The Kingdom of Christ

THE NEW EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVE

RUSSELL D. MOORE

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RUSSELL D. MOORE

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For Maria

"The heart of her husband trusts in her"

(Proverbs 31:11).

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But Benjamin and Timothy also have profoundly shaped—and reshaped—my theology of the Kingdom of God. Shortly after we arrived home with them, strangers would ask us a persistent question—"Are they brothers?" Turning to the Scriptures, I was startled to see that this was the question being answered repeatedly in the New Testament about a church made up of Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich and poor—the question of whether sonship and brotherhood is about something more than genetic lines. With new eyes, I was impressed with the magnitude of the Bible's image of our adoption as sons into one common household of the Father (Rom. 8:14-29; Gal. 3:26-4:7). My investigations led me to reconsider some too easily drawn conclusions. I am thankful to my sons for making me a better theologian, but I am far more grateful to them for making me a better Christian. Repeating "Our Father" in the Lord's Prayer was too commonplace for me, until I knew the joy of seeing these two little faces looking up at me, hearing from their mouths the word "Daddy." Thanks to them, I have a foretaste of the Kingdom joy of joining my brother Jesus in saying the most radical and liberating words in all of Christian theology—"Abba Father" (Gal. 4:6). I look forward to teaching them about the Kingdom of Christ. But, even more than that, I look forward to joining them in it, when every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed.

—Russell D. Moore
Easter, 2004

Introduction

The title of this book is, in some ways, awfully misleading. After all, there really is no "new" evangelical perspective about the Kingdom of God. What is true about the Kingdom of Jesus was, in one sense, "new" only when it was announced on the shores of Galilee, whispered in the catacombs of Rome, and shouted in the marketplaces of Ephesus. The Kingdom concept is a mystery older than the creation itself—a mystery that points to God's cosmic purpose to sum up the entire cosmos under the rule of one human King, Jesus of Nazareth (Eph. 1:10). What is "new" is that many evangelicals have stopped arguing about the Kingdom of God—and have started seeking after it.

From the very beginning of the contemporary evangelical movement, conservative Protestants have bickered and splintered over Kingdom questions. Is it future or present? Is it spiritual or material? Is it the church or the world—or neither or both? Is it to be found in evangelizing the lost or in reclaiming the culture? After a half-century of searching the Scriptures, however, a quiet consensus is emerging about the Kingdom of God—a consensus that offers possibilities for evangelical theology to correct some longstanding errors and missteps. To some degree, the Kingdom confusion among evangelicals was a byproduct of the theological health of the movement—it being protected from liberalism, after all, by the divergent streams of dispensationalism and covenant theology. Now, evangelicals have the opportunity to stop polarizing around the Kingdom question—marching off into partisan camps at war over the prophecy charts at the back of our Bibles.

This book takes a look at the Kingdom through the prism of evangelical political action, but that is not because the Kingdom is a tool to equip evangelicals for politics. It is not even because evangelical politics is all that important, in the larger scheme of things. Instead, it is because the failure of evangelical politics points us to something far more important that underlies it—the failure of evangelical theology. It was the capitulation to the political regime of Nazi Germany that convinced Karl Barth that "German Christianity" had forgotten Christ. In the same way, it was the "uneasy conscience" of a socially and politically disengaged fundamentalism that prompted theologian Carl Henry to question whether evangelicals had an adequate doc-

trine of the Kingdom of God.[1] For Henry and his colleagues, the problem was not that fundamentalists were apolitical—the problem was *why* they were apolitical. Their isolationism sprung from competing and unbiblical views of the Kingdom of God—views that would compromise their witness at almost every other point. And so evangelical political thought revealed the Kingdom crisis in evangelical theology. The same can be said of the theologically anemic (and often missiologically embarrassing) attempts at "Religious Right" and "Religious Left" activism since Henry's day. Could it be that evangelicals are seen as a political "constituency" because about all we have to offer the watching culture is politics? Could it be that the eclipse of Jesus in evangelical politics is a symptom of the eclipse of Jesus in evangelicalism itself?

