Greetings once again in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let me invite you to join me in prayer as we start. Let us pray. Good and gracious Lord, we thank you for the great privilege of studying your work in the world. And we ask that you would be with us today guiding us by your Spirit that all that we say and everything we think together will be honoring to your name, for it’s in that name we pray. Amen.

Today I want us to think together about the two major renewal movements which emerged in the late 1930s and 1940s following the collapse of fundamentalism and modernism at the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s. You will recall I suspect from our earlier discussions the basic outlines of this famous fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the fact that these two great movements emerged in the nineteenth century: fundamentalism on the one side, modernism on the other. In the early part of this century, these two great forces came to loggerheads with one another. And in the 1920s, on many different levels they did battle for the minds of the American people for the allegiance of the church for the very social structures upon which they built their life.

The result of these bitter and elongated battles was that both movements polarized. They took extreme positions as over against one another. And this ultimately led to their collapse in the late 1920s and into the 1930s. They collapsed for different reasons. The modernists or liberals collapsed because their own philosophy and understanding of life was not sufficient to deal with some of the realities of the new century. World War I raised serious questions about their affirmation about human goodness. The crash of 1929 raised questions about the problem and the possibility of progress. The Depression of the 1930s with its gnawing difficulties for many people raised serious questions about the modernist sense of optimism about the future. For these and a variety of other reasons, liberalism tended to fall apart. Fundamentalism failed for very different reasons. I think
basic among them was this lack of love or charity which marked the movement. They became all too frequently bitter, crusty, reactionary people. And I tried to suggest in an earlier lecture that what we need today is not more crusty, unhappy Christians but more joyful people of faith, those who spread the good news because in fact it is good news and who live according to the Scriptures because they bring wholeness and health and vitality and joy and reconciliation to life.

So for very different reasons, these two movements fell apart. And yet out of their ashes like a kind of modern-day phoenix emerges: two new renewal movements out of the very difficult Depression of the 1930s, a depression which was not only economic as most of us know it but was also profoundly spiritual a time of enormous depression in the life of the church and among Christian men and women. Out of that difficulty, as so often happens by the grace of God, renewal emerged. And it came in the form of two new resurgent movements. Out of the ashes of a collapsed liberalism came what we call neo-orthodoxy. Out of the ashes of a collapsed fundamentalism came what we call neo-evangelicalism. I want to talk about neo-orthodoxy and then neo-evangelicalism as we discuss these matters today.

Let’s begin with this neo-orthodox renewal which is a kind of back-to-the-Bible movement in a sense among old liberal or modern forces. Christianity has always been recognized as a historical faith. Old Testament Israel is presented to us in the Scriptures as a people living within the context of an actual historic setting or a series of settings. And they pass through actual historical time and were involved in genuine historical events. The same is true for Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who’s reflected in the New Testament in the words of the evangelists as a real historical person, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.

This essential commitment to the historical nature of the faith led a number of very gifted biblical scholars during the nineteenth century to see if they couldn’t reconstruct the historical life of Jesus. This became known as the quest for the historical Jesus, and it is narrated for us perhaps in its best-known form by Albert Schweitzer in his book of that title, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. It started in Germany in Hamburg with Professor Reimarus in what came to be called his quest for this reconstructed Jesus. It drew into its ranks people of the caliber of David Strauss and
Adolph Harnack, . . . and a host of others. Now of course many people before the nineteenth century had written accounts of Christ’s early life. Yet it wasn’t until the nineteenth century with all of the new tools of scholarship which had been emerging in Europe and here in America, these new tools of criticism that were employed with any rigor upon this central question about who Jesus was as a historical person.

