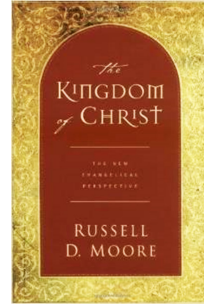


## Book Review

Russell D. Moore,  
*The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective.*  
Wheaton, IL: Crossway. 2004. 320 pp. \$21.99. Paper.  
ISBN-10: 1581346271 ISBN-13: 978-1581346275

Reviewed by, Gregory Hagg,  
The Feinberg Center for Messianic Jewish Studies, Brooklyn, NY



Most honest Christians have a nagging suspicion that they do not have all the answers. Some may not admit this, but they would be labeled extremists at the least. For example, if they were raised in a Reform tradition that equates the Kingdom of Christ with the Church, they might wonder about all the place names, promises, and predictions found in the Hebrew Scriptures that seem to describe a national entity with land, a covenant people, and a future based upon an eternal election by God. Nevertheless, they still might understand the idea of “kingdom theology” only in terms of a “kingdom soteriology” in that the presence of the spiritual Kingdom of Christ precludes any eschatological, literal, premillennial kingdom. Likewise, they might think of “kingdom ecclesiology” as only pertaining to a heavenly entity with little regard for the socio/political needs of mankind – sort of a parallel universe where the saints are in submission to the King of the Church, which is developing tangentially to the kingdom of this world.

Of course, if they were raised in the strictest form of dispensational premillennialism, they might revel in the biblical passages that predict the coming of Christ to right all wrongs, solve all social and political issues, judge all the wicked, and complete His program. When they pray “Thy kingdom come” they mean it only in

a distant eschatological way. The Kingdom of Christ for them is future. Currently, however, they have little concern with ministering to a fallen world. They, too, might disengage from socio/political concerns. They understand that Jesus currently sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, but this does not refer to the Kingdom now. It only sets the stage for His return to earth to reign for 1000 years. The nagging suspicion for them, however, is that since Jesus was so compassionate toward the disenfranchised, the lost in this fallen world, they should be concerned as well. What would Jesus do?

Perhaps the two previous extremes are weak caricatures. Nonetheless, no one has all the answers. Consensus should prevail in the Body of Messiah. The Kingdom of Christ with its distinctive New Covenant must have relevance for today and tomorrow. The Kingdom of Christ with its Millennial Rule must also have relevance for today and tomorrow. Bringing the two extremes together has been the byproduct (if not the intent) of research in covenant premillennialism and progressive dispensationalism. The intent of this enlightening book, *The Kingdom of Christ: the New Evangelical Perspective*, might be stated as “can’t we all just get along.” Evangelical consensus – focused on Kingdom Theology is the goal.

Dr. Russell D. Moore has detailed the development of this *rapprochement* in an

exceptional way. In what may be the very best treatment of this subject available, Moore's research includes about 900 extensively annotated footnotes and over 900 bibliographic entries. He accurately describes the development of an attitude of reconciliation, beginning with the altercations of the past to the prevailing spirit of respect and unity. He believes the proponents of Evangelical Theology can use the term "kingdom" in a way that seems to satisfy most and unify many. Of course, some will cry out that compromise only weakens a position. Others, however, will welcome the current state of affairs described and promoted by the author. Moore tells the story through the following outline which he uses to champion Kingdom Theology.

Toward A Kingdom Eschatology:  
The Kingdom As Already And Not Yet,

Toward A Kingdom Soteriology:  
Salvation As Holistic And Christological

Toward A Kingdom Ecclesiology:  
The Church As The Kingdom of God.

In the first chapter of the book the reader will find the stimulus behind Moore's intensive research. He is a disciple of Carl F. H. Henry who articulated a major problem that he noticed in the evangelicalism of the post World War II church, namely, the lack of social engagement. In *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947) Henry opined that evangelical theologians found themselves between two extremes, a kind of fundamentalist Christian social detachment and the liberal Social Gospel (promoted by Walter Rauchenbusch), which rejected the truth of Scripture while using the social ethics

of Protestant liberalism in political programs. He and other leaders of neo-evangelicalism challenged the church to be the salt and light that Jesus taught it to be by making a difference in the world through good works and sharing the Gospel.

