THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN THE WRITINGS
AND LIFE OF CARL F. H. HENRY

by

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ABSTRACT
The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings and Life of Carl F. H. Henry
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Evangelicalism has a weak doctrine of the church. Contemporary evangelicalism has been significantly shaped by the New Evangelical movement of the 1940s to 1960s. New Evangelicalism was an ecumenical reaction to Fundamentalism that was primarily organized around parachurch ministries. Carl Henry was one of the key leaders and theologians of New Evangelicalism. In addition to being a prolific writer, Henry was a founding faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary and the first editor of Christianity Today. Central to Henry's understanding of the church was the kingdom of God. He also addressed the relationship between the church and the state. While Henry did write about certain aspects of the church, he never articulated a complete doctrine of the church. This is indicative of the impossibility for developing a comprehensive evangelical ecclesiology. However Henry’s personal life demonstrated a concern for areas neglected in his writings, including the local church and denominational distinctives. Evangelicalism needs to recognize the importance of the local church and denominational distinctives as a necessary complement to parachurch ministry and ecumenism. The life of Carl Henry and his writings on the church are both historically significant and pertinent to evangelicalism today.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Growing up in a nondenominational evangelical church has led to my having a strong identification with the evangelical movement. While I am currently a member at a Baptist church, my primary identification is with the broader evangelical movement rather than a more specific Baptist history. The development of contemporary evangelicalism is certainly complex, but one of the forces which shaped it was the New Evangelical movement of the 1940s to 1960s. One of the key leaders of New Evangelicalism was Carl F. H. Henry, who is often regarded as the theologian of the movement. Henry was a Baptist, but “he viewed himself as a Christian first, an evangelical second, and a Baptist third.”¹ In this thesis, I look to Carl Henry and New Evangelicalism to help understand the situation which confronts the church today.

Thesis Overview

Evangelicalism is often criticized for being weak concerning the doctrine of the church. In order to understand contemporary evangelical theology, it is necessary to consider its history in the New Evangelical movement of the 1940s to 1960s. New Evangelicalism was a response to Fundamentalism which sought to address some of the perceived deficiencies with Fundamentalism. One of the central issues within Fundamentalism was an

attitude of isolationism which led to a retreat from society and social engagement. New Evangelicalism sought involvement with society at large while still maintaining the fundamental beliefs of the historic Christian faith. New Evangelicalism was also an ecumenical movement that sought to unite individuals from a broad array of Protestant denominations. In order to accomplish these goals, New Evangelicalism utilized parachurch ministries such as the National Association of Evangelicals, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Christianity Today. One consequence of this emphasis on ecumenism and parachurch ministry was a weak doctrine of the church.

Carl F. H. Henry was one of the key leaders of New Evangelicalism. His involvement in the movement includes being a founding faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary and serving as the first editor of Christianity Today. In 1947, Henry wrote The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism which became one of the catalysts for New Evangelicalism. He criticized the isolationism of Fundamentalism and called for Christian social engagement. Central to his argument was the kingdom of God having both an “already and not yet” nature. The kingdom became present in the world with the Incarnation and preaching of Jesus. But the kingdom is not yet present in its fullness, which will not occur until the Second Coming. For Henry, the church approximates the kingdom of God in this present age and embodies the redemptive presence of God for the world.

Henry also addressed the relationship between the church and the state. He saw a distinction between the role of the church and the individual in matters pertaining to the state. The primary task of the church is to give faithful exposition of God’s revealed standards for justice. A stable society is only possible when laws are based upon the Biblical standards.
But Henry argued that it is not the church’s responsibility to promote specific legislation. Rather, the individual Christian has the responsibility to support and promote just laws.

While he did address certain aspects of the doctrine of the church, the writings of Carl F. H. Henry fell significantly short of expressing a comprehensive ecclesiology. He did not give meaningful discussion to matters such as the origin of the church, church polity, and the sacraments. One reason for this is that Henry was writing as an evangelical for the ecumenical evangelical movement. The very nature of evangelicalism makes a comprehensive evangelical ecclesiology impossible.

However the personal life of Carl Henry shows a concern for areas neglected in his writing. Throughout his life as a Christian, Henry was involved in the local church. Henry was also committed to the Baptist tradition, although this was rarely expressed in his written work. In his later years, Henry became involved in the Southern Baptist Convention. As a leading theologian of the ecumenical New Evangelical movement, Carl F. H. Henry’s writings demonstrate the impossibility of developing a comprehensive evangelical ecclesiology, but Henry’s personal life provides a potential path forward regarding this important doctrine through his involvement in the local church and the embracing of denominational distinctives.

Literature Review

While the doctrine of the church did not receive extensive treatment in the writings of Carl Henry, he did address aspects of this in several of his works. In *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, he sought to distinguish Evangelicalism from Fundamentalism. While in general theological agreement with Fundamentalism, Henry was critical of its
silence in the area of social issues. This book was published in 1947 and helped to define New Evangelicalism as a distinct movement from Fundamentalism.

In his role as theologian for the New Evangelical movement, Henry avoided addressing issues which were outside the ecumenical consensus. However in 1958, he did write an article for the first volume of *Foundations: A Baptist Journal of History and Theology*. Henry’s article was titled “Twenty Years a Baptist” and it addressed his personal commitment to Baptist beliefs and practices.

In 1964, Henry published a small book titled *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*. Henry had hoped to write a more comprehensive volume on this topic, but was prevented by his editorial duties at *Christianity Today*. In this book, Henry briefly addressed specific aspects of social ethics. The book includes discussion of the proper roles for the church and the individual in social and political affairs.

*God, Revelation, and Authority* is considered Carl Henry’s magnum opus. It is a six volume set published from 1976 to 1983. The first volume covers introductory matters and epistemology. In volumes two through four, Henry expounds fifteen theses on Scripture, or God’s revelation to humanity. In volumes five and six, Henry considers some implications of God’s revelation. Thesis fourteen, contained in volume four, addresses the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. The sixth volume contains a discussion on justice and the kingdom of God.

Carl Henry published his autobiography in 1986 titled *Confessions of a Theologian*. The book provides many details of his life, including serving as professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and editor of *Christianity Today*. The book contains discussions of

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controversies that occurred while at *Christianity Today*, including some pertaining to Christianity and social issues.

In 1992, Carl Henry published an article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* titled “Reflections on the Kingdom of God.” In the article, he discusses the “already and not yet” nature of the kingdom of God. He also gives consideration to the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. The church “prefigures the kingdom as its nearest approximation in the collective history of humanity.”

Bob E. Patterson’s biography of Henry, *Carl F. H. Henry*, was written in 1983 from a non-evangelical perspective. Patterson begins with a history of the New Evangelical movement. The book then considers the thoughts of Henry in the areas of apologetics, revelation, and the doctrine of God. Patterson also discusses Henry’s position on the kingdom of God.

In the winter of 2004, the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* celebrated the life of Carl F. H. Henry after his passing. Paul R. House contributed an article titled “Remaking the Modern Mind: Revisiting Carl Henry’s Theological Vision.” House considers the works which Henry produced during the different periods of his life: his years as a seminary professor, his tenure as editor of *Christianity Today*, and the period of his writing *God, Revelation, and Authority*. In the same journal, Russell D. Moore wrote an article titled “God, Revelation, and Community: Ecclesiology and Baptist Identity in the Thought of Carl F. H. Henry.” Moore considers the question of “can Henry’s theology provide a resource for the next generation of Southern Baptists as they seek to recover a Baptist doctrine of the

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church?” Moore also gives attention to Henry’s Baptist heritage and involvement in the Southern Baptist Convention.

In 2004, Russell D. Moore also wrote *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective*. Moore considers the kingdom of God as presented in Henry’s works plus more recent developments in evangelical theology. Moore addresses the kingdom of God and its relationship to the doctrines of eschatology, soteriology, and ecclesiology. Moore also coauthored an article with Robert E. Sagers in 2008 titled “The Kingdom of God and the Church: A Baptist Reassessment.” The article includes discussion of George Eldon Ladd’s work on the kingdom of God. The role of the church is to announce the gospel of the kingdom and live out the ethics of the kingdom. The authors also argue that the kingdom of God is best understood within a specifically Baptist ecclesiology.

There has been renewed interest in Carl F. H. Henry in recent years as evidenced by the publishing of several books concerning Henry and his thought. In 2010, G. Wright Doyle wrote *Carl Henry—Theologian for All Seasons: An Introduction and Guide to Carl Henry’s God, Revelation, and Authority*. The first part of the book is a review of Henry’s life and ideas. The second part is an index and outline to *God, Revelation, and Authority*. Gregory Alan Thornbury published *Recovering Classical Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* in 2013. This book begins with an overview of Henry’s life. The book then considers the major areas addressed by Henry: epistemology, theology, inerrancy, culture, and evangelicalism. Much of the discussion is structured around Henry’s fifteen theses in *God, Revelation, and Authority*. In 2015, a collection of essays on Henry was published with the title *Essential Evangelicalism: The Enduring Influence of Carl F. H. Henry*.

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George M. Marsden has written about the history of New Evangelicalism and its development out of Fundamentalism. Marsden published Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism in 1987. He utilizes the early history of Fuller Theological Seminary, the period of 1947 to 1967, to explore the history of New Evangelicalism. The book considers the development of New Evangelicalism along with some of the tensions inherent within New Evangelicalism. In 1991, Marsden published Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism. Marsden understands Fundamentalism as a response to Liberalism, modernism, and Darwinism. Evangelicalism then arose out of a splintering within Fundamentalism over the issue of separatism.

George Eldon Ladd’s focus of study has been the kingdom of God. He published *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* in 1959. Ladd understands the kingdom to be both present and future. This book also has a chapter addressing the relationship between the kingdom, Israel, and the church. In 1961, Ladd published “The Kingdom of God and the Church” in *Foundations: A Baptist Journal of History and Theology*. He analyzes four different views concerning the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church. Ladd argues for a “theological” view where the kingdom now works through the church, but will one day manifest itself in power.

The doctrine of the church was addressed by Edmund P. Clowney in his 1995 book *The Church*. Clowney approaches this issue from a Reformed perspective. One chapter is focused on the relationship between the kingdom, the church, and the state. There have also been several recent books on ecclesiology from a Baptist perspective. John S. Hammett wrote *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* in 2005. Mark Dever published *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* in 2012. He also had a personal connection to Carl Henry. Dever became pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church with the encouragement of Henry. In 2012, Gregg R. Allison wrote *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*. This book is part of the Foundations of Evangelical Theology series which seeks to express a contemporary evangelical theology.

Carl F. H. Henry wrote extensively as a theologian of the New Evangelical movement, yet he wrote little concerning the doctrine of the church. He fell significantly short of expressing a comprehensive ecclesiology. But the personal life of Henry showed an appreciation for aspects neglected in his public writing, in particular an appreciation for the local church and denominational tradition. The life and writings of Carl Henry are best
understood within the context of the New Evangelical movement of the 1940s-1960s. New Evangelicalism will be considered in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2
NEW EVANGELICALISM

“Evangelicalism” is a fairly broad term referring to a movement or series of movements in America and Britain over the past few centuries. George Marsden provided the following description:

“Evangelical” (from the Greek for “gospel”) eventually became the common British and American name for the revival movements that swept back and forth across the English-speaking world and elsewhere during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Central to the evangelical gospel was the proclamation of Christ’s saving work through his death on the cross and the necessity of personally trusting him for eternal salvation.¹

D. W. Bebbington identified four aspects of evangelicalism:

There are the four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.²

Evangelicalism is generally understood as continuing to the present day.

The term “New Evangelicalism” is used in this thesis to describe a movement that took place within broader evangelicalism during the 1940s through 1960s. New Evangelicalism was a name the movement applied to itself as illustrated in the book titles *The New Evangelicalism* and *The New Evangelical Theology*, published in 1963 and 1968


respectively. The movement has also been referred to as “neo-evangelicalism”³ and sometimes as simply “evangelicalism.”⁴ New Evangelicalism was the term that Carl Henry used “to distinguish a socially and politically resurgent evangelicalism from the culturally narrow fundamentalism.”⁵

**A Response to Fundamentalism**

New Evangelicalism developed during the first half of the twentieth century as a response to Fundamentalism within the broader stream of evangelicalism. Fundamentalism stressed the fundamentals of the orthodox faith in reaction to Liberalism.⁶ George Marsden wrote that “an American Fundamentalist is an evangelical who is militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with ‘secular humanism.’”⁷

**A Reaction to Liberalism**

Liberalism can be understood as a movement designed to preserve Christianity from a series of significant challenges faced during the period of 1865-1917, including Darwinism, higher criticism, and Freudian psychology.⁸ George Marsden wrote that “in personal terms,

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⁷ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 1.

⁸ Ibid., 32–33.
this meant that many people brought up to accept unquestioningly the complete authority of
the Bible and the sure truths of evangelical teaching found themselves living in a world
where such beliefs no longer were considered intellectually acceptable.”

In response to this situation, Liberalism sought to redefine Christianity so it would be
acceptable to modern individuals:

As the Enlightenment ideas moved to America, the established theological
community was hit by a barrage of bewildering philosophical and scientific concepts.
Biblical criticism eroded confidence in the biblical text, and Charles Darwin’s (1809-
1882) hypothesis of evolution and natural selection eroded confidence in biblical ideas.
The most prominent response to the situation was the emergence within
Evangelicalism itself of Protestant liberalism. Liberalism came into existence as a
strategy to preserve the Christian faith from the blows of the Enlightenment. This
movement intended to restate Christianity in such a way that modern man could
believe it without the sacrifice of his science, intellect, or scholarship.

One of the ways Liberalism addressed this situation was by focusing on historical
processes which are constantly changing, in contrast to the traditional understanding of
God’s revelation as a timeless absolute. George Marsden described this as follows:

The Bible was a record of the religious experience of an ancient people. It was not an
encyclopedia of dogma but rather an ancient model of religious experience. Today this
model should not be followed slavishly, but its best principles developed as science
and modern civilization advance the understanding of God’s reconciling actions.

This aspect of Liberalism can be described as “evolutionary naturalism applied to the Bible
and to Christianity.” The goal was to make Christianity immune to modern criticism.

In addition to a focus on historical processes, Liberalism also stressed the ethical
aspects of Christianity. The focus was not on God as a judge, but rather God as father and

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9 Ibid.


11 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 34.

mankind as a brotherhood. This developed into the social gospel where the central mission of the church is transformation of society. Walter Rauschenbush expressed this as follows:

The chief purpose of the Christian Church in the past has been the salvation of individuals. But the most pressing task of the present is not individualistic. Our business is to make over an antiquated and immoral economic system; to get rid of laws, customs, maxims, and philosophies inherited from an evil and despotic past; to create just and brotherly relations between great groups and classes of society; and thus to lay a social foundation on which modern men individually can live and work in a fashion that will not outrage all the better elements in them. Our inherited Christian faith dealt with individuals; our present task deals with society.

The Christian Church in the past has taught us to do our work with our eyes fixed on another world and a life to come. But the business before us is concerned with refashioning this present world, making this earth clean and sweet and habitable.

In Liberalism, the focus of Christianity was on ethics rather than on doctrine.

The influence of Liberalism grew until “the forces of liberalism repeatedly gained control of denominations, influential seminaries and colleges and denominational mission boards.” Fundamentalism then developed in response to the growth of Liberalism. In particular, Fundamentalism can be understood as a reaction to the formation of the Federal Council of Churches:

The differences between liberals and conservatives were institutionalized in 1908 when the Federal Council of Churches was formed to bring together the social endeavors of the more liberal congregations. The conservatives counter-organized and began to harden into the fundamentalist movement.

Liberalism developed into the dominant form of Protestant Christianity, which led to the Fundamentalist reaction by conservative Protestants.

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15 Nash, 23.

16 Patterson, 30.
The Defense of Key Doctrines

Conservative Christians found the Liberal accommodations to modern thought unacceptable. Fundamentalism was initially centered on holding fast to essential Christian doctrines including the truthfulness of Scripture and the reality of the supernatural. Eventually five theological points came to be known as the fundamentals of the Christian faith:

(1) The verbal inspiration of the Bible; (2) the virgin birth of Christ; (3) his substitutionary atonement; (4) his bodily resurrection; and (5) his imminent and visible second coming.

A series of pamphlets called The Fundamentals: A Testament to the Truth was published between 1910 and 1915. These pamphlets presented arguments for the truthfulness of these historical Christian doctrines rejected by Liberalism. With more than one million copies distributed, The Fundamentals became the unofficial handbook for Fundamentalism.

Carl Henry expressed the Fundamentalist emphasis on key doctrines as follows:

Fundamentalism counteracted the modernistic philosophy of religion from the standpoint of supernaturalistic Christianity. Certain essentials that had come under special attack dictated its test for orthodoxy: the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, his virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection and literal return. The temporary test of assent to these specific tenets served its purpose well, for fundamentalism thereby exposed unbelief by boring beneath evasive declarations about the Bible and the supernaturalness of Jesus.

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17 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 37.


19 Patterson, 32.

20 Ibid., 31–32.

New Evangelicalism took issue with Fundamentalism for making these tests, which should have been temporary, into a permanent defining characteristic of Fundamentalism.

A Retreat from Society and Higher Education

Fundamentalism did not begin with an attitude of separatism, but over time this became a prominent feature of Fundamentalism. This developed, at least in part, from the growing power of Liberalism. As Liberals gained control over denominations, large numbers of Fundamentalists left the major denominations. These separating Fundamentalists either formed independent local Bible churches or joined more conservative, but generally smaller, denominations.

Separatism was originally focused on separation from Liberalism. But over time this grew to include separation from other evangelicals who were still engaged with Liberal Christians. Harold Ockenga described the growth of Fundamentalist separatism as follows:

These men were driven by controversy and discrimination to various shades of separatism. Some were compelled to leave their denominations, some operated as autonomous units within their denominations. Through controversy, in suffering, they sired a breed of fundamentalists who, in following them, confused courtesy in contending for the faith with compromise of the faith; academic respectability with theological apostasy; and common grace with special grace. They developed the theory that any contact, conversation, or communication with modernism was compromise and should be condemned.

This spirit of separatism also included the area of evangelism, as illustrated by Billy Graham’s 1957 New York Crusade. This crusade was sponsored by the Protestant Council of the City of New York which included Liberal churches, which made Billy Graham and his

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22 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 66.

23 Ockenga, 13.

Crusade unacceptable to most Fundamentalists. A person’s reaction to Billy Graham became one indicator as to whether a person was a Fundamentalist or a New Evangelical.

David Weeks summarized the development of separatism as follows:

With the arrival of the twentieth century, evangelicals were put on the defensive by a variety of theological and philosophical challenges. Liberal Protestantism, Darwinian evolution, and Freudian psychology, among others, all challenged the basic tenets of evangelicalism. This intellectual onslaught created a siege mentality among conservative Christians who increasingly became isolated both socially and intellectually. This isolationism became a defining characteristic of those conservative Christians who were eventually labeled “fundamentalists.”

