

Easing the *Uneasy Conscience*: A Comparison of the Social Engagement of Carl F. H. Henry and Olin T. Binkley

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Abstract: *This essay compares the social engagement of Carl F. H. Henry and Olin T. Binkley, primarily using Henry's The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism and Binkley's Victory Unto Victory and The Churches and the Social Conscience. Henry's conscience was uneasy regarding fundamentalism's lack of social engagement in the post-war era; however, this essay argues that Olin Binkley's conscience was at ease because the post-war era provided Southern Baptists with a missionary opportunity to rebuild society through the application of the mind of Christ, interpreted by the integration of Scripture with modern scientific insights. This comparison of Binkley and Henry's short post-war books demonstrates Henry and Binkley's different approaches to social engagement. Binkley blended sociological insights with a scientific interpretation of Scripture to address social sins, whereas Henry appealed to propositional truths in the Bible's divine revelation as the source of ethics and social engagement.*

Key Words: *Carl F. H. Henry, evangelicalism, fundamentalism, Olin T. Binkley, post-war evangelicalism, progressive Southern Baptists, propositional theology, Southern Baptist social engagement, the mind of Christ*

The comparison of Carl F. H. Henry and Olin T. Binkley presents a unique case study in Baptist social engagement. They held much in common. Both were pious Christians who took their faith seriously. Both men lived long lives, stretching through most of the twentieth century. Both deeply valued their faith's social implications. They received prestigious northern educations and were instrumental in establishing two seminaries founded to engage contemporary society with the gospel—Henry joined the founding faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary, and Olin Binkley joined the early faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Their differences are just as notable. Henry (a Northern Baptist conservative) and Binkley (a Southern Baptist progressive) approached Christian social engagement differently. At his core, Henry was a philosopher whereas Binkley was an ethicist. Henry wrote much whereas Binkley

wrote little.

Although, Henry and Binkley were undoubtedly familiar with one another, there are no extant records of them having corresponded. Nevertheless, this essay seeks to place them in conversation with one another, comparing their distinct views of social engagement. When comparing these leading ethical thinkers, one wonders why Olin Binkley did not share Carl Henry's uneasy conscience. Olin Binkley's conscience was at ease because the post-war era provided Southern Baptists with a missionary opportunity to rebuild society through the application of the mind of Christ, interpreted by the integration of Scripture with modern scientific insights.

This comparison accomplishes two goals. First, it highlights Olin Binkley's overlooked contributions to the development of Baptist social engagement. Casual observers may view the comparison of Binkley to Henry as that of apples to oranges. Although Carl F. H. Henry is the better-known figure today, Binkley's name carried much weight as a leading Christian ethicist in the mid-twentieth century. For example, his 1948 *The Churches and the Social Conscience* was part of a series that included scholars from the University of California at Los Angeles, Yale University, the University of Chicago, Oberlin College, Union Theological Seminary. Binkley's inclusion in this lineup compiled of esteemed sacred and secular institutions speaks to his credibility as a leading Christian ethicist. Further, this essay highlights the progressive Southern Baptist tradition that Olin Binkley represented and is often neglected in modern scholarship, seeking to call attention to and fill that lacuna.¹

Second, this comparison focuses primarily on Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947) and Binkley's *Victory Unto Victory* (1945) and *The Churches and Their Social Conscience* (1948). Comparing these small books explores the differences between two contemporary theologians writing on the same topic at the same time from different perspectives. Carl Henry represents the fundamentalist-evangelical movement, and Olin Binkley represents the progressive Southern Baptist tradition. The comparison of their books, supplemented with their later writings and lecture notes, demonstrates Henry and Binkley's different approaches

¹ For more on progressive Southern Baptist social engagement, see John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (University of Tennessee Press, 1987); David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (The University of Press of Kentucky, 1999). See also Larry McSwain and William Lloyd Allen, *Twentieth Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics* (Mercer University Press, 2008). Interestingly, McSwain and Allen include neither Henry nor Binkley, though Binkley is mentioned in the chapter on Henlee H. Barnett.

to social engagement. Binkley blended sociological insights with a scientific interpretation of Scripture to address social sins, whereas Henry appealed to propositional truths in the Bible's divine revelation as the source of ethics and social engagement.

Introducing the Context and Characters

The Post-War Cultural Context

On August 6 and 9, 1945, the United States of America unleashed the destructive forces of atomic bombs on Japan. The preceding horrors of two world wars, a world-wide economic depression, and the Holocaust, proved the optimism of postmillennialism and theological liberalism shortsighted. These theological traditions failed to solve the world's problems. Significant parts of Europe and Asia required post-war reconstruction. Yet these regions were not alone; American Christianity also underwent reconstruction. Neither fundamentalism's emphasis on separatism nor Protestant liberalism's emphasis on humanity's innate goodness could address the horrors of war, economic depression, and genocide. Fundamentalism and liberalism were forced to reconcile with a new cultural moment.