Furthermore, there was a development in history of the understanding of that discipline as a science. And this is perhaps best tied to the work of Leopold von Ranke. Now von Ranke suggested that one could reconstruct the historical past with a scientific accuracy. It was possible to get to this kind of objective history. You put all of these elements together, this growing interest in the academic disciplines of criticism, the desire to reconstruct the historical life of Jesus, and the understanding of history in the von Rankean fashion. And you have the basic foundation upon which this movement begins to build. With critical precision these folk attempted to approach the documents of the New Testament eliminating that which they did not feel squared with their scientific assumptions, cutting out that which they could not substantiate with complete objectivity in the von Rankean sense. What they produced was essentially frustration, and many of them gave up in despair. More like plastic surgeons of a sort, they succeeded only in remaking the image of Jesus over into the kind of liberal ideals which they felt they wanted to affirm. The very heart of supernaturalism was cut out of the Christian message.

This was a major problem especially for theological students in Germany and throughout Europe at this time who were studying under these very teachers and who found that when they got into the churches, they had little to preach. If you eliminate the supernatural, the miraculous, that unusual breaking into history of the God of the universe, if it becomes simply that which you can verify by normal objective means, you don’t have much to preach. And you have very little to counsel with when people have need. In fact that is exactly the existential problem facing folk like Karl Barth and others in Europe at this time. The way out was given through the work of Martin Kahler, a little-known but very important figure in this development. He developed the distinction between what he called *historie* using that German term, those historical facts which could be objectively verified in the von Rankean sense, and *Geschichte*, the kind of history which had existential meaning. It was the affirmations of faith, the
commitments of a believing community. It could be understood only through participation. Therefore, you take a phrase like “Jesus died for my sins” and you can get at the first part of that “Jesus died” through historie because you could establish beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus actually lived and died. But to be able to say that Jesus died for my sins, that salvific element, one needed Geschichte. You can’t affirm that by objective history. You can only understand that through the affirmations of faith.

Now you see that distinction. Historie, Kahler argued, could not touch the real significance of life and ministry through Christ. The questers were involved in a useless and in fact futile project, he felt. One must rather seek for the understanding of Geschichte, that special kind of history known only through faith. There is where you get the famous distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. And some of you have heard that or read that in various forms. The favorite verse of this group came to be 2 Corinthians 5:16. Let me read it for you. “So from now we know no one according to the flesh [this is that famous Greek term kata sarka] if indeed we knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him that way no more.”

What that meant for this group was that the old questers had destroyed the elements of the faith that were absolutely crucial for ministry by the very objectivity of their quest. And we don’t want to know Christ. We don’t want to know Jesus more particularly that way anymore. What we want to know is the affirmations of the believing community, that New Testament people of faith; not that history didn’t occur but it simply doesn’t have the kind of importance for us that the affirmations of faith ought to have. This is exactly the kind of argument that Rudolph Bultmann, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Emil Brunner, and a whole host of others were to make. These were the folk who were studying in the seminaries at this time and wanted something to preach and to teach. They came to feel that they could find it in the Scripture; that’s why this is a kind of back-to-the-Bible movement. It opened up the Scriptures once again, not in a truncated, kind of stripped-down version, but the whole of the Scriptures to be affirmed as a document of confession by the early church, not as something that one studied and picked apart and divided by a von Rankean kind of objective historie. Now you see what’s at stake here.

And they began talking about this in a variety of ways. For Barth it was the Word of God. For Bultmann it was the kerygma. For Brunner it was this personal encounter. For Gogarten it was the “I-thou”
relationship and the like. Bultmann, for example, saw Scripture as fundamentally a confessional document not basically historical. Now many have faulted Bultmann for denying the historicity of the faith. I think that’s a false criticism. The criticism should be that he simply did not value the historical sense in the full understanding of that that we have today of the biblical message. He didn’t deny it so much as disregard it. His concern was with what the early church confessed that they believed.