The development of separatism impacted social and intellectual issues, including social reform and higher education.

There was a theological basis for Fundamentalism not wanting to join with Liberalism in the area of social action. Liberalism based social action on a belief in the essential moral capability and goodness of people. But Fundamentalism understood that the ills of society stem from the sinfulness of individuals. Therefore, society cannot be transformed without the transformation of its members. But New Evangelicalism viewed Fundamentalism as going to the extreme of reducing the gospel to individual sin management and removed from it any principle of social reform. This led to the separation of religious life from everyday life.

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28 Nash, 24.
This removal of social reform from Christianity was contrary to historical evangelicalism. Millard Erickson described the situation as follows:

During its long history orthodox, or conservative, Christianity had stressed the application of its message to social ills. In the nineteenth century, for example, evangelicals in America were in the forefront of the forces contending for abolition of slavery.

As the twentieth century moved on, however, fundamentalism neglected this emphasis. To the non-evangelical observer it appeared that the fundamentalist simply had no social program. The fundamentalist seemed to be the modern equivalent of the priest and Levite, by passing suffering humanity.29

As Liberalism became more identified with social reform, Fundamentalism retreated further from concern for society.30

The separatism of Fundamentalism also included the realm of higher education. Ronald Nash saw Fundamentalism as having an attitude of distrust towards science in general, which had developed from a distrust of evolution.31 He wrote that “Fundamentalism’s attitude toward science was typical of its depreciation of scholarship in all fields.”32 But George Marsden made a more carefully nuanced statement:

During the 1920s, fundamentalists were often regarded as anti-scientific and anti-intellectual. This evaluation was accurate to the extent that most fundamentalists were unwilling to accept the principal assumptions and conclusions of recent science and philosophy. Indeed fundamentalists reflected many of the popular, sentimental, and sometimes anti-intellectual characteristics of the revivalist heritage. Nevertheless they stood in an intellectual tradition that had the highest regard for one understanding of true scientific method and proper rationality.33

29 Erickson, 178.
30 Ibid., 32.
New Evangelicalism understood Fundamentalism as having developed an anti-intellectual attitude. Millard Erickson wrote that “from a movement of genuine scholarship, positive statement, and a certain latitude of evangelical position, fundamentalism came to be increasingly a negative, defensive, and reactionary movement with a narrowing of its theological options and an evaporation of scholarship and literary productivity.”

Ronald Nash summed up the positive and negative aspects of Fundamentalism as follows:

Fundamentalism had sought to defend and preserve God’s message from the inroads of modernism and unbelief. But it had neglected and overlooked the need of projecting that message into the social and intellectual life of the country.

Fundamentalism began as a needed correction to a theology of disbelief present in Liberalism. But over time Fundamentalism came to be associated with a retreat from society and higher education.

Dispensationalism

Dispensational Premillennialism was highly influential within Fundamentalism from the very beginning. The production of The Fundamentals was overseen by Dispensational leaders. But the articles themselves included both Dispensational and non-Dispensational

34 Erickson, 29.

35 Nash, 30.


37 Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism, 37.

38 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 40-41.
authors who were opposed to Liberalism. But the influence of Dispensationalism grew over time until it came to be at the center of the Fundamentalist movement.

Dispensationalism tends to take a more pessimistic view of the world and its condition prior to the return of Christ. This helped explain the struggles which were occurring within the church itself. George Marsden described these as follows:

Dispensational premillennialists said that the churches and the culture were declining and that Christians would see Christ’s kingdom only after he personally returned to rule in Jerusalem. They thus offered a plausible explanation of the difficulties the church was facing.

Over time, Dispensationalism developed into one of the marks of Fundamentalism. This furthered the separation with society that was already present in Fundamentalism.

New Evangelicalism was a response to Liberalism, as was Fundamentalism. They both sought to defend the doctrine of historic, orthodox Christianity against the challenges of Liberalism. But New Evangelicalism also sought to correct errors it perceived in Fundamentalism, including disengagement with society and higher education. New Evangelicalism was also theologically broader than Fundamentalists Dispensationalism.

**The Rise and Decline of New Evangelicalism**

In the early days of New Evangelicalism, there was not a hard line separating it from Fundamentalism. This distinction was something that only became clear over time:

There was no clear line between fundamentalists and evangelicals during the period between 1947 and 1957. The emerging evangelicals were in an in-between state,

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40 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 57.

41 Ibid., 39.
repudiating some of the distinctives of fundamentalism, especially dispensationalism . . . , and yet eager to preserve what they considered the essence of fundamentalism, its commitments to the essentials of historic Christianity in firm opposition to secularism and theological liberalism.\(^{42}\)

While New Evangelicalism was in general agreement with Fundamentalism in terms of theology, there was disagreement in the area of practice. New Evangelicalism condemned theological orthodoxy which did not result in a life of love and service.\(^{43}\)

One way to describe the development of New Evangelicalism is through its key institutions. Carl Henry mentioned the following:

Then a series of remarkable developments posed an accelerating challenge to the religious scene: formation of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942, founding of Fuller Theological Seminary in 1947, national headlines for Billy Graham’s evangelistic crusades beginning in 1949, founding of *Christianity Today* magazine in 1956. These enterprises informally linked some of evangelicalism’s ablest leaders for an overall witness contributory to evangelical ecumenism, evangelism, theology, apologetics and social ethics.\(^{44}\)

The following are some of the key institutions, plus one book, that helped define New Evangelicalism.

**National Association of Evangelicals**

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) can be understood in relationship to the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) and the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC).\(^{45}\) The FCC was an ecumenical coalition of Liberal churches which promoted a social gospel. The ACCC was formed as a conservative alternative by Carl McIntire to the

\(^{42}\) Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, xii.

\(^{43}\) Ockenga, 14.


FCC in 1941. The ACCC was strongly separatist and rejected membership to anyone affiliated with ecumenically linked churches. The NAE was theologically conservative like the ACCC, but in contrast to the ACCC, the NAE was not separatist. The NAE sought to uphold the historic truths of Christianity, but with a focus on cooperation.

The NAE was founded in 1942 with Harold Ockenga as its primary organizer. The NAE brought together a great variety of conservative evangelical groups: including Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and Mennonites. Evangelicals from approximately fifty denominations attended the Constitutional Convention on May 3, 1943. However, a number of denominations decided to formally stay out of the NAE including the Southern Baptist Convention and Missouri Synod Lutherans.

Like the FCC, the NAE was concerned about social action. One of the early efforts in this area was to provide goods and services for those people affected by World War II. A Committee for Postwar Relief began collecting donations in 1944, which were then distributed after the war concluded. The NAE was theologically conservative like the ACCC, but sought to be socially engaged like the FCC.

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48 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 69.

49 Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 49.

50 Shelley, 71.

51 Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 50.

52 Shelley, 104–109.
The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism

_The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism_ by Carl Henry was significant in the formation of New Evangelicalism. Gregory Thornbury expressed its impact as follows:

Out of this awesome vision for the future, many worthy evangelical institutions, publications, and organizations were either born or sustained. _Uneasy Conscience_ gave permission to a new generation of evangelicals to dream.\(^{53}\)

Russell Moore wrote that _The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism_ “served in many ways to define theologically much of what it meant to be a ‘new evangelical,’ in contrast to the older fundamentalism.”\(^{54}\)

Carl Henry published _The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism_ in 1947, shortly after the conclusion of World War II. The book began with a criticism of Liberalism:

The modernist embarrassment is serious indeed. The shallow insistence on inevitable world progress and on man’s essential goodness has been violently declared false. Not only sound Bible exegesis but the world events of 1914-1946 indict optimistic liberalism.\(^{55}\)

Henry then quickly moved on to the primary target of his book, Fundamentalism. Henry criticized Fundamentalism for a serious disregard of social issues. He wrote that “against Protestant Fundamentalism the non-evangelicals level the charge that it has no social program calling for a practical attack on acknowledged world evils.”\(^{56}\) While Liberalism failed by equating Christianity with social reform, Fundamentalism failed through removing social reform as a concern for Christianity.

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53 Thornbury, 173.


56 Ibid., 2.
While Henry was critical of both Liberalism and Fundamentalism, he does acknowledge that Fundamentalism started with the correct premise of human sinfulness:

This is not to suggest that Fundamentalism had no militant opposition to sin. Of all modern viewpoints, when measured against the black backdrop of human nature disclosed by the generation of two world wars, Fundamentalism provided the most realistic appraisal of the condition of man. The sinfulness of man, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and that God alone can save man from his disaster, are insistences that were heard with commonplace frequency only within the evangelical churches. But the sin against which Fundamentalism has inveighed, almost exclusively, was individual sin rather than social evil.\textsuperscript{57}

An understanding of the fallen nature of humanity is necessary to address the problems of a fallen world. Fundamentalism provided a starting point to address social issues.

Christianity is a worldview, which means that theological beliefs should impact all areas of life:

Hebrew-Christian thought, historically, has stood as a closely-knit world and life view. Metaphysics and ethics went everywhere together, in Biblical intent. The great doctrines implied a divinely related social order with intimations for all humanity. The ideal Hebrew or Christian society throbbed with challenge to the predominant culture of its generation, condemning with redemptive might the tolerated social evils, for the redemptive message was to light the world and salt the earth.\textsuperscript{58}

However, Fundamentalism failed to understand Christianity as a worldview.

In \textit{The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism}, Henry called for a Christianity that would apply the gospel to all areas of life:

Therefore evangelicalism can view the future with a sober optimism, grounded not only in the assurance of the ultimate triumph of righteousness, but also in the conviction that divine redemption can be a potent factor in any age. That evangelicalism may not create a fully Christian civilization does not argue against an effort to win as many areas as possible by the redemptive power of Christ; it can engender reformation here, and overthrow paganism there; it can win outlets for the redemption that is in Christ Jesus reminiscent of apostolic triumphs.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 67.
Henry’s call for social involvement by theologically conservative Christians was a central aspect of the New Evangelical movement.

Henry connected premillennial and amillennial eschatological views with a pessimistic attitude toward social reform:

The problem is more complicated for the premillennialist and amillennialist. They are convinced not only that non-evangelicals cannot bring in the perfect social order in their methodological context, but also that the evangelicals will not bring it in by their proclamation of the Gospel. . . . In this respect, the premillennialists and amillennialists, who together form the largest segment in modern Fundamentalism, are aligned against the postmillennialists, who labor to bring in the kingdom of God by human redemptive effort and anticipate the return of Christ will follow a golden age of world conversion. 60

Henry did not argue for a particular millennial view, but he did point out a potential danger for certain positions.

The kingdom of God is closely related to the issues of social reform and the millennium. Henry was critical of both Liberalism and Fundamentalism for failing to properly understand the nature of the kingdom of God. Gregory Alan Thornbury summarized this as follows:

He contrasts two ideological frameworks that characterize this problem; the kingdom-now systems and the kingdom-then systems. Kingdom-now systems, generally characterized by liberal reform movements, assume a paradigm of kingdom utopianism, which places the inauguration of a perfected social order on the agency and will of man. Kingdom-then systems relegate the possibility of a perfected social order to a future era, the inauguration of which is essentially unaffected by human agency. 61

In contrast to the Liberal and Fundamentalist errors, New Evangelicalism accepted the kingdom of God as both “already and not yet.” 62

60 Ibid., 17.

61 Thornbury, 172–173.

62 Ibid., 173.
Henry was concerned for the relevance of Christianity in the contemporary world. R. Albert Mohler Jr. expressed this as follows:

Henry was convinced that the fundamentalist movement would be required to change its anticultural stance if it was to be effective in the twentieth century. His concern that fundamentalism had ignored all social and ethical issues led to the publication of Henry’s first epochal work, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.  

Henry’s call for Christian social involvement was motivated by a concern for evangelism. He expressed this as follows:

The Christian life must be lived out, among the regenerate, in every area of activity, until even the unregenerate are moved by Christian standards, acknowledging their force. The unregenerate are not, on that account, redeemed; nevertheless, they are more easily reached for Christ than those who have made a deliberate break with Christian standards, because they can be reminded that Christian ethics cannot be retained apart from Christian metaphysics. To the extent that any society is leavened with Christian conviction, it becomes a more hospitable environment for Christian expansion.  

*The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* was a call for Fundamentalism to become engaged in social endeavors, as evangelicalism had been in the past. The principles in Henry’s book were central to New Evangelicalism.

**Fuller Theological Seminary**

Since Liberalism had gained control over most of the major denominations and associated seminaries, New Evangelicals felt the need for their own seminary. Fuller Theological Seminary, “the visionary project of evangelist Charles E. Fuller and Harold J. Ockenga, pastor of Boston’s prestigious Park Street Church,” was intended to fill this need. In the early 1940s, Charles E. Fuller had the largest radio audience in America with his

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65 Mohler, 281.
program “The Old-Fashioned Revival Hour.” Charles Fuller provided most of the funding for the startup of the seminary, but stayed out of the actual management of the institution.

A group of five men met in Chicago to consider the founding of an evangelical seminary in California during May of 1947. Carl Henry, one of the five men, wrote that “a common conviction gripped us of the need for what we envisioned: an evangelical seminary of uncompromising academic and spiritual priorities, and that granted professors built-in time for research and writing.” Harold Ockenga was the initial president of the seminary and early faculty included Carl Henry, Edward Carnell, and George Eldon Ladd.

Fuller Theological Seminary was founded during the fall of 1947 in Pasadena, California. Harold Ockenga said in his Opening Convocation speech that though interdenominational in church relationships, “we do not believe and we repudiate the ‘come-out-ism’ movement.” Through this statement, Ockenga was identifying Fuller Theological Seminary with the ecumenical New Evangelical movement rather than separatist Fundamentalism.

John Muether described the seminary’s relationships with Liberalism and Fundamentalism as follows:

On the one hand, Fuller’s founders were marginalized in mainline denominations by their evangelical convictions; many of them were denied entrance in the Southern

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66 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 68.
67 Ibid., 72.
69 Ibid.
70 Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism, 8.
71 Ibid., 64.
California Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church. And on the other hand, they repudiated the “come-out-ism” of the separatists.\(^{72}\)

Fuller Theological Seminary was a New Evangelical institution which sought to maintain a position distinct from both Liberalism and Fundamentalism.

**Christianity Today**

*Christianity Today* was founded in 1956 and became the unofficial voice of New Evangelicalism. Bob Patterson described the influence of *Christianity Today* as follows:

Under Henry this journal became the biweekly voice of the evangelical message. Designed primarily for clergy and seminarians and deliberately cast in a scholarly and intellectual style, it was to become the "official" mouthpiece for three organizations: the National Association of Evangelicals, the Evangelical Theological Society, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.\(^{73}\)

One of the forces behind *Christianity Today* was J. Howard Pew, a wealthy layman who made his money through the Sun Oil Company. He desired the magazine to serve as a firm intellectual foundation for conservative theology and politics.\(^{74}\) Another significant personality behind *Christianity Today* was Billy Graham. Graham saw the need for a substantial theological voice that would complement his evangelistic revivals. He desired the magazine to be conservative in theology, but liberal in the area of social issues.\(^{75}\)

Part of target the audience for *Christianity Today* was pastors with uncertainty regarding their theological position. Harold Ockenga wrote the following:

There are many ministers who have been trained in liberal theological seminaries who want to believe biblical Christianity but cannot because they lack theological education.

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\(^{73}\) Patterson, 23–24.

\(^{74}\) Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 155–158.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 158.
which supports the position. To reach these ministers with the rationale of biblical Christianity is the objective of Christianity Today.\(^{76}\)

Carl Henry also addressed this intellectual goal of the magazine in his first editorial:

> There is evidence that more and more people are rediscovering the Word of God as their source of authority and power. Many of these searchers for truth are unaware of the existence of an increasing group of evangelical scholars throughout the world. Through the pages of Christianity Today these men will expound and defend the basic truths of the Christian faith in terms of reverent scholarship and of practical application to the needs of the present generation.\(^{77}\)

*Christianity Today* also sought to apply the Christian worldview to all of life. This was reflected in the location of their offices in Washington, D.C. Henry wrote that their view overlooking the White House reminded him “of Christianity’s relevance for all facets of life, politics included, and also of the importance of church-state separation.”\(^{78}\) Application of the Christian worldview included social concerns, which Fundamentalism had failed to address. Henry wrote the following concerning this:

> Christianity Today will apply the biblical revelation to the contemporary social crisis, by presenting the implications of the total Gospel message for every area of life. This, Fundamentalism has often failed to do.\(^{79}\)

Carl Henry described the focus of *Christianity Today* as follows:

> The first nine issues had made plain the emphasis of the magazine: in theology, conservative and biblical, without provincialism; in evangelism, promotive of personal decision in view of Bible doctrine; in ecclesiastical affairs, cooperative while disapproving ecumenical inclusivism; in social concerns, stressing Christianity’s relevance to culture and the arts without falling into a social gospel; in economics, partisan to responsible free enterprise over Marxist collectivism while rejecting secular

\(^{76}\) Ockenga, 14.


\(^{78}\) Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 149.

materialism; in socio-political affairs, exhibiting the connection of human freedom and rights with the Christian revelation; in all things, charity coupled with faith and hope.\textsuperscript{80}

*Christianity Today* sought to give New Evangelism a voice which included an intellectual commitment and social engagement.

The Fragmentation of New Evangelicalism

As an ecumenical movement consisting of many players, a precise end to New Evangelicalism is impossible to identify. It is probably better to consider the fragmentation of a movement. Writing in 1968, Millard Erickson commented that New Evangelicalism was becoming a movement of subdivisions.\textsuperscript{81} George Marsden wrote that by the early 1970s, New Evangelicalism became divided into a number of parties, none of which were in a position to speak for the whole.\textsuperscript{82} During the 1960’s, Carl Henry considered the development an evangelical alliance still possible with *Christianity Today*, under his leadership, providing a transdenominational link that could transcend denominational distinctives.\textsuperscript{83} However by the early 1970s, he considered the possibility of a massive evangelical alliance remote. It seems appropriate to understand New Evangelicalism as coming to an end in the late 1960s.

The end of the New Evangelical movement is symbolized in two events. One was the passing of Edward J. Carnell in 1967.\textsuperscript{84} Carnell had been a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary for many years and even served as president. The second event is the end of Carl

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\textsuperscript{80} Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 170.

\textsuperscript{81} Erickson, 206.

\textsuperscript{82} Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 9.


Henry’s service as editor for *Christianity Today* in 1968. Under Henry’s leadership, *Christianity Today* was a key voice in unifying New Evangelicalism. The change in editorship was due in part to a desire for change from a magazine focused on seminary trained individuals to one more focused on lay-people. These events are best seen as indicators of a change, rather than being events which fragmented the movement.

New Evangelism grew in terms of numbers, which brought diversification to the membership. This diversification helped to fracture the movement:

By the late 1950s, neoevangelical leaders had succeeded in their goal of reengaging American culture. Signs of success hung all around. Evangelicals had access once again to the levers of power. Their ministries were prospering. Their numbers were abounding. More Americans went to church than ever before. Many now looked to these descendants of the fundamentalist controversy to lead the global evangelical movement. Not surprisingly, however, as the movement had expanded it had also diversified, exceeding the grasp of the neoevangelicals.