The need for Christian engagement in the new cultural moment coincided with the renewed rise of fundamentalism. As the fundamentalist movement gained prominence in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it began to experience schism. Although the movement was never truly united, it split into distinct ideological camps in the mid-1950s. One side of the movement wished to separate itself from perceived corrupt and modernistic denominations. The other side retained a commitment to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but instead of separating from culture, this group sought to influence and transform culture.² This split led to the distinction between the terms "fundamentalist" and "evangelical."³ Fol-

² George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2022), 289.

³ "Evangelicalism" is a loaded term. This study relies on David Bebbington's quadrilateral to define evangelicalism. Bebbington understands evangelicals to emphasize (1) Biblicism, (2) crucicentrism, (3) conversionism, and (4) activism. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 1989), 2–3.

lowing this split, "fundamentalist" referred to the separatists, and "evangelical" referred to those who sought to engage the culture.⁴ As the intellectual leader of this group, Carl Henry helped centralize and unite evangelicals around "a powerful and culturally influential white male elite."⁵ Simultaneously, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) entered a heyday of unprecedented growth and expansion. Between 1942 and 1963, the SBC's membership doubled from 5.4 million to 10.4 million.⁶ Southern Baptist elites who led the Convention's entities were theological progressives. Olin Binkley stood tall among these progressives as a leading thinker, optimistic that Southern Baptist progressives could lead in rebuilding society.

Carl F. H. Henry

Born to German immigrants on January 22, 1913, Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry grew up in Long Island, New York. He graduated from Wheaton College with a BA (1938) and an MA (1941), and from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary with a BD (1941) and ThD (1945), and he later completed a PhD at Boston University.⁷ As a student at Wheaton College, the young academic became frustrated with the assigned textbook for his ethics course. The book, J. S. Mackenzie's *A Manual of Ethics*, "skirted the ethics of revelation," allotting only one page to the discussion of Christian ethics and only referencing Jesus Christ in relation to Buddha and Kant.⁸ His doctoral studies of ethics at Boston University "swung the pendulum in the opposite direction" toward idealism with a "gentlemanly distaste" for ethics rooted in revealed religion.⁹ These experiences led

⁴ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 290. This split occurred in the mid-1950s. Thus, literature written in the early twentieth century often uses "fundamentalist" and "evangelical" synonymously. The words continued to grow with the complexity of the movement, thus contemporary usage no longer corresponds with the mid-to-late twentieth-century use of the terms.

⁵ Matthew Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 195.

⁶ Anthony Chute, Nathan Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (B&H Academic, 2015), 262.

⁷ James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study* (Mercer University Press, 2009), 515–16.

⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Eerdmans, 1957), 16.

⁹ Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 16.

Henry to formulate a system of Christian ethics based on “a comprehensive revealed ethic, full-orbed as Christian Theology.”¹⁰

In 1947, Henry helped establish Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, where he and his colleagues sought to reform the fundamentalist movement.¹¹ Henry taught at Fuller until 1956 when Billy Graham invited him to become the editor of *Christianity Today*. He edited the periodical for eleven years but left the organization over differing visions for the magazine’s direction.¹² The next era of Henry’s life proved very productive. He taught in various institutions, started researching and writing *God, Revelation and Authority*, and advocated for evangelical social action through World Vision.¹³ Through personal contact and his writings, Henry mentored a new generation of evangelical leaders, providing them with a philosophical and theological framework for engaging culture from a theologically conservative perspective. Henry died in his sleep at his home in Watertown, Wisconsin on December 7, 2003, at the age of 90.¹⁴

Olin T. Binkley

Born August 8, 1908, Olin Trivette Binkley grew up in rural Nash County, North Carolina. His parents were farmers, and his father was a bi-vocational Baptist pastor. Binkley enrolled at Wake Forest College at age sixteen and graduated in 1928 with a double major in English and Greek.¹⁵ Wake Forest College President William Louis Poteat taught Binkley biological evolution and its compatibility with Scripture, leaving a

¹⁰ Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 16. See also Richard J. Mouw, “Toward a Full-Orbed Evangelical Ethic: The Pioneering Contribution of Carl F. H. Henry,” in *Essential Evangelicalism*, ed. Matthew J. Hall and Owen Strachan (Crossway, 2015). Mouw’s chapter expands on Henry’s quote in *Christian Personal Ethics*.