This book calls evangelical Christians to shape our identity by our convictions about the Kingdom of God in Christ. The new perspective on the Kingdom of God can define evangelical theology along the lines of the central themes of the Old and New Testament canon. In the end, a renewed focus on the Kingdom is essential if evangelicals are ever going to grapple with the *evangel* of a crucified, resurrected, and enthroned Messiah. As such, American evangelicalism ought to become both more and less political. Evangelical theology will not serve an activist agenda to be an identity caucus in someone's political party. But evangelical theology will remind Christians that the call to Christ is not a call to "go to heaven when you die," but instead a call to be "joint-heirs" (KJV) with the Messiah who will inherit an all-encompassing Kingdom. This means that the most important political reality of all is not the local voter precinct or the White House reception room, but the creaky pews of the local congregation. A renewed Kingdom theology can remind evangelical churches that they are the rulers of the universe—but not yet (1 Cor. 6:3). This means that evangelicals can see the Kingdom of God as something more than the terminus point on the prophecy chart; something more than a crocheted sentiment hanging on the kitchen wall. It means that evangelicals can confront the Caesars of this age with a truth that once caused riots in the streets—there is "another king" (Acts 17:7). It means that we can remind ourselves that the only perspective on the Kingdom of Christ that matters ultimately is quite old. And that perspective has already been addressed over the waters of the Jordan and in the caverns of a garden tomb, and will be repeated once more before a watching cosmos: "Jesus is Lord" (Phil. 2:9-11).

List of Abbreviations

BibSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
CSR	*Christian Scholar's Review*
GTJ	*Grace Theological Journal*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
TrinJ	*Trinity Journal*
SWJT	*Southwestern Journal of Theology*
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*

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An Uneasy Conscience in the Naked Public Square: Evangelical Theology and Evangelical Engagement

INTRODUCTION

"Modern conservatism owes much of its success to the aggressive political activity of evangelical Christian churches," observes commentator Russell Baker. "In Goldwater's era they stayed out of politics; now they crack whips."[1] Despite the exaggeration of this statement, it illustrates a key problem in constructing a basis for a theology of evangelical engagement. For much of the American news media, if not for large sectors of the American public as a whole, evangelical churches seem at times to be caricatured as not much more than Sunday morning distribution centers for Christian Coalition voter guides. The postwar evangelical project called for a vital presence of evangelicalism in the public square, but it did so in terms of a theologically cohesive foundation for cultural and political interpenetration. For the pioneers of contemporary evangelicalism, the political isolationism of conservative Protestantism was not problematic because it sidelined fundamentalists as a voting bloc; it was problematic because it pointed to underlying theological problems, centered on an inability to come to terms with the most central theme of Scripture—the Kingdom of God. And so, the task of evangelical engagement was about a recovery of Kingdom theology—not simply a mobilization of evangelical voters. In the years since World War II, however, the kind of theologically informed engagement envisioned by Carl Henry and the movement's other early theologians has not often been reflected in the most visible efforts at evangelical sociopolitical action. And, as with the fundamentalist isolationists before them, the failure of evangelical politics is often, at root, the failure of an evangelical theology of the Kingdom.

AMERICAN POLITICS AND EVANGELICAL ENGAGEMENT

The perception that evangelicalism is primarily a political movement is partially understandable since, for much of the nation, evangelicalism seemed to emerge *ex nihilo* in the mid-1970s, largely in relation to political happenings of the time, namely, the conversion of Republican Watergate felon Charles Colson and the very public evangelical identity of Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter, with each announcing that he had been "born again."[2] Shortly thereafter, widespread publicity was given to the mass organizing of evangelicals and fundamentalists to oppose Carter on issues such as abortion rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and the Panama Canal Treaty.[3] Since then, the evangelical presence on the national scene has been closely linked to evangelicals as a political constituency. Thus, the most widely disseminated analyses of American evangelicalism have seemed too often content to trace the movement in terms of the progression from Moral Majority to the Liberty Federation, from the Pat Robertson presidential campaign to the Christian Coalition. Even grassroots revivalist movements such as Promise Keepers are often considered part of an electoral constituency.[4]

