eschatological theological proposal, I will now turn to its implications for evangelical social engagement as a means to improve evangelical environmentalism.

19:45-46, and John 2:14-17.

123. For example see Rom 15:18 where Paul links the pairing of word and deed to the quality of his evangelistic witness; in Col 3:17 where the exhortations about Christian conduct include the reminder that everything that is done, in word or deed, is done with thanksgiving; and 2 Thess 2:17 which encourages the reliance on God's strength to speak and do what is good.

124. Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Attending to the Gaps Between Beliefs and Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 40.

CHAPTER 5

A THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT FOR EVANGELICALS

Evangelicals are in general theologically pragmatic. Their primary theological concerns revolve around what Bebbington identified as their activism — the demonstrable ability to share their *evangels* with people. Because my proposal challenges the narrow focus that often guides evangelical activism (an *evangel* based on a truncated gospel), it is important for me to establish the practical application of my theological proposal. By verifying the practical nature of my proposal I am not only appealing to evangelical pragmatism, I am also demonstrating the effectiveness of my proposal. Therefore, I will outline some of the implications of my proposed eschatological theology for developing an evangelical response to the contemporary environmental crisis.

The Environmental Crisis and Evangelicals

One area of concern I have as an evangelical theologian, is the lack of critical attention paid by evangelicals to environmental issues. Most often when evangelicals construct reasons to ignore or devalue environmental issues those reasons are eschatologically based. Pessimistic eschatologies do not articulate a future that is good news for the physical world we live in. Such eschatological narratives, as a result, are used to interpret the environmental crisis as simply another portent of a coming apocalypse. Human culpability and responsibility are largely considered non-issues because the environment is merely a tool of history and ultimately destined for destruction. Additionally, scientific insights about the environment are distrusted.¹ Although

1. Katherine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley, *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts*

science paints a bleak picture about the future, it does so without indicating that such decline simply fits the evangelicals' pessimistic eschatological narratives. Thus, the lack of attention paid by evangelicals to environmental issues is not surprising. When adopting an optimistic eschatology, however, evangelicals can no longer continue to view the environment as an incidental aspect of a soon to be discarded history.

In the eschatology that I propose, the world we live in is the arena of God's redemptive activity. This optimistic proposal is good news for all of creation. Therefore, for the evangelical animated by this optimistic eschatology, the environmental crisis must not be ignored or devalued. Within my proposed theological framework the evangelical is called on to listen with concern to the data regarding the nature of the contemporary environmental crisis. First, I will turn my attention to briefly outlining the scope of the crisis. In light of the data regarding the environment, evangelicals can use my proposed theology of social engagement to evaluate existing evangelical responses to and formulate better evangelical proposals for the environmental crisis. After introducing the environmental crisis, I will explore how evangelicals, when they do respond to the environment, frame their environmental theologies. And finally, I will identify improvements that can be made to evangelical environmental theologies by using my proposed eschatological theology of social engagement.

The Environmental Crisis

Moltmann outlines well the contemporary environmental crisis:

The spread of scientific and technological civilization as we know it up to now leads to the annihilation of more and more plant and animal species. Carbon dioxide and methane gases produce the 'greenhouse effect' which is going to change the climate of the earth momentarily in the next few decades. The ground is being poisoned by chemical fertilizers and diverse pesticides. The rain forests are being cut down, the pastures are being over-grazed, the deserts are growing. In the last sixty years, the population of the world has increased fourfold and in the year 2050 will total between eight and ten billion people. The required means of living (food, water, and so on), as well as the production of waste, will increase in proportion. The urbanization of humanity has grown from 29 percent in 1950 to over 50 percent today. The human ecosystem has lost its equilibrium and is on the way to the destruction of the earth and hence its own destruction. The slowly

spreading crisis is given the name ‘environmental pollution’, and people are seeking technological solutions for it. But in my view it is in actual fact a crisis of the whole total project of modern civilization.²

Moltmann goes on to critique the pursuit of technological solutions as a distraction from the necessary task of the reorientation “of this society’s fundamental values.”³ This task of reorientation is an important prerequisite to communicating the gravity of the environmental crisis to evangelicals.