¹¹ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1987), 57.

¹² R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Carl F. H. Henry,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Broadman, 1990), 521.

¹³ “Carl F. H. Henry,” 521.

¹⁴ Beth Spring, “Carl F. H. Henry, Theologian and First Editor of Christianity Today, Dies at 90,” *Christianity Today*, December 1, 2003. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2003/12/carl-fh-henry-theologian-and-first-editor-of-christianity-today/>. Oddly, the *Christianity Today* website dates the article as December 1, 2003, though Henry did not die until December 7, 2003.

¹⁵ Olin T. Binkley, “Oral History Interview of Olin T. Binkley,” by John F. Loftis, 1978. Archives and Special Collections, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

lasting impression on Binkley.¹⁶ He moved to Louisville, Kentucky and completed his Bachelor of Divinity degree at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. At both Wake Forest College and Southern Seminary, Binkley learned a critical interpretation of Scripture and a social application of the gospel. After seminary, he completed a PhD in sociology and ethics at Yale Divinity School in 1933.

Binkley joined the Wake Forest College faculty, teaching until 1944 when he became professor of Christian Ethics and Sociology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.¹⁷ Upon the establishment of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) in Wake Forest, North Carolina in 1950, the SEBTS Board of Trustees asked Binkley to be the seminary’s first president. Binkley declined but joined the SEBTS faculty in 1952 as Professor of Christian Ethics and Sociology.¹⁸

The Southeastern faculty looked to Binkley as the intellectual leader of the seminary. Olin Binkley, not President Sydnor Stealey, delivered the opening lecture of the seminary’s second term in the Fall of 1952. Binkley spoke on “the fundamental emphases in [Southeastern’s] educational program.”¹⁹ He indicated that the seminary existed to teach “a coherent interpretation of the Christian message and mission in a responsible society.” Continuing, Binkley stated the administration and faculty hoped that Southeastern “will help to advance the gospel of Christ and the ethic of righteousness and love which issues out of it.”²⁰ From the beginning, SEBTS was missional, and that mission contained a social application of the gospel.²¹ Binkley’s vision of social engagement marked the seminary’s

¹⁶ Binkley Oral History. Binkley’s dissertation, which was inspired by Poteat, is entitled “The Anti-evolution Movement in Relation to Public Education in the United States.” For a new treatment of Poteat, see Paul A Sanchez, *New Christianity for the New South: William Louis Poteat and Liberal Religion in the Baptist South* (The University of South Carolina Press, 2026).

¹⁷ Binkley Oral History.

¹⁸ Keith Harper, Josh S. Pruitt, and Faith Steele, *Building a Great Commission Seminary: Different by Design: A Brief History of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary* (Southeastern, 2025), 31–34, 50–51.

¹⁹ Olin T. Binkley, “Fundamental Emphases,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 4, 1952.

²⁰ Binkley, “Fundamental Emphases.”

²¹ “Missional” is a contested term. In this essay, “missional” means that Southeastern was founded with Christian missions in mind. However, the school’s understanding of what comprises missions changed over time. At its founding, Southeastern understood Christian missions to contain an element of

understanding of mission.

Southeastern's trustees elected Binkley as the school's first dean in 1958 and its second president in 1964. Theologically, Binkley was neither liberal nor fundamentalist; he held evangelical commitments to gospel proclamation and adhered to neo-orthodox theology with a social gospel ethic.²² Binkley retired as president of Southeastern in 1974, and he retained the title of president emeritus until his death on August 27, 1999, at the age of 91.²³

Whereas Henry's influence is seen as a writer and public theologian, Binkley's influence is seen most clearly in the academic structures he built. Binkley's greatest contribution was shaping Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary into the progressive Southern Baptist educational institution. As seminary professor and administrator, Binkley primarily produced students who took his ethical framework into their pulpits, communities, and classrooms. Leading twentieth-century Southern Baptist ethicist Henlee H. Barnett credited Olin Binkley as the "most influential figure" in his intellectual development.²⁴

Theological Context of the Twentieth Century

Modernism

Olin Binkley existed squarely in the progressive Wake Forest College tradition that sought to reconcile faith and science to appeal to the intellect of modern humanity. Although Binkley held strong evangelical sym-

social Christianity. Southeastern's early faculty understood "mission" to include elements of societal transformation. They affirmed that the gospel redeems humankind and that it speaks to social ills. For more, See Harper, Pruitt, and Steele, *Building a Great Commission Seminary*, 243–45.

