1991

The political thought of Carl F.H. Henry

David L. Weeks

Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/3031
THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF CARL F. H. HENRY

by

David L. Weeks

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May

1991
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is important to acknowledge those who have assisted me on this project. The members of my committee, James Wiser, Thomas Engeman, Ronald Nash, and Raymond Tatalovich, are true scholars and gentlemen. I appreciated their gentle prodding, personal encouragement, and unending patience. I was continually impressed with their sharp intellects, wise counsel, and thoughtful, reflective responses to my work. Their gentlemanly demeanor and their commitment to careful scholarship have been an inspiration to me.

Christopher Flannery provided me with much needed editorial assistance. Moreover, his keen and thoughtful insights clarified and sharpened my thinking on numerous occasions. William Mounce solved a myriad of word processing problems and helped shape the original proposal. Thomas Schreiner read various portions of the text and offered very helpful comments. The library staff of Azusa Pacific University diligently sought and retrieved numerous out-of-town and out-of-print sources. The administration of Azusa Pacific University contributed much needed financial and moral support.

Most of all, I want to acknowledge three people who have stood behind me throughout my academic career. My parents, Bob and Dorothy Weeks, have provided me with unending support and encouragement. Their faith in me and their prayers have been a constant source of moral support. My wife, Debbie, reassured, comforted, sustained, and supported me throughout the writing of this dissertation. Her love, devotion and longsuffering are beyond measure. As an expression of my sincere appreciation and affection, this dissertation is dedicated to her.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. JUDEO-CHRISTIAN THEISM</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. TWENTIETH CENTURY CHRISTIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE POLITICS OF REGENERATION</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. JUSTICE IN THE TEMPORAL KINGDOM</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, humanity has been plagued with social and political problems. Political philosophers have fashioned many different solutions in their attempts to attain justice, bring about peace and maintain public order. The most important efforts in this regard seem to emerge in times of greatest crisis. Each crisis returns humanity's attention to very basic questions. Are there moral, social and political principles which are universally true and which provide solutions to political problems? If so, how may mankind learn about them?

Carl F. H. Henry, a leading evangelical statesman, believes that western civilization is confronted with such a crisis, nihilism. The crisis has profound ramifications for all areas of life. The solution to the crisis, he claims, will become apparent only when we "reinvestigate the cohesive intellectual alternative that Judeo-Christian theism offers."2

The world of politics, in particular, is of special concern to Henry. He bemoans the fact that conservative Christians abandoned the political enterprise in the first half of the twentieth century. This error must be rectified. Renewed interest and involvement in politics is vital. This revival must be preceded by a reinvestigation into basic political questions. How should an evangelical Christian approach the world of politics? What

1 See James Wiser, Political Theory: A Thematic Inquiry (Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1986), xi.

guidelines for social and political activism have been made available to humanity via divine revelation? What do evangelicals have to contribute to the quest for a just political order?

Carl F. H. Henry's stature in the evangelical community is unparalleled. Henry is widely accepted as the elder statesman and preeminent theologian of the evangelical movement. As Kenneth Kantzer, the current editor of Christianity Today, wrote of Henry: "Among evangelicals--left, right or center--Carl F. H. Henry stands without peer as the honored dean of evangelical theologians."

A full understanding of Henry's solution to the crisis of nihilism requires an

---

3 Bob Patterson, a professor of religion at Baylor University, past president of the American Academy of Religion and editor for the Journal of Church and State, has written the only published book-length monograph on Henry. The book was written as a part of an eighteen volume series edited by Patterson. Speaking of Henry, Patterson wrote: "As editor of this series . . . I had to select an (or the) outstanding American evangelical theologian about whom to write a book. The choice was simplicity itself--Carl F. H. Henry, of course. Carl Henry is the prime interpreter of evangelical theology, one of its leading theoreticians, and now in his 70s the unofficial spokesman for the entire tradition." Carl F. H. Henry (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 9. In addition to the volume on Henry, the series, entitled "Makers of the Modern Theological Mind," devotes book length studies to theologians such as Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Emil Brunner, Soren Kierkegaard, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Hans Kung, and Friedrich Schleiermacher.

4 Several scholars have identified Henry as the most important evangelical theologian in recent years. For example, Gabriel Fackre, a prominent non-evangelical theologian, wrote: "If the twentieth century 'evangelical renaissance' in North America has produced a Michelangelo, that exemplar is surely Carl Henry. Premier theologian, key figure in its formative institutions, chief public interpreter of its ways and critic of its wanderings, this renaissance man has left his mark on an epoch . . . As evangelical presence is now widely felt through American society and its churches, its intellectual leaders are getting a hearing. In this company Henry has no peer." "Carl F. H. Henry," in A Handbook of Christian Theologians, enl. ed., eds. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1984), 583. A. James Reichley, a political scientist, calls Henry the "leading evangelical theologian of his generation." Religion in American Public Life (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1985), 253. Henry has received similar recognition in popular circles. Evangelist Billy Graham said of Henry that he is "intellectually the most eminent of conservative theologians." "Mr. Inside," Newsweek, 15 January 1968, 71. Time magazine described him as the "leading theologian of the nation's growing evangelical flank." "Theology for the Tent Meeting," Time, 14 February 1977, 82.

investigation of his philosophical presuppositions. Thus, the starting point for this study will be Henry's description of the ontological and epistemological foundation for Judeo-Christian theism. What are Henry's arguments concerning the supernatural, divine revelation, and human reason?

After describing Henry's philosophical principles, this study will proceed to its central concern, namely, to demonstrate how Henry views the nature and direction of Christian political involvement. He insists that "social concern is an indispensable ingredient of the evangelistic message." He says:

The evangelical community has a mandate to challenge social injustice wherever it is found, and to call and strive for social justice—as part of what it means to love God with one's whole being and one's neighbor as one's self. The Christian is to work for just government and for just laws.

Prior to the more substantive portion of this dissertation, the remaining sections of this chapter will review the importance of this study, explain the research approach, and provide an outline of the dissertation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY

This study is important for several reasons. First, evangelical Christians are playing an increasingly important role in contemporary politics. After several decades of political

---


and social passivity, a resurgence of evangelical activism has occurred in the second half of the twentieth century.⁹ Scholars agree that throughout the 1800s, evangelical Christians were one of the most active social and political forces in America.¹⁰ 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 evangelicalism.¹¹ These challenges contributed

---


¹¹ Liberal Protestantism was "a somewhat diverse movement in Protestant theology which arose in the second half of the nineteenth century. Negatively, it is characterized by a rather critical attitude to naive biblicism (e.g. to a simplistic affirmation of statements in the Bible) and to traditional dogmatic formulations of the Christian faith. Positively, it is concerned to present the spirit of the Christian gospel in contemporary terms and to assert the importance of the individual's religious experience." "Liberals hold in common a suspicion of natural or speculative theology; consider dogma an illegitimate mixture of religion and metaphysics, therefore secondary or dispensable; cherish human freedom and reason; endorse the application of critical scholarship to the Bible and ecclesiastical tradition; and emphasize the practical side of religion, especially the ethical imperatives of
to society's "progressive abandonment of supernaturalism." In response to this intellectual onslaught, a "siege mentality" resulted and conservative Christians increasingly became isolated socially and intellectually.\textsuperscript{12} The label "fundamentalist" was attached to those who failed to engage in intellectual debate with their modern opponents and who separated themselves from society at large.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{14} Hunter, \textit{American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of
"the endorsement of social concern but [with] the emphasis on social concern to the exclusion of the spiritual dimensions of faith." 15 Thus, to counteract the liberal emphasis, they began to ignore social concerns and focus upon evangelism and personal piety. 16

After World War II, a distinct movement emerged from the fundamentalist ranks. 17 Calling themselves evangelicals, often labeled neo-evangelicals, this movement argued that fundamentalism had gone awry:

... it had a wrong attitude (a suspicion of all who did not hold every doctrine and practice that fundamentalists did), a wrong strategy (a separatism that aimed at a totally pure church on the local and denominational levels), and wrong results (it had not turned the tide of liberalism anywhere nor had it penetrated with its theology into the social problems of the day). 18

Carl Henry's book, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, played an important role in this movement by reminding conservative Christians of their social responsibilities. 19

---

15 Ibid.
16 In addition, one must acknowledge the rise of a premillennial eschatology in fundamentalist theological circles which maintained "a sustained pessimism towards the period owing to their view that the trials of the age are evidences of humankind's total depravity and of the approaching Second Coming of Christ and the end of time. Thus, their greatest preoccupation became the salvation of souls." Ibid. A good discussion of premillennialism during this era can be found in Timothy P. Weber, Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1925 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979).

17 For a contemporary attempt by a political scientist to differentiate fundamentalists from evangelicals, see Corwin Smidt, "Evangelicals Within Contemporary American Politics: Differentiating Between Fundamentalist and Non-Fundamentalist Evangelicals," Western Political Quarterly 41 (1988): 601-620. Smidt's unpublished article is also useful, "Evangelicals Versus Fundamentalists: An Analysis of the Political Characteristics and Importance of Two Major Religious Movements . . . " (Presented at the Midwest Political Science Association Meeting in Chicago, April 1983).


This resurgence of activism has received significant attention since it has been accompanied by tremendous numerical growth. For example, George Gallop named 1976 as the year of the evangelical when his polls determined that there were as many as 50 million adult evangelicals in the United States.\(^{20}\) This numerical strength illustrates the potential of evangelicalism as a potent social and political force in modern society. Jeremy Rifkin argues: "There is no other single cultural force in American life today that has as much potential as the evangelical community to influence the future direction of this country."\(^{21}\) Several empirical studies have documented and described this phenomenon but little is known about the intellectual basis of modern evangelicalism.\(^{22}\) Serious thought

---

\(^{20}\) Quebedeaux, The Worldly Evangelicals, 3-4. While evangelicalism is often thought of as a movement in the United States, evidence suggests otherwise. Richard Rodriguez says: "After four Catholic centuries, a new brand of Christianity is catching fire in Latin America. Latin America . . . is turning Protestant. And not just Protestant, but evangelical." He goes on to say: "At the beginning of the century there were fewer than 200,000 Protestants in all of Latin America. Today, one in eight Latin Americans is Protestant; there are more than 50 million Protestants in Latin America. The rate of conversion (by one estimate, 400 per hour) leads demographers to predict Latin America will be evangelical before the end of the 21st century." Los Angeles Times, 13 August 1989, part V, p. 1.


should be devoted to what the evangelicals can contribute to political discourse. In this regard, the work of Carl Henry merits close study. He is often identified as the central figure in the resurgence of evangelical theology and political involvement. According to Patterson:

His influence in theology, personal and social ethics, evangelism and socio-political involvement is unparalleled among evangelicals, and his writings give promise of continuing contributions to American thought and life.

Second, for many years conservative Christians have been labeled anti-intellectual. In an attempt to escape this label, evangelicals have separated themselves from their fundamentalist counterparts and have sought to achieve a degree of theoretical and intellectual respectability. Henry is one of the central figures in this regard. Patterson describes him as "the prime mover in helping evangelical theology in America reassert its self-respect." Henry sets out to "show that orthodox Christianity is able to answer the fundamental questions of life as adequately as, if not more adequately than, any other view would." He issues a "plea for a vital presentation of redemptive Christianity which does

---


23 University of Wisconsin political scientist, Robert Booth Fowler, calls Henry the "pioneer within evangelicalism for a new gospel of social concern." A New Engagement, 77. A Lutheran theologian, Mark Ellingsen, says Henry was the "modern trail-blazer in revitalizing social ethical concern among Evangelicals." The Evangelical Movement: Growth, Impact, Controversy, Dialog, 277. David Moberg concurs: "The first prominent spokesman calling for a revival of interest in social issues was Carl F. H. Henry." The Great Reversal: Evangelism Versus Social Concern, 160.

24 Patterson, Carl Henry, 169. Although widely considered a conservative, Henry's pioneering efforts spawned political involvement among both the religious right and the evangelical left as represented by Jim Wallis, John Alexander, and Sojourners magazine. See chapters five and six in Fowler, A New Engagement, 77-139.


26 Patterson, Carl Henry, 9-10.

27 Ibid., 59.
not obscure its philosophical implications, its social imperatives . . . and its revelational base." In part, this study will describe and evaluate Henry's contribution to the evangelical attempt to shed its anti-intellectual label.

The third reason for this study is the lack of a major substantive work on Carl Henry's political thought. Several major studies have been written on Henry but none has concentrated on the nature, direction and philosophical foundation of Henry's political thought. Given the significant influence that Henry has had on the evangelical

---


movement, it is important that a full length study of Henry's political thought and its philosophical foundation be done.

THE RESEARCH APPROACH

This study is not apologetical. It will demonstrate the basis for and direction of Henry's call for evangelical political activism. It will be both a descriptive study and a critical evaluation. The central question will be: "What is Carl F. H. Henry's understanding of the nature, direction, and philosophical foundation of Christian political activism?"

In terms of methodology, the political and philosophical writings of Henry will be scrutinized carefully and Henry's response to the research question will be described and analyzed. A very prolific scholar, Henry has written or edited over forty books and several hundred articles.

Among his philosophical writings, his six volume magnum opus entitled, *God, Revelation and Authority*, will be most important.30 In these volumes, Henry focuses on ontological and epistemological questions and modern attempts to discount biblical revelation. He has identified the "modern crisis of truth" as the theme for this work.31 He insists that humanity is capable of "cognitive" knowledge of God via divine revelation and he proposes to challenge "encroaching naturalism with its besetting inability to identify

30 The first four volumes focus on epistemology, primarily the question of divine revelation, and the last two volumes are metaphysical discussions on the nature of God. Speaking of this project, fellow evangelical Ronald Nash wrote: "Henry's exciting and creative work will undoubtedly be regarded as the definitive statement of the evangelical theological consensus for years to come." *Christianity Today*, 22 February 1980, 38. Kenneth Briggs, the religious news editor of the *New York Times*, described these volumes as "the most important work of evangelical theology in recent times." *New York Times Book Review* 3 April 1977, sec. 7, 32. Prominent theologian, J. I. Packer, calls it a "magnificent achievement," and says it is "quite simply, the best, fullest and most masterly apologetic account of the evangelical view of scripture that you can find anywhere." *Crux*, December 1984, 28.

fixed truth and values."\(^{32}\)

The view of revelation adopted by Henry is perhaps the most important theological
distinction of contemporary evangelicalism. Most evangelicals insist on "the
indispensability and legitimacy of a belief in cognitive or propositional revelation."\(^{33}\)
While much of contemporary Protestant theology has "questioned God's ability to
communicate truth to man" and doubted "man's ability to attain knowledge about God," the
evangelicals have held to an older traditional view of revelation.\(^{34}\) John Hick describes
this traditional understanding of revelation as follows:

In the propositional view, that which is revealed is a body of religious truths
capable of being expressed in propositions. Because a knowledge of these truths is
necessary for man's salvation, God has supernaturally made them known.\(^{35}\)

A more common conception of revelation among twentieth century theologians, and a view
rejected by Henry, is the perspective which:

maintains that revelation consists not in the promulgation of divinely guaranteed
truths but in the performance of self-revealing divine acts within human history.
The locus of revelation is not propositions but events, and its content is not a body
of truths about God but "the living God" revealing himself in his actions toward
man.\(^{36}\)

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 356.

\(^{33}\) Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man: The Crisis of Revealed
Truth in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House,
1982), 9.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 5:190. A helpful discussion of different understandings of revelation can
be found in Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday &
Company, 1983). Dulles presents five models of revelation. 1. Revelation as Doctrine:
"Revelation is divinely authoritative doctrine inerrantly proposed as God's word by the
Bible or by official church teaching." 2. Revelation as History: "Revelation is the
manifestation of God's saving power by his great deeds in history." 3. Revelation as
Inner Experience: "Revelation is the self-manifestation of God by his intimate presence in
the depths of the human spirit." 4. Revelation as Dialectical Presence: "Revelation is
Knowledge of "truth" or "propositions" is denied on the basis of "particular theories about the nature of human knowledge . . . [or] . . . view[s] of the nature of God . . . [or] . . . because of theories about the nature of human language." Scripture is not divine revelation itself but is a witness of divine revelation.

As a preeminent exponent of modern evangelicalism, Henry finds the contemporary conception of revelation untenable. He defends the traditional conception of revelation as propositional truth as well as those orthodox doctrines based upon it. He believes a return to the traditional understanding of the Christian faith, as represented by modern evangelicalism, is the solution to the woes of modernity.

Among his political writings, one should start with his call for evangelical social action in The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism. The character of Christian political involvement has been a recurrent theme in many articles as well as in books such as Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture, and Twilight of a Great Civilization.

God's address to those whom he encounters with his word in Scripture and Christian proclamation." Revelation as New Awareness: "Revelation is a breakthrough to a higher level of consciousness as humanity is drawn to a fuller participation in the divine creativity." (115) Henry is a representative of the first model. Dulles' critique of model one will be addressed in chapter eight. Other useful sources include J. Baillie, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1956); H. D. MacDonald, Theories of Revelation (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979); and, David H. Kelsey, The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975).


39 Aspects of Christian Social Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans
The critical evaluation of Henry's political contributions will include questions regarding the proper role of government, the nature of political rule, the goals of and justification for political involvement as well as an analysis of his practical political prescriptions.

Regarding Henry's understanding of the role of government, one must ask: What are the goals of political life? Do biblical principles require a minimalist state? Is benevolence, as argued by Henry, outside the realm of legitimate governmental activity? Should a government attempt to legislate morality? Does the state have any spiritual functions? For example, would Henry approve of St. Augustine's call for civil authorities to punish the heretical Donatists? Concerning the form of government, does the existence of divine commands for political behavior lend itself more to authoritarianism than to democracy?

Questions regarding the nature of political rule need to be addressed. Does political rule require a morality different from that expected of individuals? For example, does public morality permit the use of violence or the telling of a "noble lie" that would be unacceptable for an individual? Is a Christian faith a prerequisite to true statesmanship?

On the topic of Henry's call for Christian political involvement, one can ask: Why should Christians engage in political thinking and action? Can men deliberately affect the course of history through political action? Why is revolution unacceptable for Henry? When, if ever, is civil disobedience permissible? In addition, two questions raised by fellow evangelical Lewis Smedes merit attention. Is Henry's reliance on personal regeneration as the evangelical strategy in social ethics inadequate? Does Henry's stress on the individual tend to diminish the social part of human nature and thus undermine political
community? 

His specific political prescriptions need to be evaluated also. For example, does his analysis provide sufficient biblical exegesis? Do his political prescriptions logically follow from his philosophic presuppositions or are they merely a reflection of the conservative predisposition of the evangelical community as argued by Murray Dempster? How can a believer convince a non-believer to accept the viability and superiority of political prescriptions based upon a divine revelation that the non-believer rejects? Another question to be addressed was raised by Gabriel Fackre: Does Henry adequately deal with the biblical teachings on war and peace, solidarity with the poor and liberation?

These questions provide a framework for a critical evaluation of Henry's work. Thus this study will provide a descriptive and critical evaluation of one of evangelicalism's most prolific and authoritative proponents.

OUTLINE

Following the introductory material in this chapter, the second and third chapters of this study will survey Henry's description of the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of modern naturalism, classical Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian theism. While Henry admires the philosophical efforts of classical Greek philosophy--especially the work of Plato and Aristotle--he views their work as inadequate. What, according to Henry, were their strengths and what were their fatal flaws?

Henry is very interested in the dominant philosophical alternative available today.

---


While acknowledging differences among modern thinkers, Henry insists that modernity is guided by a philosophical orientation that he labels "naturalism." This view, explicitly repudiates the reality of the supernatural, rejects all transcendent revelation and divine commandments, excludes objective purpose and providence from history and the cosmos, and forfeits any divine plan of salvation or special destiny that sets man apart from the animals.

When humanity attempts to live according to these presuppositions, Henry insists, "he drains his own life of meaning and worth and progressively empties his existence of everything that makes human life desirable." He believes "the basic modern assumptions are trickling their philosophic course to pessimism," and it is now time to remind humanity that biblical theism offers a philosophically sound and practically useful alternative.

Chapter three is a summary of Henry's effort to articulate a Judeo-Christian view of life and the world. Of particular importance--for Henry as well for the purposes of this study--will be a review of the roles of reason and revelation. In simple terms, Henry views reason as "a divinely fashioned instrument for recognizing truth." Henry's view of

---

43 "Not that modern speculation (is) a one-colored cloak. Between rationalists like Descartes, Leibnitz, and Spinoza, and the empiricists like Locke, Berkeley and Hume, stands an immovable obstruction. Kantian criticism and Hegelian idealism have their weighty differences and both together are far removed from Comtean positivism. . . . Yet they all. . . . may be catalogued in federation [when] they declare . . . for the ultimate reality of nature. . . . Even where Kantian and Hegelian thinkers link man to a world of supernature or insist that nature is not so ultimate as the Absolute . . . [it is a] man-made realm of supernature and a man-projected Absolute or [they] so merged the realms of nature and supernature that the one was lost in the other . . ." Carl F. H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), 22-23.


45 Henry, *God Revelation and Authority*, 1:140.


47 Patterson, *Carl Henry*, 65.
revelation as propositional in nature also merits close attention. He defines a proposition as "a verbal statement that is either true or false; it is a rational declaration capable of being either believed, doubted or denied." Henry asserts that the "Judeo-Christian religion centers supremely in the living God self-disclosed in his Word, and this biblically attested Word is communicated intelligibly in meaningful sentences." To ignore the revelation of God as the final ground and source of truth and the good accommodates and accelerates the contemporary drift to nihilism. To avert a nihilistic loss of enduring truth and good, only the recovery of revelation will suffice.

After describing the philosophical foundation of Henry's work, the remaining chapters will focus on Henry's political thought. Chapters four and five describe Henry's reaction to twentieth century Christian political engagement and reviews the corrective measures that he prescribes. Calling for a return to evangelical social activism, Henry bemoans the fact that "one often hears that nonevangelical theology seems to speak . . . directly to the dilemmas of the age [while] evangelical theology . . . all too often fails to project engagingly upon present-day perplexities." How have twentieth century non-evangelical Protestant Christians responded? Where have they gone awry? Why is it essential for evangelical Christians to respond to a call to activism? What is the basis for this call and what are the practical ramifications of that call?

The sixth chapter addresses several significant questions. What is justice? What do we know about it? How do we obtain it? Is justice conventional in the sense of being mere law-abidingness or is it a higher principle to which the state must aspire? What type of

48 Henry, God Revelation and Authority, 3:456.

49 Ibid., 1:27.

50 Ibid., 1:29.

51 Ibid., 1:9-10.
justice is the temporal kingdom capable of maintaining? What are the proper roles for the state and the church? What are their responsibilities, duties and limitations? What responsibilities fall upon the individual and how should one conduct oneself in the often rough and tumble world of practical politics?

Chapter seven will review Henry's attempt to apply his political thought to practical political issues. Henry adamantly asserts: "The Bible may not deal with many particular problems of modern life but it exhibits the only framework in which they may be permanently unravelled."52 What principles are available to humanity in Scripture that provide guidelines to the world of practical politics? How does he apply them to the issues of today? Contemporary debates over abortion, capital punishment, war and peace, poverty-relief programs, economic systems and civil rights will be covered.

The concluding chapter will summarize the study and critically evaluate the work of Henry. In the 1940s, Henry set out to, among other things, "clarify the philosophical implications of biblical theism" and to "develop a valid social ethic."53 A careful theoretical analysis will demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of his work. What are the problems, if any, with his analysis? What can we learn from him? What are the implications for further study for evangelicals? What, indeed, has he contributed to the quest for a just political order? These questions will be addressed in the closing chapter.


CHAPTER TWO

MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

Carl Henry's interest in the history of philosophy is not merely historical. Rather, he is concerned with man's search for meaning. He looks at the ancient, medieval and modern philosophers, not as historical curiosities, but as thinkers pursuing seriously the meaning of the world and of life. Henry believes their search enlightens our understanding of important philosophical questions and their inadequacies contribute to the argument that Christianity provides the only sound and logically consistent solution to the problems perplexing humanity.

Henry identifies three distinct philosophical epochs.¹ He says that "each epoch is distinguished from the others by a diverse way of discerning facts and of assessing their importance. Peculiar to each is a genius, a certain homogeneity of outlook, which requires a distinction between them."² This chapter will summarize Henry's discussion of ancient Greek philosophy, medieval Judeo-Christian theism and modern naturalism.

¹ "The reason for this tripartite division of history is intellectual or philosophical. Every culture is seen to have its own motivating impulse and sense of values, raises its own special questions and provides its own distinctive answers. Each culture relates itself to reality by its own peculiar methodology--be its reason or revelation or empirical observation or tentative hypotheses or subjective decision or whatever else." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:31.

² Carl F. H. Henry, The Drift of Western Thought (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), 11. As a Christian apologist, Henry is interested in the influence of philosophy on Christianity and with the influence of Christianity on philosophy. Accordingly, he devotes little attention to Eastern philosophy.
ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY

The first division in intellectual history is the period of classical Greek philosophy. Henry says, "when we speak of the ancient mind, we mean that outlook on reality and life that was shaped by the classic Greek philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle." He looks carefully at these ancient Greeks thinkers and concludes that we can learn from them, but, in the final analysis, their views are inadequate.

The classical Greek view emerged to challenge the prevalent philosophies of the time. These ancient idealists, as Henry calls Plato and Aristotle, were primarily responding to and confronting philosophical naturalism—the view that nature is the sum total of reality.

The most systematic and consistent ancient Greek naturalist was Democritus. Henry notes that Democritean philosophy had "reduced nature to the interplay of countless atoms ruled by chance. In short, he held that nature, or atoms in motion, is the only reality; man is a complex correlation of such atoms and, consequently, is not immortal; truth and the

3 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:31. "Plato (B.C. 428-347) and Aristotle (B.C. 384-322) are the most significant Greek philosophic minds because classic ancient thought rests on their idealistic principles." Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 186.

4 Henry refers frequently to Plato and Aristotle as idealists. A note explaining what he means is in order. He uses the terms idealism and naturalism in a metaphysical sense. Naturalism refers to the philosophical position that the material world is the sum total of reality. Ideas and values are derivative. On the other hand, idealism asserts the ultimacy of the supernatural or spiritual world. Henry writes, "a division of the history of ethics, or of philosophy, into Naturalism and Idealism, may seem to be unfortunate since, while Naturalism is a type of metaphysics, Idealism is today usually thought of as a type of epistemology. . . . But the terms are used here to designate contrastive metaphysical views: the one asserts the contingency of the mental and spiritual, and the other its absoluteness and ultimacy." Carl F. H. Henry, Christian Personal Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 22.

5 "This idealistic frame was consciously opposed to the naturalistic school which in Greek antiquity had come to its most systematic expression in Democritus. The classic philosophers realized that if Democritus remained unchallenged, Greek culture was doomed." Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 15. "Democritus stands out as one of the key philosophers of antiquity because, postulating materialism as an all-inclusive philosophical principle, he endeavored systematically to develop its implications." Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 80.
good, like everything else, are changing and relative."^6

The Greek philosophers argued that a systematic application of naturalism would undermine civilization. They reasoned that "if nothing endures . . . , if chance and change permeate all reality, including truth and goodness . . . then human life loses meaning and purpose . . ."^7 Thus, Democritean philosophy "robbed human life and nature of purpose" and "offered no basis for a durable Greek culture."^8 Democritus was guilty of this, they argued, because he eliminated the categories of formal and final causation.

Explain men and things wholly in terms of efficient causation, account for effects by the mere reference to whatever causes immediately precede them, and one critically banishes the realm of ends, or final causes, for the sake of which all things exist.^9

Thus, "Democritus's theory rules out purpose or teleology; everything evolves from a combination of necessity and chance."^10

Plato and Aristotle insisted there was an alternative, a superior explanation of life and reality that gave purpose to life. For them:

The universe can be understood only teleologically; a world without meaning and purpose . . . is a meaningless universe, a worthless and purposeless universe; it becomes necessary to forfeit the significance of everything, human existence and thinking included.^11

This loss of meaning, Plato argued, according to Henry:

flows from the fact that from experience one can gain no uniform idea of the beautiful, the good, the just, the pious--indeed, of anything. Ideas of categorical meaning, dealing with judgment predication, must precede experience, else we

^6 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:31.

^7 Ibid., 1:32.

^8 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 16.

^9 Ibid.

^10 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:31.

^11 Ibid.
cannot account for their existence and claim to universal validity. Therefore, Plato contends we must know the likeness at which particulars aim before we come to particular objects of knowledge, since from the latter we could never confidently distill the universal.12

Thus, "the Greek idealists ... entered the philosophic arena convinced that the case for a teleological idealism could be rationally proved and that the naturalistic alternative rested on insufficient reason." 13

In response to their naturalist antagonists, "Plato and Aristotle stressed the reality and priority of the supernatural, the qualitative uniqueness of man and the objectivity of morals ..." 14 Henry insists that "these great affirmations are at the heart of Socratic-Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy" and are the "most important achievement of the ancient mind." 15

Contrary to the teachings of the naturalists, Plato and Aristotle stressed "the reality and priority of the supernatural." 16 The ancients insisted on an "ontologically real world of Ideas" as logically prior to man. 17 For example, Plato "affirms the existence, alongside the corporeal sense world, of an immaterial realm of abiding and unchanging essences. The eternal Ideas, for Plato, constitute the sphere of Being, and are known not by sensation but by conception." 18 The physical world is not supreme nor is it the limit of reality. 19

12 Ibid., 1:285.
13 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 17.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 14.
16 Ibid., 17.
17 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:285-286.
18 Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 187.
19 "The world of nature, in the Platonic interpretation, is dependent upon the world of supernature not for the existence of the formless matter out of which it is shaped, but rather for its pattern or design; that is, it exhibits a logical dependence. But the Ideas, which comprise the realm of Being, themselves sustain logical relations to each other, with the Idea of the Good as the highest and ruling idea. All reality exists for the sake of this supreme Idea of the Good; neither the world of nature nor the world of supernature
To the contrary, "beyond the visible natural world of time and change is an invisible moral and spiritual world that is eternal and unchanging." 20

Henry notes, interestingly, "the conflict between epistemology and ontology, which is in the forefront of the modern disputes over knowledge, is conspicuously absent. Thinking is represented as an ontological activity in and through which man comprehends reality itself." 21 The supernatural world was real. We do not know it empirically, only conceptually, but that does not limit its reality. Henry says:

It is important, then, to emphasize that the "ideas" are not, for classic philosophy, our own thoughts, but rather are objects of our thoughts; they are realities apprehended, not ways of apprehending. Man is rational, not because he has perceptual images ... but because man's mental powers are characterized by an ontic reference to the world of changeless eternal ideas or forms. 22

Moreover, only to the extent that man knows this reality beyond the material world does life become meaningful. For "only in relation to an eternal, purposive, spiritual sphere are nature and man meaningful." 23

In regard to human nature, Plato and Aristotle argued for "the qualitative uniqueness of man." 24 Their view of man, according to Henry, stressed the rationality of man and man's a priori link to the transcendent world. 25 The link was human reason. Henry says:

receives an adequate interpretation except in terms of teleology, or purposive goodness." Ibid., 188.

20 Ibid.

21 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:288.

22 Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 250.

23 Ibid., 14.

24 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 17.

25 "For Plato and Aristotle, man was differentiated from all other creatures by his rationality. True, his animality linked him as them to the world of nature, to the laws of which he was thereby subject. And, since classic Greek thought assumed that matter is evil or imperfect, life in the body could never fully manifest the perfections of the eternal ideas or forms of the Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics. . . . Yet the essential goodness of man's
Plato held that the eternal ideas innately inhere in the soul of man. The inward eye of reason is a faculty whereby man can grasp the unchanging eternal "forms" and "ideas" that constitute the ultimate world. By this faculty of reason men can rise cognitively to the idea of the Good which is the source of all knowledge.26

Thus, "man is qualitatively superior to the animals because of this rational link to the supernatural; he is not merely a creature of time and space."27 The rationality of man makes him distinct. Henry explains:

Man, linked by his reason to the eternal ideas or forms, was to that extent lifted out of his animal creaturehood, and made a participant in the world of supernature as well as subject to the laws of nature. . . . As distinguished from all other creatures, man is a spiritual and moral being; his differentiation from the animals is simply, as Aristotle puts it, that man is a rational creature. This meant that . . . contrary to other animals man has a conceptual knowledge, can think in terms of universals, can surmount the realm of flux and change and participate in the eternal forms of goodness, truth and beauty.28

Thus, "while man is physically an animal, limited by space and time . . . he is essentially or spiritually more than an animal: his mind is an aspect of God's mind, and hence is indestructible and immortal."29

Epistemologically, the ancients insisted on the "a priori validity of the rational reason is involved in the Greek assumption that, by his rationality, man has a link with the world of supernature, or the eternal ideas. For rationality is viewed as a universal and immortal principle which enters man from without, so that man in his essential or rational nature is identified with the divine." Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 56. "Uniquely constituted a rational animal, man has a capacity for valid knowledge in the world of sensations. Man's possession of timeless universals is explained as a recollection of the Idea-world inherited from a previous soul life. Plato suspends the a priori element in human knowledge upon this theory of preexistence and recollection. Unable by perception alone to come to any real knowledge, human beings can make judgments of general validity only because experience of the timeless Ideas in a priori existence conditions man's present experience through recollection." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:286.

26 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:86.

27 Ibid., 1:14.

28 Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 243-244.

29 Ibid.
elements in experience, in contrast with sensation." They argued that the a priori factor in human knowledge is thereby connected with the supernatural rational order. Man's rational experience is made possible only by a divine Mind, a hierarchy of changeless Ideas, in which particulars gain their only reality by way either of participation or imitation. For Plato, the priority of the rational element can be understood only through an antecedent spiritual Idea-world.

For the Greeks, "... the possibility therefore exists of genuine theoretical knowledge of the metaphysical realm." Henry emphasizes three aspects of ancient epistemology. First, the ancients stress "the priority of the rational over the perceptual." Second, they maintain "the ontological reality of the eternal Ideas." Third, they believe in a "theory of preexistence and recollection, which supplies the basis of man's ability to make rational judgments that pierce through the sense manifold to the inner realm of changeless ideas."

Ethically, the ancients insisted upon "the objectivity of morals." There are objective standards of right and wrong and humanity is morally obligated to discover and abide by such standards. Contrary to the ancient naturalist position, Plato and Aristotle argued that "moral distinctions are objective and eternal, not merely relative and arbitrary." Henry writes: "What made possible a science of morals, for the classic Greek mind, is the fact that man is not only an animal, subject to the laws of nature, but that he also partakes of rationality, which gives him a reference to a world of supernature

30 Henry, God Revelation and Authority, 1:285-286.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 1:288.
33 Ibid., 1:286.
34 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 17.
35 Ibid., 14. "Truth and the good, moreover, are not relative and changing distinctions but are eternal and unchanging realities." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:32.
with its unchanging absolutes, its eternal ideas and forms."36 Humanity has access to objective standards of right and wrong.

The influence of these ideas extended beyond their lives. Henry contends that "even successors who repudiated the Platonic-Aristotelian synthesis were unable to avoid their influence . . . "37 While naturalism remained in ancient times in some circles, the classic philosophers were more influential.

Whether in government or sculpture, in literature or art, Greek culture, in major manifestations, patterned itself around the convictions that man is uniquely related to a supernatural realm of abiding goodness, truth and beauty. Greek customs and institutions, political, social, and religious, aimed to realize more fully that supernatural ideal which the classic philosophers found implicitly embodied in the actual structure of things, and which was uncovered to philosophic contemplation.38

In fact, according to Henry:

So convincingly and powerfully did they persuade their contemporaries, that Greco-Roman culture--literature and the arts, politics, and all realms of learning and life--was predicated henceforth on the premise that ultimate reality is spiritual, that truth and goodness are objective and eternal, that man is qualitatively unique, that human existence has ultimate meaning and purpose. The Greek populace thus anchored its expectation of a purposive, reliable and intelligible life in the confidence that an objective order structures our world, an order not derived from or dependent on our experienced cosmos, but one, rather, on which the cosmos and man depend for meaningful existence.39

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the ancients was their decisive rebuttal of ancient naturalism. Henry contends that the similarities to our time when naturalism has again reared its head are obvious and thus "the classic struggle against ancient naturalism immediately enlists our interest."40 The Greeks wisely considered "both what things really

37 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 14-15.
38 Ibid., 18.
39 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:32.
40 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 15.
are and why they are as equally important, and ultimately more important than how they assertedly behave." Henry believes that the classic philosophers answered and refuted their naturalistic counterparts with an idealistic philosophy that more accurately portrayed reality. This "idealistic rebuttal of naturalism" is one from which we can learn as we confront naturalism in the twentieth century.

Among those aspects of ancient Greek thought that Henry finds appealing is "an interest in connecting the a priori with the ontic constitution of the metaphysical order, and therefore in man's constitutive relationship to that order." Henry agrees with the notion that an a priori supernatural world exists. Henry also agrees that knowledge regarding the meaning of the world and of life is dependent upon one's relationship to the supernatural realm. "Tested by the Christian view," Henry concludes, "the most important emphasis in Platonism was its recognition of the need to transcend the world of change in order to reach the ideal and eternal."

Henry also sees problems with ancient Greek philosophy. He is most concerned with the notion that man has a rational connection with the supernatural. He says:

Among the most objectionable features of classic idealism was its connection of human reason in a privileged way with a supposedly autonomous world of order and meaning. Central to the New Testament is the Christian conviction of a divinely structured creation whereby the transcendent Logos sustains the cosmic order and supplies the direction and universally valid meaning of all things. The contrast can hardly be overstated between this view and Greek notions of an immanent rational a priori ungrounded in the transcendent Creator and unrelated to the created structures of the universe. Christianity expounded its world-life view on the basis of the transcendently revealed Logos of God, and grounded the universal order of existence and meaning in the self-disclosed Creator and Lord of all. Greek philosophy had insistently asked what speculative reason is driven to

41 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:32. Henry's italics.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 1:286.
44 Ibid., 1:35.
affirm about ultimate reality, about being and becoming. . . . Christianity affirmed that through chosen spokesmen and their inspired biblical writings the living God had intelligently proclaimed his redemptive purpose, thus publishing to all men the prospect of divine redemption. In gracious incarnation the Logos himself stepped into history to unveil God in the flesh and to show himself the sinner's Savior. From its beginnings this confidence in a rational-verbal and incarnate divine disclosure, in the fully revealed Word of God, shapes the Christian outlook.45

Henry contrasts the Greek nature/supernature distinction with the Creator/creature distinction of Judeo-Christian theism. The former leaves open the possibility of autonomous man reaching up independently to the supernatural realm in his quest for knowledge. The latter distinction, the one adopted by Henry, rejects this possibility and depends exclusively upon the divine reaching down to man in an act of revelation.

Granting this inordinate capacity to human reason, according to Henry, was the result of the Greek's faulty view of human nature.

The Platonic construction assumes what Judeo-Christian revelation has always called into doubt, that man's present reasoning powers are devotedly rather than seditiously related to general divine disclosure. Since Platonism optimistically subscribes to the notion that human nature is unthwarted by a sinful bent of will, the a priori factor in combination with everyday experience is regarded as issuing in a valid natural theology.46

The Greek failure to acknowledge sin and man's will as the root of human problems is a significant error. They concluded that problems result neither from sin nor from a depraved will but from ignorance. Politically, this meant Plato could attribute the problems of society to ignorance. Henry notes: "Plato . . . felt that humanity's central problem was ignorance, and he projected principles for a state based on knowledge and ruled by philosopher-kings."47

Ultimately, ancient society failed "despite the concentration upon the supernatural and

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 1:286.

the objectivity of the moral claim." It simply lacked the "power to achieve moral standards which were idealistic and supra-naturalistic."48

What was the cardinal weakness? It was a too simple view of human nature, however much more profound it was than that of naturalism, [that] stood at the center of Greek idealism. . . . The Platonic-Aristotelian emphasis on man's rational relation to the supernatural was developed so as to minimize any disparity between man and God except in terms of man's incompleteness. . . . That stress on sin which, in Hebrew theology, accented man's separation from God not merely in terms of creaturehood, but also in terms of conscious moral revolt, was absent.49

Henry calls this a "misplaced confidence" in man.50

In another area, the classics did not satisfactorily answer the naturalists. The claim for objective truth failed to materialize.

. . . the classic emphasis on the reality and priority of the supernatural created as many problems as it solved, for the philosophers were less explicit about the religious aspect of their views than the thirst of the human spirit requires. . . . Hence Greek philosophy, having promised rational certainty about the supernatural, failed to deliver where it touched man at the deepest level; deep longings remained unsatisfied and forceful questions were unsolved.51

As a result, philosophy became increasingly ethical and even mystical in later years. According to Henry, "Platonic-Aristotelian obscurity, precisely in the area at which it demanded clarity--concerning, that is, the nature of the supernatural--issued in later philosophies in a concentration on the ethical more than on the metaphysical."52 This led to such movements as Neo-Platonism which "substituted a rational approach which culminated in an ecstatic, mystic experience."53

48 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 19.

49 Ibid., 20-21.

50 Ibid., 22.

51 Ibid., 20-21.

52 Ibid., 22.

53 Ibid.
In conclusion, Henry holds that classical Greek philosophy is insufficient. It does not provide solutions to the problems of human existence. Its shortcomings include an inaccurate understanding of human nature, a lack of objectivity regarding the supernatural and an inability to supply a moral dynamic that would enable man to live according to the principles of truth. The search for answers must continue elsewhere.

THE MEDIEVAL ERA

The medieval era began with the coming of Christ.\(^ {54}\) The appearance of Christ in human history led to the development of a culture based upon divine revelation. It was a culture that would stumble eventually but one from which Henry believes we could learn a great deal.

At the time of Christ, ancient Greek philosophy was struggling beneath two burdens; the lack of objective standards and the lack of a sufficient dynamic to enable men to live according to those higher moral standards. These weaknesses enabled Christianity to burst upon the scene and to become the dominant cultural phenomenon for the next several centuries. Henry writes:

When Christ came, the ancient view, to be sure, was already creaking under heavy strain from its internal defects. The more insistently its philosophers had asserted an invisible spiritual world, the greater had been the demand for information about God's nature and way. . . . The classic philosophers had assumed, moreover, not only that finite man could know the truth apart from special divine revelation, but also that even in his present moral condition he could achieve the good apart from special divine enablement. But both these expectations collapsed through the weaknesses of human unregeneracy.\(^ {55}\)

There were similarities between the ancient and medieval views. In particular, both views accepted "the reality of the supernatural, the uniqueness of man, and the objectivity

\(^{54}\) "... Christian culture in its partial realization did not become an actuality for many centuries and yet its beginnings were rooted in the singular events of B.C. 6 - 30 A.D." Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 38.

\(^{55}\) Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:33.
of truth and right." Medieval Christians stood with the classical Greek philosophers in opposition to ancient naturalism. At the same time, they were different from their ancient counterparts on several counts. The medieval Christians, Henry explains:

stood opposed . . . to the classic emphasis on the rational competence, in the realm of metaphysics, of the natural man in his state of sin; to the dualistic reduction of evil from a moral to a metaphysical problem; to the failure to identify the moral realm with the will of God; to the emptying of history of redemptive significance. The primary difference was epistemological. For "the medieval alternative appeals not to philosophical reasoning but to divine disclosure, to the truth about God revealed supremely in Jesus Christ." Epistemologically, medieval assertions regarding the reality of the supernatural, the uniqueness of man and the objectivity of truth and right were not based upon human reasoning but upon divine revelation.

This revolutionary explanation of man, life and meaning came to dominate the Western world for several centuries. Henry claims: "For more than a thousand years, until modern philosophy raised its head, the shaping ideals of the masses are rooted in this spiritual understanding of reality and life."

What are some of the specifics of the medieval mind? Henry writes:

. . . the medieval mind affirms that God is the ultimate sovereign and personal Spirit, the free Creator of the cosmos; that by creation man bears God's unique rational-moral image for the intelligent obedience and service of his Maker; that man voluntarily fell into disobedience and only by repentant reliance on divine grace can now escape the power, guilt, and penalty of sin that issues in final doom; that God has mercifully revealed himself . . . and fulfilled his promise of salvation in the divine gift of his Son; that as incarnate, crucified, risen and exalted, Jesus Christ is the living head of the regenerate church enlivened by the Holy Spirit; that the risen Redeemer is the first-fruits of a general resurrection and pledges and guarantees a final outcome of history involving his second advent and messianic reign as Prince

56 Ibid., 1:33-34.
57 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 27.
58 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:33.
59 Ibid.
of Peace, the vindication of righteousness, conformity of all believers to his
glorious image, and the final doom of the impenitent.60

In spite of its distinctively Christian character, medieval society is not necessarily
worthy of imitation. For "it can hardly be maintained that the Middle Ages issued in the
fullest sense in a Christian culture." To the contrary, "sometimes its inner message was
lost."61 We cannot forget the
crass superstition and religious intolerance to which Roman Catholicism
accommodated itself, moreover, and the needless years of darkness in the wake of
the passing of the Graeco-Roman culture, the ecclesiastical institutionalizing of
Christianity, the emphasis on credal subscription apart from genuine spiritual
decision, the ascetic and monastic movements, the supplanting of the exclusive
mediation of Christ--these unhappy perversions are an indubitable element of
medieval times.62

Nonetheless, there is much to be admired about the medieval era. A distinctive
culture emerged based upon a self-conscious attempt to relate faith to all of life.