The problem evangelicals have with descriptions of the environmental crisis, such as the one just presented, is that when interpreted through the lens of their understood relationship to the world it simply confirms their decline narratives. The narrative (story) through which they interpret present environmental conditions needs to be reoriented. By understanding the planet as the actual arena of God’s redemptive activity, and further the physical environment as an object of God’s concern, evangelicals are challenged to relate to the world differently. No longer can the world simply be seen as merely a resource, or collection of resources, for supporting some exclusively human project. Additionally, our complicity in the destruction of the planet is now understood as direct opposition to the active redemptive works of God.

Evangelical Response to the Environmental Crisis

Despite the lack of attention paid by evangelicals to the seriousness of environmental issues, there are still notable efforts made to develop evangelical environmental theologies. For example, many evangelical social engagement proposals employ some form of environmental activism as a “bait-and-switch” tactic for proselytizing. Such evangelicals develop their environmental theology in service to their *evangels*, believing that sharing a common concern with non-evangelicals will afford opportunities to share those *evangels*. Most evangelical environmental proposals present some form of stewardship that encourages recycling, and other

2. Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 133.

3. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 133.

simple solutions, yet are unable to foster an examination of the systemic and the ideological notions through which we all continue to participate in the destruction of the environment. With this in mind, I will demonstrate the capacity of my proposal to improve evangelical environmental theologies. To this end I have strategically chosen to interact with the environmental theology of Vineyard leader Tri Robinson as it is detailed in his book *Saving God's Green Earth*.

Engaging with an Evangelical Environmentalist

I will interact with Robinson for two primary reasons. First, Robinson is a Vineyard pastor. The Vineyard is a movement that is profoundly shaped by Ladd's inaugurated-enacted eschatology.⁴ Historically, the Vineyard has produced some excellent resources for social action, such as, *Doing Reconciliation*, which details the theological underpinnings of Alexander Venter's response to racism in the South African apartheid context. Venter's theology of social engagement, as expected from a Vineyard practitioner, is thoroughly influenced by an inaugurated-enacted eschatology.⁵ While there are definite references to eschatology in Robinson's proposal, in his environmental theology eschatology does not form the same theological underpinning as it does for Venter's work.

Secondly, Robinson's main book on the subject, *Saving God's Green Earth*, has almost everything I desire to see in an evangelical response to the environmental crises. Robinson does a passable job of describing the present environmental crises. He acknowledges the cosmological dimension of salvation; Jesus died not just for people.⁶ Further, Robinson makes explicit the

4. It is also worth noting that there has been considerable interaction between Vineyard scholars and Miroslav Volf. Volf, as a student of Moltmann, has popularized for the evangelical communities many of Moltmann's theological proposals. By virtue of this relationship, Moltmann's insights will have some degree of familiarity for Vineyard scholars and practitioners.

5. Alexander Venter, *Doing Reconciliation: Racism, Reconciliation and Transformation in the Church and World* (Cape Town: Vineyard International Press, 2004), 142–44, 254–60.

6. Tri Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility*

connection between the environment and the potential for human flourishing.⁷ His book, *Saving God's Green Earth*, is an impassioned plea for concrete environmental action.⁸ And Robinson even recognizes that environmental engagement must be done in concert with those outside of the Christian faith.⁹ Because his work is quite good and representative of the best of evangelical environmental proposals, it makes the task of identifying improvements that should be made to his proposal a fitting challenge for my theological framework.

While Robinson's approach represents some of the better aspects of evangelical social engagement, there are deficiencies in his approach that hinder its ability to encourage a sufficient response to the issues at stake in the environmental crisis. These deficiencies can be divided into four categories: theological problems related to eschatology, insufficient reflection on the causal aspects of the environmental crisis, limitations on proposed activism, and the lack of an adequate framework for assessing evangelical responses to the current state of the natural world. These deficiencies are common to most evangelical environmental theologies.

The Environmental Theology of Stewardship

At the core of most evangelical proposals is a theology of environmental stewardship. Stewardship is defined as the requirement for the people of God to "be diligent to tend the garden God has given" them.¹⁰ Robinson further details this simple definition, but there is a basic problem with the idea of tending a garden that deserves to be addressed first. Proponents of the garden tending approach to stewardship define the *telos* of God's redemptive activity as being the

to Environmental Stewardship (Norcross: Ampelon Publishing, 2006), 26.

7. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 75.

8. For example see, Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 60.

9. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 74.

10. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 13.

restoration of Eden. Eden is an important image as it is often used to represent God's ideal for the natural world.