²² Josh S. Pruitt, "A Rural Social Gospel: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's Church-Community Development Program as a Means of Southern Regional Development, 1953–1978" (MA thesis, Adams State University, 2025), 44–52. See also Harper, Pruitt, and Steele, *Building a Great Commission Seminary*, 31.

²³ Lee Weeks, "Southeastern's 2nd President, Olin T. Binkley, dies at age 91," *Baptist Press*, August 27, 1999. <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/southeasterns-2nd-president-olin-t-binkley-dies-at-age-91/>.

²⁴ Ronald D. Sisk, "Henlee Hilux Barnett (1911–2004): Principlist in the Southern Seminary Tradition," in *Twentieth Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics*, ed. Larry McSwain and William Lloyd Allen (Mercer University Press, 2008), 82. See also See Henlee Hilux Barnett, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: My Story* (Mercer University Press, 2004), 49–53. Barnett studied under Binkley at Wake Forest College, and Binkley supervised Barnett's doctoral studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

pathies, he had one foot planted in modernism and emphasized a "reasonable and righteous" faith.²⁵ He felt that modernism emphasized human intellect at the cost of personal faith. Binkley valued science and an intelligent interpretation of the Bible, but he also valued the Bible itself. Although not a full-fledged modernist, Binkley was modernistic. For Binkley, modernism was not a threat; it was a tool that could be used effectively.

Binkley epitomized post-war Southern Baptist progressivism. Mid-twentieth-century Southern Baptist progressive theology limited the scope of Scripture's inspiration to the religious sphere. This narrow view of inspiration allowed progressives to present Christianity as credible to the modern scientific mind while maintaining reverence for Jesus and the Bible. Notably, Southern Baptist progressives emphasized the social application of the gospel, especially in civil rights, income inequality, social welfare, and the peace movement.²⁶ This emphasis is seen in Binkley's social ethic.

Although Binkley expressed some comfort with modernism, Henry strongly opposed it. In *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, he stated that fundamentalists proclaimed the gospel but had neglected its social implications. Modernists, however, had dropped the supernatural aspects of the gospel while retaining *only* the gospel's social teachings.²⁷ Although this assessment is overly simplistic, Henry's point is relevant: both fundamentalism and modernism had neglected important aspects of Christianity. According to Henry, both modernism and progressive Baptist theology failed to recognize the authority of the Bible as God's self-revelation.

Resurgent Fundamentalism

The fundamentalist movement retreated from the public eye, losing its momentum after infamous Scopes Trial (1925), but it spent the 1930s and 1940s building interdenominational coalitions to combat modernism within established Protestant denominations. During this interlude between the Scopes Trial and the foundation of the National Association of

²⁵ Olin Binkley, Note, no date, Olin T. Binkley Papers, MS 460 Box 22, Folder 1, Special Collections & Archives, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N.C., USA (hereafter WFU Archives).

²⁶ Gregory A. Wills, "Progressive Theology and Southern Baptist Controversies of the 1950s and 1960s," *SBJT* 7.1 (Spring 2003): 13.

²⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Eerdmans, 1947), 18.

Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942, many fundamentalists focused their attention on building institutional networks of Bible institutes, radio programming, and parachurch organizations.²⁸ Fundamentalists fought to preserve doctrinal purity in essential Christian doctrines: Jesus's virgin birth, his miracles, his bodily resurrection, his substitutionary atonement, his second coming, and the authority of Scripture—especially the inerrancy of Scripture.²⁹

Olin Binkley expressed concern over resurgent fundamentalism, especially in the US South. Carl Henry's ministry primarily focused in the northern and western United States, but Binkley's concerns likely still applied. Binkley noticed three trends in religious thought impacting the US South: resurgent fundamentalism, defensive liberalism, and the new orthodoxy.³⁰ Binkley held varying degrees of sympathy with aspects of each of these trends. Nevertheless, "mature religious thinkers" needed to respond to those movements by encouraging "an affirmative attitude toward religious faith and a deeper perception of its relation to scientific and intellectual disciplines."³¹ Mature Christian leaders needed "to clarify the role of the church in its community" by bringing "the mind of Christ effectively to bear upon personal, political, and economic decisions," advised Binkley. Going further, he charged intellectual leaders to replace "fear-motivated behavior" and "to confront a radically secularized situation in which a new society is emerging with a Christian interpretation of

²⁸ Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 3. Matthew Sutton has contested this claim. See Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). Although Sutton seeks to downplay the importance of the Scopes Trial in fundamentalism (p. xiii), he later refers to the trial as having a "central role in facilitating the redefinition of fundamentalism" (p. 176). Further, Sutton writes, "Despite the claims of post-World War II evangelicals such as Carl Henry, fundamentalists never expressed indifference to the world around them ... they never retreated" (p. xiii). Nevertheless, one is hard-pressed to discount Carl Henry's firsthand account of the changing tides of fundamentalism. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* serves as a primary source document proving fundamentalism's lack of social engagement. Regarding whether fundamentalists had retreated from engaging society, this essay sides with Henry's account of fundamentalism's failure to engage the cultural challenges of post-war America found in *Uneasy Conscience* over Sutton's assertions.

