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*Traditional Dispensational Social and Political Ethics —
From J. N. Darby to Charles C. Ryrie*

From the White House¹ to the Congress,² from the pulpit³ to the Tea Party⁴ to the Iowa caucuses,⁵ the political influence of religious conservatives, many of whom are

¹ “Pat Robertson’s resignation this month as president of the Christian Coalition confirmed the ascendance of a new leader of the religious right in America: George W. Bush. For the first time since religious conservatives became a modern political movement, the president of the United States has become the movement’s de facto leader—a status even Ronald Reagan, though admired by religious conservatives, never earned. Christian publications, radio and television shower Bush with praise, while preachers from the pulpit treat his leadership as an act of providence.” Dana Milbank, “Religious Right Finds Its Center in Oval Office,” *The Washington Post* (2001), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A19253-2001Dec23?language=printer> (accessed June 24, 2012).

² “On July 16, I attended Christians United for Israel’s annual Washington-Israel Summit. Founded by San Antonio-based megachurch pastor John Hagee, CUFI has added the grassroots muscle of the Christian right to the already potent Israel lobby. Hagee and his minions have forged close ties with the Bush White House and members of Congress from Sen. Joseph Lieberman to Sen. John McCain. In its call for a unilateral military attack on Iran and the expansion of Israeli territory, CUFI has found unwavering encouragement from traditional pro-Israel groups like AIPAC and elements of the Israeli government.

But CUFI has an ulterior agenda: its support for Israel derives from the belief of Hagee and his flock that Jesus will return to Jerusalem after the battle of Armageddon and cleanse the earth of evil. In the end, all the non-believers - Jews, Muslims, Hindus, mainline Christians, etc. - must convert or suffer the torture of eternal damnation. Over a dozen CUFI members eagerly revealed to me their excitement at the prospect of Armageddon occurring tomorrow. Among the rapture ready was Republican Former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay.” Max Blumenthal, “Rapture Ready: The Unauthorized Christians United for Israel Tour,” *The Huffington Post* (2007), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/max-blumenthal/rapture-ready-the-unautho_b_57826.html (accessed December 31, 2015).

³“This weekend, hundreds of pastors, including some of the nation’s evangelical leaders, will climb into their pulpits to preach about American politics, flouting a decades-old law that prohibits tax-exempt churches and other charities from campaigning on election issues. The sermons, on what is called Pulpit Freedom Sunday, essentially represent a form of biblical bait, an effort by some churches to goad the Internal Revenue Service into court battles over the divide between religion and politics.

‘There should be no government intrusion in the pulpit,’ said the Rev. James Garlow, senior pastor at Skyline Church in La Mesa, Calif., who led preachers in the battle to pass California’s Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage. ‘The freedom of speech and the

dispensationists, has been, and continues to be, considerable. While much of the focus of these religious conservatives is centered around moral issues such as abortion and homosexuality, the political muscle exerted by these voters extends far beyond such narrow

freedom of religion promised under the First Amendment means pastors have full authority to say what they want to say.’ Mr. Garlow said he planned to inveigh against same-sex marriage, abortion and other touchstone issues that social conservatives oppose, and some ministers may be ready to encourage parishioners to vote only for those candidates who adhere to the same views or values.

‘I tell them that as followers of Christ, you wouldn’t vote for someone who was against what God said in his word,’ Mr. Garlow said. ‘I will, in effect, oppose several candidates and — de facto — endorse others.’” Stephanie Strom, “The Political Pulpit,” *The New York Times* (2011), <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/01/business/flouting-the-law-pastors-will-take-on-politics.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed December 31, 2015). According to the Alliance Defending Freedom, over 2600 churches from all fifty states and Puerto Rico participated in this civil disobedience in 2014. “Pulpit Freedom Sunday 2014 Participating Churches”, Alliance Defending Freedom, <http://www.adfmedia.org/files/PFS2014Participants.pdf> (accessed December 31, 2015).

⁴“Evangelicals, and more generally the Religious Right, are disproportionately present among the Tea Party voters.... [I]n their pro-Zionist politics, Evangelical Protestants match if not exceed in their fervor even the neocons and (if humanly possible) the Wall Street Journal. Evangelicals are perpetually behind the Israeli Right, and even if they elicit undisguised contempt from their allies, the American Israeli lobby and its Middle Eastern agenda can depend on their unqualified support.” Paul Gottfried, “What Drives the Religious Right,” *The American Conservative* (2011), <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/who-misleads-the-religious-right/> (accessed December 31, 2015).

⁵ “Iowa evangelical leader Bob Vander Plaats today bestowed a coveted, but not unexpected, endorsement on Texas Sen. Ted Cruz.

Vander Plaats, president of the Family Leader, is the most influential Christian conservative leader in Iowa. The state’s Feb. 1 caucuses are the first test of the 2016 presidential campaign, and social conservatives have considerable influence. That’s also Cruz’s target audience.” Todd J. Gillman, “Cruz Wins Coveted Endorsement from Iowa Evangelical Bob Bander Plaats,” *The Dallas Morning News*, <http://trailblazersblog.dallasnews.com/2015/12/cruz-wins-coveted-endorsement-from-iowa-evangelical-bob-vander-plaats.html/> (accessed December 31 2015).

concerns. Supporting fiscal restraint⁶ and strong national defense in addition to their social conservatism (sometimes called the “three-legged stool”),⁷ religious conservatives “make up almost a third of the total electorate, and four out of five of them vote Republican.”⁸ In addition to the “three-legged stool,” unwavering support for the nation of Israel also characterizes the Christian Right. While it remains true that politicians from both the left and the right loudly trumpet their support for Israel,⁹ Gallup maintains that Republican support

⁶“‘Fiscal restraint’ is notoriously difficult to define, but generally refers to a commitment to free-market economics, limited government spending and taxation, as well as an understanding of what motivates people to certain actions and not others. Concerning this last point, Smith writes, ‘It’s the day I discovered that economics is not just about math; it’s about motivation. Debits, credits, ledgers, and spreadsheets matter, but so do determination and leadership. Sound, moral economic policy must take the foibles and folly of a fallen human nature into account, and must have human dignity—an understanding that we are all made in the image of God—as its goal.’” Warren Cole Smith, “The Day I Became a Fiscal Conservative,” *World Magazine* (2012), <http://online.worldmag.com/2012/01/10/the-day-i-became-a-fiscal-conservative/> (accessed June 15, 2012).

⁷“Ronald Reagan often spoke of a ‘three-legged stool’ that undergirds true conservatism. The legs are represented by a strong defense, strong free-market economic policies and strong social values.” J. Matt Barber, “Republicans Must ‘Hang Together’ ...,” *The Washington Times* (2010), <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/oct/29/republicans-must-hang-together/print/> (accessed June 15, 2012).

⁸Michael Brendan Dougherty, “Crossing the Tea,” *The American Conservative* (2011), <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/crossing-the-tea/> (accessed June 14, 2012).

⁹“America’s love for Israel is so strong that politicians on the left and right go out of their way to offer verbal support for Israel. President Obama has said that, ‘The United States is going to be unwavering in its support of Israel’s security.’” Jordan Sekulow, “Why Christian Conservatives Are Israel’s Ambassadors,” *The Washington Post* (2010), http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/Jordan_Sekulow/2010/10/why_christian_conservatives_are_israels_ambassadors.html (accessed June 15, 2012).

for Israel is 25 points higher than Democrat support “with liberals¹⁰ the least supportive of Israel of any group Gallup measured.”¹¹

All of this evidence points to a church that is politically and socially engaged. Organizing to oppose the normalization of biblically-defined sin, believers fight against abortion, homosexuality, and prostitution. Not content with mere opposition, they establish pregnancy resource centers, rally for Israel, hold voter registration drives, and generally press their agenda through grass-roots activism. Much of this activism occurs from a wide range of Christian traditions. Roman Catholics, for example, have been at the forefront of the pro-life movement. This being said, some, indeed many, have argued that dispensationalists are not politically and socially active enough or at least are not engaged in the right areas.

Understanding a theological motivation for certain Christians to believe and act in political and social ways raises a natural question: If a certain theology *encourages* one sort

¹⁰ Gallup does not define liberal in his methodology, but allows people to self identify their political leanings. While there is no one single definition of what constitutes a political liberal, the consensus seems to be that liberals generally hold to larger government, more social programs, smaller defense, and greater personal liberty. This means they are generally pro-choice, pro-gay rights, less involved in traditional marriage, and less religious.

¹¹“Republicans continue to be Israel’s strongest U.S. supporters: 80% sympathize more with the Israelis in the conflict, substantially higher than the 57% of independents and Democrats sharing this view. A similar pattern is seen by political ideology, ranging from 74% among conservatives to 49% among liberals -- with liberals the least supportive of Israel of any group Gallup measured.” Lydia Saad, “Americans Maintain Broad Support for Israel,” *Gallup Politics* (2011), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/146408/americans-maintain-broad-support-israel.aspx> (accessed June 15, 2012).

of political/social action, could it be that this same theology *discourages* other sorts of political/social action? More to the point, if accepting traditional dispensationalism¹² (hereafter TD) leads one to political action in support of Israel, could it be that TD could dissuade one from engaging other societal ills?

In fairness, not everyone who finds fault with the social ethics of TD believes that the (alleged) neglect is an inevitable result of TD's theological framework. Pyne, for example, accepts that social disengagement is not demanded by dispensationalism. Nevertheless, he maintains that dispensationalism provides a "theological loophole for those whose understanding of social ethics had been thrown out of balance by sin, controversy and culture."¹³ As an example of the "loophole" in practice, Pyne relates a personal interaction he contends is a natural result of TD:

¹²Darrell Bock divides the recent history of dispensationalism into three categories: "Scofieldian dispensationalism," which reflects the approach of the 1909 and 1917 editions of *The Scofield Reference Bible*, "Essentialist dispensationalism," which applies to those subscribing to the approach of later dispensationalists, particularly those who hold to Ryrrie's *sine qua non* description of the fundamental elements of dispensationalism, and "Progressive dispensationalism," which focuses on the progress of revelation, so that each subsequent dispensation represents "progress" in the unified plan of God. Darrell L. Bock, "The Son of David and the Saints' Task: The Hermeneutics of Initial Fulfillment," *BSac* 150, no. 600 (1993): 440-41 n. 1. This writer uses the term "Traditional" when describing the dispensationalism of Ryrrie and those before him, following the categories in Herbert W. Bateman, IV, *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. IV Herbert W. Bateman (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999).

¹³Robert A. Pyne, "The New Man in an Immoral Society: Expectations between the Times," in *Evangelical Theological Society Dispensational Study Group* (Santa Clara, Calif.: 1997), 10. This unpublished paper should not be confused with Pyne's published article in

Several months ago I found myself in a conversation with a student about the church's responsibility to the poor. I had said something in class about having an obligation to serve the needy, and this fellow challenged me afterward to prove my point from Scripture. I started with Galatians 2:10, but he said that Paul's words about "remembering the poor" only applied to those suffering in the Jerusalem church. I tried the book of Amos, but he said that was an Old Testament text that didn't apply to the church. He said that Psalm 72 and Matthew 6 provide instruction concerning the millennium, and that Matthew 25 describes standards for those who have gone through the Tribulation. He said that Acts 4 merely reported (but did not endorse) the Jerusalem church's temporary practice of communal living, while James 2 was directed toward Hebrew Christians. I tried 1 John 3, but he was quick to point out that the apostle only calls us to love one another, not to love those who are in the world, and I finally said, "I'm not sure you and I are reading the same Bible." He was no longer convinced I was really a dispensationalist, but I had a bigger concern than that. I was no longer convinced he was really a Christian.¹⁴

Unfortunately, Pyne never goes on to defend his use of Scripture or challenge his student's exegesis, but merely discusses dispensationalism's "bad reputation."¹⁵ In passing, one might add that all such personal experiences should be taken *cum grano* as Newton's third law tends to be true of anecdotal evidence as well as motion. When one story is told, an equal and opposite tale is not far away.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it appears that it is this student's

BSac 154 (Jul-Sep 1997) by the same name. That article is primarily concerned with the contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr to the church's role in societal change.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵ Stallard responds to Pyne in Mike Stallard, "An Essentialist Response to Robert A. Pyne's 'The New Man in an Immoral Society: Expectations between the Times,'" in *Evangelical Theological Society Dispensational Study Group* (Santa Clara, Calif.: 1997). In addition to answering Pyne's concerns, he addresses a way forward with regard to social ethics.

¹⁶Reformed theologian Richard Mouw also finds a fundamental defect with dispensationalism, but finds a different reality with regard to praxis than Pyne. He writes, "The dispensationalist perspective undercut Christian social concerns; but long before I had ever heard of Mother Teresa, I saw dispensationalists lovingly embrace the homeless in rescue missions. Whatever the defects of the older dispensationalism as a theological

acceptance of Ryrie's *sine qua non*¹⁷—in particular his understanding of literal hermeneutics and the distinction between Israel and the church—that leads him to his understanding of the church's social responsibility.

In response to this loophole, there has arisen within dispensationalism in particular and in evangelicalism generally a movement whose stated goals include closing the (theological) loophole that inhibits “correct” social and political behavior in TD.¹⁸ Since its inception,¹⁹ progressive dispensationalism (hereafter PD) has argued for a “broader concept of redemption,” a redemption that is “holistic.”²⁰ This means that the promise of salvation and blessing of the nations—as opposed to just the salvation of Israel—extends the reach of

perspective, it embodied a spirituality that produced some of the most Christlike human beings I have ever known.” Richard J. Mouw, “What the Old Dispensationalists Taught Me,” *Christianity Today* 39, no. 3 (1995): 34.

¹⁷ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, revised and expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 38-41.

¹⁸ Pyne, “New Man”, 10. “In recent years progressive dispensationalists have attempted to close that loophole. By suggesting that the church is an inaugurated expression of the kingdom of God, one that consists of both Jews and Gentiles, progressive dispensationalists have argued that it should provide a model of reconciliation for the rest of the world.” *Ibid.*

¹⁹ PD is widely recognized to have begun on November 20, 1986 at the first annual meeting of the Dispensational Study Group of the Evangelical Theological Society. Ronald T. Clutter, “Dispensational Study Group: An Introduction,” *Grace Theological Journal* 10, no. 2 (1989): 124.

²⁰ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, “Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 382.

salvation into “political and national dimensions.”²¹ Therefore, the present role of the church includes being a “witness to and advocate for social and political righteousness.”²²

While many have commented on the alleged ethical discrepancies inherent in dispensationalism as a system, there has been no full-length treatment of the social/political ethics of TD.²³ This paper attempts to partially fill that gap. Specifically this work will investigate and defend the view of TD regarding social and political action by the church.

With these considerations in mind, the following dispensationalists will be reviewed to determine non-progressive dispensationalism’s view toward social and political ethics:

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ There have been works that examine one element of TD’s social ethic. Chenault’s work on the Sermon on the Mount is an example. In it he examines the social ethic surrounding Matthew 5-7, but largely ignores dispensationalism’s use of the OT law or its understanding of social action in Philemon, for example. Will Chenault, “Dispensationalism and Social Concern: An Evaluation of Dispensationalism, the Sermon on the Mount, and Social Ethics” (Th.M thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2003).

J. N. Darby,²⁴ C. I. Scofield,²⁵ Harry Ironside, L. S. Chafer, Alva J. McClain, John Walvoord, and Charles Ryrie.²⁶

While an attempt was originally made to standardize the topics and headings under each author and to treat each author separately, it quickly became clear that such an undertaking was largely impossible. With rare exceptions, the authors under consideration did not write with the purpose of examining social ethics. Their comments spring naturally from their exegesis of various passages and their discussion of a wide range of theological topics. As a result, the organization of the relevant material varies with each author. Not only

²⁴ While not as well known as others outside of dispensational circles, Darby's selection for study is obvious. "Acknowledged father of modern dispensational premillennialism, Darby is remembered especially for his recalling the church to expectancy for its rapture at the return of the Lord before Daniel's Seventieth Week." Floyd Elmore, "Darby, John Nelson," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 83.

²⁵ Author of the Scofield Reference Bible, C. I. Scofield's contribution "to the development of the evangelical fundamentalist movement in the twentieth century has been enormous, particularly as it relates to premillennial dispensationalism." John Hannah, "Scofield, Cyrus Ingerson," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 391. It is difficult to conceive of a serious review of historical dispensational theology (as a whole) with his inclusion.

²⁶ Author of the *Ryrie Study Bible*, Ryrie's attempt to codify the essentials of dispensationalism in his *sine qua non* (see note 44) has been largely accepted within TD, although recently challenged by PD (see note 45). "The importance of this work for the self-understanding of late twentieth-century dispensationalism cannot be overstated." Paul P. Enns, "Ryrie, Charles C.," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 385. "Dr. Ryrie's writings have consistently been on the theological cutting edge, addressing the critical issues of the day and speaking on behalf of dispensational premillennialism." *Ibid.* Again, no serious study of historical dispensationalism would be complete without an investigation of Ryrie's contribution.

so, but the attempt to be both thorough and consistent in the treatment of each author quickly grew the length of this dissertation beyond the accepted guidelines. As a result, this chapter will synthesize the broad teaching of TD (represented by the authors considered) into general categories.

Unfortunately, these general categories are exactly that—general. As the authors touched on social or political ethics most often in the context of a larger discussion, their comments often range over several categories at once. As a result, a particular author’s treatment of an individual topic might easily be assigned to more than one category. For example, Darby’s views on voting could easily be considered under a discussion of the world as a system, the believer’s responsibility to government, or the governance of God, among others. It should not surprise the reader, therefore, to notice an overlap between authors and concepts amidst the various topics.

The Heavenly/Earthly Dichotomy

Ryrie maintains that the distinction²⁷ between Israel and the church is “the most basic theological test of whether or not a person is a dispensationalist,” and “undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive.”²⁸ Still, for this assertion to have meaning, one must understand

²⁷ “A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct.” Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 39.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

what is meant by “distinction.” At the heart of this understanding is what might be called the heavenly/earthly dichotomy.

Definition

Ryrie defines “distinction” by appealing to Chafer’s explanation.²⁹

The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity.³⁰

It is important to note that this definition involves the purposes and objects of each people, not the location in which they will dwell.³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Fort Worth: Exegetica, 1951), 103.

³¹ Some have taken this distinction and expanded it to include the future location of each people. Chafer notes that the “earthly people ... are present in the earth in all ages from their beginning in Abraham on into eternity to come....” (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947-48; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 4:49. The church, in contrast, only exists on earth during this present dispensation. Ibid. Similarly, McClain addresses where resurrected, church age saints will live when they reign with Christ. According to McClain, the resurrected church-age saints reside in heaven and merely commute to earth. “The residence of the saints in heaven while ruling on earth, actually, is much less of a problem than that of a business man whose office is in a city while his residence is in the suburbs.” Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1959), 500. Still, this view is in no way demanded by the standard understanding of the heavenly/earthly dichotomy. Ryrie holds that “dispensationalists maintain the separate place and distinct blessings of national Israel restored and regenerated in the millennial kingdom. The church, while distinct in the millennial kingdom, is not apart from it.” Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 135.

Chafer does not consider the terms “earthly” and “heavenly” mere abstract expressions, but argues that they describe concrete realities true of each people group. In fact, Chafer draws twenty-four contrasts between the heavenly people and the earthly people.³² Space does not permit an exhaustive study of his thought regarding these distinctions, but a few examples may be helpful.

Chafer maintains that entrance into the earthly people comes by physical birth, while entrance into the heavenly people comes by spiritual birth.³³ Since admission to the heavenly people is spiritual, not physical, the earthly people in this dispensation may leave the one for the other.³⁴

Chafer argues that the heavenly/earthly language describes the promises made to each people group, their sphere of influence, and their purpose. He insists that every “covenant,

³² Chafer lists these contrasts under the following headings: The Extent of Biblical Revelation, The Divine Purpose, The Seed of Abraham, Birth, Headship, Covenants, Nationality, Divine Dealing, Dispensations, Ministry, The Death of Christ, The Father, Christ, The Holy Spirit, A Governing Principle, Divine Enablement, Two Farewell Discourses, The Promise of Christ’s Return, Position, Christ’s Earthly Reign, Priesthood, Marriage, Judgements [*sic*], and Position in Eternity. Chafer, *Theology*, 4:47ff.

³³ *Ibid.*, 4:48.

³⁴ “However, in the present age, bounded as it is by the two advents of Christ, all progress in the national and earthly program for Israel is in abeyance and individual Jews are given the same privilege as the individual Gentiles of the exercise of personal faith in Christ as Savior and out of those thus redeemed, both Jews and Gentiles, the heavenly people are being called.” *Ibid.*, 1:38.

promise, and provision for Israel is earthly,” while every “covenant or promise for the Church is for a heavenly reality.”³⁵

Chafer also holds that God has two distinct and separate purposes, one “for the earth which is centered in His earthly people and that for heaven which is centered in His heavenly people.”³⁶ These two purposes are so entirely separate that Chafer balks at the idea of the church being called a “parenthesis” in God’s plan for Israel. “A parenthetical portion sustains some direct or indirect relation to that which goes before or that which follows; but the present age-purpose is not thus related and therefore is more properly termed an *intercalation*.”³⁷

Chafer stresses that the earthly nature of Israel and the heavenly nature of the church is so absolute that this distinction continues indefinitely. Why is it strange, he wonders, that “the Scriptures so designate an earthly people who go on as such into eternity; and a heavenly people who also abide in their heavenly calling forever?”³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., 4:47.

³⁶ Ibid., 5:116.

³⁷ Ibid., 4:41.

³⁸ Chafer, *Dispensationalism*, 103. Walvoord agrees with this assessment. Speaking of the eternal state, Walvoord observes that “[t]he distinctions between the racial Jew and the church composed of both Jews and Gentiles is maintained in this revelation.” John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 638.

Chafer's understanding of the heavenly/earthly dichotomy is not original with him.

Instead, he echoes the thought of J. N. Darby.

There are two great subjects which occupy the sphere of millennial prophecy and testimony: the church and its glory in Christ; and the Jews and their glory as a redeemed nation in Christ: the heavenly people and the earthly people; the habitation and scene of the glory of the one being the heavens; of the other, the earth. Christ shall display His glory in the one according to that which is celestial; in the other, according to that which is terrestrial--Himself the Son, the image and glory of God, the centre and sun of them both.³⁹

Thus Darby teaches that Israel is an earthly people with earthly glory, the church is a heavenly people with heavenly glory, and that the promises for both Israel and the church are quite different.

Scofield agrees, adding that the separate promises given to Israel and to the church are in absolute contrast to each other and are "impossible to mingle."⁴⁰

The Jew was promised an earthly inheritance, earthly wealth, earthly honor, earthly power. The church is promised no such thing, but is pointed always to heaven as the place where she is to receive her rest and her reward.

The promise to the church is a promise of persecution, if faithful in this world, but a promise of a great inheritance and reward hereafter. In the meantime, she is to be a pilgrim body, passing through this scene, but not abiding here.⁴¹

³⁹ J. N. Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, ed. William Kelly, 34 vols. (Oak Park, Ill.: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.), 2:122.

⁴⁰ C. I. Scofield, *Prophecy Made Plain* (Greenville, S. C.: The Gospel Hour, 1967), 52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

In the same way Ironside keeps a strict distinction between Israel and the church. In this distinction, Ironside speaks of God's "earthly people Israel"⁴² and of "His heavenly people"⁴³ (the Church). The difference between these two peoples has to do with the inheritance they receive. "Of old they were blessed with all temporal blessings in earthly places in the land of promise through Joshua. Today we are blessed 'with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ' (Ephesians 1:3)."⁴⁴

Ironside describes the "whole gospel age" consisting of "believing Jews and Gentiles" as "a heavenly people who will share His throne as the bride of His heart, in the coming age, and through eternity."⁴⁵ The Church is a "heavenly people" not only on account of her future heavenly glory, but also because of her present position. "As we are occupied with Him in the heavenlies, we will receive new strength to enable us to appropriate and enjoy our present portion as a heavenly people."⁴⁶

⁴² H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1920), 106 in Logos Bible Software.

⁴³ H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on Ezekiel the Prophet*, 2d ed. (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1949), 299, in Logos Bible Software.

⁴⁴ H. A. Ironside, *The Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations on the Word of God*, 2d ed. (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1943), s.v. January 31.