New Evangelicalism began as a reform effort within Fundamentalism itself. But once it became clear that reform was impossible, New Evangelicalism became a distinct movement. This initial connection with Fundamentalism was one of the unifying factors within New Evangelicalism. George Marsden wrote that “the bondings of their common heritage were reinforced during the first half of the twentieth century by the shared experiences of most of them in fundamentalist reactions against ‘modernist’ theological innovations and certain cultural changes.” But as the 1960s progressed, the number of New Evangelicals grew.

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86 Ibid., 290.


88 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 65.
Evangelicals without any Fundamentalist roots grew. This loss of shared history was a significant factor in the splintering of New Evangelicalism.\(^8^9\)

George Marsden wrote that by 1967 it was “becoming impossible to regard American evangelicalism as a single coalition with a more or less unified and recognized leadership.”\(^9^0\) New Evangelicalism was a coalition of individuals and parachurch organizations that shared common goals. But as it grew, this coalition became more diverse and fragmented. New Evangelicalism was a significant force from the 1940s to 1960s.

**Characteristics of New Evangelicalism**

There were a number of characteristics of New Evangelicalism. R. Albert Mohler Jr. identified three characteristics: a stalwart defense of the orthodox faith, solid academic foundations, and careful attention to the social application of the gospel message.\(^9^1\) The characteristics considered in this section are a reliance on parachurch ministries, intellectual commitment, and a desire for ecumenism, since these help distinguish New Evangelicalism from Liberalism and Fundamentalism.

**Parachurch Ministries**

Evangelicalism has a long history of utilizing parachurch organizations:

Evangelicalism has also always been a transdenominational movement. Since the nineteenth century it has worked increasingly through independent agencies—what are now called “parachurch” institutions. Modern individualism has only encouraged this trend. Though offering warm fellowship in local congregations, evangelicals emphasized that the church was made up of individual converts. Often these individuals would be so filled with zeal to proclaim the gospel that they felt compelled to move beyond ponderous denominational structures. They did not usually repudiate

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90 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 74.

91 Mohler, 283.
their denominations but simply set up their own extradenominational agencies in order to promote the cause more efficiently.92

Parachurch ministries were part of the broader evangelical movement, which New Evangelicalism continued to utilize.

But New Evangelicals were also forced to utilize parachurch ministries since the major denominations were controlled by Liberals. Gordon H. Clark described this as follows:

The largest, or at least the most powerful segment of American Protestantism can roughly though justly be described as modernistic. The leaders of the great denominations have largely abandoned the orthodoxy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and through the influence of Kant, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl have developed quite a different type of religion.93

By the middle of the twentieth century, almost all of the mainline denominations were controlled by Liberals.94

This led to New Evangelicals being marginalized within the major denominations:

The early neo-evangelicals were lambasted, after all, by denominational bureaucrats, who saw evangelical ministries and missionaries as “competition” with churches that had long ago marginalized orthodox believers within their ranks. . . . Evangelicals (including Henry) . . . could find no outlet for ministry save in the parachurch entities (such as Fuller Seminary) they created.95

Two stories relating to the founding of Fuller Theological Seminary illustrate the opposition New Evangelicals faced from the mainline denominations. Presbyterians found difficulties in coming to teach at Fuller. 96 Carl Henry wrote that “the United Presbyterian

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92 Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism, 2.
96 Henry, Confessions of a Theologian, 118.
Church sought, in fact, to block Presbyterian faculty members from teaching at Fuller by requiring consent not only of the presbyteries from which the men came but also of the presbytery to which they moved.”97 This resulted in several of the Fuller faculty being forced to transfer to alternate denominations. As a Baptist, Henry also faced hostility in coming to Fuller Theological Seminary. When Henry informed the American Baptist Convention of his new position, they removed him from their retirement plan.

R. Albert Mohler Jr. summarized the parachurch nature of New Evangelicalism:

The evangelical movement itself, while including many within established churches, was largely a parachurch movement. The momentum and defining characteristics of the movement came from the parachurch institutions which shaped the evangelical consciousness. Henry’s biography includes a litany of evangelical parachurch organizations.98

The fact that New Evangelicalism could be defined through parachurch organizations shows its dependence on parachurch ministry. New Evangelicals faced a similar situation as Fundamentalists and were forced to utilize parachurch organizations.

Intellectual Commitment

A number of the future leaders of New Evangelicalism, including Edward Carnell and George Eldon Ladd, attended Harvard during the 1940s.99 While Harvard was theologically liberal, it had a legacy of academic excellence. This time spent in liberal academic institutions impressed upon these men the importance of scholarship. Kenneth Kantzer described this as follows:

We had secured a deep appreciation for the disciplined life of a scholar, and the importance of scholarship if evangelicalism were to make its necessary impact upon

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97 Ibid.
98 Mohler, 292.
99 Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism, 120.
our society. We believed we had in some measure mastered the skills to foster an intellectual rehabilitation of fundamentalist or evangelical scholarship that, with a few bright exceptions, had drifted into eddies of thinking isolated from the main currents of the day.\textsuperscript{100}

New Evangelicals called for a return to intellectual commitment among theologically orthodox Christians.

Harold Ockenga wrote that New Evangelicalism “desires to win a new respectability for orthodoxy in the academic circles by producing scholars who can defend the faith on intellectual ground.”\textsuperscript{101} Carl Henry called for New Evangelicals to “develop a competent literature in every field of study, on every level from the grade school through the university, which adequately presents each subject with its implications from the Christian as well as non-Christian points of view.”\textsuperscript{102} The goal was for evangelical Christianity to “contend for a fair hearing for the Christian mind, among other minds, in secular education.”\textsuperscript{103} Henry also called for “evangelical colleges and universities, with the highest academic standards.”\textsuperscript{104}

New Evangelicals sought engagement in intellectual and academic endeavors. Gordon Clark wrote that “a contemporary Christian literature that studies all phases of intellectual interest is the great need of our age, for the fundamentalists have too long neglected their obligations.”\textsuperscript{105} New Evangelicalism was dedicated to intellectual commitment which they believed Fundamentalism had lacked.

\begin{footnotes}

\footnote{101} Ockenga, 14.

\footnote{102} Henry, \textit{The Uneasy Conscience}, 68.

\footnote{103} Ibid.

\footnote{104} Ibid., 70.

\footnote{105} Clark, 13.
\end{footnotes}
Ecumenism

New Evangelicalism sought to be an orthodox theological movement built upon cooperation across denominational lines.\(^{106}\) The National Association of Evangelicals was one expression of this desire for cooperation. Harold Ockenga wrote that the NAE “insisted on a positive position toward the then Federal Council of Churches and later National Council in distinction from the position later adopted by the American Council of Christian Churches.”\(^{107}\) The NAE was founded on an attitude of cooperation rather than separatism.

Millard Erickson wrote the following concerning ecumenism and the NAE:

The basis for cooperation was to be spiritual unity: all believers in Christ are one in fellowship. It was a cooperative fellowship of individuals and groups, rather than in any sense a “superchurch.”\(^{108}\)

Erickson expressed the Biblical basis for this as follows:

One of the most conspicuous aspects of the Biblical teaching regarding Christian believers is that all who are in Christ are somehow one. Jesus prayed for those who believed in Him and were to believe in Him, that “. . . they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:11, RSV). Paul’s reference to the church as the body of Christ stresses that, despite the diversity of gifts and roles, the church is one.\(^{109}\)

New Evangelicalism saw ecumenism as an application of Christian unity taught in Scripture.

This attitude of cooperation was in contrast to the separatism of Fundamentalism.

New Evangelicalism was forced to operate in parachurch ministries, which was similar to the situation faced by Fundamentalism. But in contrast to Fundamentalism, New Evangelicalism had an intellectual focus and a commitment to ecumenism. In these areas New Evangelicalism was similar to Liberalism, but with a different theological commitment.

\(^{106}\) Mohler, 284.

\(^{107}\) Ockenga, 14.

\(^{108}\) Erickson, 42.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 192–193.
A Weak Doctrine of the Church

Evangelicalism has been criticized for having a weak doctrine of the church. John Stott sees this as the result of allowing a concern for individual salvation to override other matters such as ecclesiology:

One of our chief evangelical blind spots has been to overlook the central importance of the church. We tend to proclaim individual salvation without moving on to the saved community. We emphasize that Christ died for us “to redeem us from all iniquity” rather than “to purify for himself a people of his own.” We think of ourselves more as “Christians” than as “churchmen,” and our message is more good news of a new life than of a new society.  

New Evangelicals also accused Fundamentalism of having a weak doctrine of the church. Carl Henry expressed this as follows:

Neglect of the doctrine of the Church, except in defining separation as a special area of concern, proved to be another vulnerable feature of the fundamentalist forces. This failure to elaborate the biblical doctrine of the Church comprehensively and convincingly not only contributes to the fragmenting spirit of the movement but actually hands the initiative to the ecumenical enterprise in defining the nature and relations of the churches.

New Evangelicalism understood the weak ecclesiology of Fundamentalism as being harmful to that movement. Harold Ockenga wrote that “the cause of the fundamentalist defeat in the ecclesiastical scene lay partially in fundamentalism’s erroneous doctrine of the Church which identified the Church with believers who were orthodox in doctrine and separatist in ethics.”

However, New Evangelicalism was also guilty of having an underdeveloped ecclesiology. In his 1967 work on the National Association of Evangelicals, Bruce Shelley

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12 Ockenga, 12.
wrote that a “major area of need in the NAE is an in-depth study of the doctrine of the church.”\textsuperscript{113} In spite of criticizing the Fundamentalist doctrine of the church, New Evangelicals themselves wrote very little about the church.\textsuperscript{114} Carl Henry saw New Evangelicalism’s weak doctrine of the church as something inherited from Fundamentalism.\textsuperscript{115}

Silence in Areas of Agreement with Fundamentalism

In terms of theology, New Evangelicalism was generally in agreement with Fundamentalism. Harold Ockenga expressed this as follows:

Evangelical theology is synonymous with fundamentalism or orthodoxy. In doctrine the evangelicals and the fundamentalists are one. The evangelical must acknowledge his debt to the older fundamentalist leaders.\textsuperscript{116}

While Ockenga’s assessment might be an overstatement, it does reflect the general relationship between New Evangelical and Fundamentalist theology.

Millard Erickson provided a more careful articulation of the relationship between Fundamentalist and New Evangelical theology:

The new evangelicalism holds much of its theology in common with fundamentalism and other orthodox theology. It has therefore not spoken out in some of these areas. It is where fundamentalism has seemed to distort the correct understanding, or where new data has been discovered, or where new problems now face the orthodox theologian, that the new evangelicals have articulated their doctrinal views. Their writings have primarily dealt with certain problem areas, rather than constituting a complete systematic theology.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{113} Shelley, 124.

\textsuperscript{114} Erickson, 115.


\textsuperscript{116} Ockenga, 13.

\textsuperscript{117} Erickson, 85.
Ronald Nash reflected a similar attitude in his book on New Evangelicalism. In the section titled “Evangelicalism and the Church,” Nash wrote that he was focusing on the areas of “disagreement between the evangelical and the fundamentalist.”

New Evangelicalism assumed the theological beliefs of Fundamentalism as a base from which to build. This meant there was silence in areas of agreement with Fundamentalist theology. This silence included aspects of the doctrine of the church.

A Focus on Parachurch Ministries and Ecumenism

New Evangelicalism was marked by a reliance on parachurch ministries, which were comprised of individuals from a number of different denominations. Denominational differences were viewed as a problem in the uniting of evangelicals to combat Liberalism. One result of the parachurch nature of New Evangelicalism was the minimizing of denominational distinctives.

Ecumenism presents the danger of Christianity being reduced to a least common denominator, where differences are either ignored or deliberately suppressed. Carl Henry wrote that “theological differences are minimized by evangelical publishers and publications reaching for mass circulation, by evangelists luring capacity audiences and even by evangelism festivals seeking the largest possible involvement.”

This emphasis on ecumenism helped contribute to an underdeveloped doctrine of the church. The areas of ecclesiology that received attention by New Evangelical theologians were primarily those related to ecumenism, as illustrated by Ronald Nash’s *The New*

118 Nash, 80.

119 Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 158.

Evangelicalism published in 1963. Nash wrote that “evangelicals have given serious consideration to the study of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the Church,” in his introduction to a section titled “Evangelicalism and the Church.”\footnote{Nash, 80.} As the introduction continues, Nash described the contents of this section as addressing “such matters as separatism, ecumenicity, and cooperative evangelicalism.”\footnote{Ibid.} It appears that for Nash, as a New Evangelical, a serious study of ecclesiology is accomplished by only addressing topics related to ecumenism.

In 1957, Carl Henry called for a greater focus on the doctrine of the church by New Evangelicals. But rather than seeking a comprehensive doctrine of the church, Henry called for addressing the issues of ecumenism and unity. Henry wrote that “the evangelical movement needs also the sustained study of the New Testament doctrine of the Church and a greater concern for the unity of regenerate believers.”\footnote{Henry, Evangelical Responsibility, 76–77.} The ecumenical nature of New Evangelicalism contributed to a truncated and weak doctrine of the church.

Even though New Evangelicalism was critical of Fundamentalism for having a weak doctrine of the church, it was also guilty of this. The consideration of ecclesiology was hindered by silence in areas of agreement with Fundamentalism and a desire for ecumenism. The emphasis of the New Evangelical movement on parachurch ministry and ecumenism made the development of a comprehensive ecclesiology difficult. When New Evangelical theologian Carl Henry addressed the doctrine of the church, he focused on the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God and the relationship between the church and the state. These relationships will be considered in the next two chapters.
CHAPTER 3
THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

R. Albert Mohler Jr. used the word indispensible in describing Carl Henry’s role within the New Evangelical movement:

His role in the neo-evangelical movement was, without overstatement, indispensible. Just as the story of America’s founding is impossible to tell without the indispensible George Washington and his network of colaborers, so also is it impossible to tell the story of the evangelical movement in the twentieth century without the indispensible Carl Henry and his fellow laborers Harold John Ockenga and Billy Graham.¹

While serving as editor of Christianity Today, Henry had “much to do with shaping the message that reached thousands through its pages, and he became Evangelicalism’s foremost journalist and strategist.”² Carl F. H. Henry is widely considered to be the theologian of New Evangelicalism.³

Paul House gave the following summary of Carl F. H. Henry’s activities in a volume of the Southern Baptist Journal of Theology dedicated to the life of Henry:

Though one can certainly critique his theological vision, it is historically untenable to ignore or dismiss Carl Henry’s role in the shaping of twentieth-century American evangelicalism. His involvement in evangelical life is well known and has been well documented by himself and others. He graduated from Wheaton College (B.A. 1938; M.A. 1941) and Northern Baptist Theological Seminary (B.D. 1941; Th.D. 1942), both evangelical institutions at the time.

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He taught at Northern Baptist from 1942–1947 and then became a founding faculty member at Fuller Seminary, where he served from 1947–1956. While teaching at Fuller he taught summer classes at Gordon College and completed his doctorate from Boston University in 1950. In 1956 he became the first editor of Christianity Today, and in 1966 acted as Chairman of the Berlin Congress on Evangelism, the first major international congress sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. After leaving Christianity Today in 1968 under difficult circumstances, he spent a sabbatical year at Cambridge University, and then taught at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School from 1969–1974. He maintained a part-time teaching presence at Trinity until 1997. He lectured for World Vision worldwide from 1974–1986, and in “retirement” taught and lectured at several colleges, universities, and seminaries. At one time there were precious few institutional stops Henry had not made. Along the way he was elected president of the Evangelical Theological Society and the American Theological Society. He participated in the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and in the Evangelical Affirmations conference. Through years of service given, number of miles traveled, quantity of books penned, and diversity of talks given, Henry proved his dedication to evangelical life and thought. His service deserves to be compared favorably to that of other seminal American evangelical leaders such as Harold Ockenga and Billy Graham, as well as British evangelical leaders such as James Packer and John Stott.4

While Henry addressed many matters of theology in his work, he gave little attention to the doctrine of the church. The two aspects of the church which did receive attention were the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God, considered in this chapter, and the relationship between the church and the state, considered in the next.

Thesis two in God, Revelation, and Authority, stated that “Divine revelation is given for human benefit, offering us privileged communion with our Creator in the kingdom of God.”5 Henry gave the following description of the kingdom:

The kingdom is God’s and his alone; only he has the sovereignty, authority, wisdom and freedom to rule as absolute Creator of all. Where God is present in person and in power, in righteousness and truth and love, there is the kingdom: it is wherever God holds sway.6

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6 Ibid., 2:32.
For Carl Henry, the kingdom of God was foundational in understanding the church.

**Deficient Views on the Kingdom of God**

Carl Henry found both the liberal and dispensational views on the kingdom of God to be deficient. George Marsden wrote that Henry “explicitly rejected both the ‘kingdom then’ view of dispensationalists and the ‘kingdom now’ view of the liberals.”

Millard Erickson described the situation as follows:

The Bible seemed to speak of the Kingdom as having two dimensions, or aspects, one present and one future. Liberals stressed the “Kingdom now” character and talked about “bringing in the Kingdom.” Fundamentalists majored increasingly on the “Kingdom then” or futuristic nature of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is both future and present, the new evangelicals insist, and it ought to be preached in both respects.

Basic to Henry’s position on the kingdom was embracing it as both “already and not yet.”

**Liberalism**

Henry understood Liberalism as correct in seeing an already present aspect to the kingdom of God. However Liberalism was wrong in seeking the kingdom without the regeneration of the individual as its basis:

A new attitude then arises toward society, a shift of ecclesiastical strategy due to more optimistic theories of human nature. Redemptive regeneration is no longer thought necessary to alter the main course of history, and liberalism looks instead to the social sciences as a lever to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

While redemption involves both the individual and society, the redemption of individuals must be prior to the restoration of society:

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It is to the credit of evangelical Christianity that it has never defined its primary responsibility to be the unfruitful task of reorganizing unregenerate society. Rather, it has throbbed first to the heartbeat of the Great Commission in its program of individual rescue and enlistment. Then it has uniquely and strategically registered the social impact of Christianity. The message of divine creation and redemption thus comprehends both the individual life in its private growth and the redeemed man in all his social and cultural life.\(^{10}\)

A mistaken notion concerning the person of Jesus Christ is related to this. Liberalism accepts the work of Jesus in redeeming society, but denies that Jesus was God incarnate:

The old liberal theology still subordinates the person of Jesus to the Kingdom-idea. It locates the secret of the Kingdom in Jesus’ work and teaching, not in His person. The Kingdom is then defined as a life of humanitarian idealism. Gone is the supernatural Jesus, the supernatural atonement, and supernatural regeneration.\(^{11}\)

Liberalism failed to recognize the future aspect of the kingdom of God and sought to bring about the kingdom without the supernatural work of Christ.