Nothing can be clearer than that the medieval mind related to Christ, at least in
intention, not only theology and worship, but philosophy, government, art, music
and literature. It did so not in terms of human initiative, but of divine disclosure;
not in the spirit of groping for God's forgiveness, but rather of expressing gratitude
for the divinely provided gift of salvation, and of an awaiting of the complete
vindication of God's promises.63

Nevertheless, the medieval era was a passing phenomenon. The seeds of destruction were

60 Ibid., 1:34. The central tenets of the medieval mind were not new, rather they
were a reiteration of views first stated in the Hebraic Old Testament. "That the one eternal
and sovereign God created the world and all things by divine fiat; that man was created in
the divine image, and hence possessed a distinctive dignity, being made for personal
fellowship with the Deity; that man, by voluntary revolt, fell from original righteousness
into a state of moral and spiritual revolt; that salvation is impossible of attainment by human
effort but is a provision of the God of holy love, who through His prophets promised a
vicarious mediation from the divine side; that the promise of salvation is to be realized
within history itself by the God who in a special way reveals Himself to His chosen
people--what are these, but affirmations which stand at the core of the Old Testament, no

61 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 31.

62 Ibid., 32.

63 Ibid., 33-34.
planted and the medieval era would be superceded by modernity. The transformation from medieval times to modernity was a change more radical . . . than the ancient replacement of philosophical idealism by Biblical theism, since both these views affirmed the reality of the supernatural. But the modern transition ends with the denial of the supernatural, whether it is affirmed on speculative or on revelational ground.

A notion held in common by the medieval Christians and the ancient Greek philosophers was the idea that man was rationally connected with the supernatural. In the medieval era, this conviction led to disparate ends. Henry writes:

The medieval confidence that man's spirit stands in the loftiest areas of thought in an immediate rational connection with the divine Spirit could be carried forward in two ways. One is essentially theological-revelational, the other philosophical-speculative. Of this twofold division, Augustine and Anselm may be considered in some respects the representatives.

Henry considers St. Augustine as a philosopher par excellence and the best example of the theological/revelational approach to knowledge. He will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Two Benedictine priests, St. Anselm (1033-1109) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), led medieval thinkers down the road of speculative philosophy.

While Anselm is often considered Augustinian, his most interesting contributions are related to natural theology as later developed by Aquinas. Anselm argued that "man possesses the idea of God innately." Based upon our innate knowledge of God, Anselm provides "surprisingly detailed information concerning the nature and works of God,"

64 "In its appeal to natural reason, the Thomistic pattern contained within itself the seeds of its destruction." Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 231.

65 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 34.

66 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:288.


68 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:291. This is an Augustinian notion.
including truths such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, the doctrine of election and the reprobation of the wicked as well as divine attributes such as God's aseity, his goodness, his justness, his truthfulness, omnipotence, compassion, omniscience, wisdom, eternity, and omnipresence. His discussion of these attributes can be found in his *Prosligion* and *Monologion*. Henry admits it is unfair to categorize Anselm as a speculative philosopher, but he believes "Anselm's confident employment of the ontological proof for a complete doctrine of the nature of God nonetheless lent itself easily to a conjectural metaphysics which would work itself free of any and all dependence upon special biblical revelation." Ultimately, Henry believes that "Anselm ventures to prove the Christian doctrines without appealing to scriptural revelation, and ... views reason itself as a source of truth."

This emphasis on natural theology was carried forward by the scholastics, in general, and Thomas Aquinas, in particular. Aquinas and the scholastics sought to reconcile Christianity with ancient philosophy, and thereby laid the foundation for subsequent philosophers who would reject divine revelation outright. Henry argues that scholasticism ... by its alliance with Greek metaphysics helped to obscure the serious noetic effect of sin and thereby aided the concealment of the principle of special revelation. The classic Greek confidence in the competence of human reason in the metaphysical realm, which Christianity had overthrown, became a cardinal emphasis of the early modern rationalistic philosophies which had been encouraged, by medieval theology, to pursue the case for theism by speculative philosophy alone and without appeal to Biblical theology. The synthesis of

69 Ibid., 1:296-297.

70 Both works can be found in volume one of *Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. Jasper Hopkins, tr. Herbert Richardson (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1974).


72 Ibid., 1:299.

73 A discussion of Henry's understanding of general revelation and natural theology as well as his interpretation of Aquinas is in chapter three.
Thomas Aquinas, ... calls for certainty to be reached by natural theology on the questions of the existence of God and the existence and immortality of the soul. What Thomas did not discern ... was that when once the case for theism was pursued apart from the environmental conditioning of Christianity, the emphasis on the competence of human reason in the area of metaphysics would work itself around from a case for theism into a case against theism.74

Henry points out that

The medieval scholastics ... revived ... particularly through Thomas Aquinas, an optimistic doctrine of human reason and stated the case for biblical theism in a way that attracted speculative doubt. The movement of Western philosophy away from the biblical outlook may be summarized as a decline of faith in the existence of an objective, transcendently created structure of law and order. Replacing this view is a speculative projection of autonomous structures that are directly accessible to human reason independent of divine revelation, and are discontinuous with the sense world. Despite their assertion of a transcendent Creator, the medieval scholastics failed to recast effectively the classic Greek emphasis on immanent structures of truth and order. Instead they incorporated into their exposition of a Christian world-life view speculative elements that widened the possibilities of human autonomy. Christianity had discounted the Greek emphasis on an immanent rational a priori in mankind; but by synthesizing a revelationally grounded theism with the classic Greek view of Aristotle, medieval scholasticism indirectly hastened a philosophy of the autonomy of man and nature independent of the Logos-structured meaning and law of creation.75

Henry agrees with Martin Luther and John Calvin whom he feels argued that

"Christianity was presented to the modern world in most unsatisfactory and self-defeating terms by the Thomistic relating of reason and faith."76 For Aquinas had "shifted the case

74 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 98. "Thomas Aquinas affirmed that, by reason alone, man can attain to the knowledge of the existence of God, the existence of the soul, and immortality; his 'five-fold proof,' developing Aristotelian premises, by which he sought to 'mediate' Christianity to the 'Gentiles,' provided a logical demonstration of God's existence, he affirmed. For further light, however, conceded Thomas, man's reason is inadequate." Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 230.

75 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:36. According to Henry, some evangelical theologians such as Charles Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd and A. H. Strong have made a similar error. The Drift of Western Thought, 98. "Once medieval thought had granted the competency of reason to some extent, the moderns widened its competency so as wholly to exclude the revelational principle. ... The disastrous consequences invited by the compromise apologists for Christianity grew out of a failure to appreciate fully the principle of revelation. ... Thinkers who had come under the influence of the Thomist view, that the divine existence is logically demonstrable from natural theology, soon found themselves yielding important ground to their opponents." Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 201.

76 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 35.
for the existence of God, the soul, and immortality, from special divine revelation to universal experience."77 Thus, "the Thomistic synthesis of science, philosophy and theology involved such an obscuring of the inner genius of Christianity that sooner or later the revelation view must lose its hold."78 The path to modernity was started.

MODERN PHILOSOPHY

For Henry, "... the modern mind, in its outworking, becomes an alternative to both the Greek idealistic and the Hebrew-Christian theistic views." The predominantly naturalistic view of modernity provides a "stark contrast to the outlooks of ancient and medieval times."79 This modern naturalistic mind, and its nihilistic consequences, receive careful attention by Henry.

To call the modern age a naturalistic age appears to be an oversimplification. Henry admits that modernity has had "its great theistic and idealistic traditions." But, he claims, "it is the naturalistic philosophy which has worked itself out to dominance and victory on the modern scene."80

What does Henry mean when he suggests that the modern mind is naturalistic? Ontologically, this view contends that all existence has a naturalistic or materialistic foundation.81 The basic ontological presupposition of modern naturalism is clear to

77 Henry, God. Revelation and Authority, 1:36.

78 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 35.

79 Ibid., 36-37. Henry accepts Rene Descartes as the father of modern philosophy. See God. Revelation and Authority, 1:36.

80 Ibid., 38. See also p. 63. Henry claims: "The conviction that nature is man's widest and deepest environment now dominates virtually the entire Western intellectual world. The contemporary conceptualization of reality is deliberately antitheological and antisupernaturalistic." Henry, God. Revelation and Authority, 1:135-136.

81 Henry, God. Revelation and Authority, 1:135.
Henry. He says: "The central postulate of the modern mind, in its final expression, has been the ultimacy of nature."82 The modern mind has reverted to "the suppressed naturalism of the Graeco-Roman era... and in spirit united with its affirmation of the ultimate reality of nature."83 In the final analysis, Henry believes this to be true for almost all modern philosophic traditions.84 Epistemologically, modern naturalism has adopted the scientific empirical method as the sole source of knowledge.

It is almost ironic that modern philosophy becomes thoroughly naturalistic. Henry is convinced that "in its beginnings, modern philosophy was not intentionally naturalistic; it was, on the contrary, determinedly theistic or idealistic."85 He argues that "the initial movements in modern philosophy were, in most regards, far nearer to Plato and Aristotle than they were to Democritus and Lucretius."86

In its beginnings, from Descartes to Hegel (1600-1800), the modern mind shows itself remarkably like the ancient mind... It affirms what the great Greek philosophers had also affirmed: the reality of the supernatural, the uniqueness and immortality of man, the objectivity of truth and right.87 Nonetheless, modernity has left behind its idealistic and theistic origins and has become

82 Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 41.
83 Ibid., 47.
84 "Not that modern speculation was a one-colored cloak; unquestionably, it was a coat of many colors. Between rationalists like Descartes, Leibnitz and Spinoza, and the empiricists like Locke, Berkeley and Hume, stands an immovable obstruction. Kantian criticism and Hegelian idealism have their weighty differences and both together are far removed from Comtean positivism, at least in intent. Yet they all disclose a concurrence by virtue of which they may be catalogued in federation. They declare, as if by one voice, for the ultimate reality of nature and the ultimate animality of man." Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, 21.
87 Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:37. In time, the modern age becomes predominantly naturalistic. Henry says that "the modern mind reached its naturalistic terminus not at once but by a gradual process..." *The Drift of Western Thought*, 38.
37

predominantly naturalistic. The consequence of this is the crisis of nihilism.

Henry thinks that the key to understanding the evolution of modern philosophy is the progressive abandonment of revelation. While the modern era did not deliberately begin down the road of anti-supernaturalism, the compromises made resulted in a trend that soon became explicitly naturalistic. The most significant compromise was the depreciation of special divine revelation. Slowly but surely the acceptability of divine revelation disappeared and with it the existence of a supernatural became increasingly problematic. 88

As man depended on himself for knowledge of the supernatural, he became increasingly skeptical about the reality of anything beyond the physical material world. Epistemological questions came to the forefront of philosophical speculation. This preoccupation with epistemology had not existed in either the ancient Greek nor the Christian medieval eras. 89 However, "in modern philosophy . . . ontology and epistemology were to be merged, so that the problem of being was frequently lost in exploring the problem of knowledge. Here what classic ancient thought had been able to take for granted, that human thought has an ontic reference, came now into dispute." 90 Ultimately, naturalism denies the reality of the supernatural and "explicitly rejects the

88 "If there is one ingredient in modern philosophy which made quite inevitable its removal from supernaturalistic to naturalistic terrain, it is the fact of its rejection of the principle of special divine revelation." Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 46.

89 Ibid., 49. Henry believes this is a logical result of modern man's rejection of divine revelation. He writes: "Since Christianity had made more specific and more compulsive that belief in the reality of the supernatural which classic idealism had projected as a necessity of contemplative thought, the dismissal of the Christian claim to the possession of special revelation meant that much that ancient idealism had assumed was now also to be called into question. It was not an accident of philosophy that, once the impact of revelational theism had been felt and repulsed, this occupation with the epistemological more than with the ontological should ensue, so that western thought should have to face first on almost every hand the question of what and how men know." 49-50.

90 Ibid.
possibility of special divine revelation."91

Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, is identified by Henry as a philosophical rationalist in the tradition of the ancient Greeks. Both the ancient Greeks and the early moderns, such as Descartes, agreed that "thought mirrors the ultimate intelligibility of the real world."92 Descartes "contended that the mind possesses faculties productive of intuitive knowledge, including the certainties of self-existence and mathematics. From the intuitive certainty of self-existence he tried to derive all other truths."93

Descartes and others claimed that man with his innate ideas had the competence to understand the nature of reality apart from divine revelation.

The competence of the mind to know metaphysical truth now means that, apart from any dependence on and necessity for divine disclosure, man is in his present condition able by rational inquiry to arrive at the whole truth about reality and life. On the basis of innate truths held to stock the human mind independently of revelation, mathematical rationalists expected mathematical inquiry to demonstrate the nature of the externally real world and to unveil the secrets of its inner behavior.94

This philosophical undertaking had both strengths and weaknesses. Henry writes:

The strength of philosophical rationalism lay in its insistence that the principles of logic and the mathematical sciences are not derived from experience, but make experience possible, and that truth is self-destructive unless noncontradictory and governed by the canons of reason. Yet the "impartial truth" which rationalists philosophers extolled was something far more elusive than they thought. Although emphasizing the priority of reason, the most brilliant rationalists had themselves produced a spectacular array of impressively competitive and conflicting world views, each highly consistent with its postulated first principles, yet diverging from the others despite the high claims made for certainty, consistency and coherence. Such disagreements among the early modern rationalists, no less than the correction

91 Ibid., 41.
92 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:321. "In their mutual regard for human reason as an immanent a priori, endowed on the basis of man's intrinsic dignity to cope with the deepest problems of life and being, the early modern rationalists (Descartes, Leibnitz and Spinoza) and the classic Greek idealists (Socrates, Plato and Aristotle) essentially agree." 1:387.
93 Ibid., 1:74.
94 Ibid., 1:87.
of some of their contentions by empirical evidence, had already lent force to the counterviews of the scientific empiricists. The early modern era of philosophical theism gave way to the post-Kantian era of philosophical idealism, and that in turn to the age of philosophical naturalism, with its leading thinkers all the while justifying their conflicting schemes by an appeal to the demands of human reason.95

Henry believes that:

The excesses of philosophical rationalism therefore encouraged an empirical reaction that boldly substituted a new method of knowledge alternative to reason, but one which was as hostile to transcendent revelation as was the rationalistic option, in view of the emphasis that the content of knowledge is supplied not by human reasoning but by sensation alone.96

Locke, Hume and the empirical school led the charge against the doctrine of innate ideas.97

The empiricists "do not derive so-called intuitive knowledge from some innate faculty that provides man with first principles, but ascribe all knowledge to inferences from observation."98 Philosophical rationalism found itself on the defensive.

An attempt to mediate between the rationalists and the empiricists was a turning point for modernity. Unfortunately it was a turn for the worse. Kant, often identified as an idealist, had wanted to halt the skepticism of modern empiricism, but he actually set the stage for the emergence of a dominant naturalistic viewpoint. Henry writes:

The effort of idealists, particularly of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), to mediate between rationalists and empiricists, only widened the broadening emphasis on human autonomy, and thus extended the concessions already made by medieval

95 Ibid., 1:90.

96 Ibid., 1:88.

97 "The modern empiricist counterattack against philosophical rationalism . . . proclaimed human sense perception rather than human reasoning to the sole source of truth. Led by Locke, Berkeley and Hume, the empirical alternative was proposed to offset evident weaknesses of secular rationalism. The supposedly immanent rational a priori on which early modern rationalists relied issued in remarkably diverse and irreconcilably divergent conclusions about reality and truth. Their conflicting theories clearly reflected not a transparent ultimate reality and objective truth but a considerable range of subliminal theorizing. Their views of nature, moreover, were subject to obvious correction by empirical observation." Ibid., 1:387.

98 Ibid., 1:75. "The empiricist . . . considers sense observation the source of all truth and knowledge." 1:78.
Kant argued that we can have real knowledge, but it was real knowledge of the natural or phenomenal world, not the noumenal world. The noumenal world was mere postulation. Kant denied "that either divine revelation or innate factors communicate trustworthy knowledge of metaphysical realities." Thus, the physical world is the extent of sure knowledge. Henry summarizes:

There is no objective knowledge of any reality outside of and independent of human consciousness, no knowledge of the nature of objects considered in themselves. What we know we know only under the conditions of (the innate forms of) time and space, and only as structured by a priori categories supplied by the human knower.

Since Kant had asserted "the incompetence of human reason in the area of metaphysics" due to the "supposedly severe intrinsic restrictions of finite reason," man's attention turned to the physical material world. Henry says:

Kant's philosophy set the mood in many ways for the modern regard for the method of natural science as the normative source of the content of our knowledge,

99 Ibid., 1:38. "Kant recognized that empiricism, most fully elaborated by Hume, abridges knowledge experience to disconnected animal sense perceptions, and can supply no reason for assuming that the parts of our experience are connected. Such a skeptical reduction of human experience, to mere atomistic individual perceptions and one's private psychic responses, destroys the universal validity of human knowledge." 1:388.

100 Ibid., 1:281.

101 Ibid., 5:29. "Kant becomes influentially decisive for a whole movement in philosophy that erases the significance of cognitive reason for metaphysical realities. The categories of thought are correlated only with empirical data. All thought is time-bound and space-bound because time and space are universal conditions of human experience. By the very limits of human reason as Kant stipulates these, man is cut off from any possession of transcendent truth. God is indeed an indispensable postulate, a regulative ideal demanded by the moral nature, contends Kant, but not an objective of cognitive knowledge... All claims by the metaphysicians about the objective nature of the ultimate world are considered invalid and outside the range of human knowledge." 1:88.

102 Ibid., 1:281.
and the consequent distrust of all claims to cognitive knowledge of any reality that transgresses the natural world. Through the Critical Philosophy, metaphysical affirmations came to be looked upon as unjustifiable, and conceptual knowledge was associated solely with empirical observation or sense experience.\textsuperscript{103}

When Kant "cut man off from rational knowledge of the noumenal... Shrewder eyes would read it as prolegomena to future naturalism."\textsuperscript{104} The logic of this position was best illustrated by Comte. "With Auguste Comte (1798-1857) we have the inauguration of the era of so-called positive science, where reason is reconnected with reality now understood solely as the phenomenal world."\textsuperscript{105} Other very important naturalists include Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and John Dewey.

Following Kant, even the idealistic tradition in modern philosophy led away from and even attacked the theistic world view of the medieval era. "Whereas naturalism struck at the Biblical view from the side of naturalistic monism," Henry maintains, "idealism did so from the side of spiritualistic monism; both philosophies, however extensive their differences, conspired to remove man from his Biblical status." The idealists did this by "making nature itself part of ultimate reality, indeed, the very thought-content of the Absolute, and then absorbing man to this thought-content."\textsuperscript{106} Ultimately, "whereas naturalism absorbed man to nature, idealism in modern times came to absorb nature and man to God."\textsuperscript{107}

Judeo-Christian theism, as understood by Henry, is opposed to idealism in both its ancient and modern manifestations; primarily because idealism ignores the problem of sin. Henry says, "the Biblical doctrine of sin finds no place in either the ancient or the modern

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 1:193.

\textsuperscript{104} Henry, \textit{The Drift of Western Thought}, 53-53.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 38.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 48-49.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
idealistic tradition; the idealistic distinction between nature and the supernatural rather than
between creation and Creature, has always absorbed man's spiritual nature to the divine
nature." For Henry, sin has so stained human nature that he is hopelessly estranged
from the supernatural. Apart from the grace of God, man has no sure knowledge of truth,
no reason for hope and no chance for eternal salvation.

Having eliminated the problem of sin, idealists develop an extremely optimistic view
of man. Modern idealists have done so to a greater extent than their ancient predecessors.

Modern idealism, Henry says:

eliminated any notion that matter and the body are evil and hence a drag on human
achievement; hence it divorced itself from a certain hopelessness which
characterized classic Greek thought. Rejecting the Christian emphasis that man . . .
is a sinner in revolt against God, it rejected also that the [sic] Greek emphasis that
man, on his physical side, is prevented from realizing his ideals due to an evil
body.109

Without the inherent limitations that sin or evil bodily existence place upon man, human
achievement knows no bounds. This idealistic notion, in large part, contributed to the
modern emphasis on inevitable progress.110

Interestingly, Henry believes that one of the reasons modern idealism adopted its
optimistic view of man was the Christian teaching regarding the incarnation and the
perfection of Christ. He explains:

In the revolt against Greek thought [modern idealism] was encouraged by the
Christian emphasis that nature and man are a divine creation, so that matter or the
body as such are not intrinsically hostile to the divine. . . . The Christian emphasis
of a divine incarnation in Christ . . . became in idealism the pattern for a universal
externalization of the divine in humanity at large; that conformity to the divine image
which Christian theology had reserved for the state of glorification in the
eschatological experience of redeemed sinners, modern idealism now made a

108 Ibid., 50-51.

109 Ibid.

110 "From the Kantian and Hegelian streams did come, in large measure, the
modern emphasis on the inherent goodness of man and on his inevitable advance . . ."
Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 25.
potentiality of all men, in their natural state, who were conceived at the core of their personalities in their present relationship to God not as sinners but as intrinsically divine. Here were the outlines, of course, of the recent belief in the essential goodness of man.  

Such potential practically insures historical progress. Modern idealism, he says, "... united the divine with history and time in such a way as to underwrite the recent dogma of the inevitability of progress. The events of history were the divine activity externalized. . . . History which, since it was conceived as the divine self-manifestation, could only reflect the divine in a progressive spirituality."  

Thus, modern idealism was characterized by "an explicit revolt against special revelation, by a preoccupation with the problem of knowledge, and by an intrinsically optimistic view of men and events which concealed the reality of sin and evil." These characteristics correspond with much of modern naturalism and contributed to the progressive rejection of the Judeo-Christian theistic view of reality.  

As the modern idealistic tradition continued, it became more difficult to differentiate it from naturalism. For "a deity so identical with the world process was too easily dismissed as only a reverent title for the process, and not in any way different from the process." Thus, modernity in both its naturalistic and idealistic modes adopted similar positions on essential philosophical questions. In direct contradiction to the basic presuppositions of classic Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian theism, the modern mind "gains a viewpoint all its own. . . . It declares that nature is the ultimate reality, man is essentially a time-bound animal, truth and the good are relative and changing."  

111 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 50-51.  
112 Ibid., 51-52.  
113 Ibid., 52-53.  
114 Ibid., 54.  
115 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:38. "Assuredly, vigorous forces in modern thought appear to resist a naturalistic view. But even where Kantian and Hegelian
In the place of revelation, man depended increasingly upon human reason. In the **early modern philosophical scheme of things**

the external world is presumably structured by immanent mathematical laws, and man's mind simply on the basis of man's own identity is assumed to be a storehouse of prefabricated concepts, and to possess universally valid knowledge. Reason as a human a priori is independent of transcendent divine revelation as a special source of knowledge and now confidently speculates about reality on its own.116

Henry identifies five presuppositions of the early modern era. (1) The inevitability of human progress; (2) the inherent goodness of man; (3) the absolute uniformity of nature; (4) the ultimate reality of nature; and, (5) the ultimate animality of man.117 These presuppositions provided modern man with a coherent explanation of the world and of life. Henry, however, rejects each of these presuppositions as incompatible with his understanding of Judeo-Christian theism.

Man's belief in the inevitability of progress was based upon a variety of factors. Modern technological science, political and economic revolution, and the modern scientific and philosophic evolutionary theories of Hegel and Darwin combined to portray the future as inevitably better than the present.118 Modern intellectuals "anticipated a benevolent thinkers link man to a world of supernature or insist that nature is not so ultimate as the Absolute, a solution for human difficulties is sought without recourse to special revelation; the competence of unaided human reason to dissolve all enigmas is taken for granted. Idealism busied itself with a man-made realm of supernature and a man-projected Absolute. Those who argued for a superworld were either committed to a Kantian epistemology which precluded real knowledge in the realm of metaphysics and encouraged only a faith without evidence, or were ambiguous about the personality of the Absolute, or so merged the realms of nature and supernature that the one was lost in the other . . ." Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, 23.

116 Ibid., 1:37-38.


118 Ibid., 31-37. "Thus did Hegelian idealism and Darwinian biologism blend with scientific invention and discovery and with western political trends to encourage the grand dream of a sociological utopia for all mankind. The implications of evolutionary science and philosophy seemed always the same: the unlimited progress of the human race." Ibid., 41.
earthly kingdom spawned by the genius of experimental science." They were convinced that history was on their side. For "by virtue of the evolutionary process, mankind and society presumably were rising to ever higher potential and achievement. Only surviving strands of selfishness stood between man and his day of earthly bliss."119

A corollary to this optimistic future was a belief in the inherent goodness of man. Man was good and was capable of improving upon himself. The problems of human existence were identified in strictly naturalistic terms and the solution to those problems lie in the hands of humanity. "Modern scientific culture thinks that the great problem of human history is the control of man's external environment and that man himself has the wisdom and skill to achieve an ideal heaven and earth."120

Modernity also assumed the uniformity of nature. Henry writes: "Man had come to view all reality as subject to an unchanging network of mathematical law, which became the vantage point from which every scientific explanation of events was formulated."121

Henry claims:

That nature and history are dominated by a universal causal necessity from which it is impossible to exempt any experience of the space-time universe . . . was a dictum which by the turn of the past century had succeeded in dominating modern philosophy and science. It became the cardinal tenet of western research.122

This emphasis furthered the doubt of skeptics regarding the truthfulness of Christianity.

"The insistence on the absolute uniformity of nature, more than anything else, had created


120 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:42. "From Descartes to Dewey one finds the same confidence that man, apart from any reference to a special supernatural revelation, can solve all his problems . . . " Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 22.

121 Ibid., 1:93.

122 Ibid., 1:96.
the impression that the Christian Weltanschauung is demonstrably unscientific, and thus promoted a permanent estrangement of theology and science."123

The moderns also assume the animality of man. "No longer is he [man] defined, in contradistinction from the other animals, as a rational or spiritual creature. . . . Modern thought. . . . discovers man's difference not in rationality so much as in complex animality."124 Charles Darwin, more than anyone else, convinced the intellectual class that man was little more than a more advanced form of animal life.125

One of Henry's frequent arguments is that much of the modern mind has been borrowed without logical justification from its Judeo-Christian and classical Greek heritage. Henry writes:

For, although it had rejected the supernatural, even the naturalistic modern mind at the turn of the century nonetheless retained the notion that reality is structured by rational order, by an intelligible pattern, which science presumably could discover by empirical observation and experimentation. And while it rejected man's qualitative difference from the animals, it still retained the notion that nature has reached its apex in the appearance of man as a rational creature, and viewed reason as man's highest faculty; rational methodology was expected to promote man's power over nature and to demonstrate his superiority and autonomy. While it rejected an eternal, unchanging truth and good, the naturalistic modern mind insisted nonetheless on universal norms such as scientific objectivity, human brotherhood and democracy, and even assumed that human progress implies standards normative from generation to generation.126

Eventually despair set in as the logical philosophical conclusions of modern naturalism began to emerge and as practical experience began to demonstrate potentially horrendous consequences. Logically, man began to ask himself some serious questions for which answers were found wanting.

123 Ibid., 1:97.
124 Ibid., 1:245.
126 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:39.
Why, if the world of events is ultimately natural, man should be essentially good, why, if progress is inevitable, man's goodness or badness would be at all relevant; why, if nature is totally uniform, there should be real progress--these were some of the inner difficulties of the modern eclecticism.127

On a practical level, Henry insists that our experience in the twentieth century contradicts the basic assumptions of modernity.

History itself disclosed a progress in warfare so destructive that by the mid-twentieth century it had brought both hemispheres into crisis, and raised for western culture the fear of the inevitability of disaster. Recent anthropology, from Freud's studies to the Nazi atrocities, and then the Russian slave camps, afforded no ground for angelicizing man. Contemporary physics, with as much of a distaste for the biblical miraculous as philosophical rationalism, acknowledged discontinuities in nature, whereas the modern revolt against miracles had grown from the dogma that there could be no discontinuities. And western man, who had acted more and more for several generations on the conviction that nature is the only ultimate reality, lacking an orderly pattern of convictions, hesitated in indecision when, armed with military advantage in the superior possession of hydrogen and atomic bombs, he could have swept to victory by brute power--hesitated in indecision because somehow he felt to be real what he thought he must deny: an objective moral order, an ought not dictated by human expedience.128

As it became increasingly apparent that many modern beliefs were not supportable given their naturalistic presuppositions, modern naturalism began to change. Many modern assumptions such as the inherent goodness of man and the inevitability of progress came under attack. The optimism of the early modern period began to fade. Attempts were made to adhere more closely to the axioms of modernity with its logical conclusions. In the subsequent reaction, Henry argues:

the twentieth century stripped away the quasibiblical remnants. The naturalistic modern mind now veers away from any and every recognition of the universe as a rational network of laws. Man is no longer viewed as nature's final climax, nor reason as necessarily man's highest faculty, nor ethical behavior as necessarily related to objective principle as opposed to situational decision. The emphasis on evolution, on change and progress, undercuts even the modern insistence on immutable, unchanging a priori aspects of human rationality. Whatever binds man firmly to the past is now viewed as a threat to his freedom and autonomy; man faces a wholly open future, whose outcome and general course assertedly depend upon

127 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 58-59.
128 Ibid., 58-59.
man's creative ingenuity. 129

More and more, philosophers began to realize and accept that "secular naturalism . . . actually deluges reality with comprehensive contingency, total transiency, radical relativity and absolute autonomy." 130

What does this mean? When Henry speaks of the comprehensive contingency of all reality, he is referring to "the merely provisional character of all reality, [that] allows no transcendent dimension to existence." 131 "The universe and man are not to be explained in terms of intelligible and purposive causes. There is no decisive reason for the universe and man, no ultimate plan or design. . . . We live in an environment lacking ultimate meaning and goodness." 132 This premise becomes the "controlling premise of contemporary philosophy." 133 Ultimately, comprehensive contingency deprives life and the world of meaning. "Everything is dynamic and moving and changing. . . . Reality is inherently irrational, nature is blind, history is unpredictable and chaotic." 134

Epistemologically, knowledge to the extent we can know anything, is grounded in nature.

The presumption that we can know only contingent processes and events is coupled with a congruous theory of knowledge and view of worth. Its knowledge theory grounds reliable cognition in what is directly perceptible and testable, that is, in sensory observation of the physical world and of the persons around us. The

129 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:39.
130 Ibid., 1:137.
131 Ibid., 1:137-138.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid. In this regard, Henry identifies with the German scholar Karl Lowith. Henry says that Lowith "identifies contingency--the idea that all is finite and mutable--as the basic characteristic of modern man's view of existence." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:138. See Karl Lowith, Nature, History and Existentialism (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1966).
134 Ibid.
value-scheme cherishes empirical reality above interest in the invisible and transcendent. Since empirical science is thus valued as the most reliable index to ultimate reality, the view of existence that it accredits, namely, that the world and man are by-products of impersonal forces and events, is considered to be more intelligibly based than are projections that ground or anchor human values in some invisible spiritual context. Only what is scientifically investigable has rational significance; everything else falls outside the scope of reality.135

But even this is problematic. Man can know nothing absolutely, all is relative.

The far-reaching consequences of this must be stressed. . . . Man, like the animal, can never get beyond himself, if his own mind is the point of reference for reality; what he knows, he knows only relatively. His "ideas" are no longer true because they mirror the eternally valid rational pattern which permeates the natural order; they are "true" only in proportion to man's insights—which comes simply to saying that they are not absolutely true, and that man in this respect, like the animals, is bound to the world of nature alone.136

Increasingly, scientists are accepting that they can tell us nothing absolutely because ultimately we cannot know absolutes.

Science today makes no claim to tell how reality is actually structured, nor does it presume to discern "the laws of nature." Instead it ventures only to depict "how things work," and that merely in terms of statistical averaging. For its interpretations of nature it relies increasingly on creative postulation. . . . Nature is presumably haphazard and man's own creative ingenuity imposes intelligibility and direction upon the environmental sense-flux.137

Thus, science can reach no final conclusions. For "science has so little basis for fixed and final truth about reality that it must stand ready to alter every pronouncement it makes and then to alter that alteration ad infinitum."138 It is a simple fact that "the empirical approach

135 Ibid., 1:136.

136 Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 253.

137 Ibid., 39-40. "There is presently a notable fallout from the infatuation with science characteristic of the recent past. This growing disenchantment is not due simply to the fact that virtually all its insights can be deployed by barbarians for malevolent ends, nor to the circumstances that every conclusion of empirical science is in principle refutable or revisable, nor to observations like Karl Popper's that 90 percent of what is done in science is a waste of time. It has more to do with science's unfulfilled promise to ennoble man's spirit and elevate the quality of human life. . . . However comfortable and sometimes convenient modern science has made human existence, it has bestowed neither character nor the good life, and the kind of knowledge it confers is something other than wisdom." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:167.

138 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:173.
cannot arrive at the truth because it is committed to an unending search."\textsuperscript{139}

Henry also argues that modernity is characterized by total transiency. By this he means "time is presumed to be the ontological structure of all being; becomingness and mortality are held to pervade all reality. Temporal process is the essence of nature and history, of existence as a whole, and leaves nothing unchanged."\textsuperscript{140} Nothing is permanent, all is momentary, brief and fleeting.

The modern secular view also champions radical relativity. Henry writes:

It affirms the relativity of all truth, values, and events to their changing cultural context and historical situation. Man's total existence is held to be embedded in historical relativity, and all human phenomena are therefore evaluated in terms of natural processes. . . . Therefore no claim to ultimate truth can be ventured. . . . Implicit in radical relativism is the rejection of all authoritative norms, and the inevitable obsolescence of all ethical standards and moral codes.\textsuperscript{141}

The meaning or significance of anything depends entirely upon the situation. Nothing has permanent significance or importance. In regard to ethics, nothing permanent remains. To the contrary, "ethical claims become merely culture-relative, for an evolving humanity decides what truth and morality signify at any moment."\textsuperscript{142} The reasoning is simple: "An empirical outlook . . . cannot establish or sustain any norms, least of all objective moral norms; it is descriptive and at best can detail only what is perceptibly observed."\textsuperscript{143} If knowledge is grounded in experience, we must acknowledge that "the verdicts of

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 1:95.

\textsuperscript{140} Henry, \textit{Remaking the Modern Mind}, 138.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 139.


\textsuperscript{143} Henry, \textit{God, Revelation and Authority}, 1:146.
experiment and experience are always tentative and revisable." Thus, he concludes, "ethical norms cannot be derived from empirical observations." The modern perspective is left with ethical relativity.

Lastly, modernity implies the absolute autonomy of man.

Man's uniqueness is found not in his special relation to a transcendent Creator, nor in an immanent rational a priori, nor in a relation to a rational order in nature nor even in man's methodological thinking. His uniqueness, rather, is seen in subjective decisions and in the self's freedom to shape the future. Put in other words, man's uniqueness consists in the possibilities of an empirically based autonomy whereby he . . . imposes upon his senseless environment his own goals and means.

In another place, Henry writes:

Man alone remains, self-sufficient and autonomous, to rescue the cosmos from absurdity and worthlessness. No divine sovereign places human life under unchanging commands, no divine revelation tells man what is true and trustworthy, no divine book stipulates what is permanently right and wrong. . . . Man does not need God either to know the truth or to do the good but is considered inherently capable of coping with all concerns nonreligiously. . . . Man's problem is not one of recovering a forfeited selfhood, a lost relationship to an eternal order of meaning and value, but rather one of freely fashioning his life, history and nature through self-creativity.

In this regard, man "creates his own future by exercising inherent powers of mind and will." In fact, "naturalism considers every man his own lord, setting his own standards and implementing them by his own powers. Man alone is able to decide his life's course, he alone is the source of what truth he affirms and of what good he champions."

Thus, naturalism has stripped itself of any and all biblical remnants and has reached

144 Ibid., 6:267-268.

145 Ibid., 1:41.

146 Ibid., 1:139.

147 Ibid., 1:140.

148 Ibid.
its logical conclusions. As a result, a wholly secular view has come to predominance.

Henry describes it as follows:

The secular outlook postulates man's being and destiny solely in view of finite forces, the interrelatedness of all cosmic processes, and the relativity of all historical events. It affirms that nature alone has produced man. This carries with it a special understanding of man's place in the tangible world and bears upon all the central elements of human existence. All that man does and achieves is shadowed by transience and relativity. Within this context of existence his station and role and all his sociohistorical institutions are conditioned by his social environment, which alone shapes and sharpens his capacities. Nothing traditional is sacrosanct. . . . No objectively given order of reality seems wholly impervious to his manipulation; technology has enabled him to rearrange his once apparently uncontrollable environment to serve his own interests and desires. All convictions and creeds are considered to be culture-bound, all commitments of truth and morality tentative. The very possibility of human progress on an empirico-scientific basis is held to require the human revaluation of all standards and structures; change alone is the way into a helpful future. Secularism sponsors a new self-consciousness which divorces man from a dependent relationship with God. In a world without objective reason and purpose, man needs autonomous freedom to create and re-create his own meaning and security. Man is viewed as a creature competent without gods to cope with all problems through social rather than supernatural resources, and all his powers and choices are contingently grounded.149

Two individuals who express modern naturalism most fully are Marx and Nietzsche. Nietzsche was particularly straightforward about his view, although, Henry contends, he fell short of accepting the radical implications of his own views.

Nietzsche's program was to rid the earth of ordinary men, and at the same time of its reverence for the God-man, and to substitute therefore the man-God, the superman, who knows no ethics of humility, of submission, of love for enemies. . . . For one reason only--for the ironic reason that Nietzsche was still 'too Christian'--did his view halt short of a thorough pessimism, or even nihilism. . . . That was the confidence . . . that human nature can be changed, that the superman could somehow rise out of the herd.150

Marx also borrowed from Christianity to avoid the decline into despair. Not only did Marxism maintain a "Nietzschean confidence that human nature can be improved," but he adopted a quasi-Christian view of history. Henry argues that "in its assurance that history is put together so as to guarantee the ultimate triumph of the proletariat, Marxism gets its

149 Ibid., 1:136-137.

150 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 56.
vitality not from a naturalistic view of history, but from the biblical teaching that history moves to a goal . . ."151 Both Marx and Nietzsche were unable to accept fully the logical conclusions of their philosophical assumptions. But the logic of modernity is becoming increasingly apparent and Henry is convinced that "when this conviction, that human nature is thus pliable, is set aside, then the drift to nihilism will really run its course."152

One of the great weaknesses of modern naturalism, according to Henry, is the fact that humanity cannot and does not live according to its own precepts. Rather, mankind strives to exhibit purpose in life. Naturalists cannot accept the nihilism implicit in their own assumptions about the nature of reality. "Secular man refuses to see himself as merely an animated cog or self-asserting animal, having no real future but only a day after tomorrow empty of lasting life and purpose, a temporary phenomenon . . . that finally succumbs to and in nothingness."153 Modern man still posits certain values as worthy of pursuit.

For all the emphasis that cosmic reality is a natural process wholly indifferent to human purposes and values, secular man devotes himself energetically to human welfare, social justice and human dignity. While insisting that the cosmos respects no human aspirations except as self-interest prevails on its own, secular man champions self-giving and service to others, elevates love for neighbor and pursuit of justice as inviolable ends, proclaims a positive view of the earth as an object of ethical duty, and finds the core of human life in man's moral commitments. Hence, secular man adjusts his life to norms of truth and value which the naturalistic outlook cannot validate or accommodate.154

Henry is convinced that this is inconsistent with the precepts of modern naturalism.

"Secular naturalism can hardly reconcile these confident assertions of the meaning and worth of human life . . . with its relativization of reality and life."155 There is no room for

151 Ibid., 56-57.
152 Ibid.
153 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:41.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid. "Although contemporary humanists champion an agenda of social ethics, their proposals involve little more than a pirating of selected aspects of biblical morality that
an "ought" in the scheme of things posited by modern naturalism. All things are characterized as that which "is." "Ultimate transiency and relativity provide no court of appeal from the simple verdict that 'that's the way it is.'"156

In fact, no one should expect the modern naturalist to develop a compelling ethical construct. Henry is convinced that "naturalistic morality . . . can neither summon nor vindicate fixed ethical principles of any kind. If homo sapiens is essentially but an animal he can hardly be expected to subordinate self-interest to the good of the community."157

This secularistic view of reality is totally unacceptable. Henry is convinced that modernity is ripe with relativism and "relativism begets pessimism and pessimism begets nihilism."158 Henry insists:

A culture lacking a conviction that any goal whatever ought to be pursued permanently, and without any single unifying objective in its academic life, and dedicated progressively to the elimination of the "fetish" of changeless norms and the substitution therefore of temporary ideals which are somehow obligatory for us, has already imbibed the hemlock of death.159

Biblical theism is the only solution. Henry claims "a comprehensive naturalistic philosophy . . . could be met only by a supernaturalism which found its vitality not in philosophical postulation, but in the self-revealing God."160

Man is confronted with a choice. Henry maintains "the final choice for modern man are totally unrelated to the naturalistic theory of the universe." Henry, "The God of the Bible and Moral Foundations," 3-4.

156 Ibid. "An empirical outlook, of course, cannot establish or sustain any norms, least of all objective moral norms; it is descriptive and at best can detail only what is perceptibly observed . . ." 1:146-147.


158 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:29.

159 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 66-67.

160 Ibid., 70.
is between Christianity and nihilism, between the Logos of God and the ultimate meaninglessness of life and the world."161 Henry is convinced that ". . . the widespread acceptance of [modern] premises hastened the breakdown of western culture."162 He emphasizes that "wherever secular man tries to live consistently by these convictions, he drains his own life of meaning and worth and progressively empties his existence of everything that makes human life desirable."163 Henry quotes Karl Lowith who wrote: "How can one feel at home in a universe which is conceived as the chance result of statistical probabilities and which is said to come into existence through an explosion? Such a universe cannot inspire confidence or sympathy, nor can it give orientation and meaning to man's existence in it."164

One need not accept the Judeo-Christian world-view to have foreseen these consequences. To the contrary, Henry argues that "any disciplined reader of Plato's Republic . . . could have foretold the final issue of such assumptions, for the classic ancient mind was philosophically convinced that, given a full-fledged naturalism, the meaning would evaporate from existence."165

Henry is adamant, "the dilemma of secular man is this: In order to escape the nihilism and personal worthlessness implicit in naturalism, he invests his life with sequestered meanings and values that naturalism cannot sustain."166 Henry reminds us

161 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:41.
162 Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 22.
163 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:140.
164 Lowith, Nature, History and Existentialism, 28; quoted in Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:141.
165 Henry, Remaking the Modern Mind, 22.
166 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:142.
man is not born with the naturalistic prejudices about reality, and they go against his deepest intuitions and his own essential humanity. . . . The dilemmas and ambiguities of his personal experience are such that secular man himself does not practice his naturalistic commitments with life-and-death seriousness. Instead, secularists themselves repeatedly contradict their own naturalistic claims in their daily lives, and adjust their private affairs to quite different presuppositions. 167

As things now exist, "secular man therefore lives by a double standard--by the naturalistic credo which he affirms and reveres when it serve his purposes, and by hidden alternatives for action that he readily accepts whenever he prefers. His private life gives unwitting testimony to the omissions and inadequacies of a naturalistic outlook." 168

This view of the world is not necessarily the perspective of a rational man. To the contrary, the premises of naturalism are accepted without reason and the inability of naturalism to fully account for man's desires and inclinations only demonstrate the inadequacy of this view of reality.

Reason, we are told, requires the secular perspective; faith in God is derided as emotive or volitional in character. The plain fact is, however, that naturalism is not a demand of reason but reflects an arbitrary conceptualization of reality. It is inexcusably limited as an account of the ultimate world and is grounded in a perverse will and rebellious heart. 169

Humanity need not despair. Solutions to the problems of human existence are available, according to Henry, in the revealed will of God. Thus, our attention should turn to Judeo-Christian theism.

CONCLUSION

Today, humanity is confronted with a naturalistic view of reality that, according to Henry, will never resolve the plight of humanity. To the contrary, the modern view of reality is a direct result of man's rebellious nature and will only lead him further astray as

167 Ibid., 1:145.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid., 1:148.
he seeks his own solutions to problems that he misunderstands and misconstrues.

The solution, according to Henry, is not a return to classical Greek philosophy. For all its strengths, in the final analysis, it too falls short. Henry argues that solutions are not, however, impossible to find. A return to the philosophy of St. Augustine and a renewed faith in divine revelation is the key to our quest for answers to the questions that most perplex humanity. Only a continuous effort to consistently and accurately understand and apply these great truths will suffice. Man's sinful nature which inclines him to seek his own solutions to his own problems is even a possibility within Christian circles. St. Thomas had fallen prey to this tendency.

Thus, Henry calls for a rearticulation of Judeo-Christian theism as the only solution for humanity. Humanity's greatest need, of course, is the need for salvation. Other needs such as the need for a just social order also require human acknowledgement and dependence upon God for solutions. Fortunately, our quest for a just social order has been given some direction by God in his Holy Scriptures. Divinely revealed general principles can point humanity towards solutions in our quest for a just social order. Chapter five will begin to sketch out those principles that Henry has identified as essential for the world of politics. They are principles derived from the divinely revealed Scriptures. Prior to that, the next chapter will explain Henry's understanding of Judeo-Christian theism.
CHAPTER THREE

JUDEO-CHRISTIAN THEISM

Given the inadequacy of both ancient and modern philosophy it is necessary to consider a third alternative, Judeo-Christian theism. Henry has argued that all explanations of reality necessarily rely upon basic axioms or presuppositions. Such is also the case for Judeo-Christian theism. Henry attempts to delineate carefully the presuppositions that he posits and proceeds to demonstrate how these presuppositions more adequately explain all of reality than the alternatives of ancient idealism and modern naturalism. He insists that no theologian can avoid "philosophical discussions involving ontology and epistemology." He does not shy away from the task. He maintains:

The Christian faith stands or falls with certain specific and explicit assertions about reality. Christianity offers its own ontology, and any statement of the ultimately real world not based on divine revelation and relying instead merely on human reasoning will show itself less than adequate if not hostile. Christian theology is metaphysically affirmative, in the sense that it ventures to inform us on the basis of revelation what is actually the case about God and the spiritual world. . . . There cannot be a Christian theology in the sense in which Christianity has historically understood its own claims without ontological and metaphysical assertions.