For example, Robinson's theology is well rooted in his experience of the natural world. He views the natural world as a sacred landscape, a place where he, and by extension the rest of us, encounter God's revelatory presence.¹¹ To this end he acknowledges the role of landscape in his own convertive experiences.¹² These are great aspects of his theology. However, he overstates the garden imagery in his effort to reconcile his experiences to his theology. Contrary to his claim that the biblical story begins in Eden and ends in a restored garden, there is no going back to the garden after the expulsion in Genesis.¹³ The Biblical narrative might begin in a garden, but it definitively ends in a heavenly city.¹⁴

The *telos* of a return to the garden shapes the eschatology Robinson presents in his discussion of the kingdom of God.¹⁵ Robinson correctly speaks of his experience of the kingdom as perceiving God's active care for creation. Earlier in his book he also identifies the influence of pessimistic eschatologies that prevent evangelicals from recognizing the kingdom in God's enacted care for creation.¹⁶ He points out that these pessimistic eschatologies forecast the

11. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 21.

12. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 34–36; Tri Robinson, *Small Footprint Big Handprint: How to Live Simply and Love Extravagantly* (Boise: Ampelon publishing, 2008), 18–19.

13. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 18.

14. This city is described in the apocalyptic narrative of Revelation 21. One novel aspect of most orthodox Judeo-Christian theology is the rejection of endlessly cyclic notions of history. By leaving the garden, religion tied to the cycles of agricultural growth gave way to religion of sojourning towards God's promised future. This God of promise is presented in both testaments as doing new things in history, not simply repeating historical happenings. See Jürgen Moltmann, "Religion, Revolution, and the Future," in *The Future of Hope*, ed. Walter H. Capps (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 104–05.

15. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 56–57.

16. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 16.

inevitable destruction of the planet, a view inconsistent with the belief that God actually cares for the natural world. However, God's response to the environmental crises of our day is not simply a restoration of or a return to Eden. God's redemptive promises for the natural world involve doing something completely new in the world. As we read in the prophet Isaiah: "Look, I am about to do something new. Now it begins to happen! Do you not recognize it? Yes, I will make a road in the desert and paths in the wilderness."¹⁷ The kingdom of God is not just seen in God's care for creation, but also in the completely new things God does in the natural world fulfilling God's promises for the future of this world.

God is not only a caregiver to creation; God's predicted return brings harsh judgment on those whose actions destroy the earth.¹⁸ Where the natural world is concerned, the justice of God is just as much the activity of God in history as is creation care. Yet, stewardship is not adequately concerned with environmental justice. Its concerns are primarily caring for creation so that creation can go on providing resources for human consumption and enjoyment. In stewardship models the planet is not usually understood as even having the capacity to be treated unjustly. It is simply the garden.

The garden metaphor is present throughout *Saving God's Green Earth* and provides the underpinning for Robinson's understanding of how humanity, and especially Christians, relate to the natural world. "Stewardship is the idea that we should care for, manage, and nurture what we have been given."¹⁹ Stewardship rests on the idea that the natural world is a garden given to humanity to use; the planet is "a resource and provision" for the needs and desires of humans.²⁰

17. Isaiah 43:19 NET.

18. Revelation 11:18 describes the anticipated implications of God's return. "The nations were enraged, but your wrath has come, and the time has come for the dead to be judged, and the time has come to give to your servants, the prophets, their reward, as well as to the saints and to those who revere your name, both small and great, and the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth." (NET)

19. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 19.

While Robinson does emphasize that we have a contiguous responsibility to protect creation, he fails to acknowledge sufficiently the interdependence between humanity and the natural world.²¹

The strong differentiation of humanity from the rest of creation is a weakness of the stewardship model. This differentiation reduces environmental activism to a desired, but not essential, activity. The perceived loss that accompanies failure in environmentalism is only our not performing our God-given task to tend the garden. For example, when our negligence threatens the extinction of a species, in stewardship there can often be no sense of the impact that such a loss of biodiversity will have on human flourishing or even on earth flourishing. Stewardship, as a model, abstracts human flourishing from the health of the environment. By distinguishing the human from the natural world, stewardship models have a difficult time proposing adequate responses to the destruction of the environment.