²⁹ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1987), 4.

³⁰ Olin Binkley, "A Subject for Research: Religion in the South," MS 460, Box 45, Folder 2, WFU Archives. Notably, Binkley crossed out "the new orthodoxy" and replaced it with "critical orthodoxy."

³¹ Binkley, "A Subject for Research."

history and a positive, prophetic message."³² Binkley's statement seems targeted toward fundamentalism's escapism and liberalism's comfort with secular society. Both Carl Henry and Olin Binkley offered alternative methods of engaging the post-war culture.

A Comparison of Carl Henry and Olin Binkley's Social Engagement

Henry and Binkley's Books on Social Engagement

Carl Henry was a prolific writer, but his *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* may be his most succinct work, calling for evangelical social engagement. Although his six-volume *God, Revelation, and Authority* details his mature understanding of social engagement, *The Uneasy Conscience* provides an early glimpse at Henry's thinking during the mid-to-late 1940s. During that same period, Olin Binkley wrote two short books outlining his vision of social engagement. In 1945 Binkley wrote *From Victory Unto Victory*, and in 1948 he wrote *The Churches and the Social Conscience*. Although both Henry and Binkley emphasized the church's need for social engagement, comparing their post-war works provides helpful insight into their distinct understandings of social engagement.

The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism

In his 1947 preface to *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Carl Henry noted that, in the post-war era, "The hour is ripe ... for a rediscovery of the Scriptures and of the meaning of the Incarnation for the human race."³³ Indeed, Henry's conscience was troubled because fundamentalists—people who had established themselves as biblicists—had failed to apply the teachings of the Bible to the problems facing contemporary society. Too often, fundamentalist social engagement had been limited to reactionism and escapism.³⁴

Contrary to perception, Henry argued that fundamentalists did possess a social ethic, though it had been neglected.³⁵ By definition, the fundamentalist (and later the neo-evangelical) movement defined itself by a commitment to the authoritative and inerrant Word of God, but Henry observed that the movement had no social plan to address the evils of the

³² Binkley, "A Subject for Research."

³³ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Eerdmans, 2003 reprint), xvi.

³⁴ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 3.

³⁵ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 13.

world.³⁶ Liberal Christians had retained an emphasis on social reform but had dropped the supernatural aspects of Scripture. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, maintained an emphasis on the gospel and full biblical authority, but they had stopped emphasizing the gospel's social implications.³⁷ Henry felt that in fundamentalism, the gospel had been divorced from social reform, leaving "the Christian social imperative ... in the hands of those who understand it in sub-Christian terms."³⁸

By the time he wrote *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry had lived through two world wars, a worldwide economic depression, and the use of atomic bombs. Theological liberalism's insistence that the world and humanity were becoming better "had been violently declared false."³⁹ Fundamentalists could no longer simply rail against personal sins; social sins were influencing the world negatively.⁴⁰ The time had come—indeed, it had passed—for fundamentalists to address totalitarianism, racism, and oppressive labor practices among other social ills.⁴¹ "The modern crisis is not basically political, economic or social," wrote Henry, "it is religious."⁴² The solution was not building new social structures, as the liberals had attempted. Rather, the solution was "the proclamation of redeeming grace to sinful humanity."⁴³ Henry affirmed that gospel proclamation provided the solution to society's problems.

Henry believed that if Christians who valued biblical authority "holds itself aloof from the present world predicament, it is doomed to a much reduced role."⁴⁴ Fundamentalists could not simply retreat into their own camps and ignore the world's problems. Separation was not the answer; biblical social engagement rooted in gospel proclamation answered society's questions. They needed to unite with those outside their fundamentalist echo chamber to transform society. Nevertheless, the evangelical gospel "is the most pertinent message" in post-war society.⁴⁵ Henry opposed the separatism common among some fundamentalist, emphasizing the centrality of the gospel in social engagement.

Henry's social engagement is best summarized in his own words:

³⁶ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 2.

³⁷ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 18–19.

³⁸ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 39.

³⁹ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 1.

⁴⁰ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 7.

⁴¹ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 63.

⁴² Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 83.