**Dispensationalism**

Carl Henry was also critical of the Dispensational view of the kingdom of God. He wrote that “Dispensationalism holds that Christ’s Kingdom has been postponed until the end of the Church age, and that Kingdom-ethics will become dramatically relevant again only in the future eschatological era.”\(^{12}\) Dispensationalism recognized the future aspect of the kingdom of God, but denied the present aspect.

Closely related is the issue of the millennium. Henry’s position was premillennial, but not dispensational premillennialism. He was critical of dispensational premillennialism and

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its postponement theory of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{13} Within Dispensationalism, the church and the kingdom of God are severed from one another with the kingdom of God being postponed until the second coming of Christ. Russell Moore and Robert Sagers wrote the following:

Faced with what was deemed a doctrinally and morally falling Church of England in the nineteenth century, dispensationalism radically severed the church and the Kingdom of God, seeing the church as a “parenthesis” in God’s redemptive program. The church represented a mystery people, promised heavenly blessing. The Kingdom, however, was yet future, and belonged to ethnic Israel over whom Jesus would rule from David’s throne in a rebuilt Jerusalem. When the church is raptured out of the world at the end of the age, and the kingdoms of this world are judged in the Great Tribulation, then the Kingdom of God will come with Jesus in the Eastern skies, the dispensationalists taught.\textsuperscript{14}

Part of Henry’s dissatisfaction with the Dispensational view of the kingdom of God was practical. The Dispensational view supported the church in avoiding social issues, which had a negative impact upon people’s receptiveness to Christianity. The lack of social involvement by Christians hampered evangelism. Russell Moore wrote that “Henry found the fundamentalist dismissal of the relevance of social and political engagement as a hindrance to the priority of personal evangelism.”\textsuperscript{15}

Both Liberalism and Dispensationalism had deficient views of the kingdom of God. Liberalism saw the kingdom as fully present and made the church identical with the kingdom of God. Dispensationalism saw the kingdom as fully future and denied any relationship between the church and the kingdom of God.


The Kingdom of God

For Carl Henry, the kingdom of God was essential to a proper understanding of the church. A key to understanding the kingdom is recognition of its present and future aspects. A correct understanding of the kingdom of God joins the salvation of the individual and society. Henry also discussed the relationship between the kingdom of God and justice.

The Kingdom is Both Here and Not Here

For Carl Henry, it was important to understand that the kingdom of God has both a present and future aspect. He wrote that “Jesus taught clearly that, in some tremendous sense, the Kingdom of God is now for everyone who receives Him as Savior and Lord.” But the kingdom of God has not yet come in its fullness. Henry wrote that “the fulness of His Kingdom will come at last not through man’s self-effort but like lightening slashing from heaven: it will be eschatological.”

Henry described the “already and not yet” aspects of the kingdom as follows:

In line with the progressive nature of historical revelation the OT portrayal oscillates between an emphasis on Yahweh’s already existing kingly rule and on his rule in progress toward its yet future climactic goal. In the NT the kingdom (basileia) combines these two emphases, speaking at once of God’s ongoing supremacy over and transcendent confrontation of all the universe and of the concrete historical significance of the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Man, the coming Savior of the world. The incarnation of the Logos links the transcendent and the historical in ways that force upon us an exposition of God’s kingdom in terms of both the “already” and the “not yet,” whether we have in view the kingdom of Heaven, the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Christ.

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16 Henry, The God Who Shows Himself, 100.

17 Ibid., 103.

For Henry, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Heaven, and the kingdom of Christ were terms expressing different aspects of the same kingdom.\(^{19}\)

Henry connected the Incarnation of Christ with the already aspect of the kingdom:

In the life of Jesus the Kingdom is most conspicuously present in history. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God “at hand,” because the King Himself was now personally present in the midst of men. In His very person the Kingdom of God had already come.\(^{20}\)

He saw this as being clearly taught in the gospels:

Mark 1:14–15 summarizes Jesus’ preaching as the proclamation of God’s kingdom: “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” The waiting period was over, and God was in a climactic way initiating his royal salvific work on earth. Luke 4:21 tells of Jesus beginning his ministry by reading Isaiah 61 and declaring that passage vitally fulfilled. Jesus’ miraculous works are depicted as manifestations of the kingdom of God (Matt 11:5; cf. Isa 35:5–6). Jesus’ teaching was centered in the inbreaking kingdom of God, which will bring all other kingdoms to a standstill. That kingdom was already present and manifest in his teaching, his works, and above all his person.\(^{21}\)

Henry also saw this expressed in Jesus’ words at the Last Supper:

When Jesus instituted the last supper as Judas was about to betray him, Jesus said to his disciples: “I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:37).\(^{22}\)

The kingdom of God as a present reality gives power to those who are members of the kingdom:

We are already in the kingdom; we share in eternal life, live on speaking terms with the Lord in whom we have our new life and who indwells us. We are quickened by the power of the Holy Spirit to do his will and enlisted in the historical expansion of the kingdom from heaven to earth. . . .

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 43–44.


\(^{21}\) Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” 41.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 43.
Though “not of this world” (John 18:36, KJV) the kingdom of God exists not on some invisible and inaccessible planet; in significant respects it is already a historical reality even here on earth where the risen Lord is sovereign in a kingdom that exists alongside other kingdoms and interpenetrates and confronts them as an invincible reality. In this world, where every historical institution and activity must fall under the judgment of God, and where the church even at her best is but an approximation of the kingdom of God, only the grace of Christ can avail for any of us. For all that, the kingdom is nonetheless not without historical presence and power.  

But while the kingdom is already here, it is not yet here in its final form. Henry wrote that “yet Christ’s kingdom is to reach its supreme climax in the goal of the messianic age, the eternal kingdom of God.”  

Henry found Scriptural support for the kingdom of God as future:

All branches of Christendom find the ultimate consummation of the kingdom of God in a new heavens and a new earth (Revelation 21) in which justice is fully at home and where righteousness has an undisputed dwelling place. The vision of the heavenly city of God (Rev. 21:9-22:5) that Christ first unveils at his second advent “comes down” from above in express contrast to the city of the antichrist (17:1-18).

Revelation teaches that the climax of history will be the kingdom coming in its fullness.

Central to Henry’s thought was the kingdom of God as both here and not here. He presented an overview of this in The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism:

No study of the kingdom teaching of Jesus is adequate unless it recognizes His implication both that the kingdom is here, and that it is not here. This does not imply an ultimate paradox, but rather stresses that the kingdom exists in incomplete realization. The task of the Bible student is to discover (1) in what sense it is here; (2) in what sense it is to be further realized before the advent of Christ; and (3) in what sense it will be fully realized at the advent of Christ.

Understanding the extent to which the kingdom was “already and not yet” was critical for Carl Henry.

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23 Henry, God, Revelation, and Authority, 2:36.

24 Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” 43.

25 Ibid., 49.

26 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience, 48.
Carl Henry understood that redemption involves both the individual and society. One of the problems with Liberalism was that it addressed the salvation of society, but neglected the salvation of the individual. While Fundamentalism made the opposite error by limiting salvation to the individual and failing to extend it to society. The kingdom of God embraces both the salvation of individuals and society.

Henry saw danger in equating Christianity solely with either society or the individual. He wrote the following concerning the danger of equating Christianity with society:

One would relate Christianity primarily to social structures, and strip the Gospel of its imperative call to personal redemption by Jesus Christ who forgives sinners one by one and allots them individually a place in His kingdom. This interest simply in Christian culture or Christian civilization has plagued Western Christianity in modern as well as medieval times. In effect, it reduces the Gospel to a social philosophy and turns the Bible into an ideology, prizing them simply as instruments of social renovation.\(^27\)

Henry addressed the danger of equating Christianity strictly with the individual as follows:

The other temptation is to taper our proclamation of Jesus Christ solely to the message of individual redemption, to the forgiveness of sins, and to conceal the fact that He is the King of truth and Lord of life. If it is objectionable to reduce the Gospel to social ideology, it is no less objectionable to neglect and narrow the whole counsel of God by not affirming the lordship of Christ over the larger world of human learning and culture.\(^28\)

The salvation of the individual and society are joined within the kingdom of God. A proper understanding of the kingdom of God precludes the possibility of thinking about salvation strictly in terms of the individual or society.


\(^{28}\) Ibid., 39.
Justice and the Kingdom of God

Carl Henry wrote that “the goal of God’s kingdom is to subordinate all things to him as the creator, judge and redeemer.” One aspect of this subordination is justice, with the source of justice being the one true king who rules over all:

Justice is at home in heaven not only because God dwells there and will reign as king over the coming new heavens and new earth, but also because justice has its very foundation and essential structure in the kingdom of God. Moral law and justice are not independent self-sufficient realities, nor are they a self-generated creaturely perfection of human nature. Nor does universal human reason immanently postulate them. The source, content, and sanction of justice exist exclusively and uniquely in the nature and will of God.

But justice will always be limited in the current fallen state of the world:

Justice is not fully at home in fallen man’s history; more as a pilgrim, frequently as a harried pilgrim, justice struggles for a fixed place in one civilization and culture after another. Only in heaven is justice truly at home.

Justice will not be fully established until the kingdom of God is fully established. Justice, like the kingdom, is both “already and not yet.”

Justice and the kingdom of God begin with proclamation of the divine source for morality. But justice also requires that the citizens of the kingdom be living examples:

Evangelicals need, in brief, to display the courage and sacrifice implicit in love as the public fulfillment of law by helping articulate the implications of justice and law in the life of the world. The present civilizational crisis calls for recovering the transcendent basis of law and justice as well as the truth of revelation; for newly respecting objective law and justice in public structures; for formulating and supporting constructive policies and programs; for accelerating neighbor love that reflects both the spirit and the letter of the law; and for recharging dispirited individuals with evangelical and evangelistic vitalities that nurture self-restraint.

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29 Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” 40.


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 6:436.
The members of the kingdom of God should both proclaim the source for justice and be living demonstrations of divine justice.

The kingdom of God is both “already and not yet.” A proper understanding of the kingdom of God connects the salvation of society and the individual. The source for justice is the king who rules over his kingdom.

The Church’s Relationship to the Kingdom of God

The “already and not yet” nature of the kingdom of God enters into its relationship with the church:

To be sure it is God’s Messiah, and not God’s people zealously engaged on their own and independently of Jesus Christ, who can truly overthrow the powers of unrighteousness. In almighty power Jesus Christ himself will come to subdue the forces of evil. Overturning all the structures of injustice he will establish the great age of peace and righteousness. But the church which bears his name is already called, now, to challenge and contain the powers of evil: as the living Body of its living Head the church is now to resist the Evil One, now to indict rampant injustices and support the afflicted and oppressed, now to sensitize moral conscience against wrong and for the right, now to exhibit the purpose of God in a new life and a new community while it proclaims the revealed truth and will of God.  

For Carl Henry, the church is an approximation of the kingdom of God and a sign of God’s redemptive presence in the world.

An Approximation of the Kingdom of God

Thesis fourteen in God, Revelation, and Authority directly addressed the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. Henry wrote that “the church approximates God’s kingdom in miniature, mirroring to each generation the power and joy of the appropriated realities of divine revelation.” Henry described this in greater detail:

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34 Ibid., 4:542.
On the frontiers between the unregenerate world and the kingdom of God the Christian community is entrenched to proclaim the gospel and to clarify the dual destinies that confront the whole human race. The Church is not the kingdom but prefigures the kingdom as its nearest approximation in the collective history of humanity.\(^{35}\)

As a community of believers, the church is engaged in warfare for its king:

Moreover the emancipating Redeemer grants new life to the penitent and enlists them as a committed community, as the new society, to his ongoing victorious combat over the forces of evil. Even now the risen Christ is active in history, leading his followers in resistance against sin and Satan whom the wicked serve.\(^{36}\)

Henry understood that “the closest approximation of the Kingdom of God today is the Church, the body of regenerate believers that owns the crucified and risen Redeemer as its Head.”\(^{37}\) The church is made up of members of the kingdom.

A Sign of God’s Redemptive Presence

The role of the church is not to impose the kingdom on the world; rather the church is to serve as a sign for the world of God’s redemptive presence:

Instead of contriving to impose theonomy on a rebellious world, which in any event is dying in its sins, the Church should strive rather to be a radiant Christocracy wherein Christ rules the obedient new society by the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit. Where the Spirit enlivens the new community there the kingdom’s incursion is manifest, transforming once ungodly individuals into a holy fellowship. The kingdom is a community-nourishing reality in which the people of God share citizenship by invitation of the King.\(^{38}\)

The church is able to serve as a visible representation of the kingdom because Christ is its head and it has the power of the Holy Spirit:

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\(^{35}\) Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” 44.

\(^{36}\) Henry, God, Revelation, and Authority, 4:542.

\(^{37}\) Henry, The God Who Shows Himself, 89.

\(^{38}\) Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” 45.
The kingdom of God is present in the Church in the presence of Jesus Christ its invisible Head. It is present in the Holy Spirit’s dynamic, transforming power in the lives of saints, who remain sinners despite their best resolves and yet who are united in a deep love for God and for each other in a community that anticipates a deepening moral communion as the kingdom takes visible form.  

But the church cannot fulfill its role as a sign of God’s presence in the world if it turns a blind eye to injustice:

Christ’s church cannot signal hope to those whose destitution and deprivation annul the dignity and the meaningfulness of human survival if it uncritically condones members as those who profess devotion to Christ while they consciously support socially and politically oppressive powers, policies and programs; or if it communicates the notion that a believer’s only response to political or economic injustice is passivity and acquiescence; or if it closes its eyes to the public or private abuse of the poor by those who augment its coffers; or if it proclaims evangelism as its only interest in the needs of mankind so that other agencies must implement the concern for social justice. The Christian world mission dare not be labeled sympathetic to ongoing domination and oppression when its true mission encompasses new freedom in new life.

Henry utilized the phrase “God’s redemptive presence” in discussing the relationship between the church and the world:

The church of Christ Jesus is the sign of God’s redemptive presence in the world. The church evidences that in fallen history a new humanity and a new society can arise where reconciliation and righteousness, hope and joy replace the rampant exploitation and oppression of fellow-humans and their despair of survival.

The kingdom of God is both “already and not yet.” The already nature of the kingdom means that the church can serve as an approximation of the kingdom today. It also means that the church can serve as a sign of God’s presence to the watching world. The not yet nature of the kingdom means that justice cannot be fully present in the world at this time. The future aspect of the kingdom is seen in the church being in a still fallen world.

39 Ibid.

40 Henry, God, Revelation, and Authority, 4:545.

41 Ibid., 4:543.
An Evaluation of Henry’s Position

The issues raised by Carl Henry concerning the kingdom of God were developed by other evangelical theologians, including George Eldon Ladd. Ladd was a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and gave extensive consideration to the kingdom of God. He wrote the following concerning the importance of the kingdom of God:

Modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus. Mark introduces Jesus’ mission with the words, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’” (Mk. 1:14–15). Matthew summarizes his ministry with the words, “He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (Mt. 4:23). Luke’s introductory scene does not mention the Kingdom of God but instead quotes a prophecy from Isaiah about the coming of the Kingdom and then relates Jesus’ affirmation, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:21).

This section will evaluate Henry’s teaching on the kingdom of God from the standpoint of Scripture and the writings of other theologians.

Matthew 16:18-19

In Matthew 16:13-20, Jesus questioned the disciples concerning his identity. Peter ultimately answered that, “You are the Christ, the Son of the loving God” (16:16). Jesus’ response to Peter included the following words:

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and

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43 Moore and Sagers, “The Kingdom of God and the Church,” 70.


whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (16:18-19)

Matthew 16:18-19 is considered one of the most controversial passages in Scripture. This discussion will focus on the church and the kingdom of God.

One preliminary issue is the role of Peter in this passage. Do Jesus’ words apply to Peter alone or are they more comprehensive? While it was Peter who made the pronouncement in Matt. 16:16, he was acting as the leader and spokesman for all the disciples, so it is reasonable to assume that Jesus’ words apply to all of the Twelve. Matt. 18:18, which is a parallel passage, also supports the application of Jesus’ words to all of the apostles. In Matt. 16:19, the pronouns Jesus used were singular, but in Matt. 18:18, Jesus makes the same pronouncement utilizing plural pronouns. In Matt. 16:13-20, Peter was acting as representative for the Twelve, so Jesus’ response should also be applied to the Twelve. Peter served as representative for the Twelve and even for the entire church.

The next point for consideration is the usage of the word ‘church’ in this passage. Some commentators argue that the word church was not originally spoken by Jesus. Leon Morris comments on this as follows:

The word church has also caused much disputation. Since it occurs in the Gospels again only in 18:17, many scholars hold that Jesus could not have used the word. Its occurrence here, they think, is a case of Matthew’s reading back onto the lips of Jesus an expression that would justify the existence of the church in his day.

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47 Ibid., 468.

But the word for church has a broad range of meaning from a nonreligious assembly of people, to God’s people in the Old Testament, to a Christian congregation.  

So Jesus was not necessarily referring to the church as it was more fully developed.

But Jesus’ use of the word church should be understood to mean more than just any assembly. Jesus would have intended his followers to continue as a group after his death.  

Also, “ancient teachers regularly established communities of followers to perpetuate their teachings.” The idea of a Messiah without a Messianic Community would have been virtually impossible. While Jesus’ words do not necessarily refer to the fully developed New Testament church, they do refer to “the community of people who submit to God’s kingly rule.”

The final point for consideration is Jesus’ reference to “the keys to the kingdom of heaven” in Matt. 16:19. Within the context of this thesis, the most significant issue is the meaning of the phrase “the kingdom of heaven.” Concerning the term kingdom of heaven and it relationship to the kingdom of God, R. T. France notes that Matthew’s usage of the kingdom of heaven is functionally the same as Mark and Luke’s usage of the kingdom of heaven.

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50 Morris, 424–425.


52 Ibid., 427–428.

God and even occurs in parallel passages. Matthew’s use of the kingdom of heaven may simply be a matter of style requiring no explanation.

This passage also relates the church to the kingdom of God. Leon Morris describes the relationship between the church and the kingdom as follows:

The kingdom, of course, is not to be identified with the church. The kingdom has reference to the divine rule; the church to the people of God. They are closely related, but not identical. The understanding that the church and the kingdom are closely related but not identical to each other is in line with Henry’s teaching.

D. A. Carson goes on to explicitly connect this passage with inaugurated eschatology:

The messianic reign is calling out the messianic people. The kingdom has been inaugurated; the people are being gathered. So far as the kingdom has been inaugurated in advance of its consummation, so far also is Jesus’ church an outpost in history of the final eschatological community. While Carson may be going beyond the intention of Jesus’ words, this does show that Carl Henry’s understanding of the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God was consistent with Scripture. An “already and not yet” view of the kingdom is consistent with Matthew 16:18-19.

Both Here and Not Here

George Eldon Ladd argued that the kingdom of God has both “already and not yet” aspects. He wrote that “as there are two advents of Christ, one in the flesh which we call the Incarnation, the other in glory which we call the Parousia or Second Advent, so there are two

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55 Morris, 425.