Understanding of the Causes of the Environmental Crisis

One reason that stewardship models fail to address adequately human contributions to the environmental crises is the lack of attention paid to the root causes of these crises. For example, Robinson's approach actually presents an indifference to the causes of environmental crisis.²² He chooses this tactic because he knows his target audience, evangelical Christians, are often suspicious of environmental activists. This suspicion is articulated by his statement that the theology emerging from the 1960s environmental movement "took no one to God."²³ While Robinson does acknowledge evidence of human implication in the environmental crisis, his concerns are focused primarily on the public witness of evangelicals.²⁴ However, the lack of

20. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 20.

21. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 20–21.

22. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 79.

23. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 24.

24. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 76–77.

attention to human causality in the environmental crisis reflects a belief that focusing on causes only serves to complicate matters and, at its worst, prevents the gospel of personal salvation from being heard.

The Environmental Activism of Stewardship

The simplicity of the stewardship model also limits the scope of environmental activism. Proponents of stewardship focus on fostering an appreciation of nature, recycling, and little else. Even though Robinson astutely connected recycling to redemption, if humanity has any hope of halting the destruction of our environment, doing so will take more than just reducing our contributions to landfill sites. An adequate solution will not simply be tending the planet like a garden full of resources. In reality, viewing the planet as being a collection of resources given to humanity is at the root of the environmental crisis. Stewardship, as it is presented as an evangelical option, simply perpetuates the thinking that created the problem while evoking the false sense that evangelicals are engaging in effective environmental activism. This limitation is reflected in the choices of evangelicals of how and with whom to participate in environmental projects, the actions utilized in their environmental activism, and in their inability to adequately assess their own environmental actions.

For example, Robinson describes his church's response in helping the victims of hurricane Katrina.²⁵ In this description he discusses how his church invited the community to participate in the hurricane relief work. He describes fund raising by collecting electronics for recycling from people in his church's neighbourhood. Robinson is quite excited about how "allowing others to participate in what we were doing stimulated the best response we've ever had."²⁶ By "response" he is referring to the favour those neighbours showed to his community and the ability of his people to share their *evangel* with these same neighbours. Absent in

25. See Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 74.

26. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 74.

Robinson's account are opportunities for the broader community to participate, other than through charitable giving. This might engender good will amongst the community, but it is orchestrated entirely on the terms set by the evangelical group leading the project. There is little real participation and, more significantly, no opportunity for outside voices to help shape the responses being offered by the church. This description is analogous to how most evangelicals see environmental activism functioning.

Because evangelicals are concerned primarily with their evangelism, they guardedly control any environmental activism in which they participate. Their guiding concern is ensuring that any promoted activism ultimately serves the need to communicate their *evangels*. These evangelicals work hard to balance participation in environmental activism as part of their public witness with making sure this activism does not overshadow their *evangels*.²⁷ This pursuit of balance is accomplished through carefully creating their own approaches to environmental activism. By keeping environmental activism as an internally conceived and executed programme, evangelicals are able to ensure that their favoured agenda of evangelism remains unchallenged. Such an approach, however, also ensures that their actual environmental activism is not properly assessed for efficacy.

The Need for a Means of Assessment

The biggest drawback to enacting environmental activism with little outside participation is that it can easily produce inadequate, even problematic, responses with no way to readily identify the problems with those responses. Rather than just accepting charity from our neighbours, there is a need to learn from and to interact with environmental activists who are not myopically focused on proselytizing those same neighbourhoods. There is a need to understand the causes and implications of the state of the natural world today. Robinson's environmental

27. R. Scott. Rodin, "Stewardship," in *Toward and Evangelical Public Policy: Political Strategies for the Health of the Nation*, ed. Ronald J. Sider and Diane Knippers (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 280.

proposal is illustrated by his church's response to the victims of hurricane Katrina. His proposal is typical in that it contains no readily identifiable encouragement to reflect on problems with recycling. Nor does his proposal encourage reflection on the socio-economic conditions that create such an abundance of recyclable goods that his church can readily collect discarded electronics from their neighbours.