Historians rightly identify the first visible rumblings of evangelical social engagement with Carl F. H. Henry's 1947 jeremiad, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.[5] Still, Henry could not have foreseen the way in which evangelicals would in fact lift their voices in the public square in the generation after *Uneasy Conscience*. After all, the National Association of Evangelicals of the 1940s and 50s deemed it necessary to plead for fairness for evangelicals on the public airwaves. With the onset of Moral Majority and other activist groups in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, the mid-century urgings of Henry seemed dated, if not inconceivable, to a new generation of politically savvy evangelicals. The impetus to evangelical engagement included the emergence of an evangelical left, including an "Evangelicals for McGovern" organization formed to oppose Billy Graham's friend Richard Nixon in the 1972 presidential election.[6] While the evangelical sociopolitical left continued to exist throughout the rest of the century, most sectors of its influence seemed to drift away from any semblance of evangelical theological commitments.[7] Instead, the most vigorous evangelical forays into the sociopolitical arena have come from the right side of the cultural and political spectrum.

The most significant move toward evangelical engagement did not come through a reflection on the philosophical appeal of Henry or any other theologian. Instead, it came through the mobilization of the Christian right following the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, an act that served as the opening shot of the "culture wars." In 1976, the Jimmy

Carter campaign cleared the path for religious conservatives through Carter's self-disclosure of a new-birth experience, a disclosure that called for rigorous "spin control" from the campaign to convince the public that, among other things, Carter did not hear audible voices from God.[8] By the next election cycle, evangelical conservative activists would have a forum to question Republican primary candidates about their personal regeneration, or lack thereof.[9] By the end of the century, few eyebrows were raised when the Republican presidential frontrunner spoke in terms reminiscent of Jimmy Carter of "recommitting" his life to Jesus Christ through the ministry of Billy Graham.[10] The public discussions of evangelical piety were not limited to candidate autobiographies. Appeals to religious conservatives infused much of American political discussions, especially during the Reagan administration of the 1980s. After all, even Reagan's historic denunciation of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire," it must be remembered, was delivered before the National Association of Evangelicals. Even more remarkable, and relatively unnoticed, is the fact that this geopolitically significant statement was set in the context of Reagan's prayer that those behind the Iron Curtain might be born again, a comment that would have been unthinkable, even for Jimmy Carter, only a few years before.[11]

The emergence of politically active evangelicals, led by populist figures such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, received a mixed reception among their political cobelligerents. Conservative theorist Robert Nisbet denounced the evangelical conservatives as not conservative at all because they rooted their ideology in a theological underpinning, "a characteristic they share more with those Revolution-supporting clerics in France and England to whom Burke gave the labels of 'political theologians' and 'theological politicians,' not, obviously, liking either."[12] Most of the Republican conservative establishment, however, received the evangelical constituency as a key voting bloc, especially in the South and Midwest. One Jewish neo-conservative theorist, for example, wrote that most of his fellow Jewish conservatives, "however bemused they may be by styles of evangelical piety—a bemusement, I might add, shared by a number of non-evangelical Christians—still have no problem counting Christian conservatives as staunch cultural and political allies."[13]

The emergence of the Christian right, however, was not about crafting a united evangelical theology of sociopolitical engagement. Instead, evangelical political activists practically celebrated the fact that their entrance into the public arena was more of a forced conscription than a purposeful engagement.[14] Even many nonevangelicals, who shared some of the same cultural goals as the Christian right, supported the defensive nature of evangelical engagement.[15] As

Yale University law professor Stephen Carter notes, "The more that a nation chooses to secularize the principal contact points between government and people—not only the public schools, but little things, like names and numbers and symbols, and big things, like taxes and marriage and, ultimately, politics itself—the more it will persuade many religious people that a culture war has indeed been declared, and not by the Right."[16]

Thus, the political activism of twentieth-century evangelicals was not an essentially theological movement, even though many of the activists were reliant on the kind of worldview formulations provided by evangelicalism's theologians and philosophers.[17] Some of this had to do with an American public ignorant of and uninterested in the theological nuances of evangelical theology.[18] Much more had to do, however, with the motivations and public statements of the politicized evangelicals themselves. Evangelical political action, to begin with, often failed to see the larger social and political nature and the interrelationships of the issues over which they were so energized.[19] Moreover, the Christian right often deliberately sought to avoid theological commitments, for fear that they could not sustain the traditionalist coalition of evangelicals, Roman Catholics, conservative Jews, Mormons, and even right-leaning secularists. As Jerry Falwell explained, "Moral Majority is a political organization and is not based on theological considerations."[20] Similarly, the Christian Coalition's Ralph Reed contended, "This is not a vision exclusively for those who are evangelical or Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox or Jewish. This vision makes room for people of all faiths—and for those with no faith at all."[21]