56 Carson, 420.
manifestations of God’s Kingdom: one in power and glory when Christ returns, but one which is present now because God’s Son has already appeared among men.”

Ladd was critical of both the Dispensational and Liberal views of the kingdom. He used the term eschatological to describe the view of Dispensationalism, which sees virtually no present relationship between the kingdom of God and the church. The kingdom is something which belongs to Israel alone, with the church being a parenthesis within God’s dealing with Israel. But the eschatological position fails since Scripture teaches a present reality of the kingdom of God. In Matthew 12:28, Jesus said, “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” The apostle Paul teaches that Christians have been brought into the kingdom in Colossians 1:13.

Ladd used the term sociological to describe the position of Liberalism regarding the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. The sociological position understands the kingdom as something to be achieved by the church on earth:

The Kingdom of God is the ideal social order in which men learn to enjoy a relation to God as sons and to one another as brothers. It is humanity organized according to the will of God, the Christian transfiguration of the social order, the establishment of a community of righteousness in mankind. The goal of the church is to build the kingdom of God on earth. But the sociological view is not faithful to Christian eschatology. The final consummation of the kingdom will not occur until the second coming of Christ.

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59 Ibid., 167–168.

60 Ibid., 167.
Ladd used the term theological to describe the proper relationship between the kingdom of God and the church. In the theological view there is a close relationship between the church and the kingdom, but the two are not identical. The kingdom of God necessarily involves the church, since the church is “the people of the Kingdom, those who have accepted the redemptive rule of God.” But the church is not identical with the kingdom. The theological view preserves the strengths of both the eschatological and social views. Like the eschatological view, it recognizes that the kingdom of God will only come to consummation at the second coming of Christ. And like the sociological view, it understands that the kingdom is active today in delivering people from physical evil.

Ladd summed up the relationship between the church and the kingdom as follows:

Thus, the church is essential to the Kingdom. The Kingdom has invaded human history in Christ; it has created the church. The Kingdom now works in the world through the church, redeeming men from the tyranny of sin and influencing human society for righteousness wherever it goes. And it will yet manifest itself in power, purging the world of sin and bringing the redeemed into the full blessings of God’s consummated Kingdom.

Gregg Allison, a Baptist theologian, presented five themes concerning the kingdom of God:

In summary, the kingdom of God includes (1) the universal rule and complete reign of the sovereign King over everything he has created and sustains in existence; (2) the people of Israel, graciously chosen from among all the peoples of the world to be God’s covenant kingdom people; (3) an anticipated future vision associated with a Davidic King and the Son of Man; (4) an inaugurated reality, fulfilled “already” in Jesus Christ who preached the gospel of the kingdom of God, which message gives rise to and results in children of the kingdom and citizens of opposition; and (5) a hope for the “not yet” aspects of the kingdom reality in Jesus, to be completed soon.

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61 Ibid., 168–171.
62 Ibid., 168.
63 Ibid., 171.
Accordingly, the church relates to the kingdom of God according to these five themes.\textsuperscript{64} Both Ladd and Allison take a view of the kingdom of God similar to Carl Henry where there is both an “already and a not yet” aspect to the kingdom. They also see a close, but distinct relationship between the church and the kingdom of God like Henry. Ladd was also critical of Liberalism and Dispensationalism for having deficient views of the kingdom of God in a similar fashion to Henry.

During Carl Henry’s earlier and most active years, there was a lack of agreement among evangelicals concerning the nature of the kingdom of God. But in more recent years, the “already and not yet” aspect of the kingdom of God has been widely recognized. This position is held by a variety of theologians, from Progressive Dispensationalists, such as Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, to Covenant theologians, such as Anthony Hoekema and Edmund Clowney.\textsuperscript{65} Regarding the kingdom of God, the general consensus among evangelicals today is for an inaugurated eschatology,\textsuperscript{66} which was the position of Carl Henry.

The Church and the Kingdom of God

George Eldon Ladd wrote that “one of the most difficult questions in the study of the Kingdom of God is its relationship to the church.”\textsuperscript{67} He said that the “difficulty rests in the fact that this relationship is not explicitly set forth in Scripture but must be inferred.”\textsuperscript{68} For

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} Gregg R. Allison, \textit{Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church, Foundations of Evangelical Theology} (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 93.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Moore, \textit{The Kingdom of Christ}, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ladd, \textit{A Theology of the New Testament}, 103.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Ladd, \textit{The Gospel of the Kingdom}, 107.
\end{itemize}
Ladd, the kingdom as both “already and not yet” was central to a proper understanding of the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God.

George Eldon Ladd wrote that “the Kingdom of God, as the redemptive activity and rule of God in Christ, created the Church and works through the Church in the world.”69 This was true during the time of Jesus’ ministry when he sent out the seventy-two in Luke 10:1-12 to perform signs of the kingdom and declare that “the kingdom of God has come near to you.”70 And this is still true for the church today:

In the same way, the Kingdom of God, the redemptive activity and power of God, is working in the world today through the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is the fellowship of disciples of Jesus who have received the life of the Kingdom and are dedicated to the task of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom in the world.71

George Eldon Ladd discussed five points which help explain the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church.72 The first is that the church is not the kingdom. While there is an inseparable relationship between the church and the kingdom, they are not identical. The second point is that the kingdom of God creates the church. Jesus’ mission presented the dynamic rule of God, which brings people into the fellowship of the church. The third point is that the church’s mission is to witness to the kingdom of God:

If Jesus’ disciples are those who have received the life and fellowship of the Kingdom, and if this life is in fact an anticipation of the eschatological Kingdom, then it follows that one of the main tasks of the church is to display in this present evil age the life and fellowship of the Age to Come.73

69 Ibid., 115.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 115–116.
73 Ibid., 113.
Fourth, the church is an instrument of the kingdom of God. Just as Jesus’ disciples were his instruments while performing miracles in his name, so does the church serve Christ today. The fifth point is that the church is the custodian of the kingdom of God. The disciples of Jesus are the true children of God’s kingdom and its custodians.

Ladd’s understanding of the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God is in agreement with Henry. The church and the kingdom are closely related, but not identical. And the church is to visibly display God’s kingdom to the watching world.

Russell Moore and Robert Sagers, also Baptist theologians like Henry and Ladd, have a similar understanding to the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church. But they press the issue even further and argue that a Baptist ecclesiology best represents the “already and not yet” nature of the kingdom of God:

The contention of this article is that understanding the church as a colony of the Kingdom in this already/not yet structure makes most sense within a Baptist ecclesial framework. The church, then, in its relationship to the Kingdom of Christ, is made up of subjects of the Kingdom, announces the onset of the Kingdom, and lives out the ethics of the Kingdom. A historic, confessional Baptist ecclesiology has the exegetical and theological explanatory power lacking in some contemporary expressions of evangelical ecclesiology.74

Moore and Sagers also point out that one of the weaknesses in Henry’s writings was a lack of attention to the church. This created difficulties for a proper understanding of the kingdom of God:

But without a clearly developed doctrine of the church the benefits of inaugurated eschatology are nullified, as it is then almost impossible to differentiate between the “already” and the “not yet” aspects of the Kingdom. In Scripture, the new society created by the “already” reign of Christ is not some unexplainable force or indefinable group, but rather an assembly, a church, a colony of the Kingdom itself.75

74 Moore and Sagers, 65.

75 Ibid., 76.
As a New Evangelical, Henry was willing to discuss limited aspects of ecclesiology, such as the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. But even these aspects could not be fully developed within an ecumenical evangelical theology.

For Carl Henry, the proper relationship between the church and the kingdom of God was the foundational issue for understanding the doctrine of the church. The other aspect of ecclesiology that was given significant attention was the relationship between the church and the state. This will be considered in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4
THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

In January of 1968, J. Howard Pew wrote to Carl Henry about an article in Christianity Today addressing social action.\(^1\) In response to Pew’s concerns, Henry laid out the following five points:

I assured Pew that Christianity Today’s commitment on Christianity and social action had not changed from its original stand and listed the five tenets of our position:

1. The Bible is critically relevant to the whole of modern life and culture—the socio-political arena included.

2. The institutional church has no mandate, jurisdiction or competence to endorse political legislation or military tactics or economic specifics in the name of Christ.

3. The institutional church is divinely obliged to proclaim God’s entire revelation, including the standards or commandments by which men and nations are to be finally judged, and by which they ought now to live and maintain social stability.

4. The political achievement of a better society is the task of all citizens, and individual Christians ought to be politically engaged to the limit of their competence and opportunity.

5. The Bible limits the proper activity of both government and church for divinely stipulated objectives—the former, the preservation of justice and order, and the latter, the moral-spiritual task of evangelizing the earth.\(^2\)

While Henry did not address the topic of the church very often, one area that did receive attention was the relationship between the church and the state. He wrote that “although the Christian Church ought to rely on the spiritual regeneration of individuals to


\(^2\) Ibid.
transform society, it must not on that account neglect the role of education and legislation in preserving what is valuable in the present social order.” Henry was concerned about the proper roles for the church and the individual in relation to the state.

**Deficient Views on the Church and the State**

Carl Henry was critical of the Liberal and Dispensational views concerning the relationship between the church and the state. His criticism was closely related to their deficiencies regarding the kingdom of God. Liberalism makes too close of a connection and Dispensationalism does not make enough of a connection.

**Liberalism**

Liberalism removed the salvation of individuals as necessary for the transformation of society. “No longer was the Kingdom distinctive found in Jesus' regeneration of lost individuals; instead, the ‘moral influence of Jesus’ in public affairs, and then the socio-political influence of churchmen espousing legislative programs in His name, soon became the essence of Christian relevance.” Henry also wrote that “in the twentieth century the ecumenical movement has failed most conspicuously in its mission to the world by relying on political and sociological forces, and by neglecting spiritual dynamisms.” Liberalism connected the church and the state too closely and equated Christianity with political action.

Russell Moore wrote the following on Henry’s view of Liberalism:

It was also that the liberals had succeeded in turning the denominations into the equivalent of political action committees, addressing a laundry list of social and

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5 Ibid., 72.
political issues. The problem with the Social Gospel ecclesiology, Henry concluded, was the same anti-supernaturalism that destroyed its soteriology; Protestant liberalism had replaced a regenerate church over which the resurrected Messiah ruled as Head with a largely unregenerate visible church. Henry thereby tied the liberal Protestant view of the church and political action directly to a theologically problematic view of salvation, a “neo-Protestant view” that “substitutes the notion of corporate salvation for individual salvation.”

Liberalism made the error of asking the church to directly seek to establish just laws.

Dispensationalism

Henry saw Dispensational Premillennialism as also having an erroneous view concerning the relationship between the church and the state. This was based on their denying any current reality to the kingdom of God:

Dispensationalism erects a cleavage in biblical ethics in the interest of debatable eschatological theory. Dispensationalism holds that Christ’s Kingdom has been postponed until the end of the Church age, and that Kingdom-ethics will become dramatically relevant again only in the future eschatological era.

Dispensationalism made the ethics of the kingdom of God irrelevant to the present age. This leaves the church with no obligation to proclaim the divine standards for ethics to the world.

Henry understood the position of Fundamentalism as due in part to a reaction against the error of Liberalism:

Social action begins, of course, only where there is some sense of the immorality of the status quo, a witness against social evils, and a creative challenge to the established attitudes and patterns of society. Social passivity is no strategy at all. Hence we ignore that mood of indifference settling on some churches in their recoil from Protestant liberalism’s substitution of social betterment for spiritual redemption. In these churches the sole preoccupation is private saintliness, preaching “Christ crucified” in absolute isolation from socio-political affairs, and promoting the piety of the local church in total unconcern over social disorders and evils.

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The church has a responsibility regarding the state which was denied by Dispensationalism.

**The Role of the Church**

The relationship between the church and the state is distinct from the relationship between the church and its members. Henry wrote that “while among its own constituency the Church may legislate its moral code under threat of discipline, it is not free to force its distinctive requirements upon society as a whole through techniques of pressure and compulsion.”

Rather the role of the church is to reveal the divine standards of justice to the world.

**The Faithful Exposition of Divine Standards**

Carl Henry wrote that “as the new society headed by the risen living Christ, the regenerate church is called to demonstrate to the world the character of moral life implicit in the new covenant; as light and salt the church is to reflect God’s will in the world.” This demonstration involves both words and actions:

The new society is divinely obliged to witness to the world and to teach the nations all that Christ has commanded. The new society is to publish worldwide the criteria by which Christ at his return in power and glory will judge the human race and all the nations. In her own lifestyle, moreover, the believing Church is to exemplify what spiritual and moral obedience really requires and is to exhort the world to conform its legal structures and social enterprises, as well as its interpersonal life, to God’s revealed will.

The church can do this because of its relationship with the sovereign Lord:

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The Church upholds transcendent law in its insistence on man’s dignity and on social morality, not for the sake of law as such, but in recognition of the centrality of God’s revealed will. The Church knows the Lord who transcends all legal statues and authority. It knows that law and religion meet in the law-enlightened conscience.\textsuperscript{11}

The church needs to explicitly connect justice with the God and his written Word:

The Church’s most important concern in regard to law and order is that government should recognize its ultimate answerability to the supernatural source, sanction, and specification of human rights and duties, and hence of government’s limited nature and role as a “minister” of justice. This recognition implies a congruity between the social commandments of the Decalogue and the principles expressed ideally in the laws of the State.\textsuperscript{12}

The church’s involvement in the world and giving voice to God’s standards is not optional:

Yet the believing Church’s engagement in the surrounding culture is not merely optional. God’s people must expose the world’s pretentious assumptions, must indicate whence these flawed premises come and whither they lead, must counter them with the sovereign Lord’s revealed truth and will, must expound the factuality of the kingdom in its Edenic forfeiture, in its prophetic promise, in its Christological manifestation, in its apostolic proclamation, and in its ongoing conflict with alien powers that the risen Lord perpetuates through the regenerate society that he directs as commander-in-chief.\textsuperscript{13}

The church must proclaim God’s sovereignty, the divine standards, and the reality of the kingdom of God to the world.

Henry also saw limitations on the church’s role in the area of social justice. He wrote that “while the corporate or institutional church has no divine mandate, jurisdiction, or special competence for approving legislative proposals or political parties and persons, the pulpit is responsible for proclaiming divinely revealed principles of social justice as part of

\textsuperscript{11} Henry, \textit{Aspects of Christian Social Ethics}, 90.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 97–98.

\textsuperscript{13} Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” 48.
the whole counsel of God.”

The church is not to promote specific legislation, but it is to proclaim the standards which legislation should be based upon.

Compassion and Benevolence

Carl Henry understood that the church, not the state, has the responsibility to exercise compassion and benevolence. Liberalism made the error of shifting the responsibility for compassion and benevolence to the state:

Evangelicals do not view government as an instrument of benevolence or compassion, since love is preferential and shows favor or partiality. Constantly pressing the question, “Don’t you care?,” liberals enlist support for legislating programs of benevolence. Such an appeal to “compassion” in support of legislative programs commits a twofold error, however: it diverts government from an ideal preservation of equal human rights before the law, and it shifts to the state a responsibility for compassion or benevolence that belongs properly to the Church.

Henry warned that confusion would result from a failure to properly distinguish between the roles of the church and the state:

The Church's failure to differentiate clearly what she supports as justice in government welfare, from what she distinguishes as benevolence, is a costly mistake. It creates a twilight zone in which human rights and human desires are difficult to distinguish.

Has the Church any biblical basis for viewing agape as a government duty, or for making agape a citizen's rightful expectation from the State?

Is not the State's obligation in preserving justice to provide what is due (as corresponding to the rights of men) rather than to implement agape by acts of mercy or love?

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15 Ibid., 63.

Henry wrote that “ideally, the purpose of the Church is to preach the Gospel and to manifest unmerited, compassionate love.”\(^{17}\) This is in contrast to the purpose of the state which is “to preserve justice, not to implement benevolence.”\(^{18}\) Acts of compassion and benevolence should come from the church as an expression of the love of God.

**An Objection to Wrongs by the State**

The church is called to object when the laws of the state are in conflict with God’s standards. The objection must be tied to the divine standards which are being violated. This type of objection is distinct from one based on the will of the people:

> Yet objecting to the arbitrary will of a sovereign power because of its conflict with the revealed will of God is something very different from objecting because of the will of the majority. That majority may, of course, identify itself with the divine will. But most democratic societies today now correlate positive law first and exclusively with only the will of the people, even as most totalitarian societies correlate it with the will of the dictatorial rulers.

As a result, the content of positive law changes frequently and unpredictably. In the United States, moreover, law also differs regionally from state to state and even within different cities in the fifty states.\(^{19}\) This type of objection can only occur when the church is already faithful in proclaiming the divine standards for justice.

Like the prophets in the Old Testament, the church is called to speak out against injustice. But the church should not be involved with specific laws and policies:

> Nor do we deny the Church’s scriptural right through the pulpit and through its synods, assemblies, and councils to emphasize the divinely revealed principles of social order and to speak out publically against the great moral evils that arise in community life. The Old Testament prophets thundered against injustice, oppression, and other forms of social evil, and they did so in the name of the Lord. So too


\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6:452.
Christians must, if they are to be faithful to their calling, speak in God’s name against unrighteousness in society.

But the Church as a corporate body has no divine mandate to become officially involved in the approval of economic programs and political strategies. It is not the business of the Church to inform the federal government about matters of national defense and international policy. Nor is it the duty of the Church to consider the economic, military, and peacetime aspects of getting to the moon, and to advise the government whether this ought or ought not to be done.\(^{20}\)

One of the reasons Henry gave for the church not entering into the world of politics was practical. Involvement in politics can lead to turmoil within the church. “Whenever the Church advances a political ideology or promotes partisan legislation, its ecclesiastical leaders are soon forced into the position of impugning the integrity of influential Christians who sincerely dissent from the official views.”\(^{21}\)

The church is not to utilize the government to bring about the kingdom of God:

To achieve a Christian society by political action is, therefore, not the Church’s objective. Using government as a transforming agency to produce a social utopia, and projecting the Kingdom of God as essentially politico-economic in character, have harmed both the character of pure religion and the cause of government. In such attempts, the Christian religion neglects its distinctive message and its distinctive dynamism for social regeneration, and the state loses its proper passion for justice in sentimental theories of benevolence that simply tend to substitute the special privileges of one class or group for those of another.\(^{22}\)

The role of the church is linked to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is “extended by the new regenerate society’s containment of injustice and unrighteousness.”\(^{23}\)

While the church itself should exercise restraint in terms of pursuing positive goals, through the influence of its membership, the church can influence on the state:

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\(^{23}\) Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” 45.
Through government of its own members, the Church indirectly promotes the welfare of society as a whole. Its moral demands obviously overlap broad aspects of general social conduct, especially in sexual and marital concerns. Since the family is fundamental to society, the Church’s administration of marriage vows—even if it is not free to demand a religious ceremony—gains importance by upholding the ideal of unbroken union and mutual obligation of one man and one woman. When the Church requires her membership to practice Christian principles in everyday life it unavoidably touches upon many areas of conduct subject also to civil legislation.  