Therefore, one could divide between the historical life and teaching of Jesus and the *kerygma*, the proclamation of the Christian community. This is how it was possible to divide between the Easter event and the Easter faith. The event is something that you get at through *historie*. The faith is clearly there through the confessional documents of the New Testament. It’s the affirmation of the believers who believed Christ was raised from the dead. Now this has spawned a whole series of additional developments which are quite fascinating. It has spawned, among other things, a new quest for the historical Jesus, because increasingly people became dissatisfied with that easy kind of division between historical faith and confessional faith. Gunther Bornkamm, Hans Conzelmann, Ernst Kasemann, Emil Fuchs, a whole series of others have entered into this new quest for the historical Jesus starting in the 1950s even though the methodology has somewhat changed. For most of these folk it’s very clear that the early Christians believed that Christ was raised from the dead even though they may themselves deny the resurrection as an historical reality. Still it’s important for them that we not only affirm what they believe but also attempt to bridge that back to the actual historical events of Jesus’ life.

Bultmann was frustrated with this effort. He said that many of his students were returning to what he called “the fleshpots of liberalism” which had been defunct before and would lead them down the primrose path to debacle and failure again. Others, like Wolfhart Pannenburg and Jürgen Moltmann, have rejected some of those kinds of methodological directions and emphases of the new questers and have suggested that in studying events of the Scripture cannot yield that which is theologically true but historically false. Using Luke-Acts as a kind of model, the Gospels, the accounts of Jesus’ life tied in to the early beliefs and affirmations and work of the early Christian communities, that model of Luke-Acts which I think is a good one for us today, has opened up the possibility of reconnecting *historie* and *Geschichte*. I would suggest to you that virtually all historians today have
rejected any kind of von Rankean understanding of history. It hasn’t been done for years. And what we need to discover is that it’s possible for us to look not only at what people said they believed and affirmed as confessional but also the historical milieu out of which it emerged. We talk about events as acts and interpretation connected together, just as Luke-Acts is a connection of those two very important elements of the full historical nature of Christianity that it is rooted in actual happenings that occurred. If we’d been there with a camera we could have snapped them. But in addition to that, the understandings, the theological surroundings of that that give it meaning and purpose and understanding, and these come through the revelation which we find in Scriptures.

America picked up some of this European development of the new orthodoxy, this neo-orthodoxy through people like Walter Lowry and Douglas Horton, Paul Tillich, and most notably the Niebuhrs, Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr. This Niebuhr family is fascinating including their sister, Hulda, who wasn’t so much involved in this particular debate but who taught for many years in Christian education at McCormick Seminary. Reinhold, after serving as a pastor, then went to Union Theological Seminary and served there as a teacher. His brother, Richard, studied his areas of church history and then went to teach at Yale. These folk came to see the weaknesses of the old liberalism and in fact declared through their writings that the old liberalism had been weighed in the balances and found wanting. And the reason that it was found wanting is that it did not have a sufficient understanding of human sinfulness. If you affirm as the old liberals did a kind of optimistic, positive feeling about human nature that all we need to do is put it in the right context, educate people properly, and they’ll be good. They discovered what the Scripture has been teaching us for centuries, and that is that it doesn’t matter how good the context is. There’s a basic sin problem that we all struggle with. And in fact, in the words of some commentators, the Niebuhrs and others helped to bring the devil back to liberal theology. They helped to bring an understanding of depravity back to the debate.

And they put it again on the table for discussion. In short, what had been happening in Europe was a kind of bankruptcy of the old liberal understandings in terms of the stress upon the quest for this sort of objective *historie* and their theological understandings which left out the true nature of human beings, a nature which involved sinfulness, the kind of thing that Saint Augustine and Luther and others had affirmed so strongly in the past. What we
have emerging then is a new more biblically centered affirmation. And though one could critique neo-orthodoxy for its weak view of Scripture and its approach to interpretation, one might critique it for certain other emphases which are part of it. The fundamental element of neo-orthodoxy is a renewal element to allow for an avenue for old, discouraged, somewhat disenchanted liberals to reenter genuine Christianity again and to come back to Scripture and to be able to read it and preach it and teach it as a supernatural document with its fullness of emphasis upon human depravity and the need for salvation. These elements form the core of that renewal which now goes under the title of this huge movement, a catch-all movement in a sense of neo-orthodoxy. And I want to come back to that later on.