Even so, the lack of an overarching theology of evangelical engagement did not save the Christian right's political coalition, but instead unraveled it. The *ad hoc* nature of the religious right left evangelicals without the theoretical tools to evaluate political priorities *theologically,* and thus to articulate the issues in terms of an overarching evangelical worldview.[22] This further alienated some in the evangelical constituency, who began to wonder if evangelical political priorities were being negotiated according to the platform of the national Republican Party, rather than according to biblical revelation.[23] Moreover, at the century's end, evangelical optimism about their place in the "silent majority" of the American mainstream was replaced in many sectors by a sober pessimism that American culture was "slouching towards Gomorrah."[24] Religious conservatives would then broach the subject, not only of whether Christians should engage the public square but also of whether they could any longer support the American regime at all, or whether the American project was irreparably broken.[25]

Evangelical Theology and Evangelical Engagement

While the precise definition of evangelicalism may be hotly debated among evangelicals themselves, all sides agree that the term does not refer primarily to a voting bloc of the Democratic or Republican National Committees. This does not mean, however, that sociopolitical activism is incidental to evangelical identity. Evangelicalism, at least as originally conceived by the theologians at the helm of the postwar evangelical renaissance, is first of all a *theological* movement. Indeed, even the postwar call for sociopolitical engagement was cast in terms of a self-consciously theological agenda. As a result, the evangelical attempt to engage politically without attention to these prior questions of theological self-identity and underlying philosophy has served only to frustrate the kind of evangelical engagement envisioned by the movement's founding theologians.

Henry's *Uneasy Conscience,* after all, was not first of all a sociopolitical tract. Instead, it served in many ways to define theologically much of what it meant to be a "new evangelical," in contrast to the older fundamentalism.[26] Along with Ramm, Carnell, and others, Henry pressed the theological case for evangelicalism in terms of a vigorous engagement with nonevangelical thought.[27] As articulated by Henry and the early constellations of evangelical theology, such as Fuller Theological Seminary and the National Association of Evangelicals, evangelicalism would not differ with fundamentalism in the "fundamentals" of doctrinal conviction, but in the application of Christian truth claims onto all areas of human endeavor.[28] Henry's *Uneasy Conscience,* which set the stage for evangelical differentiation from isolationist American fundamentalism, sought to be what Harold J. Ockenga called in his foreword to the monograph "a healthy antidote to fundamentalist aloofness in a distraught world."[29] Thus, the call to sociopolitical engagement was not incidental to evangelical theological identity, but was at the forefront of it. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience,* and the movement it defined, sought to distinguish the postwar evangelical effort so that evangelical theologians, as one observer notes, "found themselves straddling the fence between two well-established positions: fundamentalist social detachment and the liberal Social Gospel."[30]

Such "straddling," however, is an inaccurate term if it carries the idea that Henry and his postwar colleagues sought to find a middle way between fundamentalism and the Social Gospel. The evangelicals charged the fundamentalists with misapplying their theological convictions, but they further charged the Social Gospel with having no explicit theology at all. "As Protestant liberalism lost a genuinely theological perspective, it substituted mainly a political program," Henry lamented.[31] The new evangelical theologians maintained that their agenda was far from a capitulation to the Social Gospel, but was instead

the conservative antidote to it.[32] This was because, Henry argued, evangelicalism was a theology calling for engagement, not a program for engagement calling for a theology. The Social Gospel theologians, Henry claimed, "exalt the social issue above the theological, and prize the Christian religion mainly as a tool for justifying an independently determined course of social action."[33] Nonetheless, fundamentalism was also, in many ways, not theological enough for Henry and his cohorts, a fact that lay at the root of fundamentalist isolation, as the evangelicals saw it. Henry commended fundamentalists for their defense of the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, and so forth. This was not enough, he warned. "The norm by which liberal theology was gauged for soundness unhappily became the summary of fundamentalist doctrine," he wrote. "Complacency with fragmented doctrines meant increasing failure to comprehend the relationship of underlying theological principles."[34] This meant, Henry argued, that although conservative Christians could apply the biblical witness to evangelistic endeavors and certain basic doctrinal affirmations, "they have neglected the philosophical, scientific, social, and political problems that agitate our century," such that those seeking to find a theoretical structure for making metaphysical sense of the current situation were forced to find it in Marxism or Roman Catholicism.[35]