Henry felt that there were two extremes within the evangelical world, both of which should be vigorously engaging non-evangelical thought. Extreme dispensationalists, on the one hand, who questioned the present reality of the Kingdom of Christ were tempted to minimize the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount (if not relegate them to a future millennium) or to refuse to recite the Lord's prayer because it had to do with another age. Extreme covenantalists, on the other hand, were tempted to focus primarily on the spiritual justification of individuals while minimizing the material or socio/political needs of people. Whether the emphasis is on a "future" kingdom or a "spiritual" kingdom, both extremes could result in disengagement with the fallen world of the here and now. Both camps could fail to minister properly because of faulty Kingdom thinking. This book is a challenge to develop a Kingdom Theology. Is it possible for all evangelicals to agree on the kingdom concept so as to bring consensus in eschatology, soteriology, and ecclesiology?

Moore attributes movement toward the middle position to the progressive dispensationalists, Robert Saucy, Darrell Bock, and Craig Blaising. Those from the covenant camp who have moved to a more centrist position are Anthony Hoekema, Vern Poythress, Edmund Clowney, and Richard Gaffin. Moore states that "the coalescence with the other tradition on various disputed points seems almost coincidental in the scholarship of both groups," (23-24). Those on the outer fringes of each position struggle with the socio/

political ramifications for the church. Some covenant thinkers fear the politicization of the church, and some dispensational thinkers ask if there is a difference between kingdom ethics and ecclesiastical ethics.

Chapter Two tackles the subject of Kingdom Eschatology. This, of course, is the topic most relevant to the theme of the first edition of the *Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies (JMJS)*, “Thy Kingdom Come.” According to Henry and Moore, too much attention, time, and energy were given to debates about the nature of the millennium and the time of the rapture among both covenant and dispensational theologians. Rather, there should be an emphasis on a present aspect of Kingdom living which will more likely influence the non-Christian world for Christ. The scholar who did the most to promote the “already but not yet” nature of the Kingdom, according to Moore, was George Eldon Ladd following the lead of such scholars as Oscar Cullmann and his inaugurated eschatology (31).

Moore provides excellent documentation for the reaction of earlier dispensational thinkers to the views of Ladd. They felt the messianic kingdom could not be inaugurated until the King returns to Jerusalem, literally. They felt that such an inaugurated eschatology was too much of a compromise between historic premillennialism and amillennialism. They felt that the throne of the kingdom has not been transported to heaven, nor has Jesus begun to rule as the Davidic king promised in the Hebrew Scriptures at His ascension. Moore quotes Charles Feinberg as saying, “That is not ‘historic’ premillennialism, but undiminished and recognizable amillennialism,” (35).

Similar reaction, however, came from the Reformed, amillennial side of the controversy with its Augustinian view that the Kingdom is a spiritual entity in which Christ is ruling

in the present day, or somehow there are disembodied souls ruling from heaven. This view left no room for an earthly kingdom, and, therefore did not answer the whole council of God with respect to kingdom teaching. Ladd faced the unwanted theological continuum of an essentially heavenly and spiritual kingdom of the amillennialists on one end, and the essentially political and futurist kingdom of the dispensational premillennialists on the other.

Moore’s next task is to demonstrate that there has been considerable progress, primarily through the Progressive Dispensationalist movement. For the reader who is interested in a cogent, brief but thorough and irenic presentation of the view he should read this treatment by Moore. Using such key passages as 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 16, Psalm 110, and Acts 2 the progressives argue that when Jesus assumed the exalted position of His session at the right hand of the Father, He essentially is sitting on the throne of David as both Lord and Christ. Therefore, Jesus’ current rule as the “head” of the church is the same as His rule as the “Messiah” of Israel. This is more than a mere spiritual form of the kingdom, it is the kingdom inaugurated.