So while the church should not to become directly involved in matters of the state, the church can influence the state. The church is called to proclaim the divine standards to the world, exercise compassion and benevolence, and object to wrongs by the state.

The Role of the Individual

Henry distinguished the role of the individual from that of the church:

The Church as a corporate body has no spiritual mandate to sponsor economic, social, and political programs. Nowhere does the New Testament authorize the Church to endorse specific legislative proposals as part of its ecclesiastical mission in the world.

The priority of the individual Christian action in society is not in dispute. Every Christian according to his place and opportunity must bring his Christian faith to bear upon the problems and questions that arise in all areas of life.  

Unlike the church, individual Christians can directly engage in matters of the state.

The Working towards Positive Goals

In contrast to the church, the individual Christian is in a position to work towards positive goals. Henry wrote that “there is no reason at all why evangelical Christians should not engage energetically in projecting social structures that promote the interests of justice in every public realm; in fact, they have every legitimate sanction for social involvement.”

24 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 79.


The basis for this involvement is the common denominator of humanity between

Christians and non-Christians:

The Christian is not, by his church identification, isolated from humanity, or from involvement in the political and economic orders. Not only is he called to identify himself with society: he is identified, by the very fact of his humanity, and as a Christian he bears a double responsibility in relation to the social needs and goals of mankind. Social justice is a need of the individual, whose dignity as a person is at stake, and of society and culture, which soon collapse without it.  

Individual Christians have a responsibility to care for their neighbors:

The Christian is called not simply to abstain from evil and to deal justly with other men, but he is also to seek his neighbor's regeneration. Wherever his life touches human need, the believer is to respond. His involvement in social responsibility grows not so much out of a comprehensive social theory as out of direct obedience to God and genuine personal interest in his neighbors.

Individual Christians are called to work towards positive goals for their neighbors and all of society.

The Support and Promotion of Just Laws

While the church is charged with proclaiming the biblical principles of social order, individuals have the responsibility of working toward the implementation of biblical principles in just laws:

Biblical revelation confines itself largely to ideal principles of social order; it does not commit itself to particular parties or programs of social reform. A serious approach to political responsibilities, however, must move from the norm of principles to involvement with personalities, parties, and programs in the given situation, and must grapple with their respective claims to serve the cause of justice and truth. Here the individual Christian must commit his personal support; but he has no right to commit the endorsement of the Church as a whole.

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27 Ibid., 61.
28 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 100.
29 Ibid., 129.
Carl Henry called for the involvement of individual Christians in civil government to the extent of their abilities:

Public duty to civil government by the Christian includes challenging legal injustice and promoting legal justice and equity in the application of civil law. The Christian is to “submit to the authorities” in good conscience (Rom. 13:5, NIV). He is to be publicly engaged in the arena of justice to the limit of personal ability and opportunity but always within the boundaries of morality.\(^{30}\)

These actions by the individual are an aspect of God’s plan for redemption:

As citizens of two worlds, individual church members have the sacred duty to extend God’s purpose of redemption through the Church, and also to extend God’s purpose of justice and order through civil government. Christians are to distinguish themselves by civil obedience except where this conflicts with the commandments of God, and are to use every political opportunity to support and promote just laws, to protest social injustice, and to serve their fellow men.\(^{31}\)

While the church was prohibited from involvement in the specifics of the state, individual Christian have an obligation to be involved to the extent of their abilities. The extent of a person’s abilities includes their individual talents as well as the type of government they live under. Individuals are to work towards implementation of the divine standards.

**An Evaluation of Henry’s Position**

The proper relationship between the church and the state was an issue during the Protestant Reformation. The magisterial reformers accepted that the state should have power to aid the church to some degree. Mark Dever wrote the following about this:

During the Protestant Reformation the leading theologians continued to affirm the traditional Western understanding of the relationship between church and state. Whether a somewhat more passive (Lutheran) or aggressive (Calvinist) stance was taken toward the magistrate’s authority, the various reformations effected little immediate change in the church-state relationship. A nation facing a reformation would


focus on the questions of which church to recognize and what structure to adopt, two questions about theology and leadership that did not disrupt the basic unit of the European parish. Protestant nations varied in their answers to these questions. But in no magisterial reformation was the local parish dissolved or replaced.\textsuperscript{32}

The development of a belief in a regenerate church by some Protestant groups led to a greater separation between the church and the state. Dever described this as follows:

> The Baptist belief in regenerate church membership made the relationship between citizens and their church, and thus between church and state, voluntary. This would have been unimaginable in the early and mid-sixteenth century. Ultimately, the Baptist ecclesiology provided the seed for the birth of modern notions of freedom of religion, in which no one church is established and the rights of citizens of every religion are secured.\textsuperscript{33}

Chapter twenty-three, article three in the \textit{Westminster Confession of Faith} (WCF), published in 1647, presented the view of the magisterial reformers:

> The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.\textsuperscript{34}

The civil magistrate has authority for peace and unity in the church and the suppression of heresy.

\textit{The New Hampshire Confession} of 1833 expressed a Baptist understanding of the relationship between the church and state. Chapter twenty-six reads as follows:


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 106.

We believe that civil government is of divine appointment, for the interests and
good order of human society; and that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously
honored and obeyed; except only in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is the only Lord of the conscience, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.\textsuperscript{35}

The Baptist position makes a stronger distinction between church and state than the
magisterial reformers. This section will evaluate Henry’s teaching on the church and the state
from the standpoint of Scripture and the writings of other theologians.

\textbf{Romans 13:1-7}

Paul addressed the relationship between Christians and governing authorities in
Romans 13:1-7. This passage continues consideration of the proper relationship between
Christians and non-Christians. “The theme of doing good or evil in relation to outsiders
connects 13:1–7 and 12:17–21.”\textsuperscript{36}

Paul summarized his position in Romans 13:1-2:

\begin{quote}
Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority
except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever
resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur
judgment.
\end{quote}

Christians are to submit or be subject to the governing authorities. This submission is based
upon God’s sovereignty over all things. In this passage, “Paul is drawing upon teaching in
Jewish literature about God’s sovereignty over the rise and fall of earthly rulers.”\textsuperscript{37} Daniel
told Nebuchadnezzar that his dream was “to the end that the living may know that the Most
High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Dan. 4:17). Submission is

\textsuperscript{35} Philip Schaff, \textit{The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes}, vol. 3, The

\textsuperscript{36} Colin G. Kruse, \textit{Paul’s Letter to the Romans, The Pillar New Testament Commentary} (Grand

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 493.
recognition of a subordinate place within a hierarchy, so submission to governing authorities is a way to recognize God’s sovereign authority over all things.

In this text Paul is writing about a general attitude of submission, but he is not comprehensively addressing all situations:

This text is misunderstood if it is taken out of context and used as an absolute word so that Christians uncritically comply with the state no matter what is being demanded. What we have here is a general exhortation that delineates what is usually the case: people should normally obey ruling authorities. The text is not intended as a full-blown treatise on the relationship of believers to the state. It is a general exhortation setting forth the typical obligations one has to civil authorities.

Paul should not be understood as overturning the words of Peter in Acts 5:29, “We must obey God rather than men.” Douglas Moo wrote that “for the purpose of his argument at this point, Paul is assuming that the laws of the state embody those general moral principles that are taught in the word of God.” When the laws of the state are contrary to God’s moral principles, then disobedience to the government may be appropriate.

But this passage can also be understood as a warning against moving too quickly to civil disobedience. Leon Morris noted that Paul was addressing the Roman government in the first century:

We should be clear that Paul is writing about the existing state, not some ideal state that he hoped would appear. Every state has its faults, and first-century Rome had many. But it still had to be treated as the ruling authority and as such as the servant of God.

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40 Moo, 802.

So while there may be specific instances where disobedience to the government is appropriate, Paul’s words are a caution against acting too quickly. Craig Keener wrote that “as a general rule, including in a pagan and unjustly structured society like the Roman Empire, he expected Christians to be model citizens.”

There is also the question of applying Paul’s words today. The Roman Empire was a very different type of government from a modern democracy. Craig Keener wrote as follows:

This does not mean that they should not work for change by evangelizing and seeking justice, but we should keep in mind that Paul’s audience did not have all the same recourses for political transformation available in a modern democracy, and they were a small minority movement in any case.

With this in mind, Romans 13:1-7 should not be taken as a denial of the individual Christian’s right to influence government. Submitting to the governing authorities does not mean that working to change the government is prohibited.

While Paul does not directly address Henry’s points on the relationship between the church and the state, there is support for Henry’s position in this passage. Christians are to submit to governing authorities because of God’s sovereignty. And whether the ruling authorities recognize it or not, they are also under the power of the sovereign Lord. Since the existence of civil government is due to the will of God, the civil government has an obligation to obey the will of God. This connects with the church’s responsibility to publically proclaim the revealed will of God. So this passage does provide support for Henry’s point that the church is to give exposition of the divine standards. And while the

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43 Ibid.
passage does not address the role of an individual in a democracy, Paul’s words do not contradict Henry’s teaching on the role of the individual in working towards just laws.

The Role of the Church and the Individual

Basic to Carl Henry’s understanding on the relationship between the church and the state is a distinction between the role of the church and the role of the individual. A similar distinction is made by other theologians. Covenant theologian Edmund Clowney wrote the following concerning the involvement of individuals and the church in politics:

Since democracy gives its citizens a voice in the government, Christians have the responsibility of their privilege to participate. There is every reason for the general office of the church (‘laity’) to consult together on political issues. So, too, the special officers of the church must provide biblical guidance and wisdom to assist in Christian analysis of political questions. The church has a prophetic role to perceive and expose ethical questions that underlie political issues. Where God has spoken in condemning sin, whether sodomy or financial exploitation, the church cannot be silent. 44

Individual Christians have a responsibility to be involved with government, which can include Christians working together in groups outside of the church. Clowney also argues for the church having a limited role in matters of government. The church is not to use the government to control morality. Government should be limited “to support life and restrain evil, but not to enforce the righteous living that is the standard of morality for Christ’s church.” 45

Mark Dever described the role of individual Christians in the area of justice as follows:


The Bible calls individual Christians to live lives of justice and generosity toward others. Organically, Christian disciples scatter and represent Christ powerfully and in ways the Bible does not call the institutional church to act.\textsuperscript{46}

But Dever goes on to say that the church does have a role to play as follows:

At the same time Christ gave the church a unique institutional mandate to preach, display, model, and express the good news of Jesus Christ. And in obedience to that institutional mandate, Christian congregations have both the liberty and the responsibility to take prudent initiatives in advocating mercy or justice in our community as opportunities arise, perhaps collectively in the name of the church and certainly as individuals in the name of Christ.\textsuperscript{47}

Dever sums up the responsibility for the church as “what all this means is that congregations\textit{ may} take action in the cause of this-worldly justice, but they are not required to.”\textsuperscript{48}

In their book on the mission of the church, Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert argue that it is proper for the institutional church to be involved in justice ministries and social action, but that this is not required of the church.\textsuperscript{49} Social justice is not the central mission of the church; therefore it is not required of the church. But engagement in social justice can help further the mission of the church, so this may be appropriate for the church. They argue that decisions need to be made on a case by case basis in each individual church.

Concerning the role of the individual, DeYoung and Gilbert, argue that Christians must be engaged in doing good things for the people that surround them.\textsuperscript{50} They present several reasons for this position. One reason is that good works should flow from a love for God and neighbor. Also, good works are a demonstration to the world of God’s character.

\textsuperscript{46} Dever, 79.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 80.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 81.


\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 223–229.
These good works are the fruit of the Spirit which is at work in Christians. And finally, good works help to win a hearing for the gospel in the world today.

Mark Dever also makes a distinction between the role of the church and the individual in the area of social injustice:

I ask this question: Is this something that is uniquely the role of the church, or is this something that all humans made in the image of God are to be concerned about? Is this something an agnostic, a Muslim, or a Jew cares about? Racism, for example, is not merely a Christian concern. It is a human concern. I’m a little reluctant to think that a local church is the right instrument to be devoting itself to solving that kind of problem in society as a whole. That’s a community-wide issue, not a church issue.

Now, I would be delighted for an individual Christian to be involved in addressing racism in the community. . . . But I would not want to narrow the issue of racism to be something the church itself is called to do, because it’s not just Christians who are supposed to be involved in fighting racism.51

There is a place for the church to be involved in social endeavors, but this is restricted to matters which are of concern to Christians in particular. Individual Christians can work with non-Christians in matters of general social concern.

These theologians make a distinction between the role of the church and the role of the individual which is similar to Carl Henry’s. Individual Christians can and should be engaged in matters of social justice. There may be times for the church to be directly engaged in matters of social justice, but this requires careful consideration. But the church does have the obligation to speak about the principles of justice.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer talked about the church bearing witness to the world:

The Christian community thus lives its own life in the midst of this world, continually bearing witness in all it is and does that “the present form of this world is

Bonhoeffer connected this with the idea that the church-community makes the body of Christ visible. There are two primary means for the church to make the body of Christ visible: the preaching of the word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

When Carl Henry discussed the church in his writings, he generally gave consideration to the universal church. He had little to say about the church as a local body. But it is the church as a local body that can be a visible witness to the world. The world can observe the actions of a particular local body in ways which are not possible concerning the universal church.

While Carl Henry was considered the theologian of New Evangelicalism, he gave limited attention to the doctrine of the church. The two areas that he did address were its relationship to the kingdom of God and its relationship to the state. The “already and not yet” nature of the kingdom are foundational to a proper understanding of the relationship between the church and the state. The role of the church is primarily that of giving pronouncement to the standards which God has revealed in Scripture. The individual Christian has an obligation to work towards positive goals and promote just laws. But this falls significantly short of expressing a comprehensive ecclesiology, which will be considered in the next chapter.

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53 Ibid., 225–229.
CHAPTER 5
NEGLECTED ASPECTS IN CARL HENRY’S WRITING

In discussing Carl Henry’s *God, Revelation, and Authority*, R. Albert Mohler Jr. wrote that “the most glaring omission in his theological project is the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology).”\(^1\) Russell Moore also noted the neglect of the church in Henry’s writing:

The theological foundations for the universal—or “invisible” (as it is, unfortunately, often called)—church were established in Henry’s thought at the most basic levels. What was missing was theological specificity on some of the things that make a church a church—the ordinances, membership, church government, and so forth. It is not debatable that these issues were often intentionally minimized to maintain unity within an evangelical movement seeking to take on Protestant liberalism, separatist fundamentalism, and cultural nihilism.\(^2\)

Rather than directly addressing ecclesiology, Moore wrote that “Henry seems content merely to have assumed a doctrine of the church.”\(^3\) Moore went on to say that Henry’s “doctrine of the church is constructed mostly in terms of ad hoc responses to specific issues troubling the evangelical movement of his day.”\(^4\)

The result of this was that while Henry did address certain aspects of the church, such as its relation to the kingdom of God and its relation to the state, he never developed a comprehensive ecclesiology. A consideration of the doctrine of the church should include

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\(^3\) Ibid., 28.

\(^4\) Ibid.
topics such as the nature of the church, church polity, and the sacraments. But the ecumenical nature of the New Evangelical movement made discussion of these debated issues problematic. It is not possible to have a comprehensive evangelical ecclesiology.

Defining the Church

One of the first issues to consider on the doctrine of the church is the definition of the church. As in many matters concerning ecclesiology, Carl Henry assumed that the general prevailing understanding of the church was correct. But an ecclesiology must start with considering the definition of the church.

The Nature of the Church

The Greek word used in the New Testament for church is *ekklēsia*. This term appears 114 times in the New Testament, with 109 of these occurrences referring to the New Testament church. Some of these occurrences refer to the church universal, but the majority refers to local assemblies. The universal church is made up of all of God’s elect, while the local church is a gathering of Christians in a specific location.

In the New Testament, the local church is generally identified with the church in a city. This contrasts with the situation today, where most cities or towns have a multiplicity of churches. But whether there is one church in a city or multiple churches, the local church should still be central in a definition of the church. This contrasts with the writing of Carl Henry, which generally used the term church in reference to the universal church.

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6 Ibid., 29–30.
Closely related to the nature of the church are the members of the church. Some evangelicals understand that professing believers and their children are members of the church. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* expresses this in Chapter twenty-five, section two as “the visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children.” The key phrase here being “and of their children.”

This contrasts with the Baptist position presented by Gregg Allison:

The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit. It consists of two interrelated elements: the universal church is the fellowship of all Christians that extends from the day of Pentecost until the second coming, incorporating both the deceased believers who are presently in heaven and the living believers from all over the world. This universal church becomes manifested in local churches characterized by being doxological, logocentric, pneumodynamic, covenantal, confessional, missional, and spatio-temporal/eschatological.

Evangelical theology lacks agreement concerning the nature of the church.

In his writing as a New Evangelical, Carl Henry did not address the nature of the church. He did not clearly distinguish between the local church and the universal church. Henry also did not address the issue of whether the children of professing believers are part of the church or not.

The Relationship between the Church and Israel

One of the preliminary issues concerning the doctrine of the church is the relationship between the nation of Israel and the New Testament church. Within evangelical theology there is a spectrum of thought from a high degree of continuity to almost absolute

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discontinuity. Covenant theology sees a high degree of continuity between the church and Israel which Edmund Clowney expressed as follows:

When Jesus speaks of the “church,” however, he uses a term rich with Old Testament meaning. Israel was God’s assembly in the great day when God assembled them before him at Mount Sinai to make his covenant with them. He had brought them on “eagles’ wings” to himself (Ex. 19:4). The exodus redemption culminates at Sinai “in the day of the assembly” (Dt. 4:10, LXX; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). Israel was an assembly because they gathered before God, appearing in his presence (Dt. 4:10). 9

In contrast to this is Dispensationalism which maintains a sharp distinction between Israel and the church. 10

The New Testament used a number of images when discussing the church. One of these images is the church as the people of God. 1 Peter 2:9-10 used Old Testament language in describing the church as God’s people:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In this passage Peter takes language which the Old Testament used about Israel and applied it to the church. The two schools of thought concerning continuity or discontinuity between the church and Israel lead to different understandings of this passage. 11 Covenant theology emphasizes the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Peter used the same language to speak of the church and Israel because there is only one people of God. Dispensational theology, which emphasizes discontinuity between the Testaments,

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10 Hammett, 32.

11 Ibid., 32–33.
understands that Peter was using familiar language in describing the church, but he was not thereby identifying the church with the nation of Israel.

Another aspect of this issue is when did the church begin? Covenant Theology emphasizes the oneness of the people of God. Edmund Clowney writes that “Pentecost did not create the people of God, but renewed them.” Therefore in Covenant Theology it is proper to speak of the church as existing in Old Testament times. But in Dispensational Theology, the church did not come into existence until the day of Pentecost.

While Carl Henry was critical of Dispensationalism, he never addressed the relationship between the church and Israel. Within evangelicalism there is a continuum of positions from strong identification of the church with Israel to strong separation between them. As a New Evangelical, he sought to address people holding a diversity of opinions on this issue. Henry avoided issues which were outside of the ecumenical consensus.