But doctrinal reductionism was merely a symptom of the crisis of fundamentalist isolation. The effort toward a "united evangelical action" in the public square was likewise hampered by the internal lack of cohesiveness within the American evangelical coalition itself. It is here, at the core of evangelical identity, that conservative Protestantism faced its crisis over the Kingdom of God. Despite the assertions that contemporary evangelicalism can be described best as a doctrinal "kaleidoscope" of various competing ideologies, a cursory glance at the postwar evangelical coalition will reveal less of a "kaleidoscope" than a river, fed by at least two very distinctly identified streams.[36] A vast array of historians has observed that the evangelical movement was strongly influenced by, as Sydney Ahlstrom puts it, a Reformed "denominational, seminary-oriented group" and "a Bible institute group with strong premillennial and dispensational interests" that were able to maintain an "uneasy alliance" against the common foe of modernism since dispensationalism gave the conservatives "a measure of interdenominational cohesion and esprit" while Reformed theology gave the movement "theological and historical prowess."[37] While some elements of this historiography are contested, the preeminence of these two streams in shaping contemporary evangelical theology is not in dispute.[38]

The Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy had provided a common enemy against which conservative Protestants, especially confessional

Calvinists and dispensational premillennialists, could coalesce in a common defense of orthodoxy. Henry, however, sought to serve in a role similar to that of William F. Buckley, Jr., in Buckley's successful attempt to create a "fusionist" postwar conservative political coalition between libertarians and traditionalists against the common threat of global communism and domestic liberalism.[39] The intellectual leaders of the fledgling evangelical movement after World War II recognized that a vast cooperative movement of conservative American Protestants would require more than tactical alliances against mainline liberalism on the left, obscurantist fundamentalism on the right, and a rising tide of secularism on the horizon. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience,* therefore, insisted that a socially and politically engaged evangelicalism could not penetrate society so long as the movement itself was saddled with internal theological skirmishes.[40] In this, Henry received the hearty agreement of other leaders such as Harold J. Ockenga and Edward J. Carnell.[41]

The skirmishes between Reformed and dispensational theologies were symptomatic of what Henry viewed as part of a larger trend of evangelical "navel-gazing."[42] This was, however, a real threat to evangelical theological cohesiveness, especially since the debates between the groups predated the postwar evangelical movement itself.[43] This lack of cohesion was even more important given that the bone of contention between evangelical covenantalists and evangelical dispensationalists was the concept Henry identified in *Uneasy Conscience* as most fundamental to an articulation of Christian sociopolitical engagement: the Kingdom of God.[44] Thus, the emerging evangelical movement could not dismiss the covenant/dispensational controversies over the Kingdom as mere quibbling over secondary matters, nor could these concerns be divorced from the rest of the doctrinal synthesis as though the differences were akin to the timing of the Rapture. Dispensationalists charged covenant theologians with shackling the biblical witness to a unitary understanding centered on the justification of individuals rather than on the larger cosmic purposes of God. Covenant theologians accused dispensationalists of denying the present reality of the Kingdom of Christ, divorcing the relevance of the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount from this age, and with denigrating the centrality of the church by considering it a "parenthesis" in the plan of God. These Kingdom-oriented differences were multitudinous, and none of them could be resolved by an umbrella statement on last things appended to the conclusion of the National Association of Evangelicals statement of faith.