Acknowledging the declining interest in metaphysics in recent decades, Henry insists

1 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:245. "The basic axiom of every system is undemonstrable, that is, cannot be deduced from some still higher or prior knowledge, since the whole system of theorems and propositions is dependently suspended upon this primary axiom. The axioms of the Christian system of truth are not presuppositions shared in common with secular thought." Ibid., 1:223.

2 Ibid., 1:190. Although he pursues tangents frequently, the first four volumes of God, Revelation and Authority focus on the question of epistemology. The remaining two volumes focus on ontology.

3 Ibid., 1:198.
a reversal is occurring and an intelligent expression of Christianity is extremely important at this time.

We stand at the threshold, it may be, of an exciting renewal of philosophical activity, a development which could shape the outlook of world thought in the twenty-first century and beyond. The human mind, just because man is by nature a spiritual-rational-moral agent, will not and cannot forever shun the larger issues of truth and reality; the nonmetaphysical and anti-metaphysical eras always turn out to be transition interludes. . . . Metaphysics tomorrow will be either Christian or non-Christian, but metaphysics there will be. . . . The task of Christian leadership is to confront modern man with the Christian world-life view as the revealed conceptuality for understanding reality and experience, and to recall reason once again from the vagabondage of irrationalism and the arrogance of autonomy to the service of true faith.4

Henry does not hesitate to investigate the truth claims of Christianity. He contends that "Christianity has no fears in respect to truth and reason. No philosophy and no religion presses the concern for intellectual and moral integrity more insistently than does the Bible."5 To the contrary, he insists that one must do so and when done properly, he believes Christianity can withstand careful scrutiny and prove itself as the superior explanation of reality.

The fundamental presupposition of orthodox Christianity, according to Henry, is God known in revelation.6 This axiom includes both an ontological and an epistemological element. He argues that the ontological element is central and the epistemological is secondary. He refuses to adopt the modern approach that places epistemology in the forefront of philosophical inquiry. The proposition that "God exists" is the principle axiom of Judeo-Christian theism. For "the self-disclosed God . . . exists forever in a self-specified condition free of external determination; his reality, purpose and activity are not

4 Ibid., 1:43.
5 Ibid., 1:264.
6 Ibid., 1:212 and 1:14-15. See also 1:219 where he specifically identifies God as the basic ontological presupposition and divine revelation as the basic epistemological presupposition of Christianity.
contingent on the universe. He continues steadfast, unimpaired and immutable."7 The derivative epistemological assumption is important for apart from divine revelation humanity would not nor could not know of God's existence and nature. "The living God is the original Christian axiom, both ontically and noetically, for God discloses himself in revelation as the God who is eternally there."8

Henry views epistemology as "a prolegomenon to ontology," while insisting upon the centrality of ontology as the most vital philosophical concern.9 Henry has written that "the determinative question may be expressed: Is there or not, a reality beyond nature."10 Portions of Henry's discussion of the attributes of God that are relevant to this study will be presented in subsequent chapters. This chapter will serve as a prolegomenon and will present Henry's understanding of Judeo-Christian epistemology. First, I shall discuss each of the following propositions.

Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included. Human reason is a divinely fashioned instrument for recognizing truth; it is not a creative source of truth. The Bible is the Christian's principle of verification. Logical consistency is a negative test of truth and coherence a subordinate test. The proper task of theology is to exposit and elucidate the content of Scripture in an orderly way. The theology of revelation requires the apologetic confrontation of speculative theories of reality and life.11

Following that discussion, I will review the fifteen theses regarding divine revelation proposed by Henry in God, Revelation and Authority.

DIVINE REVELATION

---

7 Ibid., 5:11. "God's existence is the foundational biblical doctrine; from it flow all other Christian principles and precepts." Ibid., 5:9.

8 Ibid., 5:10.

9 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 49.

10 Henry, "The Relation Between Conduct and Belief," 58.

11 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:215.
Henry claims that "God in his revelation is the first principle of Christian theology, from which all the truths of revealed religion are derived." This means that our knowledge of the nature of being and of God is dependent upon divine revelation and is limited to the extent to which divinity reveals truth to us.

What is revelation? It is the divine manifestation or unveiling of truth to man. Henry explains:

The term "revelation" means intrinsically the disclosure of what was previously unknown. In Judeo-Christian theology the term is used primarily of God’s communication to man of divine truth, that is, his manifestation of himself or of his will. The essentials of the biblical view are that the Logos is the divine agent in all revelation, this revelation being further discriminated as general or universal (i.e. revelation in nature, history and conscience) and special or particular (i.e. redemptive revelation conveyed by wondrous acts and words). The special revelation in sacred history is crowned by the incarnation of the living Word and the inscripturation of the spoken word.

While he readily accepts general revelation, and insists that any sound theology does likewise, he is particularly concerned with the relationship between general revelation and special revelation. General revelation requires special revelation; apart from it, general revelation is inadequate. It would not have been so except for man's choice to reject God and pursue life and meaning apart from his creator. "Because of sinful alienation from God, fallen man culpably thwarts the ongoing general revelation of God in nature and history, a revelation which constantly invades even his mind and conscience."

12 Ibid.

13 "The knowledge of God is both as limited and as vast a topic as God himself is in his revelation; only on the basis of God’s self-disclosure is man able to make any legitimate statements whatever about him." Ibid., 1:216. Our knowledge is entirely dependent upon God himself. "Only as God manifests himself and as the truth of his revelation determines our affirmations do we truly know him." Ibid., 5:13.


15 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 103.

16 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:223.
Fortunately, special revelation fills the void.\textsuperscript{17}

In Scripture an authorized summary of all God's revelation—in the universe, in redemptive history, in Jesus of Nazareth—is divinely provided for us in inspired form. . . . The Bible openly publishes man's predicament and God's redemptive remedy in the form of objectively intelligible statements. The scriptural revelation takes epistemological priority over general revelation, not because general revelation is obscure or because man as sinner cannot know it, but because Scripture as an inspired literary document republishes the content of general revelation objectively, over against sinful man's reductive dilutions and misconstructions of it. Moreover, it proclaims God's way of redemption to sinful man in his guilty condition.\textsuperscript{18}

It appears that general revelation has as its primary purpose to demonstrate to man one truth, the truth that he is a fallen creature. The Bible does not present general revelation on the thesis that the true knowledge of God is possible to fallen man through the natural light of reason apart from a revelation of Christ, but rather introduces general revelation alongside special revelation in order to emphasize man's guilt. Thus the Scripture adduces God's unitary revelation, general and special, to display man's true predicament; he is a finite creature with an eternal destiny, made for spiritual fellowship with God, but now separated from his maker by sin.\textsuperscript{19}

The purpose of special revelation, on the other hand, is to reveal the plan of redemption.

Special revelation is redemptive revelation. It publishes the good tidings that the holy and merciful God promises salvation as a divine gift to man who cannot save himself (OT) and that he has now fulfilled that promise in the gift of his Son in

\textsuperscript{17} "... the necessity for special revelation is grounded in the inability of man the sinner to read off general revelation as man unfallen would have translated it. To confuse general revelation and natural theology is not to take sufficiently seriously either the sinfulness of man or the uniqueness of special revelation." Carl F. H. Henry, Notes on the Doctrine of God (Boston, MA: W. A. Wilde Co, 1948), 68.

\textsuperscript{18} Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:223. Henry is not the first to argue for the limited utility of general revelation. Demarest places Henry within a tradition that Henry prefers to identify with by including him in a long line of widely recognized theologians. He writes: "Authorities such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Hodge, Warfield and Henry argue for the objective reality of general revelation and its limited utility in mediating an elemental knowledge of God's existence and character." B. A. Demarest, "Revelation, General," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 945.

\textsuperscript{19} Henry, "Revelation, Special," 946.
whom all men are called to believe (NT). The gospel is news that the incarnate Logos has borne the sins of doomed men, has died in their stead, and has risen for their justification. This is the fixed center of special redemptive revelation.20

THE ROLE OF HUMAN REASON

If revelation is the basic epistemological axiom of Judeo-Christian theism, then what is the relationship between human reason and divine revelation. Henry identifies the three classic ways of describing that relationship as those of Tertullian, Aquinas and Augustine.21 He places himself firmly in the camp of Augustine.

Henry believes that the Tertullian way is exemplified by several modern theologians such as Kierkegaard, Barth, Bultmann and Tillich. This view, which Henry says was "never typically Christian," attempts to "sharply contrast revelational truth with metaphysical and scientific knowledge." Tertullian is often quoted as saying: "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?" He was not simply emphasizing the "priority of faith, but rather . . . the disjunction of faith and reason." In other words, for Tertullian, "Christianity requires belief in what to the unregenerate mind seems absurd." Henry rejects this approach.22

The second way is that of Saint Thomas Aquinas. While Tertullian was guilty of depreciating human reason, Henry thinks Aquinas went too far in the other direction. He grants too much to human reason and sets the stage for the subsequent modern abandonment of divine revelation.

The Thomistic way . . . made room for natural or philosophical theology as preparatory for revealed theology. While Thomas Aquinas approaches the existence of God both from man's ordinary experience and from supernatural revelation as starting points, he nonetheless invokes philosophical theology, or

20 Ibid.

21 "In the long history of Christian thought, revelation and reason have in fact been depicted as standing in three remarkably different relationships, sometimes designated as the 'three ways'--that of Tertullian, of Augustine and of Aquinas." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:182.

22 Ibid.
metaphysics, a natural type of knowledge open to anyone, to supply the foundations of faith. Aquinas considers the first use of philosophy in respect to theology to be the demonstration of "items that are preambles to faith." All Aquinas's arguments for the existence of God rest on an appeal to sense observation without reliance on divine disclosure.23

The great strength of the Thomistic position is that it provides common ground between believers and non-believers. A common ground that believers can rely upon in their demonstration to non-believers of the truth of the Christian faith.

It is important to point out that Aquinas does not rely upon human reason alone. To the contrary, Scripture is very important.

To be sure, Aquinas insists that the theology taught in Scripture gives supplementary information about God and his purposes for man that cannot be derived from any source but divine revelation--so, for example, the doctrine of the divine incarnation in Jesus Christ, the Trinity, bodily resurrection, and so on. But the truths of the existence of God and the existence and immortality of the soul are not grounded on religious considerations but are considered inferences from sense observation, and philosophical reasoning is viewed as capable of supplying a demonstrative proof.24

This interpretation, according to Henry, depreciates divine revelation and mitigates the depravity of fallen humanity. It assumes that individuals have reasoning potential that exceeds their true capacity. Henry does not believe that a depraved and fallen individual can come to a knowledge of eternal and supernatural truth apart from divine revelation.

The Thomistic emphasis on unaided human reason only encourages humanity to seek truth via their own capacities. Thus, Henry accuses Aquinas of contributing to the subsequent modern abandonment of revelational knowledge. He writes:

When early modern philosophers were unpersuaded that Thomas's philosophic approach to God issued in the conclusions he adduced, difficulties arose. . . . In particular, the claim that the divine existence can be logically demonstrated by inferences from sense experience was assailed, first by philosophical rationalists and then by empiricists. Since Thomas suspended the case for the existence of God on philosophical demonstration, a breakdown of the five-fold proof could only

23 Ibid., 1:184.

24 Ibid.
leave revealed theology floating nebulously in midair.25

In other words, when subsequent thinkers, using unaided human reasoning, rightly or wrongly, concluded that Thomistic philosophy was not true, it was a very short time before they began to lose faith in Scripture as well. Henry need not and does not agree with the arguments of the modern rationalists and empiricists; rather, he believes that reason, uninformed and ungrounded in revelation, will inevitably lead one astray. Our fallen nature guarantees it.

The third way, that of Augustine, is the way with which Henry identifies. Augustine appealed "to revelation in the interest of a more fully informed reason." He is identified as the originator of the notion that one should "believe in order to understand." Belief is the first step to understanding. Faith is essential for proper understanding. Human reason is incapable of knowing apart from divine revelation. Henry says: "Human reason is not viewed as a source of truth; rather, man is to think God's thoughts after him. Revelation is the source of truth, and reason, as illuminated by the Spirit, the instrument for comprehending it."26

One must begin with revelation for "the revelation of the living God is the precondition and starting point for human understanding; it supplies the framework and corrective for natural reason." Reason and philosophy survive but within a limited context. They merely "explicate the wisdom found in Scripture."27 For both Augustine and Henry, "divine revelation and authority rather than human reasoning are . . . the starting point of 'Christian philosophy.'" It is "inspired Scripture," not "philosophical speculation," that "constitutes the gateway to truth."28

25 Ibid., 1:184-185.
26 Henry, "Revelation, Special," 948.
27 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:183.
28 Ibid., 1:183-184.
Henry provides a relatively full exposition of Augustine's view in the first volume of *God, Revelation and Authority*. This view, one that Henry labels the "theological transcendent a priori," is based upon the axiom that man innately knows of the existence of God.29 Henry says:

Augustine of Hippo stands unrivaled as the brilliant exponent of the Christian thesis that the knowledge of God and of other selves and the world of nature is not merely inferential. Whatever else is contributory to the content of human cognition, this knowledge involves a direct and immediate noesis because of the unique constitution of the human mind. Knowledge of God is no mere induction from the finite and nondivine, but is directly and intuitively given in human experience. However much knowledge of the self and of the physical world may be expounded by inference, it is bracketed always by a primal antecedent relationship to the spiritual world which makes man's knowledge possible and holds him in intuitive correlation with God, the cosmos, and other selves.30

Thus, all of humanity has a "primordial ontological awareness of God."31 What does this entail?

Augustine held that on the basis of creation the human mind possesses a number of necessary truths. Intellectual intuition conveys the laws of logic, the immediate consciousness of self-existence, the truths of mathematics, and the moral truth that one ought to seek wisdom. Moreover, he held that in knowing immutable and eternal truth we know God, for only God is immutable and eternal.32

29 Ibid., 1:323.

30 Ibid., 1:325.

31 Ibid., 1:149. Not only does humanity innately know that God exists but we also have "knowledge of moral accountability to the eternal Sovereign, a sense of personal guilt and vulnerability to final judgement for wrongdoing." To those who would argue that this is religious nonsense, Henry replies by saying: "To insist that the living God of the Bible is inescapably an aspect of everyday experience may strike the man 'come of age' as nonsense, since the very possibility is excluded by his definition of reality and his delimitation of experience. Nonetheless his conscience and behavior remain much more ambivalent than his secular presuppositions imply, and his mind itself is in touch with transcendent divinity. Although dismissing the nonsecular in theory, the secular man betrays in his practice a self-awareness that incorporates and acknowledges the nonsecular; his everyday life mirrors a dimension of the ultimate that gives meaning to those very religious symbols he has professedly discarded. His conduct, moreover, reflects private assumptions about personal interpersonal relationships and the given character of external reality that sharply contradict the naturalistic framework." Ibid., 1:149.

32 Ibid., 1:76-77.
Augustine saw man as a unique creation of God designed for knowledge of both the natural and supernatural worlds. This involves the theory of preformation. This Augustinian theory, adopted by Henry, maintains that "the categories of thought are aptitudes for thought implanted by the Creator and synchronized with the whole of reality."33 The means of knowledge for each are the product of God and are uniquely designed for the nature of the object being known. It is "the senses [that] link man to an objective world of sense perception, while the intellect links him to the objective world of intellect."34 Henry is quick to remind readers that even our knowledge of the sensible world is based upon forms of thought given and sustained by God. "Never," Augustine and Henry contend, "is human knowledge adequately described as an achievement of human factors operating wholly in isolation from a divine activity."35

Both Augustine and Henry are also quick to discount any notion of the divinity of man. Man is a creation of God. He is created in the image of God but he is not God. As Henry says, "the Augustinian doctrine of immediate awareness in knowledge experience--of God and the self and the world--presupposes the Hebrew-Christian view of man's creaturely relationship to his Maker, even in its emphasis on man as bearer of the divine image."36

The fact that humans have this innate ontic point of reference is an ongoing process. It was not the result of a once-for-all creative act of God. To the contrary, man's ontic

---

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 1:325.
35 Ibid., 1:326. In another place, Henry says "there is no such thing as 'unaided' human knowledge." Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 104. In all cases, knowledge of any kind is a gift of God. Henry says: "Knowledge in all its ramifications is a divine gift to man for the sake of spiritual fellowship and moral obedience." God, Revelation and Authority, 1:330.
36 Ibid., 1:327.
reference is the product of an ongoing act of divine revelation. At no point is man
independently capable of knowledge of the divine. Henry explains further:

Augustine has no sympathy, therefore, for a deistically conceived doctrine of
innate ideas. He resists the notion that man as a rational being stands in possession
of a body of ideas impressed once-for-all from birth upon his constitution as a
human being, and of which the intellect becomes aware by its own subsequent and
independent activity. Rather, Augustine's a priori flows from his view of the
creaturely soul standing in the process of intellection in unbroken relation of
dependence upon God. The theistic conception of the universe requires that the
creature, while endowed with real activities of its own, yet stands constantly
supported by God in the exercise of all its activities. In the process of intellection
the human soul is not only active, but is acted upon. Whatever light it sees, it sees
illumined by divine light. 37

Augustine refers to this ongoing act of revelation as the "divine activity of illumination." 38

The divine source of knowledge is what provides man with certainty. He explains:
"That all knowledge is constituted by divine revelation . . . surrounds truth with assurance.
Since God is the author of our rational faculties . . . God is the ultimate ground of man's
certitude and is surety for the validity of knowledge." 39 This certainty, however, does not
imply the omniscience of man in any way. For man is limited both by his finite and fallen
nature. Human finitude limits the scope of human knowledge. Henry says, "man as a
finite creature doubtless does not grasp anything exhaustively, but he may have genuine
knowledge nonetheless." 40 For, "the soul, although finite, can indeed know 'perfect'
knowledge, that is, it can attain truth, yet it is not omniscient. Yet even when we know in
part, we may have unlimited certitude." 41

Human depravity limits the apprehension of knowledge. "Man's knowledge is

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 1:328.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 1:335.
41 Ibid., 1:329.
conditioned by his ethical state, which has a determinating effect upon his mental activity. This effect is especially vitiating with regard to the knowledge of God."42 Thus, our sinful condition limits our ability to know. Scripture makes clear the condition of the human soul. It is fallen. Henry argues: "Revelation itself affirms that man is depraved in consequence of the fall, and that this depravity affects him in the entirety of his being—in volition, affection and intellection."43 Because our fallen nature impedes us, "a right perception of the truth becomes impossible."44 Henry insists that "human faculties become so impaired by sin that the natural man is precluded from the ascertainment of truth."45 Because of our sinful nature, that which God has revealed to man in a general way is distorted by sinful man. Sinful man postulates new explanations of reality based upon his cloudy understanding.

The competitive views implicate man in an artificial ontology, misstate the nature and condition of the soul, reconstruct or falsify the image of God in man, and arbitrarily exclude the factors of sin and special redemptive revelation in knowledge-theory by their very misdefinition of the a priori. In brief, they so fabricate the intellectual processes as to make man's created finiteness and contingent sinfulness virtually irrelevant before the discussion of epistemology even gets underway.46

The fallen state of humanity does not mean that man has wholly lost his rational

42 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 107. "Although divine revelation opens to us the divine world of ideas . . . the human mind is not merely passive in the acquisition of knowledge. Man's knowing activity is conditioned both by the intrinsic nature and contingent state of his soul; it is qualified, both by man's finitude and by the ethical disposition of his will. Knowledge is a function of the whole man. The soul must prepare for reception of the truth, and also embrace it." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:328.

43 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:226-227.

44 Ibid., 1:329.

45 Ibid. He insists that "the rebellious human knower erects a barrier to adequate spiritual truth which only special divine revelation can overcome." Ibid., 1:281.

46 Ibid., 1:331.
capacities. To the contrary, the fallen state of man does not mean "that man's rational abilities are wholly nullified."

The fall conditions man's will more pervasively than his reason. Man wills not to know God in truth, and makes religious reflection serviceable to moral revolt. But he is still capable of intellectually analyzing rational evidence for the truth-value of assertions about God. If the noetic effects of the fall were totally and utterly damaging, thus making man incapable of thinking aright and immune to the rational validity of the basic categories of logic (e.g., the law of contradiction), then no rationally persuasive case could be mounted for or against anything whatever. 47

Thus, the fall of humanity does not mean that man cannot know God, rather it means that man chooses not to know God. Our lack of knowledge is not so much a result of a defective rational capacity but the result of a defective will.

The problem is not one of fundamental intellectual incompetence, or men could know nothing at all. Nor is it that the canons of reason and forms of logic are irrelevant to ultimate reality. Were that the case, we would be doomed from the outset to ontological skepticism. Rather, man the thinker, for whatever reason (Judeo-Christian theology would point to the fall and sinfulness of man) employs his intelligence to formulate comprehensive explanations of reality and life that...rival...transcendent cognitive revelation. 48

The solution to this condition of man is revelation.

Only special revelation and grace, which aims to restore man to the knowledge for which he was created, can master the noetic effects of sin. Already dependent on God alone for existence, and continually sustained as a rational creature by the activity of God, the sinner is restored to light and life only through special divine intervention. 49

At another point, Henry writes, "revelation lifts human reason beyond restrictions of intellect limited by finitude and clouded by sin through the knowledge it conveys of man's

47 Ibid., 1:226-227. "Not even the cataclysmic moral tragedy of the fall has wholly demolished man's capacity for knowing God and his revealed truth." 1:227. Man is still rational in spite of the fall for "...man bears the divine image on the basis of creation and...this image while distorted by sin is not destroyed." Henry, "Revelation, Special," 948.

48 Ibid., 1:91.

49 Ibid., 1:329.
Maker and Redeemer." Revelation, however, requires rationality. For apart from human reason, man could not understand that which God has revealed to us. Henry explains:

Knowledge of God is indeed wholly dependent upon divine revelation, but man was divinely made with rational and moral aptitudes for intelligible communion with his Maker and for the joyous service of God. The possibility of man's knowledge of divine revelation rests in the created capacity of the human mind to know the truth of God, and the capacity of thought and speech that anticipates intelligible knowledge and fellowship. . . . That man's reason is a divine gift for recognizing God's truth is a main tenet of the Christian faith. Human reason was a divine endowment enabling man to have knowledge of God and his purposes in the universe.  

Thus, Henry concludes, "the Christian religion assigns a critical and indispensable role to reason." That role is to "to recognize and elucidate [truth]." Any other explanation of human reason is inadequate if it overestimates or underestimates the capability of man.

THEOLOGICAL SCIENCE

Henry believes that theology is a science in the classical sense. He writes:

In its classic definition, science meant any clearly defined subject matter that yields valid knowledge communicable from mind to mind and from generation to generation. Science therefore was not limited to only one particular methodology; each science elaborated its content by the method appropriate to its own subject matter.  

Modern usage of the word "science" has departed significantly from this definition. Today, science has been "narrowed to include only systematized information gained by the observational method of the physical sciences." But taken in its classical sense, theology

50 Ibid., 1:201.
51 Ibid., 1:227.
52 Ibid., 1:226.
53 Ibid., 1:202.
54 Ibid. Henry does not dispute the utility of modern science. "Common sense requires modern man's recognition of the scientific method as a spectacularly useful
is a science and, as such, the basic axioms and methods appropriate to this science need explanation.

Christian theology is interested no less than any other science in discussing presuppositions and principles, sources and data, purposes or objectives, methods of knowing, verifiability and falsifiability. Indeed, Christianity is a genuine science in the deepest sense because it presumes to account in an intelligible and orderly way for whatever is legitimate in every sphere of life and learning.  

Henry begins with a basic axiom. Theology, he asserts, "sets out not simply with God as a speculative presupposition but with God known in his revelation." He continues by arguing "the appeal to God and to revelation cannot stand alone, if it is to be significant; it must embrace also some agreement on rational methods of inquiry, ways of argument, and criteria for verification." Henry believes it is essential for theologians to explain why Christianity offers a legitimate and truthful account of reality. Without an apologetic defense of itself, Christianity is unarmed against the onslaught of modern historicism.

Without persuasive epistemic credentials, Christianity will be assimilated to the historical approach prevalent in the modern intellectual world where all events are instrumentality for transforming our environment. Respect and gratitude are indeed due the scientist for many comforts and conveniences furnished to modern living . . . " But he is quick to place limits on modern science. Respect for the successes of modern science with its use of the empirical method need not be extended to permit empiricism to apply to metaphysical or moral questions. "Taken by itself, the empirical method provides no basis for affirming or denying supernatural realities, since by definition it is a method for dealing only with perceptible realities. It cannot, therefore, validate supraperceptible being; nor can it validate moral norms either . . ." 

55 Ibid., 1:203-204.

56 Ibid., 1:14-15.

57 Ibid.

58 He says: "Since theology is a rational discipline, it must of necessity declare which method or methods of knowing it considers appropriate to the knowledge of God, and what tests for religious truth it approves. When a non-Christian asks, 'What persuasive reasons have you for believing?' the basic issue at stake is, is theology credible?" Ibid., 1:213.
set in the context of developmental contingency and any claim to finality and absolute uniqueness is leveled. If the theology of revelation holds more than an antiquarian interest, Christians must indicate their conviction that Christianity is distinguished above all by its objective truth, and must adduce the method of knowing and the manner of verification by which every man can become personally persuaded. 59

A rational account of one's belief is also important to the believer. For "if the question of method and verifiability is left unanswered, even the Christian himself can have no rational certainty in his commitment to God." 60

The first step is to affirm the existence of truth itself. Henry says "the evangelical's first task is to insist upon the truth. An age that submerges questions of religious truth must be confronted with an insistent call to face the truth or falsity of its doctrines. The next task is to identify truth and indicate how one can recognize and be assured of it." 61

How does one verify the claims of the Christian faith? Henry insists that "the Bible is the Christian's principle of verification." 62 For only "the inspired Scriptures are the proximate and universally accessible form of authoritative divine revelation." 63

Christianity claims to assert basic truths that are universally applicable. 64 Since the truths are universally applicable, the Christian must be able to show their logic to the non-believer. For "if Christianity traffics in the truth--not merely 'truth for Christians' but truth

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 1:214.
61 Ibid., 1:215.
62 Ibid., 1:229.
63 Ibid.
64 "Christianity contends that revelational truth is intelligible, expressible in valid propositions, and universally communicable. Christianity does not profess to communicate a meaning that is significant only within a particular community or culture. It expects men of all cultures and nations to comprehend its claims about God and insists that men everywhere ought to acknowledge and appropriate them." Ibid.
valid for all men—it must speak to the outside world."65

Theological verification is not dependent upon personal faith or national or cultural perspectives. If a person must first be a Christian believer in order to grasp the truth of revelation, then meaning is subjective and incommunicable. Regeneration assuredly creates new attitudes toward the truth of revelation and facilitates man's comprehension of it, but the new birth is not prerequisite to a knowledge of the truth of God.66

Thus, Henry refuses to deny "all common ground between the believer and the unbeliever."67 This does not mean one can logically convince others to become a believer but, one can demonstrate to others that it is not irrational to become a believer.

To be sure, we cannot commit others to the truth of revelation simply by theoretical arguments, but we can demote and demolish nonrevelational counterclaims. Men do not appropriate the Christian revelation through conviction reached solely on the basis of rational argument. Personal faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but truth is God's revelational provision, and the Spirit uses truth as a means of persuasion and conversion.68

Thus, Henry encourages the non-believer to investigate Scripture.

The truth-content of theology can be investigated—as can that of astronomy and botany and geology—quite apart from the moral character of the technical scholar and his interest or disinterest in a new way of life. The truth of revelation is intended for sinners, and the unbeliever can indeed examine the content of theology. If the truth of revelation cannot be known prior to commitment to Christ, then men cannot be culpable for its rejection; moreover, it would be a waste of time and energy to try to persuade them of its validity.69

Demonstration to the non-believer of the legitimacy of biblical Christianity involves the use of logic. Henry does not hesitate to test the validity of what he believes. To test his assertions, Henry claims that "logical consistency is a negative test of truth and coherence a

65 Ibid., 1:244.
66 Ibid., 1:229.
67 Ibid., 1:227.
68 Ibid., 1:228.
69 Ibid., 1:229.
subordinate test."70

These logical tests are essential.

Without noncontradiction and logical consistency, no knowledge whatever is possible. Christianity insists that verification answers the question, "How can I know that this claim is true?" and not the question of personal preference. To rational minds, the credibility of a religious claim, like any other, rests upon the availability of persuasive evidence and adequate criteria.71

Henry acknowledges that some people reject the use of these criteria in establishing truth but he maintains their legitimacy.

Some decry the rational emphasis on logic and consistency in considerations of divine revelation. God is not bound by such criteria, it is said; he is assertedly above the canons of human reasoning, so that the "truth of revelation" confronts man in terms either of contradiction or of paradox or of mystery. But without appeal to sufficient reason, the mind of man has no basis for discriminating between mysteries, paradoxes and contradictions.72

He explains his use of these logical tests as follows:

Consistency is a negative test of truth; what is logically contradictory cannot be true. A denial of the law of contradiction would make truth and error equivalent; hence in effect it destroys truth. How else except by persuasive rational evidence that unmasks the inconsistencies of other views and exhibits the rational consistency of Christian claims shall we make it apparent to the nonbeliever that his alternative, however fantastic are its promises, lacks the intellectual compulsion of the Christian view?73

Such arguments are useful in demonstrating to the non-believer the legitimacy of one's beliefs.

Attention to logical consistency will clarify that nonbelievers thrust aside the Christian revelation not because of any illogicality of Christian truth, but because of their own personal illogicality and sinfulness. Logical consistency alone can

70 Ibid., 1:232. "Some may think that tests of revelation or truth are highly inappropriate, and that human creatures ought to accept the divine without question. But questions of truth are wholly appropriate." Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 1:232-233. Examples would include Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr.

73 Ibid., 1:233-234.
adjudicate whether any alternative is worthy of one's commitment.74

But the actual commitment is an act of will. However, he adds quickly, one does not usually commit oneself to something that is obviously inconsistent or contradictory. Thus, according to Henry, "the Christian system of doctrine prizes internal consistency. The truths of revealed religion do not contradict each other; [and] the theorems derived from the axiom of revelation are self-consistent."75

But logic is not the final word. To the contrary:

Given divergent starting points, the possibility remains that several logically consistent alternatives might be postulated; a nontheist might even grant the consistency of the Christian system of truth, given its primary axiom of the reality of God in his self-revelation. But if such considerations lead one to dismiss the importance of logical consistency, one demolishes any possibility of truth whatever. Logical consistency is not a positive test of truth, but a negative test; if it were a positive test, logical consistency would accredit all views, however, conflicting, that consistently follow from differing starting points. While logical consistency as a positive test might commend too much, logical inconsistency is a liability to any view. As a test, logical consistency disqualifies any serious contender whose truth-claim is characterized by logical contradiction.76

Nonetheless, Christianity "offers a more consistent, more comprehensive and more satisfactory explanation of the meaning and worth of than do other views."77 Quite simply, "it accounts most adequately for human experience."78

What role exists for theology? Henry is again clear: "The proper task of theology is to exposit and elucidate the content of Scripture in an orderly way."79 He explains

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 1:235.
77 Ibid., 1:238.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid. Later in this same work, Henry sketches out a fuller exposition. "Its task is sixfold [sic]: (1) to explain the methodology appropriate to its special object of understanding, that is, God; (2) to adduce the truths and facts knowable by that method; (3) to exhibit persuasive epistemological credentials, including a proper verifying principle and test of truth; (4) to present its data in an orderly and systematic manner; (5) to display the
theology as follows:

Christian theology is the systematization of the truth-content explicit and implicit in the inspired writings. It consists essentially in the repetition, combination, and systematization of the truth of revelation in its propositionally given biblical form. The province of theology is to concentrate on the intelligible content and logical relationships of this scripturally given revelation, and to present its teaching as a comprehensive whole.  

Such efforts will never succeed fully but their merit should be obvious. "The fact that no theologian has succeeded as yet in fully arranging the truth of revelation in the form of axioms and theorems is no reason to abandon this objective."  

Henry also indicates that one must confront alternative explanations of reality and reveal their shortcomings. Much of his own work is devoted to this task. "The theology of revelation requires the apologetic confrontation of speculative theories of reality and life." He does not hesitate to use logic in this regard.

By applying the laws of logic, the Christian apologist will mount internal criticism of contrary positions and expose the contradictions inherent in the axioms of secularism; he will thereby reduce to absurdity the successively proffered alternatives to Christian theism and force the intellectual abandonment of speculative views. At the same time, he will exhibit the internal consistency of the Christian axioms and show that evangelical truth far better accounts for any desirable facets of a proffered alternative while also avoiding its logical inconsistencies.

80 Ibid., 1:238-239.

81 Ibid., 1:240.

82 Ibid., 1:241. "The Christian can show that his epistemology avoids the problems latent in and impeditive of alternative views of knowledge... Evangelical theology is not only ready to debate any and all rival axioms proposed for an understanding of reality and life, but is also more eager than its rivals to do so, as attested by its evangelistic initiative and missionary expansion. To support its own claim and to contest competing claims, revealed religion is fully prepared to adduce criteria and principles for verification." Ibid., 1:224.

83 Ibid., 1:241.
Defenders of the faith should begin with divinely revealed truth as the starting point and utilize human reason in the service of the faith to explain the truths of Judeo-Christian theism and to expose the logical fallacies of alternative explanations of reality.

SUMMARY

This discussion leads to a very simple, yet important, question. Is Christianity rational? Henry says "yes."

Henry insists that all philosophical systems are based upon unprovable assumptions. Such assumptions, or axioms, are pre-philosophical. How does one apprehend basic assumptions? Ultimately, they are accepted as a matter of faith. Acceptance of Christian principles relies upon the faith that is made available to humanity via the grace of God. Does this mean that Christian principles are somehow irrational? Henry says no. No basic principles are rational in the sense of being a product of rational deduction. All axioms are based upon faith and, therefore, Christian axioms are no more or no less rational than any other set of axioms.

Once these assumptions are accepted, Henry argues, one must be logically consistent in their application. He insists that Christianity can be logically consistent given its first

84 "Just as geometry has basic axioms from which its theorems flow, so theological and philosophical systems also have governing axioms. Axioms are the ruling principles with which any system of thought begins. They are never deduced or inferred from other principles, but are simply presupposed. No axiom is arrived at by reasoning; as the starting point, an axiom is therefore in the nature of the case beyond proof." Carl F. H. Henry, Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 64.

85 Henry denies the possibility or even the necessity of proving that his first principles are true. "Throughout its long history, philosophy has always recognized the legitimacy of assuming without proof a philosophical axiom or postulational principle as an initial basis of reasoning. Democritus never demonstrated that all substance consists of indivisible and imperceptibly small particles; he postulated his premise and attempted to explain all existence consistently in terms of it. Plato never demonstrated the independent existence of the invisible world of Eternal Ideas; he argued that all lesser existence participates in or mirrors them. . . Kant, for example, did not derive his transcendental forms of thought through his epistemic theory . . . [he] postulated them independently of the theory." Ibid., 45-46.
principles that "God exists" and "God has revealed himself." Thus, Henry believes, Christianity is as rational and logically consistent as any other comprehensive explanation of reality.

This apologetical defense of the faith is useful and important. Henry has defended the faith against the charge of irrationality and has shown that Christianity is not bankrupt intellectually. He succeeds in showing that Christianity is as legitimate as any other comprehensive explanation of reality. He seems less effective in arguing for the superiority of the Christian world-view.

From Henry's perspective, since axioms are not based upon rational proof--they are based upon faith--one cannot rationally convince others to reject their interpretative framework and adopt Christianity. Thus, in one sense, "final verification or demonstrative proof of the truth of any metaphysical overview is presently impossible." Yet in another sense, it is important for Henry to demonstrate that Christianity is not merely a viable alternative but that it is the truth. Such efforts encourage individuals to seek the gift of faith.

86 "The argument that the Christian system is circular because it sets out with what needs first to be proved would apply to all systems, since no system exists without basic axioms. The fact is, all arguments involve circularity. Circularity is not a liability; it cannot but be an asset, if all premises mesh in a comprehensive unity of discourse. In a logically consistent system, all propositions comprise a comprehensive unity in which the component elements find their logical validity. Interrelated in a conceptual framework, the various aspects interpenetrate each other to constitute a complex categorical scheme. Every consistent system becomes self-complete and self-contained in this way, apart from possible illogical departures from its starting point." Ibid., 90-91.

87 The believer has "spiritual reassurance" that his or her assumptions are true, but even the non-believer can be shown that Christianity is not irrational or illogical. Henry is convinced that a Christian apologist can explain the basic axioms of the faith and demonstrate the logical cohesiveness and consistency of Christianity to non-believers. Such understanding does not lead to belief. One can understand the basic axioms and see how the Christian logically and consistently applies those axioms and still refuse to accept the axioms as true. "Rational presuppositionalism, in contrast to fideism, does not sponsor a disjunction of faith and reason. It insists that all humanity can comprehend God's revelation and, moreover, can comprehend it prior to regeneration or special illumination by the Holy Spirit." Ibid., 105.

88 Ibid., 88.
and to become believers.  

Henry tries to demonstrate the superiority of the Christian faith but his argument seems to lack cogency. His primary effort in this regard revolves around logical consistency. Even if one cannot rationally convince a non-believer to believe, it is possible to demonstrate that alternative "interpretive frameworks" are inconsistent and, therefore, flawed. "There can be but one comprehensive system of truth. If the true system is comprehensive, every false system must contain contradictions." Ultimately, Henry believes that basic and profound inconsistencies will emerge in all non-Christian explanations of reality. The superiority of the Christian faith becomes apparent when it withstands all similar logical challenges.

He weakens his own argument in two ways. First, he admits that logical consistency grants validity but it does not prove something is true. It is "only a negative test of truth."

By exposing logical inconsistency in an interpretive scheme, we call its truth claim in question. But although logical inconsistency invalidates any truth claim, logical

---

89 Without such efforts, Christianity is merely one alternative explanation of reality--no more or no less rational. If one has no reason to choose Christianity over other beliefs then one's choice is a blind subjective leap of faith. Furthermore, if one has no reason to choose Christ over the infinite alternatives, how can one be held morally culpable?

90 Henry, Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief, 88. "If Christian revelational claims are true, no system will or can be more comprehensively consistent." Ibid., 82. "All systems other than the Judeo-Christian revelation are but partial or segmented. . . . Only the Christian revelation embraces all of reality and can claim for its positions both validity and truth." Ibid., 92.

91 Henry has contradicted himself on this point. For example, he wrote, "Consistent systems may be elaborated on the basis of rival and mutually exclusive a prioris." Ibid., 87.

92 Validity is a characteristic of an argument that is logical. Validity has nothing to do with the character of the premises on which the argument is based. Truth is a possible characteristic of a premise on which an argument is based. This point and other arguments in this section are discussed systematically in Ronald Nash, Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), parts 1 and 2.
consistency does not of itself establish the truth of a particular claim. For a system to be true, more is required than simply not harboring a contradiction.93 Therefore, the logical consistency of Christianity does not compel non-believers to accept it. When "alternative frameworks" are refuted on this basis, non-believers simply turn from one falsehood to another.

Second, Henry confesses that at times it is difficult, if not impossible, to conclusively demonstrate logical inconsistency and/or consistency. Christians are still fallen creatures and susceptible to human frailties. One should not expect Christians to apply their axioms perfectly and logically nor demonstrate irrefutably the logical inconsistencies of all alternative frameworks. Only when Christ returns will the truth become fully obvious and wholly compelling. Moreover, even the most astute apologist will find that it is impossible to demonstrate logical contradiction, on occasion, because contradictions have not manifested themselves.

Henry hints at, but seems to avoid, two other considerations that might contribute to the argument that Christianity is the most superior--and therefore true--explanation of life. These arguments revolve around inductive reasoning and innate ideas--both of which Henry employs at times and disparages at times. Henry's reluctance to employ inductive reasoning and his failure to sketch out the ramifications of intuitive knowledge or innate ideas weakens his argument when he attempts to argue for the superiority of Christianity.

Henry is wedded to deductive reasoning. He rejects inductive thinking because it--at best--only provides probability, not certainty. However, Henry has admitted that certainty in matters regarding basic beliefs comes only through the God-given gift of faith. If certitude cannot be achieved--via deductive reasoning--then demonstration of probability--via inductive reasoning--seems to be an asset since it might encourage non-believers to seek the gift of faith. Therefore, it seems that one must ask questions such as: does this view of

93 Henry, Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief, 87.
the world correspond with my experience? Does it adequately account for life as I know it? Does it seem coherent? Henry concedes this point, partially, when he contends that the consequences of a consistent naturalism are existentially unacceptable.94 It seems that the cumulative effect of probable arguments could lend greater credence to the truthfulness of Christianity.95

Henry also refuses to sketch out the ramifications of innate ideas or intuitive knowledge. He admits that humans were created with an innate knowledge of God's existence. But, he is convinced that human understanding of such knowledge is so clouded by the fall that it is rendered virtually worthless. This view is not uncommon in protestant Christian circles. However, Henry does not claim that man's innate knowledge of the existence of self, other selves, and the external world has been clouded beyond utility. Why must that be so for the knowledge of God? I wonder if one's cloudy and somewhat vague sense of a supernatural could, at the least, lend support to those views which proclaim the existence of a God.

If human experience or intuition bears witness to one choice over another, then humans have guidance in making their choice and they can be held morally accountable for it. If human experience has a religious or spiritual element and if we experience order and design in the universe, then any comprehensive account of reality must account for these things. Any view which discounts the reality of what we experience must be viewed

94 "Man is not born with the naturalistic prejudices about reality, and they go against his deepest intuitions and his own essential humanity.... The dilemmas and ambiguities of his personal experience are such that secular man himself does not practice his naturalistic commitments with life-and-death seriousness. Instead, secularists themselves repeatedly contradict their own naturalistic claims in their daily lives, and adjust their private affairs to quite different presuppositions." Henry, _God, Revelation and Authority_, 1:145.

95 This argument is nothing new. For example, see Nash, _Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith_; D. Elton Trueblood, _Philosophy of Religion_ (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1957); and, Edward Carnell, _An Introduction to Christian Apologetics_ (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956).
skeptically. Furthermore, if humans possess an innate sense that God exists and that good and evil exists, then one must reject any view that denies the existence of a transcendent and a moral order, for it defies what we know innately. These kinds of arguments could aid in establishing the rational superiority of the Christian faith.

Henry does not claim that we have no evidence for choosing Christ. To the contrary, he insists that Scripture itself is sufficient evidence. He calls this evidence "objective" and "decisive." We should turn our attention to Henry's claims regarding divine revelation.

FIFTEEN THESSES

If divine revelation is the starting point and if only inscripturated propositional revelation is adequate to overcome the fallen nature of man, then the legitimacy of all subsequent claims will depend upon the authority of Scripture. In his magisterial work, God, Revelation and Authority, Henry provides fifteen theses relating to divine revelation. Each thesis contributes to his understanding of revelation and helps establish the authority of the Bible.

Thesis One: "Revelation is a divinely initiated activity, God's free communication by which he alone turns his personal privacy into a deliberate disclosure of his reality."  

---

96 If, as I have argued, evidence or intuition suggests that Christianity is true, why would someone hold assumptions that are diametrically opposed to those innate ideas divinely implanted in man as a part of the imago Dei? The only possible answer is through volition. Our fallen nature permits and even encourages us to accept as true that which runs counter to truth itself. We choose to believe that which is false and then attempt to demonstrate logical consistency to rationalize our disbelief. Even when proven illogical, we prefer to seek a new and different explanation of reality rather than accept God's truth. For such choices, we are morally culpable.

97 Henry, Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief, 55.

98 A brief summary of the fifteen theses can be found in Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 2:7-16.

99 Ibid., 2:8. Scriptural support for this thesis includes: "The things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God" (I Cor., 2:11b, ASV), and "a man can receive nothing, except it have given him from heaven" (John, 3:27 ASV). A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 2:17-29.
Man alone can know nothing about God. All knowledge is dependent on the divine. Henry comments: "Apart from divine initiative man could not perceive even God's existence, let alone his perfections and purposes; God's very reality would remain wholly problematical had he not chosen to disclose himself." All we know about God is a result of God's initiative and revelation.

Henry refers to revelation as "God's unmasking of himself." He contends that "the essence of revelation is that God steps out of his hiddenness to disclose what would otherwise remain secret and unknown." Why has God done this? God's motivations cannot be explored but we do know that the "essential purpose of divine disclosure is . . . to communicate truth."

**Thesis Two:** "Divine revelation is given for human benefit, offering us privileged communion with our Creator in the kingdom of God." The beneficiary of divine revelation is humanity. While it is true that revelation unveils God's glory, it is done "specially for man's sake." Through divine revelation, "we may know him personally as he is, may avail ourselves of his gracious forgiveness and offer of new life, may escape catastrophic judgment for our sins and venture personal fellowship with him." Henry calls this "priceless good news."

What is the content of this good news? Divine revelation offers humanity "a lucid

---

100 Ibid., 2:18.
101 Ibid., 2:17.
102 Ibid., 2:20-21.
103 Ibid., 2:27.
104 Ibid., 2:9, and 2:30. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 2:30-46.
105 Ibid., 2:31.
divine assessment of its woeful predicament" as well as information regarding "God's gracious provision and indispensable condition for reversing that condition."¹⁰⁶ This information requires a decision and a response on the part of individuals. The proper response leads to personal salvation.

Henry rejects the universal salvation implicit in the theology of Karl Barth. Barth and others have argued that revelation itself is salvific and "intrinsically redemptive." They claim that God has revealed himself in a personal way to individuals and that "personal awareness of revelation is itself redemptive" because it "involves the restoration of a broken relationship."¹⁰⁷ To the contrary, argues Henry, revelation conveys the message of salvation but is separate from it. Revelation informs us of the requirements for salvation and calls individuals to respond but it is not salvation itself. Henry contends that "salvation is conditioned upon personally accepting and appropriating the truth of revelation."¹⁰⁸ Thus, revelation is beneficial to man because it conveys truth that is essential to salvation but in the final analysis this truth benefits humanity only if one accepts the message.