Evangelicals look for and find resources within their traditions to animate environmental activism. Yet, the assumption in their approaches is that if God reveals a need for action, God will also provide the "plan and ... strategy" to address that need.²⁸ The response of evangelicals is formed and shaped entirely from inside their tradition with little means to assess adequately its efficacy. Robinson, like other evangelicals, develops a limited internal solution to a complex global problem. Finally, within these internal solutions evangelicals fail to include any means to evaluate the actions themselves.²⁹

Improving Evangelical Environmental Theologies

I believe Robinson could develop a better response to environmental issues if he employed his denomination's eschatology in a thoroughgoing manner. Robinson does articulate God's active work ameliorating the environment. Also Robinson does invite individuals to participate with God in that ameliorative activity. Yet an understanding of provisionality could help Robinson develop an evaluative strategy that accounts for the problems inherent in developing an entirely internal solution to a global problem. God might indeed have a plan and strategy, but it is unwise to assume that evangelicals completely understand and flawlessly execute that plan. Further, Robinson would benefit from an emphasis on eschatological tension. God's own response to the destruction of the environment is shaped by God's promises contrasted with the actual state of the world today. When we neglect to understand the actual

28. Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 112.

29. I made a note in my copy of *Saving God's Green Earth* on page 131 that I was still waiting for a strategy of evaluation, no such strategy was forthcoming.

state of the world, including the causes of the environmental crisis, we miss at least half of the process by which adequate responses are formed. Resolving the tension too quickly and too easily predictably lulls us into thinking that our responses are adequate. Recycling is a great thing to do. But if it simply resolves the tension, making us feel like we are doing our part for the environment, then we miss the problems that lead to the need for recycling projects in the first place. While I appreciate Robinson's heart for the environment, and believe his is one of the better evangelical proposals, there is still much that could be improved.

Hope for Evangelical Social Engagement

My proposed eschatological theology takes as its starting point an optimistic eschatological narrative. The inaugurated-enacted kingdom is based on the narrative of God's active and ongoing redemptive work in history. God's future kingdom reign breaks into the present, bringing with it all of the proleptic potential of that reign. In such a narrative, stewardship models, as they are often presented by evangelicals, are insufficient.

Most evangelical stewardship models are fixated on caring for a set of resources gifted to humanity.³⁰ By promoting a programme of managing resources for the service of humanity, evangelical proposals of stewardship exhibit little care for the actual physical world itself. There is no justice for those resources envisioned - simply concern for the continuance of a way of living enjoyed by one species among many that share this planet. Stewardship is really just a way of theologically justifying gardening. Unfortunately, the environmental crisis we face today requires more than just gardening by any means.

The inaugurated-enacted proposal, in contrast to stewardship, presents God as amelioratively transforming the world. God is on the side of justice for the whole of creation, not simply the service of humanity. God is at work making the world a better place, not just for humanity, but for all of creation. God's work is not a temporary solution that will ultimately be

30. A notable exception is proposed by R. Scott Rodin in "Stewardship".

abandoned, but rather the actual future of all creation proleptically breaking into the present. This kingdom work can be seen wherever justice for creation triumphs: when biodiversity is preserved, when carbon dioxide and methane emissions are reduced, when poisons are removed from the grounds, when “[t]he human ecosystem” regains its equilibrium.³¹ The optimistic eschatological narrative requires a reorientation of how evangelicals understand their relationship with the physical world. The call is not to tend the garden while waiting for an anticipated exodus from this world. Rather, the call is to participate with God in the redemptive work of transforming the world into the promised future where all of creation flourishes - including humanity.

Developing Environmental Activism

In my proposed eschatological theology, environmental activism is animated from a desire to participate with God in God’s environmentally ameliorative works. While such activity will contribute to the public witness of evangelicals, that public witness is not the reason for engaging in environmental activism. Evangelicals can shift the motivation for environmental activism from building a public witness to participating with the ongoing work of God in the world. This reorientation allows evangelicals to stop evaluating their environmental activism (and by extension all of their projects of social engagement) through their need to share their *evangels*. Without the need to tightly control activism, evangelicals can focus instead on developing effective strategies for addressing the environmental crisis. Those strategies must include attending to the actual causes of environmental issues without losing sight of the promises of God, developing robust long-term approaches to environmental issues, and embracing comprehensive evaluative tactics for assessing the efficacy of those approaches.

Convertive Piety for the Environmentalist

The mechanism for evangelical conversion is tension. When one is faced with the tension

31. Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, 133.

between one's current life and one's understanding of the life God intends for them, a crisis emerges which often is resolved through a personal conversion experience. Evangelicals, as 'twice-borns', tend to be prone to such Jamesian crisis-conversion experiences.³² In my proposed theological framework I encourage embracing the strengths of such an understanding of convertive piety. The crisis-conversion experience I promote comes from the tension between the current environmental state and one's understanding of God's promised future for the physical world.