⁴⁵ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on Daniel the Prophet*, 2d ed. (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1920), 7.

⁴⁶ H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Book of Joshua* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1950), 62.

Implications

Such an understanding of Israel and the church has real-world significance. For if the purpose, promises, and sphere of influence of the church is properly heavenward, then one must question what activities here on earth are in keeping with these spiritual realities.

Earthly Responsibilities

While Darby did view the church as primarily a heavenly people, he recognized that, at least for the present, they were earthly as well. As a result he tended to emphasize the visible nature of the church over the invisible. Therefore, he had no trouble speaking of the earthly existence and purpose of God in the church.

Since the church is a heavenly people with a “calling ...on high,” events on earth do not enter into the believer’s calling. Of course in saying this, Darby is not inferring that the believer is to withdraw from all the world’s interaction in a sort of stoic detachment. Nowhere does Darby approve of neglecting proper duties such as the feeding one’s family or the necessity of profitable labor, for example. On the contrary, he writes:

Now comes in the responsibility of the Christian. True responsibility flows from the place we are in—not as having to get into the place, but as being in it. Seeing our place we can learn what our responsibilities are; else we never can assume responsibility. You are not responsible to me as children or servants, because you are not my children or my servants. If you were my servant, your duties and responsibilities would flow from your being so.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 32:239.

Instead, Darby considers the believer to have a “duty to God in subservience to men”⁴⁸ that is accomplished on this earth, despite it having a heavenly origin and empowerment. This duty Darby calls “ministry,”⁴⁹ which he defines as “the activity of the love of God in delivering souls from ruin and from sin, and in drawing them to Himself.”⁵⁰ Using this definition, it becomes clear that some aspects of the Christian life that are commonly considered to be the task of the believer are not part of his calling.⁵¹

When God views the world, he sees men as wicked, miserable, rebellious, and lost.

Nevertheless, he also sees them

...according to His infinite compassions; He only notices the wretchedness of man to bear witness to him of His own pity. He beholds and comes to call men by Jesus; that they may enjoy in Him, and through Him, deliverance and salvation, with His favour and His blessing.”⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1:53.

⁴⁹ Darby is careful to distinguish between the priesthood of the Law (Jewish dispensation) and the ministry of the Christian. The Jews had a priesthood which “maintained the Jews in their relations with God” while “by ministry Christianity seeks in this world worshippers of the Father.” Ibid., 1:208.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Worship, for example, is not ministry in Darby’s view. “The worship of God is not ministry; it is the expression of the heart of the children before their Father in heaven....” Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 207.

While it is God who does the calling, he has committed “to man the word of reconciliation.”⁵³

It should be quickly noted that Darby does not limit ministry just to evangelism. Rather, he sees two activities in ministry: “the free activity of the love, which impels to call souls to Christ” and “the service of love which is unwearied in its efforts to edify them when called.”⁵⁴ Both aspects of ministry are to be accomplished through the gifting and power of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, both activities are examples of the love of God toward lost humanity, and the love of the believer towards God.⁵⁶

Since it is God who is the prime mover in every aspect of ministry thus defined, this ministry reflects the character of God. For example, this ministry is an example of God’s sovereignty.⁵⁷ Therefore, this ministry “excludes the choice of man”⁵⁸ with regard to the

⁵³ Ibid., 209. (2 Cor 5:19 KJV)

⁵⁴ Ibid., 210.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1:218ff.

⁵⁶ “We thus see, that the principle of ministry is the active energy of love, of grace, flowing from the faith by which we know God. To touch this is to overthrow the whole in its fundamental principle. In its essence, ministry flows from individual knowledge of the Master’s character. Grace known and strongly felt becomes active grace in our hearts—the only true, the only possible source, in the nature of things, of a ministry according to God.” Ibid., 1:210.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1:218.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

extent of ministry or the gifts required to carry it out. It deals only with the ministry of reconciliation, whether it is calling the lost to salvation or edifying those already saved. Anyone who would change the scope of ministry or his or her place in it “is opposing this sovereignty.”⁵⁹

This ministry is also a ministry of love, just as God himself is love. It is God’s love for mankind that is its message, and love for God that is its motivation. Those who would declare such a ministry “unloving” due to its limited scope (i.e. the calling of the lost and the edification of believers) would be incorrect in Darby’s view. He would undoubtedly argue that the most loving act a believer could bestow upon a lost soul is to share with him the message of reconciliation. Any other activity would be infinitely inferior in worth since the condition of the soul is eternal while every other aspect of his being is temporary.

Finally, even though this is a ministry performed on earth, it is essentially a heavenly ministry. If one defines “heaven” as “the abode of God,”⁶⁰ then it is difficult to find an earthly component to this ministry other than the location of those ministering and those being ministered to. Therefore, this concept of ministry is in agreement with Darby’s earthly/heavenly dichotomy. In fact, it seems to be demanded by it.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), s.v. “Heaven.”

Similarly, one reads too much into Ironside if one concludes that the heavenly/earthly dichotomy was so absolute that the earthly people had no connection with heaven or vice versa. Ironside insisted that even though the Israelites are an “earthly people,” they are called upon to maintain a heavenly conduct.

Like the Israelite about whose garments was to run a fringe of blue, the reminder that he was linked up with the God of heaven, and upon which he was to look and remember that he was called to exhibit the heavenly character, for God had said, “Be ye holy; for I am holy,” so we, too, are to manifest holiness in all our words and ways as becomes a heavenly people passing through a world of sin.⁶¹

Similarly, the “heavenly people” have earthly responsibilities.

The Bible does not treat lightly of human need, but it shows the transcendent importance of attending to spiritual things. Christians are encouraged to thrift and prudence in handling their temporal affairs. The ideal believer is not a monkish recluse who seeks to be relieved of all responsibility for either his own or other people’s comfort and well-being. But the Word of God always insists on the supreme importance of the welfare of the inner man.⁶²

Thus Ironside maintains that the “heavenly people” have earthly responsibilities, which include the physical “comfort and well-being” of other people. Still, this responsibility takes a back seat to the “welfare of the inner man.” Put another way, physical aid in the here and now is important, but should never challenge eternal responsibilities in importance or emphasis.

⁶¹ H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Epistles of Peter* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1947), 20, in Logos Bible Software.

⁶² H. A. Ironside, *The Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations on the Word of God*, 2d ed. (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1943), s.v. June 2.

Still, since the identifying factor for each of these two peoples is their sphere of blessing and influence, not the location of their responsibilities, it would be a mistake to conclude that the believer's spiritual and temporal responsibilities run counter to one another. Ironside is quite clear that "[t]here is no conflict of duties between the spiritual life and one's earthly responsibilities."⁶³ To the contrary,

The more truly we love God, the more sincerely will we seek the good of mankind. We express our faith in God by our love for our fellow men (1 John 3:23). The Christian should be an example in his community of devotion to everything that is good and for the well-being of his neighbors.⁶⁴

As Christians go on with the Lord they will recognize their duty toward those in less comfortable circumstances than themselves. In other passages of the New Testament we have emphasized for us our responsibility as Christians to think of the needy and the suffering.⁶⁵

Chafer refers to the heavenly purpose of the church as "the gathering out (ἐκκλησία) from both Jews and Gentiles of a heavenly people, the Body and Bride of the glorified, resurrected Christ."⁶⁶ This purpose is fundamentally different from that of Israel. God's purpose for Israel is found in the enthronement of an earthly king (Psalm 2:6⁶⁷). In contrast,

⁶³ Ibid., s.v. July 8.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First and Second Epistles of Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1947), 112.

⁶⁶ Chafer, *Theology*, 6:81.

⁶⁷ "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."

God's purpose for his heavenly people is to bring people into a heavenly glory

(Heb 2:10⁶⁸).⁶⁹ Put another way, God's divine purpose for this age is the salvation of individuals.⁷⁰ This conviction causes Chafer to speak of evangelism almost exclusively when discussing the responsibilities of the church.

The Importance of the Heavenly/Earthly Dichotomy

Ironside believes that recognizing the heavenly/earthly dichotomy is necessary for proper exegesis. Speaking of the Olivet discourse in Mark 13, he writes:

Therefore in reading this great prophetic discourse we do well to recognize its strictly Jewish character. While it reveals much hitherto kept secret, there is no intimation in it of origin, course or destiny of the Church, the heavenly people now linked by the Spirit with the risen Christ.⁷¹

Scofield's understanding of the heavenly/earthly dichotomy causes him to conclude that the error of the church is that she has endeavored "to take from Israel her promises of earthly glory, and appropriate them over into this church period."⁷² "It is not so much wealth,

⁶⁸ "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."

⁶⁹ Chafer, *Theology*, 4:288.

⁷⁰ "All else is being conformed to this purpose. Ephesians 3:1–6 declares this purpose and there it is seen to be the outcalling into one new Body of both Jews and Gentiles, who, each and every one, are made new creatures by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit." Ibid., 1:45.

⁷¹ H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Mark* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1948), 193, in Logos Bible Software.

⁷² Scofield, *Prophecy Made Plain*, 52.

luxury, power, pomp, and pride that have served to deflect the church from her appointed course, as the notion, founded upon Israelitish promises, that the church is of the world, and that therefore, her mission is to improve this world.”⁷³

It may safely be said that the Judaizing of the Church has done more to hinder her progress, pervert her mission, and destroy her spirituality, than all other causes combined. Instead of pursuing her appointed path of separation, persecution, world-hatred, poverty, and non-resistance, she has used Jewish Scripture to justify her in lowering her purpose to the civilization of the world, the acquisition of wealth, the use of an imposing ritual, the erection of magnificent churches, the invocation of God’s blessing upon the conflicts of armies, and the division of an equal brotherhood into “clergy” and “laity.”⁷⁴

When the church tries to set this world in order through education or reformation, she leaves behind her heavenly mission and takes upon herself the earthly assignment given to “a restored and converted Israel” in the next dispensation.⁷⁵ Therefore Scofield’s plea is “let us leave the government of the world till the King comes.”⁷⁶

The Nature of the Gospel

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1986), 19, in Logos Bible Software. One cannot help but hear the echo of Darby in Scofield’s assessment of the church, especially in his opposition to a division between clergy and laity.

⁷⁵ Scofield, *Prophecy Made Plain*, 55.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 56.

One of the major questions that must be answered when discussing social and political ethics from a Christian viewpoint is this: What is the Gospel? Ryrie asks, “Is saving souls the gospel, or is saving souls plus saving bodies the “whole” gospel? Is God’s plan of redemption saving souls alone, or is social action also redemptive?”⁷⁷ One’s answer to these questions essentially determines one’s view of social responsibility. For if the gospel is evangelism only, then social responsibility is not included in it. However, if the gospel “includes obedience, following Christ, bringing in the kingdom or at least living kingdom ethics now, then social responsibilities will definitely be a part of the gospel message.”⁷⁸

The Limitations of the Gospel

Ryrie observes that the word “gospel” has shades of meaning in various Gospels.⁷⁹ In Matthew, the gospel is the good news concerning the promised OT kingdom.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Social Responsibility* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 10.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁹ For the sake of clarity, when the word “gospels” is capitalized, it refers to a division of the canon. *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 157.

⁸⁰ See Matt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14. Ryrie mentions one exception in Matthew concerning this general rule. Matthew 26:16 records the Lord Jesus referring to his impending death as the gospel. Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 21.

Matthew 24:14⁸¹ indicates that this kingdom is still future. Mark, in contrast, uses the term “gospel” uniformly to emphasize the person of Christ,⁸² while John does not employ the term at all.⁸³ Luke uses the term to describe the good news of Christ being born (2:10) and the announcement of the kingdom.⁸⁴ This being said, Ryrie, in a prescient moment,⁸⁵ singles out Luke 4:18–19 as being of particular importance to the discussion of social responsibility. He observes that “Social activists use these verses to define the Christian’s mission as bettering the situation of the poor and downtrodden.”⁸⁶

⁸¹ “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

⁸² Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 21.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁵ In 2008, Dr. Samuel Wells (vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, visiting professor of Christian ethics at King’s College, London, former dean of Duke University Chapel and research professor of Christian Ethics at Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC), delivered a paper entitled “The Nazareth Manifesto” where he presents a “Theology of Nazareth.” In this manifesto, Wells argues from the gospel records of Jesus’ time in Nazareth that our Lord modeled an engagement with the poor by working for, working with, and working beside the downtrodden and oppressed. Sam Wells, “The Nazareth Manifesto,” in *Vagt Lecture* (Lynchburg, VA: 2008). See also Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2015). Even though Wells does not appeal to Luke 4:18-19 directly in his 2008 address, other promoters of this theology have made this verse a centerpiece of their call for social action. This youtube.com video produced by “Ethics Daily” is typical. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gghchjus76g> (accessed December 17, 2015).

⁸⁶ Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 21.

The key to interpretation of this passage is appropriate definitions for the words “gospel” and “poor.”⁸⁷ Ryrie argues that the “poor” may refer to either the spiritually or the materially poor, but most likely refers to both. As previously shown, the “gospel” in Luke refers to the coming kingdom. This kingdom will deliver both spiritual and material blessings.⁸⁸ But as this kingdom is still future, it is a mistake to speak of “kingdom ethics” today.

People get sidetracked when they attempt to impose kingdom ethics on the world today without the physical presence of the King. The Christian is responsible to practice church ethics, not kingdom ethics. Church ethics focus on the church; kingdom ethics focus on the world.⁸⁹

The Apostle Paul is the one who provides the classic definition of the “gospel” as it is applied to the church. Appealing to 1 Cor 15:3-8,⁹⁰ Ryrie teaches that Paul’s gospel is based upon the twin facts that a Savior died and rose again. His burial proves the reality of his

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”

death while the witnesses give testimony to his resurrection. Everyone who believes this (1 Cor 15:2)⁹¹ is saved. “That, and that alone, is the whole gospel of the grace of God.”⁹²

While this definition may seem obvious to most dispensationalists, the import of this definition for social ethics is immense. If the church’s gospel contains other elements beyond the redemption of individuals, then the church’s evangelistic efforts must reflect those elements. But if the gospel is limited as Ryrie suggests, evangelism “cannot include other responsibilities since the good news does not.”⁹³ Additionally, if the gospel is restricted to the salvation of individuals, then this speaks volumes with regard to the ministry of Christ during his first advent. Ryrie contends that, even though the ministry of Jesus included elements that could legitimately be brought under the heading of social ethics,⁹⁴ his mission was strictly redemptive, not social.⁹⁵

⁹¹ “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”

⁹² Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 23.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Ryrie points out that the social service of Christ was “very selectively, almost within the community of Israel, and never oriented toward politics or economic redistribution. Further, His good deeds like the miracles were proofs of His ability to redeem.” *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Ryrie admits that establishing social justice is in fact part of God's program. Still, it does not automatically follow that instituting social justice is a part of God's program for this dispensation.⁹⁶ "Justice will come to this world only when Christ comes...."⁹⁷ In the mean time "[t]he commission to the church is to preach that good news and to teach the Word."⁹⁸

Similarly, Ironside excludes any hint of social reform from legitimate preaching of the Gospel.

There are some men who have become ministers simply by solicitation or advice of friends or relatives. Others have "entered the ministry," as it is called, because of worldly ambition. They think of it as one of the learned professions where there is an opportunity to give one's self to the study of social problems, religious theories, and other interesting questions. Again, others are moved by a real compassion for the souls of men; and they endeavor to qualify as pastors and leaders in Christian work, in order to carry out humanitarian plans for the alleviation of the miseries of under-privileged people. Some of these motives are good and some are not. But it is not in any of these ways that God makes ministers. He takes men up in mercy, saves them by His grace, and puts into their hearts a burning desire to make Christ known to the world. That is what He did for Saul of Tarsus. When God makes a man a minister, His word is as a fire in his soul, and he can say, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ "To be sure, God is a God of justice as well as redemption, as Stott and others say, but it is not true to imply that God's program *today* is to effect worldwide justice as well as worldwide preaching of the gospel." Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First and Second Epistles of Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1947), 34-35, in Logos Bible Software.

For Ironside, the difference between the message of the cross and social action is one between the temporal and the eternal. The best way to illustrate Ironside's understanding of this distinction is to recall an illustration he heard from General William Booth of the Salvation Army.

Take a man who has ruined himself by strong drink, has become a confirmed drunkard, beggared his family so that his wife has been separated from him, and his children are in orphan homes; he is just a common drunkard on the street. Take that man and sober him up; get him to sign the pledge and promise never to take another drink; move him out into the country in a new environment; settle him down in a little cottage; teach him a trade if he does not know one; bring back his wife and children; make his home a comfortable one, and then let him die in his sin and go to hell at last! Really it is not worth-while, and I for one would not attempt it.¹⁰⁰

The Indirect Benefits of the Gospel

Scofield readily admits that Christianity introduced into a society has beneficial results. Indeed, these favorable consequences are so evident they have all too often become the motivation for missions. Yet these are "incidentals" to the true mission of the church and eventually act as competition to it.¹⁰¹

More and more the motive in service comes to be purely humanitarian. The Gospel must be preached and missions maintained that humanity, which is in sore distress

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 114.

¹⁰¹ Scofield, *Prophecy Made Plain*, 37. "It appears that the sick in Jerusalem were healed when the shadow of Peter fell upon them as he walked the streets, but Peter, my friends, was not walking the streets for the purpose of casting that beneficent shadow; he was going and coming in the work of his apostleship. Suppose he had turned aside to this business of shadow making? Who doubts that very speedily the shadow would have lost its power?" Ibid.

with the consequences of sin, may “have the benefits of Christian civilization.” Oppression is everywhere, disease, ignorance and degradation, and the Gospel emancipates, heals, enlightens and uplifts. “Earth,” we say, “needs a better ideal, a loftier ethic.” The human mind lies fallow, it must be broken up that better seed may grow. The millions of heathendom are enslaved to superstition and ignorance, and the Gospel must be preached because where the Gospel goes these things diminish or vanish.¹⁰²

Scofield’s concern is that the humanitarian motive is short-lived. “We do not care intensely any more about the girl babies suffocated in the mud of the Ganges, the child-widow, sorrowful under her palm tree, or the procession staggering on to the grave of the drunkard.¹⁰³ Appealing to 2 Corinthians 5:14-15,¹⁰⁴ Scofield pleads for a more theocentric motivation.

Might it not be worth while once more to think of God in all this; of His rights in every human being—rights outraged by all this sin and shame? Might it not be worth trying, at least, to reestablish as a motive the exaltation of the Lord in this world? Might it not be well to begin again to look upon sin not merely, nor primarily, as something which is hurtful to man, but an insult to God?¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² C. I. Scofield and Mary Emily Reily, *No Room in the Inn, and Other Interpretations* (Greenville, S. C.: The Gospel Hour, 1941), 125-26.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 126-27.

¹⁰⁴ “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

¹⁰⁵ Scofield and Reily, *No Room*, 127.

Still, while part of the church's failure in missions is a misconception concerning the nature of sin, the main problem is one of mistaken identity. The church has forgotten that her calling and her promises are heavenly, not earthly.

The church has a definite mission that is "limited in its purpose and scope,"¹⁰⁶ and an "appointed pathway of separation, holiness, heavenliness and testimony to an absent but coming Christ."¹⁰⁷ The one commission she has received is to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."¹⁰⁸ In short, the "simplicity" of the church's mission is "the evangelization of the world."¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the church should "leave the civilizing of the world to be the incidental effect of the presence there of the gospel of Christ,"¹¹⁰ commit its time, strength, money and days "to the mission distinctively committed to the church, namely: to make Christ known 'to every creature.'"¹¹¹

Likewise Chafer admits that the evangelistic efforts of the church have had an "indirect influence" upon society. There is a "popular appreciation" that the standards most

¹⁰⁶ Scofield, *Prophecy Made Plain*, 52.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

hold as “good” are found in the Bible and in the life of Jesus.¹¹² Many believers conclude that any recognition of the value of Scripture is “a glorious victory for God.”¹¹³ But Chafer disagrees. His understanding of the divine purpose for this age overrides any marginal benefit to society such an admission might bring. For Chafer, the bottom line is that “it cannot be proven that fallen humanity is any more inclined to accept God’s terms of salvation than in the generations past.”¹¹⁴

Ironside, despite his insistence that social change is not a part of the gospel, likewise concedes that the message of Christianity, while not a message of social or political change in and of itself, nevertheless effects such change. Echoing Scofield, Ironside contends:

The Bible has everywhere been the precursor of civilization and liberty, driving out barbarity and despotism, as bats and vermin flee from the brilliant sunshine. The Bible has dispelled ignorance and superstition in every land where its free and unrestrained reading has been encouraged. And as to spiritual things, who can fathom the joy and gladness, the peace and blessing that the Bible has carried to countless souls?¹¹⁵

¹¹² “This partial recognition of the truth is required by the world to-day, for, while the direct result of the believer’s testimony to the Satanic system has been toward the gathering out of the Bride, there has been an indirect influence of this testimony upon the world which has led them to see that all that is good in their own ideals has been already stated in the Bible and exemplified in the life of Jesus, and that every principle of humanitarian sympathy or righteous government has been revealed in the Scriptures of truth. Thus there has grown a more or less popular appreciation of the value of these moral precepts of Scripture and of the example of Christ.” Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Satan* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1909), 82, in Logos Bible Software.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ H. A. Ironside, *Letters to a Roman Catholic Priest* (New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1954), 44, in Logos Bible Software.

Ironside credits this improvement of civilization to the changed lives of individuals.

This vast multitude exerts influence on society by raising the moral tone of a given populace generally.¹¹⁶

This program adhered to necessarily makes for improved social conditions. If individuals are saved, they will affect in a marked way the environment in which they live. Consequently, the social order has been wonderfully improved through the coming of Christ and the proclamation of His gospel.¹¹⁷

Ironside provides, as an object lesson, the elimination of slavery in the civilized world.

The spread of Christianity did not drive slavery out of the world all at once; but from the beginning it established a new conception of human values, and Christian masters learned to esteem and treat their slaves as brothers and sisters in Christ. Under Roman law it would not have proved a kindness, in all circumstances, to free the slaves. But as the centuries went on and men became more enlightened, it was through the teachings of Christ and His apostles that slavery disappeared from the civilized world.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ The great abolitionist and English statesman William Wilberforce is notable for espousing this view. He insists that “the state of Religion in a country at any given period ... immediately becomes a question of great *political* importance....” William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 190. This assertion is based upon the reality that the “temporal well-being of political communities” is influenced to a great degree by the “general standard or tone of morals” that exist in that community. This is “a fact which depends on such obvious and undeniable principles, and which is so forcibly inculcated by the history of all ages, that there can be no necessity for entering into a formal proof of its truth.” *Ibid.*, 190-91. It is unclear whether Ironside was familiar with Wilberforce’s work (which is highly possible as Ironside read widely) or if he arrived at his conclusions solely through the study of Scripture. Regardless, Ironside’s viewpoint is nearly identical to Wilberforce.

¹¹⁷ Ironside, *Continual Burnt Offering*, s.v. July 29.

¹¹⁸ Ironside, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, & Philemon*, 280.

What should be noted in this illustration is that societal reform, through the agency of the Gospel, is not limited to improving individuals. Those individuals influence the governments of this world, bringing about institutional change. For example, when the Apostle Paul stood before Felix he was accused of being a “troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world” (Acts 24:5). Paul consistently taught that Christians must be subject to the governing authorities and that they should pray for those same authorities.¹¹⁹ Yet, even the riots and disturbances cause by the preaching of the gospel, worked to bring about structural change in society. Commenting on Acts 24:5, Ironside writes:

It may be that one sees things in the governments of this world which are contrary to the mind of God, but he seeks to overcome them by methods that are in accordance with the spirit of the gospel. The remarkable thing is that the effect of the preaching of the Word throughout the Roman empire was used by God to overturn very many things that oppressed men and brought distress upon the world. In fact, practically all of the great reforms that have been wrought through the centuries owe their existence to the proclamation of the liberty-giving; message of the gospel of the grace of God.¹²⁰

It is important to remember that Ironside considers such social advancement a by-product of the gospel, not a part of the gospel message itself. The salvation of the individual remains the goal of Christianity. Social reform, being a goal unto itself, puts the cart before the horse and is thus doomed to fail.

¹¹⁹ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1943), 562.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 562-63.