Despite some exhortations to the contrary, the evangelical movement's theologians seemed to realize that more than doctrinal détente was needed between these two groups if evangelicalism were ever to go beyond its

Kingdom paralysis toward a cohesive theology of evangelical engagement. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* waded into the Kingdom debate as an incipient call for a new consensus, one that was a break from the Kingdom concept of classical dispensationalism and also from the spiritual understanding of many covenant theologians.[45] Henry was joined in this by the exegetical and biblical theological syntheses of George Eldon Ladd, who went even further in calling for a new evangelical vision of the Kingdom, usually riling both dispensational premillennialists and covenantal amillennialists in the process.[46]

Beyond the mere matter of a Kingdom "cold war" between these two streams of evangelical theology, however, was the fact that the differences on the Kingdom were directly correlated to various aspects of the evangelical sociopolitical task. The concept of the Kingdom was thus off-limits to the construction of an evangelical political theology, a situation that would paralyze any such effort since the problematic features of both fundamentalism and the Social Gospel in relation to the public square were directly related to Kingdom concepts. The incendiary debates about the Kingdom within conservative Christianity, particularly between dispensationalists and covenant theologians, had led, Henry argued, to a "growing reluctance to explicate the kingdom idea in fundamentalist preaching."[47] This aversion was so pronounced, he noted, that a fundamentalist spokesman had warned him to "stay away from the kingdom" when addressing the root of the uneasy conscience.[48]

Jettisoning such advice, however, Henry set forth his manifesto for sociopolitical engagement as, above all, a theological statement; more specifically, it was a plea for an evangelical Kingdom theology.[49] For Henry, such a Kingdom theology was urgent not only because of the theological fragmentation of evangelicals over the Kingdom question, but also because only a Kingdom theology could address the specific theological reasons behind fundamentalist disengagement:

> Contemporary evangelicalism needs (1) to reawaken the relevance of its redemptive message to the global predicament; (2) to stress the great evangelical agreements in a common world front; (3) to discard elements of its message which cut the nerve of world compassion as contradictory to the inherent genius of Christianity; (4) to restudy eschatological convictions for a proper perspective which will not unnecessarily dissipate evangelical strength in controversy over secondary positions, in a day when the significance of the primary insistences is international.[50]

The formation of such a Kingdom consensus was, however, easier proposed than accomplished, not only because of the internal theological Kingdom ten-

sions within evangelicalism, but also because of the role of Kingdom theology in nonevangelical American Christianity. After all, a Kingdom consensus had indeed been achieved within the ranks of Protestant liberalism by the onset of the early twentieth century.[51] The integrative motif of the "Kingdom of God" proposed by mainline Protestant theologians was most vigorously opposed by dispensationalist and Reformed conservatives.[52] The ethical and anti-supernatural "Kingdom" offered by theologians such as Albrecht Ritschl, covenantalist biblical theologian Geerhardus Vos contended, gave liberals "an opportunity to remain within the circle of religion and yet have less of the obsession of God in religion."[53] Vos contrasted the definition "of God the Kingdom" in the theology of Jesus and the apostles with "the Kingdom (of God)" as offered by contemporary liberal theologians.[54]

Kingdom Theology and Evangelical Engagement

In the years since *Uneasy Conscience,* evangelical theology's "cold war" over the Kingdom has thawed dramatically. Remarkably, the move toward a consensus Kingdom theology has come most markedly not from the broad center of the evangelical coalition, as represented by Henry or Ladd, but from the rival streams of dispensationalism and covenant theology themselves. Progressive dispensationalists, led by theologians such as Craig Blaising, Darrell Bock, and Robert Saucy, have set forth a counterproposal to almost the entire spectrum of traditional dispensational thought.[55] With much less fanfare, but with equal significance, a group of covenant theologians, led by scholars such as Anthony Hoekema, Vern Poythress, Edmund Clowney, and Richard Gaffin, has also proposed significant doctrinal development within their tradition.[56] The move toward such development has been prompted by a Reformed theology dependent on the redemptive-historical emphasis of Geerhardus Vos.[57]

Interestingly, this growing consensus did not come through joint "manifestos," but through sustained theological reflection. The cooperative doctrinal endeavors between dispensationalists and covenantalists, especially through the Evangelical Theological Society's Dispensational Study Group, have resulted in what one dispensationalist scholar calls a spirit of "irenic yet earnest interaction" over the meaning of the Kingdom.[58] Nor has the consensus come through a doctrinal "cease-fire" in order to skirt the issue of the relationship of the Kingdom to the present mission of the people of God. Instead, it came as both traditions sought to relate their doctrinal distinctives to the overarching theme of the Kingdom of God as an integrative motif for their respective systems. Whatever the objections of critics in both traditions, progressive dispensationalists did not set out to "covenantalize" dispensational

theology, nor did modified covenantalists set out to "dispensationalize" covenant theology. Rather, the coalescence with the other tradition on various disputed points seems almost coincidental in the scholarship of both groups.