**Church Polity**

Another significant aspect of a doctrine of the church is polity or church government. Two of the major forms of church government in North America are Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. In Presbyterian church government, the local assembly is ruled by a group of elders. Presbyterian denominations also have organizational levels beyond the local church, which set overall doctrine and policy for local congregations within the denomination. In contrast, a Congregational church government focuses on the local

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12 Clowney, 53.

13 Hammett, 140–143.
congregation as the final authority.\textsuperscript{14} The congregation is over the elders or deacons.

Congregations may associate together, but no association has authority over the local church.

The \textit{Westminster Confession of Faith} expressed the relationship of synods and councils with the local church in chapter thirty-one, section three:

It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially to determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience, to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of His Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in His Word.\textsuperscript{15}

The Presbyterian form of church government should not be seen as placing the presbyteries, synods, or assemblies in power over the local church. Presbyterian theologian Louis Berkhof was careful to explain that the local church has primary authority within the Presbyterian system:

The power of the church resides primarily in the governing body of the local church. It is one of the fundamental principles of Reformed or Presbyterian government, that the power or authority of the Church does not reside first of all in the most general assembly of any Church, and is only secondarily and by derivation from this assembly, vested in the governing body of the local Church; but that it has its original seat in the consistory or session of the local Church, and is by this transferred to the major assemblies, such as classes (presbyteries) and synods or general assemblies. Thus the Reformed system honors the autonomy of the local church, though it always regards this as subject to the limitations that may be put upon it as the result of its association with other churches in one denomination, and assures it the fullest right to govern its own internal affairs by means of its officers.\textsuperscript{16}

Baptist theologian Gregg Allison addressed potential misunderstanding of this issue by non-Presbyterians as follows:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 143–146.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Westminster Confession of Faith}, 121.
\end{itemize}
A common misapprehension of presbyterian government is that the higher-level structures— the presbytery/classis, synod, and general assembly—wield the actual authority in this system. This is simply not the case, as local churches led by their session or consistory exercise authority in and over those congregations.  

But Congregationalism is a distinct form of government. In Congregationalism there is no ecclesiastical body over the local congregation and the form of government is democratic rather than representative. Gregg Allison described congregationalism as follows:

Congregationalism is based on two essential concepts: (1) autonomy, that is, the local church is independent and self-governing (it is responsible for its own finances, calls its own pastor, owns its own property and building, and the like); and (2) democracy, that is, the authority within the local church resides in its individual members, all of whom participate in congregational decisions through democratic processes.

Evangelicalism contains churches with differing forms of government. Carl Henry did not address matters of church polity in his writings. This is consistent with his avoidance of matters outside of the New Evangelical consensus.

The Sacraments or the Ordinances

The sacraments are a critical aspect of an ecclesiology, but much of this doctrine falls outside of the evangelical consensus. There is not even agreement at the most basic level of terminology. Should these be referred to as the sacraments or the ordinances? Covenant theology prefers to use the term sacraments. Edmund Clowney explained the basic meaning behind this term:

A sacrament is a sign of participation in saving grace. It marks not simply the presence and work of God, but his application of salvation to sinners.

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17 Allison, 271.
18 Ibid., 277.
19 Clowney, 271.
Covenant theology connects the sacraments of the New Testament church with the history of Israel, which Clowney expressed as follows:

Through Christ’s circumcision and baptism, his righteous life and his offering as God’s Lamb, the shadows of the Old Covenant ceremonies became reality. Christ is our circumcision, our Passover (Col. 2:11; 1 Cor. 5:7). To replace those blood-shedding signs, he appointed new signs for the inclusion and fellowship of the renewed people of God. These sacramental signs are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. 20

Other groups, such as Baptists, prefer to use the term ordinances in reference to baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The term ordinance refers to the fact that these practices were ordained by Jesus Christ himself while on earth. Additionally, some evangelicals prefer to avoid the term sacraments due to its usage by other groups. Mark Dever wrote that some evangelicals are hesitant to use the term sacrament because “it suggests that the signs are effective apart from a believer’s faith.” 21 The theology of the sacraments or the ordinances lacks agreement among evangelicals even in the area of terminology.

Baptism

The two sacraments, or ordinances, recognized by evangelical Protestants are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Concerning baptism, a significant area of disagreement concerns who the proper candidates for baptism are. Is baptism only for confessing believers or is baptism also appropriate for infants? Covenant theology, with its emphasis on the connection between the Old and New Covenants, makes a strong connection between the sign circumcision and the sign of baptism. Edmund Clowney expressed this as follows:

20 Ibid.

In the Old Covenant, children were given the sign of God’s covenant promise. In the New Covenant the sign of its fulfillment is not denied them. The covenant promise is expressly claimed for households.22

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* expresses this in chapter twenty-nine, section four with “not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents, are to be baptized.”23

In Baptist theology, the only proper candidates for baptism are adults who have made a profession of faith. Baptists base their argument upon the fact that baptism represents a union with Christ, which John Hammett expressed this as follows:

> But the most conclusive argument against infant baptism is the simple fact that infant baptism does not match the meaning of baptism reflected in the New Testament. Infants cannot affirm their faith or make an oath of allegiance; they cannot proclaim their identification with Christ and his church. On the divine side, it is difficult to see how God can act in baptism to seal a decision that has not yet been made.”24

Evangelicals do not agree on whether baptism is only appropriate for believing adults, or should also include the children of believers.

Carl Henry’s personal conviction was that baptism is defined as the immersion of a believer,25 but he never significantly addressed this issue in his written work. Russell Moore wrote the following:

> Despite his conviction that baptism is defined as the immersion of a believer, Henry fails to provide an apologetic for this viewpoint in his theological project. He speaks of baptism as an “ally” of the preached word which, along with the Lord’s Supper, are too often “merely appended to preaching as occasional additives or alternatives.”26

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22 Clowney, 282.


24 Hammett, 270–271.


26 Moore, 34.
Moore further wrote that “Henry rarely moved beyond the vague generalities that could be embraced by all sectors of the evangelical movement.”

The Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is also an area of disagreement within evangelicalism. Controversy concerning the Lord’s Supper relates to the words Jesus spoke at its institution in Matthew 26:26, “Take, eat; this is my body.” One position is the memorial view, which traces its roots back to Ulrich Zwingli. This view emphasizes the Lord’s Supper as a memorial or act of remembrance. This position is represented in the New Hampshire Baptist Confession chapter fourteen which states that “the Lord’s Supper, in which the members of the Church, by sacred use of bread and wine, are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ; preceded always by solemn self-examination.”

Covenant theology emphasizes the Lord’s Supper as more than a mere symbol of a spiritual reality. This position is identified with John Calvin. Jesus is understood as being spiritually present, though the Lord’s Supper is only effective and profitable through the faith of the recipient. The Westminster Confession of Faith expressed this in chapter twenty-nine, section seven as follows:

Worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the

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27 Ibid., 35.

28 Hammett, 278–281.


30 Clowney, 288–289.

31 Dever, 109.
body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses. 32

Carl Henry did not address the nature and the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. Henry was generally writing as an evangelical for other evangelicals. This evangelical audience contains a diversity of theological positions on a number of topics. Henry chose to restrict himself to areas of agreement among evangelicals as a leader in the ecumenical New Evangelical movement.

While Carl Henry is just one individual, he was considered to be the theologian of the New Evangelical movement. He produced a significant volume of work during his career and addressed a broad number of topics. So Henry’s avoidance of disputed theological issues is representative of the evangelical movement as a whole. When writing as an ecumenical evangelical, theologians will avoid topics which lack a consensus.

The Impossibility of a Comprehensive Evangelical Ecclesiology

Due to its broad nature, Evangelicalism cannot express a comprehensive ecclesiology. Richard Mouw presented the following line of reasoning concerning the impossibility of a comprehensive evangelical systematic theology:

Given the coalition character of the evangelical movement, we cannot insist on an all-encompassing, tightly defined system of thought. Our evangelical coalition embraces a diverse mix of theological traditions—Reformed, Wesleyan, Pentecostal, Anglican, Free Church, dispensationalist, and so on. The most we can hope for is that we can agree to rally around a common set of corrective emphases in theology and spiritual practice—the kinds of things associated, for example, with what has come to be known as “the Bebbington quadrilateral,” referring to the British historian David Bebbington’s account of evangelicalism as essentially characterized by these four features: an emphasis on the need for conversion, a fidelity to biblical authority, a central emphasis

32 Westminster Confession of Faith, 118.
of the atoning work of Christ on the cross of Calvary, and the insistence on a life of active discipleship.  

Mouw does not take issue with there being “a transconfessional, transdenominational evangelical-theological consensus.” But Mouw does take issue when theology is limited to nothing more than a common consensus. A generically evangelical theology cannot provide protection from theological error. Mouw connected this with the doctrine of the church in particular:

But without careful attention to ecclesiology we can get into serious theological trouble. There is plenty of evidence today that when we start with a theology that features only the emphases in the Bebbinton quadrilateral and then begin to water down one or more of those items, we are left with a movement that can easily be blown about by every wind of doctrine. A generic evangelical theology is a weak basis for sustaining biblical orthodoxy.

An incomplete theology is inadequate to protect the church.

A consideration of the writings of Carl F. H. Henry has revealed a problematic situation. A fully developed Christian theology is needed in order to maintain the historic orthodoxy of the Christian faith, but this is impossible within the realm of generic evangelicalism. A fully developed Christian theology is only possible within the realm of denominational traditions where positions can be taken on disputed doctrine. This thesis will move from the writing of Carl Henry to his life in seeking of a solution. In his personal life Henry was committed to the local church and the Baptist tradition.


34 Ibid., 50.

35 Ibid., 51.
CHAPTER 6
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF CARL HENRY AND
CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL EXAMPLES

Carl Henry’s writing as the theologian for New Evangelicalism showed the impossibility of developing a comprehensive evangelical ecclesiology. But as Richard Mouw pointed out, a comprehensive ecclesiology is necessary to remain true to the orthodox Christian faith. Consideration will now turn to the personal life of Carl F. H. Henry in seeking a way forward regarding this problem. His life showed an appreciation for the local church and denominational distinctives which was not present in his public writing.

The Example of Henry’s Life

Russell Moore made the rather scathing remark concerning Henry’s neglect of the local church that “at times, Henry seemed so ensconced in the subculture of the parachurch offshoots of the movement that he seemed barely to recognize an ecclesiology centered on the local congregation.”¹ While this may be a fairly accurate assessment of his writing, it does not reflect Henry’s personal life.

The public persona of Carl Henry was that of a theologian, writer, and leader of an ecumenical movement, but his personal life showed another set of concerns. Kenneth Kantzer wrote the following:

Yet it would be wrong to see Carl Henry as first of all a scholar or a theological strategist. There were things infinitely more important to him than his scholarship or his humanly devised strategy for the advance of evangelical faith—his love for Christ and desire to serve Christ and his church, for example.\(^2\)

Henry did have a love for the church, which included concern for the local church and denominational distinctives.

**Church Membership**

Paul House wrote that the universal church was the aspect of the church most important to Carl Henry.\(^3\) This was the aspect most prominent in Henry’s writing, but his personal life showed an appreciation for the local church. Most of Henry’s public activity and writing was outside of denominational tradition, but Henry’s personal life demonstrated a commitment to the local church and Baptist distinctives. R. Albert Mohler Jr. summarized the situation as follows:

Concern for a biblical understanding of baptism led Henry into membership in a Baptist church during his days at Wheaton and Northern Seminary. Upon his call to the ministry he was licensed to preach by the Babylon Baptist Church on Long Island, having been baptized there just ten months earlier. In October 1940, he was called as student pastor of the Humbolt Park Baptist Church in Chicago and was ordained to the ministry there in 1941. The ordination service was performed with the Chicago Baptist Association, affiliated with the Northern Baptist Convention (now the American Baptist Churches). . . . While at Fuller the Henrys attended a Baptist church, and upon his move to *Christianity Today*, they joined the Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., an evangelical congregation affiliated with the American Baptist Churches and the Southern Baptist Convention.\(^4\)

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As a Christian, Henry was consistently involved in the local church and even served as a pastor for a period of time.

Henry’s commitment to the local church was described by Kenneth Kantzer as follows:

Needless to say, Carl Henry was also a churchman of the highest order. Throughout his life he was extraordinarily loyal to the church he adopted after his conversion as a young man. The local church loomed very large in his life. The church, in fact, was a third center for his life and fellowship. He was faithful in his attendance and support of his local church.⁵

Henry’s life showed a commit to the local church which provided balance to his involvement in the parachurch dominated New Evangelical movement.

Involvement in the Southern Baptist Convention

Carl Henry experienced divine forgiveness for sin on the merits of the saving work of Jesus Christ on June 10, 1933.⁶ Four years later, Henry was immersed in a Baptist church and remained a Baptist for the rest of his life. Henry described his Baptist convictions as follows:

Student days in the interdenominational climate of Wheaton College propelled me toward Baptist views as I studied Scripture, interacted with campus associates and reflected on contemporary religious life. In 1937, consequently, I was immersed on profession of faith and became a member of Babylon Baptist Church on Long Island, after the local pastor somewhat carefully reviewed the implications of this step. In 1940, while contemplating theological studies at Northern Baptist Seminary in Chicago, I was ordained to the Baptist ministry at a student pastorate, Humboldt Park Baptist Church. My persuasion of Baptist distinctives has deepened and strengthened through these years.⁷

Henry did not seeing being a Baptist as incompatible with working for the advancement of the Christian church in general:

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⁵ Kantzer, 376.


⁷ Ibid., 46–47.
As I see it, Baptists are not so much interested in promoting the Baptist denomination as such in the world as to advancing the one Church Christ heads through the Baptist witness. But we should not feel that to realize this purpose requires surrender either of Baptist distinctives or of denominational fervor. . . . We believe that denominationalism can serve as a unitive rather than as a divisive factor. In other words, I do not think that Baptist and ecumenical interests necessarily conflict.⁸

Being a Baptist was not in conflict with being an evangelical Christian.

But Henry did distance himself from denominationalism when he moved to Fuller Theological Seminary. After this time, his major public efforts were focused on the evangelical community at large, rather than on a particular denomination. John Muether wrote that “Henry turned parachurch and after he left his teaching post at Northern Baptist Seminary he no longer exercised leadership in the institutional church.”⁹ But Henry did become significantly involved in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) later in his life, when he was less in the public spotlight.

Carl Henry’s connection with the SBC began while he was editor of Christianity Today. When he moved to Washington, D.C., he became a member at Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church which was affiliated with the SBC.¹⁰ But it was not until later in his life that Henry became significantly involved in the SBC.

Henry’s 1984 visit to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was not a smooth beginning to his dealings with the SBC.¹¹ This was a period of debate within the SBC concerning evangelical identity. The contentiousness within the SBC meant that none of the

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⁸ Ibid., 48.


faculty would agree to host Henry. Albert Mohler, then serving as assistant to the seminary’s president, was asked to host Henry. During his visit, Henry accompanied Mohler to a graduate seminar, where Henry was allowed to observe but not speak. After the class, Henry revealed to Mohler his depth of knowledge on the topics that had been discussed:

Later that day Dr. Henry pulled three large manila envelopes out of his briefcase and handed them to me. The first was dated two weeks previous and labeled “Debate with Brevard Childs–Yale University.” The next envelope was also dated very recently and labeled “Dialogue with Hans Frei.” The final envelope was also recently dated and labeled “Debate with James Barr, Tyndale Fellowship, Edinburgh.” Each of these conversations had take place just within the past few weeks! The PhD colloquium and faculty had just been discussing Brevard Childs, Hans Frei, and James Barr, and here was the man who not only had written about them but had just engaged them in public conversation.12

Fortunately, Henry’s relationship with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the SBC developed over time.13 Albert Mohler would eventually become president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and lead the school in a return to conservative theology.14

Henry’s connection with the SBC is illustrated in the republication of God, Revelation, and Authority in 1999. This was brought about through a cooperative effort between Crossway and the Carl F. H. Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.15 In addition to serving as a visiting professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Henry has delivered lectureship at New Orleans Baptist Seminary and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. At the 1987 Southern

12 Ibid., 31.

13 Ibid., 33.


Baptist Pastors’ Conference, Henry was honored for his contributions to Baptist theology and presented with a plaque identifying him as a Southern Baptist.  

Henry’s involvement in the SBC had a significant impact upon the denomination:

It would not be going too far to say that Henry has been a mentor for nearly the whole SBC conservative movement. He helped officiate at the installation of Land, Mohler, Timothy George of Beason Divinity School, and Mark Coppenger, president of Midwestern Baptist Seminary in Kansas City.

Russell Moore gave the following description of Henry’s involvement in the SBC:

Nonetheless, most critiques of Henry’s anemic ecclesiology have focused on the early Henry rather than the later years of the theologian, in which his activity was concentrated far more within the denominational life of the Southern Baptist Convention. By the end of the denomination’s inerrancy controversy Henry was self-consciously a Southern Baptist. He served on the SBC Resolutions Committee at the 1984 convention where he drafted a controversial resolution against women in the pastorate. In 1992, SBC president H. Edwin Young appointed Henry along with George, Mohler, Land, Coppenger, Herschel Hobbs, and others to a Presidential Theological Study Committee which reported its findings to the 1994 Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Florida. The report, which articulated a conservative Southern Baptist response to contemporary questions on the doctrines of Scripture, God, the person and work of Christ, the church, and last things, was adopted by the convention despite fierce opposition from moderates who viewed the report as a “creedalistic” interpretation of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message. In 1996, he wrote a treatise on the plight of American democracy for the SBC Christian Life Commission, now the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. Clearly, Henry’s identification with the SBC moved beyond simply his quietly retaining membership at Capitol Hill Baptist Church.

The life of Carl Henry shows a commitment to the local church and the Baptist tradition which was not present in his written work. He was both an ecumenical evangelical leader and personally committed to denominational distinctives. But rather than integrating these two aspects, Henry kept them distinct from one another. If he had allowed his

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appreciation for the local church and personal commitment to Baptist beliefs greater influence in his public writing, Henry would have been able articulate a more comprehensive doctrine of the church.

The Importance of the Local Church

The life of Carl Henry showed recognition for the importance of the local church. He also wrote briefly about this in the later part of his life:

The local church–right where you are–is a critical link in fulfilling this task. Parachurch movements have made an amazing impact in our time, largely because major denominations have neglected or have been unable to fulfill vital aspects of their mission. But revival has almost always begun in the local church, not in parachurch movements or in denominational headquarters. Renewal of the local congregation is vitally important for the evangelistic task.19

As Henry grew older, he acknowledged the significance of the local church and the limits of a parachurch movement. It is the local church, rather than parachurch organizations or an evangelical movement, which makes the body of Christ visible.

The New Testament usually uses the term church in reference to the local gathering of believers. Scripture speaks clearly about the importance of the local church. D. G. Hart understands the need for individual Christians to recognize the importance of the local church.20 It is within the local church that people are ministered to and have a Christian identity. The Christian life is centered in the local church.