Attending to the environmental crisis involves more than acknowledging that something is amiss in the physical world today. We must closely observe the scientific data. Evangelicals who are concerned with the environment tend to have some understanding the scientific data. We must, however, also attend to the sociological and ideological causes of ongoing environmental destruction. This second aspect is critical, as in it we will discover our own complicity with environmental sins. However, we only understand them as sins when we bring our understandings of the state of the physical world into dialogue with our understandings of the promises of God for this world.

Traditional notions of conversion, for the evangelical, come from understanding one's own sinfulness as a personal barrier to experiencing God's promises in one's life. Often formulated as sin separating one from God, this traditional conversion experience involves an individual turning from one's own participation in sin to embracing the promises of God. At its best this conversion is a transformation to a wider horizon of hope; hope which includes a better way of living and being in this world. This same dynamic can be employed to extend the convertive piety into other areas of activism, such as environmental activism.

My proposal extends the eschatological hopes for evangelicals from an individual's life to the whole of creation. Understanding that God's promised future includes the redemptive

32. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 186.

transformation of this world creates conversion-fostering tension when brought into dialogue with an informed understanding the state of the environment today. The attention to sociological and ideological causes (conscientization) reveals the sinful complicity which the convert will seek to abandon. Just as an evangelical convert is expected to turn away from their personal sins, the environmental convert is expected to turn away from their environmental sins.

Removing the Limitations from Environmental Activism

Recognizing that our participation with God's ameliorative work is provisional allows evangelicals to develop robust proposals for environmental activism. In addition to removing the limitations imposed by the need to use environmentalism to promote their *evangels*, evangelicals can also shed their inadequate models of stewardship. Rather than seeing environmental responsibility as merely sustaining a way of life for humanity, moving beyond stewardship means seeking justice for the planet itself. Those robust proposals for environmental activism are able to take into consideration the long-term strategies necessary for any sort of environmental amelioration to take place. In addition, evangelicals are released to find partners in their environmental activism outside of their internal evangelical contexts. Such dialogue partners also provide a much needed vantage for assessing evangelical environmental activism.

Assessing Evangelical Environmental Activism

The provisionality of human participation is central to my inaugurated-enacted proposal. This provisionality engenders an openness to critical evaluation. This is important because while one is engaged in environmental activism there is always a risk that the actions promoted can have unforeseen, and sometimes negative, repercussions. Being able to embrace the critical evaluation of environmental activism will allow projects to mature over time. The complexity of the physical world demands no less than an activism that can adapt as conditions and our understandings of environmental conditions grow.

Evangelicals as Hope for the Environment

I am encouraged that evangelicals are engaged in projects of environmental amelioration. And despite my reservations concerning details about the approaches evangelicals take, I see a great deal of potential in evangelicals to do a better job of being agents of environmental amelioration. Evangelicals can reform their environmental agency by attending to the ways their eschatologies influence the character of their participation with God in making better the world in which we live. By changing their eschatological narratives, evangelicals can develop better models of environmental activism.

Conclusion

MY HOPE FOR EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Throughout this thesis I have argued that evangelicals are socially engaged. The character of this engagement, however, is often inadequate to the actual needs of social amelioration. The primary reason for this deficiency is a product of how eschatology shapes current evangelical social engagement. Pessimistic forms of eschatology impoverish what Ron Sider calls the evangelical conscience.¹ In this thesis, I have traced out the implications of this impoverished conscience for the four evangelical priorities of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism.

Evangelicals and Biblicism

In chapter one I explored the influence of the Fundamentalist movement on evangelical biblicism. Evangelicals always read the Bible through an eschatological lens, and the Fundamentalists were no exception. However, in adopting a pessimistic eschatology the Fundamentalists changed their understanding about the nature of the Bible, making it subservient to their decline narratives and elevating it beyond scrutiny through their insistence on the inerrancy of scripture.

After the Second World War, the neo-evangelicals began to recognize that the focus on inerrancy and decline narratives actually hindered the promulgation of their *evangels*. In chapter two I introduced neo-evangelical scholar Carl Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*. Although neo-evangelicals such as Henry did not reform the evangelical relationships with scripture, they did

1. The title of his 2005 critique of how evangelicals behave in society. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books).

begin a work of reforming other Fundamentalist evangelical theologies which I build on throughout this thesis. Most importantly, their work did attempt to reform the pessimistic eschatologies of the Fundamentalist movement as is seen through the work of George Eldon Ladd which I examined in chapter four.