_Thesis Three:_ "Divine revelation does not completely erase God's transcendent mystery, inasmuch as God the Revealer transcends his own revelation." What we know of God, based upon divine revelation, is true but not exhaustive. As Henry says: "The God of revelation transcends his creation, transcends his activity, transcends his own disclosure."¹⁰⁹ Revelation tells us a great deal about God but we should not assume that it tells us everything.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 2:38.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 2:42-43.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 2:45.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 2:9. Scriptural evidence for this thesis can be found in I Cor. 13:12. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in _God, Revelation and Authority_, 2:47-68.
Judeo-Christian religion insists that God's revelation does not totally exhaust his being and activity; even in his revelation he is the free sovereign God. Yahweh's voluntary self-disclosure does not wholly cancel his incomprehensibility nor eliminate all mystery. Scripture does not deplete all possible revelation; even on the basis of biblical revelation our knowledge of God is an incomplete knowledge. There is more to God's perfections and plans than we now know.\textsuperscript{110}

Since revelation is separate from "human insight and discovery," the scope of revelation is not determined by man but by God, the sole source of truth. Scripture tells us that there is more to know about God than what he has chosen to reveal. Henry reminds us that "God's divine revelation does not bestow human omniscience."\textsuperscript{111}

Henry is cautious in his explication of this thesis. He is careful to avoid what he considers to be the exaggerated transcendence common to neo-orthodoxy. For example, Barth, with his emphasis on God as "wholly other," claims that "the finite cannot know the infinite, that nature and history cannot manifest what is beyond the relative, and that human thought cannot comprehend or convey divine revelation."\textsuperscript{112} This neo-orthodox "revolt against the applicability to the sphere of transcendence of reason and the forms of logic" results in an emphasis upon "noncognitive divine encounter."\textsuperscript{113} Henry argues that "the fact that we now know only 'in part,' however, does not destroy the validity and trustworthiness of that portion of knowledge we have through divine disclosure. That God does not reveal himself to man exhaustively does not mean that he does not reveal himself truly."\textsuperscript{114} We know truly but only in part. Furthermore, our knowledge of God is not a noncognitive encounter but a rational and cognitive understanding of those things God has chosen to reveal to us.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 2:47.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 2:52.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 2:53.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 2:60-61.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 2:54.
Thesis Four: "The very fact of disclosure by the one living God assures the comprehensive unity of divine revelation." Divine revelation is the work of one sovereign God. He "guarantees a unified divine revelation." Revelation may come in different forms but it reveals one truth. Revelation does not contradict itself; rather it presents to man a logically consistent expression of truth.

The forms of revelation are varied but the truth conveyed is unified. Much can be made of the universal and particular character of different forms of revelation but Henry insists that the message remains the same. The distinction between special and general revelation is useful, but "in no way can the distinction . . . imply dual or rival revelations. The essential continuity of general and special revelation is a pervasive biblical assumption. Special revelation does not annul general revelation but rather republishes, vivifies and supplements it." Thus, different forms of revelation do not translate into different messages. Revelation is multiple in forms but one in message.

Thesis Five: "Not only the occurrence of divine revelation, but also its very nature, context, and variety are exclusively God's determination." Theologians often characterize God's revelation as either "general" or "special." Henry agrees that this classification is a useful way of describing the works of God. God has manifested himself to humanity in many ways, in history, in nature, in the conscience of man, in Scripture and in Christ. These various means of manifestation and the message and significance of each is wholly determined by God alone. "God determines not only the if and why of divine disclosure, but also the when, where, what, how and who."117

115 Ibid., 2:9. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 2:69-76.

116 Ibid., 2:71-72.

117 Ibid., 2:9-10. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 2:77-150. "God alone in his sovereign initiative determines the actuality, direction, nature, content and diversity of his self-disclosure." Ibid., 2:78.
Henry is particularly interested in discussing general revelation due to what he considers a misrepresentation of the concept by both neo-orthodox theology and Roman Catholicism. The neo-orthodox reject the possibility of general revelation while Roman Catholicism, following the lead of Aquinas, "conflates general revelation into natural theology."  

Neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth denies that either Scripture or general revelation is truly divine revelation. This notion is drawn from his understanding of religious knowledge. Henry writes: "A key emphasis in Barth's theory of religious knowledge is that because God is the only being of his kind and dissimilar to all else, he is unknowable by the ordinary categories of human knowledge." General revelation simply does not and cannot exist. The infinite qualitative difference between God and man, the supernatural and the natural, preclude the possibility of general revelation or propositional special revelation. Barth believes that revelation only occurs in "special personal confrontation." Scripture is a "witness to revelation" but is not revelation in and of itself.  

In response to the neo-orthodox rejection of general revelation, Henry argues that "general revelation of the Creator in his creation is integral to Christian doctrine . . ." Henry claims the neo-orthodox position is an explicit rejection of the teaching of Scripture itself. General revelation, he maintains, is taught in Scripture. In support of this premise, Henry cites several biblical passages.

In the words of an Old Testament Psalm: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork" (19:1); in the words of a New Testament epistle, "Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that

118 Ibid., 2:84.
119 Ibid., 3:228.
120 Ibid., 2:88.
121 Ibid., 2:83.
have been made. So they are without excuse..." (Rom. 1:20 R.S.V.). And John's Prologue tells us that the true Light, the Logos, "lights every man" (1:9), that this Light "shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it" (1:5, NEB). Man the sinner does not walk in total ignorance of the living God; what makes him as a sinner is revolt against light, both in Adam and on his own account.122

Furthermore, the rejection of general revelation has serious theological repercussions. He asserts that "God's invisible being has been clearly seen ever since the creation through his created reality; it is here that God universally confronts man."123 In addition, God is universally revealed internally through man's moral conscience. It is the rejection of this universal revelation that imputes universal guilt to humanity.

God's general revelation is presupposed not only because the revelation of Scripture declares it to be the basis of man's moral and spiritual responsibility to God. In an even deeper sense it is mankind's revolt against this general revelation, both in Adam and on each one's individual account, that constitutes human beings sinners. The universal revelation in creation makes all humans responsible. . . . Rejection of God's general revelation is what makes men and women heathen.124

The traditional Roman Catholic stand on general revelation also troubles Henry. He believes that Aquinas, the most profound Roman Catholic expositor on the subject, confused general revelation with natural theology. Aquinas taught that "truths about God [could] be learned from created things (nature, man, world) by reason alone."125 Most important, by reason alone man could know of God's existence as well as know many of God's attributes.126

122 Carl F. H. Henry, Evangelicals At the Brink of Crisis (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1967), 112-113. "Psalm 19, often considered the classic Old Testament text on God's disclosure in the creation, may be taken as a summary statement of what many so-called 'nature psalms' affirm. New Testament passages that emphasize the doctrine are not difficult to find; among them are John 1:4, 9; Acts 14:17; 17:26-28; Romans 1:18-20; 28-32; 2:14-16." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 2:84.

123 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 2:84.

124 Ibid., 2:85-86.


126 Henry describes the five-fold Thomistic argument as follows: "The first
Henry believes that "neither Scripture nor human experience warrants the notion that, as a recipient of God's general revelation, man in sin can translate that revelation into undiluted truth about God, that is, into a 'natural theology.'"127 To the contrary, Scripture and experience teach that fallen humanity either rejects general revelation or twists it to serve their own purposes. Henry says: "It is not into 'proofs' of the living God's existence, but into an occasion of revolt and estrangement that man the sinner turns the general disclosure of God. The Bible connects the universal or general revelation of God not with 'natural theology' but with man's guilt (Rom. 1:20)."128

In the final analysis, Henry's rejection of natural theology is threefold. He rejects it "because of the express nature of supernatural revelation, because of man's epistemic nature and because of the invalidity of empirically based arguments for theism."129 He argues that "divine revelation is neither a distillation of history nor of the spirit of man, but argument, in brief, is that we perceive things in motion and, since no body moves itself, the cause of this motion must be external. . . . There must, therefore, be a first mover. . . . The second argument proceeds similarly from our perception of external cause-effect sequences to a first efficient cause; it does so on the ground that without this first cause no intermediate causes would exist in a causal series. . . . The third argument is that anything capable of non-existence . . . is not self-sufficient and has its ground elsewhere. . . . In brief, whatever is not self-explanatory demands what is necessarily eternally existent as its explanation. . . . The fourth argument is that no perfections can arise in anything except through a cause that displays these qualities in equal or infinite amount; the ultimate cause of the universe, moreover, must exhibit all the varieties of perfection of goodness in infinite degree. . . . The fifth argument [begins] . . . with the behavioral adaptation of many observed objects. Blind mechanism, Thomas argues, cannot explain this complex adjustment toward ends; required are a controlling intelligence and providential wisdom. . . . Taken in order, the arguments, if valid, establish (1) an unending source of all change; (2) a first cause of all productive efficiency in the universe; (3) a necessary ground of all contingent beings and events; (4) an infinitely perfect cause of all excellences in the finite universe; and (5) an intelligent, providential governor over everything." Henry acknowledges that a few evangelical scholars such as Norman Geisler accept the validity of the Thomistic argument. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 2:105.

127 Ibid., 2:86.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid., 2:123.
a transcendent disclosure..."130 All knowledge is grounded in and comes from God. From the time of Adam man's epistemic nature has been fallen and Aquinas "underestimates the epistemic predicament of finite man."131 Fallen man willfully distorts general revelation, he does not marshall it in the service of the living God.

Furthermore, the use of the empirical method as a key component in our knowledge of God's existence is invalid.

God's universal disclosure in nature, history and to the human mind and conscience is not in dispute. What is rejected rather is the expectation that fallen man will translate general divine revelation into a natural theology that builds a secure bridge to special revelation; in that event special revelation has significance only as a crown that caps natural theology elaborated by man in sin. Those who expound the theistic proofs often do so not expressly in view of general revelation at all, but simply on the basis of empirical observation, and look to man's inferences from experience to prepare the way for any and every clue to divine reality. Their stance is... that "we have a basis for affirming God's existence in observational data" and that "without empirical evidence no basis remains for affirming his existence." In this way a denial of empirical evidence becomes tantamount to a denial of God's reality.132

Subsequent philosophers have weakened the Thomistic argument and thus the case for Christianity. Henry identifies Hume and Kant as the most widely accepted destructive critics of the Thomist proofs. Hume argued that causality is not "a basic law of cosmic reality, but rather a psychological necessity that arises in the mind." Hume goes on to argue that even if we were to accept causality as an explanatory principle, "the terrors of natural evil allow us to infer empirically a god of only finite power, since a deity who is good would prevent such destructive occurrences." Kant "rescued causality from merely psychological significance... but he too limited its application to the sensually perceived world so that causality has no relevance whatever for God."133

130 Ibid., 2:121.
131 Ibid., 2:122.
132 Ibid., 2:117-118.
133 Ibid., 2:113-118.
In the final analysis, Aquinas' argument "encompasses too many concessions to the empirical method to turn that method skeptically against its naturalistic devotees." Modern empirical science no longer considers "an infinite series of motions to be irrational" nor do they see a need to explain a first cause. Reliance on the empirically based arguments of Aquinas have not resulted in widespread acceptance of Christianity. To the contrary, use of empirical arguments more often than not have led modern thinkers to the conclusion that Christianity is not true.

Thus, Henry concludes, divine revelation alone is sufficient. Furthermore, one must take revelation in its totality. Only when revelation in its general and special manifestations are taken seriously and together, can we come to a proper understanding of truth.

Universal or general revelation came first.

Because God willed to make himself known thus, he provided a universal revelation in the cosmos and in history, a general anthropological revelation in the mind and conscience of man, and to the Hebrews as a chosen people a particular salvific revelation consummated in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and head of the church. God is universally self-disclosed, therefore, in the created world, in man who bears the remnants of the divine image even in his moral rebellion; and in the whole sweep of history that repeatedly falls under God's moral judgment.

Because of human depravity, such general revelation is inadequate in and of itself. Its purpose was not to convey propositional truth but to prepare humanity for what was to follow. It is important to remember that special or redemptive revelation has also occurred.

In redemptive revelation, God discloses himself in the once-for-all saving acts of Judeo-Christian history, particularly in Israel's exodus from Egypt and the consequent founding of the Hebrew nation, and in Jesus' resurrection from the tomb and the consequent founding of the Christian church. And he is disclosed in Jesus Christ the incarnate Logos. He is revealed, moreover, in the prophetic-apostolic Word, in the whole canon of Scripture which objectively communicates in propositional-verbal form the content and meaning of all God's revelation. In Scripture, moreover, God forewarns mankind of his final eschatological disclosure.

---

134 Ibid.
135 Ibid., 2:106-107.
136 Ibid., 2:87.
and reminds the world that the resurrection of Jesus Christ supplies an actual sample of a future resurrection of men everywhere from the dead.137

Henry concludes that general and special revelation are interdependent. The first prepares the way for the second. The second, special revelation, enables man to properly comprehend the first.138

*Thesis Six:* "God's revelation is uniquely personal both in content and form." God is not an impersonal being nor is He an impersonal thing. To the contrary, God is a person and has revealed himself as such to mankind. He has disclosed his name and character.139

In response to those such as Barth and Niebuhr who argue that we cannot have objective knowledge of God, Henry claims that merely because God is ontologically other than man does not preclude objective knowledge of him. To the contrary, God has taken the initiative to provide humanity with objective information about himself. Henry agrees with Barth that "revelation is personal communication," but, contrary to Barth, Henry believes that personal communication need not be noncognitive.140

Only the superimposing of arbitrary views concerning the externally real world is what restricts God's self-revelation merely to internal confrontation. Only alien views concerning the nature and limits of human knowledge are what confine revelation to the inner non-intellective existential surd championed by recent neo-Protestant religious theory.141

God's revelation is uniquely personal and objective when God reveals a name for himself; for a name "not only serves the purpose of identification ... but also serves a descriptive and definitive function in the disclosure of inner nature."142 Thus, God has

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid., 2:90.

139 Ibid., 2:10. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in *God, Revelation and Authority*, 2:151-246.

140 Ibid., 2:151.

141 Ibid., 2:166.

142 Ibid., 2:173. The variety of names used by God to describe himself tells us
personally revealed himself to us in an objective manner that we can understand.

_Thesis Seven:_ "God reveals himself not only universally in the history of the cosmos and of the nations, but also redemptively within this external history in unique saving acts." The most significant historical revelation of God occurred in the development of the Hebrew nation and in the "incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ." 143

Henry contends that "biblical religion neither denies the reality of history, nor is indifferent to it, but rather regards history as a focus for Yahweh's revelation and the realm where Yahweh actively operates as Redeemer and Judge." 144 In fact, "evangelical Christianity insists that certain specific historical acts are integral and indispensable to Judeo-Christian revelation." 145 God has revealed himself in specific acts and in directing the course of human history. However, Henry claims, "Christian certainties are not suspended on the probabilities of historical investigation." Fortunately, "the biblical revelation is epistemically foundational in enabling man in sin to perceive revelational meaning undistorted by his volitional rebellion" and this includes historical revelation. 146 Scripture "declares the direction and goal of history and identifies the great events and their redemptive meaning." 147 God has acted in history and Scripture provides us with an explanation of the significance of such acts.

different things about him that he wants us to know. Henry discusses the many names of God and gives special attention to Elohim, (Almighty One); El Shaddai, (Omnipotent One); Yahweh; Adonai (Lord); and, Jesus (God's Salvation). See Ibid., 2:184-246.

143 Ibid., 2:11. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 2:247-334.

144 Ibid., 2:249.

145 Ibid., 2:311.

146 Ibid., 2:310.

147 Ibid., 2:320. See also 2:330.
Thesis Eight: "The climax of God's special revelation is Jesus of Nazareth, the personal incarnation of God in the flesh; in Jesus Christ the source and content of revelation converge and coincide." Christ is divine revelation in its highest manifestation. In Christ, "the divine source of revelation and the divine content of that revelation converge and coincide." 148

Christ is the central figure in all divine revelation. It is Christ "through whom and for whom God made the universe; likewise he is the sole mediator of redemption through whom he redeems man and the world. It is Christ, moreover, who sustains the creation as an ordered whole and will bring it to its destined finality and consummation." 149 It is through Christ that we know God.

The Almighty manifests himself in the form of the Nazarene who, by falling prey to death exposes the depth of human animosity toward God, and by his resurrection reveals himself to be the unconditionally omnipotent executor of the Father's will and thus discloses in the public arena of cosmic life the secret of his existence. In Jesus of Nazareth we reckon and deal with God; the Godhead is revealed in embodied existence (John 1:14; Col. 1:19). In Christ, moreover, the divine being has been made fully evident; his earthly life and ministry mirror the perfections of divinity. 150

The earthly manifestation of God in Christ is critical. Henry reminds his readers that "Jesus' earthly life and work are therefore of controlling importance; human destiny is predicated on individual decision concerning his historical manifestation and work." 151

The ultimate message of Christ is the gospel. "The New Testament meaning of the term gospel is clear and precise: the gospel is the good news of God's merciful rescue of an otherwise doomed humanity through the mediatorial life and work of Jesus Christ. At its

148 Ibid., 2:11. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 3:9-163.
149 Ibid., 3:16.
150 Ibid., 3:18.
151 Ibid., 3:66.
center is the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, whose sinless life and atoning death supply the ground of salvation for all who repent and believe." 152 Christ is man's salvation.

In addition, Christ came to assert his lordship and kingship. Christ is King and Lord. "The New Testament affirms not only that the risen Christ is the coming King who in the end time restores royal dominion to God, but that he is also the present King whose cosmological relationships extend throughout the whole creation (Phil. 2:10; Col. 2:6) and the exalted and authoritative Lord to whom believers must render service (Rom. 12:1, 11; I Cor. 12:15; Eph. 6:7; Col. 3:23)." 153 Henry notes that "Christ came not only to inaugurate the kingdom of God in the flesh, not only to publish in his resurrection the fact that he will universally vindicate righteousness and finally punish evil, but also to penetrate and permeate every arena of human decision and life with his invincible claims." 154 Christ is not only the central figure in revelation but he is also to be the Lord and King of all earthly matters.

**Thesis Nine:** "The mediating agent in all divine revelation is the Eternal Logos--preexistent, incarnate, and now glorified." 155 Not only is Christ divine revelation incarnate but he is also the agent of all revelation. Christ is the Logos, the Word of God. Henry describes Christ as the "preincarnate, incarnate and now glorified" Logos and the "unique and sole mediator of the revelation of the living God." 156 Thus, "the Logos is

152 Ibid., 3:63.

153 Ibid., 1:14.

154 Ibid., 3:67.

155 Ibid., 2:11-12. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 3:164-247. "The term logos is used biblically to indicate a spoken word, and also the living Word; the New Testament uses the term additionally of the enfleshed Word and also to summarize the theme and content of the major New Testament events, centrally the message of the incarnate Christ." Ibid., 3:177.

156 "As preincarnate, the Logos was the mediating agent in the divine creation of the universe; as incarnate, he was and is the mediating agent of redemption; and as glorified,
revealed both ontologically in Jesus of Nazareth, and epistemologically in conceptual forms" with Christ as the mediator.157

Neo-orthodox theologians accept Christ as the Logos, but they reject Scripture as the Logos. They argue that Christ alone is the Word; God has not spoken and cannot speak otherwise. They claim the Word is known only in a "nonrational personal encounter." Divine revelation is dialectical or paradoxical, it cannot be known as "an object of reason but has its reality in an internal decision of faith." 158 Henry finds this position untenable. He insists the Word of God was incarnate in Christ, but, in addition, the Word of God has been revealed in other times and in other ways with Christ as the mediating agent.159

this same Logos of God is to be the mediating agent of the coming judgment. In brief, the life-giving Logos is the giver of creation life (John 1:3-4), of redemption life (3:16; 5:24-25), and of resurrection life. The Word of God attested in the Johannie prologue, indeed the Logos of the Bible as a whole, is therefore not merely transcendent communication, but Yahweh in action, whether it be in revelation, creation, incarnation, redemption, or judgment." Ibid., 3:203. In another passage, Henry explains more fully. "The Logos of God, perfectly embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, is the executor of all divine disclosure. The divine Logos who became in Jesus Christ a concrete individual existing in the history of man and the world, is and ever was the eternal Word and Truth of God. The preexistent Christ was the revealing agent within the Godhead antecedently to creation; the preincarnate Christ was the revealing agent in the created universe, and also of the Old Testament redemptive disclosure; the incarnate Christ is the embodied revelation of God's essential glory and redemptive grace. All these functions, as attested by the truth of Scripture, the risen and exalted Christ gathers into one, and as the glorified Christ he will be the revealing agent in God's final judgment and consummation of all things. Christ is not merely a special feature within a larger panorama of revelation but, as mediating agent, encompasses the whole revelation of God from eternity past to eternity future. All revelation is mediated by the Logos of God who daily discloses the reality, eternal power and glory of God throughout the created universe." Ibid., 3:206.

157 Ibid., 3:222.

158 Ibid., 3:164-166. "Neo-orthodoxy considered Jesus Christ alone to be the Word or Logos of God, known to be thus solely in dialectical confrontation and internal decision; any objectively given Word of God, whether in a coherent divine revelation in external nature and history or in the propositional affirmations of Scripture, is disowned." Ibid., 3:197.

159 For example, he argues that "while the revelation of the Logos did take place perfectly in Jesus of Nazareth, it nonetheless did not take place there either exclusively or completely." While the Word of God has been revealed in different ways, Christ remains the mediator. Henry writes: "The Logos of God as scripturally identified is personal, intelligible communication centered in the transcendent Christ as the sole mediator of divine
Scripture is the most important example.

Henry believes the recognition of Christ as a mediating agent contributes to the argument for objective and rational revelation. If the logos is something more than personal, i.e. Christ, then subjectivity is replaced with the possibility of objectivity. If something is being revealed, it must be revealed in a way that is understandable. Henry argues that revelation is meant to be "apprehended and cognized" and eventually "appropriated and obeyed." Christ, the mediating agent, guarantees the rationality of the message which creates the possibility of apprehension, the prerequisite to appropriation.160

The logos is our insurance that life has meaning. In fact, Henry contends:

The Logos of supernatural revelation towers as the only effective barricade against the meaninglessness of the world and human life. Christianity affirms that this world is a rational universe, that it is God's world; knowability of the universe is grounded in God's creation of man as a rational creature whose forms of thought correspond to the laws of logic subsisting in the mind of God, as well as to the rational character of the world as God's creation.161

revelation." Ibid., 3:211-212.

160 Ibid., 3:170.

161 Ibid., 3:192. "The Christian doctrine of creation supplies firm guarantees that the forms of human knowing and things-in-themselves are not totally heterogeneous. The dependence of man and nature alike on the transcendent Logos as the ultimate source of all created structures and forms assures an underlying affinity between man and his total environment, and involves us at once in the knowledge of ourselves and of God and other selves. The categories of thought are indeed a priori and not derived from experience, but neither are they simply determinations of the human mind. The transcendent God makes intelligible human experience possible as the sovereign Creator and Preserver of all things. Both the human mind and external reality have their basis of intelligibility in the Logos of God who structures nature and sustains man in the divine image. Reality is knowable because the categories of knowing are applicable to things-in-themselves; human knowledge has ontic significance. Things outside ourselves have an independently real existence, and stand in ontological and epistemic relationship to our cognition and sensory perception on the basis of the intelligible creative activity of the Logos of God. The dependence both of mankind and of the cosmos on the divine Logos vouchsafes not only the necessary character and validity of human knowledge, but its objectivity as well. The possibilities of valid and objective knowledge of God and of the universe lie in these facts, that by creation man bears the divine image rationally and morally, and that the fall of man was not completely destructive of this image, so that even in sin man is proffered revelation objectively communicated by the Creator-Redeemer God." Ibid., 1:393-394.
The logos is "the foundation of all meaning and the personal source and support of the rational, moral and purposive order of created reality." \(^{162}\)

**Thesis Ten:** "God's revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form." Scripture is not "a human interpretation of the deeds of God or an existential inner response to a spiritual confrontation," rather it is the words of God himself conveyed to humanity in terms that are fully understandable by the human mind. God is the creator of the human mind and he communicates to man in a vein that that mind can comprehend. \(^{163}\) Despite the fall, Henry contends, the *imago Dei* survives and communication between God and man remains a real possibility. Man cannot independently know God, but he retains the ability to know God if and when God reveals Himself to man.

Contrary to the claims of modern theology, Henry believes that "God's disclosure is rational and intelligible communication" and that man's mind is fully capable of understanding. \(^{164}\) Many modern theologians such as Barth, Bultmann and Brunner reject this idea of objective rational revelation while maintaining the reality of divine self-disclosure. For them divine self-disclosure becomes an "internal confrontation" that is "existential or paradoxical rather than rational in nature." \(^{165}\) Objective knowledge about God is rejected and only an "inner awareness of forgiveness or of reconciliation"

\(^{162}\) Ibid., 3:195.

\(^{163}\) Ibid., 2:12-13. "God stoops to state his purposes in our language and thought-forms which he first fashioned that we might think his thoughts after him, commune with him and serve him." Ibid., 5:16. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:248-488.

\(^{164}\) Ibid., 3:248.

\(^{165}\) Ibid., 3:249. He is critical of evangelicals who have fallen under the influence of Barth. For example, he points to Donald Bloesch as someone who denies that revelation is propositional in nature. Ibid., 3:475.
These claims are problematic and some contemporary theologians have attempted to overcome the ambiguity by positing revelation as historical in nature. For example, Wolfhart Pannenberg rejected the idea of a merely subjective internal form of revelation in favor of a view that maintains that "the historical events of the Old and New Testament [are] a dynamic revelation of God." But while Pannenberg permits God to act in history, he refuses to acknowledge that we have true knowledge of the meaning of such acts. At present, the meaning of God's revelation lies not in Scripture but in "human reflection and conjecture." Pannenberg believes that "the unity and meaning of all events is to be understood only in the light of the eschaton anticipated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ." We shall know when Christ returns. In the meantime, all knowledge is tentative. Statements about God are "doxological in nature," and do not communicate "valid information." Henry accuses Pannenberg of committing a fatal error.

Pannenberg violates the provisionality which he casts over the theory of knowledge whenever he considers his own theological formulations—including even his theory of cognitive provisionality—to be the preferred explanatory premises under which all else may be confidently subsumed. . . . If the meaning of history cannot be known until the end of history, on what basis does Pannenberg identify the resurrection of Jesus as proleptic of the end?

Nonetheless, both modern views, that of Pannenberg and Barth, reject the notion that "Scripture embodies supernaturally given truths that interpret God's redemptive acts and

166 Ibid., 3:249.
167 Ibid., 3:259.
168 Ibid., 3:262.
169 Ibid., 3:295.
170 Ibid., 3:369.
Henry believes the resistance of Barth and Pannenberg to the idea of objective revelation is the result of the influence of modern philosophical trends. Since "radical secularism presumed to explain nature and history comprehensively by naturalistic categories; the only remaining role for God was therefore restricted to something internal in man." 173

Why did the neo-orthodox revolt against the notion of propositional revelation? Henry adduces two primary reasons. The first relates to modern epistemology and the second to modern linguistic theory.

Their first argument is that "God is absolute Subject, and hence, it is said, cannot be an object of human knowledge." 174 This is a not a scriptural notion, Henry contends, but a product of modern philosophy. Kant speculated that "sense experience alone supplies the content of human knowledge." 175 This postulate excluded knowledge of the supersensible. Furthermore, Kant claimed that "the form of knowledge derives solely from innate forms and categories of reason" supplied by man himself. 176 Hence the forms only apply to sensate objects. If there is a God we can only know him in his relation to us.

Indeed Kant postulates the existence of God based upon the moral nature of man. He detected an "internal logical necessity" for God. 177

Modern theology has adopted this Kantian postulate and claims that "God can be

172 Ibid., 3:251.
173 Ibid., 3:252.
174 Ibid., 3:430.
175 Ibid., 3:432.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
known only as Subject and that only in personal response."\(^{178}\) Neo-orthodox theologians transform Kant's "internal logical necessity" into sporadic divine personal revelation.

Much of this modern theological development stood in witting or unwitting indebtedness to Kantian knowledge-theory, which sharply limited the reality perceptible by theoretical reason. Restriction of the content of knowledge to sensations of the phenomenal world in principle deprives man of cognitive knowledge of metaphysical realities. Divine revelation on this basis can neither be connected with cognitive reason nor can it have external and objective grounding, since Kant's view excludes revelation in nature and history, as well as in an objective scriptural revelation. ... Kant's denial of the universal cognitive validity of revelational knowledge became a feature of the theological movement from Barth through Bultmann. We should note, however, that by denying cognitive knowledge in order to make room for faith, Kant envisioned not what neo-orthodox theologians stress, namely, faith, as a divine gift whereby man trusts the supernatural God, but rather a moral response that issues from man as a rational being.\(^{179}\)

Henry argues, to the contrary, that while God himself is a subject, in his self-revelation, God "gives himself also to be the object of man's knowledge."\(^{180}\) The modern denial of "truth-revelation" in favor of "person-revelation" is ultimately self-defeating as the foundation for revelation of any kind is undermined.\(^{181}\) "The weakness in neo-Protestant theories of revelation stems precisely from this hesitancy to affirm the content of divine disclosure to be cognitive and intelligible."\(^{182}\) The rejection of objectivity inevitably lends itself to relativism and skepticism.

\(^{178}\) Ibid., 3:431. "Kant's postulational theology ... rejects the human possibility of factual knowledge of supernatural reality. His denial of the cognitive status of religious beliefs directly or indirectly influenced a long succession of neo-Protestant thinkers, among them Albrecht Ritschl, Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and Rudolf Bultmann." Ibid., 3:463. It is also important, in this regard, to remember the influence of Kierkegaard. Henry considers Soren Kierkegaard as the "fountain of neo-orthodoxy" due to his emphasis on "the priority of obedience over knowledge." Ibid., 3:277.

\(^{179}\) Ibid., 3:278.

\(^{180}\) Ibid., 3:431.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., 3:433.

\(^{182}\) Ibid., 3:283.
Henry insists our knowledge of God is something more than a subjective necessity. He writes:

The reality of revelation is far more than simply man's own self-consciousness of the world propelled into a conviction of God's objective reality. Were that not the case, theology would be not a science but only an illusion. To be sure, knowledge relationships require a subjective knower. But that man must know subjectively in order to know at all, surely does not mean that he cannot have knowledge outside of and independent of himself. For in that event we would be left not only without knowledge of God but also without knowledge of the world and of other selves.183

The answer to this problem is God. God makes "possible man's knowledge of other selves and of the world, and indeed of himself also, as well as of his Maker."184

The second reason for the neo-orthodox rejection of objective propositional revelation comes from modern linguistic theory. Henry writes: "Sometimes it is contended that since propositions involve the use of language, propositional truth is of necessity culturally conditioned."185 If one accepts that language is empirically based and/or historically or culturally conditioned, as many neo-protestant theologians do, then divine revelation, if it occurs, must occur in some type of noncognitive, irrational, divine encounter. We will not have "objectively valid information about God's nature and ways" but merely an individual subjective experience. This illustrates what Henry considers the decisive difference between evangelicals and the neo-orthodox. Is revelation "rational and objectively true" given in the form of propositions or is it "noncognitively life-transforming" given in a personal manner?186 Henry insists on the former.

Henry contends that the argument regarding the cultural or historical conditioning of

---

183 Ibid., 3:274-275.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid., 3:436.
186 Ibid., 3:455.
language "is self-defeating: if this verdict conveys unconditional truth, it refutes the assertion; if it does not, the assertion need not detain us." 187 Language is far too important to permit sacrificing it to mere cultural conditioning.

Without a system of vocal symbols by which human beings of any social group and culture interact and communicate, neither man's complex knowledge nor control of his environment would be conceivable. Language is a human capacity, and its possession is a necessary presupposition of society and civilization. It is a major basis on which man's mental thought is organized, and a systematic means of expression by which he communicates with others of his own species and transmits his experiences. 188

For Henry, language is a gift of God that "facilitates communion between man and God and communication of the truth." 189 He insists that "language is possible because of man's God-given endowment of rationality, of a priori categories and of innate ideas, all of which precondition his ability to think and speak." 190

The Bible depicts man as specially equipped by God for the express purposes of knowing God's rational-verbal revelation, of communicating with God in praise and prayer, and of discoursing with fellow-men about God and his will. God enabled the first Adam to express his thoughts linguistically. Human language is adequate for theological knowledge and communication because all men are

187 Ibid., 3:436.

188 Ibid., 3:326. Admittedly, other species can communicate symbolically but language is unique. Henry writes: "What distinguishes human speech and language is the objective meaning that man attaches to symbols or words, and his logical ordering of the units of linguistic communication. Human beings correlate language with abstract thought, and they combine sounds as units to convey complex ideas and information. While the watchdog can warn of intruders, he cannot report that two armed men and a woman who jimmed a door are now escaping with important papers and valuable antiques. Parrots and myna birds can be taught to repeat two sentences--perhaps even a major and minor premise of simple syllogism--but they will never logically formulate the conclusion. There is a structural characteristic of an empirical nature that separates animal communication from human language, viz., syntax and semantic arbitrariness. Language is a system of linguistic units having an orderly representation and arrangement. These units of language are conventional; no particular identity prevails between them and what they publicly symbolize." Ibid., 3:331. "Words are never only symbols; they combine to express ideas, and ideas in turn have civilization-impacting significance." 4:492.

189 Ibid., 3:387.

190 Ibid., 3:389.
We can trust the dependability of human language to the extent that it adheres to logic. "Logic is indispensable to human thought and to human speech. Without the law of contradiction no significant speech is possible; even attempts to refute the law of contradiction would have to be formulated in intelligible language that presupposes it." 192

While propositional revelation means that language can and does effectively convey the will of God to humanity, it does not mean that only one literary form is used. Henry explains:

By its emphasis that divine revelation is propositional, Christian theology in no way denies that the Bible conveys its message in many literary forms such as letters, poetry and parable, prophecy and history. What it stresses, rather, is that the truth conveyed by God through these various forms has conceptual adequacy, and that in all cases the literary teaching is part of a divinely inspired message that conveys the truth of divine revelation. Propositional disclosure is not limited to nor does it require only one particular literary genre. And of course the expression of truth in other forms than the customary prose does not preclude expressing that truth in declarative propositions. 193

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid., 3:390. "The biblical view of language therefore includes several presuppositions. Language has a cognitive function; it is serviceable as a means of God's revelation to man and of man's communion with God; it can and does convey an informed interpretation of divine reality; it is an instrument for expressing God's disclosure of his nature and will; intellectual and moral maturity requires familiarity with scripturally given propositions. Religious language in the Bible, as elsewhere, has many functions, but its basic function is cognitive: the purpose of religious language is to express and interpret the nature of ultimate reality, and to invite the human race to share in the privileges of a personal relationship with God and to warn of the costly and eternal consequences of spiritual neglect." Ibid., 3:402.

193 Ibid., 3:463. Some might argue that the conventional nature of language prevents it from communicating eternal truths. Henry argues that if one holds that "because of their conventional or symbolic nature, words can convey no literal truth, then their thesis is self-refuting, since if no literal truth can be conveyed because words are symbolic, it is impossible to communicate even this literal truth about the nature of truth. Nonsymbolic communication is humanly impossible; without words or signs others are unsure of our meaning. If all we mean by language as being symbolic is that all words are symbolic, then religious language is no more threatened than any other language; if literal truth can be conveyed anywhere, it can be conveyed by religious language as readily as by language about nonreligious reality; if literal truth is precluded because religious language is symbolic, then it is in principle precluded likewise in other realms of discourse." For Henry, "the prime issue is therefore not whether human concepts and words are human,
The possibility of truth revealed in propositional form is based upon Henry's view of God.

An almighty and sovereign God can and does communicate to the human race in understandable linguistic forms.

If God is the sovereign, rational God, and if his incarnate Son is the Logos of God, and if God desires to communicate indispensable information, than no modern theory of linguistics can be considered a roadblock. The reason is twofold: first, the truth of revelation implies its own view of language and its limits; second, the secular contemporary theories of language are inconsistent and self-refuting.194

What then, in conclusion, does Henry claim about propositional revelation?

Claiming to speak for most evangelicals, he says:

We mean by propositional revelation that God supernaturally communicated his revelation to chosen spokesmen in the express form of cognitive truths, and that the inspired prophetic-apostolic proclamation reliably articulates these truths in sentences that are not internally contradictory. . . . The inspired Scriptures contain a body of divinely given information actually expressed or capable of being expressed in propositions. In brief, the Bible is a propositional revelation of the unchanging truth of God.195

He defines revelation as

that activity of the supernatural God whereby he communicates information essential for man's present and future destiny. In revelation God, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, shares his thoughts with man; in this self-disclosure God unveils his very own mind; he communicates not only the truth about himself and his intentions, but also that concerning man's present plight and future prospects. . . . However much or little it may be, the information that God discloses is supernatural information, knowledge otherwise unavailable to man. Precisely for this reason divine revelation is the most important truth that man can ever know.196

but whether--since man was made in God's image and God addresses man in revelation--our concepts and words can convey reliable information about God and his will."

Furthermore, Scripture teaches that "God by creation fashioned man for conceptual-verbal knowledge of himself. . . . Man's sinful rebellion against God unquestionably clouds and frustrates this knowledge. But the Bible insists nonetheless that man even in sin cannot escape answerability to God for sure knowledge of his Maker and Lord." Ibid., 4:105-111.

194 Ibid., 3:289.

195 Ibid., 3:457.

196 Ibid.
Henry goes on to insist that humanity, even in a fallen state, can know and understand this revelation of God.

All significant human experience is cast in rational and moral form. The fall of man does not vitiate the rationality of knowledge, but rather impairs the human effort to know. Man is subject to error and has a distorted apprehension of truth and goodness. But what man knows, whether in the sphere of general revelation or of special revelation, he knows within the bounds of the laws of consistency and contradiction or he does not have genuine knowledge. . . . The divine image in man did not, in the fall, suffer to such an extent that man's ratio is now unable on the basis of general and special revelation to receive conceptual knowledge of the supernatural world; rather, divine revelation is addressed to man as a totality both in its general and special forms, and hence with a view to the rational as well as the volitional and emotive aspects of his existence.197

Thesis Eleven: "The Bible is the reservoir and conduit of divine truth." Scripture is central to Christianity. It is a form of special revelation that provides humanity with an "authoritative written record and interpretation of God's revelatory deeds" and is a "source of reliable objective knowledge concerning God's nature and ways."198 Scripture is vital. Henry argues:

Without the Scriptures all knowledge of God is sullied by man's religious experience as sinner. God speaks to us today by the Scriptures; they are the trustworthy and adequate bearer of His revelation. They are . . . fuller and more explicit than revelation in its general form. The Bible is indispensable for fallen man. . . . It is the final factor in presenting God's redemptive activity as a unified and comprehensive whole, an indispensable mode of revelation through which the redemptive events become coherent. . . . The inscripturation of special revelation is the objective culmination, therefore, of God's redemptive disclosure in special historical events and in propositions communicated to chosen prophets and apostles.199


Modernity has revolted against practically all forms of authority. In fact, it was the problem of authority that inspired Henry to undertake the project of producing *God, Revelation and Authority*. Henry decries the fact that modernity is "skeptical of all transcendent authority." This rejection stems from a belief that "finalities and objective truth simply do not exist." Secularism "repudiates divine absolutes, revealed truth, scriptural commandments, fixed principles and supernatural purpose as obstacles to individual self-fulfillment and personal creativity." Modernity has made everything historically relative. Humanity sees itself as "living on a planet devoid of any intrinsic plan and purpose, and supposedly born of a cosmic accident." Mankind must be free to posit values. All external authority is threatening.

Henry reminds us that Christianity is authoritarian by nature. "God commands and has the right to be obeyed, and the power also to punish the disobedient and reward the faithful." These commands are not simply to be understood but to be obeyed. Thus, "human beings are commanded by him not only to love the truth but also to do it (John 3:21; 1 John 1:6); knowledge is not merely an intellectual concern but involves ethical obligation as well." Since the fall, humanity has been impenitent. But God, in his grace, has presented humanity with an authoritative account of the creation and fall and holds out a ray of hope. That account can be found in Scripture in which God "equips sinful rebels with valid information about the transcendent realm, and discloses the otherwise hidden possibility of enduring personal reconciliation with God." Fallen humanity must accept and appropriate "this divinely inspired teaching."

---


201 Ibid., 4:10-11.

202 Ibid., 4:15-16.

203 Ibid.
Modern theology is skeptical regarding evangelical claims for the Bible because of biblical criticism. Henry, however, tends to discount biblical criticism. Its tendency is to reject portions or even the totality of Scripture by questioning the historical factuality, or historical and literary development of some theory. Henry believes that most such theories are the result of alien presuppositions and that even those change frequently when new evidence suggests that the theories are in error. Henry does not mind a careful historical and literary study of the Bible, but he questions the intentions of those who do so with a predisposition to skepticism. Much of their work, Henry feels, is "characterized as much by eisegesis as much as by exegesis." Henry responds by insisting that "the first claim to be made for Scripture is not its inerrancy nor even its inspiration, but its authority." Many neo-protestant theologians, while accepting many of the conclusions of biblical criticism, still champion biblical authority. They argue that Scripture is "essentially a human product" but is authoritative "in the manner in which it operates existentially in the life of the believing community." In other words, it is authoritative, not because it is inspired but because it is inspiring. For Barth, Scripture becomes "a fallible witness through which God in Christ personally encounters the trusting reader or hearer." Scripture is merely functional. This view, Henry warns, must be rejected.

The current effort to salvage a special role for "scriptural authority" in a merely functional sense must be recognized for what it is: the newest phase in a continuing antiscryptural revolt against divine authority. It repudiates the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the scriptural writings, repudiates the contingent divine authority of the apostles in their doctrinal witness to such inspiration, and repudiates the objective truth of the inspired teaching of Scripture.

204 Ibid., 4:83.
205 Ibid., 4:27.
206 Ibid., 4:54, 68.
207 Ibid., 4:84.
208 Ibid., 4:97.
To the contrary, Henry asserts:

In Scripture we are dealing with what the Holy Spirit tells and foretells, with divinely inspired data, with what is known by special revelation, with what the Spirit communicates in a definitive way. God is the authority who renders Scripture authoritative; inspiration is the special phenomenon that imparts this character of divine authority to the writings and logically necessitates fulfillment of written prophecies. 209

Thesis Twelve "The Holy Spirit superintends the communication of divine revelation, first, by inspiring the prophetic-apostolic writings, and second, by illuminating and interpreting the scripturally given Word of God." The Holy Spirit first inspired the writers of Scripture by superintending "the divinely chosen prophetic-apostolic recipients of the Word of God in their communication of the divine message to others." 210 Thus, the original copies of Scripture are error-free, inerrant. This does not mean that Scripture is the product of "divine dictation." Rather the divine inspiration of Scripture refers to "a supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon divinely chosen men in consequence of which their writings become trustworthy and authoritative." 211 Scripture represents a unique "confluence of the divine and human." 212 Admittedly Scripture reflects the "psychological, biographical and even sociohistorical differences" of the writers; nonetheless, it maintains its status as divinely inspired and therefore authoritative. 213

209 Ibid., 4:75.

210 Ibid., 2:13. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 4:129-493.

211 Henry, "Bible, Inspiration," 145. See also "Divine Revelation and the Bible," 275. "Inspiration is a supernatural influence upon divinely chosen prophets and apostles whereby the Spirit of God assures the truth and trustworthiness of their oral and written proclamations." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:129. Henry denies that Scripture is a product of divine dictation. Ibid., 4:138.

212 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:142.

213 Ibid., 4:148.
doctrinal inspiration has more to do with the writings than with the writer. Henry believes that "inspiration is primarily a statement about God's relationship to Scripture, and only secondarily about the relationship of God to the writers." The Holy Spirit continues his work "in the activity of illumination whereby the readers and hearers of the scriptural Word grasp the content of revelation."

Henry argues that many neo-orthodox theologians reject the idea of divinely inspired authorship, opting instead for the belief that Scripture becomes the Word of God, as opposed to being the Word of God. This occurs "as the reader hears and submits to the divine Spirit speaking through the writings." In addition to the influence of Kantian epistemology, many neo-orthodox theologians have been influenced by the historical-critical method of biblical criticism. Adherence to this hermeneutical approach leads theologians such as Emil Brunner to say that the Bible "is full of errors, contradictions, erroneous opinions, concerning all kinds of human, natural, historical situations." The neo-orthodox argue, however, the existence of errors in the text is unimportant. Scripture is not divine revelation and we should not expect more of it than we do any other human text. Regardless of the errancy of the text, God may and does speak to people through the writings. Thus, Scripture is important but it is not divine revelation.

---

214 Ibid., 4:143.

215 Ibid., 2:13-15. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 3:129-493.

216 Ibid., 4:136.

217 There are three prongs of higher criticism "(a) detecting the presence of underlying literary sources in a word; (b) identifying the literary types that make up the composition; and (c) conjecturing on matters of authorship and date." R. K. Harrison, "Higher Criticism," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 511.

218 Quoted in Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:222.
Henry is convinced that this hermeneutical approach creates significant problems and leads to skepticism. Henry asks rhetorically: "In an errant text, how do we tell essential truth from inessential truth, and all the more from inessential error?" Furthermore, "if geographical and historical details are untrue, why should the events or doctrines correlated with them be true?" If we assume error in parts of Scripture, by what authority do we distinguish the true from the false?

The methods of higher criticism, as accepted by many modern theologians, need not lead to the conclusions that are often accepted in scholarly circles. In fact, Henry argues, the attitude the scholar takes with him when studying Scripture often predetermines the conclusions he reaches.