But the important thing is to put first things first; preach the gospel to the individual, and when he is saved set him to work seeking the salvation of his neighbors. It was in this way that the Christianity of the first three centuries overturned the paganism of the Roman Empire. To reverse this order is fatal.¹²¹

At this point, the question may be asked, “If the Gospel inevitably brings about social change, why not include social reform as a secondary goal for the believer?” In other words, what would be wrong with teaching the new believer that his role includes social action in addition to his responsibility to evangelize? In response to these questions, Ironside would argue that 1) the Bible explicitly states that evangelism is the task of the believer, and 2) social reform is never mentioned as a worthy activity, let alone a duty. Using the example of Philip in Acts 8:5, Ironside remarks:

He sent him forth to preach Christ unto the people of Samaria. I call your attention to that. He did not go to them with what some people call the “Social Gospel”; he did not go to talk to them on political subjects, but he went down to preach Christ. The message of God’s servants today should be the same as his, for “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”¹²²

In fact, Ironside views the goals of social reform as competitors to the true Gospel.

The danger is that temporal social reform will slowly but surely nudge the eternal to one side until the message of forgiveness can no longer be found.

We hear a great deal today in many quarters about the Social Gospel, and by that is meant the implication that the one great business of the Church of God in the world is to try to better the temporal circumstances of those among whom it ministers. Many churches have given up, to a large extent, the preaching of the gospel

¹²¹ Ironside, *Continual Burnt Offering*, s.v. July 29.

¹²² Ironside, *Acts*, 179.

of Christ in order to devote themselves to this Social Gospel. There should be no question as to the fact, that from the earliest days of the Church, immediately following Pentecost, Christians did recognize that they had a responsibility to those among them who were in need and distress. We are told in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." But our great business is to go into all the world and preach the gospel.¹²³

This does not mean that the proclamation of social righteousness is to be abandoned.

On the contrary, "ministers of Christ" are called "to proclaim fearlessly those principles of righteousness upon which Christ's kingdom is to be set up, in order that men may see their true condition before God and turn to Him in repentance."¹²⁴ Still, proclaiming social righteousness has as its goal the salvation of men, not the betterment of society.

The believer's obligatory love for neighbor "does not involve a recognition of the present world order as the fulfillment of the divine ideal. So long as earth's rightful ruler, the Lord Jesus Christ, is rejected there will never be perfect government in this scene."¹²⁵

Not only are believers unable to create perfect government (either individually or collectively), even the more modest task of bringing in a more righteous society is beyond their capacity. In fact, the betterment of society should not even be placed before the believer

¹²³ Ironside, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, & Philemon*, 111-12.

¹²⁴ Ironside, *Continual Burnt Offering*, s.v. May 14.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, s.v. July 8.

as a noble goal.¹²⁶ While it is true that a utopian state will be ushered in by Christ at his second advent, the mission of an ideal community was not part of his first advent.¹²⁷

It is an interesting and challenging fact that we nowhere find in the Gospels, nor in all the New Testament for that matter, certain words which are widely used today, and often as though they really provide the key to the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Such terms as “the social order,” “social service,” “the social gospel” are conspicuous by their absence. Our Lord did not attempt to overturn the social order of His day by some new system of ethical instruction. He did not take into consideration the mass as such. He dealt with the individual. And He showed that personal sin was the root of all the trouble in the world. But He did not merely attempt the reformation of the sinner. He came not to reform, but to save. He did not come to help the race to better its condition. He came to bring in an entirely new creation through the regeneration of individual sinners.¹²⁸

While Scofield, Ironside, and Chafer comment on the indirect good brought about in society by the spread of the gospel, McClain sees another benefit. As more and more people come to Christ, the morality produced helps bring about the avoidance of divine retribution.

¹²⁶ Bock, acknowledging that an ideal society is beyond reach until Christ returns, nevertheless differs from Ironside, stating “For those who argue that such attempts are destined to fail and therefore should be abandoned as pointless, it is to be noted that Christ offered the message of hope, even to those He knew would refuse it. Service need not require that the church always be successful in these attempts.” Darrell L. Bock, “The Son of David and the Saints’ Task: The Hermeneutics of Initial Fulfillment,” *BSac* 150, no. 600 (1993): 457, n. 28.

¹²⁷ For an opposing viewpoint, see Samuel Wells, “The Nazareth Manifesto,” a paper presented at the Vagt Lecture, Lynchburg, Va., 2008, available at https://web.duke.edu/kenanethics/OccPapers/NazarethManifesto_SamWells.pdf

¹²⁸ Ironside, *Continual Burnt Offering*, s.v. July 29. It is doubtful that Ironside expected neologisms such as “social gospel” to appear on the lips of the Savior. It is far more likely that Ironside is employing this modern phrase to express the truth that Jesus never implied that social reform was part of the Gospel.

While this benefit of morality is best viewed in the “constitution and laws of the historical kingdom ... this principle holds good generally in all nations in every age.”¹²⁹

Unfortunately, this blessing is seldom recognized by mankind as a whole due to the delay between “moral breach and the infliction of the sanction,”¹³⁰ and because of the way these sanctions are administered.

While it is always true that the nation which has “sown the wind” shall also certainly “reap the whirlwind” (Hos. 8:7), the harvest is generally and mercifully long delayed (II Pet. 3:9); and for this very reason men often fail to see the causal connection. Furthermore, in the general history of nations, the divine penalties are inflicted through secondary causes behind the veil of providential control (Jer. 51:28-30). For these reasons the skeptical have been able to question the existence of any divinely ordained moral government in human history, and the LORD’s own people at times have been greatly troubled and perplexed by the problem (Hab. 1:1-14).¹³¹

Still, whether or not the cause and effect relationship between immorality and providential displeasure is recognized, the correspondence between immorality and judgment—and thus conversely the linkage between morality and blessing—displays the necessity of true religion amongst the populace, which is the basis of morality.

This being said, McClain also recognizes (along with Scofield, Ironside, and Chafer) the direct and indirect benefits to society produced by the gospel. Christians, of course, are to

¹²⁹ McClain, *Kingdom*, 86.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

do good to others in the household of faith.¹³² But the command to show mercy cheerfully (Rom 12:8) has a broader application than to just the church. McClain contends this applies to society as a whole.

“He that showeth mercy” undoubtedly has wide application. This may be in relation to the poor, taking care of them. The church has always had a ministry there. Down through the ages it has been the church that has led the way. Men never started a hospital until the church started one. Men generally did not show mercy to the sick. Within the church there are folks who go about their business in an unspectacular way, and yet they have a wonderful ministry visiting the poor and the aged.¹³³

Agreeing with earlier dispensationalists, McClain argues that the work of the church is evangelism.¹³⁴ As has been demonstrated above, the work of the church does not involve any sort of kingdom building or the improvement of the current state of affairs. This being said, McClain leaves room for some social action by the church, although it appears that this social action is a by-product of the gospel itself.

McClain scorns the idea of imposing upon society the moral and social ideal of the kingdom along with corollary duties that follow. He insists that those who require the

¹³² Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace*, ed. Herman A. Hoyt (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1973), 212. “If you see a Christian that is in need, you ought to share with him.” *Ibid.*, 213.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹³⁴ “What is the work of God? The church. God is building the church today. He is putting in members....” *Ibid.*, 237.

believer to “vote the right ticket politically,¹³⁵ give to the Red Cross, help the Boy Scouts, support the United Nations, endow hospitals, etc.”¹³⁶ as a spiritual duty are misguided.

¹³⁵ Voting as a Christian duty is not a new idea. Charles Finney, in a chapter entitled “Hindrances to Revivals,” opines, “The church must take right ground in regard to politics. ... [T]he time has come that Christians must vote for honest men, and take consistent ground in politics, or the Lord will curse them. ... Christians have been exceedingly guilty in this matter. But the time has come when they must act differently, or God will curse the nation, and withdraw his spirit. ... Politics are a part of religion in such a country as this, and Christians must do their duty to the country as a part of their duty to God. ... Christians seem to act as if they thought God did not see what they do in politics. But I tell you, he does see it, and he will bless or curse this nation, according to the course they take.” Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 274-75. The text of this book is available as a pdf at <http://charlesfinney.com/finney/pdf/Lectures%20on%20Revival.pdf>. More recently Bill Bright argues that “[v]oting for and supporting moral candidates who support moral public policies is the minimum required of Christian citizens in a system of self-government.” Bill Bright, “Your 5 Duties as a Christian Citizen,” ed. Campus Crusade for Christ (Peachtree City, Ga.: New Life Resources, 2008), 9. Like Finney, Bright believes that societal evil is due, at least in part, to the failure of believers to vote. “Only when you cast your vote do you fulfill your Christian responsibility in government. ... If you fail to vote conscientiously for godly rule, evil will increase in our nation. ... Our nation will then bear the consequences of our choices.” *Ibid.*, 20. While some may find these arguments biblically defensible, other claims made in support of this point of view are more problematic. For example, Colson maintains that, unlike in the OT, in this age “God no longer chooses our leaders directly (although some of us wish he did, if only to spare us the years-long political campaigns). We live in a democracy, so God entrusts to us the job of choosing leaders he will anoint.” Charles Colson, “Voting Like It Matters,” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/october/22.150.html> (accessed February 10, 2016). One cannot help but wonder how Colson would incorporate Rom 13:1-2 into this worldview. Yet he goes further. Identifying church age believers with OT prophets, he writes, “Like Samuel, we are commissioned to choose leaders of competence, virtue, and character. That's why not voting or rejecting candidates because they are not perfect on some biblical or political score sheet is a dereliction of our trust. So is voting for a candidate simply because he is a Christian—startling as this may sound. Rather than checking on the candidates' denomination, we should look for the ablest candidate.” *Ibid.* Suggesting that an unbeliever may be the best candidate based on “virtue and character” is an outlandish statement that ignores the clear teaching of God's Word regarding the fallen state of man.

¹³⁶ McClain, *Kingdom*, 520.

On the other hand, McClain agrees that the ills that plague physical existence are a matter of Christian concern,¹³⁷ because such concern mirrors the compassion of Christ whose love motivates the believer to action.¹³⁸ Therefore “the Church should be working at these problems right now, and not waiting with folded arms for the coming of a future kingdom.”¹³⁹ This being said, McClain again echoes earlier dispensationalists by arguing that the “influence of the gospel” is what is working “toward the solution of economic problems and relief of human suffering.”¹⁴⁰

The benefit offered by the church to society is a direct result of a premillennial philosophy of history.¹⁴¹ While the optimism of premillennialism is rooted in the future, it has practical application in the present.

It says that life here and now, in spite of the tragedy of sin, is nevertheless something worth-while; and therefore all efforts to make it better are also worth-while. All the

¹³⁷ “We admit that we are concerned about the problems of physical existence. We think that the Church right now could well manifest more of the compassion of Christ about these things. We would like to see an *end* of the terrible diseases of mankind, an *end* of the deadly peril of another world war, and *complete* economic just for all men. Furthermore, we would like to see the Good News of Christ carries fully to every human soul without delay.” Ibid., 504.

¹³⁸ “The intelligent Christian does not serve God because he is afraid the world will go to pot without his efforts, but out of love and obedience to a Saviour who gave Himself that we might be saved.” Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 531.

true values of human life will be preserved and carried over into the coming kingdom; nothing worth-while will be lost.¹⁴²

It is in this coming kingdom, however, that the dispensationalist's true optimism lies.

McClain argues that life in the present should have some proper goal. That goal may be seen, imperfectly to be sure but nevertheless actually, in the progress of mankind. Progress, he reasons, has been made on some fronts such as disease, life-expectancy and so forth. Why then is it illogical to expect a time when all diseases will be eliminated and life-expectancy greatly expanded?¹⁴³

If there be a God in heaven, if the life which He created on the earth is worth-while, and not something evil *per se*, then there ought to be in history some worthy consummation of its long and arduous course.

It is just there that we must part company with any theological school which dogmatically asserts that there will never be such a "Golden Age" upon earth in history, which argues that for the present we must be satisfied with a mere pittance of progress in such matters, that the world which now is must continue with its terrible needs, its tragic handicaps, struggles, and problems, to the very end.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ "Forgetting for the moment what has been accomplished in the natural world by those great intrusions of supernatural power in the course of history, and confining our attention wholly to what man under God has done, we know that *some* physical diseases have been conquered, *some* wars have been prevented, *some* hazards to life and safety have been eliminated, *some* years have been added to the brief span of human life, *some* social and political evils have been corrected. If this be so, why then should there not be an age when *all* wars will be stopped, *all* diseases cured, *all* the injustices of government rooted out, and a *full* measure of years added to human life? Why should there not be an age in which all such unrealized and worth-while dreams of humanity will at last come true on earth? Ibid., 530.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Such a time is coming when all the evils of this world and its sorrows are made right. This is the optimism of premillennialism. But this optimism is not centered in the ambitious plans of man, but rather in the promised coming King. He is the “indispensable figure” of this new government.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, this golden age will never be brought about through the efforts of mankind generally or the church in particular.¹⁴⁶ “What the world needs, as the prophets saw clearly, is not primarily a better philosophy of government or a more perfect system of legislation, but a *Person* who has the character, wisdom, and power needed to rule for God among men.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 161.

¹⁴⁶ “This might be otherwise if this Kingdom were merely the consummation of human attempts at social improvement and political organization; for in that case the most important things would be principles, laws, and systems.” Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Following Scofield¹⁴⁸ and Ironside,¹⁴⁹ it appears that McClain believes that a sufficient number of changed lives will bring about the improvement of society. This vast multitude exerts influence on society by raising the moral tone of a given populace generally.¹⁵⁰ Thus the spread of the gospel introduces social justice on an individual level which, when multiplied by a sufficient number, produces social righteousness on a larger scale. Adopting this interpretation of McClain would reconcile his statements against

¹⁴⁸ “With these general principles to guide one, it seems clear that the Christian could take little part, if any, in schemes for the improvement of the unregenerate world. The whole scene is one awaiting judgment; but as our Lord met throngs of people, He healed the sick and fed the hungry without asking whether they believed on Him or not. In other words, He did works of mercy. To apply all this to the case, for instance, of licensing saloons in a village, seems very simple. We love men because our heavenly Father and our Redeemer loved and loves them, and whatever we can do to benefit them or to keep them from harm, we should gladly do. It is this relation of love, rather than of citizenship or participation in the ambitions and rewards of political movements and reform movements that governs the conduct of believers. If we could put up a fence that might prevent even a blind horse from falling into a pit, we should gladly do it. How much more should we lend a hand to put up a fence between the youth of a village and the open bar-room. In other words, our relation to everything is dominated by the law of love and of loving service. From time to time questions arise not easy of decision, but keeping the separate place in this attitude of loving helpfulness will, with prayer and the individual direction of the Spirit of God, enable us to keep in the pathway.” C. I. Scofield, *Dr. C. I. Scofield’s Question Box* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, n.d.), 35-36.

¹⁴⁹ “The Bible has everywhere been the precursor of civilization and liberty, driving out barbarity and despotism, as bats and vermin flee from the brilliant sunshine. The Bible has dispelled ignorance and superstition in every land where its free and unrestrained reading has been encouraged. And as to spiritual things, who can fathom the joy and gladness, the peace and blessing that the Bible has carried to countless souls?” Ironside, *Letters to a Roman Catholic Priest*, 44.

¹⁵⁰ As stated before, this idea is nearly identical to Wilberforce’s conjecture that “the state of Religion in a country at any given period ... immediately becomes a question of great political importance....” Wilberforce, *Practical View*, 190.

political involvement and those acknowledging the believer's acts of compassion in the present which work to solve social ills. This author concedes that this position is not stated explicitly by McClain. Still, noting the similarity to previous dispensationalists, one should not consider it automatically foreign to his thought.

Bolstering this interpretation is McClain's argument that the "judgment of the nations will involve *persons* as well as governments," and that "citizens of the state, as well as its rulers, will bear a certain measure of moral responsibility for national crimes."¹⁵¹ In this context, McClain reminds his readers that there are times when the believer's obedience to God supersedes his obedience to the state.¹⁵² The importance of this is found in the fact that "*morally* there can be no absolute divorce between personal and governmental responsibility. For a government, apart from its rulers and citizens, is wholly an abstraction." For this argument to make sense, one has to recognize the influence of individuals upon the state as a whole. Therefore, one way to influence the state is to change the beliefs and behavior of its citizens. Put more explicitly, the spread of the gospel will inevitably bring about societal change if the penetration of the gospel is broad enough.

¹⁵¹ McClain, *Kingdom*, 205.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

Equally related to this argument is McClain's understanding of the process of governmental reform. As it is "an axiom of political science that no government in the long run can be more perfect than its rulers,"¹⁵³ it follows that no government prior to the kingdom is perfect and that all governments need to be changed in ways both large and small.

McClain asserts that "apart from violent revolution, any lasting reform in government must always start at the top."¹⁵⁴ This being said, it also remains true that no state "can wholly succeed unless there exists a sufficiently large body of its citizens who are in inward harmony with its constitution and laws."¹⁵⁵ It follows, therefore, that evangelism is the most effective instrument of change, for the regeneration of the individual brings about the "inward harmony" necessary for a successful state. While this by itself will help to reorganize the powers that be, evangelism is a particularly potent agent of change in nations where the populace has a voice in the selection of their rulers.

Therefore, the purpose of the church is evangelism. Evangelism will bring about a change in the populace, making it more loving as it follows Christ. These converted

¹⁵³ Ibid., 128.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 129.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 128.

individuals will provoke a change in the nation, either great or small depending on the number of believers.

The Futility of Reformation without Regeneration

As mentioned above, Chafer insists that evangelism is the sole activity of the church with regard to the world. Chafer believes that no appeal to the lost for moral betterment is either required or helpful. Concerning the lost, God has revealed his will.

To the unsaved, God makes no appeal with regard to their manner of life; no improvement or reformation is required of them. Society and civil governments may press their claims upon unregenerate people as also upon regenerate people to the end that prescribed ideals may be realized, but this fact—in so far as it obtains—must not be confused with the uncompromised attitude of God in His relation to these classes. He requires of the unsaved that they hear and heed the gospel only.¹⁵⁶

In fact, Chafer views any attempt to better man's moral condition as an impediment to that one primary task. The danger is that Christianity will be seen primarily as an ethical system.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Chafer, *Theology*, 3:226-27.

¹⁵⁷ "Failure on the part of religious leaders to recognize the all important, supernatural salvation which is in Christ for all who *believe*, is largely responsible for the present tendency to treat Christianity as though it is merely an ethical system, and as though its standards of living were designed of God to be applied to a Christ-rejecting world. The unregenerate can hardly be expected to see more in Christianity than its ethical teachings, but the people of God should be led on to the full knowledge of the great realities in grace." Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace: The Glorious Theme* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), 355.

Through false emphasis by many religious leaders, Christianity has become in the estimation of a large part of the public no more than an ethical system. The revealed fact, however, is that the supreme feature of the Christian faith is that supernatural, saving, transforming work of God, which is made possible through the infinite sacrifice of Christ and which, in sovereign grace, is freely bestowed on all who believe.¹⁵⁸

Some may argue that, while biblical Christianity is unquestionably more than an ethical system, it is certainly nothing less. What, then, could be the harm of attempting to apply the ethical teaching of the Scriptures to the social ills of the day? Why not attempt to persuade key individuals in the existing social, economic, and political structures, who are not inclined to come to Christ for salvation (for, say, ethnic or intellectual reasons), to nevertheless embrace the ethical teachings of Jesus of Nazareth?

Chafer would respond that any attempt to improve the moral life of the unregenerate is to miss the point.¹⁵⁹ First of all, such attempts at reformation “cannot be justified from Scripture.”¹⁶⁰ Second, it is “humanly impossible” to impose the walk of the regenerate upon

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., vii.

¹⁵⁹ “How short the vision is which can see no farther than to strive for the reformation of an individual in matters of purpose and conduct, as desirable as such reformation may be, when the divine plan to produce a whole new being with its new heart, disposition and power is plainly revealed.” Lewis Sperry Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Ass’n, 1936), 66-67.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 67. “The Word of God makes no appeal to the unsaved for a betterment of life. There is but one issue in this dispensation between God and the unregenerate man, and that is neither character nor conduct; it is the personal appeal of the gospel of the grace of God. Until the unsaved receive Christ, who is God’s gift in grace, no other issue can be raised. Men may moralize among themselves, and establish their self-governments on principles of right conduct; but God is never presented in the unfoldings of grace as seeking

the unregenerate.¹⁶¹ Only when a person is born again do they “receive both the power to discontinue and the disposition to turn from sinning.”¹⁶² Third, moral reformation is so far beneath the miracle of salvation, that it is “puerile to be obsessed with a by-product of the fact of eternal life.”¹⁶³

[I]f all people could be persuaded to abandon sinful practices and even were they enabled to sin no more, there would still not be one person saved by such an achievement. Efforts to reform the lost apart from regeneration—the true objective in Christ’s death—are well termed the folly of the ages.¹⁶⁴

Finally, the purpose of God in this age is salvation not reformation. “The New Testament reveals that the purpose of God in the present, unforeseen dispensation is the outcalling of the Church (Acts 15:13–18)”¹⁶⁵ While it remains true that God’s purpose *in*

to *reform* sinners. Every word regarding the quality of life is reserved for those who are already rightly related to Him on the greater issue of salvation.” Chafer, *Theology*, 4:183.

¹⁶¹ Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy*, 67.

¹⁶² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Salvation* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1922), 140. “Sometimes preaching against sin is with a view to encouraging men to cease sinning. This is superficial indeed and unbiblical. The unsaved are ‘dead in trespasses and sins,’ and are ‘in the power of darkness.’ Sin is a nature as well as a practice. Fallen man would be lost had he not sinned. He must be born again; not as a means of correcting the effects of his past practices, but because of his fallen Adamic nature. Being spiritually dead, he must be given spiritual life. No reformation can change the fallen state. When preaching against sin, it is well to remember that the unsaved cannot cease sinning.” *Ibid.*, 139-40.

¹⁶³ Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy*, 66.

¹⁶⁴ Chafer, *Theology*, 7:105.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5:256.

the future is to transform society, in no way does this imply that this is God's purpose in *this* age.

No doubt will be raised by any intelligent Christian concerning the truth that it is within the range of divine power to transform society in this age, or at any other time. The question is really one of whether world transformation *is* the divine purpose for this age; and until the one who believes that this is the divine purpose has made a reasonable exposition and disposition in harmony with his views of the vast body of Scripture that discloses the confusion and wickedness with which this age is said to end, there is little to be gained by accusing those who believe God's present purposes to be the outcalling of the Church of "dishonoring the Spirit of God," or of "minimizing the value of the cross."¹⁶⁶

Agreeing with Chafer, McClain also insists upon the futility of reforming the individual apart from Christ. Improving the old man is a "hopeless case. ... He is always what he is."¹⁶⁷ As a result, "you cannot take the Christian rule of life and apply it to the man who is not a Christian. It is a spiritual impossibility."¹⁶⁸ Therefore, directing spiritual virtues and commands to someone who is not born again does not change the man but merely causes resentment and rebellion.¹⁶⁹ Failure to recognize this fundamental truth is the great error of those who would endeavor to change society apart from Christ. For it is experiencing the mercies of God that alone is powerful enough to change man.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4:17-18.

¹⁶⁷ McClain, *Romans*, 156.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

When you have not revealed to people the mercies of God, you have ignored the most powerful moral factor that the world has ever seen. There is the great mistake of modernism. Assuming that we may give them credit for sincerity, and giving them credit for a desire to see the church live on a higher plane of life, still like the blind leaders that they are, they have lost the one motive, the one factor that is powerful enough to get hold of the hearts of men and raise them up to that plane of righteousness where they out to be. Until sinners have experienced God's mercies, you will get no place.¹⁷⁰

Experiencing the mercies of God is not only necessary for holy living before God, but also for general morality in society. According to McClain, the Mosaic law provides ample evidence that religion and morality cannot be severed. "The Mosaic Code therefore struck at two dangerous errors: first, the ancient notion that a true religion can exist apart from morality; and second, the more modern notion that morality is able to stand on its own base without any religious foundation."¹⁷¹ The "appalling discrepancy between the laws of the nation and the everyday conduct of its citizens" provides plenteous evidence that even morally-correct laws "are by themselves ... no guarantee of right conduct."¹⁷² What is needed is a heart-felt religious foundation for those edicts.

Echoing these sentiments is Walvoord, who likewise holds that the proper role of the church is evangelism, not societal reform. While the believer should not "be opposed to any

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 206-207.