Also, after the Second World War German political theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann, wrestled with how to read scripture in light of the atrocities of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Unconcerned with the North American preoccupation with inerrancy, Moltmann boldly focuses on God's promises of the future as the hermeneutic key to interpreting scripture. Moltmann sees these promises as foundational to building a theology of active hoping.

In my own challenge to the notion of inerrancy, found in chapter four, I shift the conversation from inerrancy to authority. I begin by describing how evangelicals actually understand the Bible as being authoritative. As a result I am able to promote a functional approach to biblical authority. In this approach, the authority of scripture is established not by some innate inerrancy, but by how scripture resources our relationship to the world in which we live. Using functional authority with the promises of God as a hermeneutic key allows evangelicals to read the Bible in conversation with the situations of the world, and to find hope through seeing through these promises the activity of God working to make the world a better place.

My proposal of an evangelical theology of social engagement insists that eschatology can be used to promote a better evangelical biblicism. This proposed biblicism interprets the promises of God in scripture as both realized and at the same time futurist. These promises are interpreted as realized through the manner in which they describe God's proleptic activity in history. These promises are interpreted as futurist through the way in which they describe the *telos* of that activity in history. Seen through this both/and interpretive lens, the biblical promises create a theological tension whenever they are contrasted with the actual state of the world today. It is the tension, between what is and what God desires to be that elicits our participation in God's works of amelioration. I charge evangelicals to read the Bible with this tension as their

interpretive lens. Evangelicals need to look deliberately for the promises of God in scripture while, at the same time, being conscientized to the world in which they live. For it is this world, its present and its future, to which God's promises are addressed.

Evangelicals and Crucicentrism

The Fundamentalist movement adopted a narrowed evangelical soteriology of the cross. In particular these Fundamentalists focused on the theology of substitutionary atonement. This is a particular focus on the cross as representing the atoning work of God that secures the future for those who embrace it. These theologies emphasize a future destination for individuals as being the goal of God's salvific action in history. This narrowing of theological focus followed the Fundamentalists' pessimistic eschatology. Their narratives of the end insisted that a segment of humanity would be saved out of this world. Building on a lifeboat metaphor, simplifying soteriology meant they could clearly define the rules for how individuals could be saved. What was sacrificed by this truncated soteriology was any emphasis on the implications of the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus.

Neo-evangelicals were animated primarily by the desire to communicate the *evangel*s formulated mostly by their Fundamentalist predecessors. Unfortunately, the neo-evangelicals did little to challenge the crucicentrism of the Fundamentalists. However, adopting a more optimistic eschatology did raise considerations with which the Fundamentalists were not concerned. For example, through his eschatology, Henry added an emphasis on redemption as a process of overcoming personal sin in the life of the believer. Doing so, Henry countered the overly futurist Fundamentalist approach in which salvation was often exclusively about a future reality. Henry broadened the concerns of evangelical soteriology to include the implications of being saved for the believer alive in the world today.

Moltmann identifies the isolation of the cross from the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus as a problem in evangelical soteriologies. In the evangelical efforts to make the cross more palatable, they have robbed the cross of its full theological significance. Rather than the cross

being God's comprehensive response to the needs of our world, the truncated cross is a purely privatized personal matter. And in this truncated form, the soteriological significance of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus are also devalued.

In the fourth chapter I propose a more robust evangelical soteriology. I insist that the cross of Christ be central to evangelical theology, but not the palatable privatized cross of personal salvation. I also insist that evangelicals understand the cross as the divine protest against all that is wrong in this world. And that the cross is God's comprehensive response to the needs of the world in which we live. Through my proposed evangelical soteriology, the cross is central to the sanctification of this world because it represents God's entrance into this world's injustices. This entrance into the injustices of the world opens the possibilities for God's redemptive works. Salvation as redemption takes what is decidedly not good (such as the scandalous cross) and makes of it something good for the whole world (the protest of God against all earthly injustice). And finally the cross not only represents the divine protest, but commissively orients God toward restoration. Just as the resurrection answers the cross, the promises of God, as they are enacted by God, open up new possibilities in history.