An interpreter will face difficult passages on either of two governing presuppositions. If one accepts the biblical teaching of plenary inspiration with its implicature of pervasive reliability, then he will probe all possibilities of reconciliation, even to the point of patiently anticipating further light from the study of archaeology or linguistics. If he does not accept plenary inspiration, he will likely consider every biblical affirmation to be questionable unless independently verified. If phenomena alone are considered determinative of the biblical doctrine of inspiration, then except for the revelational assurances of pervasive divine inspiration of the writings, both the surface textual difficulties and the possibility of human error become decisive. Henry is quick to distinguish between inerrant and infallible. "By inerrancy we mean without error; by infallibility, not prone to err." Henry insists that inerrancy only applies to the original monographs and holds true because of divine inspiration. Infallibility is the characteristic of the copies we possess today. "One may 'trust and believe' the copies because, although they are subject to incidental verbal variation and linguistic deviation, they faithfully convey the propositional truth of the original." Thus, the copies

219 Ibid., 4:171.
220 Ibid., 4:178.
221 Ibid., 4:191.
222 Ibid., 4:220. Inerrancy does not imply the following:
"reliably and authoritatively communicate the specially revealed truth and purposes of God to mankind." Henry concludes:

In summary, it may be said that although the copies are not inerrant, they are nonetheless infallible, and that they possess this quality of infallibility because of their perpetuation of the truth of the inerrant autographs. This acknowledgement of error in copies and translations does not require the insistence on error in the text of Scripture per se, nor is there anything logically contradictory or incredible about the view that the sovereign God inspired inerrant autographs. While the content of the autographs was subsequently transmitted or translated with less than perfection, the truth-content of the originals remains uncompromised. The distinction between inerrancy and infallibility follows necessarily from the insistence on the divine

---

1. "Inerrancy does not imply that modern technological precision in reporting statistics and measurements, that conformity to modern historiographic method in reporting genealogies and other historical data, or that conformity to modern scientific method in reporting cosmological matters, can be expected from biblical writers."

2. "Inerrancy does not imply that only nonmetaphorical or nonsymbolic language can convey religious truth. Scripture employs a wide range of figurative language and many literary forms, such as parable, poetry and proverb. All are capable of serving appropriately as vehicles to communicate truth."

3. "Inerrancy does not imply that verbal exactitude is required in New Testament quotation and use of Old Testament passages."

4. "Inerrancy does not imply that personal faith in Christ is dispensable since evangelicals have an inerrant book they can trust. . . . The Written Word itself demands personal faith in Christ."

5. "Scriptural inerrancy does not imply that evangelical orthodoxy follows as a necessary consequence of accepting this doctrine."

Inerrancy does imply the following:

1. "Verbal inerrancy implies that truth attaches not only to the theological and ethical teaching of the Bible, but also to historical and scientific matters insofar as they are part of the express message of the inspired writings."

2. "Verbal inerrancy implies that God's truth inheres in the very words of Scripture, that is, in the propositions or sentences of the Bible, and not merely in the concepts and thoughts of the writers."

3. "Verbal inerrancy implies that the original writings or prophetic-apostolic autographs alone are error-free." In a jocular fashion he rebuts a frequent criticism of this proposition. "The familiar rejoinder that no one can exhibit the errorless autographs need not discomfit evangelicals in their claims about the inerrant originals. The critics similarly can furnish none of the errant originals that they so eagerly postulate."

4. "Verbal inerrancy of the autographs implies that evangelicals must not attach finality to contemporary versions or translations, least of all to mere paraphrases, but must earnestly pursue and honor the best text." Ibid., 4:201-210.

223 Ibid., 4:246.
inspiration of chosen writers over against even the most careful labors of devout copyists who did not share that special superintendence. For all that, the copies and the faithful translations of the copies give us a propositionally trustworthy statement of God's truth, and the copies are to be honored as the Word of God written in view of their infallibility. The infallible copies unfailingly direct mankind to the redemptive grace of God and serve ongoingly as the conceptual framework whereby the Spirit of God convicts human beings of sin and enables them to share in salvific mercy.  

Henry believes that inerrancy is the historic stance of orthodox Christianity.  

Today, the position has lost its popularity except in limited circles. Evangelicalism is one such circle. "Most evangelicals insist," Henry reminds his readers, "not that the Bible explicitly teaches inerrancy, but that inerrancy in logically implicit in and logically inferred from its doctrine of divine inspiration." The biblical passage referred to most frequently is 2 Timothy 3:16. Nonetheless, Henry admits that there are a few glaring discrepancies in the text that we have today.  

The copies are only as inerrant as the copyists and that, of course, implies the possibility of mistakes even in the course of uncompromised devotion. Alterations in the copies of the biblical texts are of two kinds, intentional and unintentional. Unintentional alterations would include such things as skipped or duplicated words, misspellings, use of a wrong word due to a copyists' misunderstanding of dictation, faulty judgment or memory... Intentional changes might be the inclusion of grammatical or linguistic updating, and in some texts even elimination of an apparent incongruity or an attempted harmonization of passages.  

The possibility and probability of error need not destroy one's commitment to the

---

224 Ibid., 4:253.

225 "Inerrancy is the evangelical heritage, the historical commitment of the Christian church." Ibid., 3:367.

226 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)

227 For example, "the most troublesome discrepancies occur not in passages where the biblical text is in doubt, but rather where the text is not in question. We read in Genesis 50:4-13, for example, that Abraham bought a burial place in Hebron and in Acts 7:16 that he bought it in Shechem." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:232.

228 Ibid., 4:235.
text. To the contrary, "the possibility of harmonizing apparently contradictory passages has time and again been demonstrated by evangelical scholars." Furthermore, Henry argues that the range of error is far less than is frequently proposed. He points out that the errors made by higher critics far outnumber the actual errors in Scripture. Henry finds no evidence that any scribal error has jeopardized "any doctrinal teaching or other essential biblical teaching."

Henry implores evangelical scholars to attend to problem passages and not put their heads in the sand. The methods of the higher critics can be useful when rightfully employed. Henry does not reject all forms of biblical criticism outright but he does reject its abuse by "those who manipulate the historical-critical method on antimiraculous prejudices." Thus, he does not dismiss textual criticism as an illegitimate enterprise;

229 Ibid., 4:174.

230 Ibid., 4:358. For example, for many years higher critics insisted that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch. Henry quotes Eric Voegelin on the consequences of this assumption. "(1) The disappearance of Moses as the author of the Pentateuch entailed the disappearance of the meaning of the Bible narrative in its final form. (2) What was found in its place turned out to be not worth finding, measured by the treasure of meaning that had always been sensed in the narratives but now escaped the critics." Ibid., 4:458. Henry notes that recent archaeological finds have revealed otherwise. Writings from the time of Moses have been discovered. In other words, further research has once again proven the critics wrong. Henry points out that "archaeological investigation and linguistic discoveries . . . have canceled many of the sensational charges of error made by negative critics of the Bible." Ibid., 4:356.

231 Ibid., 4:387. "In summary, evangelical theology properly affirms that:

1. Historical criticism is not inappropriate to, but bears relevantly on, Christian concerns.
2. Historical criticism is never philosophically or theologically neutral.
3. Historical criticism is unable to deal with questions concerning the supernatural and miraculous.
4. Historical criticism is as relevant to miracles, insofar as they are historical, as to nonmiraculous historical events.
5. Historical criticism cannot demonstrably prove or disprove the factuality of either a biblical or a nonbiblical historical event.
6. To assume the unreliability of biblical historical testimony--or of Xenophon's *Anabasis* or Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*--in order to believe only what is independently or externally confirmed, unjustifiably discounts the primary sources.
indeed, it can contribute to the recovery of the original text.\textsuperscript{232}

In superintending the writing of Scripture, the Holy Spirit was acting as the source of inspiration. Today, the Holy Spirit is still active but in terms of illumination, not in the act of inspiring man to knowledge of new truths.\textsuperscript{233} The illumination that humanity receives is illumination of Scripture; it is not the illumination of the individual. Henry accuses Barth of confusing illumination and inspiration and it leads to his emphasis on the direct inspiration of the individual in which Scripture becomes the Word of God.\textsuperscript{234} Henry's understanding is that inspiration and illumination are two separate phenomena. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture and he illumines humanity today when we read the Scripture.

\textit{Thesis Thirteen}: "As bestower of spiritual life the Holy Spirit enables individuals to appropriate God's revelation savingly, and thereby attests the redemptive power of the revealed truth of God in the personal experience of reborn sinners."\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{235}} The principal purpose of revelation is redemption. God revealed himself and his will to humanity as an

---

7. Discrimination of biblical events as either historically probable or improbable is not unrelated to the metaphysical assumptions with which a historian approaches the data.

8. A historian's subjective reversal of judgment concerning the probability or improbability of an event's occurrence does not alter the objective factuality or nonfactuality of the event.

9. Although the historian properly stresses historical method, he is not as a person exempt from claims concerning supernatural revelation and miraculous redemptive history, for the historical method is not man's only source of truth.

10. Biblical events acquire their meaning from the divinely inspired Scriptures; since there could be no meaning of events without the events, the inspired record carries its own intrinsic testimony to the factuality of those events." Ibid., 4:403.

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 4:243.

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 4:258-259.

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 4:266.

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 2:15. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in \textit{God, Revelation and Authority}, 3:494-541.
act of love and grace for the express purpose of delivering "doomed sinners from the
penalty and guilt and power--and ultimately from the very presence-- of sin, and to restore
the penitent to vital fellowship with himself and to righteousness." The life, death and
resurrection of Christ was intended to provide fallen man with a means of salvation.

The need for revelation was not due to a shortcoming of God. To the contrary, it
resulted from man's rejection of God. Humanity was created by God in his own image.
Following the creation, humanity recognized the sovereignty of God and the relationship of
Creator to creature was not estranged. However, the fall has indelibly shattered the image
of God in man and has resulted in estrangement. Henry says: "No longer does the human
race bear the divine image in an unbroken way; no longer does man give himself to truth
and right and love for neighbor; instead, man seeks his own selfish will at the expense of
others and in detriment to the earth and its creatures over which he was to rule in
righteousness." Given the fallen condition of man and the resulting depravity, how can man know
and pursue that which is true and right? Henry believes that "the Holy Spirit is the personal
divine power who by regeneration and sanctification conforms believers to the image of
Christ." Earthly man does not become perfect. Nonetheless, Henry is convinced
Scripture teaches us that

the Spirit shapes a new mindset for those who were formerly hostile to God, (Rom.
8:5-7), a mindset that prizes God's truth and stimulates wholehearted obedience to
his will. The Spirit, moreover, nurtures a new and godly life and provides the
dynamic for defying sin and its temptations. . . . The life-giving Spirit by whom
God raised Jesus from the dead is already active in Christians, liberating them, as
they appropriate his presence and power, from the moral inabilities of their sinful
past and bringing them forward toward a future eschatological defeat of the present

236 Ibid., 4:495.

237 Ibid., 4:497-498.

238 Ibid., 2:15. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God,
Revelation and Authority, 3:494-541.
Apart from this divine dynamic, humanity is destined to sin and fail to live up to the standards of truth, justice, and righteousness. "The biblical view is that sin hinders the effort of natural man, unenlightened by divine revelation and untransformed by divine redemption, to advance truth and the good. The biblical call for a new selfhood asks for nothing less than crucifixion of man's unregenerate nature and birth of a new nature by a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit." 240

Thesis Fourteen: "The church approximates the kingdom of God in miniature; as such she is to mirror to each successive generation the power and joy of the appropriated realities of divine revelation." The church is composed of the redeemed; those among humankind who have accepted the salvation proffered to them by God. They have a corporate responsibility to be a witness to the world for God. 241 As Henry says: "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." 242

It is certain that Christ, in an exercise of divine power, will return and "subdue the forces of evil" and "establish the great age of peace and righteousness." In the meantime, the Church cannot passively sit on the sidelines and await the victorious return of Christ. The church is to act in God's behalf even now. Henry insists that

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

239 Ibid., 4:501.

240 Ibid., 4:519. See also, Christian Personal Ethics, chap. 16.

241 Ibid., 2:16. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God, Revelation and Authority, 3:542-592.

242 Ibid., 4:542.
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.\footnote{243}

This world is to be evangelized not ignored. Henry argues that "the Christian should
know himself by spiritual birthright to be in the fallen world as a member of the already
existing 'new community' which is not only called 'out of the world' but also dispersed
through it as 'salt' and 'light.'"\footnote{244} As "salt" and "light" of the world, the church should
serve as a witness to unregenerate man. By example, the church should be the evidence
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 oppressions of fellow-
humans and their despair of survival."\footnote{245}

Thesis Fifteen: "The self-manifesting God will unveil his glory in a crowning
revelation of power and judgment; in this disclosure at the consummation of the ages, God
will vindicate righteousness and justice, finally subdue and subordinate evil, and bring into
being a new heaven and earth." Scripture teaches clearly that history is moving towards a
climactic end. At that time, there will be a "final eschatological judgment of the
unrepentant."\footnote{246} This end does not mean extinction; rather it means "an end of spiritual
decision making and the sealing of human destiny on the basis of this life's choices."\footnote{247}
The repentant will be escorted "into the eternal presence of the Lord of glory." At that time
many of the mysteries of God and reality will be unveiled. As Henry writes: "There, face
to face, our heavenly Father will unveil intimacies of love and knowledge hitherto

\footnote{243}{Ibid., 4:545-546.}
\footnote{244}{Ibid., 4:553.}
\footnote{245}{Ibid.}
\footnote{246}{Ibid., 2:16. A more complete discussion of this thesis can be found in God,
Revelation and Authority, 4:593-614.}
\footnote{247}{Ibid., 4:610.}
unknown, and reserved for those who love him."248

**SUMMARY**

Henry has very clear notions about reason, revelation and theology. In many respects his thought is Augustinian. The starting point for all knowledge is God. "God is himself the source of all knowledge."249 In his divine revelation, God has freely chosen to reveal himself to humanity. God has revealed truth and knowledge that is essential for the salvation of individuals and for our earthly existence. This divine revelation does not answer all questions about God and reality, but the answers that are given are true and reliable. We can rely upon this truth because it comes from God through Christ. The time and manner of God's revelation has been chosen by God for reasons unbeknownst to us. Nonetheless, revelation has been conveyed in a way that we can rationally comprehend and understand.

Our primary source of divine revelation is Scripture. For in Scripture, Christ, the Logos, has spoken, through the Holy Spirit, in an intelligible and meaningful way that has been preserved infallibly through the ages. Man alone, in his fallen nature, is unable to appropriate this truth to himself, but the grace of God has enabled humanity to appropriate truth by the Holy Spirit.

Until God’s final revelation of himself at the end of the ages, the Redeemed have a charge to exhibit the truth to the world through word and deed. Theologians are to "exposit and elucidate the content of Scripture" and "confront alternative explanations of reality." Christians, both individually and collectively, are to reflect "the power and joy of the appropriated realities of divine revelation." How might Christians do this politically? Henry's answer will be explored in the following chapters.

---

248 Ibid., 4:614.

249 Ibid., 3:275.
CHAPTER FOUR

TWENTIETH CENTURY CHRISTIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Henry has reviewed twentieth century Christian political engagement and is critical of what has transpired over the last several decades. In particular, he rejects the liberal social gospel at the turn of the century; the social isolation of the fundamentalists; neo-orthodoxy of the 1930s and 1940s; and the theologies of liberation and revolution of the 1970s. Each view, Henry believes, has crippling liabilities and falls short of the correct biblical perspective. This chapter will review his critique of each of these important Christian political movements.

Prior to an investigation of the liberal social gospel and its offspring, neo-orthodoxy, it is useful to comment briefly about Henry's view regarding the impact of philosophical trends on the modern theological view of revelation. In this regard, according to Henry, Hegel and Kant were extremely important figures. The philosophical teachings of these great German thinkers contributed to the decline of belief in scriptural divine revelation as a special once-for-all explication of the will of God. When revelation loses its elevated status, Henry contends, the authority for specific Christian contributions to the search for social order is undermined. For supporters of Hegelian philosophy, revelation becomes an ongoing activity while for adherents of Kant, the impossibility of knowledge of the supernatural depreciates revelation altogether. Henry writes:

The theologians who were influenced most by Hegel obscured Biblical once-for-all revelation; for them, the universal movement of thought provided the most significant disclosure of the Absolute. Those influenced by Kant repudiated it, contending that the categories of thought do not extend to the supernatural; consequently, they faced the problem of overcoming agnosticism about the existence of the religious object. On both approaches, however, whether due to a
pantheizing divine immanence or to the supposed impossibility of metaphysical knowledge, revelation came to be simply another term for human insight and discovery.\(^1\)

It is the depreciation of revelation due to the influence of German philosophy that Henry believes underlies the inadequacy of twentieth century Christian theology. Furthermore, Christian political thought loses a solid grounding when Scripture is undermined. The political claims of theologians are no longer grounded in Scripture and, Henry claims, the results are predictably dire.

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

The first significant twentieth century statement of a Christian social ethic came in the form of the liberal social gospel. Throughout the nineteenth century, theologians were attempting to remake Christianity in light of the philosophical challenges of Hegel and Kant. The most influential theologians at this time, according to Henry, were three prominent Germans: Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), whom Henry identifies as the founder of modern theological liberalism; Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889); and, Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923).\(^2\) These powerful scholars began to redefine Christianity in modern terms. They stressed "divine immanence, which annulled the distinction between nature and the supernatural," "evolutionary development as God's method," and "the higher critical view of the Scriptures."\(^3\)

Liberalism had the scholarship and genius to restate Christianity definitively in modern categories. Biblical theology was being "remade" in terms of the modern mind. The determinative principles, . . . were those of immanent and evolutionary philosophy, with their rejection of special revelation, miracle, the unique deity of Christ, and a divinely provided redemption, or, in a summary word, the trustworthiness of the Bible.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Carl F. H. Henry, *Fifty Years of Protestant Theology* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 1950), 16.

\(^2\) Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:218.

\(^3\) Henry, *Fifty Years*, 23.

\(^4\) Ibid., 33.
Henry believes that liberalism became so enraptured with modern philosophy that it eventually lost its Christian identity. He argues that "liberalism offered a Christianity without atonement, without Christ's deity, without the triune God, without heaven and hell--indeed a 'Christianity' without anything distinctively Christian."5 Liberalism failed to maintain its Christian character primarily, according to Henry, because of its rejection of scriptural divine revelation. He insists that "liberalism lost its way when it lost the Bible."6 It lost the Bible because of its reliance on modern epistemological theory, especially Kant. Henry writes: "Protestant liberalism . . . had dismissed miracle and the supernatural as unjustifiable beliefs because unverifiable by [the] scientific method. Rejecting the distinction between the natural and the supernatural meant declaring large segments of the Bible to be unbelievable."7 If the Bible was not believable in all respects, then there was little reason to rely upon it for guidance in political and social matters. As a result, the liberal political perspective was only vaguely derived from Scripture.

The social ethic which emerged out of Protestant liberalism, frequently called the social gospel, placed an emphasis on direct political action. The movement was influenced primarily by Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918).8 It was a Canadian, British and

5 Ibid., 93.
6 Ibid., 95.
7 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:253-254.
8 Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist minister in New York City and later a professor of Church history, wrote Christianity and the Social Crisis (1907), Christianizing the Social Order (1912), and A Theology for the Social Gospel (1917). For more information, see Charles H. Lippy, "Social Christianity," Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience, eds. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 2:920. Rauschenbusch had stressed the importance of both individual regeneration and social involvement. Unfortunately, many of his followers forgot the former and focused strictly on social action. Henry writes: "Despite his preliminary insistence on personal spiritual regeneration, therefore, the 'social gospel' viewed political action as a means not simply of promoting and preserving justice, but of actually transforming society. This social emphasis of Rauschenbusch's thought became characteristic of Protestant liberalism." Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 109-
American protestant movement "committed to the development of a social order grounded in principles believed to be those taught by Jesus." The movement focused almost exclusively on societal evils. One scholar describes the movement as follows:

The Social Gospel movement was an attempt by numerous and varied preachers, theologians, and concerned laymen to emphasize the prophetic and social justice aspects of Christianity. They specifically sought to respond to conditions brought about by the rise of industrial capitalism, such as unhealthy and crowded urban housing, exploitation of children as laborers, corruption of political processes, and growing class segregation, by emphasizing the concept of social, rather than simply individual, sins and by seeking appropriate reforms.

Participants in the movement described themselves as follows:

The social gospel is the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. It is the old gospel of peace on earth among men of good will. It is the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven, a divinely ordered society, to be realized on earth. It is the application of Christ's Golden Rule and Law of love to all the business and affairs of life. It is the glad tidings of peace and purity and plenty.

Henry believes that the social gospel was based upon a truncated scriptural message. Utilizing the scientific methodologies of higher criticism, liberal social gospel theologians stripped away most of Scripture and reduced the biblical message to the "simple affirmation of 'the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man' realized in the teachings of Jesus about the kingdom of God." They simply refused to accept the entire traditional Scripture as authoritative. Thus, they needed to look elsewhere to sketch out the social and political ramifications of the one simple message that they were willing to accept as divinely


This truncation of Scripture led to the reconstruction and redefinition of several biblical doctrines. For example, the incarnation took on new meaning. Rather than referring solely to the appearance of Christ, the son of God, on earth, it began to refer to "the potential within all humanity for love of God and love of one's fellow human being." Such potential was first realized and exhibited by Christ. Christ showed us the "latent perfectibility of humankind." We should emulate Christ.

Such a view led to an emphasis on the kingdom of God as an earthly possibility. Granted it would come about gradually, but "what was vital to Rauschenbusch and those who adopted his views was the conviction that humanity had the skills and knowledge to Christianize the social order." The resulting political perspective was "optimistic" in a "secular rather than sacred sense."

Henry argues that the social gospel distorted the Christian message and redefined the role of the political enterprise in a nonbiblical fashion. Politics was to provide solutions to problems that Henry believes it was never intended to address. Preservation of the social order was no longer the goal of politics. Social transformation, a goal that Henry feels politics is ill-equipped to achieve, became the focus. Henry says:

Thus dynamisms originally intended to preserve social order were assigned the additional expectation of transforming the social order, and their wholly proper and indispensable role was distorted. Reliance on social legislation as a moral dynamic was now promoted at the expense of spiritual alternatives, and in contrast with legislation the latter were disregarded as inferior methods of securing social objectives. . . . In the long run, this attachment of excessive expectations to the

13 Ibid., 2:926-927.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

preserving dynamisms could only lead to disillusionment, and to a subsequent distrust of their adequacy not only for social regeneration (for which they never were intended) but even for preservation of social order (in which they have an essential role.)

This view, Henry observes, lacked an important component of biblical teaching. It failed to emphasize the fallen nature of humanity and the resulting despair apart from divine intervention.

The pessimistic note in revealed religion—the note of man's sin and the fall, of condemnation and judgment, of the need of supernatural regeneration and redemption—was suppressed. And the optimistic note no longer was attached to a supernatural God intervening redemptively in fallen history, and at last inaugurating a spiritual Kingdom of righteousness and peace by the personal return of Jesus Christ.

In the final analysis, "the liberal social gospel was really grounded in non-biblical considerations." Their optimistic view of the future discerned the outline and promise of a coming millennium in the modern age of discovery, global expansion and scientific invention; in the enlargement of democratic rights for middle and lower classes in the Western nations. The dogmas of inevitable progress and of man's inherent goodness, taken from evolutionary theory, supplied the real assurance of its future reality.

Henry attributes the social gospel to several questionable assumptions.

(1) that the world itself will steadily progress until it finally becomes a kingdom of justice and peace.

(2) that this transformation can follow by inspiring human dedication to Christian ethical principles.

(3) that this golden era does not depend on supernatural redemption, regeneration, sanctification, or the Lord's return.

These assumptions, Henry argues, were the product of secular philosophy, not divine

17 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 111.


19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.
revelation. And, unfortunately, this philosophy was primarily social and political as opposed to theological. Henry bemoans the fact that "as Protestant liberalism lost a genuinely theological perspective, it substituted mainly a political program."22 The theological emphasis was lost after belief in propositional revelation was abandoned. In its place, a man-centered political and social program was substituted. A political program that lacks a grounding in Scripture, according to Henry, was a political program doomed to fail.

NEO-ORTHODOXY

After two world wars and a great depression, theological liberalism and the social gospel movement lost momentum. The theological weaknesses of liberal theology, Henry theorizes, led to the emergence of a new school of thought, neo-orthodoxy, which became dominant in theological circles. This neo-orthodox school was composed of "self-conscious liberals, who, under the sway of world war, economic depression, and European crisis theology (or Barthianism, the European form of Neo-orthodoxy), became increasingly disenchanted with the reigning assumptions of liberal thought."23

The neo-orthodox quickly captured the attention of the theological academic community. This new school of thought "found its inspiration in Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)." Kierkegaard had "reacted violently to the [immanent and rational] Hegelian atmosphere of Denmark by championing the qualitative uniqueness of God and the supra-rational and paradoxic nature of faith."24

The neo-orthodox were quick to distinguish themselves from other Christian theological traditions.


24 Henry, Fifty Years, 34.
As against classic liberalism, [the neo-orthodox] reaffirmed the Hebrew-Christian movement to be an essentially unique revelation of God, and Christian experience to be unintelligible in terms merely of the psychology of general religion outside Biblical redemption; it insisted that man is sinful at the core of his personality, and that Christology is crucial both for theism and for redemption. As against immanental idealism, it stressed the transcendence of God, and the limitation of human reason in a more radical sense than had Christian theology since Tertullian. As against evangelical theology, it reduced the Scriptures to a record of revelation, rather than viewing them as God's revelation written; it retained an evolutionary view of origins and championed the necessity of higher criticism from the first; it denied that divine revelation is propositional, and rejected the authority of Scripture for a so-called objective authority of the Spirit.25

While they were distinguishing themselves from other philosophical and theological traditions, they maintained that they were returning to a more orthodox understanding of the Christian faith. Henry agrees that in some respects they did just that, but they failed miserably in other areas.

While the neo-orthodox retrieved several traditional orthodox teachings such as the transcendence of God, human depravity and the reality of divine revelation, the doctrinal restoration was incomplete according to Henry. For "in biblical scholarship, scriptural interpretation, and social ethics, the Neo-Orthodox were deeply influenced by their liberal predecessors."26 Even in those areas where the neo-orthodox reverted to traditional teaching, they often misconstrued the biblical emphasis in a way that had significant implications. For example, "neo-orthodoxy protested liberalism's exaggeration of divine immanence, and it reacted instead to an extreme emphasis on divine transcendence whose implications are fully as important for ethics as for theology."27

In regard to divine revelation, Henry suggests, the return to orthodoxy was critically flawed.

The dialectical theology is particularly deceptive in its attitude toward Scripture. It

25 Ibid., 36.


recognizes that the appeal to any part of Scripture as divine is exposed to higher criticism, with which it has no desire to wage a constant warfare. Consequently, the crisis theologians deny that the Bible at any point is God's revelation; rather, they hold, any part of the Bible may become revelation by the testimony of the Holy Spirit to me. The Bible is reduced to a "sign" or "witness to" revelation, which is said to occur only in the encounter with the Holy Spirit. . . . This position, presumably, attacks higher criticism from behind, for the door is now open to as much error in the Bible as criticism might insist upon, yet faith, resting not on history nor on an inerrant Bible, would not be flustered. 28

This new and rather unorthodox understanding of Scripture abandoned any notion of objective knowledge of truth based upon propositional revelation. Knowledge of God and of ethical precepts lost its objective and absolute character.

Neo-Protestant reconstruction of the doctrine of divine revelation eliminated its external and objective features; and concentrated solely on an internal divine confrontation; even this, moreover, was said to be existential or paradoxical rather than rational in nature. Cognitive revelational knowledge concerning the very reality of God and his disclosure even in Jesus of Nazareth was therefore deliberately forfeited. Understood only as divine self-communication, revelation was easily transmuted into only an inner awareness of forgiveness or of reconciliation—that is, into merely relational categories—while the issue of objectively valid truth was bypassed. 29

As a result, Henry feels, we are left with subjectivism and "vague mysticism." 30

Apart from propositional revelation, Christian doctrine becomes more difficult to define and defend. Henry says:

The effect of dialectical and existential theories of divine revelation upon many church leaders was to dilute the importance they attached to doctrine or dogma. . . . Once one abandons revelation as rational information, no specific doctrines need any longer be asserted to maintain one's Christian identity, and . . . theological doctrines then become fallible human efforts to verbalize an essentially non-cognitive spiritual relationship to God. . . . If the objective truth of theological doctrine is forfeited, can theology escape being reduced to mysticism and skepticism? 31

The loss of objective doctrinal certainty had many profound ramifications, including an...

28 Henry, Fifty Years, 100-101.
29 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:249.
30 Henry, Fifty Years, 101-102.
31 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:278-279.
important impact on Christian political thought.

Given the fundamentalist abrogation of the social arena during this era, neo-orthodox theologians took the lead in Christian political and social involvement. Whereas the liberal social gospel had engendered an optimistic social ethic, Henry characterizes the social ethic of neo-orthodoxy as primarily pessimistic. Lacking specific divine directives, fallen humanity has little hope of improving upon our lot.

The whole ideal of Christian culture is abandoned, the historical order being consigned permanently and universally to the world, the flesh, and the devil. The Christian believer is obliged passionately to advance temporary social expedients as integral to the Gospel of reconciliation.32

The best we could hope for was to jump on the bandwagon of secular social reform movements in an attempt to mitigate our dour situation. The most prominent proponent of this approach was an American thinker, Reinhold Niebuhr.33

Rather than abandon the social sphere, neo-orthodox theologians such as Niebuhr opted to participate in various social reform movements. In the process, Henry argues, the neo-orthodox theologians minimized "the significance of evangelism and spiritual revival for the advancement of social morality" and ultimately led to the formation of a Christian social ethic that is "competitive with the proclamation of the Gospel."34 The emphasis becomes man-made recommendations not divinely revealed guidance.

In spite of their reform orientation, Henry insists the neo-orthodox are unduly

32 Henry, "Christianity and Social Reform," 19.

33 "Niebuhr formulated a perspective on religion and social reform known as Christian realism in books such as The Nature and Destiny of Man (1941), The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (1944), and Man's Nature and His Communities (1965)." He was also an activist. "He ran for Congress on the Socialist party ticket, founded the Americans for Democratic Action, was instrumental in the formation of the World Council of Churches, and served on the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department." Glenn R. Bucher and L. Gordon Tait, "Social Reform Since the Great Depression," Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience, eds. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 2:1465.

pessimistic about the potential of a Christian culture. Although his expectations are not utopian, Henry thinks the neo-orthodox fail to recognize the power of God and the power of his divinely revealed guidelines.

The disparagement of the ideal of Christian culture fails to do full justice to the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the redeemed community. Surely a sound theology must recognize that defilement by sin precludes the believer's glorification in present life, and also that aggregate group behavior is likely to compound the weaknesses of individual behavior. Nonetheless, sanctification remains the New Testament norm for the regenerate, and a distinctive social morality and culture seem possible to the community of evangelical faith. 35

Henry admits that the neo-orthodox are not unified on many social and political issues, but there are commonly held "controlling convictions."

(1) Human history is so determined by sin-in-depth that the ideal of Christian culture must be dismissed, all cultures being judged negatively from the standpoint of Christian criticism.
(2) Social problems are regarded as not decisively responsive to personal redemption and social justice therefore relies strategically upon propaganda pressures and legislative compulsion.
(3) In the absence of specially revealed ethical principles and doctrines, social strategy is governed by "middle axioms" which, although lacking a basis revelation, are held to be critically creatively relevant.36

A sharp critic of neo-orthodox theology, Henry is equally critical of neo-orthodox social ethics. He argues that

Distrust of rational revelation . . . leaves neo-orthodoxy without an authoritative basis for its theological and ethical positions. . . . The anti-intellectual element in neo-orthodoxy thus divorces its ethical declarations from assured basis in revelation and ultimately dissipates its social dynamic.37

In other words, the neo-orthodox, having rejected Scripture as propositional revelation, have no certain authority on which to base their proclamations.

The primary problem with the liberal social gospel and the neo-orthodox political

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 20.
37 Ibid.
notions, according to Henry, relates to their theological errors regarding God's attributes--errors that he feels result from their rejection of Scripture as propositional truth. He contends that a mistake in identifying divine attributes can effectively distort all subsequent doctrine and it will certainly pervert one's ethical constructs.

Christian doctrine is a harmonious unity whose main axis is the nature of God. For this reason a correct understanding of the whole range of Christian faith and duty turns on a proper comprehension of divine attributes. How the theologian defines and relates God's sovereignty, righteousness, and love actually predetermines his exposition of basic positions in many areas--in social ethics no less than in soteriology and eschatology. Even the smallest deviation from the biblical view of divine justice and divine benevolence eventually implies far-reaching consequences for the entire realm of Christian truth and life. 38

The key to a correct understanding of divine attributes, he claims, lies in the careful study of Scripture.

In regard to social ethics, Henry believes that the liberals and the neo-orthodox have misconstrued divine attributes. He suggests that liberal theologians such as Schleiermacher and Ritschl have overemphasized the love of God at the expense of his justice and righteousness.

The great fallacy of Protestant liberalism was its theological discounting of God's wrath by losing or submerging God's righteousness in his love. . . . In effect, this dissolving of justice into love cancels any separate function for justice in the moral order of the world, shifts the motive force of ethical theory to benevolence instead, and misinterprets love as a universal rather than a particular manifestation of the divine nature. 39

Love becomes all-consuming and justice becomes little more than a synonym. Lacking a sound understanding of God's justice and love, social gospel theologians looked elsewhere for guidance in the realm of politics. Henry claims that,

since the rise of the "social gospel," Protestant ethical theory has lost vital contact with biblical perspectives. Instead, Protestant expositors have tended to promote the "practical idealism" of Anglo-Saxon social philosophy in the name of Christian religion. Christian social ethics, therefore, has preoccupied itself mainly with

38 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 146.

39 Ibid., 147.
material betterment. Although now and then asserting a Christological foundation in broadest generalities. Protestant moralists have addressed the social situation in terms of particular programs having ecclesiastical approval rather than in terms of a theological interpretation of social order. Neither motivations nor goals are distinguished clearly in relation to justice or love. As a result, the content of Protestant social ethics has become scarcely distinguishable from the objectives of secular reform: development of retarded nations, conservation of natural resources, adequate housing, and higher wages are typical concerns. Political adjustment of economic differences is regarded as a proper expression of Christian love for neighbor, and even as a necessary aspect of "the kingdom of God."  

Henry claims that the response of the neo-orthodox theologians to the social gospel left much to be desired because they too misunderstand the divine attributes. He argues that "neo-orthodoxy merely modifies and does not rectify the error of liberalism. It relates righteousness and wrath inadequately to the core of God's being, still subordinating them to divine love."  The modern church, influenced by neo-orthodoxy, finds itself with little to say that is significant.

The Church is in a dilemma. To make justice virtually akin to "righteous love" in the sphere of human action is a tenuous social strategy, in which justice soon loses its own status. . . . Basic to this confusion is the sentimental modern reconstruction of the nature of God. This theological quagmire results from neo-orthodoxy's failure to rise above the modernist refusal to identify righteousness and justice no less than love with the essential core of God's being.

Admittedly, the neo-orthodox approach does not "yield a wholly uniform scheme of social ethics, for neo-orthodox theologians give divergent expositions of many questions in politics and economics."  But, Henry insists, to the extent that neo-orthodox political solutions relate to the Christian faith, they do so in reference to love of one's neighbor. The idea of justice is shunned.

Thus, theological leaders of both modern liberalism and modern neo-orthodoxy

40 Ibid., 129.
41 Ibid., 149.
42 Ibid., 167.
43 Ibid., 149.
"have derived the content of the 'common good' from modern social theories rather than from biblical principles." It is important, however, to be reminded that there are differences between these two schools of thought. Henry illustrates:

What distinguishes current statements of God's justice and love from those of recent past may be put this way: Classic liberal theology (1) denied any recognition of wrath whatever in divine experience; (2) merged divine righteousness into benevolence, so completely identifying God's nature with love that justice became simply one aspect of love's functions. But contemporary theology strikes deeper: (1) it reinstates wrath as a legitimate divine experience; (2) it differentiates justice from love (although sometimes only dialectically) so that righteousness no longer is wholly submerged in the divine will of love; (3) it even makes righteousness a constituent element of the nature of God. All this it affirms, however, within the prior assumption that (4) love is fundamental to the divine nature. Righteousness therefore becomes a constituent of the divine nature only as a constituent of love... This theological readjustment still denies righteousness the same ultimacy as love in the nature of God.

Henry despairs of this "continued denial that God is sovereign justice as well as sovereign love." He suggests, in summary,

that theology that obscures the distinction between justice and grace soon sponsors alien views of social ethics, and any social theory that confounds justice and benevolence will work against a true understanding both of the nature of God and of the character of the gospel.

Without a grounding in Scripture, it does not surprise Henry that modern theologians fall prey to the most powerful ideology of our time, namely Marxism. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, we see powerful theological forces promoting liberation and revolution. Marxist terminology and concepts are wrapped in a theological veneer and a new political perspective emerges.

44 Ibid., 160.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 171.
THE THEOLOGIES OF LIBERATION AND REVOLUTION

Henry describes liberation and/or revolution theology as the "greatest modern challenge to the evangelical concept of social justice."\(^{48}\) While liberation theology is primarily a Latin American and Roman Catholic movement, it challenges orthodox theologians to rethink the importance of political involvement and it has influenced some left-leaning evangelicals.

Henry admires the concern for the poor that characterizes the liberation theologians while specifically condemning them for their lack of orthodoxy.

Even if Christians should and must deplore pseudotheologies that deal inadequately and objectionably with human oppression, they nonetheless must recognize the positive concerns of theologies of liberation and of revolution with their indictment of political, economic, and other injustice against the human spirit. The critically desperate condition of vast masses of people strangled by oppressions pleads for evangelism and social engagement.\(^{49}\)

Criticism of leading liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez and Richard Shaull cannot be merely negative.\(^{50}\) A positive alternative must be proffered. Henry's efforts in this regard will be explained in later chapters.

The emergence of liberation/revolution theology as a prominent movement does not seem to surprise Henry. To the contrary, once biblical authority is undermined, as he believes has been done by liberal and neo-orthodox theologians, it becomes easy for


\(^{49}\) Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:543.

dominant secular perspectives to infiltrate and influence Christian political discourse.

Marxism has penetrated some theological circles and liberation/revolution theology is the result. Henry writes: "The emphasis on supposedly divine action divorced from both biblical once-for-all miracles and a scripturally disclosed meaning is being exploited today by the theology of revolution. This current movement transmutes an appeal to the God of action into theological justification for Marxist-type economic social change." 51

Liberation/revolution theologians differ from their liberal and neo-orthodox predecessors in the emphases they chose to identify in Scripture. Henry writes:

When and as [liberation/revolution theology] claims biblical legitimacy, it differs from the recent existentializing of faith-concerns in at least three ways. First, it insists that divine action involves transforming external history and demands the forced alternation of unjust social structures. Second, it champions a literal divine deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian oppression under the leadership of Moses since it considers the exodus a paradigmatic sanction and imperative for revolutionary sociopolitical action. Third, it assumes the validity of eschatological representations of God's vindication of righteousness and final containment of evil, and in present history promotes an anticipation of this ultimate triumph. 52

There is a difference between liberation and revolution theology, although the differences begin to blur together in the practical realm. Liberation theology is often characterized as evolutionary and more moderate while revolution theology is more radical and revolutionary by definition. For Henry, "the main difference between revolution theology and liberation theology is that the former affirms that God actively promotes historical justice through revolutionary violence, whereas liberation theology approves violence only as an activity of final desperation." 53 The difference is important but not significant ultimately.

Liberation theology stresses that violence is not absolutely or always necessary to achieve the socialist overthrow of the existing order; revolution theology, on the

51 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 2:278.

52 Ibid.

other hand, unhesitatingly sponsors violence and even tries to confer biblical legitimacy upon it. For all that, liberation theology almost always champions countercultural violence in the Marcusian sense.\(^{54}\)

He goes on to say: "Liberation theology gives only a situational verdict on violence rather than a verdict of principle; although violence is not theoretically espoused, its possible necessity in practice is admitted."\(^{55}\) Thus, he believes, acceptance of violence as a point of distinction is, in practice, a relatively unimportant difference.

There are many similarities between the two theological positions. These similarities are more important for Henry than are the differences. Liberation and revolution theologians base their thinking, according to Henry, on several assumptions. These include:

1. The divinely mandated task of Christianity is to enforce a particular politico-economic policy upon the nations.
2. Socialism is a biblically legitimated economic view.
3. Marxism offers an objective analysis of society.
4. The world predicament can be rectified preeschatologically in terms of universal justice.
5. God's covenant should be translated into a program of contemporary political and economic idealism.
6. Universal redistribution of wealth will overcome the economic crisis.
7. The role of the church as an exemplary new society gifted with a new mind and will is less significant than the alteration of social structures.
8. Jesus Christ enlisted the apostles in a direct challenge to earthly political powers and promoted a revolutionary alternative to the Roman empire.\(^{56}\)

Henry calls these assumptions "debatable." He does not develop an eight point rebuttal but he does formulate a response. There are four thematic objections that he raises.

His first objection revolves around Scripture. Henry insists that Scripture is the only proper starting point for Christian theology. He accuses the liberation theologians of adopting a base other than divine revelation for their theology. They subvert Scripture.

---

\(^{54}\) Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:557.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 4:558.

It is important to understand from the outset that the basic gulf between the two schools of thought concerns the authoritative basis on which each system is founded. Instead of building on the Bible as inspired revelation, liberation theology begins with praxis and considers doctrine to be a second step. It considers action in the social arena to be the true beginning point for a theology.57

This emphasis on action, involvement, praxis, is unique to liberation/revolution theology. Henry explains: "The Christian life, Gutierrez affirms, is a 'praxis,' an involvement in this world, and theology is 'critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word.'"58 Scripture becomes secondary. Gutierrez illustrates the problem.

Instead of first focusing on Christ and the Bible as the revelational center of human history and destiny, and by that light illuminating the cultural context, Gutierrez and his praxis-oriented exegetes make existing social and political conditions the necessary lens for viewing and interpreting scriptural data. . . . Man's factual historical condition is considered the necessary starting point; from the outset faith gains a political dimension and reference. What specially characterizes liberation theologians is their insistence that theological reflection must begin with the historical situation rather than with the biblical revelation, and thus becomes directed toward a prestipulated social reconstruction.59

As a result, liberation theology is preoccupied with a socio-political emphasis. Henry says: "Politically oriented theology concerns itself primarily with criticism of the sociopolitical orders and promotes action that aims to transform existing social structures. . . . Its fundamental priority is sociopolitical action, action that aggressively promotes a radical structural inversion of the status quo."60

Henry does not object to the notion of praxis. In fact, he argues vociferously that Christians have an obligation and a duty to become involved in the world. He expresses admiration for the concern expressed by liberation theologians for the poor and the oppressed. But he insists that praxis must be guided by scriptural guidelines. He says that

57 Ibid., 208-209.

58 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:556.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 4:555.
praxis is the carrying out of God's revealed will that is already objectively made known and published. Scripture must remain central and it must be the foundation for socio-political involvement.

Liberation theologians do not reject divine revelation. They do, according to Henry, demean it. A new priority is established. Henry writes: "Sociopolitical emphases are given priority over the theological-revelational; the social sciences are considered the contextual starting point for theological and moral reflection." Scripture becomes illustrative and tendential. When God speaks, he speaks through revolution not Scripture. For the liberationists, "political revolution, not the once-for-all miraculous events in Jesus Christ's redemptive death and resurrection, is God's decisive speech and act."

When liberation/revolution theologians use Scripture, according to Henry, they abuse it. He accuses leaders of both the theology of liberation and the theology of revolution of "exegetical misuse of the Bible." Shaull "appropriates biblical categories in defining and canonizing its ideological proposals for revolutionary social change." Gutierrez does similar things with Scripture.

Gutierrez calls the Word of God his norm, but he seldom adduces Scripture in a decisive way. Personal experience and social conflict are all exegeted by a selective use of Scripture without in fact employing Scripture as the normative authority. He . . . confers biblical legitimacy on much that is not really derived from Scripture and need not actually be expounded in correlation with it.

The role of Scripture changes. It is used tendentiously. It does not reveal the secrets

61 Ibid., 4:563.
62 Ibid., 4:573.
63 Ibid., 2:248.
64 Ibid., 4:557.
65 Ibid., 4:555.
66 Ibid., 4:560-561.
and mysteries of the supernatural. Rather it is used to promote a particular cause.

[Their] use of Scripture is notably tendential. To restrict theology to the historical sociopolitical context sidelines all elements of the biblical revelation that pertain to transcendent reality--the nature of God as he objectively is, the divine nature and work of Christ, the transcendent aspects of the kingdom, and so on.67

Scripture loses its centrality. Something else must provide a basis for an explanation of all of life. In this case, sociological theory prevails. More specifically, Marxist sociological theory becomes the grid through which we make sense of life. Scripture becomes relative and a new absolute is substituted.

Biblical teaching then has merely an illustrative and supportive role; only political reflection is considered "scientific" or authentic theological engagement. The consequence is that scriptural teaching is relativized, while contemporary sociological concerns are absolutized.68

Henry's second objection revolves around the ready adoption of a Marxist sociological analysis by the liberation theologians. Having rejected Scripture as propositional truth, the liberation/revolution theologians looked elsewhere for a comprehensive explanation of life. They found Karl Marx. Henry states explicitly, "Marxism . . . provides the scientific grid for constructing this praxis-oriented theory."69

The influence of Marx is obvious.