¹⁷¹ McClain, *Kingdom*, 86.

¹⁷² Ibid.

true social program which helps others,”¹⁷³ the “program of the early church was one of evangelism and Bible Teaching.”¹⁷⁴ The order of that statement is important, for Walvoord insists that a focus on evangelism logically precedes Bible teaching.

Walvoord explains that the Bible “was intended to...reveal ethical principles, to provide wisdom for human judgments,” and to “reveal moral and material values” among other things.¹⁷⁵ This being said, Walvoord maintains that “ethical principles will not survive” apart from salvation.¹⁷⁶ Regeneration, not reformation, is required for a virtuous life. Merely following a moral code is insufficient for personal righteousness, as only the enablement of the Holy Spirit is enough to overcome the fallen nature to which all are heir. What is often

¹⁷³ One should note that “not being opposed” is not the same thing as “being actively in favor of....” Walvoord uses the same language when speaking of 2 Thess 3:8-12. “Here is a proper Christian standard. But some have adopted the philosophy that the world owes them a living. This is not found in the Bible. The attitude of the Bible is just the opposite. The attitude of the Bible is that the world owes the Christian nothing, but that we owe the world something. We have something to give to the world. This does not mean that Christians should be opposed to any true social program which helps others. But we are not to take the attitude that the world owes us a living. Paul lays down the principle in verse 10: “If any would not work, neither should he eat.” That was a simple method of getting folks to work. If they did not eat, they had to do something.” John F. Walvoord, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 96 in Logos Bible Software. It is difficult to tell, but in the context it appears that Walvoord is speaking of government programs, and not ministries of the local church.

¹⁷⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 134.

¹⁷⁵ Walvoord, *Handbook*, 12.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 359.

overlooked, in Walvoord's opinion, is that what is true for the individual is also true for society at large, since it is composed of individuals.

The dramatic moral depravity of contemporary civilization illustrates graphically the need for just such a spiritual renewal as is provided by the Spirit in regeneration. Man, sinful by nature, needs to have the reviving and transforming new life in Christ. The moral crises of our day confirm what the Scripture has long taught—that man cannot be good apart from a supernatural work of God in his heart.¹⁷⁷

The difficult reality, however, is that very few are saved even though the gospel is preached throughout the world. Because of this, as this age progresses, the world becomes “increasingly wicked.”¹⁷⁸ Since the only moral progress possible is “within the bounds of the

¹⁷⁷ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit at Work Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), 20.

¹⁷⁸ Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 134. “The intelligent Bible student who implicitly believes the content of revelation afforded in the Scriptures is faced with some hard facts. The realities of heaven and hell, the revelation of the wickedness of the human heart, the hopeless condition of men apart from Christ, the power of Satan, the inability of men in spiritual things all combine to furnish a mental setting involving many difficulties. While the responsibility to witness to the saving grace of Christ is clear enough, the Christian is warned that the age will progress in evil rather than righteousness, ‘that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils’ (1 Tim. 4:1); that ‘in the last days perilous times shall come’ in which men will go continually deeper into sin (2 Tim. 3:1); that ‘evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived’ (2 Tim. 3:13). The gospel is ‘hid to them that are lost’ (2 Cor. 4:3), Satan himself blinding their eyes and hindering their faith. For the Christian, there is warning that ‘your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour’ (1 Pet. 5:8). In spite of faithful preaching of the word, ‘the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables’ (2 Tim. 4:3, 4).” John F. Walvoord, “Is Moral Progress Possible,” *Bibletheca Sacra* 101, no. 401 (1944): 161-62.

true Church,”¹⁷⁹ any expectation of improving society as a whole is misplaced. In fact, Walvoord calls the goal of improving society at large a “mirage.”¹⁸⁰ “The whole attempt to find moral progress in the world as a whole is to ignore the distinction in God’s dealings with those who trust Him and those who do not, ignore the necessity of regeneration for moral improvement, and to ignore individual responsibility before God by substituting a social consciousness.”¹⁸¹ The only true “moral progress” is to be found in the believer’s own heart.¹⁸²

Walvoord denies the charge of “pessimism”¹⁸³ so often leveled at this general viewpoint. Using an insurance company’s mortality table as an example, he argues that the

¹⁷⁹ Walvoord, “Moral Progress,” 160.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ For the sake of clarity, this author does not consider dispensational premillennialism to be pessimistic in nature. On the contrary, the heart waiting for “the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13) has deposited within it the most optimistic view of the future possible. The pessimism in view here refers only to the future of a world absent Christ. As Ironside remarks, “While we who belong to the Church, the Body of Christ, have our hearts fixed on the heavenly hope, as we look for the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto Him, we cannot but rejoice to know that God has such blessing in store for Israel His earthly people and for the nations of the earth who have been the prey of such distressing circumstances throughout their history, circumstances which they are so powerless to change.” H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Prophet Isaiah* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1952), 219-20, in Logos Bible Software.

prediction that all will die is not pessimism, but realism. In the same way, acknowledging the inability to morally improve any given population through political action, social reform, and the like “is merely facing a hard fact to which history and prophecy give combined testimony.”¹⁸⁴

Ironside presses this case further. The evil done by nations is an expression of the resident evil in each heart. Using war as an example, he explicitly states the relationship between sinful man and national unrest.

War is the result of the distrust and jealousies that prevail among the nations, and all of these are but expressions of the sinfulness of men’s hearts. Until all this is curbed there can be no lasting peace for mankind. Men may try to bring about universal peace by treaties and covenants, but as long as sin rules in their hearts their efforts will only end in disappointment and heart rending strife.¹⁸⁵

Nor is this anything new. It follows that since the heart of man has made no progress towards righteousness since the fall, the nations ruled by men have made no progress either. Put another way, despite obvious visible differences between ancient and modern political

¹⁸⁴ Walvoord, “Moral Progress,” 160. Ironside notes that the charge of premillennial “pessimism” was particularly common before World War I (but less common afterwards). “It was once the fashion to scoffingly refer to premillennial teachers as ‘visionary enthusiasts’ and ‘rank pessimists,’ when they declared that the coming of the King, and not humanitarian agencies, would alone bring in the reign of peace on earth predicted by the angel host. But the pessimists are now on the other side. The frightful European convulsion has caused a wail to rise from thousands once given to lauding the achievements of civilization and the evolutionary progress of the race.” H. A. Ironside, *The Midnight Cry!* (New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1928), 3, in Logos Bible Software.

¹⁸⁵ Ironside, *Continual Burnt Offering*, s.v. April 1.

states, they are, at their core, fundamentally the same. Therefore, just as fallen humanity needs Christ to be made right, so a fallen world needs Christ for the same reason.

It is most humbling to man's pride, to realize that all our boasted civilization is utterly unable to prevent war and oppression in spite of Peace Conferences, a now effete League of Nations and our present United Nations Council. Christ alone can put things right. His return is man's only hope for lasting peace.¹⁸⁶

Hard-nosed realism should not give way to apathy. Walvoord teaches that the wickedness of the world “does not relieve the Christian of his duty to proclaim the truths of the Scripture nor of his responsibility in the larger sense to his fellow men.”¹⁸⁷ While it is unclear what Walvoord has in mind by this last statement, it seems likely that he is referring to the various duties outlined in Scripture toward a wide variety of people and organizations. In addition to evangelism,¹⁸⁸ the believer has responsibilities to government, parents, children, spouses, masters and servants, sinning brothers, weak brothers, and so forth.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Prophet Isaiah*, 220.

¹⁸⁷ Walvoord, “Moral Progress,” 160.

¹⁸⁸ Walvoord, *Handbook*, 439.

¹⁸⁹ “The Christian’s former association with the world is altered, and by grace the Christian may be delivered from the power of the world system, though remaining in the world and being subject to its government. . . . The Scriptures trace many other aspects of the believer’s association. His relation to the organized church is stated. The relation of parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants, and other similar relationships are noted in Scripture. The particular duties of a Christian as living with other Christians are often mentioned, including the Christian’s relation to his sinning brother, to brothers weak in faith or practice, and to brothers who give rebuke or correction.” John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 1st paperback ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 150.

If the phrase “responsibility in the larger sense to his fellow men” is ambiguous, Walvoord’s attitude toward the church and social reform is not. Again, agreeing with those that preceded him, he is opposed to any sort of activity by the church designed to make the world a better place structurally or politically.

To be clear, Walvoord acknowledges that advances may be made in the “extent of knowledge of the natural world [and] better treatment of disease.” Even the benefits of “better working conditions” and “more beneficial governments” may be attained without a change in moral conditions.¹⁹⁰ The problem with judging society along these lines, however, is three-fold.¹⁹¹ First, there is no means to accurately assess how much improvement has taken place, if any. Statistics, even when they are available, are of no use in measuring morality. Second, one man’s progress is another man’s degradation. Apart from the authority

¹⁹⁰ Walvoord, “Moral Progress,” 150-51. This being true, Walvoord contends that such improvements will not be made permanent without a change in the moral tenor of a society. *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁹¹ One might consider a fourth factor in Walvoord’s thinking, namely the influence upon society by the unseen spiritual world. “Although the entire subject of the unseen struggle between the holy angels and the fallen angels is not clearly revealed in the Scriptures, from the rare glimpses which are afforded, as in this instance, it is plain that behind the political and social conditions of the world there is angelic influence—good on the part of the holy angels, evil on the part of the angels under satanic control. This is the struggle to which Paul referred in Ephesians 6:10–18.” John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 247. While both fallen and elect angels have influence upon civilization, complicating even further the improvement of any given nation, the impact of their efforts does not seem to affect one’s ability to assess the favorability of social “improvements,” which is Walvoord’s main argument here.

of God's Word, there is no objective measure of what is progress and what is not.¹⁹² Third, the Bible declares man to be "dead in transgressions and sins" (Eph 2:1). Therefore, "Whatever outward moral progress may be induced by education and environment, there is no possibility of inner change except by an undertaking of God for him."¹⁹³

At this point one might argue that, while the lost may be agnostic (in the strictest sense of the word) with regard to what is, or is not, moral improvement, those in the household of faith have no such problem. Those that accept the testimony of Scripture have an infallible guide. Since Walvoord concedes that social change is possible in the short term, shouldn't the believer be working toward a more just government, a more compassionate society, and so forth? Walvoord's answer, not surprisingly, is no.

Walvoord's justification for this position is four-fold. First, the Bible "presents no commands to improve society as a whole."¹⁹⁴ In particular, the "apostles are notably silent on any program or political, social, moral, or physical improvement of the unsaved world."¹⁹⁵ Second, there is no positive example of the apostles making efforts to "correct social abuses

¹⁹² Walvoord, "Moral Progress," 150-52.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 153.

¹⁹⁴ Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 134.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

or to influence the political government for good.”¹⁹⁶ Third, if part of God’s plan for his church includes the moral improvement of this world, and if the world does not improve (as the Scriptures assure the reader it will not), then God will have failed in his purpose.¹⁹⁷

Fourth, God’s plan in this age is for individuals, not nations.

The very structure of Biblical prophecy concerning the course of Gentile nations, the course of Christendom and the Pauline revelation of the church as the body of Christ, make it clear that God’s purpose is primarily individual, the formation of a new group taken out of the world as a whole and transformed by an inner regeneration. The Gospel appeal is delivered to individuals rather than nations, and social results are indirect rather than direct.¹⁹⁸

As Walvoord contends that the “gospel appeal” is directed at individuals, it seems doubtful that he would object to evangelistic measures that have secondary results. Scofield’s

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ “If the task of the church is primarily social, the application of justice and brotherly love and inculcating of Christian standards of morality in the whole structure of society, then, indeed, the idea of moral progress is essential, and unless we achieve it not only man but God fails to achieve His purpose.” Walvoord, “Moral Progress,” 159.

¹⁹⁸ John F. Walvoord, “Is Moral Progress Possible?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 101 (1944): 159–160. The “indirect” social results of the Bible evidently stem from the wide distribution of the Bible, as well as the ability of the Word to transform lives. “In the light of modern discoveries that are unfolding new aspects of our created world, it is amazing that the Bible, written so long ago, still fits in naturally and intelligently with all the important truths of science that are substantiated and has supernaturally influenced millions of those who have read its pages. No other book has ever been written that has had a wider circulation in more languages, in more cultures, and in more periods of human history than the Bible. Today, as in former years, millions of copies of the Bible are being distributed. As translators reduce languages to writing, the Bible, or portions of it, continues to be translated for the benefit of people of diverse language backgrounds. The influence of the Bible has not simply been social, though it has affected the morality and spirituality of those with whom it has come in contact, but the Bible has also demonstrated its ability to transform lives. Millions of people read its pages and come to faith in Christ.” John F. Walvoord, *What We Believe: Discovering the Truth of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1990), 17-18, in Logos Bible Software.

YMCA building at the railroad hub¹⁹⁹ or modern-day evangelistic crisis pregnancy centers come to mind. In each case, the primary goal is the salvation of the lost. That such activities have resulting benefits to the lost individually and to society generally would likely cause no harm to Walvoord's scheme. As with previous dispensationalists, it would only be when the secondary results become the primary motivators that Walvoord would object.²⁰⁰

The Cosmos Diabolicus

One reason social reformation is an exercise in futility is that this world system is under the control of Satan. Interestingly, Chafer maintains that the "Satanic ideal of this age is...an improved social order, a moral and cultured people, who are devout worshippers of

¹⁹⁹ East St. Louis, Ill was the "bridgehead" for many trains waiting their turn to cross the Mississippi into St. Louis proper. The railroad men would routinely loaf around the bars that frequented the area in order to keep warm while waiting for their turn to cross. Scofield's early attempts at evangelism among these men met with little success until he befriended a railroad conductor who was sick. "He saw to it that the sick man had a good doctor, and whatever else was needed. This Jim Turner, a freight conductor, not only found his health under Scofield's loving ministry, but he found his Saviour also. Then he went back to the tracks with his new friend Scofield; he would stand alongside and shout out a testimony for Christ, telling his railroad pals that they must listen to the man who had come to bring them a message. Things went better now, and Jim himself was soon made a railroad Y. M. C. A. secretary—a novelty for those days." Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, *The Life Story of C. I. Scofield* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 38-39. Scofield saw the need for a building where the men could keep warm and write letters without the necessity of spending time in the saloons. He brought this suggestion to the railroad companies who saw the wisdom of this suggestion and acted upon it. The result was that a railroad Y.M.C.A. building was erected, and Scofield's ministry to the railroad men and their families flourished. *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁰⁰ Thanks go to Ms. Trinka Jeffery for her request for clarification at this point.

himself.”²⁰¹ Indeed, “the system which Satan has constructed includes all the good which he can incorporate into it and be consistent in the thing he aims to accomplish.”²⁰² This explains why the “Satanic message for this age” is “reformation and self-development.”²⁰³ In broadcasting this message, Satan “like a fond mother, is bending over those in his arms, ... feeding their tendency to imitate the true faith by great humanitarian undertakings and schemes for the reformation of individuals and the betterment of the social order.”²⁰⁴

This Satanic message is contrasted with “the message of God” which is “regeneration by the power of the Spirit.”²⁰⁵ This fundamental difference in message is vital for understanding Chafer’s social ethic. Reformation is useless apart from regeneration. Thus, the believer should eschew social reform for the more effective message of the cross. In fact, Chafer maintains that preaching a message of humanitarianism and social reform is, in reality, a denial of the gospel. In turning to these good but subordinate things they have

²⁰¹ Chafer, *Satan*, 74.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 100-101. Chafer posits an interesting theory regarding Satan’s involvement in the problem of evil. “A serious question arises whether the presence of gross evil in the world is due to Satan’s intention to have it so, or whether it indicates Satan’s inability to execute all he has designed. The probability is great that Satan’s ambition has led him to undertake more than any creature could ever administer.” *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

revealed, both by their careless rejection of the one Gospel of Grace and by their unbounded enthusiasm for these unworthy substitutes, that the riches of the ‘glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, has not dawned on them.’”²⁰⁶

Not only is reformation at the individual level a futile endeavor, but so is reformation of the world system, whether it be at the governmental, social, industrial, or economic level. This world system, which is under Satan’s control, cannot be improved upon. This is because many “humanitarian ideals, morals, and aspects of culture” have a spiritual component to them, even though they are “resident in the *cosmos*.”²⁰⁷ “The root evil in the *cosmos* is that in it there is an all-comprehensive order or system which is methodized on a basis of complete independence of God.”²⁰⁸ Since the entire system is based upon the wicked assumption of the creature’s autonomy from the Creator, the entire matrix must be destroyed.

It is not the reason of man, but the revelation of God, which points out that governments, morals, education, art, commercialism, vast enterprises and organizations, and much of religious activity are included in the *cosmos diabolicus*. ... Revelation declares that the whole *cosmos-system* must be annihilated—not its evil alone, but *all* that is in it, both good and bad. God will incorporate nothing of Satan’s failure into that kingdom which He will set up in the earth. The *cosmos diabolicus* must be “broken in pieces” and become like the chaff of the summer threshing floors which the wind carries away....²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *True Evangelism* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1911), 40, in Logos Bible Software.

²⁰⁷ Chafer, *Theology*, 2:84.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:100-101.

Chafer admits that accepting such a dire pronouncement upon the world system is not easy. Faith is required to believe that much of what one would normally call “good” comes from Satan himself and that the divine purpose of this age does not include improving it. But those who reject this teaching work towards “unscriptural and hopeless ends” and contribute “to the confusion and darkness that is prevalent today.”²¹⁰

Darby speaks of the “world” as a “system in which men seek honor one of another, and not the honor which cometh from God only.”²¹¹ “It is a vast system, grown up after man had departed from God, of which Satan is actually, though not by right of course, the god and the prince.”²¹² “The world in its origin, is a system sprung up from man’s disobedience and departure from God, and which has turned God out of it as far as it could when He came into

²¹⁰ Chafer, *Satan*, 40. “It seems a sore test of faith to believe that which is predicted for the present age, though those predictions are being fulfilled in every particular. This prevailing attitude of unbelief usually arises from one of two errors; either Satan has been so estimated that it seems impossible for him to be the promoter of anything that is moral or good (of this error more will be said in the following chapters): or the exact meaning and purpose of this age has been disbelieved or misunderstood; and because of these conditions many enthusiastic Christians are found to be, not only working toward unscriptural and hopeless ends, but are actually contributing to the confusion and darkness that is prevalent today.” *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 34:111.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 34:111.

it in mercy.”²¹³ Such an unflattering appraisal prompts one to ask if there is any hope for this world. Darby’s answer is no.

What, then, is its end? Judgment, speedy judgment. Of the day and the hour, no man knows: it comes as a thief in the night. The world will not get really better. The thoughts men have of its doing so are one of the worst expressions of its evil confidence in man, man’s development, man’s energies.²¹⁴

While it is true that mankind is progressing technologically and economically, the true measurement of progress is the moral state of the world.

Men have telegraphs, railroads, Armstrong guns, and iron-clads; but I hardly know in what respect they are the happier for it. It is a question if they have not excited the passions more than they have satisfied them. Children are not more obedient, families not more united, servants not more honest and respectful, masters not kinder, wives not more faithful. Morally speaking, I do not see what the world has gained. It thinks better of itself, and vaunts its powers: I do not know that this is any advance.²¹⁵

Certainly “Christianity, as light come into the world, has made a difference.”²¹⁶ But that difference has not fundamentally changed the world or its system. As a citizen of heaven, with heavenly promises, Darby is insistent that the consistent Christian not get embroiled in the affairs of this world.

I have nothing to do with these things, and never intend to have to do with them. The world goes its way; and I am not of it. The allegations of Christians about it I have to say to, and I do not accept them, or the accommodating Christianity to what is called

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 34:115.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 34:110.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

progress; only I think the Christian has to form his own ways, and not to expect to mend the world. I see no moral gain in its progress.²¹⁷

Darby is so adamant about remaining separate from this world that he states that a bill before the House of Commons—a bill he very much opposes because of its effect on the poor²¹⁸—would not cause him to exercise his vote even if he belonged to that chamber.²¹⁹ In fact, Darby is opposed to voting by believers even in general elections, for they entangle the believer in an activity that identifies him or her with the satanic system of this world.

It seems to me so simple that the Christian, not being at all of this world, but united to Him who died and rose again, has no business to mix himself up with the most declared activity of the world, by an act which affirms his existence as belonging to the world, and his identification with the entire system which the Lord is about to judge; that I think the truth has only to be presented in order to be acknowledged by

²¹⁷ Ibid., 10:278-79.

²¹⁸ “If I had been in Parliament when a proposition was made to shut up the London parks on Sunday (that is, the foot gates, leaving the carriage gates perhaps open for the sick) I should have moved as an amendment (did I meddle with such things) to shut the carriage gates and open the foot ones — the rich could go out every day, and if sick could drive elsewhere. That a poor man, the one day he has with his family, should be able to breathe, I delight in; I rejoice to see the affections of a father cultivated in kindness to his children, and both happy together; and if the Lord’s day gives him the opportunity, the Lord’s day is a true blessing.

The poor, every one labouring during the week, should insist on the Sabbath: it is essentially his own day. ... As to excursions, they are a thorough curse to all engaged in them. I cannot help them; I leave them there. But as to Sunday trains, I do not believe they are for sober reasons to meet cases of necessity and mercy, as men speak; they are to make money. If it be alleged that the requirements of society oblige it, what are the requirements of society but haste to be rich, and an imperious claiming of the right to have one’s own way? I understand very well that railroads, monopolizing the roads, there is a kind of supposed obligation to meet the case of those who could have travelled at any rate. But if obliged, they can hire something to go. No. It is facility, cheapness they want — it is money and will. They are as free to travel as they were before. Ibid., 10:278.

²¹⁹ “For the same reason I avow, if my vote decided it, and happily for me I have none, and *would not have or use one*, not a train should run on the Lord’s day” (emphasis added). Ibid.

those who have understood their position; so much the more that these events²²⁰ place the world more manifestly (not more really) on its own ground, but more really near the great catastrophe which is about to fall upon those who rise up against God. Oh how my soul longs that His people should be separated to Him, and even with understanding of what is awaiting the world, and still more of what they ought continually to await themselves!²²¹

This does not imply that the Christian is to be ignorant of the political happenings of this world. But the events of this world system should not occupy his thoughts or his desires so that Christ is no longer the supreme object of his affections. “The Christian takes cognizance of the events which are taking place, as a testimony to the one who understands; but his thought, his desire, his portion, is much more within the sanctuary than all that.”²²²

But one may ask, “What about evil government that oppresses the poor and promotes injustice? What of issues of life and death, such as war? Surely the believer is expected to try and restrain evil.”

The Christian is to be subject to such authority - the Queen of England or a Turk, wherever it is. It may not be righteousness. I do not look for righteousness but at the right hand of God - Christ. I do not mean it *ought* not to be, but I do not *expect* it. My business is to walk as a Christian, and shew the character of Christ, not to set the world right; when Christ comes He will do that, for He will take it into His hand. If I

²²⁰ Darby is referring to the Revolutions of 1848, a “series of republican revolts against European monarchies, beginning in Sicily, and spreading to France, Germany, Italy, and the Austrian Empire. They all ended in failure and repression, and were followed by widespread disillusionment among liberals.” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Revolutions of 1848,” <http://www.britannica.com/event/Revolutions-of-1848>, (accessed January 19, 2016).

²²¹ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. Darby*, 3 vols. (Sunbury, PA: Believer's Bookshelf, 2007), 1:129-30.

²²² *Ibid.*, 1:130.

could only set myself and other Christians right, that would be the thing. The Christian should be the perfect presentation of the character of Christ in the world that has turned Him out. We are the living witnesses of what we are enjoying of the Christ they will not have. The world is under judgment, but in grace God has not executed it; He is sending out His gospel.²²³

Admittedly, this sounds foreign to modern ears. Still, Darby's main point is difficult to refute. True, one may graciously influence the world around us. The believer is to "let his light shine, and the testimony of what his principles are be so distinct and positive that they 'see your good works.'"²²⁴ Nevertheless, using the world system in general and in politics in particular to remove injustice or improve morality logically implies a non-Christian truth:

There is something in the world system that can make the world a better place.