⁴³ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 84.

⁴⁴ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 63.

⁴⁵ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 85.

Is there political unrest? Seek first, not a Republican victory, or labor victory, but the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Then there will be added ... political rest. Is there economic unrest? Seek first, not an increase of labor wages coupled with shorter hours ... but the divine righteousness; this latter norm will involve fairness for both labor and management.... There is no satisfying rest for modern civilization if it is found in a context of spiritual unrest.... The gospel of redemption is the most pertinent message for our modern weariness, and that many of our other so-called solutions are quite impertinent, to say the least.⁴⁶

Indeed, the undiluted gospel as proclaimed in the authoritative Bible offered the solution to society's problems. Carl Henry believed that the gospel would redeem the sinner, and the sinner could affect Christian social reform within the society.

From Victory Unto Victory and The Churches and the Social Conscience

Olin Binkley did not share Henry's uneasy conscience. Binkley's conscience was at ease because the post-war era provided Southern Baptists with a missionary opportunity to rebuild society through the application of the mind of Christ, interpreted by the integration of Scripture with modern scientific insights. Binkley's post-war set of books presents a progressive Southern Baptist alternative to Carl F. H. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.

When World War II ended in 1945, Broadman Press published Binkley's second book, *From Victory Unto Victory*. Binkley believed that, in rebuilding post-war society, "the supreme task in this new day is the Christian missionary enterprise," and that American Christians were responsible to expand and express Christianity at home and abroad.⁴⁷ Although military strength helped win the war, Christian social ethics were necessary to rebuild society. Binkley observed that "fundamental changes come, not through surface manipulations and compromises [in politics, economics, and military arrangements], but through the spiritual regeneration of human nature and the renewal of human life by the Spirit of God."⁴⁸ Here, Binkley and Henry agree. They differ, however, in the application of that sentiment.

In a post-war world, Binkley believed Christians had a three-fold mis-

⁴⁶ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 85.

⁴⁷ Olin T. Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory* (Broadman, 1945), Foreword, np.

⁴⁸ Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 24.

sion. First, the Christian's primary objective is "to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear in saving power upon the lives of people."⁴⁹ However, Binkley noted elsewhere that "a person is not completely evangelized until he has the Christian attitude toward God, himself, others, and things."⁵⁰ Evangelism was primary in social engagement, but evangelism was not alone.

Second, Christians should educate others "in the mind of Christ."⁵¹ For Binkley, "the mind of Christ" comprised the entirety of Christian ethics and repeatedly used the phrase in reference to his understanding of social engagement. The "mind of Christ" was more than a scriptural reference for Binkley; it was the essence of the gospel. The mind of Christ is the "message of Jesus, the revelation of love and truth."⁵² Pursuing the mind of Christ entailed studying Scripture and through observing the social sciences. Pointing toward his modernistic tendencies, Binkley noted that the mind of Christ "includes the insights and the laws which the saints and the scientists have discovered."⁵³ However the saint and scientist were not alone in discerning the mind of Christ; the Holy Spirit's mission is to guide Christians "into a deeper understanding of the mind of Christ."⁵⁴ Binkley's emphasis on the Holy Spirit in discerning truth is prominent in his writings.

Third, Christians should provide social relief. Christians "cannot disregard the hunger, the suffering, the loneliness, the ignorance, and the bondage of men and women for whom Christ died," wrote Binkley. He emphasized that the gospel included evangelism, education, and social engagement. Through this three-pronged mission, Jesus's moral teachings could be applied to the family, community, and socioeconomic order. With this understanding, American Christians could move from victory in war to victory in social engagement. Binkley's conscience was far from uneasy; it was encouraged at the possibilities coming out of World War II.

Demonstrating his prominence as a leader in ethical thought, Binkley was selected as "a distinguished authority" by the National Foundation

⁴⁹ Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 30.

⁵⁰ Olin Binkley, Handwritten note on "Christian Sociology 91, Third Term, Christian Ethics and the Larger Social Life" Notes, circa 1944–1951, MS 460, Box 28, Folder 6, WFU Archives.

⁵¹ Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 34.

⁵² Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 34.

⁵³ Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 34.

⁵⁴ Olin Binkley, "Our Helper in World Missions," MS 460, Box 28, Folder 8, WFU Archives.

for Education in American Citizenship to contribute a volume to the Fundamental American Principles Series on Religion in 1948, just one year after the publication of Carl Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*.⁵⁵ Binkley's thesis for the book is that religion—specifically the Christian religion—is a powerful social force.⁵⁶ Christianity functions as a social control through its moral and ethical standards of conduct, and it is a determining factor in social change.