The issue is not parachurch or the local church. Rather the issue is recognition of the proper roles for each. The parachurch can aid the local church, but the parachurch cannot take priority over the local church.


20 D. G. Hart, Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 188.
The Importance of Denominational Distinctives

In addition to a commitment to the local church, the life of Carl Henry showed an appreciation for denominational distinctives. But the presence of denominations raises the issue of church unity, which Jesus prayed for in John 17. Does church unity require a promotion of ecumenism and a suppression of denominational distinctives?

Church Unity

Jesus’ prayer in John 17 is often cited by the ecumenical movement since in this passage Jesus prayed for the unity of the church. John 17:20-23 reads as follows:

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

One issue with the passage is the nature of the unity which Jesus sought. The unity that Jesus prayed for was first a spiritual unity. But the prayer also makes it clear that this unity cannot be limited to a spiritual unity. “The unity in question, while it is a spiritual unity rather than one of organization, as we have seen, yet has an outward expression, for it is a unity that the world can observe, and that will influence the world.” Verse 21 states the unity is “so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” This requires that the unity be visible in some manner. But this is not necessarily a call for institutional unity. John Frame expressed this as follows:

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22 Ibid., 651.

Jesus prayed that the church would be one, as he and his Father are one (John 17:20f). Now some exegetes understand him here to be referring to “spiritual” unity rather than “organizational” unity. Certainly organizational matters are not the emphasis of this prayer. The emphasis is on the vital union of the believers with Christ in the Spirit. However, that union is not wholly invisible; it is visible in the conduct of Christians in their relationships to one another as well as to God himself.24

Jesus’ prayer connects Christian unity with the Godhead:

It is of fundamental importance to recognize that in the prayer the basis of the unity of the Church is the nature of God and the reality of his redemptive activity. More specifically, it is an outflow of the relations within the Triune God and of his action in and through the incarnate Son, whereby his saving sovereignty became operative in the world.25

Christian unity is only possible because of the unity between believers and the Godhead. This means that Christian unity cannot be achieved by “human efforts at reconciling the conflicting interests of people.”26 Unity is only possible through the supernatural work of God. It should also be remembered that perfect unity will not be achieved in our fallen world.27

The passage teaches that when unity is lacking among Christians, the ability to give testimony to the united triune Godhead is impaired. Therefore, unity among Christians is certainly desirable. And this is a unity which requires a visible presence. One way to achieve this is through institutional unity.


26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 307.
The desirability of institutional unity leads to the issue of denominational merger. John Frame argues that the merging of denominations is an appropriate response to the church’s ultimate unity:

If God is pleased to bring about reunion of his one, true church, I tend to think that it will be a step-by-step process. Most likely, denominations will first merge with those denominations that are most like themselves. Then those larger, more diverse denominations will merge with others most like themselves and so on, doubtless with many roadblocks along the way.\(^{28}\)

Frame argues from a posture favoring denominational union. He wrote that “the question is not whether we will be strengthened or weakened by a union, but whether we will commit sin by entering into it.”\(^{29}\) The burden of proof concerning merger falls on the side opposing reunion.

There is the issue of doctrinal differences between denominations and how this relates to mergers. John Frame argued for tolerance concerning doctrinal differences within the church. He understands Scripture as presenting four arguments for doctrinal tolerance.\(^{30}\) First, every believer is subject to the process of growth in their understanding. Second, some theological matters are more difficult to discern than others. Third, the historical distance between the Biblical situation and today’s culture limits our understanding. And fourth, not every matter is important enough to be a test of orthodoxy.

Carl Henry also saw denominational fragmentation as a negative:

We must encourage theological fidelity, evangelistic earnestness, and community concern, without at the same time neglecting what Jesus meant by his church, his

\(^{28}\) Frame, 132.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 144.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 88–90.
unique church that reflects the unity embodied by the Father and the Son and, let us add, the Spirit.\textsuperscript{31}

Henry asked, “Can a church divided and subdivided and subdivided truly be Christ’s church?”\textsuperscript{32}

But Henry also warned against unity at all costs. He argued that theological truth must come before unity:

But whoever holds reason and truth in high regard should recognize the fruitlessness of any refusal to put truth first. A refusal to put truth first may succeed in camouflaging disunity, but it cannot succeed in achieving unity. Any approach that avoids first making peace with the truth must either fall at last under the weight of error, or survive by compromising the role of reason in the realm of religion. Where commitment to truth is moderated religious affirmation becomes intellectually unimportant. If the reconciliation of ideological differences best occur \textit{after} union, then truth is inessential to unity.\textsuperscript{33}

Henry understood that theological unity was required prior to institutional unity.

Edward Carnell, another New Evangelical, also wrote about the unity of the church and denominational mergers. Denominationalism should not be a surprise, since the unity of the early church did not even last until the completion of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{34} Carnell argued that denominational mergers may be an appropriate response to Scripture’s call for unity:

The modern church is trying to shrink the paradox by merging denominations of like heritage. Such mergers, when undertaken with proper ends in view, should by all means be encouraged. If Christians agree on doctrine, they should learn to agree on form.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{31} Henry, \textit{The Christian Mindset}, 33.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 31–32.


\textsuperscript{34} Edward J. Carnell, \textit{The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life} (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 110.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 118.
But Carnell also addressed the limitations of denominational mergers and the value of denominational differences:

Moreover, the major denominations grew out of a sincere effort to honor the teachings of Scripture. Scripture does not claim to give a finished system. When the Apostle Paul says, “I know in part,” he speaks for the whole church.

It is only natural, therefore, that theologians will disagree on questions such as polity, the eucharist, the subjects and modes of baptism, predestination, and degrees of sanctification. And such disagreements are bound to be reflected in the forms which the Christian community assumes when it enters history. We should not be ashamed of our theological differences. They are signs that we are taking the work of exegesis seriously. Furthermore, a genuine Christian fellowship can exist within the framework of denominational plurality. Love can hurdle existing barriers.36

So while Carnell found denominational merger to be desirable in some circumstances, he also understood that it would not always be possible. Denominationalism is a reality and it is not entirely negative.

Frame’s argument for denominational merger and the cautions given by Henry and Carnell are not necessarily opposite positions. Henry and Carnell are urging caution to groups emphasizing organizational unity over spiritual unity. While Frame is focusing on Christians who accept organizational separation where there is significant spiritual unity. But it is still appropriate to understand Frame as pushing for greater institutional unity than Henry and Carnell.

The consideration of the doctrine of the church in this thesis has shown that unity among evangelicals concerning the doctrine of the church is impossible. Significant areas of disagreement exist in other doctrine as well. Therefore the institutional unity of the church can only be possible if areas of significant theological disagreement are ignored. But the

36 Ibid., 118–119.
suppression of theological distinctives has already been shown to be problematic. Denominationalism will and should continue in evangelical Christianity.

Denominational Diversity

The division of the church into denominations is not something that will go away. But this can be understood as benefitting the church. Richard Mouw taught that a generic evangelical theology is not adequate to sustain biblical orthodoxy; rather a comprehensive theology is required. And this can only be developed within the confines of a theological tradition.

Richard Lints is critical of the ecumenical nature of evangelical theology:

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the evangelical consensus concerning the essential theological beliefs of the gospel has created a false sense of unity for contemporary evangelicalism. It forces evangelical Lutherans to repress aspects of their tradition that are distinctively Lutheran, Presbyterians to repress what is distinctively Presbyterian, Methodists to repress what is distinctively Methodist, and so on. Evangelicals have not yet developed a “principled pluralism” that could accommodate both a commitment to the essentials and a recognition of the theological diversity of the movement.\(^37\)

An evangelical Lutheran, for example, faces pressure from the evangelical consensus to repress distinctively Lutheran beliefs. Over time, a Lutheran theology can be truncated and become a generic evangelical theology. But this has been shown to be insufficient. Rather a Lutheran needs to maintain an explicitly Lutheran theology in order to have a comprehensive theology. The same is true for all evangelical theological traditions.

Evangelicalism needs the diversity of theological traditions which it encompasses.

Lints wrote that “rather than evangelical theologians, there must be Baptist theologians,

Presbyterian theologians, Methodist theologians, and so on.” Lints is calling for recognizing and embracing the denominational diversity within the evangelical movement.

Lints is also aware of the Church’s unity in Christ. He argues for a unity-in-diversity approach to theology and the church:

The gospel itself is implicit in this model of unity-in-diversity. It is the gospel for which the church exists and through which the church is to act. It is the consequence of the gospel that the “dividing walls of hostility” are broken down in Christ. He is our “peace” in whom the many are fit into one body and with whom the many diverse members are each to contribute. Unity-in-diversity is more than mere toleration; rather engagement in the theological square is necessary. Lints does not call for the end of denominations, but rather an end to understanding theological traditions as fortresses from which to wage war. Rather than fortresses, denominations should be homes into which outsiders can be invited into for hospitality. Lints calls for a ‘principled pluralism’ which accepts theological diversity within the boundaries of evangelicalism.

John Webster also discusses the need for interaction between denominational traditions within the broader stream of evangelicalism:

In the present unreconciled state of the churches, evangelicals need to offer what they have received from their own traditions to the wider fellowship of the saints. They must do so without stridency or anxiety, with humble confidence and generosity, with attentiveness and a teachable bearing towards those from whom they find themselves separated by reason of confession. But these things can only happen if evangelicals

38 Ibid., 321.


40 Ibid., 182–183.

41 Ibid., 183.
take the time to reacquaint themselves with the deep exegetical and dogmatic foundations of the traditions to which they belong.\textsuperscript{42}

Both Lints and Webster understand the need for theology done from the position of theological traditions. Interaction between denominations will benefit all evangelicalism if done with the proper attitude.

An example of this is Russell Moore and Robert Sagers’ discussion of the church and the kingdom. They argue that a Baptist ecclesiology is in an advantaged position to understand the kingdom of God:

This is where a Baptist vision of the church can serve to help further the discussion about the Kingdom reality of the church. Baptist ecclesiology, after all, has always been built upon inaugurated eschatology. We do not baptize infants, because the “last days” of the new covenant have arrived in Christ. We do not merge the church and the state because the consummation of those “last days” is not yet here. Recent attention to inaugurated eschatology can serve to forge a more consistent—and more biblical—Baptist witness, even as the Baptist witness can spur other Christians to test their models of the church against the biblical witness to the Kingdom of God. A Baptist understanding of the church as the present reign of Christ would mean that local congregations should anticipate the Kingdom in three ways: composition, proclamation, and transformation. This is to say, the church is made up of subjects of the Kingdom, the church announces the onset of the Kingdom, and the church lives out the ethics of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{43}

The issue here is not whether Moore and Sagers are correct concerning a Baptist ecclesiology. Rather the point is that other theological traditions may learn through giving consideration to a specifically Baptist ecclesiology. Baptists will also benefit by the questions posed from other traditions.

The evangelical community faces the challenge of integrating two divergent realities: the unity of the church and denominational diversity. But within this tension is also a path


forward. The evangelical movement needs a robust and comprehensive theology rather than
generic ecumenical theology. Only theology tied to a particular tradition can be truly
comprehensive. At the same time, different theological traditions can learn from one another.
A Baptist theology can interact and learn from a Presbyterian theology, and vice versa. But
this can only take place when theologians are fully open about their theological traditions and
willing to positively engage with evangelicals from other traditions.

Examples for Today

As a leader of New Evangelicalism, Carl Henry assumed too much potency from an
ecumenical evangelicalism. Russell Moore commented on this:

Yes, Henry was naïve about the possibility of a pan-evangelical movement,
united around a minimal confession of faith and the inerrancy of Scriptures. But he was
right that parachurch evangelicalism—when rooted in healthy, confessional churches—
can be an excellent vehicle for Kingdom activity, and for rescuing Christians from the
insularity of their own traditions. \(^{44}\)

Ecumenism is not wrong, but theological traditions are also necessary. Parachurch
ministry is not wrong, but it cannot be a substitute for the local church. A commitment to the
local church and denominational identity are necessary. J. Ligon Duncan III and Mark Dever
are examples of evangelicals committed to the local church, public about their
denominational commitment, and involved in ecumenical parachurch ministry.

J. Ligon Duncan III

One example of someone denominationally connected and involved in ecumenical
parachurch ministry is J. Ligon Duncan III. Duncan is strongly and publically Presbyterian as
demonstrated by his involvement in the Presbyterian Church in America and Reformed

\(^{44}\) Moore, “God, Revelation, and Community,” 39.
Theological Seminary. At the same time, he is also involved in The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood which is an ecumenical parachurch ministry.

Russell Moore describes Duncan’s activities as follows:

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), for instance, of which Henry was a Board of Reference member until his death, is an example of such a parachurch ministry. The current board chairman, J. Ligon Duncan, is also moderator of the Presbyterian Church in America—and no one is more insistent in his scholarship on the importance of Presbyterian polity, infant baptism, and covenant theology. The CBMW leadership and constituency, however, spans the evangelical spectrum from conservative Episcopalians to Southern Baptists to Pentecostals—all just as open about their confessional and ecclesiological commitments, and all just as united around the biblical teachings on gender.45

A commitment to denominational distinctives does not need to conflict with ecumenical parachurch activity.

Mark Dever

Mark Dever is another example of someone committed to denominational distinctives yet involved in ecumenical parachurch ministry. Dever came to know Carl Henry while studying at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the 1980s. They developed a friendship which continued throughout Henry’s life.46

Henry was a member at Capitol Hill Baptist Church from the time of his moving to Washington, D.C. in the 1960s until the time of his death. In January of 1993, Carl Henry wrote to Mark Dever and informed him about the church’s pastoral search.47 Dever has served as pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church since 1994.

Dever understands the importance of the local church:

45 Ibid.

46 Mark Dever, interview by author, January 5, 2017.

I've come to see that love is largely local. And the local congregation is the place which claims to display this love for all the world to see. So Jesus taught His disciples in John 13:34-35, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." . . . The local church is God's evangelism plan. The local church is God's evangelism program.  

Dever understands that an ecumenical movement cannot reveal Christ to the world as effectively as the local church.

While serving at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Mark Dever began the 9Marks ministry which he currently serves as President. The mission of 9Marks is to “help pastors and church leaders, as well as all interested Christians, think more biblically about church health.”

9Marks is a parachurch ministry directed at helping local churches. Dever sees parachurch ministry as something that should support the local church rather than perform tasks which properly belong to the church. Parachurch ministry serves the local church rather than replacing the local church.

Dever is also publically open about his denominational loyalties: he is senior pastor at a SBC church and he has served as a trustee of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In the preface to his book on the doctrine of the church, he described it as a primer on the doctrine of the church for Baptists. Dever understands the importance of the local church, is openly committed to the Baptist tradition, and serves in an ecumenical parachurch ministry.

The New Evangelical movement sought to suppress denominational differences to further their ecumenical cause. This made the development of a comprehensive theology

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49 Dever, “Ministry in the Capital,” 70.

50 Mark Dever, interview by author, January 5, 2017.

impossible. However, a comprehensive theology is necessary if the church to remain true to historic biblical orthodoxy. Therefore a commitment to denominational distinctives is necessary for the church. At the same time there must be recognition of the church’s unity in Christ.

The New Evangelical movement established its identity in parachurch ministries. But the significance and centrality of the local church should not be forgotten. Parachurch ministry can aid the local church, but it cannot be a replacement for the local church.

The evangelical movement needs a balance between the unity of the church and denominational traditions. Evangelicalism also needs a balance between the benefit of parachurch ministry and the importance of the local church.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

New Evangelicalism developed out of Fundamentalism. Fundamentalism was a reaction to Liberalism dedicated to maintaining the historic beliefs of orthodox Christianity. Like Fundamentalism, New Evangelicalism sought to maintain the truths of historic Christianity, but it also sought to engage society. Characteristics of New Evangelicalism included a reliance on parachurch ministries and a commitment to ecumenism. While New Evangelicalism was critical of Fundamentalism for having a weak doctrine of the church, it suffered from an underdeveloped ecclesiology itself.

For Carl Henry, the kingdom of God was the starting point for understanding the doctrine of church. The kingdom of God is both “already and not yet.” Henry’s basic understanding of the relationship between the church and the kingdom is that the church approximates the kingdom of God. Within the world today, the church is to serve as a sign of God’s redemptive presence. George Eldon Ladd was a significant theologian who addressed the kingdom of God. He also taught that the kingdom is both “already and not yet.” This understanding of inaugurated eschatology has become the position held by most evangelicals today.

Henry understood the church and the individual as having different roles in relation to the state. The role of the church is primarily that of giving exposition to the divine standards for justice. The church should also object to wrongs by the state, but the church should not promote specific laws or policies. However, the individual Christian can and should work
toward positive goals and promote just laws. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called for the church to be a visible witness before the world. This is related to the church’s proclamation of the divine standards for justice. But Bonhoeffer connected this visible witness with the local church. Whereas Henry gave little attention to the local church and addressed the universal church in nearly all of his writing.

There are a number of topics necessary for a fully developed ecclesiology which Henry never significantly addressed, including the origin of the church, church polity, and the sacraments. Henry limited himself to issues where there was an evangelical consensus, and avoided areas of disagreement. Richard Mouw wrote that due to the diverse character of evangelicalism, a full orbed evangelical theology can never be developed. Rather all that is possible is a minimum consensus evangelical theology, which is not adequate to sustain biblical orthodoxy. The conclusion reached after consideration of Henry’s writing on the doctrine of the church is that evangelicalism needs a comprehensive ecclesiology, but cannot develop one.

In search of a solution to this problem, the life of Carl Henry was then considered. While Henry’s writing as an ecumenical evangelical gave little attention to the doctrine of the church, his personal life showed a commitment to the church and denominational traditions. He was an active member of the local church, committed to the Baptist tradition, and involved in the Southern Baptist Convention.

A consideration of denominational distinctives raised the issue of church unity. In John 17, Jesus prayed that the church would be one as are the Father and the Son. This unity is not only spiritual, but must also be visible. Denominational mergers are one way to demonstrate this unity, but they are only appropriate when there is spiritual and theological
unity. But within the fallen world there will always be some division, so denominational plurality will never go away. Evangelical theology needs theologians who represent distinct traditions while still open to interaction with other traditions. Both J. Ligon Duncan III and Mark Dever are examples of men engaged in ecumenical parachurch ministry, but also committed to the local church and open about their denominational convictions.

This thesis has considered two different tensions within evangelical theology. One of these tensions is the unity of the church and the importance of theological traditions. The other tension is the importance of the local church and the benefit of parachurch ministry. New Evangelicalism sought to resolve these tensions through an emphasis on unity and parachurch ministry. But the history of New Evangelicalism showed that this path cannot develop a theology comprehensive enough to sustain biblical orthodoxy. While an alternate solution could be attempted, neither of these tensions can be fully resolved. Evangelical Christianity needs to embrace the benefit of parachurch ministry and the importance of the local church. Evangelical Christianity also needs to embrace the unity of the church and the value of denominational distinctives.
Primary Sources


Secondary Sources

Books


Articles