If I am to set the world right I must join with the world, and cannot have any principles but theirs. Then I must give up Christianity: for they have none to be governed by. ... If [the Christian] joins with an infidel he owns infidelity can set the world right.²²⁵

One may argue that, while the world certainly will not be made right until Christ comes, cannot the world at least be made better? Wasn't the world better by the removal of National Socialism in Germany? Wasn't the world made better by the abolition of slavery in England and the United States? The answer to these questions hinges on how one defines

²²³ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 34:478.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 34:479.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

“better.” If Darby is correct in stating that there is nothing good in the world system, then it would seem that “better” often means exchanging one set of sins for another.

That this runs contrary to the believer’s heart, Darby acknowledges. Yet he will not back away from his position of leaving the governance of this world to God.

If I can relieve bodily wants as a Christian I am bound to do it, or prevent one beating another if I can do it by kindness; but I am to *leave the world alone*. It is hard to do it; in our hearts we do not like it. Suppose a war is going on, we wish success to one side; it was all settled before you ever heard it. There is a hard-hearted emperor wishing Rome had one neck that he might cut it off, or setting the city on fire, and then accusing the Christians of it; well you must be subject – “The powers that be are ordained of God.”²²⁶

Thus, if there is a revolution in a nation and a new government comes to power, the believer must be submissive to the new government as before, since this act of revolution was ordained by God.²²⁷

Darby insists that getting involved in the affairs of this world causes one to “compromise Christianity, instead of maintaining its testimony.”²²⁸ He finds biblical justification of his view in Col 3:22.²²⁹

“Servant” here is slave, and nothing but sin brought in slaves. There would never have been such a thing if sin had not been there; but the apostle does not meddle with

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 34:480.

²²⁹ “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.”

it. He does not say he approves of it, but he leaves the government of the world just where it is.²³⁰

Darby also finds justification in Paul's delicate handling of the runaway slave Onesimus.

Even though Darby finds slavery an evil brought about by sin, Paul exercises restraint.

...Paul sends the runaway Onesimus back to his master. He expects Philemon to set him free, and speaks very touchingly – “I beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” But he would do nothing “without thy mind,” “knowing thou wilt do more than I say.”²³¹ He expects grace; but he *leaves the thing where he finds it.*²³²

Thus Darby's view of political action is that there should be none. As God has ordained the powers that be, the believer should submit to whatever authority God has ordained, regardless of how that power came to be. To join with the world system (in this case politics) to better the world is to believe that the evil world system has the ability to mend itself. As a result, any political action—even voting—entangles the believer in the satanic system of this world and compromises his or her Christian testimony.

At this point, someone might argue that the believer has the right to vote in this country and therefore is bound to exercise it. Darby will have none of this.

Remark here, that the obedient side comes first in everything. It is the natural thing the Christian gets into. He is “sanctified unto obedience.” He never gets out of it; he fails in it, of course. The Lord says, “As the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.” The apostles never said, what often jars on one, I have a right to do so-and-so. It is, “We ought to obey God rather than man.” If man hinders me from

²³⁰ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 34:478-79.

²³¹ Darby quotes from Phlm 9, 14, and 21 respectively.

²³² Darby, *Collected Writings*, 34:479.

obeying God, it is wrong. But it is not, I have a right, but I must “obey God rather than man.”²³³

Instead, believers are to devote themselves to prayer. This is the only avenue to peace in a wicked world. Commenting on Phil 4:2, Darby explains:

There is the positive direct intervention of God, everything working together for good; and by prayer our hearts get through grace in connection with this overruling power of God, whether to stop some mischief Satan is doing, or to open a door of utterance. “We will give ourselves to prayer, and the ministry of the word” - not the ministry of the word and prayer. Whatever the subject of prayer is, there is continually bringing in God, so that the heart is with God. If I am entirely dependent on Him, living in Him, and His word living in me to direct my thoughts, I am sure to get what I ask. Then there is most gracious dealing with regard to my requests – “Be careful for nothing.” “Make known your requests to God.” It does not follow that they are right; but do not brood over anything, bring it to God. Perhaps He may say He cannot grant it; as when Paul asks for the thorn to be taken away, He says, I have given it to you for a purpose; I am not going to take it away. And the power of Christ rested on him through the very thing that had broken him down. So the peace of God keeps my heart.²³⁴

Thus Darby concludes the way of peace is not political action or social intervention by the church. Such actions are futile and ultimately end in failure. It is trusting in the governance of God in this world which allows a believer peace.

Even though Scofield agrees with Darby with regard to the nature of the world and the necessity of the believer being separate from any schemes to improve it,²³⁵ he opposed to

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid., 34:480.

²³⁵ This being said, this writer has found no instance where Scofield addresses believers voting in government elections. He does speak of voting and righteousness in government in this brief statement: “There is today, in the United States Senate, an absolute impossibility of securing a vote on the pure food bill. Why? The Department of Agriculture

“a mere mechanical separation from the world.”²³⁶ Scofield maintains that distinction between the world of men as the object of God’s redemptive love, and the world as a system which is “organized under Satan in its forms social, political and commercial” must not be forgotten.²³⁷ The believer’s attitude toward each must reflect that of the Lord Jesus and the apostles.

With these general principles to guide one, it seems clear that the Christian could take little part, if any, in schemes for the improvement of the unregenerate world. The whole scene is one awaiting judgment; but as our Lord met throngs of people, He healed the sick and fed the hungry without asking whether they believed on Him or not. In other words, He did works of mercy.²³⁸

As a result, “our relation to everything is dominated by the law of love and of loving service.”²³⁹ Whatever a believer may do to benefit men and keep them from harm, the believer should gladly do. Scofield admits that occasionally questions regarding the

says because of the influence of distillers and manufacturers of injurious foods. Let righteousness strike a profitable evil, and that evil will find means to ‘frustrate their purpose.’” C. I. Scofield, *Things New and Old; Old and New Testament Studies*, compiled and ed. Arno C. Gaebelain (New York: Publication office “Our Hope”, 1920), 96, in Logos Bible Software.

²³⁶ Scofield, *Question*, 35.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

application of these principles will arise that defy easy answers. Still, with prayer and the direction of the Holy Spirit, one may “keep in the pathway.”²⁴⁰

By way of example, Scofield contends that the licensing of taverns in a village provides a case study that is “very simple.”²⁴¹ Just as one would erect a fence to prevent a blind horse from falling into a pit, “how much more should we lend a hand to put up a fence between the youth of a village and the open bar-room.”²⁴² In this instance, it is love, not the demands of citizenship, political movements or reform campaigns that dictates the conduct of the believer.²⁴³

The Futility of Kingdom Building

Ryrie complains that most popular treatments of the OT with regard to social ethics are little more than a string of references of better known texts that condemn mistreatment of the poor. This type of treatment is “the basis for stirring up Christian involvement in social

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 35.

²⁴² Ibid., 36.

²⁴³ Ibid., 35-36.

problems today.”²⁴⁴ Pulling no punches, Ryrie calls this “overly simplistic” and “theologically inept.”²⁴⁵

His objection with this theological method stems not only from his dispensationalism,²⁴⁶ but also from his understanding of the OT theocratic kingdom. He defines a theocracy as “government of a state by immediate divine guidance or by officials regarded as divinely guided.”²⁴⁷ An obvious question, then, automatically follows: “Can the laws of a theocracy (which Israel was) be transferred to a democracy or a dictatorship?”²⁴⁸ Ryrie’s answer is no.

Ryrie is quite clear that the law was given to the theocracy in the OT and not to the church. This being said, he is equally clear that “some of the guidelines are the same for both the theocracy and the church.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 41.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ “Consider this question: Is every command in the Bible binding on all people at all times? If so, then why do we not obey them all today? If not, then which ones should we obey?” Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 42.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 41-42.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 46.

The outstanding similarity between the church and the theocracy is that the “unit of society to which social ethics” apply is the “in group.”²⁵⁰ Thus, in the OT the object of social ethics was the people of Israel and sojourners living in the land who also worshipped the Holy One of Israel. The crucial item of differentiation was religious in nature. In the same way, “the church’s social responsibilities are primarily directed to the body.”²⁵¹

As a result, there is a hierarchy with regard to who receives financial help first. He lists “the Lord’s servants” first, then “the Lord’s people who are in need,” and finally “others.” Those who minister to other people have the right to expect to be supported by those who receive their ministry (1 Cor 9:11²⁵²). On the basis of Gal 6:10,²⁵³ Ryrie states that “believers take priority over unbelievers.”²⁵⁴

This hierarchy extends to geography as well. Those closest to the believer are the first responsibility of the believer. “The needy in one’s local church are the primary responsibility

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² “If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?”

²⁵³ “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

²⁵⁴ Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 92.

of the members of that church.”²⁵⁵ As the circle extends, “the church’s own missionaries and the countries they serve will claim special interest.”²⁵⁶

Ryrie notes that some will argue that premillennialists are unconcerned about social ethics since the world is hurtling towards terrible apostasy and destruction. “The expected end of life is death; but when I am sick I fight to prolong life, and when I am well I try to create conditions to keep well.”²⁵⁷ The Bible commands believers to do good to all people as salt and light.²⁵⁸ It is, therefore, unbiblical “to sit on our hands and do nothing to combat evil.”²⁵⁹

What, then, is the believer to be about? Ryrie lists four priorities which could be considered a concise summary of his entire social ethic.

Ryrie considers the pursuit of personal holiness “at the top of the list.”²⁶⁰ This is more important than programs or strategies. For any program initiated or promoted will be tainted

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 92-93.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 112.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 114.

by personal sin, lack the discernment of maturity, or the moment by moment direction of

God the Holy Spirit.²⁶¹

It is more important to be than to do, for if I am what God wants me to be, then I will do what He wants me to do. ... Primarily we do not need to develop programs but people. If that sounds too individualistic, pietistic, or isolationist, remember that this is the biblical emphasis. ... The changing of individuals, not institutions, is primary.²⁶²

Second, the believer needs to be about personal evangelism. Ryrie, following Chafer, considers this our biblical mandate. It was the primary concern of the early church. Of all man's needs this is the most serious and the most basic. Only the gospel offers a solution to his eternal welfare. Even though some try to add material benefits to the gospel, Ryrie rejects such notions. "It simply is not true that you cannot preach the gospel to a hungry person. Indeed, you had better preach it to him, for he might die of starvation before you or anyone could save his live. And then where would he be?"²⁶³

In considering evangelism, once again Ryrie eschews programs for people. He recognizes group activity as biblical, but notes that "it is only as good as the effort each one puts into it."²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Ibid., 114-15.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid., 115.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 117.

Planning, strategy, and corporate effort have their place in reaching the world with the gospel, but our needs are usually not in those areas. Individual believers simply need to pray for unsaved friends, need to be sensitive to opportunities, and need to give more generously. We do not need more conventions, but more commitment; not more congresses, but more concern; not more methods, but more motivation; not more programs, but more prayer.²⁶⁵

Third, the believer should be involved in building Christ's church. Ryrie lists numerous activities involved in this agenda item, such as adding new converts to the body and helping them mature in Christ. The believer should cultivate a culture of love and concern that will attract the lost to the gospel. The believer should also cooperate with all kinds of support activities with other believers in the body. To accomplish these things will require a dependence upon God the Holy Spirit.²⁶⁶

Finally, while some call for a simplified lifestyle with the elimination of extravagances from the life, Ryrie takes a different approach. He calls for a more generous lifestyle. He argues that "if one deliberately seeks ways to increase his giving he will also find ways to cut expenses so that he will have more to give."²⁶⁷ Ryrie is clear that he isn't

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 116.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 117.

speaking of increasing income so that one might give more, but increasing the percentage available from one's income.²⁶⁸

Of course there are differences between the theocracy and the church with regard to social ethics as well. For example, the people of Israel “were not told to do good to all men. Members of the church are.”²⁶⁹ The rules for living were much more detailed in the theocracy than in the church. The regulations concerning giving are also different between the two entities.²⁷⁰

While the Christian has an obligatory love for neighbor, Ironside believes this “does not involve a recognition of the present world order as the fulfillment of the divine ideal. So long as earth's rightful ruler, the Lord Jesus Christ, is rejected there will never be perfect government in this scene.”²⁷¹

Not only are believers unable to create perfect government (either individually or collectively), even the more modest task of bringing in a more righteous society is beyond their capacity. In fact, the betterment of society should not even be placed before the believer

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 47.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ironside, *Continual Burnt Offering*, s.v. July 8.

as a noble goal.²⁷² While it is true that a utopian state will be ushered in by Christ at his second advent, the mission of an ideal community was not part of his first advent.

It is an interesting and challenging fact that we nowhere find in the Gospels, nor in all the New Testament for that matter, certain words which are widely used today, and often as though they really provide the key to the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Such terms as “the social order,” “social service,” “the social gospel” are conspicuous by their absence. Our Lord did not attempt to overturn the social order of His day by some new system of ethical instruction. He did not take into consideration the mass as such. He dealt with the individual. And He showed that personal sin was the root of all the trouble in the world. But He did not merely attempt the reformation of the sinner. He came not to reform, but to save. He did not come to help the race to better its condition. He came to bring in an entirely new creation through the regeneration of individual sinners.²⁷³

McClain argues that not only will this world never enter a golden age on its own, but this world will not “be even measurably safer...until all men without exception have become *good men*” or until God supernaturally establishes “a Kingdom of righteousness and compassion *upon earth*, thus supplanting the misrule and impotence of men.”²⁷⁴ The first

²⁷² Bock, acknowledging that an ideal society is beyond reach until Christ returns, nevertheless differs from Ironside, stating “For those who argue that such attempts are destined to fail and therefore should be abandoned as pointless, it is to be noted that Christ offered the message of hope, even to those He knew would refuse it. Service need not require that the church always be successful in these attempts.” Bock, “Son of David,” 457, n. 28.

²⁷³ Ironside, *Continual Burnt Offering*, s.v. July 29. It is doubtful that Ironside expected neologisms such as “social gospel” to appear on the lips of the Savior. It is far more likely that Ironside is employing this modern phrase to express the truth that Jesus never implied that social reform was part of the Gospel.

²⁷⁴ McClain, *Kingdom*, xiii.

alternative is clearly beyond reach in the present age. Therefore the latter alternative is the only realistic hope.

The reason man will never bring about marked improvement in this world is due to two aspects of his nature: his finiteness and his sinfulness. With regard to man's finiteness, McClain argues that, even with the best of intentions, his limited knowledge is a fatal impediment to true social progress. "Even if it were possible for men without God to put an end to the staggering economic waste of war, there would still remain two obstacles to the realization of social justice: First, the experts must know what to do."²⁷⁵ But secondly, because of man's sinfulness, even if the best human theoreticians were faultless in their conclusions, "there would still be needed some higher and beneficent power to enforce the remedies without leaving the patient in worse condition than before."²⁷⁶ McClain turns to communism²⁷⁷ and socialism²⁷⁸ as prime examples of the suffering brought about by economic miscalculations and the ultimate failure of merely good intentions.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 225.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 226.

²⁷⁷ "Economic experiments may work immeasurable disaster to society. Recently the leaders of Communist Russia have been confessing with great fanfare that many of their policies under the long leadership of Stalin were wrong. But in their glib statement of penitence there is no mention of the untold human suffering and destruction which was the awful price of their economic 'mistakes.'" Ibid., 225.

²⁷⁸ "There is nothing inherently wrong with the central thesis of classical Socialism. No intelligent man of goodwill would wish to deny that every person on earth ought to have

Ryrie also comments on man's inability to know the right thing to do. He defines "sovereignty" as God being the supreme ruler. The word itself does not discuss how God rules, although the Bible has much to say on the subject.²⁷⁹ God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph 1:11). This fact alone has enormous implications for social ethics. For it shows that God "is in control of all things, regardless of His means of operation."²⁸⁰

As a result, God sometimes intervenes directly, establishing one nation over another, sending rain on one city and not on another, or raising up one ruler and putting down another.²⁸¹ It also means that God permits the sinfulness of man to act in a way that brings about his purposes while in no way making God the author of sin.

Because God is just, his justice will "ultimately triumph," but not necessarily in the here and now.²⁸² "There is an ultimate justice that God Himself will bring about. There is a

at least as much as he produces. But the twin errors of Socialism are: first, that they have left the true God out of their panaceas; and, second, they have had an unwarranted confidence in the alleged 'goodness' of sinful men." *Ibid.*, 226. McClain also considers socialism "politically naïve" and resents "its inevitable regimentation of the individual by means of rigid social controls." *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷⁹ Charles Ryrie, "Perspectives on Social Ethics Part I: Theological Perspectives on Social Ethics," *Bibliotheca sacra* 134, no. 533 (1977): 36.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 30.

present justice that can sometimes be accomplished and sometimes not. There is a postponed justice that is often involuntary and sometimes used by God for higher purposes.”²⁸³ As the believer may never be certain as to when it is God’s pleasure to administer his justice, he cannot know when it is appropriate to “fight for immediate justice, or when he must grieve over justice that must be postponed and wait patiently for God’s ultimate justice.”²⁸⁴

The application of these truths to social ethics seems clear. No man knows the mind of God. What may seem like a tragedy to well-meaning believers is ultimately in the plan of God. Political upheavals,²⁸⁵ environmental disasters,²⁸⁶ wars and their consequences, even general wickedness²⁸⁷ may be the avenue by which God brings either blessing or judgment to one group or another.

Let me raise a problem. If God should judge some area by withholding rain and bringing famine, could it be possible that well-meaning Christians might be dulling the sword of God’s judgment if they attempted to alleviate the famine? That’s

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ “In the realm of politics we know that God raises up and removes rulers (Daniel 4:35), sometimes by direct intervention (Acts 12:23) and sometimes by permitting them to carry out their sinful plans (Revelation 13:5–7).” Ibid., 28.

²⁸⁶ “Sometimes He intervenes by sending rain on one city and not on another as punishment (Amos 4:7). In the future He will send worldwide judgments that will bring all kinds of social problems.” Ibid.

²⁸⁷ “Sometimes God permits men to have free rein over their sinful desires, again with far-reaching social ramifications (Romans 1).” Ibid.

a tough question, but it illustrates how an attempt to reflect the love of God might counter the justice of God.²⁸⁸

Such a recognition is not a call to fatalism, but is certainly an argument in favor of Darby's principle of non-involvement.²⁸⁹

McClain argues that even when mankind understands the appropriate goals, striking the proper equilibrium between competing positive principles proves to be elusive. It is beyond the reach of sinful man to balance justice and benevolence²⁹⁰ or economic equality with personal liberty.²⁹¹ McClain insists that, while there may be some improvement to the

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ "If I can relieve bodily wants as a Christian I am bound to do it, or prevent one beating another if I can do it by kindness; but I am to *leave the world alone*. It is hard to do it; in our hearts we do not like it. Suppose a war is going on, we wish success to one side; it was all settled before you ever heard it." Darby, *Collected Writings*, 34:479.

²⁹⁰ "We are at present finding it very difficult, even with all our advanced social laws, to preserve a proper balance between strict justice and virtue of benevolence. In the administration of social benefits, government agencies tend to swing either toward legalistic harshness or toward sentimental laxness." McClain, *Kingdom*, 226.

²⁹¹ "Historically, no perfect way has ever been found to reconcile personal liberty with complete economic equality; the reason being that the root of the problem is in the nature of man himself, and consequently individual action is never wholly predictable. The law of the historical kingdom accepted these facts of life and laid down its rule accordingly. Since men could not be left wholly free and at the same time be fully protected from their own economic follies, certain provisions were established to safeguard them in the exercise of their economic rights and also to ameliorate some of the inequalities arising there-from." Ibid., 76.

body politic, “just as the regeneration of the human soul is a miracle from above, so also is the regeneration of society.”²⁹²

While McClain denounces all forms of establishing the kingdom in the present, he especially condemns “modern Liberalism...with its dubious and interminable process of

²⁹² Ibid., 505.

‘kingdom building.’”²⁹³ In fact, his harshest attacks²⁹⁴ are leveled at the “liberal social-kingdom idea.”²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Ibid., xii.

²⁹⁴ “In the long history of special interpretations of the Kingdom of God, there has been none more one-sided or guilty of greater excesses than this Social-Kingdom conception. With fanatical zeal some of its champions have been ready to scrap almost anything in the realm of Christian faith and morals if only the process of ‘social reconstruction’ could be somehow advanced. Gandhi, who never renounced the degraded religion of India, was lauded as the greatest ‘Christian’ of his generation. Opportunist politicians of the worst kind were supported and the ground that they advocated ‘progressive social principles.’ Even Russian Communism, its hands bloody with mass murder, was held up as a beneficent forward step in the social progress of mankind. These extreme opinions have shocked many thoughtful observers, yet their logic was inherent in the movement from the very beginning. For it is a fact, though not generally known, that the infamous and now widely publicized dictum about religion being ‘an opium does for...the people’ was originally written by the Charles Kingsley mentioned above.

As the movement ran its course, the Kingdom of God became a ‘democracy’ in which man and God (if there is a God!) struggled together for the social redemption of mankind. The Social Gospel thus developed may be traced back to a number of religious and philosophical tendencies: First, an unwarranted belief in the inherent goodness of man who, it is assumed, will do right if only given the right kind of social environment. Second, an almost exclusive emphasis on the immanence of God which, following Sinoza, proceeded to strip religion of supernatural elements, and more or less came to identify God with the ‘social consciousness’ of humanity. Third, a politically naïve acceptance of Socialism as the best theory of government, with its inevitable regimentation of the individual by means of rigid social controls. Fourth, a critical attitude toward the Bible, highly subjective, by which the material could be reduced to such areas as might more easily lend themselves to a strictly social interpretation. Fifth, the diminishing of essential theology to an alleged universal Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.

Although today under attack from many directions, and in spite of its utter failure as an economic theory of government, this Social-Kingdom idea is not dead by any means. For its every failure, its proponents recommend simply a larger dose of the same thing.” Ibid., 11-12.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 11. This is one of eight interpretive theories of the kingdom that McClain evaluates at various lengths. Ibid., 7-15. The liberal social-kingdom idea is where the “Kingdom of God is the progressive social organization and improvement of mankind, in which society rather than the individual is given first place. The main task of the Church is, therefore, to establish a Christian Social Order which in turn will actually make ‘bad men do good things.’” Ibid., 11.

But in reality it does not matter if the proponents of a “kingdom now” understanding of Scripture are theologically liberal or conservative. Holding to a theory of the promised kingdom in the present age is not only mistaken, but leads to disastrous consequences. In a prescient warning to PD, McClain argues *any* concept of a kingdom now leads to political entanglements and the blunting of the church’s actual mission.

Theological confusion, especially in matters which have to do with the Church, will inevitably produce consequences which are of grave practical concern. The identification of the Kingdom with the Church has led historically to ecclesiastical policies and programs which, even when not positively evil, have been far removed from the original simplicity of the New Testament *ekklesia*. It is easy to claim that in the “present kingdom of grace” the rule of the saints is wholly “spiritual,” exerted only through moral principles and influence. But practically, once the Church becomes the Kingdom in any realistic theological sense, it is impossible to draw any clear line between principles and their implantation through political and social devices. For the logical implications of a present ecclesiastical *kingdom* are unmistakable, and historically have always led in only one direction, i.e., political control of the state by the Church. The distances down this road travelled by various religious movements, and the forms of control which were developed, have been widely different. The difference is very great between the Roman Catholic system and modern Protestant efforts to control the state; also between the ecclesiastical rule of Calvin in Geneva and the fanaticism of Münster and the English “fifth-monarchy.”²⁹⁶ But the basic assumption is always the same: The Church in some

²⁹⁶ The fifth monarchists were “an extreme Puritan sect They were so called from their belief that the time of the fifth monarchy was at hand—that is, the monarchy that (according to a traditional interpretation of parts of the Bible) should succeed the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman monarchies and during which Christ should reign on earth with his saints for 1,000 years. After the fall of the monarchy, they at first supported Oliver Cromwell. The Nominated, or Barebones, Parliament of 1653, chosen from nominees of the Independent churches, raised their hopes of speedily accomplishing the rule of the saints. The establishment of the Protectorate, however, dashed these hopes and turned the sect against Cromwell. The violence of their agitation led to the arrest of their leaders—Thomas Harrison, Robert Overton, Christopher Feake, John Rogers, and others. An attempt at an armed uprising, led by Thomas Venner in April 1657, was easily suppressed. Venner attempted another, equally abortive uprising in January 1661. He and a number of others were executed, and the special doctrines of the sect died out.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*

sense is the Kingdom, and therefore has a divine right to rule; or it is the business of the Church to “establish” fully the Kingdom of God among men. Thus the Church loses its “pilgrim” character and the sharp edge of its divinely commissioned “witness” is blunted. It becomes an *ekklesia* which is not only in the world, but also *of* the world.²⁹⁷

The reason “political control of the state by the Church” is inevitable in these systems is because “there can be no absolute divorce between social reform and political considerations” for “there must be some machinery for the realization”²⁹⁸ of those reforms. “In short, human life being what it is, the best principles cannot operate in a political vacuum.”²⁹⁹

This being said, it must be remembered that political leaders are as weak and sinful as the rest of humanity. The implementation of even the best social reforms, therefore, is doomed to failure. Changing the government in this age in an attempt to cure social ills will merely repeat past failures. “This is the manner of sinful man in all ages, who must learn by bitter experience that ‘political action’ cannot solve problems which are basically moral and spiritual.”³⁰⁰

Online, s.v. “Fifth Monarchy Men,” <http://www.britannica.com/event/Fifth-Monarchy-Men> (accessed November 4 2015).