For all of its emphasis on the “already” aspect of the Kingdom, progressives are adamant in their views that Jesus will rule on earth during a literal 1000 Kingdom. Geopolitical rewards to a reconstituted nation of Israel will be dispensed by the King as a prelude to the eternal state, the new heavens and new earth.

To Moore’s delight there has been movement from the other side of the controversy, as has been mentioned above. In the second chapter he provides significant details about Kingdom Theology as it has developed among evangelical covenant amillennial and premillennial writers. While it seems the major concessions have come

from dispensational thinkers, Moore believes that “modified” views on both sides have made this *rapprochement* possible.

In Chapter 3 Moore discusses another area in which coming together helps solve the problem of the uneasy conscience. Socio/political engagement by evangelicals will be more likely when salvation is seen as both holistic and Christological. Moore traces the development of postwar evangelical soteriology as it is opposed by the liberal left which rejected fundamental notions of total depravity and substitutionary atonement. However, among those Christian theologians who retained Biblical convictions, there was a sense in which redemption was dichotomized into a heavenly, “spiritual” salvation of traditional covenant theology versus an emphasis on the cosmic purposes of God including the new earth. Older dispensational thinkers were thought to separate the spiritual salvation of the church from the material salvation of the nation of Israel. Regardless of how accurate this portrayal is, Moore suggests that the end result was the lack of social engagement by both extremes in evangelical theology.

Things are changing. Many have come to a centrist view on the holistic and Christological nature of soteriology. The emerging evangelical consensus of Kingdom Soteriology here runs parallel to the Kingdom Eschatology. Personal regeneration should lead to reforming societal problems. Moore shows how progressive dispensationalism is saying the same thing. It is clear as he traces the development that avoidance of the Social Gospel was paramount to earlier dispensationalists who would speak of manning the lifeboats rather than polishing the brass on the Titanic. However, Kingdom Soteriology does not distinguish between Kingdom purposes (of Israel) and salvation

purposes (of the church). Political action, social action, and structural improvement of the human community serves to ease the uneasy conscience. It is a unified Kingdom concept and a unified salvation for one people of God that makes this possible.

In Chapter 4 the logical progression continues. If the Kingdom is already inaugurated, and if salvation includes both personal redemption and the cosmic purposes of redeeming the world, then the church has a mandate to engage in socio/political concerns as a kingdom community. Moore mentions the development of evangelical seminaries reacting to the modernism of the liberal denominations. Both from the dispensational side and the Reformed covenantal side of the spectrum came trained pastors of churches and leaders of parachurch ministries. But lack of cohesion in ecclesiology added to the lack of strength in evangelical engagement with the world. Regardless of differing opinions, Moore argues that the Church is the Kingdom of God.

Again, the emphasis of Moore’s book is that consensus is occurring as progressive dispensationalists and modified covenantalists honestly evaluate the weaknesses of their past proponents and embrace a Kingdom Theology which unifies genuine believers in a common cause that is true to the Word of God and the eschatological, soteriological, and ecclesiological purposes of God.

This work must be highly recommended for all who seek to understand the development of thought among evangelical theologians, especially from the post war era to the present. Moore successfully documents an incredible array of views that are both faithfully presented and carefully analyzed. While many have learned of these things in a piecemeal fashion, Russell Moore has organized the arguments and

traced the trajectory of the subject matter in a way that excels other efforts to do so.

Clearly, all will not agree with the conclusions he draws, especially concerning the value or even the biblical defense of this growing consensus between progressive dispensationalism and modified covenantalism. Many will continue to ask if such thinking does not lead to a supersessionism that ignores the relevance of the “unbelieving” nation of Israel today. Some will not be satisfied with the terminology used to reconcile the different views. Others will ask about the role of the Holy Spirit in the already but not yet kingdom. Some will wonder what limitations there are on kingdom ethics in the church of today. The questions will continue to be raised, but this contribution by Russell Moore will advance the discussion in a wonderful way.