Marxian analysis of class struggle and proposed Marxian solutions are accepted as gospel. Marx traced the existence of social classes to stages of the determinate historical development of production; this struggle was thought to channel inevitably into the dictatorship of the proletariat, and this dictatorship, in turn, was viewed as transitional to the abolition of all classes and to the establishment of a classless society. Like Marx, liberation theology presupposes that social classes are by-products of a capitalistic society, and that all ethical ecclesiastical thought and effort must promote the overthrow of that society and replace it with a socialist alternative.70

67 Ibid., 4:562-563.
68 Ibid.
70 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:558-559.
The Marxist critique of the status quo sufficiently explains, for liberation theologians, existing conditions and provides motivation for action.

When Marxist interpretation confers this decisive role in hermeneutics upon the sociopolitical situations, it proposes to judge the cultural status quo by the socialist vision of utopia. Liberation theology demeans all theologizing outside such commitment to a socialist society as inexcusably subservient to an ahistorical world view; it decries nonliberation theology as resigned to the "ideology" of the status quo, and hence as aligned in spirit and fact with oppressive secular forces identified as imperialism, capitalism, communism, and big business linked expressly to technology or covertly associated with the missionary enterprise. It welcomes Marxism for supplying the scientific content of Christian social ethics, and considers Christian theology authentic only when and as it applies the demand for socialist reconstruction to the concrete historical situation. By appealing to the present historical milieu as the only legitimate context for theological reflection, liberation theology thus readily colors, limits and even subverts the scripturally given revelation even while it does not necessarily displace it. The biblical heritage is glossed over to advance the modern ideology of socialism. 71

The end becomes the creation of a new society and a new man. Liberation is the means to the end. Any means short of liberation is insufficient. The ready substitution of Marxist notions of the new man and the new society for the biblical notions disturbs Henry. He insists that the emphasis on a new society and a new man is understandable and biblical. But Henry objects to the Marxist redefinitions of these notions that invade liberation theology.

That Christians must be committed "both personally and collectively . . . to the building of a new society" is surely an acceptable and necessary premise if one recognizes the regenerate church as the essential structure of that new society. Indeed, it may even be said that "the new society must be a classless society" insofar as the personal dignity and equality of its members are concerned. But, we ask, what biblical basis exists for transmuting all this into the Marxist motif of "a classless society in which there is a collective ownership of the means of production?" 72

Liberation theology defines the new society as a forthcoming utopian socialist state. Such a state must come into being at any cost. "What matters is the creation of the new

71 Ibid., 4:556.

72 Ibid., 4:559. Quoted portions are drawn by Henry from the Lima Expresso, May 7, 1971.
socialist society, even if that goal must be achieved by violence. Socialism has become the eschatological hope and a parable of the kingdom of God."73 Henry quotes Gutierrez,

Only a radical break from the status quo, that is, a profound transformation of the private property system, access to power of the exploited class, and a social revolution that would break this dependence would allow for the change to a new society, a socialist society—or at least allow that such a society might be possible.74

No other choices are considered acceptable. "Revolution theology and liberation theology can see and will accept no more than two possible alternatives—either the status quo or social revolution predicated on a Marxist critique; indeed, they rarely suspect how easily socialism itself reduces to an oppressive alternative that in its own way becomes the inflexible status quo."75

The correct view, according to Henry, is a view that defines the new society as the church of Jesus Christ. He writes: "When Christianity discusses the new society, it speaks not of some intangible future reality whose specific features it cannot as yet identify, but of the regenerate church called to live by the standards of the coming King and which in some respects already approximates the kingdom of God in present history."76 More on Henry's view of the church will follow in later chapters.

There is also an emphasis on the new man. The idea of a new man is biblical, Henry concedes. But, he holds, the notion is distorted in liberation thought.

Interestingly enough, Gutierrez insists that the deep motivation undergirding the liberation struggle is the creation of a new man; liberation, he tells us, seeks "the building up of a new man" who will be the artisan of his own destiny. The biblical concept that Jesus Christ is the new man to whom the righteous are destined to be conformed seems here out of view, and necessarily so in view of the special

74 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:559.
75 Ibid., 4:560.
76 Ibid., 4:522.
importance that liberation theology assigns to material concerns. 77

This excessively materialistic understanding of the new man can be traced to a misunderstanding of human nature.

Man is viewed as divinely endowed with a creative nature that enables him to shape his own history. . . . Salvation is restated in terms of man's political liberation, and the concept of grace is subordinated to human ingenuity. God becomes merely a co-worker in an essentially man-centered program. The disposition to make sociopolitical factors primary dissolves the biblically controlled message and substitutes an anthropocentric theology for the theology of revelation. 78

Liberation theologians have an inadequate understanding of the fall. Henry writes:

"Liberation theology is inadequately aware of the imperfection of all human efforts to achieve justice in a fallen world history. To restate the fall of man in terms of private property and economic disparity caricatures the depth of human sin." 79  Their faulty understanding of human depravity leads them to proclaim a solution that is no solution at all. To the contrary, their solution, according to Henry, is almost certain to create new and perhaps even more intractable problems.

Simply because the theology of revolution lacks a profound understanding of the most oppressive dimensions of human experience--and perpetuates man's alienation from God--its ideological concentration on changed social structures (which glosses the depth of individual human alienation while it concentrates on the social) can only lead in time to another oppressive structure, and thus become a new status quo no less unjust than its predecessor, and in some respects possibly more so. 80

The biblical view of the new man, according to Henry, is Jesus Christ. He writes:

"When Christianity speaks of the new man, it points first and foremost to Jesus of Nazareth. In His sinless earthly life Jesus manifested the kingdom of God and in His resurrection He mirrored the ideal humanity that God approves for eternity." 81

---

77 Ibid., 4:565-566.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 4:572.
80 Ibid., 4:570.
81 Ibid., 4:522.
provides humanity with a vision of the new man, a vision that all men should strive to imitate.

This ready acceptance of Marxism requires a redefinition of many orthodox Christian doctrines. It is the redefinition of these doctrines that leads to Henry's third objection to liberation/revolution theology. Many biblical doctrines undergo serious change in the hands of the liberation theologians. For example, Henry says, "the radical orientation of Christianity espoused by liberation theologians results in a redefinition of salvation, christology, eschatology and the church." 82

The doctrinal shift that most offends the sensibilities of Henry is the new definition of salvation. Substituting the word liberation, the liberation theologians transform this central doctrine into a materialistic and universal concept brought about by human action.

The liberation theologians, moreover, project a human socioeconomic and political redemption that is universal; evangelism in the traditional sense has no role. . . . The notion of salvation here is unbiblically universalistic; all men are potentially saved, and actually so if they share in political liberation. The whole scheme of liberation therefore dispenses with the act of saving faith, and with the condemnation of those who do not have this faith (John 3:18, 36). 83

Divine regeneration is left out of the picture. Henry asserts that "the participation of man in his own liberation espoused by Gutierrez diverges radically from the view that only within and because of divine regeneration does fallen humanity share and survive ultimately in the kingdom of God." 84 He concludes that "liberation theology subserves a special interest not found in the biblical witnesses: socialism (rather than God) is presented as the liberator." 85

82 Ibid., 4:562.
83 Ibid., 4:561-562.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
The term liberation is not inherently objectionable to Henry. But, he does object to its specific use by liberation theologians.

The term liberation, in contrast with revolution, is indeed a term that the Bible notably associates with salvation. But the objection to its use as a Christian umbrella-concept lies not only in its failure to sum up the whole of the gospel, but also in its present interchange with the term revolution, and also because the theologians of liberation often develop it in an objectionable manner. 86

It is objectionable because it does not deliver on what it promises. In other words, Henry does not believe that liberation, as proposed by the liberation theology, is capable of providing what humanity truly needs.

Liberation in the biblical sense involves ... man's whole existence. ... Marxist exegesis, by contrast, in no way deals with man's whole existence either in theory or practice; its hermeneutic is reductionistic and misleading. On the theoretical side, Marxism involves an uncritical denial of God, and thereby extends the alienation of man to the fundamental relationships of human existence by trying to suppress God-man relationships. On the practical level, Marxism ignores the fact that wherever its socialist program has triumphed, as in Eastern Europe, alienation does not in fact disappear. ... In Marxist lands the ruling clique becomes the new privileged class while Christians and critics become the new oppressed class in a supposedly egalitarian society. 87

The liberation offered by modern theology is actually slavery. Humanity will be enslaved by a false notion. True salvation is different.

Salvation, however, is primarily God's business, or rather, God's grace. The Christian (one might also say, the church) is not the Savior of the people. God's Messiah is the crucified and risen Jesus, while we--though a minority in any generation--are first called out of the world, and then thrust back as light and salt. We are sent first and foremost as Christ's servants, not as leaders of movements. We are sent to nourish the global grapevine with a rumor of hope: the risen Lord is present and at work. 88

Christology involves the doctrinal teachings regarding the person and significance of Jesus Christ. The christology of the liberation theologians is also problematic for Henry.

---

86 Ibid., 4:565.
87 Ibid., 4:571.
88 Ibid., 4:566.
What liberation theology does with Jesus Christ is especially illuminating. However much it may stress an incarnational theology, it focuses attention primarily upon the man Jesus encountered in the neighbor; the significance of Christ Jesus as the incarnate Logos and of his historically completed atonement is thrust aside for the sake of a contemporary extension of what liberation theology considers good works. Christ is understood primarily in interhistorical terms; the incarnation assertedly makes visible every man's potential as the temple of God in history. The importance for apostolic faith of eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection is evaporated. No sure standard remains other than the political criterion for distinguishing validly Christian encounters with neighbors from non-Christian. 89

Liberation theologians, in their rush to emphasize the humanity of Christ and the good example that his life sets for us, undermine, according to Henry, the divinity of Christ.

Doctrinal teaching regarding the end times, eschatology, also undergoes transformation in the hands of liberation theologians.

Liberation theologians perceive the eschatological as the realm of new possibilities in the world's historical struggle. For them the catalyst of creative hope shapes new horizons by boldly denouncing injustice and anticipates a new political future bursting into the present; it celebrates the triumph of liberation amid particular historical and cultural struggles. 90

Henry insists, in line with traditional Christian teaching, that the glorious end times will only come by divine means when Christ returns.

The final doctrinal change that Henry finds objectionable involves the church. The role of the church changes in liberation theology and the church becomes the leading character in a task that Henry thinks does not rightly belong to it. Liberationists believe the church is to witness to God's presence in the contemporary struggle for liberation. The church is understood not spatially and numerically but dynamically; it exists in calling and mission, in the stand against social injustice, in celebrating God's salvific action in human history, and in heralding political deliverance as the fruit of evangelization. 91

The primary task of the church becomes providing leadership in humanity's quest for

89 Ibid., 4:565.
90 Ibid., 4:562.
91 Ibid.
These doctrinal redefinitions transform the nature of Christianity. Instead of furthering human understanding, Henry comments, they restrict it. He insists they do little more than perpetuate a false materialistic explanation of reality.

So-called Marxist exegesis of the Bible, moreover, perpetuates a materialistic misunderstanding of reality and life. It transmutes the Savior and Lord of scriptural revelation into a sociopolitical liberator who promotes a modern socioeconomic ideology. For the redemptive conflict with Satan and sin and death at the heart of the gospel, it substitutes the class struggle; it ignores supernatural aspects of the kingdom of God and substitutes a temporal sociopolitical utopia; it miscasts the promised Messiah as a political-economic liberator and dilutes the content of the new covenant which seeks inscription of God's moral law on man's inner nature, and it does all this in accord with a partisan modern social ideology.  

Evangelicals must call attention to these distortions of scriptural teaching. In its place,

Evangelical Christianity ought to espouse, instead, the liberation of exegesis from prerevolutionary and all other extraneous ideologies, even those whose goal is defined as human liberation. . . . A theology of transformation and preservation that is biblical will not provide gratifying footnotes on a Marxian text, but will illuminate liberation motifs to the extent that these are scriptural.  

In response to this approach, Henry insists that "it is imperative that we forge a socially concerned biblical alternative, a comprehensive scriptural vision of society." And, such a scriptural vision must includes among its aims, "the spiritual transformation of man and society. Unless central significance is given for personal regeneration, one may have a spiritual 'ideology' but not a biblical theology of social change."  

The fourth objection of Henry revolves around epistemology. Henry is inconsistent  

---

92 Ibid., 4:571. "Much like the theology of revolutionary violence, the theology of liberation encourages excessive materialistic expectations among the masses because it takes the plight of the poor and oppressed as its definitive starting point rather than the comprehensive principles of Scripture." Ibid., 4:572.  

93 Ibid., 4:570.  

94 Ibid.
in his analysis at this point. At one point he refers to the "inherent rationalism" of liberation theology while later referring to the "sophisticated spiritism."

Most liberation theologians are Roman Catholic. . . . Frequently they assume that in the midst of social conflict either the religious institution or personal religious instinct will discern the preferred course of action. Here one detects remnants of Catholic rationalism, with its confidence that humans—despite their sinfulness—can identify and appropriate ethical values from within the natural order, and do so independently of supernatural revelation.95

Foreign to Scripture, he writes in an earlier volume of the same work,

is the "secular theology of revolution" which allegedly hears God speak, as nowhere else, in the social upheavals of the day. By declaring this social ferment to be revelatory, it actually forfeits any objective standard for distinguishing the divine from the demonic, for if God speaks in revolution per se, no distinction remains between good and bad revolutions. The theology of revolution is actually a sophisticated version of spiritism, since it knows divine disclosure only in terms of vagrant voices that penetrate the chaos of modern life and culture.96

Regardless of which charge is the most accurate, the essence of his argument revolves around the lack of certainty and objectivity for what one knows. Apart from propositional revelation, Henry maintains, one has no assurance that what he believes to be true is in fact the truth.

Liberation theologians ultimately fall prey to historicism. They reject much of the traditional Christian faith due to the historical nature of knowledge. Henry, however, is quick to point out that if historicism were consistently applied, Marxism too, would not be the final answer. To the contrary, skepticism must abound. Henry makes his point:

The Marxist repudiation of transcendentally disclosed absolutes prepares the way for relativizing revealed theology and for substituting a conjectural absolute, namely the Marxist ideology itself. The Marxist welding of theory and praxis requires rejecting the permanent self-identity of the Christian faith, and losing Christianity's ongoing self-identity in the process of history. If consistently applied, of course, this view would also cancel whatever absolutist claims are made for the Marxist alternatives, yet social critics seem to absolutize Marxism while they relativize Christianity . . . . But if the truth does not yet exist, but must be achieved through change, then we are locked up, not to the Marxist view as these protagonists think, but rather to

95 Ibid., 4:558.
96 Ibid., 2:79.
ultimate skepticism. 97

The one twentieth century movement that Henry believes retained an adequate epistemology, namely fundamentalism, was also disappointing in regard to politics. Upholding Scripture as the ground for all knowledge does not necessarily mean that one will correctly interpret and apply its teachings. Why did the fundamentalists fail to apply their faith to socio-political problems? Henry thinks he knows the reasons.

FUNDAMENTALISM

Henry emerged as a significant social critic when he issued his first critique of conservative Christianity in the 1940s. In his ground breaking book, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, he insisted that humanity's quest for a just social order required a "rediscovery of the revelational classics and the redemptive power of God." 98 Otherwise he posited little hope for the human race. He was convinced that fellow conservative Christians had not "applied the genius of our position constructively to those problems which press most for solution in a social way." It is essential to do so because the truths in the Bible are "the only outlook capable of resolving our problems." 99 He specifically criticized fellow fundamentalists for failing to search out, explain and act upon the social aspects of their faith. Henry did not reject fundamentalism outright. He was promoting "an application of, not a revolt against, fundamentals of the faith." 100 Speaking of his earlier work, Henry says, "Uneasy Conscience was not an angry diatribe against fundamentalism. What it voiced, rather, was a conscience troubled by the failure of American Christianity to relate biblical verities to crucial contemporary concerns." 101

97 Ibid., 4:563.


99 Ibid., 11.

100 Ibid.

101 Carl F. H. Henry, "The Uneasy Conscience Revisited," Theology, News and
Fundamentalism had its strengths but the one shortcoming, according to Henry, was central to its failure to engage in social and political affairs. There was a lack of "social passion" among fundamentalists.\textsuperscript{102} So prevalent was the social isolationism of the fundamentalists that many people believe that "there is something in the very nature of Fundamentalism which makes a world ethical view impossible. The conviction is widespread that Fundamentalism takes too pessimistic a view of human nature to make a social program practicable."\textsuperscript{103} Henry found this "disturbing" and lamented that "evangelical Christianity has become increasingly inarticulate about the social reference of the Gospel."\textsuperscript{104} He was concerned "that a world changing message [had] narrowed its scope to the changing of isolated individuals."\textsuperscript{105} He insisted the idea that "humanitarianism has evaporated from Christianity" was simply untrue.\textsuperscript{106} Rather, only an accurate understanding of "the sinfulness of man and his need of regeneration is sufficiently realistic to make at all possible any securely-grounded optimism in world affairs."\textsuperscript{107} Thus, while appearing indifferent to social and political problems, in fact, evangelical Christians had the only answers. Humanitarianism, defined as "benevolent regard for the interests of mankind," was an important component of the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{108} Henry was convinced that Christianity is "socially as well as philosophically

\textbf{Notes:} Fuller Theological Seminary (December 1987): 3.

\textsuperscript{102} Henry, \textit{The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism}, 17.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 16.
pertinent." It was time for a reappraisal of Christian political engagement.109

What accounted for the lack of social engagement among fundamentalists? Henry identifies several factors. One problem was that many movements calling for social progress were antithetical to fundamentalism and hostile to the "historic Christian tradition." The primary problem with these reform movements was their optimistic view of man and his capabilities and their failure to take into consideration human depravity with the concomitant need for personal regeneration.

The non-evangelical movements, however desirable their goals, encourage their followers to place their trust in what, from the orthodox viewpoint, is the wrong method for attainment of such ends. . . . The evangelical is convinced that the non-evangelicals operate within the wrong ideological framework to make achievement a possibility. He believes they stimulate a naive and misplaced confidence in man, growing out of a superficial view of reality. He believes the liberal, the humanist, and the ethical idealist share a shallow sense of the depth of world need and an over-optimism concerning man's own supposed resources for far-reaching reversal even of admitted wrongs.110

Thus, even when non-evangelicals and fundamentalists were able to agree on ends, they differed so significantly on means to those ends, that they were unable to work together. "For example, the non-evangelicals were working for a just and durable peace . . . [but they] ruled out specifically Christian regeneration as its conditioning context. The end in view was a global peace without any reference to the vicarious atonement and redemptive work of Christ."111 Henry reminds us that "the rejection of non-evangelical solutions does not involve--at least, logically--a loss of the social relevance of the Gospel." In fact, he argues that "a Christianity without a passion to turn the world upside down is not reflective of apostolic Christianity."112

109 Ibid., 30.
110 Ibid., 27.
111 Ibid., 31.
112 Ibid., 28.
Not only were Fundamentalists opposed to the means of many modern movements, but often to the ends. When ends were materialistic in nature, fundamentalists were quick to label them inadequate. Henry writes: "Fundamentalists came to see that world peace, the brotherhood of man, democracy and the new economy hardly meant for religious liberalism and humanism what they meant for evangelicalism; that is, Fundamentalism insisted that its ends, as well as its methods, were distinct from the non-evangelical movements. The non-evangelicals were striving for inadequate ends." When fundamentalists denounced such movements or remained silent, they were accused of revolting "against the Christian social imperative."

A second contributing factor to the lack of fundamentalist social involvement was the eschatological teachings of many fundamentalist churches. Most fundamentalists are either premillennialist or amillennialist. This doctrinal issue involves the return of Christ and the meaning and significance of the thousand year reign of righteousness referred to in the twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation. Most fundamentalists are premillennialist.

The premillennialists believes that the kingdom of Christ will be inaugurated in a cataclysmic way. . . . The return of Christ will be preceded by signs including wars, famines, earthquakes, the preaching of the gospel to all nations, a great apostasy, the appearance of Antichrist, and the great tribulation. These events culminate in the second coming, which will result in a period of peace and righteousness when Christ and his saints control the world. This rule is established suddenly through supernatural methods rather than gradually over a long period of time by means of the conversion of individuals. . . . Christ will restrain evil during the [1000 year] age by the use of authoritarian power. Despite the idyllic conditions of this golden age there is a final rebellion of wicked people against Christ and his saints. This exposure of evil is crushed by God, the non-Christian dead are resurrected, the last judgement conducted, and the eternal states of heaven and hell established.

113 Ibid., 30.
114 Ibid., 32.
The amillennialists believe, the Bible does not predict a period of the rule of Christ on earth before the last judgment. According to this outlook there will be a continuous development of good and evil in the world until the second coming of Christ, when the dead shall be raised and the judgment conducted. Amillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ rules his church through the Word and the Spirit. They feel that the future, glorious, and perfect kingdom refers to the new earth and life in heaven.116

These theological positions do not undermine the power of the Gospel but insist that Scripture teaches that there is "no hope for the conversion of the whole world" and we must wait for the "second coming of Christ as crucial for the introduction of a divine kingdom." Thus, they "despair over the present age" because of the "anticipated lack of response to the redemptive Gospel."117 The resulting despair is easily translated into indifference toward earthly matters.118 Henry agrees that "Christ alone will usher in

116 Ibid. A third view represents the other end of this doctrinal continuum. Clouse writes, "the postmillennialists emphasize the present aspects of God's kingdom which will reach fruition in the future. They believe that the millennium will come through Christian preaching and teaching. Such activity will result in a more godly, peaceful, and prosperous world. The new age will not be essentially different from the present, and it will come about as more people are converted to Christ. Evil will not be totally eliminated during the millennium, but it will be reduced to a minimum as the moral and spiritual influence of Christians is increased. During the new age the church will assume greater importance and many economic, social, and educational problems can be solved. ... The millennium closes with the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgement." Ibid.

117 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, 29. Henry's position on this issue is pre-millennial. (51)

118 A similar argument has been adopted by some within the anabaptist tradition. "This view ... considers civil government irremediably corrupt." The world is evil and no good can come of efforts to reform it. They call for absentia from political involvement and rely "wholly on interpersonal love to solve all problems." Our only hope, the anabaptists claim, is to seek salvation and to hold out until the return of Christ. Henry admits that "both the Bible and experience do, of course, attest the fact that institutionalized power can be and is often badly abused," but that is an insufficient reason to conclude that all government is necessarily corrupt and corrupting. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:439. The argument that all earthly things are evil by nature is a variation of the Manichean position rejected orthodox Christianity since the time of Augustine. The institution of government is a divinely mandated entity and is not of Satan. Evil can result from the abuse of governmental authority, but if Christians are willing to be involved, the likelihood of such abuse is lessened. "The aim of the Christian's political activity is not to produce a utopia, but to preserve justice and promote order in a fallen world." Henry
God's kingdom," but that does not "excuse Christians from an energetic and zealous pursuit of social justice. In fact, they ought to be in the very vanguard of public concern for righteousness, everywhere pressing and exemplifying the claims of justice in fidelity to God's revealed commands."119

Another reason for the lack of fundamentalist social involvement was a reluctance to endorse "kingdom preaching."120 Henry points out that "no subject was more frequently on the lips of Jesus Christ than the kingdom."121 Nonetheless, "kingdom preaching" had become the property of liberalism and the fundamentalists were not anxious to preach a message that might be misunderstood.

There is growing reluctance to explicate the kingdom idea in Fundamentalist preaching, because a kingdom now message is too easily confused with the liberal social gospel, and because a kingdom then message will identify Christianity further to the modern mind in terms of an escape mechanism.122

Henry praises the fact that

Fundamentalism has consistently witnessed to the fact that any culture from which the redemptive element is absent is essentially distinct from the kingdom of God. It is this concept of supernatural redemption that furnishes the unique ingredient of the divine kingdom. Cultures which tend to be democratic rather than totalitarian may be preferential for many reasons, but they are not, therefore, to be equated with the kingdom. For this reason, Fundamentalism has resisted the kingdom now mood concurs with Jacques Ellul's sentiment that Christians get involved politically in order to have an influence on the world, not in the hope of making it a paradise, but simply in order to make it tolerable . . ." Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 96. "To the Christian believer, social righteousness is not just an evolutionary possibility; it is a divine demand. The fact that it cannot be fully achieved in history until Messiah reigns, as evangelical theology contends, ought not to destroy our commitment to it . . ." Carl F. H. Henry, "Christian Theology and Social Revolution," The Perkins School of Theology Journal 21 (Winter-Spring 1967-1968): 22.


120 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, 49.

121 Ibid., 52.

122 Ibid.
which characterized much liberal preaching.123

Thus, Henry partially attributes the fundamentalist withdrawal from the social arena to a "reaction to the Protestant liberal attempts to achieve the Kingdom of God on earth through political and economic changes."124

Having rejected the liberal notion of a kingdom of God on earth, the fundamentalist had little to offer. They proceeded to individualize the Christian message to the point that they lost any corporate or social component. Henry insists that "the biblical view excludes a privatizing or spiritualizing of religion that ignores the plight of fellow humans. It does not view unjust social structures as self-existent and self-sustaining; instead they are by-products of original sin."125

Rejecting the illusion of an earthly utopia should not mean surrendering all interest in socio-cultural affairs. Evangelicals needed to discard whatever in their thinking decimated world compassion, needed to revive the global relevance of their redemptive message, to formulate an evangelical social consensus. Their eschatology needed to motivate, not dissipate, cultural concerns. To be sure, the world crisis is not basically political, economic or social, but religious and moral, and only Christ's redemptive dynamic is able to activate humanity to the highest levels of ethical achievement. . . . We must offer a new evangelical world mind whose political, economic, sociological and educational affirmations reflect the Christian world-life view.126

Christians do not have the right to ignore present political and social injustices. Contrary to the fundamentalist line of thought, Henry argues that:

In order to become globally vigorous, Fundamentalism need not share the dream, now being discarded by liberalism, of an immanent utopia; an adequate insight both into human nature and into New Testament truth furnishes good ground for doubt that the kingdom can be established without the advent of Christ.127

123 Ibid., 49-50.


127 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, 68. This does not mean that one must espouse some sort of earthly utopianism. Henry believes that a middle
Christianity entails more than salvation alone. Although the redemptive message is certainly the most exciting and important news the Christian has to deliver, there is more to be said.

Surely evangelical Christianity has more to offer mankind than its unique message of salvation, even if that is its highest and holiest mission. . . . 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 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 would soon collapse without it. The evangelical knows that spiritual regeneration restores men to moral earnestness but he also knows the moral presuppositions of a virile society, and he is obligated to proclaim the 'whole counsel' of God. He may have no message for society that insures unrepentant mankind against final doom. . . . But he can and ought to use every platform of social involvement to promulgate the revealed moral principles that sustain a healthy society and that indict an unhealthy one.128

Proclaiming "the whole counsel of God" means that one should be as "explicit and urgent about the justice God demands as he is about the justification God offers."129

In the final analysis, "it was the failure of Fundamentalism to work out a positive message within its own framework, and its tendency instead to take further refuge in a road position is more viable. "As to my own views, the depth dimension of sin in history seems to me to weigh heavily against a Christian culture this side of Christ's return. . . . I do not, however, permit the eschatological expectation that Christ alone will usher in God's Kingdom in historical fullness in any way to excuse Christians from an energetic and zealous pursuit of social justice; in fact, they ought to be in the very vanguard of public concern for righteousness, everywhere pressing and exemplifying the claims of justice in fidelity to God's revealed commands." Carl F. H. Henry, "Christian Social Involvement: Its Basis and Method--A Reply to Dr. Dengerink," International Reformed Bulletin 9 (July 1966): 29. The current state of affairs is not hopeless. Change can occur. Improvement short of utopian perfection can take place in particular places in particular times.

128 Henry, "Evangelicals in the Social Struggle," 6. We must not forget that "no thesis of theology has been so much emphasized in this generation as the fact that biblical redemption has a view to the whole man and to society as a whole, and that God is concerned about human impoverishment at every level. Against the privatization of religion, biblical theism not only embraces salvation of the soul and individual moral renewal but also calls for service of God in the world and confrontation of social injustice in the name of the holy Creator and Lord." Henry, "Biblical Authority and the Social Crisis," 212.

129 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:72.
despairing view of world history, that cut off the pertinence of evangelicalism to the modern global crisis. The really creative thought, even if in a non-redemptive context, was now being done by the non-evangelical spokesmen."130 Evangelicals either attacked social reformers or remained silent in the face of ideas they could not endorse. "But the great majority cut loose deliberately from the social reform movements of the times, denounced as futile and deceptive the world-changing efforts on a non-Biblical formula, and redoubled their efforts to rescue the minority for an increasingly hostile environment."131

This lack of social engagement led to the uneasy conscience of many fundamentalists. Because for the "first protracted period in its history, evangelical Christianity stands divorced from the great social reform movements."132 Henry calls this "the most embarrassing evangelical divorce."133

Whereas in previous eras of Occidental history no spiritual force so challenged the human scene as did Christianity with its superlife in the area of conduct, its supernatural world view in the area of philosophy, and its superhope in the area of societal remaking, the challenge of modern Fundamentalism to the present world mind is almost nonexistent on the great social issues.134

Henry was disappointed that, Modern Fundamentalism does not explicitly sketch the social implications of its message for the non-Christian world; it does not challenge the injustices of the totalitarianisms, the secularisms of modern education, the evils of racial hatred, the wrongs of current labor-management relations, the inadequate bases of international dealings. It has ceased to challenge Caesar and Rome, as though in futile resignation and submission to the triumphant Renaissance mood.135

130 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, 32.
131 Ibid., 33.
132 Ibid., 36.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid., 37-38.
135 Ibid., 44-45.
His uneasy conscience results from the realization that conservative Christians were not living up to the imperatives of their faith and their great tradition of social involvement.

To regain their heritage, evangelicals must affirm two great convictions.

1) That Christianity opposes any and every evil, personal and social, and must never be represented as in any way tolerant of such evil; (2) That Christianity opposes to such evil, as the only sufficient formula for its resolution, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. 136

Fundamentalism is not logically indifferent to social evil and it is not essentially unable to deal with social problems. Instead, it requires it. Thus, he concludes:

Contemporary evangelicalism needs (1) to reawaken to the relevance of its redemptive message to the global predicament; (2) to stress the great evangelical agreements in a common world front; (3) to discard elements of its message which cut the nerve of world compassion as contradictory to the inherent genius of Christianity; (4) to restudy eschatological convictions for a proper perspective which will not unnecessarily dissipate evangelical strength in controversy over secondary positions, in a day when the significance of the primary insistences is international. 137

Fundamentalists were devoting their efforts to important concerns but were unnecessarily limiting themselves.

Fundamentalists were devoting their best energies to unmasking the theological defects of Protestant liberalism--its empirical disavowal of miracles, its optimistic hangover-notions of inevitable progress and of humanity's intrinsic goodness. Their usual approach was to scorn modernist efforts for an new social order. Fundamentalism as such sponsored no program of attack on acknowledged societal evils and ignored serious reflection on how an evangelical ecumenism might impinge on the culture crisis. 138

Fundamentalists "must confront the world now with an ethics to make it tremble, and with a dynamic to give it hope." 139

---

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid., 57.


139 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism. 60.
It had gotten to the point where, according to Henry, "the startling situation had come
to prevail, I lamented, whereby biblical Christianity, which had historically been the taproot of legitimate public concerns, was now often seen to be undevoted to human well-being." Henry insisted that it was time for a reassertion of the Christian faith and a reapplication of Christian principles to earthly affairs.

If historic Christianity is again to compete as a vital world ideology, evangelicalism must project a solution for the most pressing world problems. It must offer a formula for a new world mind with spiritual ends, involving evangelical affirmations in political, economic, sociological, and educational realms, local and international. The redemptive message has implications for all of life; a truncated life results from a truncated message.

What is the solution? How and why should Christians become involved in politics? What might they contribute to our search for order and justice? Henry's response will be summarized and analyzed in the following chapters.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, the problem with twentieth century Christian political engagement, according to Henry, is that it lacks a solid ground for its political pronouncements. The social gospel of modern liberalism and the political reform movement of the neo-orthodox both surrendered the authority of the Scriptures to the critics of the Bible. Thus, they were left with little more than vague Christian sentiments on which to base their political prescriptions. This inadequate base failed to provide direction or substance to those movements.

The liberation/revolution theologians and the fundamentalists lent more credence to Scripture. They both rely on Scripture, to some extent, to provide authority for their positions. However, the liberation/revolution theologians looked to Scripture only secondarily to support their Marxist orientation. The fundamentalists, on the other hand,


141 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, 68.
had a solid grounding in Scripture, but even they failed to develop a sufficient Christian political ethic. To the contrary, they seemed satisfied with a truncated scriptural message. A message that failed to appreciate and act upon earthly social and political obligations.

Henry believes that a correct understanding of Scripture provides both substance and authority for Christian political engagement. The authority of Scripture permits one to say some things with certainty. It also commands Christians to accept and serve in a certain role until the return of Christ. The content and direction of this message is the focus of the next two chapters.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE POLITICS OF REGENERATION

Since the days of the Roman Empire, Christianity has been often considered either an enemy of the state or as apolitical. The charges have a prima facie validity. Christians look to a higher authority; one that supersedes the state. The faithful put God first and insist that all human institutions such as the state are answerable to God. Furthermore, the principal concern of the Christian faith is salvation. Since humans have eternal souls, then issues related to their destiny are surely more important than issues related to the short span in which they inhabit this earth. Thus, to the extent that politics is merely an earthly concern, it should be depreciated in the face of humanity's desperate need for personal salvation. Does Christianity require its adherents to be apolitical? Does it undermine civic virtue and the authority of the state? Why would Christians concern themselves with politics? And, if they were involved, how should they proceed? These questions will be addressed in this chapter.

Following the lead of St. Augustine, Henry asserts the importance of the political realm. Christianity not only values politics, he argues, but it has something significant to contribute. Rather than depreciating the political realm, Christianity, according to Henry, elevates it. The world of politics is transformed into a realm that has the mandate of God which humanity has a duty to obey. Thus, while Christianity maintains a certain transpolitical character, it legitimates and even demands that believers give the state their attention and allegiance.

How does Henry make the argument that political existence is normative for
mankind? The most obvious answer to this problem would be to point to Scripture. Christians need to be involved politically because the Bible tells them so. Henry does not ignore this important component of the argument but neither does he stop here. That argument would suffice for Bible-believing evangelicals, but what about the rest of the world? What about those individuals who do not accept the Bible as the Word of God and thus give little or no credence to its commands? What other argument might provide a rationale for political involvement and, more importantly, an incentive to proceed on a quest for justice? Henry relies upon Scripture, in part, but he also looks to what he calls a "creation-ethic" for the answer.

In a recent article he writes: "The theological basis for evangelical involvement in public justice is located in God's creation-ethic and his universal revelation including the imago Dei that, however sullied, nonetheless survives the Fall."¹ Furthermore, Henry contends, "social responsibility is not a responsibility that devolves one-sidedly on Christians. . . . Responsibility for . . . justice in the social order is as universal as the human race. . . . social justice is due from all persons to all persons . . ."² All of humanity, the regenerate and the unregenerate alike, has a responsibility to seek justice. What does Henry mean by all of this and how does it fit within his broader philosophical and theological positions? The answer can be found by turning to his view of human nature.

Henry believes that humans were created by God as social and political creatures. He claims that "man cannot live alone—he must live his life in society if he is to be truly man."³

² Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:546.
³ Henry, Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis, 79. "By divine creation man is made for life in three families—fellowship with God, marital love in the home, and justice in the social order. By redemption he becomes a four-family man; he is included in the company of the redeemed. He must not, however, on that account, remove himself from the world."
To do otherwise is something less than human. But if one is to live among others, certain precepts must guide their interaction and conduct. What are these precepts and how do we know them?

The notion of a creation-ethic points to a standard established by God at the time of creation. Our knowledge of this moral standard is based on the universal ongoing general revelation of God to man. Humanity has known since the time of creation that there is a standard of right and wrong to which they will be held accountable. This norm was created by God and made known to humanity via general revelation. Indeed, if he is to be ideally man—in the image of God—he must be told the criteria by which God will judge men and nations, that is, the standards by which the Creator expected human life to be ordered in obedience to His commands, and the message of redemption that regenerates men in holiness. In the crisis of our times the task and duty of evangelical Christians is to proclaim to men everywhere what the God of justice and justification demands.

Humanity's ability to live according to this norm has been lost due to the fall of Adam. Nonetheless, the standard remains. Human understanding of that standard may be clouded by our fallen nature but, the dim realization of its existence remains due to the remnants of the *imago Dei* that have survived the fall. That norm is righteousness. It

---

4 "Mankind everywhere has an elementary knowledge of what is ultimate and abiding, of God's reality, and of final answerability to and judgment by him (Rom. 1:20, 32)." Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:12.

5 Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis*, 79.

6 "However, sullied it may be, the image of God in the human person is not totally eradicated by the fall. To be sure, the Bible alone gives the comprehensive content of divine ethics with propositional clarity. But remnants of God's moral claim nonetheless survive on the basis of the created *imago Dei* and supply an inner contact point between Christians and the secular community for bringing into relationship the good in the Christian revelational understanding and the general or public conception of the good." Henry, *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society*, 121. Henry depends upon Calvin when he looks for the content of the knowledge borne by the *imago Dei*. "The content includes the knowledge that God exists, that he is one, that he is a God of glory and majesty, and that he is omnipotent. Alongside this seed of religion universally implanted in men, he finds in conscience the engraved distinction between good and evil and a knowledge-content involving 'some notions of justice and rectitude ... implanted by
includes standards of conduct and attitude. All people, regenerate and unregenerate alike, have this realization, this common ground. Fortunately the details of this standard have been republished in Scripture and the regenerate will seek to know and abide by such standards. In general, the unregenerate either seeks to deny that the standard exists or to construct alternative standards more congenial with their fallen nature.

nature in the hearts of men... For though they have not a written law, they are yet by no means wholly destitute of the knowledge of what is right and just." Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, 158.

7 "The apostle Paul was fully aware that the Roman state was not a 'Christian government.' Yet in Romans 13:9 he adduces the prohibition of adultery, murder, covetousness, and stealing on the apparent premise that the second table of the Decalogue—that is, the social aspect of the law—is somehow anticipated by the conscience of all persons as part of the created givenness of humanity. These precepts speak of the inviolability of human life, of preservation of the integrity of family life, and of property rights—principles that today are under aggressive attack. And as Paul notes earlier in this same letter (2:14-15), even the Gentiles at times attest both in conscience and in outward behavior an awareness of certain moral imperatives were clarified, reinforced, and supplemented to the Jews by the Sinai revelation. Some cognitive awareness independent of special historical revelation is stamped upon the moral consciousness of humankind on the basis of divine creation. The spiritual and ethical rebellion of the Gentiles occurs, therefore, in a context of an inner responsible knowledge of the living God as the source of moral law and as the stipulator of the good. (1:32)." Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 107-108.

8 "Both Old and New Testament alike teach that God is manifested through his creation and that man is responsibly knowledgeable of his Creator... From Cain onward the Old Testament repeatedly holds man guilty not only for his ignorance of God but also for a knowledge of God that he suppresses in disobedience. The Epistle to the Romans teaches that God's invisible being is manifest in his works (Rom. 1:18-20) and his moral law inscribed on human hearts (Rom. 2:14-15). Apostolic missionary preaching to the Gentile was predicated on the sound assumption that God had revealed himself long before the time of Jesus of Nazareth, and that such revelation was known even to those outside the special redemptive disclosure given to Israel (cf. Acts 14:8ff.; 17:22 ff.); in their missionary preaching the apostles accordingly emphasize that no excuse exists for thrusting aside God's fuller revelation in Jesus Christ." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:399-400.

9 Some of the unregenerate have a great awareness and sensitivity to the message of general revelation. Evangelicals should be ashamed if "the concern for social justice became the special hallmark not of Christians but of strangers to God in whom remnants of the imago Dei prompt awareness of man's special dignity and destiny and who therefore try to improve the lot of society." Ibid., 6:454. "Since human experience has a general Divine revelation as its background, man cannot forge his secular alternatives to the biblical way of life without imbibing something of the truth." Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, 147.
This norm of righteousness demands justice in our public lives. From the time of creation, according to Henry, God has imprinted on the human conscience a need to seek justice. Often this demand is overlooked or ignored, but it is everpresent. Christians and non-Christians alike sense the need. Thus, the demand for social involvement is a result of universal or general revelation. Scripture, as a form of special revelation, reiterates the basic message of general revelation, namely to seek justice, in greater detail and with greater specificity.  

What does Scripture say about involvement in world affairs? Henry argues that social withdraw is prohibited by Scripture. "Jesus' exhortation to 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's' (Matt. 22:21, KJV) and Paul's requirement of submission to governing authorities (Rom. 13:1) preclude such withdrawal." There is a "biblical mandate" for social involvement. The mandate is derived from various scriptural themes such as the lordship of Christ, the stewardship of the creation and the importance of service.

Christianity, as understood by Henry, entails the lordship of Christ in all areas of human existence. He writes:

In brief, Christian evangelism must do far more than speak only to the emotional vacuums in the lives of men; it must also help shape the intellectual mood of the day, deal with cultural idolatries and national priorities, confront the problems which erode a sense of human worth and dignity, cope with the moral paralysis that emboldens multitudes to shameless vices, uncover all the subtle and alluring masks that man wears in an age which believed itself at the gates of Paradise only to

10 "Special scriptural revelation normatively sets forth the propositional content of general revelation, and does so as the framework of God's saving revelation. Scripture confronts fallen man objectively and externally with a divinely inspired literary deposit that states the intelligible components of God's ongoing general revelation in nature and history, and conveys as well the propositional content of God's redemptive revelation." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:460.

11 Ibid., 6:446.

discover a desolation and a waste.13

In other words, the Christian faith must penetrate every aspect of human existence, including the political arena. Christ is lord of all of creation, not merely the private or spiritual side of human existence. Certainly Christ will return and subdue all of creation to his divine will but in the meantime Christians are commanded to strive to do the same.14

Recognition of the lordship of Christ requires believers to endeavor to influence and shape earthly matters. To ignore any realm of human existence is to deny "the lordship of Christ as the ruler of nature, the sovereign of the nations and the decisive center of history."15 The lordship of Christ leads to two other biblical themes: the importance of stewardship and service.

Henry looks back to the account of creation for guidance. Classical Christian teaching stresses that God created humanity for a specific purpose. That purpose was to glorify God.16 This was to be done, in part, by exercising dominion and exhibiting stewardship over all of creation. The fall, according to Henry, has crippled man's ability to achieve his task but the task remains. "Mankind was created in God's image and was

13 Ibid., 1169.

14 "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 . . . the church is now to resist the Evil One, now to indict rampant injustice 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." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:545-546.

15 Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 66. "Christians are less than faithful to Christ's lordship over all political concerns if they imply that no moral choices flow from Christ's lordship in matters of political decision." Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 126-127.

16 "The chief end of man is the glorification of God in and through spiritual and moral union. Jesus spells this out in human flesh. He exhibits the perfect ideal of humanity. He shows us by his own life what God intended man to be and what man in the fullness of redemption will be." Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, 411.
assigned stewardship or dominion over the earth to preserve it for Yahweh's creational intention. The task of the people of God is, as far as possible in sinful society, to reclaim the cosmos for God's created purpose. Christians cannot neglect things of the world without neglecting their divinely mandated earthly duty. A part of this task entails the use of scientific and political means. These means enable humanity to exercise dominion over the world and implement "the creation-mandate to realize the divine Creator's moral and spiritual purposes."

This work, done in the name of stewardship, is not performed in order to earn salvation but is the result of salvation. Work is performed out of "gratitude for divine grace." "The Christian knows that he is redeemed by the mercy of God in Christ and is not in legalistic bondage to works; he seeks nonetheless through the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit to serve God obediently in gratitude for divine grace." Thus, in a spirit of thanksgiving, the Christian strives to realize God's intentions on earth.

The final scriptural argument presented by Henry relates to the idea of service. Service must be the "hallmark" of the Christian. The duty to love one's neighbor is

17 Henry, Twilight of a Great Civilization, 117.

18 Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 110-111. "For renewed humanity, work and industry from the Christian perspective become a consecrating of energy and matter to the good of mankind under God. By impressing the ethical aims of the Creator upon the material universe, the Christian community brings the physical world into the service of the spiritual. . . . Similarly the spiritual man aspires by mind and muscle to make human culture an abode for the Spirit of God by extending the ethical purposes of the Creator throughout the fallen world." Ibid.


reiterated throughout Scripture.21 Henry emphasizes that "the Bible from the outset (Gen. 4) declares man his brother's keeper."22 Humans are commanded to love their neighbors and to love God. What does neighborly love entail? According to Henry, it means observing God's commandments. More specifically, "the commandments to love one's neighbor has in view the social commandments of the Decalogue and therefore nourishes and expects voluntary service toward one's neighbor (Rom. 13:9-10)."23

Thus, scripture demands that believers seek justice. Recognition of the lordship of Christ and the responsibilities of stewardship and service requires disciples to strive for the realization of God's justice on earth. Furthermore, gratitude for salvation requires that believers live a life of service. With a flourish of biblical allusions, Henry summarizes his argument by saying: "The divine mandate is to beam light, sprinkle salt, knead leaven into an otherwise hopeless world."24 The message of Scripture is the same as that of general revelation: seek justice.

Henry does not deny that there is tension between one's "inner spiritual commitment" and the "public confrontation of social injustice."25 This tension between the "personal

21 "'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' (Lev. 19:18, Mt. 22:39; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8)." "Man must love all with whom he comes in contact--family, friends, countrymen, enemies (Lk. 10:27), the whole of mankind (Mt. 5:42, Lk. 6:32-35). Everyman is neighbor." Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, 246.


23 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:446.