²⁹⁷ McClain, *Kingdom*, 438-39.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

Not only should the church reject trying to establish the kingdom now, Chafer argues that the church should rebuff efforts to establish kingdom ethics in the present as well. He insists the “teachings of the kingdom” have not only never been applied to all men, they have never even applied to any single person. Since such teachings “anticipate the binding of Satan, a purified earth, the restoration of Israel, and the personal reign of the King, they cannot be applied until God’s appointed time when these accompanying conditions on the earth have been brought to pass.”³⁰¹

It must be remembered that a single nation was the object of the Mosaic law. In the dispensation of the church,³⁰² it is the individual that is prominent. Only with the arrival of the kingdom is the “whole social order of mankind” the object.³⁰³ When the kingdom appears, it will come with “great violence,” removing Satan and the satanic deception” from the earth while simultaneously grinding the “structure of world empires” to powder.³⁰⁴ Only

³⁰¹ Chafer, *Theology*, 4:207.

³⁰² Chafer refers to the current dispensation as the “dispensation of grace.” He is quick to note, however, that this nomenclature should not be used to imply that grace was unknown in other dispensations. This dispensation “is an age characterized by grace in the sense that in this age, God, who has always acted in grace toward any and all of the human family whom He has blessed, is now making a specific heavenly demonstration of His grace by and through the whole company of Jews and Gentiles who are saved by grace through faith in Christ.” *Ibid.*, 1:41.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 4:207. “The kingdom laws will be addressed to Israel and beyond them to all the nations which will enter the kingdom.” *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

then will the glory of Israel's covenants be realized and the promised blessings on the world and creation be a reality.³⁰⁵

While it may seem obvious, "then" is not "now." Chafer insists God's plan for the ages does not currently involve the nations as a whole. Not only so, but the church is not to be reigned over by the law of the kingdom. It is the church that will be reigning with Christ. As a result, "[t]he Church is not once mentioned in relation to the teachings of the kingdom, nor are those teachings applied to her."³⁰⁶ Indeed, to a large extent the "glory of this dispensation" is lost when either the law or "the social order of the kingdom" intrudes upon the church.³⁰⁷

The Believer's Relationship to Government

Ryrie opines that it is "without question" that "obedience is the key word the apostles use to describe the Christian's responsibility to civil government."³⁰⁸ Citing Romans 13 as "the classic passage" Ryrie lists four reasons why obedience to government is necessary: "because governmental authority is ordained of God (v. 1); because resistance to government

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 206-207.

³⁰⁸ Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 79.

is, in the final analysis, resistance to God (v. 2); because government generally opposes evil (v. 4); and because our conscience tells us to obey (v. 5).”³⁰⁹ He adds that after nearly a decade and several imprisonments, during which he had time to reconsider his position, he gives the same advice in Titus 3:1.³¹⁰ “Mistreatment at the hands of the Roman government was not sufficient existential grounds for changing his mind.”³¹¹

While obedience is clearly called for, Ryrie finds two examples of NT disobedience instructive. The first is Peter’s response to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:29: “Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men!” As this passage indicates, when a governmental command clearly contradicts a command of God, disobedience is required, although, as Ryrie warns, it does not exempt the believer from punishment.³¹² The second is when Paul was beaten without a trial although a Roman citizen in Acts 16:37.³¹³ Calling this

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 79-80.

³¹⁰ “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,...”

³¹¹ Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 80. Peter’s similar admonition in 1 Pet 2:13 gives added force to this statement. “Both Peter and Paul wrote under the reign of Nero (a.d. 54–68). Romans was written when Nero’s government was good, but when Peter wrote, Nero’s persecution of Christians had likely begun. If Peter was in Rome when he wrote 1 Peter (that seems likely from 1 Peter 5:13), this makes what he said even more striking.” Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ “But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”

a “first-century sit-in,” Ryrie commends Paul for using “a legitimate tactic to compel the Roman authorities to fulfill their lawful responsibilities.”³¹⁴

In addition to obedience, believers are to respect authorities, support the government financially, and pray for rulers. Concerning this last point he adds, “[o]ur prayers should include thanksgiving for rulers (often difficult to do) and should include all in authority, not simply rulers who agree with us.”³¹⁵

Ryrie is adamant that there is no mandate for revolution, even when the government persecutes believers and acts in an ungodly way. The misuse of power does not negate the fact that all authorities are ordained by God.³¹⁶

The Believer’s Involvement in Politics

As the state is established by God, “opposition to government is opposition to God.”³¹⁷ As a result, any participation by the believer in any form of rebellion against an existing government is completely forbidden, according to McClain.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 81.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

³¹⁷ McClain, *Romans*, 221.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.* McClain clarifies this proclamation by allowing the believer to “try to improve a form of government.” *Ibid.* It is somewhat unclear by what means a believer is to engage in such activity, but certainly is limited to lawful means.

Rebellion against an established government certainly includes the use of physical force, but is not limited to it.³¹⁹ Political agitation and even rebellious speech is prohibited.

...it is never right for a Christian to speak in a disrespectful way about any officer of the state. One day I heard a man standing on a soap box berating the President. He referred to him as “that old stiff.” Everybody laughed, and I laughed too because I was not in sympathy with the administration. Yet that is forbidden here. No matter what the character of a man may be, we are to respect his office because he holds that office by divine commission, and we are to uphold the regular, divinely constituted authorities and not to help the world in its chaos of lawlessness. We are to uphold the authorities. There was never such a need for this as now. The utter disrespect that men have today for the voice of the law and of the government is appalling. It is the Christian’s business to be the salt of the earth in everything.³²⁰

As in all things, the supreme example of what the believer’s attitude toward human government should be is the reaction of the Lord Jesus who “submitted to the men who came to arrest him.”³²¹

It is important to remember that since the government is a divine institution, the state has automatic limits upon its authority. “The state is limited to the extent that the commands of the state agree with the duty that God lays down for you as an individual.”³²² Put another

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid., 224.

³²¹ Ibid., 227.

³²² Ibid., 223.

way, should the state forbid something which God has commanded or command something that God has forbidden, then civil disobedience is warranted.³²³

At the end of the day, McClain's attitude towards God, the state, and its citizens is summed up in three short sentences. "The Christian's duty to the state is subjection. The Christian's duty to the citizens of the state is love. The Christian's duty in view of the closeness of Christ's coming is wakefulness."³²⁴

Darby holds that the church, due to the earthly/heavenly dichotomy, leaves its true realm when attempting to change the governments of this earth. As a result, he maintains that politics is outside the proper realm of the believer.

I need hardly assure your readers that I have no desire that they should meddle in politics; I do not do so myself, nor do I think that a Christian ought. He believes that God governs, and governs with a view to the glory of Christ, and that He will infallibly bring about His purposes. But it seems to me to be well that Christians should apprehend what they have to look for, and be prepared for it, if the Lord tarry. Did it not concern them religiously, you would have no word from me on such subjects.

Parties are all alike to me; they are all alike guilty, and have all alike had their part in what is going on. ... We must remember that politicians have no idea of principles, but only of existing influences to which they must be subject. ... I take no side with any party—I distrust them all³²⁵

³²³ Ibid. McClain find justification for limited civil disobedience in the phrase "because of conscience" in Rom 13:5. Ibid.

³²⁴ These three sentences reflect the message of verses 1, 8, and 11 respectfully. Ibid., 219.

³²⁵ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 32:333.

Darby seems to prefer monarchy as a form of government for he speaks disparagingly of democracy. He recounts the history of the generally poor state of religion in England under the title, “Progress of Democratic Power and Its Effect on the Moral State of England.”³²⁶ In this essay, he calls the Duke of Wellington a “most short-sighted man” for helping pass the Catholic Emancipation bill.³²⁷ This bill “admitted some sixty or seventy violent democrats into the House,”³²⁸ and fundamentally changed the English political structure.

That bill was a revolution. That is, it was not an admission of excluded influences into existing institutions, but a total change in the institutions themselves. Democracy became ascendant, and possessed the power. The Lord’s House became insignificant, and populous boroughs acquired the power once wielded by the land. Old habits

³²⁶ Ibid., 32:333-36. “When Lord Congleton took his seat in the Lords for a while in the 1860s he came in for a good deal of criticism from his Open Brethren friends.” Peter L. Embly, “The Origins and Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren” (Ph.D., St. Paul’s College, 1966), 133, <http://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/embly.pdf> (accessed April 1, 2016). Darby wrote this tract at the time of the second Reform Bill in 1867 (Ibid.), most likely “as a letter to a magazine or newspaper.” Ibid., 133, n 397. “The Second Reform Act, 1867, largely the work of the Tory Benjamin Disraeli, gave the vote to many workingmen in the towns and cities and increased the number of voters to 938,000.” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Reform Bill,” <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Reform-Bill> (accessed April 1, 2016).

³²⁷ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 32:333. The Emancipation Act of 1829 was a bill in a series of measures, which began in 1778 and ended in 1871, which granted full civil rights to Roman Catholics in Britain and Ireland. In this particular act, nearly all restrictions were lifted on Roman Catholics holding public office. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Catholic Emancipation,” <http://www.britannica.com/event/Catholic-Emancipation> (accessed February 8, 2016).

³²⁸ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 32:333.

modified the effect, but every one knows that this is what took place. The ancient institutions of the country were in principle overturned.³²⁹

As a result of this political upheaval, the population of the towns increased. With the growth of towns came the growth of dissent, “which predominates in the great towns.”³³⁰

This, in cooperation with an educational system that “ministered immensely to general infidelity, Satan in that being let loose in that respect,”³³¹ caused the clergy to be thrown into either “popery” or infidelity.³³² Without the check of the country gentry in the House of Lords, “infidel notions acquired a powerful influence over the mental activity of the country, and exercised a very great power in the governing body, the House of Commons.”³³³

Consequently, “Morally speaking, the Protestant church was gone, and rationalism and popery, in principle, divided the nation.”³³⁴

³²⁹ Ibid., 32:334.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Enlightenment Rationalism is the infidelity of which Darby speaks.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

One might wonder why Darby, who usually took no mind to matters of politics, was so incensed by the rise of democracy. The answer is found in his understanding of the mind of the poor.

But my object is to notice the effect on the state of society. God cares for the poor. But the poor have ceased to be so in the scriptural sense of the word. They are masters. The effect on the masses and on the active minds of the country will be infidelity, exalting man. Even popular religious preaching will take this character. It will keep up the name of Christian, but will exalt man in its statements, not Christ - despising government, says the apostle, presumptuous, self-willed, not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Human reason, not God, will be the arbiter of good and evil. What already prevails so largely, will be open to a vast party in the country. The will of the people, confidence in man, his rights, his general perfectibility, will be the banner of all this class.³³⁵

After this historical review, Darby proceeds to make several predictions concerning the political future. While a few of his predictions did not come to pass (*Deo gratias*), most have in one form or another, and several are eerily correct. What is important to note, however, is not the accuracy of his statements, but that Darby considers these predictions to be the natural outcome of democracy. Thus, if Darby was correct, one would expect to see these same trends in the United States.³³⁶

³³⁵ Ibid., 32:334-35.

³³⁶ While the US and the UK have a shared history, there are significant cultural differences between these two nations, such as our historical attitudes towards royalty and aristocracy. Still, Darby observed “the love of something aristocratic is inherent in the human mind,” so that “In New York, liveries and amorial bearings are coming in, and carefully studied genealogies where there are any.” Ibid., 32:336.

The poor will cease to be, biblically speaking.³³⁷ As mentioned above, this will bring about the exaltation of man, his perfectibility, and his rights. Human reason will be the “arbiter of good and evil.”³³⁸ People will begin to despise government and not be afraid to speak ill of the governing authorities.³³⁹

Protestantism will not cease, but will become increasingly infidel, as the popular will (which is really “infidel radicalism.”)³⁴⁰ becomes ascendant. The religious violence that rocked Great Britain so often in the past will cease, as no one will have the courage to “resist

³³⁷ Biblically, the poor are those who have “little or nothing in the way of wealth, goods, or means of subsistence.” *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Poor.” This prediction has come true, at least in the United States. In 2012 Fox News reporter John Stossel “interviewed several people at a food pantry who told him that they had amenities like televisions, video game machines, cell phones and air conditioners.” He reported that “to be poor in America is to live a life better than most have lived through history,” and that the Census Bureau concluded “the poorest fifth of Americans are now 17 percent richer than they were in 1967.” Noah Rothman, “John Stossel on the Poor: America’s Poor ‘Live Better Than Most Have Lived through History,’” *Mediaite.com*, <http://www.mediaite.com/tv/john-stossel-on-the-poor-americas-poor-live-better-than-most-have-lived-through-history/> (accessed February 8, 2016).

³³⁸ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 32:334.

³³⁹ *Ibid.* Disregard of the command to give honor and submission (not mere obedience) to the governing authorities (Rom 13:1-2, 7) in the North American church is now rampant. Public officials, who have been placed in their positions of authority by God, are routinely vilified, demeaned, and disrespected. This practice is so commonplace that to refuse to engage in such disobedience causes wonderment.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32:335.

the course of events.”³⁴¹ This lack of courage will cause infidelity, not Protestantism, to become the main opposition to the growth of Roman Catholicism.³⁴²

A great and rapid centralization of government will occur since it will be impossible for localities to resist the “multitudinous self-will”³⁴³ of the populace and a descent into anarchy. This centralization of power will result in a proportional loss of personal liberty.³⁴⁴ This loss of personal liberty will result in the loss of personal fortitude and resolve. “Individual personal independence of character will disappear almost entirely.”³⁴⁵

It is important to note that these predictions of the results of democracy were not intended to be a call to arms. On the contrary, they were merely a warning of what believers were likely to face.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid., 32:336.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid. According to Darby, the increase of centralized power will be the first move towards “despotism.” Ibid. According to a recent Gallup Poll, the American populace’s “satisfaction with the freedom to choose what they do with their lives” has been steadily declining. The United States now ranks 36th in the ranking of 120 countries surveyed. According to Gallup, this decline “correlates with perceptions of corruption in Nation Government.” Jon Clifton, “Americans Less Satisfied with Freedom,” Gallup World, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/172019/americans-less-satisfied-freedom.aspx> (accessed July 7, 2014).

³⁴⁵ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 32:336.

The relationship of the believer to political action in Ironside's writings is not as straightforward as one might hope. While not blatantly contradictory, some of his statements appear, at least at first blush, to run counter to one another. This is not surprising, however, when one considers Ironside's commitment to the church as a heavenly people.

The position of the Christian in this world is necessarily, under the present order of things, a peculiarly difficult and almost anomalous one. He is a citizen of another world, passing as a stranger and a pilgrim through a strange land. Presumably loyal in heart to the rightful King, whom earth rejected and counted worthy only of a malefactor's cross, he finds himself called upon to walk in a godly and circumspect way in a scene of which Satan, the usurper, is the prince and god.³⁴⁶

Recalling the savage nature of Nero,³⁴⁷ who sat on the throne when Paul penned his Roman letter, Ironside insists that the believer is “not to be found in opposition to human government, even though the administrators of that government may be men of the most unrighteous type.”³⁴⁸ “Nevertheless,” he writes, “the authorities that exist are appointed by God’ (Romans 13:1), in the sense that they exist only by His permissive will, hence the importance of subjection to the existing authority in any given country.”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1928), 155.

³⁴⁷ Ironside describes Nero as “one of the vilest beasts in human form whoever occupied a throne—a sensuous, sensual brute, who ripped up the body of his own mother in order that he might see the womb that bore him—an evil, blatant egotist of most despicable character, whose cruelties and injustices beggar all description.” *Ibid.*, 155-56.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁴⁹ Ironside, *Continual Burnt Offering*, s.v. July 8.

Understanding that governmental authority is God's delegated authority, Ironside recognizes that it is possible for government to exceed its authority. In that case, civil disobedience is required.

If human edicts be positively opposed to the expressed will of God, the Christian is to obey God rather than man (Acts 4:19). Where conditions are such that he can with good conscience cooperate with the government, he is to do so. Any other course would be contrary to the spirit of Him who said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."³⁵⁰

So far, Ironside has been relatively easy to understand. It is when he begins to discuss the relationship between submission to the government, the Christian's love for his fellow man, and the believer's political engagement that Ironside becomes less clear.

Submission to the divinely-ordained government prohibits the believer agitating for change. This would apparently include peaceful, lawful protests.³⁵¹ Following Darby, he writes:

It is not ours to "assert ourselves" and "stand for our rights." We side with Him who came into this scene not to get His rights, but His wrongs. Like Him, then, be it ours

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ "Subjection to God, and therefore to the powers that be, by Him ordained, should be characteristic of all who know the Lord. To meddle with them who are given to change would be to associate with or assist men who by rebellion and intrigue disturb the peace and order of society, delighting in revolutions and plots against the established government. ... In worldly commonwealths, Christians are subjects, not rulers. Therefore it becomes all such to render to Cæsar what belongs to him, not interfering with political changes and social upheavals." H. A. Ironside, *Notes on the Book of Proverbs* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1908), 338-39, in Logos Bible Software.

to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things which are His.³⁵²

Ironside also agrees with Darby that if the believer “joins with an infidel” to set right some wrong or bring about some socially beneficial result, “he owns infidelity can set the world right.”³⁵³ Commenting on James 5:1-6, Ironside maintains, “No demagogic labor-leader ever spoke out more strongly against this unfairness to the toilers than James does here, as, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he inveighs against such crass selfishness and cruel callousness concerning the needs of the working-classes.”³⁵⁴ Does such gross social injustice justify civil agitation and unrest? Ironside argues it does not.

What, then, is the remedy that James sets forth? What cure is there for all this industrial strife? Does he advocate that Christian workmen should join in association with godless confederations of toilers who know not God? Does he suggest that they should unite together and strike for the proper recognition of their just demands? Not at all, for in this case, as in all others, “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (1:20). So James puts before the suffering children of God the blessed hope of the Lord's return. Not until He takes over the reins of government will conditions ever be put right in this poor world.³⁵⁵

This principle of not asserting one's rights seems to color Ironside's view, not just of social action, but also of political action generally. When one accepts that the “authorities

³⁵² H. A. Ironside, *Notes on the Prophecy and Lamentations of Jeremiah* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1906), 141, in Logos Bible Software.

³⁵³ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 34:479.

³⁵⁴ H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Epistle of James* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947), 53, in Logos Bible Software.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

that exist have been established by God,” (Rom 13:1) Ironside asserts this truth will cause the believer to shy away from politics.

This will not make worldly politicians of us. We need have no more to do with the government ourselves than had the captive children of Judah in the land of Shinar; but we shall really be the salt, preserving the whole social and political system from corruption.³⁵⁶

It is not immediately clear how the believer may preserve the “whole social and political system from corruption” while steadfastly avoiding the political arena. But a further reading of Ironside indicates this may be accomplished by preaching the Gospel, prayer, and social movements.

Our business is to make new men by preaching the Gospel of the grace of God. We gladly admit this, that wherever men believe the Gospel they want to do all they can to better the condition of their fellows, and of course they will be interested in peace among the nations; of course they will pray for kings and for those in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness. Of course they will be interested in every movement that makes for the betterment of society.³⁵⁷

Thus it appears that Ironside, following Darby and Scofield, eschews the notion of Christian political action but still recognizes the beneficial effects of evangelism upon society generally.

³⁵⁶ Ironside, *Jeremiah*, 140-141.

³⁵⁷ H. A. Ironside, *Four Golden Hours: At Kingsway Hall, London with Dr. Harry A. Ironside* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1939), 80, in Logos Bible Software. While not explicitly stated, one may surmise that when Ironside mentions a “movement for the betterment of society” he mostly likely is thinking of campaigns such as the YMCA or the Salvation Army, minus the errant theology.

Even though believers have a responsibility to the civil authorities, Chafer observes that God has ordained that the governments of this world remain in the control of men. Therefore, there can be no “inherent unity possible” between the church of God and state.³⁵⁸ The “church...is of God and the state...is in the hands of men.”³⁵⁹ As a result, “[t]he instructions are clear that Christians are not to aspire to temporal power or to depend on civil authority for the furtherance of spiritual ends.”³⁶⁰ Chafer admits that it is “natural and normal for men to resort to such coercive power as is available to achieve their ends.”³⁶¹ But the believer must resist this temptation if he is going to remain true to the teaching of the NT. Instead of the using the leverage of the state, the Christian is to rely on “persuasion and love” to “appeal to heart and mind.”³⁶²

This is not to say that Chafer always considered applying biblical ideals to society a bad idea. For example, Chafer considers it “is most imperative that a day of rest for man and

³⁵⁸ Chafer, *Theology*, 1:35.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² *Ibid.* “And history records no movement other than Christianity which has secured its designs by the appeal to heart and mind. Indeed, it is one of the deflections of the Church of Rome that she departed from this spiritual ideal.” *Ibid.*

beast be maintained by civic authority.”³⁶³ He considers this a humanitarian law for which “no intelligent person could vote otherwise.”³⁶⁴ Yet the motive for the imposition of such a day should be the promotion of human welfare, not “the moral and civic good of the community.”³⁶⁵ In fact, if the special observance of one day in seven was tied to the OT Sabbath day, Chafer would consider this a “stumbling-stone” which “should be kept from the path of the unsaved.”³⁶⁶ The distinction Chafer makes is between an activity that is beneficial to mankind, and a religious observance with moral implications. Nothing should be instituted by government that would even hint at moral righteousness before God.

The unsaved sustain no relation to the Lord’s day, since that day belongs only to the new creation, and therefore the pressing of the observance of a religious day upon the individual who is unsaved, is misleading in the extreme; for it tends to the utter confusion of the Gospel of grace. God is not calling on the unsaved to keep a day to which they could in no way be related.³⁶⁷

³⁶³ Chafer, *Grace*, 286.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 285.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 286. “When a day is imposed upon the nation it is, without exception, upon the authority of the Jewish sabbath of rest, and not on the authority of anything which obtains in the new creation. The error of this legalism needs no further exposition. God is certainly not imposing a legal sabbath on any nation, or the world, when He has given His Son to remove that whole law-curse and to place men where they might be saved apart from works of their own. In this age God is represented as dealing with the individual only. In matters of human government, it is the ‘times of the Gentiles,’ with all that is involved, and no individual or nation is now accepted of God on the basis of human works.” *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 284-85.

In contrast, Ryrie states that displaying social concern by activity in the political arena is “not necessarily wrong,”³⁶⁸ but notes that this is at odds with the example of Jesus. Ryrie argues that, not only did Jesus acknowledge Roman rule in his command to pay the poll tax (Matt 22:19-21³⁶⁹), but Jesus made no attempt to reform the government. The fact that the Jewish people were suffering oppression did not move him to act or suggest any action to eliminate their subservience.³⁷⁰

The key to understanding the non-intervention of Christ is understanding the priority of the spiritual over the physical. Jesus refused to step out of the sphere of his appointed ministry, which means he would not “usurp the sphere of constituted authority.”³⁷¹

The more important priority is not our relation to the government under which we live, but our relation to God. Once again His priorities were spiritual. You can afford to be without political justice, but you cannot afford to refuse to be subservient to God. Our Lord was not a political revolutionary; but He certainly was a radical religious revolutionary.³⁷²

³⁶⁸ Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 73.

³⁶⁹ “‘Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, ‘Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?’

‘Caesar’s,’ they replied.

Then he said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’”

³⁷⁰ Ryrie, *Social Responsibility*, 73-74.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 74.