But let me turn for the remainder of our time together in this lecture to the parallel renewal which emerged out of the ashes of a collapsed fundamentalism, namely, new or neo-evangelicalism. That name was given to the movement by Harold John Ockenga and became characteristic of one of the major branches of evangelical renewal growing out of the 1920s and 1930s. This renewal needs to be seen in light of a return to revival. Remember how often renewal had come in the life of the American church through the Awakening or revival tradition. This had been true in the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, the Second Great Awakening in the nineteenth, and the third in the late nineteenth-early twentieth. Now we come to this Fourth Great Awakening which emerges in the late 1930s and comes into full blossom in the 1940s and early 1950s.

And it’s out of that new revival movement that you have a new form of revitalized evangelicalism emerging. The most notable figure in this renaissance is Billy Graham, one of the truly remarkable people of our time, one for whom I have enormous regard and appreciation. Billy Graham was born in 1918 in North Carolina, the son of a dairy farmer. His parents were members of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church General Synod. He was converted under the preaching of Mordecai Ham, a person who’s not well-remembered or known today. But in his meetings in 1934, Billy Graham was converted. In 1936 he entered Bob Jones College. And during his time there decided to transfer to Florida Bible Institute in Tampa. There, under the leadership of a number of faculty members including the dean, he experienced a much more profound commitment to Christ. He was rebaptized, ordained as a Baptist minister, and went in 1940 to Wheaton College. And then in 1949 and 1950 he came to national prominence through
the famous Los Angeles revival which is an incredibly interesting and important event and which launches at least in national significance this new evangelical movement, a movement which came eventually as we’ll see to claim the allegiance of forty, fifty, maybe sixty million Americans plus millions of others worldwide. It’s an enormous movement, and it grew out of this renaissance which came on the ashes of the collapsed fundamentalism.

Now look with me just a little bit at that if you would. There were many continuities which this new evangelicalism had with old fundamentalism and many more continuities with the older, classic form of evangelicalism which emerged in its present form in the Second Great Awakening. Theologically there were direct continuities between new evangelicalism and its parent fundamentalist body: the stress upon biblical authority, the inerrancy of Scripture, the stress upon the virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection, the return of Christ. These elements which had been so central to the theological commitments and teachings of fundamentalism were carried over and have become equally important central documents theologically for new evangelicalism.

The stress continued upon conversion as the sole means for regeneration and for the beginnings of social change, the stresses upon personal piety, the life of faithfulness and obedience, the quest for righteousness, the desire to live a holy life before God. The stress continued to be largely upon a kind of old morality as opposed to the sort of new moralities that were emerging in the 1920s and following. The movement tended to continue to be rather conservative politically, economically; and we’ll pick up that theme just a bit later.

The old fundamentalists, however, had withdrawn from a variety of different elements of life. They had withdrawn largely from the universities. Remember they had become disenchanted with schools that they felt had gone liberal, and they wanted their children out of those. They began to send them then to the Christian liberal arts colleges, to the Bible schools, and to other alternate kinds of educational facilities. They had also withdrawn from mainline churches, and there was a mass movement away from so-called centrist or mainline American Protestantism. The same kind of disengagement took place in social activities. And remember the discussion that we had earlier on with the distinction between what had been held together in classic evangelical theology between social action or justice and
personal piety and faith, evangelism. These two were divided by the fundamentalists. Now the new evangelicals wanted to see a reengagement at those levels. And new evangelicalism is at its heart a kind of reengagement with the life of the mind. It’s a reengagement in university life, and you see increased numbers of the children of evangelicals reentering universities, some of the major schools again reentering the debate and discussion on intellectual levels.