25 Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 107. "The question now frequently asked, whether evangelism or ethics, kerygma or diaconia, preaching or service, faith or works, deserves priority, erects an arbitrary dichotomy between word and deed and objectionably isolates evangelism and justice. Social action must not be viewed as an independent and detachable concern, nor may the preaching of the gospel be aborted from the whole counsel of God. Fundamental to Biblical theology is the revelation of the true and living God as the God both of justice and of justification. Only where the command of God and the grace of God are both proclaimed can the church avoid a truncated message. Where the God of justice--the God who demands righteousness in social as well as in
and social facets of Biblical faith" has existed throughout history. Henry points to the Jews
who, in his eyes, "fell easy prey to the temptation of viewing the Kingdom of God solely
in socio-political terms." On the other hand, "whereas Judaism's temptation was to lose
the vitality of personal religion amid the aspiration for social justice, that of Christianity
was to neglect the universal requirement of a just society while concentrating on the
necessity of personal conversion." Neither position is right. God demands attention to
both personal righteousness and social justice.

The Biblical view declares both individual conversion and social justice to be alike
indispensable. The Bible calls for personal holiness and for sweeping societal
changes; it refuses to substitute private religion for social responsibility or social
engagement for personal commitment to God. The Bible seeks righteousness
throughout God's creation, and commands man to live God with his whole being
(Matt. 22:37), to walk uprightly and to seek justice (Micah 2:7), in short, to love
his neighbor as himself.

---

personal life--is not proclaimed, man's height and depth of rebellion against his holy Lord
is quickly obscured, and likewise the full scope of obedience to which God desires to
restore him through the forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ." Ibid., 120.

26 Ibid., 109.

27 Ibid. "Eric Voegelin is therefore quite right in observing that 'While the Prophets
had to struggle for an understanding of Yahwism in opposition to the concrete social order
of Israel, a long series of Christian statesmen, from St. Paul to St. Augustine, had to
struggle for an understanding of the exigencies of world-immanent social and political
order. The Prophets had to make it clear that the political success of Israel was no
substitute for a life in obedience to divine instructions; the Christian statesmen had to make
clear that faith in Christ was no substitute for organized government' (Israel and
Revelation, New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 1958, pp. 182 f.)." Ibid.,
110.

28 Ibid., 107. "Sometimes the priority of social concern over evangelism is now
adduced on the basis of Matthew 25:31-46, where the Son of Man warns against neglect of
the hungry and naked and imprisoned, and emphasizes that these forms of faithful
obedience separate the sheep from the goats. The passage seems to refer however,
specifically to the physical needs of Christ's disciples as itinerant bearers of the gospel
('my brother,' vs. 40; cf. v. 45), and not to those of people in general. The cup of cold
water given in Jesus' name is elsewhere commended because it is proffered to one of
Jesus' traveling representatives (Matt. 10:41; cf. Mark 9:41). Taken in this context,
Matthew 25 would warn not against the church's insensitivity to the world's physical
needs, but rather as a warning against the world's insensitivity to the needs of Christians
sent to proclaim the gospel. In any event the derivation from Matthew 25 of current views
that Christ is to be specially found among the poor, or that the 'elect' are those who engage
in social service, depends on false expositions of Christianity that violate the rest of the
Ultimately, Christians must be politically involved because it is their duty. Henry claims that "what the evangelical does in the social order, as in every other realm of life, he does a matter of principled spiritual obedience to the lord of life." Henry says there is "no excuse" for the lack of social engagement. He insists that "those who like evangelicals believe that God wills the exercise of civil authority for the preservation of justice in a fallen society, that civil government has limited powers, that God holds nations answerable to his published will, that God acts purposefully and providentially in the history of nations, will bear their responsibility and duty in the public arena."

Surrender of the political arena can have devastating consequences. "The penalty for failure to lead and to be vocal is that others who misuse and exploit political power for objectionable ends and by objectionable means preempt the field." Thus, Henry concludes, the pursuit of social justice is essential. "Social justice is not, moreover, simply an appendage to the evangelical message; it is an intrinsic part of the whole, without which the preaching of the gospel itself is truncated."


30 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:442.


32 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:551. Henry sees a distinct, although incidental advantage, accruing to the Christian faith when political responsibilities are not ignored. "Where the claims of justice and law are obscure, there the understanding of redemption will also be confused. On the other hand, a nation whose conscience is sensitive to the objective character of justice and law and morality provides an ideal climate among the citizens for the effective preaching of the Gospel. The Christian knows that the promotion of justice, whereby God wills the preservation of the State, can and must be--not as an operation of government but in the task of the Church--a strategic element in evangelizing a fallen race." Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 94. To the extent that Christian principles are employed successfully, it is possible that their attractiveness will enhance the appeal of the Christian faith. "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
Having established the importance of social involvement, what strategy should the evangelical community employ? How does one bring about good in society? Henry sees several alternative social strategies confronting evangelicals today. All of them urge social responsibility and cry out for at least some change in the status quo. However, according to Henry, only one approach is congruent with Judeo-Christian theism properly understood.

What is that solution? Henry refers to it as the strategy of regeneration. Although he identifies four different social strategies, only regeneration is capable of bringing about the good in society. The other three approaches, revolution, reformation, revaluation, are serious but inadequate contenders. Reformation is the preferred strategy of some neo-orthodox theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr. Revolution is most popular in non-Christian communist circles, although it has become the chosen strategy of the revolution theologians discussed in the previous chapter. Revaluation was the strategy employed by

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." Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, 72. He stresses, nonetheless, that these are not the reasons for political involvement.

33 Henry's explanation of the strategy of regeneration will be explained in greater detail in the following pages. It is useful to understand the term theologically. "Regeneration, or new birth, is an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8). The Bible conceives salvation as the redemptive renewal of man on the basis of a restored relationship with God in Christ, and presents it as involving 'a radical and complete transformation wrought in the soul (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) by God the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:24), by virtue of which we become 'new men' (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), no longer conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), but in knowledge and holiness of the truth created after the image of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:2)' (B. B. Warfield, Biblical and Theological Studies, 51). Regeneration is the 'birth' by which this work of new creation is begun, as sanctification is the 'growth' whereby it continues (I Pet. 2:2; II Pet. 3:18). Regeneration in Christ changes the disposition from lawless, Godless self-seeking (Rom. 3:9-18; 8:7) which dominates man in Adam into one of trust and love, of repentance for past rebelliousness and unbelief, and loving compliance with God's law henceforth. It enlightens the blinded mind to discern spiritual realities (I Cor. 2:14-15; II Cor. 4:6; Col. 3:10), and liberates and energizes the enslaved will for free obedience to God (Rom. 6:14, 17-22; Phil. 2:13)." J. I. Packer, "Regeneration," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 924.
ponents of the social gospel at the turn of the century.  

These strategies differ in several ways. Henry specifically identifies three: "(1) the connection they maintain or disclaim between social action and theological priorities; (2) the dynamism by which they propose to revise the social order; and (3) their attitudes toward the Church in relation to social change."  

Certainly the most radical strategy is that of the social revolutionaries. "By revolution [Henry] mean[s] the radical change of social patterns, in their essential constitution, through violence and compulsion." Is this a suitable strategy for evangelical Christians? Henry says no. 

What is the connection between social action and theology from this perspective? In general, Henry finds a "radical rejection of a theological basis for social action." He is convinced that, in the final analysis, "the strategy of revolution not only proposes to rectify social evils, but it denies the existence of divinely given structures in history and society." Communist revolutionaries and "revolutionary theologies that reach for this

34 I believe these generalizations are valid but I hasten to say that Henry has not made them explicitly. In fact, this is a problem with Henry's argument. By failing to identify persons and movements who have adopted the different social strategies he becomes susceptible to charges of creating and destroying straw men. It is impossible to flesh out his analysis with examples or to respond in detail when the facts remain sketchy. Who are these revolutionaries, reformers and revaluators? Can we be certain that their approaches to social ethics are wrong when we know so little about them? Even if Henry is not guilty, he seems to be caricaturing the views of others in such a way that make them easy to refute.

35 Henry, "Christianity and Social Reform," 23.

36 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 17.

37 Ibid., 20. This is certainly true in Henry's eyes for revolutionary Marxists. Speaking of that movement Henry writes: "Not only its dogmatic naturalism but its special insistence on economic determinism as the fixed axis of historical process, requires the unqualified rejection of whatever metaphysical principle might weaken or threaten this absolute. . . . The strategy of revolution must destroy every rival to the totalitarian state as the ultimate source and sanction of human rights and duties." Ibid.

38 Ibid., 17.
new age through violent social change . . . arrogate messianic powers and prerogatives to
sinful man who himself is the crux of the moral problem. Basic to man's misperception is
his elevation to ultimate priority of what is physical, material and natural over what is
spiritual, eternal and supernatural."39 Henry is troubled by the attempt to rectify social ills
by human means alone. Apart from God's revelation, humanity does not know the good
and, apart from God's grace, does not have the ability to do the good. Thus, any
movement that proposes an earthly solution is bound to be objectionable.

Henry's major problem with revolution is that it often develops within a context that
promises final solutions to the problems of the world. Henry insists that Christianity posits
a different solution to social problems, individual regeneration. He writes:

When revolution is regarded as a self-sufficient objective (and hence is represented as
itself a panacea for social evil) it becomes insupportable and intolerable. Moreover,
when revolution is detached from spiritual and moral obligations and proffers
exemption from social responsibility it breeds irresponsibility and bestiality and must
therefore invite Christian condemnation. Christianity's interest in social change
always carries with it the demand for inner renewal, and not simply external
readjustments. But contemporary revolutions, advancing anti-Christian concepts of
life and society, seem usually to promote social disorder and to displace one form of
political injustice by another.40

Revolutionary efforts may achieve some positive gains, but they fall short of what is
necessary for humanity as a whole. On the one hand, Henry seems to question whether
one can find any positive contribution from revolutionary efforts.

We must carefully examine the fruits of revolutionary social change to determine
whether they are as permanently impressive as the revolutionaries would have us believe . . . For all their talk about improving the lot of the masses, even the
revolutionaries tend to elevate themselves as a specially privileged class with
prerogatives a cut above the rest of society.41

39 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:416-417.

40 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 178.

41 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:547.
On the other hand, he admits that some positive gains have been achieved in some selected situations, but, even if improvements were achieved, they fall short of what is needed to obtain a just society.

Whatever improvements the proponents of revolution may achieve in the social realm, these too are defective from the standpoint of the Bible, which aims not simply at the overthrow of existing unjust structures but at the regeneration of fallen men and at the reestablishment of the divine orders of creation through observance of the scripturally revealed principles of social ethics.42

By what means do the social revolutionaries propose to change the status quo? The answer is both simple and unacceptable for Henry. "The strategy of revolution, of course, relies on brute power for its promotion of social radicalism: Its upheaval of respected social norms, and substitution of novel forms, depends primarily upon resorting to incendiary methods of force."43 Social structures must be changed, and aggressive political and military action is the key to bringing about such change.

The use of violence and compulsion, according to Henry, contradicts the message of Scripture.

While the New Testament indicates that disobedience may at times be a spiritual duty, it does not encourage a revolutionary attitude toward the state. . . . The New Testament instances in which Christians disobeyed rulers involve refusal to yield to attempts to suppress the proclamation of the gospel. Fulfillment of the Great Commission was explicitly commanded, and in this mission the followers of Christ were constrained to obey God rather than men. . . . The New Testament sets absolutely no precedent for the church's advocacy of mob pressures and guerilla violence as ways of implementing socio-economic changes; the early Christians relied on proclamation, persuasion, and example.44

A biblical response to dire situations is quite different. "The Epistle of James . . . enjoins patience in the face of injustice, and trust in both God's providence and Christ's return."45

42 Henry, Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis, 60.

43 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 23.

44 Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 47.

45 "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." NIV James 5:10.
Henry gives great weight to the fact that, in spite of Roman oppression, the early "Christian movement generated no revolutionary temper, and to such government Christian believers pledged their prayers and paid their taxes." Patience and submission are the lessons of Scripture.

What is the attitude of the revolutionary to the Christian church? Certainly this approach rejects out of hand the strategy proffered by Henry. "Revolution . . . scorns supernatural regeneration as a religious fiction." As for the church, it "may be tolerated now and then for strategic purposes, especially if it confines itself to private piety and morality. Indeed, it may even be humored if it co-operates in promoting revolutionary social changes." But, in the final analysis, the church is incapable of bringing about social change, and is useful only to the extent that it does not impede the important business at hand.

As for the church's attitude toward revolution. It must never advocate nor initiate revolutionary change. Admittedly, Christians often approve of the consequences of revolution such as "the abolition of tyranny," but "Christian social theory neither promotes nor approves revolution itself as a method of social transformation." Only on one occasion does Henry give tacit support to the notion of direct action to overturn political authority and only when that authority clearly exceeds its God-given bounds. "The Christian approach to government . . . gladly obeys where government observes its proper limits, protests where it exceeds those limits, and actively resists where a totalitarian

47 Ibid., 25.
48 Ibid., 27.
49 Ibid., 176-178.
demand requires disobedience to the revealed will of God." 50

Christians may sympathize with revolutionary movements but apparently Henry does not believe they should participate in them. "Revolution can hope for Christian sympathy only where it actually protests against an established government's persistent abuse of the norms of government (maintenance of law and order, protection of the innocent, repression of bad works) and where it openly purposes to re-establish these norms." 51 If Christians benefit from the revolutionary activities of others, then Christians should not be ashamed to receive the benefits. Henry summarizes the argument as follows:

The Christian Church is not revolutionary. The Christian Church does not initiate movements for political independence. "My kingdom does not belong to this world," said Jesus (John 18:36, NEB). Yet Christianity is not ashamed or apologetic, as if on that account it merely laps up the privileges that others have earned. For the Church remains ready to proclaim and ready to be martyred for proclaiming those abiding truths and ultimate loyalties whose surrender reduces every revolution to lawlessness and whose loss casts even a free people into subjection and nihilism. 52

He seems to believe that people should seek redress of grievances and should condemn injustice, but they should not revolt. Thus, "even if a government now and then exceeds its proper authority, the Christian's hope of a better tomorrow is sustained by a firm reliance on divine providence more than by enthusiasm for human revolution." 53 If change is required, we must depend upon divine providence alone.

Reformation is the second strategy of social change. "By reformation [Henry] mean[s] that gradual but pervasive ethical amendment of particular abuses which secures a

50 Ibid., 182.

51 Ibid., 179.

52 Ibid., 186.

53 Ibid., 180. "God alone knows if and when the very institutions of law and justice require his terminating judgment because of corruption." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:433.
decisive improvement of prevailing social character and forms." The steady improvement of society is the key to progress.

Henry equates this approach with "the developmental (that is, evolutionary) philosophy of a gradually emerging ideal society." This strategy lacks the radical critique of the status quo maintained by the social revolutionaries.

Since the reform strategy must always consider the present as a necessary plateau to the next emerging level, it therefore lacks a deeply indignant criticism, and also any fixed criterion of judgment. Appeal to the process of evolution in the interest of social change and presumably progress necessarily rules out durable meaning and worth; it substitutes transient for transcendent social principles.

While criticism is necessarily muted, reformers, nonetheless, are often vocal about the need for social improvement.

What about the connection the reformers maintain between social action and theological priorities? Reformers "exalt the social issue above the theological, and prize the Christian religion mainly as a tool for justifying an independently determined course of social action." While religion is a "beneficent development in man's evolution," it is not fully explanatory of the human condition. "Reform strategy considers speculative philosophy a more trustworthy avenue of knowledge than theology and tends to find the essence of religious experience simply in loyalty to ethical ideals and social values."

Thus, religion is useful, especially the Christian religion considering its "high moral insights" in regard to social morality. However, reformers only praise those insights which coincide with their independently derived moral criteria. Such selective use of

54 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 17.
55 Ibid., 18.
56 Ibid., 19.
57 Ibid., 21.
58 Ibid., 20.
Scripture, Henry warns, is destructive. The full message of Scripture is obscured and the certainty that Scripture provides is lost. Consequently, "vagueness results just where precision is most needed today, that is, in stipulating the content of the life of social righteousness and personal virtue." 59

What steps are necessary to bring about change in the present social order? Reformers agree with their revolutionary counterparts that "social progress is best secured through a change of social environment," and that "political action most effectively implements this changed environment." 60 They disagree about the necessity of violence. Reformers are convinced that the democratic process is sufficient to bring about change in society. "The reform strategy avoids use of violence and intimidation, but for a basic instrument of change relies upon legislated morality, or political compulsion achieved by democratic processes." Initially, public education and moral propaganda were considered sufficient, but the failure of those approaches has led to the adoption of new methods. Today, "social change more and more becomes political action, and government legislation or compulsion the key instrument of such change." 61 Henry has reservations about assigning a role to the state that he believes it cannot play.

What is the attitude of reformers toward the church? Most reformers promote the church as a force for good in society. Reformers "may deplore sluggish conscience in the churches, but seldom does it decry the existence of Church itself as a historical phenomenon. Reform strategy still values churches as influences for social idealism, and even more, as latent pressure blocs for social action." 62 For Henry, the key component is

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 24.
62 Ibid., 27.
that they deny "the adequacy or the relevance of divine salvation for the basic social problems of the day."63 Thus, the reformers do "not look to the churches for any significant reservoirs of moral energy."64

The third perspective, the strategy of social revaluation, aims to revise the existing social situation by reassessing it. "By revaluation [Henry] mean[s] a fresh intellectual comprehension and direction, whereby social life and structures are critically reassessed in the light of transcendent moral norms."65 Reassessment requires standards of judgment. Unlike the reform strategy, the revaluation strategy is capable, in theory, of establishing fixed criterion of judgment since it posits "transcendent values discoverable in human experience."66

Henry questions the ground of these transcendent values.

Since the revaluation strategy appeals in its critique of culture and society to permanent values, it escapes these difficulties [the lack of fixed criterion of judgment] in principle. But this reliance on transcendent criteria, in turn, experiences constant jeopardy, not only through its association with evolutionary theory, but especially through its failure to exhibit a cosmic justification (as revealed theology does) for unchanging norms and values.67

He decries the lack of specificity and the lack of certainty in this approach that he finds in divine revelation.

What connection does the revaluation strategy maintain between social action and theological priorities? This approach is described in theological terms but rarely in terms of Judeo-Christian theism. Why?

64 Ibid., 27.
65 Ibid., 17.
66 Ibid., 19.
67 Ibid.
The revaluation strategy, by its emphasis on the priority of ideas and ideals, requires a spiritual interpretation of the cosmos which subordinates physical things to the ultimate categories of mind and value. With this commitment to transcendent norms, therefore, the next step is usually (as in most philosophies of idealisms and the theistic religions) to an infinite self-conscious will, to a deity of a sort, in relation to which the social order finds its meaning and direction. The revaluation strategy, moreover, stresses the immanence of these ideals and values in human experience, or their universal accessibility to the minds of men. Thus it prizes every religion and philosophy compatible with this quest for ideals.... But because it stresses the universal and immanent accessibility of truth and morality, the revaluation approach necessarily plays down the biblical teaching that all men are corrupted by sin and need a special supernatural rescue.68

The immanent character of these ideals, the universal accessibility of them, and the discoverability of them in human experience, lead Henry to conclude that there is no ultimate "cosmic justification" for the norms they establish.

How does this strategy propose to revise social order? While it emphasizes "moral education, propaganda, conversation and persuasion as effective media of social change," these things alone are insufficient.69 Proponents argue that changed environment without changed human perspective will not effect a fundamental revision of the social situation. Revaluation therefore seeks to inculcate an awareness of the religious dimension of life, and to exhibit the significance of the moral man for society and the universe. By stimulating conscience, this strategy relates human rights to human dignity; by stressing man's spiritual value as an individual, it supplies ethical fervor for social change.70

What of its attitude toward the church? The church is important but not vital. "Churches may indeed be specially concerned centers of community action that could hold the balance of moral power if once aroused to the social task. But the conviction seems to remain that the central dynamic for social impact does not derive from the churches."71

The reformer's notion that salvation is inadequate is shared by this perspective.

68 Ibid., 20-21.

69 Ibid., 24.

70 Ibid.

"Revaluation strategy considers spiritual phenomena congenial instruments to social change, but in energizing moral attitudes and action appeals only to religious resources that are immanent and universally accessible, and not peculiar to the theology of revelation. Its alternative to regeneration is moralization of the unregenerate man, and virtual indifference to evangelism and missions."72 Henry bemoans the fact that "the Church itself is no longer honored and recognized as the authentic bearer of a revealed social ethic."73

The fourth strategy, that of regeneration, is, according to Henry, the classical Christian view. He believes, given humanity's fallen nature, that this is the only approach that provides any lasting hope of satisfying our quest for justice. He describes this strategy as the "transformation by supernatural impulse in individual lives whereby the social scene is renewed through a divine spiritual motivation."74 In regeneration, "man's spiritual renewal secures his respect for and return to the divine intention in society. The purpose of redemption, therefore, is to bind man's will afresh to the purpose of the Creator and the Lord of life."75 Only when individuals change do they seek to do the will of God. Regeneration guarantees such a change.

The regenerational strategy holds out great promise for the future, while maintaining a degree of pessimism about the present. The optimism is based on God's sovereignty and ultimate control of history. Thus, "the Bible envisages nothing less than a new man, a new society, a veritable new heaven and earth in which universal righteousness prevails."76 The new man is the fully justified and just man and the new society is nothing short of the

73 Ibid., 28.
74 Ibid., 17-18.
75 Henry, "Christianity and Social Reform," 22.
76 Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 108.
kingdom of God. This glorious promise will come into being, however, only when Christ returns to earth in all his glory. In the meantime, all utopian earthly schemes will fail.

Nothing short of Christ's return is adequate to ensure perfect justice. Realism demands that one temper one's expectations.

To continue this discussion in the format established above, we must turn to the three questions that Henry raises regarding each strategy. First, what is the connection between social action and theological priorities? This perspective "regards the social issue as derived from the larger theological framework of divine revelation and redemption." The social issue is not ultimate.

Christian social leaders view their cultural objectives in the larger framework of the Christian mission, and do not regard themselves primarily as social reformers. They give no quarter to the illusion that Christianity is primarily an ethical idealism engaged in denouncing political and social injustice, or aiming at social reform as an end in itself. Even in the social thrust they preserve Christianity's basic nature as a religion of supernatural redemption for sinners.

In opposition to the other strategies of social change, "the regenerational strategy insists that revelational theology is prior," and that "the Church derives her social message from divinely revealed principles." Divine revelation provides a context for understanding social phenomena. Only by understanding the insights regarding the human condition that God has revealed to us, Henry says, can we begin to grapple with social and political

77 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 19.

78 Ibid., 20.

79 Ibid., 21. "Least of all did the early Christians encourage the notion that fallen man's permanent felicity and ideal existence can be achieved through the reorganization of his material environment—whether by socio-economic changes or by scientific techniques and comforts. Although justice in the political order was God's will indeed, and injustice a damnable thing, nowhere did the early Christians suggest that the permanent expectation solely of justice was a hopeful condition for sinful man. The church's message was not simply that God wills justice for and by all, but that God in mercy offers justification to sinners otherwise exposed to divine condemnation. New Testament Christianity always finds the locus of human hope not in gnosiss--or trust in man's justice or ingenuity--but in grace as a divine provision." Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 46.
problems.

The biblical message is basically one of supernatural redemption from sin, and the problem of social justice is placed in necessary relationship to man's need and God's provision of salvation. Hence such concepts as the will of God; man's fall; the revealed commandments; the law of love; the prophetic promise of a Redeemer and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ; the need for personal holiness and the gift of the Holy Spirit; the Church as a society of twice-born men and women in union with Christ; the ultimate triumph of the right and the final judgement of the wicked, become central considerations in the Christian approach to the social crisis. 80

These concepts provide a framework for a proper understanding of social reality.

How does the regenerational approach propose to revise the social order? Quite simply:

The strategy of regeneration . . . relies primarily on spiritual dynamic for social change. It aims not merely to re-educate man, but to renew the whole man morally and spiritually through a saving experience of Jesus Christ . . . Regeneration rests upon spiritual power. The Gospel of Christ is the Church's peculiar dynamis for facing the entire world. Christian social action condones no social solutions in which personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord is an optional consideration. Personal regeneration and redemption are inherent in its hope for the social order . . . The new birth restores man to fellowship with God, and lifts him not only to the vision of truth and goodness but also qualifies him with a new nature and moral power to place his energies in the service of righteousness. The Holy Spirit sunders the shackles of human sin, requiring men first to recognize social evils in the light of personal wickedness. 81

Not only does Henry claim that people must be changed but that they must be changed by God. To the extent the human race becomes regenerate, and to the extent the regenerate influence the rest of the world, justice is possible. Apart from such, there is little hope.

The need for regeneration resulted from the fall of humanity. Prior to the fall, Henry claims, humans knew the good and lived accordingly.

On the basis of creation man had more than a mere capacity for knowing God, for discerning good from evil, for discriminating truth from error. He not only knew that God is not the not-God, but he also knew Elohim his Maker personally, truly and intimately. He not only knew that good is contradictory of evil but he knew also that God's revealed will defines the good, and he knew specific elements of that will that placed him under God's command. He knew not only that truth and


81 Ibid., 24-25.
falsehood are antithetical, but also that the truth is what God thinks and says, and by divine communication he also knew and treasured in his heart certain truths enunciated by his Maker. Indeed, man in God's image knew God himself to be the truth and the good, the Creator and Lord of all; he knew reason and conscience as God's enablements to recognize and approve the true and holy Lord. Created man knew God's revealed truth and declared will, and loved, trusted and obeyed him. His fellowship with God was unbroken; he lived a moral life in truth, a life consonant with God's revelation pulsating through the imago Dei. To God he gave his whole heart, his undivided self; God's light and law were his highest fealty and felicity.

The fall changed everything.

The fall of man was a catastrophic personality shock; it fractured human existence with a devastating fault. Ever since, man's worship and contemplation of the living God have been broken, his devotion to the divine will shattered. Man's revolt against God therefore affects his entire being; he is now motivated by an inordinate will; he no longer loves God nor his neighbor; he devotes human reasoning to the cause of spiritual rebellion. He seeks escape from the claim of God upon his life and blames his fellow man for his own predicament. His revolt against God is at the same time a revolt against truth and the good; his rejection of truth is a rejection of God and the good, his defection from the good a repudiation of God and the truth.

Despite the fall, humans still can know what they ought to do but they lack the heart to do it. "Man's predicament is not that, like the dumb brutes, he possesses no insight whatever into right and wrong, but that he lacks the heart to do even what he knows to be right."  

---

82 Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 2:134. "The evangelical Protestant view of the nature of man is that he is "a distinct species, created by a divine act in a state of primal holiness, from which the first man and representative of the human race Adam fell by voluntary transgression, implicating his posterity in guilt, corruption and penalty; hence man is, at the core of his personality a sinner, whose moral ideals and attainments rest under divine displeasure, so that he is exposed to divine wrath; the divine standard of morality is achieved on his account only by the Redeemer, in justification, and in gratitude for divine grace, man, in the strength of a supernatural dynamic, seeks to realize conformity to the divine will." Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 134. Also see "The Uneasy Conscience Revisited," 4.


84 Henry, *Faith At The Frontiers*, 41. "The fundamentalist holds that primal man was a divine creation, endowed with moral righteousness, so that man is not a sinner by a necessity of his original nature, but rather by voluntary choice; consequently, the hope for a better order is directly proportionate to the appropriation of redemptive grace in human society. . . . Evangelicalism does not believe that man's progress is limited by man's nature as man, as much as by his refusal to appropriate divine regenerative grace." Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 68-69.
Sin has hampered humanity's attempt to do the right thing by corrupting the will. Speaking of sin, Henry writes: "The biblical view is that sin hinders the effort of natural man, unenlightened by divine revelation and untransformed by divine redemption, to advance truth and the good. The biblical call for a new selfhood asks for nothing less than crucifixion of man's unregenerate nature and birth of a new nature by a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit."85

Given human nature, the prospects for improvement in society are not good. Because, Henry remarks,

in the absence of moral men . . . no body of law, however just, can ensure a good society. Authentic Christian ethics concerns what is done through a desire to do God's will, in obedience to his command; this is made possible only by spiritual regeneration. No other motivation can counter the selfish drives that haunt the noblest of unredeemed men and correct the faulty vision of an unredeemed society.86

It seems obvious to Henry that "no new era of brotherliness and peace is likely to emerge in the absence of a new race of men."87 Good people are the key to a good society. "In the last analysis, a good society is one that seeks the good not because it is legally coerced to do so but because it is inwardly motivated. Christians cannot hope to reshape the world by political crusades; they must address attitudes and motives as well as structures. They do this most effectively when they speak of transformed humans whose perspectives Christ has changed and altered . . . ."88

What is the nature of the new man? Who serves as the model? No one but Christ has fully manifested the good.89 Any approximation of this perfect standard is achievable

85 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:519.
87 Ibid., 9.
89 "When Christianity speaks of the new man, it points first and foremost to Jesus
only through divine intervention.

The New Testament focuses on the Spirit's presence and power to accomplish an ethical transformation of life in which love (agape) is the forefront virtue. The Spirit shapes a new mindset for those who were formerly hostile to God (Rom. 8:5-7), a mindset that prizes God's truth and stimulates wholehearted obedience to his will. The Spirit, moreover, nurtures a new and godly life and provides the dynamic for defying sin and its temptations. We must remember that the life-giving Spirit by whom God raised Jesus from the dead is already active in Christians, liberating them, as they appropriate his presence and power, from the moral inequalities of their sinful past and bringing them forward toward a future eschatological defeat of their present mortality. 90

What is the attitude of the regeneration strategy toward the church? Henry's understanding of the church can be confusing. He has written very little about ecclesiology. He defines the church as "a spiritually obedient vanguard of morally regenerate persons," an invisible body of believers, but it is also clear that in much of his discussion he is actually referring to the visible institutional church. 91 Only by distinguishing between the two, something he assumes his readers will do, can his message be fully understood. More on the role of the institutional church will be presented in the next chapter. At this juncture, it is useful to make two points. The church, in its visible and invisible manifestations, is a vital component of the regenerational strategy. It is vital because it contributes to the process of regeneration. Second, the church serves as a model of the kingdom of God and in so doing it influences society for good. In this regard, to the extent that the visible church is an accurate reflection of the invisible church, it serves these purposes well. To the extent that it falls short, these purposes are undermined.

Since the spiritual change that an individual undergoes via regeneration is the key to

---

90 Ibid., 4:501.

social improvement, preaching the message of salvation is extremely important. The church has a special role in propagating this message. Thus, indirectly, it has a vital role in politics.

Supernatural regeneration therefore is the peculiar mainspring for the social metamorphosis latent in the Christian movement. Man's spiritual renewal vitalizes his awareness of God and neighbor, vivifies his senses of morality and duty, fuses the laws of love to sanctified compassion, and so registers the ethical impact of biblical religion upon society. Man's personal dispositions are thus enlarged for sacrificial service, and his benevolent desires are qualified by a new moral power. The familiar evangelical call to be 'born again,' the high task of winning other men to Christ, the pervasive work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, all contribute to the basic motivations of social impact.92

The Church must spread the good news that salvation is available to humanity through the redemptive death of Christ. If people respond to the message, the possibility for a positive social impact is furthered.

In addition, the church must model the new social order for humanity. Although the church is not the new society, it portends the future. The new society, the kingdom of God, was the central theme of Christ.93 The kingdom is both present and future. In its present state it is incomplete and falls short of its potential, nonetheless it is here.


93 "No emphasis finds profounder expression in Jesus' teaching than that on the Kingdom of God. . . . According to the Synoptic Gospels, what best summarizes the whole of Jesus' teaching is this theme of the kingdom or rule of God (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43). Jesus instructed His disciples to make it their main concern (Matt. 10:7; Luke 9:2) . . . He focused as well on a climactic future consummation when he the Son of Man would return in universal power and glory (Matt. 26:29). In the present interim God anticipatively extends His Kingdom or rule as human beings participate individually in the kingdom through repentance and the new birth (John 3:3,5). Jesus' disciples constitute earth's new society; they are light and salt to the world, a regenerate ecclesia that the Risen Lord rules as living head of a body encompassing both believing Jews and Gentiles. His followers are to model a character and behavior exceeding that of Pharisees and scribes (Matt. 5:19f). While not itself the kingdom, the church is the kingdom's most vital approximation and manifestation in the present age. Its ongoing mission is to extend the King's victory over the hostile forces of sin and evil, injustice and oppression; this it does by proclaiming the Gospel, declaring and exemplifying the standards by which the King will judge mankind at his return, and witnessing to the present privileges and joys of serving the Risen Lord to whom all humanity must ultimately bow." Henry, "The God of Bible and Moral Foundations," 19-20.
The church is a new social entity of regenerate humans participating in the eternal life of the kingdom. Personal redemption is its ticket of entry without which no person shares in the kingdom of God. It is the nearest societal approximation of God's kingdom on earth. In this body of humanity the kingdom takes visible form. Its members are light and salt in the world through a lifestyle conformed to the coming King's standards, through global confession of Jesus as the Christ, and through vocational mission that consecrates talent to God for human good.94

The church is not to conquer the world politically.95 "Jesus obviously did not usher in an earthly political kingdom at His Coming. . . . The kingdom which Jesus introduced, it appears, was quite compatible with earthly government which did not interfere with the realization of the summun bonam in the lives of regenerate believers . . . "96 Nonetheless, the church is to work for political betterment.

The challenging of unjust structures is an imperative that requires a biblical vision of the right, the sensitizing of community conscience, the escalation of volition and devotion to duty, active support and promotion of good laws, and equally, a sense of humility. In our fallen history, political and economic solutions never achieve utopia and are but temporary adjustments which, for all that, need to be squared as fully as possible with the plumbline of social righteousness. The justice God demands is an imperative that daily hangs over men and nations. Every political milieu is answerable to it. The task will never end until the risen Lord returns. Those who would consummate it overnight only deceive themselves and others.97

Full realization of the new society must await the return of Christ. Henry rejects the idea that "Christians prior to the eschatological end-time can successfully achieve a truly Christian culture in a society that is universally infected by the consequences of original sin."

94 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:69. "When Christianity discusses the new society, it speaks not of some intangible future reality whose specific features it cannot as yet identify, but of the regenerate church called to live by the standards of the coming King and which in some respects already approximates the kingdom of God in present history." Ibid., 4:522.


96 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, 53-54.

97 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:72-73. "The believer's own struggle against self-regarding impulse, and against that of fellow-believers, tells him that the Kingdom of Heaven has not yet fully dawned. The Gospel can rescue men from the guilt and penalty of sin, and in a remarkable degree from its power. But it does not wholly transform the world into the church, nor wholly transform the church into the Kingdom of God." Henry, "Christian Personal and Social Ethics," 1180.
sin, and in which Christians themselves are limited by their own fallibility and foibles.  

He insists that "the climax of human felicity" will not occur on earth but "in a blessed afterlife." The Evangelical vision of the new society, or the Kingdom on earth, is therefore Messianic, and is tied to the expectation of the return of Jesus Christ in glory. It is distrustful of world power, of attempts to derive a just society from unregenerate human nature. Henry's optimism, at this point, is carefully circumscribed by a temporal realism.

The glorious climax of history will result in a time of universal peace and justice. We should look forward to the day when "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." The final solution to the political and social problems of humanity will occur but not as a result of human effort. Rather Christ will

---

98 Henry, The Twilight of a Great Civilization, 117. "To strive for Christian culture is one thing; however, to affirm that Christians can achieve a pristine Christian culture in fallen history is quite another. We had best reconcile ourselves to the fact that in fallen history not even the regenerate Church will elaborate an unqualifiedly normative systematic theology, or Christian philosophy of law, or of literature and the arts. At best, Christians will achieve something less than the ideal, something always answerable to the Biblical revelation as the decisive criterion ..." Ibid., 118.

99 Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 45.

100 Henry, Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis, 68. The "historical inevitability of this public victory" is referred to in 1 Cor. 15:24; Phil. 2:10 and Romans 8:18-25. God, Revelation and Authority, 4:528. This optimism has been twisted by many modern thinkers. "During the past 150 years, evolutionary conjecture has radically revised this messianic vision. The biblical premise that history will crest in Christ's triumphant righteousness and peace was recast by Hegelian 'immanentization of the eschaton' into a logical evolution of the Absolute, by post Darwinian enlistment of biological evolution in tandem with inevitable human progress to utopia, and by Marxian economic determinism, which looked to social revolution rather than to divine intervention to facilitate the coming kingdom. These theories eclipse Messiah as the millennial catalyst. They minimize or reject biblical redemption and regeneration and cloud the singular role of the church in the world. They also view utopia as the inevitable outcome of forces already operative in nature and history." Henry, "Biblical Authority and the Social Crisis," 204-205.

101 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:545-546.
return and will "reign in full and final triumph" and "righteousness will once again prevail through the created sphere, and evil will meet its decisive doom."102

This is not to say that the biblical teaching regarding the kingdom of God has no contemporary relevance. To the contrary, Henry claims, "the extent to which man centers his life and energy in the redemptive King now determines the extent of the divine kingdom in the present age."103 Henry is not completely pessimistic about earthly possibilities at this time. He believes that justice and peace can be achieved in particular times in particular places through the efforts of good people. "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 . . . "104 This is a special message that cannot be forgotten if one hopes to bring about peace, justice and order among the human race.

Henry admits that many, even in Christian circles, view regeneration as a simplistic and ineffective solution to social problems. In its place, fellow Christians call for "moral propaganda and education, then legislation and . . . non-violent public demonstrations and even mob pressures." Henry acknowledges that

The Christian movement has a stake--a vital stake--in education and legislation. It need not disparage every effort at reform and revaluation as abortively competitive. . . Yet Christianity knows--and it dare not forget nor let the world forget--that what the social order most needs is a new race of men-men equipped not simply

102 Ibid., 5:17.

103 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, 54.

104 Ibid., 69. The potential can be found in the church itself. For "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." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:543.
with new textbooks and new laws, but with new hearts.  

He hastens to add that while "the Church has a legitimate and necessary stake in education and legislation as means of preserving what is worth preserving in the present social order, . . . it must rely on spiritual regeneration for the transformation of society." He argues, "those who think altering existing institutions is the surest way to achieve a just society need to reread the biblical writings." Certainly, "unjust structures are, indeed, in need of change, but to expect utopian improvement is futile without a moral alteration of the character of humans who pervert the principles of justice."  

Henry emphasizes that Christians must adhere to the whole message of God's revelation. Christians must stress "both the holy demand of God for personal righteousness and universal social justice, and God's gracious provision for a new man

105 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 30.

106 Ibid., 16. "Evangelical social action throbs with the evangelistic invitation to new life in Jesus Christ. 'Ye must be born again' is the Church's unvarying message to the world. Evangelical Christianity allows the secular world no hopeful program of social solutions that renders merely optional the personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. It holds hope for the social order because it offers the prospect of personal redemption. Individual regeneration is not only a chief but an indispensable means of social reform." Henry, "Perspective for Social Action, Part II," 15. "The Christian movement has no license to take its cue from modern social reformers in the matter of content or strategy. Christian visionaries blur or distort the gospel of Christ in the world when they seek to transmute the world into the kingdom of God apart from personal regeneration, or to coercively impose upon society supposedly just structures which the church herself ignores in her own life, or to promote as the content of social justice what the scriptural revelation of God does not in fact sanction. But one blurs Christ's gospel no less by emasculating its challenge to public leaders who, while presumably serving as God's entrusted ministers of justice, manipulate power in covert liaison with the privileged few or by serving inordinate self-interest. Christian silence and inaction in the face of such miscarriage of God's purpose in government obscures much of what makes evangelical good news truly good. It needlessly thins the gospel to internal experience only. It abandons biblically illiterate churches to indoctrination in social philosophies--communist and other--that are alien to the scriptural revelation." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:72.

107 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 2:123.

and a new society on the basis of redemptive grace."109 When relating God's message for society, Christians must avoid two possible errors: "first, that the world by structural changes can be turned into the new society or the kingdom of God; and second, that improving sociopolitical structures is unimportant in the distinctive call to proclaim the gospel."110 Politics is important but there are limits to its potential. If either component of this message is ignored, the message is not truly Christian.

In conclusion, Henry's strategy of regeneration results in a position that is reminiscent of St. Augustine, whose doctrine of the two cities posits a distinction between the City of God and the earthly city.111 Regeneration is the key to citizenship in the kingdom of God. Only in the kingdom of God do we find perfect justice, and that will not be fully realized until the future. For now, the Christian must remain in the temporal kingdom. In this kingdom, justice will never be fully realized. Nonetheless, particular justice is possible. The state and the institutional church are temporal entities that should promote particular justice.

In much the same way that Henry borrows from Augustine in his formulation of the two cities, he will borrow from Aristotle in his discussion of justice. His reliance on these classical figures will become increasingly apparent as we turn to a discussion of life in the temporal kingdom.

---

109 Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 120.

110 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:71.

CHAPTER SIX

JUSTICE IN THE TEMPORAL KINGDOM

The kingdom of God holds out great promise of a perfectly just society. Complete realization of that kingdom, however, is something only God can bring about. In the meantime, citizens of that kingdom, the regenerate, must strive to live their lives, along with the unregenerate, on earth. To the extent they do so according to the dictates of the will of God, they may be rightly called just. However, until Christ returns and fully conforms the regenerate to his will, not even those who have obtained citizenship in the kingdom of God can be or will be perfectly just. If believers fall short of the perfect standard, what can one realistically expect of the world-at-large?

Henry sees humanity in an interim period between the time Adam walked in the garden of Eden with God and the time when Christ returns to rule the heavens and the earth. During this interim the regenerate and unregenerate alike find themselves in a temporal kingdom. Christians struggle with this reality since they maintain dual citizenship: they are citizens of both the kingdom of God and of an earthly kingdom. Citizenship in each has special duties and distinct rewards. Henry claims that citizenship in God's kingdom does not negate one's responsibilities in the earthly kingdom. To the contrary, citizens of the kingdom of God are specifically commanded to contribute to the earthly kingdom in its quest for justice. This dual citizenship raises many questions. The question of justice in the temporal kingdom is the most significant one. Is "civil government answerable to a principle higher than itself," or does earthly justice mean...
nothing more that abiding by man-made law?\(^1\)

This chapter will focus on the temporal kingdom. Earthly institutions such as the church (the visible institutional church) and the state, Henry insists, have a responsibility to promote justice in the temporal kingdom.\(^2\) In short, Henry believes that both institutions are divinely intended structures that can contribute to the realization of God's will on earth. Before turning to a detailed investigation of these institutions, it is necessary to look more broadly at Henry's understanding of justice.

What is justice? What do we know about it? How do we obtain it? Is justice conventional in the sense of being mere law-abidingness or is it a higher principle to which the state must aspire? I believe Henry is understood best if one applies Aristotle's classical distinction between universal and particular justice to his thought. Henry's understanding of justice is actually a Christian version of a classical Greek notion. Henry doesn't explicitly acknowledge dependence on Aristotle but the influence seems clear.\(^3\)

---

1 Henry, God. Revelation and Authority, 6:421.

2 Henry does not equate the temporal and the heavenly kingdoms with the institutions of church and state. In this regard he remains true to the traditional view espoused by Augustine, Luther and Calvin.

3 In book five of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes several distinctions in the course of his discussion on justice. The distinction that seems to receive the most attention in scholarly circles is the distinction between distributive and commutative or corrective justice. However, Aristotle's first distinction is between universal and partial justice. Martin Ostwald points out that "although much of Book V is devoted to a discussion of justice in a narrow, or what Aristotle calls 'partial,' sense, Aristotle remains ever conscious of the wider connotations of the term: 'justice' is for him the same as 'righteousness,' 'honesty.' It is, in short, the virtue which regulates all proper conduct within society, in the relations of individuals with one another, and to some extent even the proper attitude of an individual toward himself." (111) Universal justice means "complete virtue or excellence . . . in relation to our fellow men." (114) This use of the word conveys both a moral and a legal component. Universal justice certainly includes law-abidingness, to the extent that law coincides with true justice, but it appears to go beyond to include relations among humans not commonly covered in legal regulations. For example, Aristotle points to relationships between a man and his slave or a parent and child. Furthermore, universal justice includes moral virtue apart from legal requirements. For example, both the moderate, generous and gentle person and the self-indulgent, stingy and short-tempered person may abide by the law, but Aristotle would not call the latter just. Only the former would be justice in the universal sense.
Aristotle's notion of particular or partial justice appears in Henry's thought in different terms, but he means something quite similar. His references to "relative" or "social" justice refer to those standards which should regulate conduct between individuals and within society. Justice in this sense requires fairness, impartiality, "outward conformity to law" and the allocation to each based upon what he/she is due. The person who is universally just not only exhibits outward conformity but does so for the right reason for this person has had "forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ." Justice in this sense means righteousness. "Justice in the context of the kingdom of God must always correlate outer action with inner character. Duty fulfilled out of wrong motives, or by chance rather than intention, coincides with justice only incidentally or accidentally."5

There is much evidence to support this theory. For example, Henry points to scriptural instances where the Bible teaches that an unregenerate person may be just. "Scripture nonetheless applies the term 'just' (dikaios) not only to the Messiah and to the meritorious faithfulness of devout believers (Matt. 1:19; Mark 6:20; Luke 1:17; 2:25, 23:50; Rom. 1:17, etc.) but also to some who are not yet Christian believers (Acts

Partial justice is usually thought of in terms of equality. On the one hand, it demands that the honor and wealth a city bestows upon its citizens should be distributed in relation to the contribution the citizens make to the welfare of the whole. Thus, partial justice demands these things be distributed proportionately. On the other hand, in exchanges between individual citizens, justice demands exact equality. The parties to any transaction expect and should be able to profit equally. In this sense, the state should attempt to rectify or correct any transaction that results in a loss of equilibrium.