Instead, at the forefront of the proposals within both traditions stands a more sweeping agenda—namely, an attempt to find a unifying center for their respective theologies in the overarching concept of the Kingdom of God. Progressive dispensationalists articulate the Kingdom as the central integrative motif of their system, citing this as a major distinction from earlier forms of dispensational theology.[59] In fact, the move toward a Kingdom theology even accounts for the name of the newer form of dispensationalism. It is called "progressive" not because it is more contemporary than other forms of dispensationalism but rather because in it "the dispensations *progress* by revealing different aspects of the final unified redemption," namely, the eschatological Kingdom of God.[60] At the same time, the modified covenantalists insist that their contention for the unity of the covenant of grace is expressed not primarily in a pre-temporal decree or in a static understanding of redemption, but rather through the unity of God's eschatological purposes to "restore and renew the human race and the cosmos" through the triumph of the eschatological Kingdom of God.[61] In this, the modified covenantalists reconfigure the emphases of the American Reformed tradition, while relating to a prominent theme in the Dutch Kuyperian stream of Reformed theology.[62]

The question of the place of this Kingdom consensus within evangelical theology is not isolated from the question of evangelical sociopolitical involvement. This is true, first of all, because it affects what Mark Noll identifies as the chief "apolitical impetus" of conservative Christianity's doctrinal streams, traditional dispensationalism and the southern Presbyterian concept of the "spirituality of the church."[63] The emergence of a Kingdom theology is criticized by both traditionalist covenant theologians and traditionalist dispensationalists for the sociopolitical ramifications such developments bring.[64] The move toward an evangelical Kingdom theology is not simply the construction of a broad, comprehensive center for evangelical theological reflection. As the Kingdom idea has been explored within evangelical theology, and within the sub-traditions of dispensationalism and covenantalism, specific points of contention have been addressed, especially in terms of the way in which the Kingdom concept relates to the consummation of all things, the salvation of the world, and the mission of the church. In so doing, this emerging Kingdom theology addresses the very same stumbling blocks to evangelical cultural engagement that were once identified as the roots of conservative Christianity's "uneasy conscience."

"For far too long, evangelicals have waited for a serious study of the Kingdom of God and its political application. That book has now arrived, and *The Kingdom of Christ* will redefine the conversation about evangelicalism and politics. Russell Moore combines stellar historical and theological research with a keen understanding of cultural and political realities. This is a landmark book by one of evangelicalism's finest minds."

—R. Albert Mohler Jr., *President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*

"A faithful heir of Carl F. H. Henry, Russell Moore not only reasserts a coherent Kingdom consensus around which evangelicals can gravitate, he also shows us a way forward in strength and unity. Anyone who cares about the future of evangelicalism will read this volume with both great interest and care."

—C. Ben Mitchell, *Adjunct Professor of Ethics and Contemporary Culture, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

"Russell D. Moore's *The Kingdom of Christ* is an enlightening account of the merging theological vision of recent dispensational and covenant theologies and a stirring call for a unified evangelical social engagement. . . . Here, theological inquiry and evangelical social activism meet in a riveting account of where we've been and where we now are in evangelicalism. . . . Moore's accomplishment is nothing short of remarkable; his writing is as clear and engaging as it is profound."

—Bruce A. Ware, *T. Rupert and Lucille Coleman Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*

"Moore's book challenges all evangelicals to find common agreement on one basis for political and social involvement: the Kingdom of God is already here but it is not yet fully here. Therefore it is right to seek to advance its influence in all areas of life, including government and society, but with the realization that these activities are never enough apart from primary focus on Christ as King. This is an informative, thought-provoking, and refreshing study that will have perspective-modifying implications for the way Christians understand their role in the world in this present age."

—Wayne Grudem, *Research Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies, Phoenix Seminary*

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