There is a reengagement also with mainline churches, and you see them moving back into reinvigorated mainline bodies. There’s also a reengagement with social issues. This is triggered perhaps more by this little volume than almost any other source. And that is a 1947 publication by Carl F. H. Henry called *The Uneasy Conscience of Fundamentalism*. This little book put out by Eerdmans Press was a clarion call for evangelical Christians to reenter an arena that they had been so much a part of in those earlier years but which had fallen away under the impact of the 1920s. Let me read just a brief portion of Carl F. H. Henry’s *Uneasy Conscience* and you’ll get some of the flavor. This comes from his first chapter. “The present tendency of conservative Christianity is to make much of the embarrassment of religious modernism. The modernist embarrassment is serious indeed. The shallow insistence on inevitable world progress and on man’s essential goodness has been violently declared false.” This is part of what we were talking about a moment ago. “Not only sound biblical exegesis but the world events of 1914 to 1946 indict optimistic liberalism. But contemporary fundamentalism is not without its own moments of guilt.” And here’s where he turns the flashlight now in his own direction. “For the world crisis serves to embarrass fundamentalism also. The uncomfortableness of evangelicalism cannot be palliated by an emphasis on someone else’s uneasy predicament. Even if it could, the device would hardly escape attention from the alert, modern mind.

“The predicament of contemporary evangelicalism can be set forth from two vantage points: that of the non-evangelicals and that of the evangelicals themselves. From which ever direction the problem is approached, it is serious enough.” And here’s what it is. “Against Protestant fundamentalism, the non-evangelicals level the charge that it has no social program calling for a practical attack on acknowledged world evils.” And then he goes on to talk about what those are and in the end calls for a reengagement of evangelical Christians with the great social issues of the time, because the Bible itself calls us to faithfulness in reengaging
those kinds of issues. So what we have emerging now out of the
revival context of the 1940s and 1950s is a massive movement
which wants to reengage with some of those earlier evangelical
commitments, most notably with the universities, with mainline
churches, and with social justice issues.

There are other elements of that agenda which is part of classic
evangelicalism which they do not touch. And in fact later on we
are going to come to see that some of the splinter movements
out of neo-evangelicalism which tends to be a cohesive force
from the 1940s until the early 1960s. This cohesiveness begins
to fall apart, and the movement fragments. But it fragments
around various subgroups that want to recapture elements of
classic evangelicalism now that have been omitted or overlooked
by the new evangelicals. So you have the peace and justice
evangelical wing which wants to recapture whole new agendas
of justice questions for evangelical interest and involvement
and engagement. You have the old evangelical movement as
it’s often called trying to recapture a fuller, more wholesome
understanding of classic evangelicalism from the nineteenth
century. You have the whole charismatic Pentecostal evangelical
wing, about which we’ll talk more in a bit. These splinter groups,
these smaller bodies are an indication that even though the new
evangelicals recaptured old territory on some very critical fronts,
and we ought to give them proper credit for their efforts to do
that within the context of a good solid biblical theology, still there
was an ongoing agenda which needed to be picked up and in fact
which now is being picked up in much more splintered form by
subgroups within evangelicalism. That story I’ll come to in a bit.

The new evangelicals, however, which came to take center stage
as a renewal movement in the late 1930s, 1940s, 1950s where they
dominated, tended to develop a whole network of institutions to
support their concerns and their emphases. We see the emergence
of such organizations as the National Association of Evangelicals
founded in 1941. This was founded in part by conservatives
who were dissatisfied with the more exclusivist or separatist
American Council of Churches which had been founded by Carl
McIntyre in 1940 which had itself been founded to counter the
Federal Council of Churches. You have also a number of other
organizations such as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
founded in 1950 which had itself been founded to counter the
Christianity Today organization which
was established in 1956 with Carl F. H. Henry established as its
first editor, the one whose writings I read just a moment ago. He
became in a sense a kind of theologian of the new evangelical
movement just as Billy Graham was its guiding voice and perhaps Harold John Ockenga its organization genius. Those elements of neo-evangelicalism then tended to coalesce around a series of institutions including some schools such as Fuller Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell, both of which grew out of this new evangelical renaissance, and Wheaton College, which had been established much earlier but which again became a kind of center for that new evangelical voice and activity.

I think it's fair to say that new evangelicalism was enormously successful not only in establishing this burgeoning empire of institutions to support its ministries and its work, but it was enormously successful in being able to propagate the Christian faith in many, many circles. Literally tens of thousands of people came to new faith as a result of the revivals, as a result of the renewal which took place under neo-evangelical auspices.