What may be said, then, about the believer trying to improve the government through political means? Ryrie, in contrast to every other author examined, actively supports such activity.

Nevertheless, promoting righteousness is a worthy activity for any Christian, including promoting it in the political arena. It should be done first of all by prayer, for it is God who raises up and removes rulers. It should be done by personal holy living in all our relation to governments. It may also involve concerted group action. If the government permits open and free assembly, grants a free vote, or offers avenues of legal protest, there is no reason why these means should not be used by Christians. In fact, there is every good reason why they should be used. Though having Christian officials cannot guarantee righteousness or even uniformity of viewpoint on issues, if the Christian is maturing in the faith and qualified and competent in his field he should have a different perspective and lifestyle and be a better civil servant. The priority each individual believer can give to such concerted action will vary depending on his calling in life.³⁷³

Even though Ryrie supports such activity, it should be noted that he falls far short of making political activity mandatory for the believer, in contrast to the calls of many evangelical leaders today. A careful reading of this statement also reveals that this endorsement of political activity is not as full-throated as it might first appear. The primary emphasis is upon the spiritual: prayer, holy living, maturing in the faith, and being conscious of God's calling of the life.

Even if one were called to political activity, Ryrie notes that no NT mandate "ever gives it a top priority."³⁷⁴ Instead, the "Christian's primary responsibilities are evangelism

³⁷³ Ibid., 84.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

and godly living.”³⁷⁵ As with those before him, Ryrie sees these as the primary means of influencing society. “Through witnessing he changes people; through godly living he does affect society; and through private and public obedience he honors God.”³⁷⁶

Church and State

McClain sees two possible errors when considering the relationship between church and state. The first would be the uniting of church and state. The second would be to place church and state in conflict with one another. It is true that one is spiritual and the other temporal. Still, the Apostle Paul “steers his course very skillfully, keeping them separate” but also showing that “there is no essential opposition between the two. He does not oppose them; neither does he confuse them.”³⁷⁷ The reason they are not in conflict is that both church and state are divine institutions with their own particular duties.³⁷⁸ The believer’s duty to both church and state “should be enforced and performed in just one way, in love.”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ McClain, *Romans*, 219-20.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 218.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 219.

The temptation to combine church and state stems from two primary sources in McClain's view. First, there is the "tremendous power of religion over the minds of men."³⁸⁰ Second is the fact that, theoretically, the idea of an "ecclesiastical State is correct."³⁸¹ Each of these concepts will be considered in turn.

Throughout history, those in power have recognized the potency of religious thought to control behavior. As a result, a union between a widely-established religion and the state has tended to cement the power of both (although not always in equal measures). The idea that *Paris vaut bien une messe*³⁸² seems to be timeless. McClain observes, "All such alliances thus humanly originated have been based on selfish motives and opportunist policies on both

³⁸⁰ McClain, *Kingdom*, 75.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 242.

³⁸² "Paris is well worth a mass." While most likely apocryphal, this phrase seems to have accurately summed up the thinking of Henry IV of France when he converted from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism in 1593. Some attribute the phrase to Henry's Protestant counselor, the Duke of Sully. Reagan White, "Henri of Navarre, 1553-1610: Strong Leader, Flexible Faith," *Christian History* 20 (2001): 33. While Henry originally promised to convert within six months of taking the throne, he waited almost four years until most of his military options were exhausted. Edmund H. Dickerman, "The Conversion of Henry IV: 'Paris Is Well Worth a Mass' in Psychological Perspective," *The Catholic Historical Review* 63, no. 1 (1977): 1-2. This being said, it appears that his conversion was not wholly one of convenience. "In spite of his confessional wavering, Henri took his beliefs seriously. He astonished his Catholic instructors with his theological knowledge, then unnerved them by tearfully asserting that they must make certain of his salvation, for he was trusting them with his immortal soul. However, he disparaged some Catholic doctrines as 'rubbish which he was quite sure that the majority of them did not believe.'" White, "Henri of Navarre," 33.

sides, and hence must always break down in the end.”³⁸³ Such an “unnatural union” exacts a price from each side which is constantly increasing. Therefore a break in the arrangement is inevitable.³⁸⁴ “A union between church and state is safe only when inaugurated and controlled by the one true God in a kingdom of His own (Zech 14:9, 16-21).”³⁸⁵

It is safe to say that some in the church have sought governmental authority out of pure motives. For example, the Constitution Party in the US states in its platform, “This great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on a foundation of Christian principles and values.”³⁸⁶ Therefore one of their goals is to “restore American jurisprudence to its Biblical foundations.”³⁸⁷ While, strictly speaking, the Constitution Party does not call for a theocracy, they do contend “[t]he moral principles and precepts contained in the Scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitution and laws.”³⁸⁸

³⁸³ McClain, *Kingdom*, 75.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ Frank Fluckiger, “Christians and the Constituion Party,” <http://www.constitutionparty.com/christians-and-the-constitution-party> (accessed November 4, 2015).

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

It is difficult to argue with the notion that a consistent reliance upon Scripture for the nation's jurisprudence would bring about a more just society. In fact, that is one of the promises of the coming kingdom. McClain's objection is not with the goal, but with the implementation. The Roman Catholic ecclesiastical states of the past were "ruled by a succession of sinful and fallible popes."³⁸⁹ People being what they are, there is no hope for better execution of ecclesiastical power in the future. In a sinful world, "political and ecclesiastical power too often get into the wrong hands, and the result is intolerable oppression."³⁹⁰ The noble goal of an unsullied ecclesiastical state is an "excellent human ideal," but one that requires "the intervention of supernatural wisdom and power on the part of God."³⁹¹

It should be noted in passing that McClain finds the "complete separation of church and state"³⁹² something currently to be desired and a valuable "precaution in a sinful world."³⁹³ It is not, however, the ideal policy, for "under the personal rule of the Messianic

³⁸⁹ McClain, *Kingdom*, 242.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 242-43.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 497.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 245.

King the union of church and state will not only be safe; it will also be the highest possible good.”³⁹⁴ That being said, McClain finds it incongruous to argue for the establishment of Christianity on the one hand and yet to advocate religious liberty on the other.³⁹⁵

Certainly these churchmen are right in battling for complete religious liberty on behalf of all men here and now. On the other hand, according to both Scripture and reason, the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ on earth could never make room for liberty on the part of false and degraded religions to propagate and practice their iniquitous delusions. If it is the business of the Christian Church to establish “Christ’s reign” on earth, as the Baptist World Alliance seems to assume, then it ought logically to enter the field of religious preferentialism and suppression.³⁹⁶

In the same way, if the Constitution Party desires to legislate “the moral principles and precepts contained in the Scriptures,”³⁹⁷ “religious preferentialism and suppression” should also be part of their platform. To be clear, McClain argues for the “present desirability of complete separation of church and state.”³⁹⁸ He recognizes that this is a “rather illogical separation”³⁹⁹ that is destined to pass away. Still, if the biblical model of church and state were to be followed today, religious liberty would be no more.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ The Constitution Party, for example, maintains that the US was founded as a Christian nation and yet for “this very reason peoples of all faiths have been and are afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here.” Fluckiger, “Constitution Party.”

³⁹⁶ McClain, *Kingdom*, 247.

³⁹⁷ Fluckiger, “Constitution Party.”

³⁹⁸ McClain, *Kingdom*, 497.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

Additionally, to maintain consistency, the church should be about initiating holy wars. McClain argues that, unlike men, God does not forget. When the kingdom is established, “there will be an examination of the political crimes of the past in the light of divine justice, and a correlation of ancient wrongs which have been too easily excepted even by the best of statesmen.”⁴⁰⁰ If the church is to be about establishing kingdom ethics, “then in the interest of ordinary morality they should be advocating some ‘holy wars’ for the purpose of setting right the wrongs of history.”⁴⁰¹

The Sermon on the Mount

Darby considered the Sermon on the Mount to be primarily eschatological. Jesus was teaching the assembled multitude “what were the real principles of the kingdom which was going to be set up.”⁴⁰² Thus, Jesus’ discourse to the multitudes laid out the “great essential principles which were to serve as the moral foundations for his kingdom.”⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 233.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Darby, *Collected Writings*, 24:132.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 24:92.

As might be expected, Darby sees the sermon in light of the earthly and the heavenly. Unfortunately, in his brief discussion of the Sermon on the Mount, Darby is even less clear than normal.⁴⁰⁴ Still, the following conclusions seem reasonably safe.

First, Darby does not consider the Sermon on the Mount to be an exposition of the law, nor does it impose a new law upon the believer. He maintains the “law is not referred to, save in the declaration that it and the prophets must all be fulfilled.”⁴⁰⁵ Second, Darby applies the ethical standards of the discourse to church age believers. “The poor in spirit, not the haughty of this world” are those who “mourn in the midst of evil.” This is a “characteristic of grace.”⁴⁰⁶ Exhibiting the character for in the kingdom, that is the morality outlined in the sermon, assures “consequences in a world of evil.”⁴⁰⁷ Finally, while these

⁴⁰⁴ Blaising correctly calls Darby “notoriously difficult to understand.” Craig A. Blaising, “Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists,” *BSac* 145, no. 579 (1988): 264. McGiffert’s criticism of Eusebius could easily have been directed at Darby. “He did not often enough clearly define and draw the boundaries of his subject before beginning to write upon it. He apparently did much of his thinking after he had taken pen in hand, and did not subject what he had thus produced to a sufficiently careful revision, if to any revision at all. Thoughts and suggestions poured in upon him while he was writing; and he was not always able to resist the temptation to insert them as they came, often to the utter perversion of his train of thought, and to the ruin of the coherency and perspicuity of his style.” Arthur Cushman McGiffert, “Prolegomena: The Life and Writings of Eusebius of Caesarea,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 27.

⁴⁰⁵ Darby, *Collected Writings*, 24:133.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

moral imperatives may be replicated, it is only if the individual has “purity within” and God as his “motive in everything” do the actions indicate the person to be a child of the kingdom.⁴⁰⁸

To summarize Darby’s position, therefore, it appears that he considers the standards in the Sermon on the Mount to be normative for the church-age believer. While the morality described is for the eschatological kingdom, the description of righteousness in the sermon illustrates the character of God and is therefore incumbent on the believer.

Even though McClain is not explicit concerning the heavenly/earthly dichotomy, in practical terms he insists on one corollary of this thesis, namely, the complete separation of the Mosaic law from the church. McClain recognizes that some, having the best of intentions, insist that believers obey the “moral law.”⁴⁰⁹ Nevertheless he is adamant that the law does not touch church age saints. He argues that the law was given to the nation of Israel as a covenant.⁴¹⁰ The blessings and curses of this covenant were dependent upon the obedience of

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ “Recently it has been raised by teachers and writers with the best of intentions. These men have been grieved and disturbed by the failure of Christian people to live the kind of life the Word of God expects of those saved by grace. As a remedy for this distressing condition in the churches they have proposed that we turn back to the law. We have failed, they argue, because we have not laid upon the members of the churches the *obligations* of the ‘moral law.’ The path of success in both the Christian life and the work of the church, they way, will be found in getting the Christian people to see that they are still *under the moral law of God.*” Alva J. McClain, *Law & Grace* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1973), 6.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

Israel to this law code.⁴¹¹ As the church is not a party to this covenant, it is not binding upon believers.

By way of definition, McClain considers the term “law” to refer to the Mosaic law, “including generally the entire Pentateuch.”⁴¹² Even though there are a few instances in the NT where “the law” refers to the entire OT,⁴¹³ this is a rare usage that “assumes the existence of the law, calls men back to the law and threatens the penalties of the law for its violations.”⁴¹⁴

Church age Jews are still under the law, even though the dispensation of law has ended.⁴¹⁵ Still, when they find freedom in the new covenant they become “dead to the law by the body of Christ (Rom. 7:4).”⁴¹⁶

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 32.

⁴¹² Ibid., 7.

⁴¹³ “Compare John 10:34 with Psalm 82:6 and I Corinthians 14:21 with Isaiah 28:11-12.” Ibid., 8.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ “This view does not conflict in any way with the fact that what we call the Dispensation of Law ended at Calvary. For God may change in his way of dealing with men without totally abolishing the main feature of a former dispensation.” Ibid., 35-36.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 34-35.

While McClain concedes the law contains three elements—the moral, ceremonial, and civil—he insists that the law remains a unified whole. The law is one law, not three.⁴¹⁷ Therefore, those that insisted on keeping only the “moral law,” while no such obligation exists for the ceremonial and civil, were dividing what is, in its essence, indivisible.⁴¹⁸

The Sermon on the Mount is a partial interpretation of this law “with special reference to its original inner meaning.”⁴¹⁹ As such, the Sermon on the Mount comments on all three elements of the Mosaic law, not just the moral. As the moral element of the Sermon on the Mount is self-evident, McClain does not endeavor to prove this aspect within the sermon. Instead he illustrates the ceremonial and civil strands within the discourse.

The ceremonial element of the law is seen in Matt 5:23-24 with the reference to the “gift at the altar.” This is the language of sacrifice and may only be understood within the context of temple ritual.⁴²⁰

The civil element of law may be seen in Matt 5:25-26 where the penalty for a debt is discharged by an officer of the court and results in imprisonment.⁴²¹ Similarly, in Matt 5:21

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 8-11.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 14.

Jesus speaks of being “subject to judgment,” another civil reference.⁴²² Yet another reference to civil authority is found in Matt 5:35 where Jesus calls Jerusalem the “city of the Great King.” This indicates “the central seat of civil authority in the theocratic kingdom, which that city was historically, and will be once again in the future reestablishment of the kingdom according to the Old Testament prophets.”⁴²³

McClain insists that “God’s people in the former age were ‘under the law’ as a rule of life, whereas today they are not ‘under the law’ as a rule of life.”⁴²⁴ Any attempt to impose the law in any form upon the believer, McClain condemns as heresy.⁴²⁵ This includes placing the believer under the “moral law stripped of its proper penalties. This might be called a ‘weak and beggarly’ legalism (cf. Gal. 4:9).”⁴²⁶

⁴²² Ibid., 13.

⁴²³ Ibid., 14.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 48.

⁴²⁵ “The Word of God condemns unsparingly all attempts to put the Christian believer ‘under the law.’ The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul gave to the church the book of Galatians for the very purpose of dealing with this heresy. Read this epistle over and over, noting carefully the precise error with which the writer deals. It is not a total rejection of the gospel of God’s grace and a turning back to a total legalism. It is rather the error of saying that the Christian life, having begun by simple faith in Christ, must thereafter continue under the law or some part to it.” Ibid., 51.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 50.

This being true, one cannot set aside the fact that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). McClain does not, therefore, set aside the law completely with regard to the believer.⁴²⁷ Instead, “the will of God revealed in the written Word must always be seen in the context of God’s grace.”⁴²⁸ What this means in practical terms is that the motivation for obedience should be the mercies and grace of God and not obligation, constraint, or indebtedness.

Using as an example what is commonly referred to as the “Golden Rule” from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:12), McClain argues that this is “a good law, but there is

⁴²⁷ “Let us beware, therefore, of the error of supposing that there is anything in the Book of God which can be set aside, or even neglected, by the Christian believer. All of the Book—every part of it no matter how small—will be found ‘profitable’ for the saved. We cannot dispense with any of it without loss to ourselves. In this connection, it needs to be emphasized without any compromise, that ‘all scripture’ includes the law of Moses.” *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 63. “Unless we see the will of God ‘in the context of His grace,’ we shall always be in danger of reverting to old systems of legalism or building new ones. If we center upon the ‘will of God’ and ignore that ‘context of grace,’ it is possible to erect a legalistic system even on such books as Romans and Galatians!” *Ibid.*, 63-64.

something higher.”⁴²⁹ Citing the “context of grace” in Phil 2:3⁴³⁰—that Christ set aside his preexistent glory and took on the form of a slave, becoming obedient to death for the benefit of those who deserve nothing—McClain contends that the command to “in humility consider others better than yourselves” is an “argument of grace, and it is irresistible for those who have been saved and know the Lord.”⁴³¹

His conclusion is that the believer is “not under law in any sense, whether moral or ceremonial.” This being said, both aspects of the law are part of the Word of God and are therefore profitable “to all the children of God in every age.”⁴³²

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 66. By stating that the Golden Rule is a good law, McClain is referring to the moral purity of the law, not the practicality of it. “By practical-minded men it has sometimes been argued that Christ’s moral principles are so idealistic that they are not only impossible of realization, but that even to attempt to follow them may prove dangerous in the present world of reality. And such objections are not altogether without justification. It was the late Dr. J. Gresham Machen who rightly pointed out that the Golden Rule, apart from a society of regenerated men whose desires are morally right, is never wholly workable and may actually prove to be a perilous mode of action. And it is possible that, had not Dr. Machen’s amillennial views kept him from following the logic of his own argument to the end, he might also have observed that, even in the regenerated members of the church on earth, there are still many selfish and sinful desires. And the conclusion seems inescapable that, short of heaven and the eternal state, only in a Kingdom of God on earth, where the outworking of the wrong desires of men is under external and immediate control, can the Golden Rule become *fully* practical principle for all human action.” McClain, *Kingdom*, 289.

⁴³⁰ “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.”

⁴³¹ McClain, *Law & Grace*, 65-66.

⁴³² Ibid., 67.

What, then, should the church age believer do with the Sermon on the Mount?

McClain rejects the notion that this commentary on the law imposes a mandate upon the believer. At the same time he confesses that, as inspired Scripture, it is profitable for the believer. This “profitability” is the same as found in the OT law. Both give illustrations as to the nature of holiness. What is different is the motivation for the church age saint. The stimulus for the Christian is love produced by the Holy Spirit.⁴³³

Nothing could be clearer than Paul’s word on the good life in his first letter to Timothy: The Christian life is to be a life of “love”: and this love rises in its ultimate source out of “unfeigned faith.” It is not something worked up in any mechanical fashion. Furthermore, the apostle writes, this “love” is actually “the end of the commandment.” It comprehends everything of value in the realm of Christian ethics, and beyond it there is nothing.⁴³⁴

Ancient Israel had a high standard of living under the law. That being said, Walvoord contends that the Christian’s standard of conduct is considerably more advanced than the “elementary” standards of the Mosaic covenant.⁴³⁵ Similarly, the ethical standards of the coming kingdom, while equally high, are different from those standards demanded in the

⁴³³ Ibid., 76.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Walvoord, *Holy Spirit*, 205.

church. This is not to say that basic morality changes with the various economies, but what God requires of the individual changes in the different dispensations.⁴³⁶

Appealing to Scofield, Walvoord defines a dispensation as a “rule of life.”⁴³⁷ As the dispensations change, so do the obligations of those under these “rules.” It follows, therefore, that as the church age saint is no longer under the dispensation of law, the Mosaic law is no longer the standard of conduct. The current “rule of life” is that of grace.

In the New Testament the rule of grace is revealed more clearly. There was grace, of course, in the Old Testament because all forgiveness stems from the grace of God that, in turn, stems from the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. In the present age, however, grace is not only a method of salvation (as it was in other dispensations), but it also is identified as a rule of life.⁴³⁸

Thus, the moral standards for the church age are found “in the New Testament particularly the Acts and Epistles and part of the Gospels.”⁴³⁹

Thus far, regarding the applicability of the law to the believer, Walvoord and McClain agree. In contrast to McClain, however, Walvoord has no compunction against using the Sermon on the Mount as an ethical blueprint for church age saints. Unlike McClain,

⁴³⁶ John F. Walvoord, “Biblical Kingdoms Compared and Contrasted,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Masters (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 87.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ Walvoord, *Holy Spirit*, 205.

Walvoord does not see the Sermon on the Mount as part of the Mosaic law, but rather as the ethical demands of the future kingdom. This being said, Walvoord does not relegate the ethical teachings found in the sermon wholly to the future.

It is true that the sermon contains “the ethical principles of the kingdom which will come into play in the future millennial kingdom.”⁴⁴⁰ It is the “comprehensive statement of the moral principles relating to the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed.”⁴⁴¹ Nevertheless, it is also true that these ethical principles are applicable now “to some extent.”⁴⁴²

In Walvoord’s view, the “Sermon on the Mount, as a whole, is not church truth precisely.”⁴⁴³ By this he means that the sermon does not present the plan of salvation nor does it present “the complete rule of life expounded at a greater length in the epistles.”⁴⁴⁴ What the discourse does do is lay out what was missing in first-century Judaism’s messianic assumptions. They desired a physical and political kingdom of material blessings and peace. What they had neglected was that this kingdom was also to be a reign of righteousness. The

⁴⁴⁰ Walvoord, *Handbook*, 364.

⁴⁴¹ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew, Thy Kingdom Come: A Commentary on the First Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 43.

⁴⁴² Walvoord, *Handbook*, 364.

⁴⁴³ Walvoord, *Matthew*, 44.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

Sermon on the Mount, therefore, emphasizes the moral principles of the kingdom to correct the Jews' unbalanced expectations. Thus the sermon "must be understood in this eschatological context."⁴⁴⁵

Notwithstanding the original context, Walvoord maintains a present application of the ethical principles found in the Sermon on the Mount for the following reasons. First, appealing to the unchanging nature of God, Walvoord claims many of the truths found in the discourse to be general in nature.⁴⁴⁶ Second, Jesus "made particular applications to current situations," and expected obedience from the assembled multitude.⁴⁴⁷ Third, Walvoord argues that "it would hardly be fitting for Matthew, writing this gospel many years after the death of Christ, to introduce material which would be irrelevant to his contemporaries."⁴⁴⁸ As

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 46. An example of such present applications may be found in the Beatitudes. "The Beatitudes pronounce those blessed, or happy, who fulfill these six standards of the kingdom in character and experience: those poor in spirit, or consciously dependent on God; those who mourn; those who are meek, or humble; those who thirst after righteousness; those who are merciful; pure in spirit; and who are peacemakers, although persecuted for righteousness' sake, are proper disciples and subjects of the kingdom. Through verse 10, these are addressed as "they," in contrast to "ye" in verses 11–12. Here is illustrated present application of general truth. The disciples were to experience persecution and false accusation. They are exhorted to rejoice in that day because they share persecution similar to that of prophets of old and because they will have great reward in heaven. It is of interest that these words addressed to those living in that generation promised them reward in heaven rather than in the future millennial kingdom. This is realistic, of course, because they would ultimately move into the church with its heavenly destiny and reward." Ibid., 46-47.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 44.

a result, the discourse should be viewed primarily as eschatological but also as ethical guidance for the church. Walvoord finds no hermeneutical problems associated with this understanding.

Accordingly, the study of the Sermon on the Mount yields its treasures to those who analyze each text, determining its general meaning, its present application, and its relation to the future kingdom program. Problems of interpretation in most instances vanish easily when viewed from this prospective.⁴⁴⁹

Unfortunately, Walvoord provides little help in applying the sermon to contemporary life. In most cases, he is content to expound the meaning the author intended for the original audience and allow the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. He does take a stand on divorce,⁴⁵⁰ oath taking,⁴⁵¹ pacifism,⁴⁵² and suggests that going the extra mile (Matt 5:40), while “literally enforced” in the kingdom, “might not be applicable to every conceivable situation” and should be considered a principle that “might not work in the mystery form of

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 45-46.

⁴⁵⁰ “Although the matter of divorce in the teaching of Jesus is subject to various interpretations, the tenor of this passage is to recognize divorce as real and final when there is fornication after the marriage relationship has been established.” Ibid., 50.

⁴⁵¹ Speaking of Matt 5:33-37, Walvoord comments, “This indicates care should be used in giving solemn promises but should not be construed as completely prohibiting entering into a pledge or a promise in this age.” Ibid.

⁴⁵² “Although some might deduce from the principles of the kingdom expounded here that the Bible supports pacifism, most interpreters would not draw this conclusion.” Ibid., 51.

the kingdom with the King absent.”⁴⁵³ More positively Walvoord argues that the “standard of conduct in all areas should be God’s attitude of love.”⁴⁵⁴ But none of these positions is well fleshed out and all are stated in the briefest of terms.

Summary of TD Social and Political Ethics

While there are minor differences between these authors, such as the extent of allowable political involvement for example, the areas of agreement far out-weigh any divergence of opinion. This continuity of outlook allows one to draw a general description of the traditional dispensational social ethic.

First, all agree that the Christian is not called upon to change the world or bring in “kingdom ethics.” Each author recognizes the futility of such effort. Lost people cannot be made better. This is an impossibility. Only when someone is born again is real moral change possible. What is true for the individual is also true for society.