Throughout the book, Binkley offers examples of Christianity influencing society for moral good. He observed that following the American Revolution, crime and immorality increased due to the prominence of Hume and Paine's teachings.⁵⁷ The "Evangelical Awakening" at the dawn of the nineteenth century, however, brought a renewed emphasis on Christian morality through benevolence societies, antislavery efforts, and enterprises focused on temperance, prohibition, and humanitarianism.⁵⁸ Binkley's brief overview of Christian morality's influence on the United States is very brief and very selective. Nevertheless, his point remains: Christianity is a powerful social force.

Continuing further, Binkley considers the social gospel movement in rather friendly terms. Binkley considered it a "minority movement" within the church that sought to recover the "social emphasis [found] in early Christianity."⁵⁹ He understood the social gospel as exemplified by Walter Rauschenbusch to exhibit Jesus's moral insights "in the family, in the community, and in the economic order."⁶⁰ In an era coming out of economic depression and world war, such emphases were needed in American society.

Binkley was a realist; he understood that other Christians disagreed with his progressive view of social engagement. He observed that Christians disagree on the church's role in social engagement. Some believed the church must work for social betterment whereas others believed the church's primary function was to proclaim the gospel.⁶¹ Nevertheless, as

⁵⁵ Samuel R. Harrell, "Preface," in *The Churches and the Social Conscience* (National Foundation Press, 1948), v. Other scholars in the series represented distinguished intuitions such as the University of California at Los Angeles, Columbia University, Yale University, the University of Chicago, Oberlin College, and Union Theological Seminary.

⁵⁶ Olin T. Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience* (National Foundation Press, 1948), 3.

⁵⁷ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 8–9.

⁵⁸ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 8–19.

⁵⁹ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 23.

⁶⁰ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 23.

⁶¹ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 31.

a Southern Baptist leader, he understood the SBC possessed the responsibility to lead its constituency in social thought and behavior. Even though the majority of Southern Baptist church members did not share the progressive social vision, Binkley held that “a minority” could “insist that the chief social task of the churches is the development of a more sensitive social conscience among their own members.”⁶² Progressive SBC leaders believed gospel mission included the social uplift of Southern Baptist churches.

Binkley understood the Christian’s social conscience to be a powerful force in the nation’s life.⁶³ He believed the gospel could “remake human nature and human society.” His conscience was at ease. Binkley and other SBC progressives sought to apply the gospel’s teachings to lost souls and society.

The Basis of Their Social Engagement

Both Henry and Binkley believed Christians should engage culture with the gospel, yet they disagreed methodologically *how* to engage society with the gospel. Carl Henry based his social engagement in God’s self-revelation of himself in Scripture, whereas Binkley based his social engagement in the mind of Christ discerned by Scripture and science. These themes can be seen in their post-war books but is fleshed out more in their later writings and notes.

Carl Henry rooted his social engagement in God’s special revelation of himself in Scripture, which he systematized propositionally. Henry wrote, “Divine revelation is the source of all truth.”⁶⁴ At the core of Henry’s theology of social engagement is the idea that God has revealed himself to humankind in Scripture, and humanity can understand God by the propositional truths revealed therein. He understood social welfare and liberation to be consequences of gospel proclamation. Gospel proclamation can result in “the blessing and liberation of the hungry, the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed,” but the gospel itself does not liberate the hungry, poor, or oppressed.⁶⁵ Henry considered the church to be a “new social entity of regenerate humans participating in the eternal life of the kingdom.”⁶⁶ For Henry, the church addressed social needs corporately as a result of its redemption.

Binkley held that humankind’s knowledge of God comes through his

⁶² Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 34.

⁶³ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 33–34.

⁶⁴ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. I, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations* (Crossway, 1999), 1:215.

⁶⁵ Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:63.

⁶⁶ Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:69.

self-revelation through history, through Christ, through obedience to God’s will, and through the Bible.⁶⁷ Notably, Binkley uses revelatory language only in association with history and Jesus Christ. “Christ is the perfect revelation of God’s character and purpose,” wrote Binkley.⁶⁸ He understood all revelation to be special revelation. He taught that revelation “does not require the Christian mind to interpret God’s truth as identical with a human statement of it.”⁶⁹ Although Henry affirmed that God has communicated to all humanity through general revelation, only special revelation through Scripture conveys “the propositional content of God’s redemptive revelation.”⁷⁰

Binkley posited that in Jesus, “the mind of God was disclosed.”⁷¹ In his lecture notes, he wrote that “God’s supreme act of self-disclosure is seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁷² God has spoken to humanity “through his mighty acts in the history of Israel and through his Son,” and the Bible offers a record of those events.⁷³ Elsewhere, Binkley wrote, “The Bible is the book in which the self-disclosure of God . . . is recorded.”⁷⁴ Binkley’s view of inspiration is weak compared to Henry’s view. Binkley understood the Bible to be “an inspired and unique body of learning.”⁷⁵ The Holy Spirit enlivens the message and events of the Bible, giving them “meaning for us in our particular life situation.”⁷⁶ Binkley’s understanding of Scripture aligns with the experiential understanding of Scripture common among theological liberals.