As always happens, however, and we saw this way back in the time of Constantine you’ll remember in the fourth century, and it has been repeated in century after century. We see emerging in the 1950s a kind of culture-captive faith in an age of relative affluence. After two decades of Depression in the 1930s and the war of the 1940s, America could now see its way clear to supply its unsatisfied demands. Between 1947 and 1957 Americans earned some 2.6 trillion dollars and spent most of it. In 1950, two-thirds of the population lived in metropolitan areas mainly in the suburbs which surrounded those cities. Three times more lived in suburban areas than in the center cities at that time. We’re seeing some reversal of that now. But people began to talk about the new urban society, this new style of society, about the lonely crowd, about the organization man. Remember those terms? The churches began to make forays into home missions, as they were called. New problems began to emerge around anxiety, status, and acceptance. This was the period of the Cold War between the Communist bloc nations with Russia as the leader and the free world with the United States as the leader. We are only recently seeing a breakdown of that classic structure which emerged now and dominated life in the 1950s.

This was a period also of resurgent, popular piety. It became very popular to be a member of a church. And in fact you see church membership growing to its very highest point during the late 1950s and reaching its very highest point in 1960 when church membership had risen to its all-time zenith, 69 percent of the population, that's incredible for any kind of modern,
industrialized society, members of a religious body. This had risen from 43 percent in 1910 to 47 percent in 1930, 49 percent in 1940, and then had zipped up to 69 percent and has been drifting downward ever since.

This was also a period of enormous church building. We have in 1945 26 million dollars spent that one year in capital improvements on churches. By 1950 they were spending 409 million dollars for church buildings. But by 1960 it had risen to 1 billion, 16 million dollars put into bricks and mortar. It was popular to believe. America was both patriotic and religious in the 1950s, and many look back to those days of relative peace or at least what appears to be peace under the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower. You remember Eisenhower’s famous statement which I think characterizes this age as well as anything else when he said in 1954, “Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply-felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.” It’s important to believe, but the content and focus of that belief is of less importance. It was 1954 when “under God” was added to our pledge of allegiance. In 1956, “in God we trust” became the official motto of America. It was a time of affluence in the life of the churches when pastors felt their churches which were now brimming over with people with new buildings and all kinds of new possibilities, felt that this would never end.

And then came the 1960s. The 1960s were a kind of bombshell in the middle of all of these complacent, hopeful, optimistic views of the future. And the 1960s in some ways can be characterized as a devastating decade for American Christianity. This was the period of the death of God, remember. I was a theological student in the early 1960s when we first discovered the death of God theology, the writings of people like Gabriel Vahanian in his book *The Death of God*, published 1961. What we thought they were saying is that in a modern age when we have all these technological and industrial advancements, people can live as if they didn’t need God because they feel they don’t. What these folk were saying, however, was far more radical. And that is that there is no God.

This is a theology that studies that which is not. Or if it is, it’s something that we find within ourselves. This was a period of angry protests when cities burned, and Vietnam became a center of protest thought and activity. It was a period of black power and red power and Chicano power. It was a time of relative ethics through the work of Joseph Fletcher’s *Situation Ethics* and Paul Lehmann’s *Ethics in a Christian Context*. It was a period of anger
and bitterness and confrontation. And it’s out of the context of that fascinating but very perplexing decade of the 1960s that you have reasserting itself once again this powerful and pervasive new supernaturalism which comes to dominate the 1970s and right down into our own time. We’ll pick that story up a bit later on.

Let me conclude by reiterating the emergence out of the collapse which had been so devastating in the 1930s of both old modernism or old liberalism on the one side and fundamentalism on the other. Emerging out of those ashes were two great renewal movements: neo-orthodoxy and neo-evangelicalism. Both have helped to mark and shape modern theology in church practice. And we’ll be seeing some of that shaping as we go into our later lectures.