This is not to say that TD does not believe in societal transformation. Each author believes that society needs to be transformed and indeed will be transformed. The question is when does that transformation take place and who does the transforming. It is only when Christ establishes his kingdom at the second coming that civilization will be made right.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 50-51.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 51.

Part of the sovereignty of God is displayed in the world's inexorable march toward apostasy and total corruption. As this wickedness is incorporated into God's plan for the future, it becomes impossible to know exactly what God is doing at any given moment on the global stage. As a result, TD advises a "hands off" approach to the evils of this world. While some would label this "pessimism" or "social disengagement," TD would counter that this is biblical realism.

This being said, the believer is called to do good to all people. Therefore, if some act of love may ease the suffering of an individual or provide some benefit—particularly if this benefit aids the church's evangelistic efforts—then one should be about it. But such good works are directed at individuals, not society as a whole.

What then is the church to be about? The task of the church is evangelism. In fact, each author examined specifically states that evangelism is the primary goal of all social ethics. It should be noted that, even though each author opposes efforts to make the world better for its own sake, each concludes that it is the preaching of the gospel that has the largest beneficial effects on this world. In fact, the favorable effects of the gospel are so great, one must be on guard against the temptation to make them an end in themselves.

Another major emphasis in TD is the sovereignty of God. No rebellion is authorized against any established authority, because every authority is established by God.

So, at the end of the day what does TD teach? It teaches that evangelism is *the primary task* of the believer. All ethical considerations should be made with a view toward their effects on evangelism. Good works should be done to all, but particularly to those in the church. Good works outside the body should have a focus on the individual, not society as a whole, and again, with evangelism always in mind. Any attempt at societal reformation is futile, and a distraction from the real mission of the church. Only when Christ returns will society be put right. As Scofield's pleads:

Dear friends, let us leave the government of the world till the King comes; let us leave the civilizing of the world to be the incidental effect of the presence there of the gospel of Christ, and let us give our time, our strength, our money, our days to the mission distinctively committed to the church, namely: to make Christ known "to every creature."⁴⁵⁵

Excursus on Jerry Falwell

Without question, Jerry Falwell subscribed to TD, being both premillennial and pretribulational.⁴⁵⁶ Falwell's commitment to TD may be seen, at least in part, in his early understanding of social and political action. In practice and in ideology, Falwell maintained fidelity with the general TD social and political ethic described above.

Nowhere are we commissioned to reform the externals. We are not told to wage wars against bootleggers, liquor stores, gamblers, murderers, prostitutes, racketeers, prejudiced persons or institutions, or any other existing evil as such. Our

⁴⁵⁵ Scofield, *Prophecy Made Plain*, 41.

⁴⁵⁶ Jerry Falwell, *Falwell: An Autobiography* (Lynchburg, Va.: Liberty House, 1997), 374.

ministry is not reformation but transformation. The gospel does not clean up the outside but rather regenerates the inside....

We pay our taxes, cast our votes as a responsibility of citizenship, obey the laws of the land, and other things demanded of us by the society in which we live. But, at the same time, we are cognizant that our only purpose on this earth is to know Christ and to make Him known. Believing the Bible as I do, I find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and begin doing anything else—including fighting communism, or participating in civil rights reforms. As a God-called preacher, I find there is no time left after I give the proper time and attention to winning people to Christ. Preachers are not called to be politicians but to be soul winners....⁴⁵⁷

Roe v. Wade and Political Action

This conviction against political action changed with the landmark Roe v. Wade decision of 1973. Horrified at the sinfulness of abortion and its threat to the traditional family, Falwell began “to teach and preach against it.”⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ Jerry Falwell, “Ministers and Marches: 1965,” in *Jerry Falwell and the Rise of the Religious Right: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Matthew Avery Sutton, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2013), 58-59. Falwell also believed that evangelism is the only cure to the social ills against which people were marching. “If the many thousands of churches and pastors of America were suddenly begin preaching the old-fashioned gospel of Jesus Christ and the power that is in His atoning blood, a revival would grip our land such as we have never known before. If as much effort could be put into winning people to Jesus Christ across the land as is being exerted in the present civil rights movement, America will be turned upside down for God. Hate and prejudice would certainly be a great measure overcome. Churches would be filled with sincere souls seeking God. Good relations between the races would soon be evidenced. God is Love, and when He is put first in the individual life and in the church, God’s people become messengers of love.” *Ibid.*, 59. “As Christians, we detest discrimination. But we do need to see that we can never stop it through any other means than that weapon which we given the church 2,000 years ago—the preaching of the gospel of Christ.” *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁵⁸ Falwell, *Autobiography*, 365. People were shocked and surprised by the change in emphasis they heard in my preaching. Until the 1970s, I have been a typical Baptist pastor who was opposed to Christians, especially the clergy, getting involved in political action. Suddenly I was calling for all-out political involvement by the Christian community. I had read and reread the stories and the sermons of the Old Testament prophets and their call to justice. I had re-study the life and teachings of Jesus, with His love for the little children and His command to see that no harm should come to them. I read the letters of Paul, Peter, and John, the books of Acts and Revelation. I felt a growing commitment to take my stand

At the heart of his decision to become politically active was his new understanding of Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees concerning paying taxes to Caesar (Matt 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; and Luke 20:20-26).⁴⁵⁹ Moving beyond a more limited understanding of submission to government,⁴⁶⁰ Falwell, as a result of *Roe v. Wade*, now understood in the phrase "render to Caesar," a responsibility to "play our part in maintaining the world of humankind."⁴⁶¹

On the plus side, Falwell understands that the believer lives in two separate worlds, and has a responsibility to both.⁴⁶² Unfortunately, Falwell fails to recognize the evil nature of the world system, or at least fails to recognize it fully. He maintains that the world of men operates with different rules. As a result, to get things done, one must operate within the rules of the world of men.

prophetically against the influence of Satan in our nation and through our nation to the world. Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 366.

⁴⁶⁰ "In these words Jesus definitely answered their question by showing that the people of God are responsible to Him in things spiritual, but must be obedient to the powers that be in things civil and national." H. A. Ironside, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 187.

⁴⁶¹ Falwell, *Autobiography*, 366.

⁴⁶² "There was a second important reminder for me in that story. When Jesus said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," He was not just telling us to be responsible in both worlds. He was also reminding us that we live in two worlds simultaneously and that we need to keep the worlds apart." Ibid., 367.

Each world works differently. What we do in God's world and with His people has different rules from what we do in the world of government, with elected officials and volunteers. America is not a theocracy, a government with God as its Commander-in-Chief. America is a democratic republic with a man (perhaps one day a woman) as its chief executive officer. In God's world, we decided by God rules. In a democratic republic, we work together, governed by the will of the majority. In God's world, we submit to Him. In man's world we submit to God and to the law of man.⁴⁶³

It is difficult to imagine that Falwell is suggesting that there are two sets of rules for the believer and that one set or the other determines behavior depending on the circumstances one finds oneself. Yet it appears he comes perilously close.

Still, if the world of men is governed by the will of the majority (a doubtful proposition), then political action by believers is necessary if the moral decay of the nation is to be halted. To be clear, Falwell does not see political action as joining with the evil world system. Instead, he sees political action by believers as bringing God's will into the world of men.⁴⁶⁴ It follows, therefore, that mere voting is not sufficient. Grassroots political action by the church and in the church is required.

I began to urge my fellow Christians to get involved in the political process. I encouraged them to study the issues, to support qualified candidates who stood for the renewal of morality and good sense in the land, or to run for office themselves. I pushed for Christians to use their churches to register voters. I dared Christians to go door-to-door getting out the vote, making the issues known, campaigning precinct-by-precinct for the candidates of their choice and using their cars and buses to get voters to the polls.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ "When we feel the law of man is unjust or contrary to the law of God, we work to change man's law." Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 368.

As this movement into political action progressed, Falwell expanded his vision. “In 1975 the nation’s bicentennial celebration was only a year away when we begin to dream about influencing the moral and ethical course of the nation in an even larger way.”⁴⁶⁶ Don Wyrzten’s musical *I Love America* was chosen as “the first offense we launched to mobilize Christians across America for political action...”⁴⁶⁷ Seventy students were trained for a “musical ministry,”⁴⁶⁸ and “were given college credits”⁴⁶⁹ to perform this musical in 141 cities.⁴⁷⁰ As one might imagine, this production did not come cheap. The students traveled on “ministry-owned” busses which were followed by “two tractor-trailer trucks carrying the stage equipment and costumes, sound systems, and lights.”⁴⁷¹ Falwell was flown back and forth to these rallies on “purchase or leased private planes,” so that he could maintain the various ministries of Thomas Road Baptist Church.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 369.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 368.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 369.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 369-70.

Unfortunately, there is much to criticize in this initial offensive. First, it is, at the very least, questionable whether or not spiritual duties incumbent on the church should be motivated by American patriotic nationalism. God has promised to bless his word (Isa 55:10-11), which should therefore be the primary motivator of his people. One might argue that such use of patriotic nationalism requires a prior commitment to American exceptionalism, which demands a particular understanding of American history that often ignores substantial evidence to the contrary. Additionally, songs with titles like “I’m Just a Flag Waving American,” “The Red, White and Blue,” and “Johnny Bull,” do not a biblical appeal make.⁴⁷³

To make matters worse, the one song that references scripture (“If My People”) cannot be applied to the United States when taken in context.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷³ The song list for this musical is as follows: 1) I Love America, 2) I’m Just A Flag-Waiving American, 3) Johnny Bull, 4) Historical Interlude, 5) In God We Trust, 6) My Home, America, 7) America The Beautiful, 8) God Of Our Fathers, 9) The Red, White and Blue, 10) My Home, America (Reprise), 11) Praise The Lord and Give Thanks, America, 12) It’s Time To Pray, 13) If My People, 14) Jesus Is Calling America, and 15) Battle Hymn Of The Republic. "John W. Peterson, Don Wyrzten - I Love America: A Patriotic Musical (Vinyl, Lp)," Discogs.com, <https://www.discogs.com/John-W-Peterson-Don-Wyrzten-I-Love-America-A-Patriotic-Musical/release/4761980> (accessed March 26 2016).

⁴⁷⁴ The use of 2 Chron 7:14 in this musical is particularly unfortunate as this promise is given specifically to Israel, echoing the stipulations of the land covenant. There is no exegetical evidence that this particular promise may be applied to any other nation. This is not to say that the general sentiment expressed cannot be found other places, such as Jer 18:5-10, where the nations generally are in view. This does not excuse, however, the misuse of the previous passage. Unfortunately, this employment of 2 Chron 7:14 became a mainstay in Falwell’s basic appeal. “And though my words sounded ominous, I always concluded each patriotic rally on the steps of each state capitol building with God’s promise: [2 Chron 7:14].” Falwell, *Autobiography*, 383.

Second, there seems to have been a fair degree of emotional manipulation involved in this appeal. Falwell would fly in to town “just in time to have dinner with the pastors and lay leaders of the city.”⁴⁷⁵ He would speak during and after dinner about his conclusions concerning political action and urge the pastors “to join us in taking a stand against the forces of evil at work in their towns and around the country.”⁴⁷⁶ Falwell describes what would happen next.

The pastors were then escorted to reserved seats in the front rows of the city auditorium, where I honored them and their families. Then the lights dimmed. The snare drums and tympanies rolled. The trumpets played a fanfare and seventy wonderful young people sang their hearts out to an inspired crowd who usually responded with an enthusiastic standing ovation. Then I concluded the evening with a Biblical challenge to the Christians gathered in those large auditoriums or coliseums to unite with their brothers and sisters in Christ to save the nation.⁴⁷⁷

One cannot help but contrast this emotional appeal with Chafer’s early ministry with nationally-known evangelistic teams.

Chafer had ample opportunity to watch the “methods” of the high-powered evangelists of those days. J. Wilbur Chapman was applying his “machinery” to gospel preaching, organizing his meetings to the point of spotting trained personal workers in every fifth row to converge on the audience during the invitation. He stormed the big cities with 25 evangelists holding simultaneous meetings. For a while, Chafer was one of the 25.”⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ John D. Hannah, “The Early Years of Lewis Sperry Chafer,” *BSac* 144, no. 573 (1987): 15.

Chafer strongly disapproved of the high pressure techniques that were used in these meetings to induce a decision for Christ. In fact, he disapproved so much that he later condemned altar calls, labeling them “a false issue,” and “a denial of the doctrine of grace.”⁴⁷⁹

The Moral Majority

Perhaps Falwell’s most enduring legacy in this effort was the creation of the Moral Majority, a “political lobbying organization.”⁴⁸⁰ The Moral Majority had a fourfold platform: “pro-life, pro-traditional family, pro-moral, and pro-American (that included favoring a strong national defense and support for the state of Israel).”⁴⁸¹ The purpose of this organization was to organize the millions of Americans ignored by the media who agreed with these issues.⁴⁸²

Just as Falwell’s newfound commitment to political action required a re-thinking of his understanding of the mission of the church, so the birth of the Moral Majority required a re-thinking of his concept of theological separation. Falwell admits that “[s]ince becoming a Christian I had lived a rather separatist life. I believed that ‘being yoked with unbelievers’ for

⁴⁷⁹ Chafer, *True Evangelism*, 26.

⁴⁸⁰ Falwell, *Autobiography*, 387.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 384.

any cause was off limits.”⁴⁸³ “Any cause” included marriage, “business partnerships, and deep-rooted involvements and relationships.”⁴⁸⁴

The Moral Majority was “never intended to be an evangelistic enterprise,” nor was it “a religious movement.”⁴⁸⁵ Falwell’s goal was to organize “Baptists and Catholics, Mormons and Jews, believers and unbelievers” to bring about political change.⁴⁸⁶ Still, it is difficult to imagine the Moral Majority as anything less than a business partnership or deep-rooted involvement with others not of like faith. It is at this point that Falwell had to face his “own personal psychological barrier.”⁴⁸⁷

Despite his theological convictions, Falwell admits, “I determined to find the way it could be done.”⁴⁸⁸ The theological rationale necessary for him to set aside his separatist

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 385.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 385-86.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 389.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 386. It is troubling to see how a deep-seated theological conviction so quickly changed to a “personal psychological barrier.”

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

convictions were provided by Reformed theologian and apologist Francis Schaeffer.⁴⁸⁹

Specifically, it was Schaeffer's co-belligerency argument Falwell found persuasive.⁴⁹⁰

Schaeffer argues that a co-belligerent is different than an ally. Schaeffer is opposed to alliances with groups that have a non-Christian base. But co-belligerency is "temporary and focused at specific points."⁴⁹¹ Therefore he encourages co-belligerency and "criticized evangelicals for leaving the battle for human life to the Catholics."⁴⁹² Falwell adopted this argument to justify his retreat from his previous separatist stance.

⁴⁸⁹ Schaeffer was a Presbyterian following in the Dutch Calvinist tradition. Mark Edwards, "How Should We Then Think?" A Study of Francis Schaeffer's Lordship Principle," *WTJ* 60, no. 2 (1998): 192.

⁴⁹⁰ Falwell, *Autobiography*, 386.

⁴⁹¹ Don Sweeting, "Changing American Evangelical Attitudes Towards Roman Catholics: 1960-2000," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 7, no. 4 (2001): 26.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.* This view of co-belligerence now seems so thoroughly engrained in evangelicalism that those who oppose it are considered "extreme." "Given the cultural disaster we face, and what is at stake, it simply makes sense for men and women who share basic worldview concerns to gather strength from each other, join hands and hearts, and enter the cultural fray. On this point, all but the most extreme separatists among us would agree." R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Standing Together, Standing Apart: Cultural Co-Belligerence without Theological Compromise," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 7, no. 4 (2001): 8-9. Nevertheless, the dangers of co-belligerency are very real. "Most evangelicals are entirely happy with what Francis Schaeffer used to call 'co-belligerency' on select issues: e.g., abortion, the importance of persons, the social importance of the family, and much more. We will disagree on some social/moral issues (e.g., gambling). But recent evangelical/Roman Catholic pronouncements in this area have, ironically, done more to set back co-belligerency than to advance it. Instead of focusing on the agreed social issues, some evangelical and Roman Catholic theologians have agreed to use ambiguous language to project an image of *theological* agreement where both sides mean quite different things. Those who think that the theological issues are of minor importance in comparison with the social issues, and who feel that theological differences should be buried in order to confront the common foe of secular humanism, are delighted. In my view, they are, at best, naive. Candor, integrity, and even the

The Effects of Politics on Falwell's Ministry

Interestingly, Falwell was under no delusions about the effect the Moral Majority had on his gospel ministry: it interrupted it. While attending President Reagan's second inauguration, Falwell reflected on the previous six years of political activity. "As the President spoke I reviewed one more time why I had interrupted my own primary task of evangelism and church growth to take up my responsibility as a citizen."⁴⁹³ Having promised "five years of [his] life to political leaders in 1979," he had actually given eight, before returning to his first calling.⁴⁹⁴

moral issues are not advanced by uses of language that mask profound differences. Substantial numbers of evangelicals quite frankly feel confused and betrayed by these agreements. They point out that no generation ever defends the truth on only one front, and if the price paid for common statements on, say, abortion, is sacrifice of the evangelical understanding of the gospel, the price is too high." D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 418-19.

⁴⁹³ Falwell, *Autobiography*, 405.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid. "Two years later, in 1987, I stepped aside from the presidency of the Moral Majority and returned to my first calling at Thomas Road Baptist Church and Liberty University. I had promised five years of my life to political leaders in 1979, as they urged me to step forward and mobilize religious conservatives in America. I actually gave eight years of my life to this cause. While I shall always be a voice for the moral and social issues, I have never been confused about God's call on my life." Ibid.

Politics, however, is not so easily given up. Falwell's sermon "America Must Return to the Faith of our Fathers,"⁴⁹⁵ delivered six years⁴⁹⁶ after his "return to his first calling" and four years after the dissolution of the Moral Majority,⁴⁹⁷ is a case in point. Falwell's five point outline is as follows.

First, "there can be no restoration for America unless we know who we are."⁴⁹⁸ Consisting mostly of quotations,⁴⁹⁹ Falwell attempts to show that the United States is a Christian nation. Second, "those persons who reject America's Christian heritage are accountable to God."⁵⁰⁰ In this section Falwell levels (much deserved) criticism against

⁴⁹⁵ Jerry Falwell, "America Must Return to the Faith of Our Fathers," (Lynchburg, Va.: Liberty University, 1993). This message is a follow up to a previous message entitled, "Our Children Must Be Told: America is a Christian Nation." Ibid., 2.

⁴⁹⁶ This sermon was delivered "on February 28, 1993 at the Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia, and aired nationally on the Old Time Gospel Hour Television Network March 21, 1993." Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ "On 10 June 1989, Falwell announced that 'our mission is accomplished' and dissolved the Moral Majority, effective 31 August 1989." *Dictionary of American History* (Encyclopedia.com, 2003), s.v. "Moral Majority" http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Moral_Majority.aspx#1 (accessed March 30, 2016).

⁴⁹⁸ Falwell, "America Must Return," 3.

⁴⁹⁹ Falwell quotes Woodrow Wilson, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Horace Greeley, Daniel Webster, Patrick Henry, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, Harry S. Truman, and Noah Webster.

⁵⁰⁰ Falwell, "America Must Return," 6. It is particularly unfortunate that Falwell ignores Paul's admonition in Rom 13:7 to give honor to whom honor is owed. Speaking of the sitting president and first lady, Falwell says, "And now, this 42nd President and his Mother Superior, Hillary Rodham Clinton, are outdistancing the Supreme Court in their anti-Christian programs and endeavors." Ibid., 7. This is one of the dangers of democracy,

President Clinton's policies concerning abortion and homosexuality. Third, "all American citizens will be punished for the ungodly actions of our leaders."⁵⁰¹ Fourth, "we must believe that national reform is possible."⁵⁰² Falwell lists three action items to accomplish this: 1) "we must aggressively resist the agenda of radical minorities", 2) "we must reclaim our public schools," and 3) "we must quickly build the largest and finest Christian school system in history."⁵⁰³

What is notably absent from this sermon thus far is any reference to the gospel as a basic need of the sinner, society, or even as a means of social reform. Falwell's fifth point promises to address this, but sadly, does not. His final point is "we must evangelize America beyond any past efforts."⁵⁰⁴ This is by far the shortest section of the sermon. As this section is so brief, the majority of what was said will be quoted below.

As the Pastor for the past 37 years of the 22,000-member Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, I have freshly committed myself to evangelizing our own Central Virginia population. With more than 200 television stations now carrying the Old Time Gospel Hour worldwide, I am recommitted to

according to Darby. "Even popular religious preaching" will not be afraid to "[despise] government, says the apostle, presumptuous, self-willed, not afraid to speak evil of dignities." Darby, *Collected Writings*, 32:334.

⁵⁰¹ Falwell, "America Must Return," 9.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12-13. A major rationale for promoting Christian schools is that it would require children to read the Constitution and The Federalist Papers. *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

giving the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. As I have stated earlier, we must renew our vows to provide Christian education for our young people. New Testament evangelization of the five billion souls on this planet must be a renewed first priority for every believer and every local church.

This commitment to world evangelization and political involvement is not a new doctrine in America. Action must be taken immediately by all who have a burden for this generation of young people.⁵⁰⁵

Evaluating this section of the sermon is, frankly, heart-rending. Falwell speaks of the thousands in his church and the number of television stations world-wide that carry his program. He renews a vow to provide Christian education to young people. In all of this there are only four lines (in the entire sermon) that address evangelism or the gospel.⁵⁰⁶ Of those four, one of them ties evangelism to politics.

While it is impossible to say whether or not this sermon is typical of Falwell's post Moral Majority preaching without a thorough review of all his sermons during this time, the fact that even one sermon exists with so little gospel emphasis is telling.⁵⁰⁷ That the sermon originates from an Independent Baptist Church with a program called "The Old Time Gospel

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 15. Following the section above, the sermon immediately concludes with a quote about politics by Charles Finney.

⁵⁰⁶ They are, 1) "I have freshly committed myself to evangelizing our own Central Virginia population," 2) "I am recommitted too giving the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world," 3) "New Testament evangelization of the five billion souls on this planet must be a renewed first priority for every believer and every local church," and 4) "This commitment to world evangelization and political involvement is not a new doctrine in America."

⁵⁰⁷ At this point it should be remembered that this sermon is a follow up to a previous sermon entitled, "Our Children Must Be Told: America is a Christian Nation."

Hour” is even more striking. One would find it difficult to believe that this is the same pastor who so eloquently preached against political action in 1965,⁵⁰⁸ if the evidence were not there.

Evaluation

That Jerry Falwell firmly adhered to TD early in his ministry is beyond question. As has been shown, his initial view of political action in and by the church is completely compatible with the general TD social and political ethic as outlined previously.

While not abandoning TD in its entirety, Falwell’s social and political ethic deviated completely from this received tradition after *Roe v. Wade*. It appears the specter of abortion drove his new theological positions. It is highly doubtful that Falwell would have made the pivot to political action had it not been for this Supreme Court decision. Put another way, one suspects his new understanding of “render unto Caesar,” and his new conviction regarding ecclesiological separation were driven by current events, not fresh exegetical insights.

Falwell recognizes that his political activities interrupted his gospel ministry. Yet even when his overt political activities were complete (i.e. after the Moral Majority), there is

⁵⁰⁸ “Believing the Bible as I do, I find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and begin doing anything else.... As a God-called preacher, I find there is no time left after I give the proper time and attention to winning people to Christ. Preachers are not called to be politicians but to be soul winners....” Falwell, “Ministers and Marches: 1965,” 59.

evidence that political concerns still interfered with this ministry. The sermon mentioned above is almost completely devoid of any gospel content.

There is little evidence that Falwell's political activity had any lasting effect. While in the short-run there seems to have been electoral consequences as a result of registering and getting new voters to the polls, the long-term goal of "turning America back to God" did not happen. One might argue that sinful policies such as support for homosexuality were slowed and support for Israel was strengthened. But these short-term victories did not turn into long-term political advantages.

It is impossible, of course, to know what would have happened if Falwell had stayed true to his convictions of 1965. What seems clear, however, is that Falwell's pivot to politics changed evangelicalism in the United States. Largely due to his efforts, many American churches and believers began to see political action as a necessary activity of the church.