Evangelical theology needs to situate its crucicentrism in the context of Jesus' incarnation and resurrection. The incarnation of Jesus is an embodiment of the proleptic activity of God in history. Jesus' cross represents God's commitment and willingness to fulfill God's promises. Additionally, a theology of the cross is incomplete without the resurrection. The cross makes way for the resurrection as the evidence that it is God's dedication to promise-keeping that creates new possibilities within history. These possibilities were already present in Jesus' incarnational ministry everywhere the kingdom was evidenced; the lame walked, the blind saw, and justice was experienced.

Evangelicals and Conversionism

Evangelicals who are convinced of their atonement-focused crucicentrism and their futurist eschatologies are often motivated by the desire to bring a message of personal salvation

to others. Conversionism is understood narrowly, by the conservative evangelical, as primarily a response to personal sinfulness. The impetus for conversion is the futurist promise of a waiting heaven. Such a narrow view of conversion limits the scope of God's promises, and along with it the ability to recognize God's ongoing ameliorative activity in history. Evangelicals must expand their convertive piety to include all of the promises of God as well as conscientization to the world in which they live.

The Neo-evangelicals began such an expansion of convertive piety. Their emphasis was on personal transformation rather than simply waiting for heaven from the safety of the lifeboat. Many neo-evangelicals saw this personal transformation as the means for social amelioration. Social change was believed to be the aggregate effect of individuals dealing with their personal sins. Yet, this project proved inadequate in dealing with social or structural sins.

Moltmann makes conversion an eschatological category. Through conversion we turn from the old world to the future. We are converted to the promises of God that orient us towards a better version of the world in which we live. This vision of conversion is much broader than even the neo-evangelical emphasis on personal transformation.

My proposed conversionism includes the expectation that we will be transformed by both the promises of God and by the realities of life. I argue for a continually convertive piety that accounts for the provisionality of our interpretations of God's kingdom activity in history. Insisting that conversion is not singular acknowledges God's continuing activity of amelioratively transforming this world. This commitment to God's continuing transformative work allows a hermeneutic circle to be constructed around the conversation between God's promises, the actual state of the world today, and the evangelicals' participation in the work of amelioration. This accounting for provisionality of our participation in God's activity is necessary for developing sufficient responses to the considerable social and environmental crises of our day.

Evangelicals and Activism

For Fundamentalists, evangelism was the only proper evangelical activism. Henry countered this myopic focus with the idea of activism as public witness. The neo-evangelicals were concerned with their ability to communicate their *evangels* in a social context in which Fundamentalist pessimism closed down the ability to communicate outside of their evangelical communities. The neo-evangelicals felt that the way to restore the public witness was through social amelioration. However, their efforts simply established evangelical activism as servant to evangelism.

Moltmann develops his theology of activism from his concerns that the Christian Church never again stand idly by while injustice rules the day. This is how he interprets the actions, or rather inactions, of the Church to the Nazi regime. To this end he calls for Christians to take up a specific kind of hope - an active hoping. This hope fuels the actions of Christians. For Moltmann this hope emerges from a particular eschatology that believes God is actively at work bettering the world.

Evangelicals demonstrate their theological and eschatological commitments with their activism. When their theological focus is exclusively on the future, then the evangelicals' activism will consist of the proclamation of an *evangel* that myopically emphasizes the notion of personal salvation that is believed to secure a particular future for the individual. My proposal insists that activism must be more than just proselytization to such an *evangel*. This activism must demonstrate a commitment to the realized aspects of eschatology as well as the futurist aspects. Evangelical activism needs to include participation in the ongoing promise keeping work of God.

Evangelicals, Social Engagement, and Eschatology

When I began this dissertation I stated my intent to explore three subjects: evangelicals, social engagement, and eschatology. Each of these is a highly complex theme. Evangelicals today continue to be a diverse group that is often difficult to clearly identify. Yet, they also represent a

collection of groups pervasive enough and distinct enough to warrant careful study. Social engagement, likewise, is highly varied and certainly some forms of social engagement are better than others. Looking at the diversity of evangelical theologies of social engagement proves a daunting task. Eschatology is the key that let me put evangelicals and social engagement together. Eschatology, however, is also a highly complex subject and this is quite evident in studying the eschatologies of evangelicals. Despite this complexity, I remain convinced that it is through eschatology that evangelicals can, and must, develop better theologies of social engagement.

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