Pursuing the mind of Christ provided Binkley with the standard by which Christians should engage the culture. The Bible, for Binkley, was secondary to the mind of Christ. The Bible served as a valuable tool in discerning the mind of Christ, but it was not primary. Scripture supplemented with knowledge of modern science and sociology provided the basis of Binkley’s social engagement.

⁶⁷ Olin T. Binkley, *How to Study the Bible* (Convention Press, 1969), 4–6.

⁶⁸ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 5.

⁶⁹ Olin T. Binkley, “Revelation and the Christian Faith,” in *Approaches to the Understanding of God* (Wake Forest University Press, 1977), 36.

⁷⁰ Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:460.

⁷¹ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 5.

⁷² Olin T. Binkley, “A Word Concerning Christ,” MS 460, Box 28, Folder 6, WFU Archives.

⁷³ Binkley, “A Word Concerning Christ”; Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 6.

⁷⁴ Olin T. Binkley, “Revelation and the Christian Faith,” in *Approaches to the Understanding of God* (Wake Forest University Press, 1977), 35–36 (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 9.

⁷⁶ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 26.

Though Binkley did not have a strong view of inspiration, he valued the Bible and considered it powerful. He felt that Scripture spoke to society's spiritual and social needs. Binkley believed that careful study of Scripture resulted in steadfast reverence for God, loyalty to Jesus, and devotion to the church and vocation. He understood the Bible to be a source of encouragement, comfort, and hope for the Christian.⁷⁷ However, he reduced Scripture from God's special revelation to "moral and religious insight" that can be understood "with disciplined minds in the Christian fellowship under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."⁷⁸

Binkley emphasized faith, not reason, in knowing the will of God, insisting that "The God of the Bible is not an abstraction or an idea to be known solely through an intellectual process of observation and contemplation."⁷⁹ Nevertheless, he emphasized that biblical interpreters must exercise intelligence in seeking to understand Scripture. Besmirching fundamentalism's overly emotional faith and practice, Binkley stated that intelligent biblical interpretation is necessary because intelligence exerts control over "powerful emotions," delivering readers from arrogance and helping them to understand the purpose of God.⁸⁰ An intelligent interpretation of Scripture stems from a critical, "scientific study of biblical documents *and* of human society."⁸¹

Although both Carl Henry and Olin Binkley agreed that the Christian faith speaks to social ills, they disagreed on *how* the church should speak to those issues. Binkley adapted the insights of sociology with a scientific interpretation of Scripture to address social sins. Henry appealed to the Bible's divine inspiration and propositional truth to provide humankind with truth claims by which to live.

Conclusion

Post-war reconstruction was not limited to war-ravaged countries in Europe and Asia. American Christianity also experienced something of a reconstruction following the world wars and the Great Depression. Fundamentalism's penchant for separatism and theological liberalism's optimistic hope in human goodness proved insufficient to address the needs of the atomic era. The theological traditions represented by Carl F. H. Henry—neo-evangelicalism—and Olin T. Binkley—Southern Baptist progressivism—both sought to reform the errors of fundamentalism and

⁷⁷ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 10–11.

⁷⁸ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 27.

⁷⁹ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 5.

⁸⁰ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 25.

⁸¹ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 25 (emphasis added).

liberalism and to address the social and spiritual needs of contemporary society.

Coming out of World War II, Carl Henry's conscience was uneasy. Christians who claimed to value the authority of Scripture had, in his view, failed to apply the Bible's social teachings. Simultaneously, emboldened by growth and expansion of the Southern Baptist Convention, Olin Binkley's conscience was untroubled. Post-war SBC leaders believed the time was ripe to enact a progressive, Baptist social vision. Men like Binkley recognized that the average Southern Baptist was conservative in both theology and social issues. Nevertheless, they believed the contemporary cultural moment required progressive leaders to move conservative, if not backward, churches toward "a more sensitive social conscience."⁸² The social application of the gospel required progressive Baptist leaders to enlighten fundamentalists and conservatives to the mind of Christ, which Binkley interpreted through the integration of Scripture with modern scientific insights.

⁸² Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 34.