I do not intend to imply that Henry's and Aristotle's understanding of justice and righteousness are identical. I am merely implying that Aristotle's distinction is instructive for understanding Henry. The parallel is interesting even if not exact. See Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, translated with introduction and notes by Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1962) book V, and Ernest Barker's remarks in The Politics of Aristotle (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 362-369. The idea that Aristotle's typology is a useful explanatory tool for understanding the biblical notion of justice is discussed in greater detail in Ronald Nash, Social Justice and the Christian Church (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1983), chapters 3-6.

4 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:414.

5 Ibid., 6:454.
This doesn't mean that the unregenerate are righteous, but it does mean that they are fair, impartial, and conform to the dictates of law. Henry also points out that translators render biblical references to justice in two different ways.

The Hebrew nouns tsedeq and tsedaqah and the Greek noun dikaiosune are properly translated either as "righteousness" or as "justice." . . . The word righteousness tends to fix attention on inner divine-human relationships, whereas the term justice suggests primarily man's conduct toward others, especially in matters of legal or personal rights (Lev. 19:35f; Deut. 25:13-16; Amos 8:5; Prov. 11:1, 16:11; Ezek. 45:9f). Just as the earlier preference for "righteousness" fixed attention on internal integrity more than on external relationships, so the current emphasis on justice focuses on social righteousness to the neglect of personal righteousness. The fact is that the God of the Bible requires attention to both individual righteousness and social justice.7

Both individual righteousness and social justice are required of humanity by God, but that does not mean they are the same thing. Other evidence will be presented as the chapter proceeds.

Henry identifies the parable of the unjust judge as one of the most instructive portions of Scripture on the question of justice.8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming.' And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:1-8

The central teaching of this parable is "the value of persistence not simply challenging injustice but also in exercising expectant faith that divine providence assures the final reign

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 6:404.

8 Ibid., 6:418.
of justice."9 One should strive for justice without end and never give up hope. However, Scripture points out that justice cannot be achieved by human effort alone. Perfect justice awaits the return of Christ.

Henry derives four conclusions from this portion of Scripture that illustrate his understanding of justice more fully. First, "Scripture unequivocally affirms the future final triumph of justice and the decisive defeat of unrighteousness."10 Perfect justice, understood as righteousness, will prevail. In the meantime, "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."11 Thus, the justice of the temporal kingdom is somehow less than perfect, less than complete, while deserving of the name justice.

Second, "the source, content, and sanction of justice exist exclusively and uniquely in the nature and will of God."12 Only God and his will are truly just. "The God of the Bible declares himself to be just, not because he conforms to some superior external criterion, but because he in himself consistently affirms his nature and is unswervingly faithful to his own promises and his covenant."13 Since only God is truly righteous, human justice is truly just only to the extent that it imitates divine justice.

Human justice is authentic justice if and when it implements the revealed will and

---

9 Ibid., 6:419.
10 Ibid., 6:419-420.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid. "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." Ibid.
13 Ibid., 6:425.
law of God, and not simply because government sanctions it or society approves. . . Because human justice has no firm independent status, it ideally patterns itself after God's revealed will. Man lacks authority and wisdom to creatively forge "what is right and just and fair" but through "the fear of the Lord and ... the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:5) he may in truth know "every good path" (Prov. 2:9).14

Third, "justice not only has both its eternal ground and final vindication in heaven, but it also steps dramatically into fallen history in the holy person of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Only the life and work of Jesus Christ, declares the New Testament, wholly meet and correspond to the righteous will of God." 15 Since only Christ fulfills God's requirement, only he can fulfill "God's righteousness redemptively for contrite sinners," and only he can serve as a truly just judge of all the nations.

Fourth, "since the supernatural grounding of law and righteousness will be fully vindicated in the transcendent coming of the kingdom of God, and since Jesus Christ has been already unveiled as the sinless exalted Judge of mankind and the nations, contemporary Christianity must explicate the role of believers in today's world." 16 Believers are not mere messengers of the good news of eternal salvation, rather they must also promote justice on earth.

Scripture unequivocally declares that unregenerate man falls far short of God's righteousness . . . But it also affirms that God has an eye for relative justice among men that avoids aggression and chaos and promotes peace and righteousness. God's establishment of civil government presupposes a fallen world in which God wills human civil authority for the preservation of justice and order. The fact that Jesus Christ is King of kings (Phil. 2:10) and will judge "men and nations" at his return (Matt. 12:18) indicates both that in a fallen world civil government even at best achieves but broken justice, and that the rulers of this world are answerable to the justice of God (cf. "he will proclaim justice to the nations," Matt. 12:18 NIV; cf. also Isa. 42:1). Throughout history God's transcendent righteousness not only points to the final judgement of mankind, but also, in anticipation of this, speaks of the present accountability of men and nations to the will and rule of the Creator and

14 Ibid., 6:432.

15 Ibid., 6:431.

16 Ibid., 6:433.
Lord of all.  

Henry is certain that "the Bible is clear in propounding not only the just man but also the just community." Christians must understand the limits of earthly existence and strive to realize the possible. What type of justice is the temporal kingdom capable of maintaining? The answer, Henry posits, is particular justice. Particular justice must strive to imitate God to the degree possible. This means treating people impartially and fairly. Scripture proves this way of proceeding is truly just. "The Bible declares that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). . . . This emphasis on divine justice as equal or non-preferential treatment of all persons underlies biblical teaching many times in many ways." In fact, Henry claims,

Scripture locates the supreme precedent for human justice in the fact that the God of justice grants each person his due. Ancient philosophers frequently observed that of all the virtues justice alone pertains to what is due a neighbor. Only by giving others what is due them do we at the same time preserve for ourselves what is properly ours. Jesus declares the so-called "golden rule" ("whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them") to be a summary of the law and the prophets (Matt. 7:13). It calls for positive performance of what is right; the negative form found in other traditions concerned itself only with avoidance of evil.

Prior to moving on to a discussion of the roles of church and state in the realization of particular justice, we should pause to consider the issue of knowledge of particular justice. Might the principles of particular justice be anchored not in divine special revelation but in natural law/natural justice? Henry says no. He accepts the definition of Jacques Ellul for

17 Ibid., 6:414.
18 Ibid., 6:454.
19 Ibid., 6:405. "It is important, therefore, to note the historic evangelical emphasis that righteousness and benevolence are equally ultimate in the unity of the divine nature. In accord with biblical theology, evangelical Christianity affirms that justice is an immutable divine quality, not reducible to a mere mode of divine benevolence on the fallacious theory that love is the exclusive center and core of God's being." Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 146.
20 Ibid., 6:406.
The essence of natural law theory, says Ellul, is the belief that divine reason is embedded in man and nature and is therefore accessible to man apart from transcendent revelation. Declared to be immanent in man and nature, this natural law is then adduced as the ideal criterion of justice. It is unnecessary, say natural law theorists, to recognize the giver or source of an immanently given morality in order to acknowledge its reality.\footnote{Ibid., 6:423.}

Could natural law be interpreted differently and different terminology adopted? Perhaps it could be understood as the belief that God has generally revealed certain laws to humanity that humans, as beings endowed with divinely bestowed reason, can understand and apply. This interpretation would permit Henry to retain his emphasis on the probability that fallen creatures will willfully refuse to obey such laws or that humans may refuse or even be unable to explain the giver or source of such laws, but they still exist and are often applied in a beneficial way for all of mankind. Perhaps the terminology could be altered from natural law/natural justice to creation law/creation justice or eternal law/divine justice and, instead of man's innate divine reason being the key, perhaps it should be described as man's God-given rational endowment which deciphers general revelation.

Henry contends that all natural law theories fall short.

That a general sense of justice and of its objectivity is innate in all human beings is no doubt true. To its credit, the natural law approach at least challenges all secular theories that reject any transcendent \textit{a priori} basis of justice by reducing law to merely social consensus or to a product of evolutionary development. But because the conjectural natural law alternatives introduce the self-revealing God too belatedly into the human predicament they obscure the living Lord. The false impression is thus made that man can penetrate a knowledge of God's will without any necessary dependence upon revelational and redemptive realities. But unless human life, human institutions, and human justice are comprehended in a theocentric context that preserves God's self-revealed priority and precedence in the concern of law, the fact is that justice and morality as well as the biblical conception of a good and just society and general agreement on the meaning of justice will fade from view.\footnote{Ibid.}

While Henry rejects natural law theories, I believe he has left open the door. He claims that...
the rejection of natural law is not a denial of "God's universal revelation in nature and history, nor the fact that God by creation has endowed man in his image with an ineradicable dignity that includes moral aptitudes, inalienable rights, and duties." He argues that "whether Christian or not, all persons share a common ground through remnants of the divine image that survive in fallen humanity," but he refuses to take the next step when he insists that "they do not share a common system of morality and cannot shape a good society." But what is this common ground unless it includes that which Henry has already argued exists: namely a common understanding of right and wrong. Henry is not always consistent on this point. For example,

the pluralistic nations are judged by the light of general revelation universally available on the basis of God's creation of humankind. Amos's indictment of ancient Israel's six pagan neighbor nations is particularly instructive. Damascus is doomed for threshing Gilead "with sledges having iron teeth" (1:3); Gaza for taking "captive whole communities" and delivering them to Edom (1:6); Tyre for delivering up a whole people to Edom and for forgetting "a treaty of brotherhood" (1:9). Edom is doomed for pursuit with the sword and for "stifling all compassion" (1:11); Ammon for ripping open the pregnant women of Gilead "in order to extend his borders" (1:13); Moab for burning to lime the bones of the king of Edom (2:1). These indictments for national crimes include havoc wrought by invasion, occupation, and captivity; by bartering slaves and captives of war as a matter of trade; by atrocity and treachery and other social evils.

Henry concedes that "the clear assumption is that ravishing neighbor nations, selling slaves and prisoners of war, and violating treaties are all infractions known to be unjust independently of the theocratic revelation to Israel." This idea of natural law/natural justice is worth further exploration. It will come up again later in this chapter and in chapter eight.

23 Ibid., 6:424.
24 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
Regardless of how one knows the principles of justice, we must move on to the question of how justice is realized in the temporal kingdom. Henry claims that two institutions, church and state, are concerned with justice. The roles of church and state in society is an issue long argued. Henry enters that debate from within the Baptist tradition. What is the proper role for the state? What about the church? What responsibilities fall upon the individual and how should one conduct oneself in the often rough and tumble world of practical politics? These issues are addressed in the remainder of this chapter.

Historically, Baptists have insisted upon a strict separation of church and state. Henry is no exception. In this regard, Henry is outside the tradition of reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin (who supported the notion of a state church) and certainly opposed to the traditions of the eastern Orthodox church and medieval Roman Catholicism. 27

Repeating the claims of Roger Williams, Henry views the church and the state as two distinct institutions, created by God, with separate purposes and powers. 28 The biblical basis for this notion is derived from the book of Mark. "In view of Jesus' differentiation of the secular and the spiritual ('Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God...

27 The prevailing theory in the Eastern Orthodox church is called caesaropapism. This means that secular rulers exercise supreme authority over the church even in doctrinal matters. In the West, the battle raged between the church and the state but, in general, throughout the middle ages, the church claimed and often maintained supremacy. The Reformation challenged the church in this regard. In general, Calvin and Luther urged separation of church and state but in practice they encouraged cooperation and even a degree of political priority, esp. Luther. The anabaptists challenged this compromise and endorsed total separation for which they were persecuted. Roger Williams and others argued that "the state had no right to interfere with the religious beliefs and practices of individuals or congregations, and that the church for its part had no claim upon the state for financial support. To receive public money was to invite government control and the loss of religious identity." R. D. Linder, "Church and State," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 234-235.

28 "The New Testament... declares both church and civil government to be divinely willed instrumentalities with distinct powers, spheres, and purposes under God." Henry, Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture, 115.
the things that are God's,' Mark 12:17), Christianity also has discriminated between the religious and political spheres, yet without fully disjoining them. Both are indispensable aspects of a faithful Christian calling, and each renders service to the other."29 Their primary objectives are simple. "While the state's primary concern is to preserve justice and maintain order, the church's role is to identify the true and living God and to proclaim the Good News. As a new and distinct society of regenerate believers . . . the church functions among mankind to exemplify and demonstrate moral and spiritual obedience to the crucified and risen Lord."30 This clear separation does not mean the state is to be merely secular. To the contrary, Henry argues that the state's responsibility to God is everpresent. Both institutions have divinely imposed limitations. Neither should perform tasks assigned to the other, nor strive to form a kingdom of God here on earth.

The Bible affords the church no basis for promoting evangelistic objectives by political means and affords the state no basis for promoting political objectives by ecclesiastical means. The notion that either the state or the church can achieve social utopia (the kingdom of God) on earth, as romanced by the social gospel, overlooks the fact of human sinfulness. Human perfectibility awaits the eschaton.31

While remaining cognizant of their limitations, each has a role to play in combating injustice in the world.

The confrontation of injustice, in the New Testament context, is to be waged on two frontiers, church and state. The church's proclamation of God's Word, evangelization of the masses, and example of moral concern is indispensable. But no less important is the universal role of civil government, which in the New Testament era is no longer theocratic but assumes diverse forms, and which deals


30 Ibid. "The church is of direct divine origin, established by Christ for spiritual ends; it is spiritual in inception, nature, function and purpose. This spiritual order is not national but supernational . . . whereas the civil order is national and alters according to the constitution of various peoples and nations. Membership in the New Testament Church, therefore, is not on a national but on an individual basis, for the church is an organism separate from the state, existing within the larger society." Carl F. H. Henry, "The Great Issue," The Watchman-Examiner, 11 September 1952, 841.

with outward conformity to law but not with motivation and metaphysical legitimation. The state is to promote justice (not to creatively define it). Civil government, no less than the church, is divinely willed, and each instrumentality has its distinctive mission. Civil government is to require conformity to law, under threat of penalties; the church proclaims forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ as an indispensable yet voluntary option. The state is not to decide between theological alternatives, or to evangelize, or to impose penalties for spiritual lethargy. The church is not to seek to legislate sectarian beliefs and practices. Yet, both church and state have a necessary commitment to justice, the former on the ground of a biblical revelation and mandate, the latter on the ground also of creational, constitutional, and civil law. The Christian carries within himself this dual commitment of church and civil government, knowing the latter no less than the former to be theistically grounded.32

Both church and state are concerned with justice. The church is concerned with universal justice, better defined as perfect righteousness. When one becomes regenerate the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to the redeemed. Thus, the church is helping individuals become just in the act of evangelization. But the church realizes that there is another aspect of justice that cannot be overlooked. It not only recognizes the importance of particular justice but it has a calling to promote it. The church must preach universal justice. The state must enforce particular justice. Each institution needs closer examination. What are their responsibilities, duties and limitations?

Henry is convinced that the state and all governmental authority is derived from divine sanction which necessitates obedience on the part of the citizenry.33 In this regard the state is not a conventional construct as viewed by modern thinkers and obedience is not an act of the will but is divinely mandated. God's sanction of government is providential for apart from such an authoritative structure, the fallen nature of humanity would undoubtedly wreak havoc in the world. The very survival of mankind and of the church


33 "God wills civil government as an institution for preserving justice and promoting peace and order in fallen society." Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 100-101. This point is clear to Henry because of its explicit specification in Scripture. "The revealed will of God, published in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, sanctions the role of civil government as the preserver of justice and promoter of social order and peace (Romans 13)." Ibid., 131.
requires government. Thus, humanity must honor, respect, and obey governmental authority.

Any discussion of governmental authority must be bracketed with a reminder of God's sovereignty. The sovereignty of God logically leads to a limited authority for government. This central attribute of God has important consequences for life on earth. All earthly authority is derivative in nature. Such a notion both limits earthly authority as well as legitimizes it.

Paul's letter to the Romans emphasizes . . . derived authority. "There is no authority but by act of God and the existing authorities are instituted by him." Precisely for that reason, "anyone who rebels against authority is resisting a divine institution" (Rom. 12:1-2, NEB), one that reflects, even if indirectly, the lordship of God into the fallen world.

"The church needs the state's preservation and promotion of justice in the world because the power of the sword is able to restrain injustice and disorder where and when mankind spurns grace and good will. But Christians also require civil government because the professing family of faith, for all the transforming power of redemption, is not yet perfect and remains vulnerable to self-assertion and self-interest." Henry, "Church and State," 12.

"Rulers are designated 'priests of God' (Rom. 13:6) whom God entrusts to promote his will by advancing good and suppressing evil." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:446. "The classic New Testament passage on civil responsibility (Romans 13) affirms that civil government has divine sanction to preserve public order for the social good, the good of Christians as well as others. The New Testament nowhere justifies anarchy. Rather it supports civil government as an institution, recognizing that at times particular governments may be tyrannical and even anti-God, suppressing good and rewarding evil (cf. the beast-state of Revelation 13)." Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 132.

"The implications of divine sovereignty . . . are far reaching. Take for example, the political realm . . . According to the Bible the state exists within God's providential will and has limited authority. When totalitarian states presume to define human rights and duties at will they illicitly claim divine prerogatives. The state's biblically stated role is to maintain God-ordained justice, not to devise or manipulate it . . ." Henry, "The God of Bible and Moral Foundations," 10.

"Civil government derives its power ultimately not from military capability or from the will of the people but from God (cf. John 19:11). All organs of power can function properly only in obedience to his will. God purposes civil government in a fallen society for the promotion and preservation of justice and order (Rom. 13). Insofar as government arrogates to itself powers and objectives contrary to its divinely intended purpose it becomes anti-God and anti-Christ
Since its authority is derivative, the state has a ministerial or servant role to play. It should serve God by performing those tasks and exercising that authority granted to it by God. To the extent that it does otherwise, it becomes apostate.

Henry is quick to emphasize that the derivative authority of the state requires a limited state. He believes that the idea of limited government has its origins in Christianity. Henry admits that those who desire to forge a broader role for government have good intentions and want to rectify persistent evils. "But political compulsion does not automatically produce 'good' people, who, obviously are an indispensable ingredient of a good society." To the contrary, only regeneration truly produces good people. Continued expansion of the role of government encourages all elements within society to try to co-opt the state for their purposes. It also lessens one's personal sense of responsibility. Narrow self-interest prevails and government becomes the instrument to serve such interests. To avoid these ills, it is essential that government limit its scope to those areas where God has authorized it to act.

What should the state do? The answer is simple. It should promote justice and preserve order. Its most difficult and important task is to particularize the general principles of justice. "The task of civil government is to interpret God's transcendent law, as expressed in universal principles, into political particularities." It does this by formulating statutory law.

The role of government is not to stipulate absolutes but rather to protect statute laws... (Rev. 13)." Henry, "Christian Personal and Social Ethics," 1176.

38 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 89.
40 Ibid., 117.
41 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:449.
that best preserve the imperative of justice in community life. Even if civil government now has no basis for legislating statute law on the ground that God reveals and commands it, it must nonetheless articulate what justice implies in social relationships. The state tries to express in legal particularities what conduct is most consistent with the moral absolutes that underlie law (e.g., the universal dignity and worth of human life).42

The state is to deal with outward conformity to law and to impose penalties on those who fail to comply. It should promote justice but not define it.

What is law? Law is a formal articulation of and a particularization of the content of justice.43 In Old Testament times, God revealed general principles of justice such as the Decalogue as well as specific particular expressions of those general principles appropriate to the Hebrew nation in that time. To the extent that we may know the specific content of justice today, we must rely upon the the second tablet of the ten commandments. Henry refers to the "enduringly valid Decalogue" as having "principles that are universally definitive for justice."44

Applying general principles of justice to specific situations, apart from God-given positive law, is not easy. Nor is it impossible. Henry admits:

It may seem difficult to derive model civil laws and legal regulations from a transcendent principle of justice. But without such a transcendent criterion for evaluating the law, despotism becomes the basis of civil government and rulers can spurn human liberties and cancel citizens' rights at will. . . . It is only transcendent objective authority, moreover, that can assure the fixed character of conventional justice and positive law.45

Application of general principles need not be uniform. The lack of uniformity does not discount the reliability of the general principles. Henry says that:


43 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:438.

44 Ibid., 6:444. "It is noteworthy that in summarizing the ideal behavior of godly citizens, the apostle Paul repeats the social commandments of the law and that in the Book of Revelation, the commandments reappear in the context of final divine judgment." Henry, "Biblical Authority and the Social Crisis," 205.

45 Ibid., 6:446.
The fact that juridical punishment for legal infractions and forms of retribution vary from land to land is not necessarily a consequence of faulty deduction; legal principles allow a variety of alternative courses. What course best promotes law and justice is largely left to determination by particular governments, and is properly subject to periodic review and revision.46

In many respects even the specific positive laws that we live under can be understood as being from God.

Since not only the Hebrew theocracy but also Gentile nations are divinely judged by the social commandments of the Mosaic law, positive law is not to be considered entirely or primarily a creation of civil government, even if the body politic elaborates most legal regulations. Civil law is not a matter of public convention only. Britons may indeed drive to the left and Americans to the right, but what underlies each statute is not whim or happenstance, but the principle of the value of human life and property.47

To the extent that law merely reflects the will of an arbitrary ruler or the will of the majority, it changes frequently, encourages promotion of narrow self-interest and is unable to compel citizens to obey. Citizens are less likely to respect and honor law if its source and sanction is no higher than the government itself.48

Law is particularly important to Henry for its preservative nature. "The purpose of statute law is to redirect fallen humankind's civil propensities so that justice prevails in community life. Statute law particularizes the content of justice and love in social relationships."49 We must "recognize in civil law the will of God by which he seeks to redirect fallen humanity's evil propensities for greed and power and privilege, and by

46 Ibid., 6:451.

47 Ibid., 6:442-443. "When the apostle Paul stresses that government should be obeyed for conscience' sake and not simply through fear of punishment, he reminds us that positive law gains its moral authority because of its source and sanction in divine law.... The man of God knows that civil government has only limited authority and why: positive law acquires its moral force from the will and power of the transcendent God, not from an earthly sovereign or a commonwealth." Ibid., 6:451.


which through civil order he seeks to reaffirm his intention for man's purposive and
creative life in community."\textsuperscript{50} It cannot transform society but it can maintain that which is
good.

Although the Christian Church ought to rely on the spiritual regeneration of
individuals to 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.
Christian social theory needs to distinguish between transforming and preserving,
and to recognize that education and legislation can serve only the latter of these
ends. But preserving the good in society is worth doing . . .\textsuperscript{51}

Law is vital. "Because there is no assurance that all men will repent and seek the will
of God, and because even Christian believers must contend with the remnants of sin, just
laws are indispensable in human history."\textsuperscript{52} It is also limited. It suffices to restrain some
of our worst tendencies, but ultimately it cannot do what can be done through regeneration.

Although just laws are desirable and imperative, law has the power only of outward
restraint; it lacks power to ensure outward obedience and inner conformity to its
command. In the absence of moral men . . . no body of law, however just, can
ensure a good society. Authentic Christian ethics concerns what is done through a
desire to do God's will, in obedience to his command; this is made possible only by
spiritual regeneration. No other motivation can counter the selfish drives that haunt
the noblest of unredeemed men and correct the faulty vision of an unredeemed
society.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} Henry, \textit{God, Revelation and Authority}, 6:436.

\textsuperscript{51} Henry, \textit{Aspects of Christian Social Ethics}, 72.

\textsuperscript{52} Henry, "Evangelicals in the Social Struggle," 10. "The Apostle Paul knew that
even the Christian, who has repented of his sins, is not wholly free from this terrible grip
of sin. The struggle of Christ's disciples against sin and evil is deeper and profounder than
that of unredeemed and unregenerate men. For the Christian knows not only the law
written on man's conscience, but he knows the divine commandments written on stone and
their inner moral requirements as proclaimed and lived by Jesus Christ. The Christian
hates sin, and abhors his former immorality, and has a heart and mind for the larger moral
claims, of God; but he nevertheless falls into sin even if he does not make a practice of it." Henry,
\textit{Faith at the Frontiers}, 41.

\textsuperscript{53} Henry, "Evangelicals in the Social Struggle," 5. "In fallen human history no
political document can be presumed to fully elucidate what divine justice implies." Henry,
\textit{God, Revelation and Authority}, 6:422. Henry admits to underestimating the importance of
law in his earlier writings. He says that "many of us underestimated the indispensable
importance of legislative coercion in a fallen society." His mind has changed, however,
only partially. "Although redemptive vitals in society continued to have priority in my
The participation of God's people is very important. For they alone have a fuller understanding of God's will as well as the heart to obey. They, therefore, are most likely, most willing and most able to conform civil law to the divine will. "The Christian believer knows that there is a secret inner connection between the transcendent justice of God and the secular law of the state, and that ideally they will coincide."54 The only hope for justice in society exists when "a nation knows that law derives its secret power from the divine spiritual realm, from justice conceived as a supernatural perfection, only then is its respect for law secure."55 Even this hope is limited for "in the absence of a will to do the good, no law, however desirable, can assuredly achieve its public objectives. Evangelism can bring to multitudes the good will and moral dynamic necessary to make good laws work."56 Thus, the state needs the church.

Strangely enough, Henry proceeds to encourage Christians to downplay the thinking," he now exhibits "an enlarging emphasis on the state's mandate for preserving public justice." Henry, "The Uneasy Conscience Revisited," 4. "There was, for all that, a notable weakness in my concentration on regeneration as the guarantee of a better world. For Uneasy Conscience failed to focus sharply on the indispensable role of government in preserving justice in a fallen society. Essential as regenerative forces are to transform the human will, civil government remains nonetheless a necessary instrument to constrain human beings--whatever their religious predilections--to act justly, whether they desire to do so or not. At mid-century ... I was prone to minimize the role of law in society and to exalt regeneration in view of its sensitizing of conscience and life-transforming power." Ibid. Henry was taken to task by Lewis Smedes on this very issue. "The Evangelicals and the Social Question," The Reformed Journal 16 (February 1966): 9-13. In a printed response Henry tried to reassure him "that Evangelicals are neither skeptical about the role of law nor disinterested in changing our environment, though we insist that environmental processes, including the legal structuring of society, are not means specially granted to the church for the transformation of human life." Henry, Faith at the Frontiers, 109.

54 Henry, Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis, 72. To disobey civil law that does not contravene God's commandments is also to disobey God and to deny him as the only absolute King. But to resist law that does contravene God's commands is also a witness to the divine sanction of law. Respect for law is grounded therefore not simply in the civil and domestic desirability of its observance but in the fact that God wills it. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:444.

55 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 90.

supernatural basis of law in their promotion of law in democratic societies such as ours. In promoting good laws, the evangelical should identify "ethical imperatives consistent with and reflective of the will of God," and promote them on grounds "familiar to the general public." In particular, he points to tradition in those societies with a Judeo-Christian heritage, and social consensus. In addition, he encourages Christians to use *ad hominem* arguments which shifts attention away from reason, logic and the issue at hand and either attacks the character of the antagonist or appeals to the feelings and emotions of the audience. The pragmatic and utilitarian value of what he is saying is obvious, but it seems to contradict his argument. On the one hand, he is saying that without a biblical grounding there is no permanent ground for justice, yet he urges Christians to promote laws on the basis of social consensus or tradition. A restatement of natural law/natural justice would alleviate this problem and permit Christians to promote justice on a revelational basis that all people, redeemed and unredeemed, might be able to understand.

What is human law to protect? Basic human rights, Henry answers.57 A proper understanding of rights requires one to start with the notion of duty. Henry's understands a right as a concomitant of a duty. It is something that accompanies a duty in a subordinate or incidental way. What are our duties?

Yahweh formulates human duties as an obligation to God, not as conferring tangible rights or benefits upon humanity per se. Ultimately all duties reduce to two: love of God with one's whole being, and under God love of others as ourselves. The biblical theory divorces human rights discussion from metaphysical or sociological speculation and preserves it in the context of divine creation, divine disclosure, and present and future divine judgment.58

Our rights are little more than divinely imposed duties on others. They are not *a priori*

57 "The role of government is but to declare, to apply, and to enforce rights which are given of God and therefore inalienable. . . . The purpose of law is to prevent one person from injuring another; my rights end and become my duty where my neighbor's rights begin." Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 92.

claims of one against another. "The Bible does not teach that human beings simply on the
basis of existence have inherent or a priori rights, or that they have absolute rights accruing
from sociological or political considerations. The Bible has a doctrine of divinely imposed
duties; what moderns call human rights are the contingent flipside of those duties."59
From these duties, we may derive rights.

Henry stresses three basic rights that governments are bound to respect in the name
of justice: the inviolability of human life, the right of private property, and religious
liberty. He alludes to a right of political liberty, but he never sketches out in any detail
what he means and where he claims to find it in Scripture.60

His concern over human rights rises from his conviction that modern philosophy,
with its naturalistic bent, has lost its ground for any notion of human rights.

Since its methodology of observation can establish neither the source, nature, nor
content of law and justice, naturalism deprives law and justice of fixed and final
norms. A naturalistic exposition of law makes inevitable a positivistic relativizing
of law, since naturalism provides no safeguard against totalitarian rulers who
authoritatively arbitrate the nature and limits of human liberty; it actually puts in
doubt the very character and validity of human rights.61

A truly secure understanding of human rights requires a supernatural grounding.

The modern controversy over human rights call urgently for a theological recovery
of the metaphysical foundations of these rights. Human rights are grounded in

59 Ibid.

60 "The evangelical view is that human rights are grounded in the revealed will of
God, that religious liberty and political liberty are alike based on the Bible." Henry, The
Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 67.

61 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:422. "For theists the principle of
justice is primary and antecedent to civil government . . . naturalists, on the other hand,
correlate justice only with political constitutions and hence with the state's power to enforce
whatever laws the state decrees. Theism evaluates justice not solely by the constitution and
laws of the state; it invokes as well an ultimate standard of justice to which the constitution
itself, all legislation and all juridical actions must answer. By disallowing absolute,
transcendent justice naturalism relates justice entirely to man-made laws and precludes any
judgement of a nation's constitution, laws, and act according to a changeless superior
principle; naturalism, in effect, rules out any objective distinction between good and bad
government." Ibid., 6:421.
God's transcendent will for man made in his image. The basis of human rights is not supplied by positive law nor can these rights be reliably defined by analyzing human nature or human experience. Efforts to translate human insight and conscience into a logic of rights stumble against the reality of man's fall, and attempts to distill those rights from human experience collapse under the incompleteness and inconclusiveness of that experience. 

Judeo-Christian theism provides this needed foundation while providing a divinely stipulated duty on government to protect human rights.

Evangelical Christianity acknowledges God as Lord of the cosmos, of history, and of human life, and hence as the transcendent source, stipulator, and sanction of human responsibilities and rights. . . . Civil government must preserve and protect these rights as a presupposition of its own legitimacy, and the citizen must live in responsible awareness that his or her rights terminate where those of a fellow citizen begin and that citizens have responsibilities to the government which maintains those rights.

God has endowed all people with inalienable rights and inalienable duties at the same time. The state must recognize and enforce those rights and duties if it wishes to be called just.

Henry insists that Scripture teaches both the dignity and equality of all human life. Human worth is based upon God's creation of man and the redemptive death of Christ. Both divine acts testify to the fact that God has imparted value to human existence. This does not mean that human life is ultimate. To the contrary, Henry argues, "human life does not have infinite value, to be sure, for man is both a finite and contingent creature."

---

62 Ibid., 6:426.


64 Ibid., 121-122.

65 "Human worth is fixed by divine creation in the imago Dei, and Christ's redemptive death, moreover, proclaims man's worth even in a sinful condition." Henry, "The God of Bible and Moral Foundations," 14. Speaking of the creation of humanity, Henry declares: "The dramatic climax of the creation account comes with the creation of man in the image of God. No statement rises more spectacularly from the Genesis narrative than the declaration: 'Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good' (Gen. 1:26-31a, RSV)." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:497.

This God-given worth is also the basis for human equality. What God has wrought, he has done for all. For all are created in the image of God, and Christ has died for all of mankind.

Among the great religious traditions none has the design and dynamic for materializing brotherhood more than the Hebrew-Christian revelation of God and the world, which stresses the universal rational and moral responsibility of the race as well as its physical similarities. Biblical religion declares that all men by creation are children of the one Creator (Acts 17:28f); that they are obliged to love each other (Luke 10:27, 36f); that as sinners they have forfeited man's original spiritual sonship to God (John 8:42ff); that they are restored to divine sonship through supernatural grace and saving faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12, 3:5).

The right of private property is the second right that Henry claims to find in Scripture. Speaking of private property, Henry insists that Scripture "assumes its legitimacy and reinforces its propriety as a social institution." Henry points to three examples. First, God gave the Promised Land to the Hebrews. Second, "the Mosaic law implies that private property is legitimate and not sinful. It confers the highest sanctity on the principle of private ownership and reinforces the inviolability of property. The Eighth Commandment teaches that it is sinful to take what belongs to another, and the Tenth Commandment that it is sinful even to covet what belongs to another." Third, Henry claims the New Testament reaffirms the applicability of the Decalogue in Matt. 19:18f and Romans 13:9ff. In addition the actions of Christ and his disciples reinforce the

---

67 Carl F. H. Henry, "Brotherhood for a Week," Christianity Today, 2 February 1959, 20. "Emphasis on the equality of human beings is deeply rooted in the biblical teaching. It is universally vouchsafed on the basis of divine creation (Job 31:13-15) and within this framework, to the Hebrews on the basis of unmerited participation in God's covenant relationship and to Jew and Gentile alike on the basis of God's love expressed in Christ the Redeemer (John 3:16). Alongside these elements stand also the biblical warnings of man's universal guilt in sin and of God's coming judgment of all humanity (Rom. 3:9)." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:406.


69 Ibid.
appropriateness of individuals holding private property. Even in that one New Testament instance that might be interpreted to call for common ownership, Henry reminds us that Peter "specifically reinforced the right of private property in his rebuke to Ananias: 'While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?' (Acts 5:4)." 70

One's right to private property is not absolute: something Henry holds is true for all rights. "In the Bible God's sanction of private property stands in a framework that proclaims divine right above human rights; and only on this basis do human rights become inalienable."71 "Man's property right in respect to God is never absolute or indefeasible, but always derivative and conditional. In respect to the state and society, however, man's property right has formal divine sanction even if his use of property subverts God's spiritual intention."72 "The transcendent Creator stands above all as the ultimate source, sanction, and support of enduring rights; and on earth every man and all things are seen as God's own--God's creatures and his creation. In a word, God is their absolute owner, and man's possessions are a contingent and limited entrustment."73

The third right that temporal law should seek to preserve is the right to religious freedom. In writing about religious liberty, Henry posits a fourfold thesis:

first, that biblical theism alone provides adequate intellectual struts for a meaningful doctrine of religious liberty and for other human rights, while nontheistic views render such rights merely postulatory and problematical; second, that religious liberty as a universal human right is appropriate and indispensable to human beings irrespective of creed; third, that the right of religious freedom in fact shelters and nurtures all other human rights; and finally, that evangelicals who value human freedom as the gift of the Creator, whom we seek in good conscience to worship and serve, should engage more actively in championing religious freedom

70 Ibid., 98-99.
71 Ibid., 94.
72 Ibid., 100.
73 Ibid., 95-96.
everywhere as well as in promoting the religious freedom of Christians in secular American society.74

The argument that modern naturalism lacks a sufficient basis for human rights was mentioned earlier. Henry bemoans the fact that religious freedom in the modern era is often thought of in terms of religious tolerance. Religious tolerance, Henry insists, is little more than a matter of expedience. The recognition that tolerance grants to unpopular religions is temporary and lacks sufficient grounding to guarantee freedom when it becomes convenient to become intolerant.

Religious freedom is a right that accrues to every human being by virtue of the fact that each person is a free moral agent. Recognition of religious freedom is an affirmation of "man's inherent and primordial right to free spiritual decision, for which he is accountable alone to God." Every person is answerable to no one but God. Henry insists that "no person is to be restrained by the state for professing doctrine or practicing worship contrary to any religion, nor is he to be constrained legally toward an unpreferred religion. Since as a responsible moral agent man is directly answerable to God for his conscience in spiritual matters, he must before the law of the state be accorded full religious liberty." Consequently, Henry claims that "before the law of the state all religions are equal."75

Henry is convinced that religious freedom can suffice as a foundational right for other treasured freedoms.

Religious freedom—that is, one's right to worship and to obey God in good conscience—shelters and nurtures all other human rights, and in this sense undergirds them. Only if human beings have political and civil liberty to worship according to conscience can they worship and serve the living God meaningfully and resist the efforts of arbitrary powers who require subjects to do what God prohibits or to abstain from what God requires. In the absence of individual liberty to worship conscientiously, citizens fall prey to pretentious powers that arrogate to themselves the absolute authority and unqualified honor reserved only to God.76


God has given humanity the opportunity to choose whether or not to serve him. It is essential that governments recognize and respect this fundamental right.

His final comment on religious freedom is actually a call for evangelicals to be supportive of religious freedom for everyone. In supporting universal religious freedom, Christians are proclaiming an essential component of the Christian faith, namely the importance of individual voluntary commitment.

The first test of a good evangelical conscience under God is commitment to religious liberty not for Christians only but for all human beings. If evangelicals have learned well the lessons of history, they know that genuine faith thrives best in a context of voluntary religion, and that state religion is as costly to the religious community as it is to government. To guarantee freedom of religious preference to others underscores the importance of a voluntary faith. . . . God seeks humanity's voluntary spiritual allegiance; coerced decision is of little spiritual value.77

Henry's emphasis on religious freedom distinguishes him from other prominent Christian political thinkers. Both Luther and Calvin were proponents of religious freedom, but were often guilty of advocating use of the state's coercive power to punish heresy and blasphemy. Hooker was more tolerant than either of his reformer predecessors, but he too could not bring himself to proclaim unconditional toleration. St. Augustine's call for state intervention in the Donatist controversy has often been identified as the precedent for the crusades and inquisitions of the middle ages. Henry would reject the arguments of all of these men. He might sympathize with the position of St. Augustine to the extent that the Donatist controversy was more an issue of social disorder than of heresy, but the idea of calling forth the sword to establish religious hegemony or to suppress heresy is an anathema to Henry.78

---


78 A general introduction to Augustine's political thought can be found in the
What should government not do? While the state is very concerned with the outward conduct of its citizens, it is not to be concerned with metaphysical or theological issues nor with the epistemological basis for principles of justice and the motivations of its people to obey.

While what ground one affirms for arriving at the morality of particular acts is of theological or philosophical importance and of great individual significance, one's theological or philosophical rationale is not the business of civil government. The state does not police and legislate the foundations of morality or the motivations of citizens for keeping the law. Its concern is with the content of legality and with outward conduct.79

Furthermore, it should not "decide between theological alternatives," "evangelize," or "impose penalties for spiritual lethargy."80

Perhaps the most controversial notion Henry has forwarded is the idea that the state is not to be an instrument of love. Henry is responding to several fellow theologians, some of them within the evangelical camp, who prefer to identify biblical justice with the notions of grace and love. Acts of love are no longer differentiated from acts of justice and the state becomes an instrument of compassion.


79 Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 122. "Only a totalitarian society, whether theocratic or atheistic, imposes metaphysical beliefs upon its citizens. . . . The metaphysical grounds on which citizens affirm the content of justice is of high theological, philosophical, and apologetic importance but it is not a matter of political interest. The state can take sides in matters of religious or metaphysical disputation only by disregarding religious freedom. To be sure, unless a methodology for validating transcendent values exists, moral alternatives have no persuasive epistemological basis. But adjudicating between religions and philosophies is not the task of civil government; such concerns fall outside the scope of political authority." Ibid., 114-115.

This argument is usually based upon the idea that love is the preeminent attribute of God. Henry believes that many socially liberal Christians have made a significant theological error in their understanding of God’s attributes. Henry feels the contemporary emphasis on the love of God leads us to ignore the other attributes of the divine at our own peril. God is love but God is also just.

However much Scripture speaks about God’s holy love and mercy, and of God’s provision of his Son as the penitent sinner’s righteous substitute, Scripture focuses first and foremost upon God’s transcendent righteousness that rewards moral creatures according to their works and requires reparation for sin. That the righteous God is also the merciful God in no way diminishes his righteousness. There is hope in the sinner’s appeal to justice only if he lays claim by grace to the Just and Holy One whom God set forth a propitiation for sin that he might remain both "just and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). It is God’s mercy that he does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities (Ps. 3:10). . . . Unless the sinner appeals to justice by way of consenting to God’s just condemnation of the transgressor, he cannot meaningfully appeal for divine salvation proffered in the mediatorial work of the crucified and risen Christ. Only by acknowledging God’s just judgment can we truly share in the matchless mercy of God. No guilty sinner can grasp the munificent grace of God in Christ who fails to perceive the rightness of God’s condemning him to an eternal death from which there is no reprieve, who fails to see the reprehensibility of his revolt against the Lord of the cosmos, who fails to acknowledge that each day’s denial of proffered reconciliation with the righteous Creator only compounds his plight.

God is love in that he "graciously takes our condemnation upon himself in substitutionary death. Though our iniquities 'deserve to be rewarded' (Ps. 103:8) with unmitigated judgement, God mercifully spares us on condition of faith in the righteous Redeemer." But, God "does not circumvent his own justice in the demonstration of His love for

81 I am referring to scholars such as Stephen Mott, Robert K. Johnston, Lewis Smedes, Jan Dengerink, Karl Barth, and Reinhold Niebuhr. "Basic to this confusion is the sentimental modern reconstruction of the nature of God. This theological quagmire results from neo-orthodoxy's failure to rise above the modernist refusal to identify righteousness and justice no less than love with the essential core of God's being." Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 167. See pp. 146-171 of Aspects.

82 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:413-414.

83 Ibid.
The tendency to dissolve God's righteousness and justice into love and to insist upon love as the essential characteristic of God has not only misconstrued Scripture and the nature of God, according to Henry, but it also has significant political ramifications.85 Namely, it permits and even encourages an expanded role for the state while depreciating the church's contribution to society.

Just as in his theological view of God the liberal dissolves righteousness into love, so in the political order he dilutes social justice into compassion. This kind of merger not only destroys the biblical view of God on the one hand but also produces the welfare state on the other. This confounding of justice and love confuses what God expects of government with what he expects of the Church, and makes the state an instrument for legislating partisan and sectarian ideals upon society. Ideally the purpose of the state is to preserve justice, not to implement benevolence; ideally the purpose of the Church is to preach the Gospel and to manifest unmerited compassionate love.86

To impose upon government the task of compassion commits two errors. First, "it diverts government from an ideal preservation of equal human rights before the law" and second, "it shifts to the state a responsibility for compassion or benevolence that belongs properly to the Church."87 The state is not a "benevolence-dispensing agency."88

---
85 "It is important, therefore, to note the historic evangelical emphasis that righteousness and benevolence are equally ultimate in the unity of the divine nature. In accord with biblical theology, evangelical Christianity affirms that justice is an immutable divine quality, not reducible to a mere mode of divine benevolence on the fallacious theory that love is the exclusive center and core of God's being." Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 146.
87 Ibid., 7.
88 Carl F. H. Henry, "Who Is My Brother's Keeper?" *Christian Herald* 85 (January 1962): 15. Henry supports the notion of emergency government assistance in extreme situations. For example, he acknowledges that private welfare agencies were simply overwhelmed by the Great Depression. That same period, however, "created an opportunity for social revisionists to promote theories of state welfare that involve the government in a continuing and perpetual role of dispensing benevolences. Whenever social welfare is permanently fixed as a dimension of state moral concern, public pressures
What are some of the consequences of this action? First, Henry suggests, "by encouraging dependence on government welfare statism undermines self-reliance." 89 Second, "it [welfare statism] pre-empts the opportunities for voluntarism in a free society." 90 Third, "at the expense of the few it caters not to genuine 'needs' but to the exaggerated 'wants' of the many." 91 Fourth, "it promotes bureaucratic government." Fifth, it "hinder[s] the Christian Church, with its compassionate concern, from fulfilling legitimate aspects of her mission in the world." It does this by changing the nature of charity which is supposed to be testimonial, personal and voluntary. 92 Sixth, it undermines individual responsibility. 93 The notion of personal responsibility is neglected and we substitute a new ethic: "In place of 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' they substitute the dogma, 'Force those who have to support those who have not.'" 94 In short, increase until government extends its provision to cover not only human rights and emergency needs, but even the wants of the many. The end result of such a process is the welfare state. The role of government becomes widened beyond its scriptural responsibility for social justice to include a responsibility for welfare legislation." Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 163-164.


90 Ibid. "And welfare statism sustains itself only by increasing government appropriation of private income and by progressive taxation; thus it siphons off and dries up the reservoirs of voluntary philanthropy and benevolence." Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid. "The Christian perspective defines three special objections to welfare statism. For one thing, Christian giving to others is testimonial in character... Furthermore, the relationship in Christian benevolence is specific and personal; it nurtures responsible neighborliness, and thereby reinforces the living unity of God's created family. ... Moreover, as already stressed, Christian stewardship is voluntary. This quality confers on the donor as great a benefit as on the recipient." Ibid., 58.

93 "The Christian message involves individual responsibility to use personal possessions for the compassionate care of loved ones and of the needy; it suggests no assignment or transfer of legal responsibility to the state for the needs of others." Ibid., 17.

94 Ibid., 16.
"Public welfare programs stifle moral conscience." It undermines Christian virtues such as "the dignity and duty of work; personal responsibility and integrity; individual initiative; equal justice before the law." Justice, not charity, is the proper concern of the state. "Justice is concerned with what is man's right and due; charity goes beyond such claims." The best one can hope for is a society that protects the rights of everyone impartially and fairly. "In a fallen society justice best protects the civil and political rights of all because it is impartial; love is preferential."

The plain fact is that in the social order all prattling about love is irrelevant when what is needed is justice. The withholding of justice may be an expression of lovelessness, and the performance of justice may be described as love in action. But justice is not on that account formally identical with love, or vice versa. Nor are they identical in content: love goes beyond justice, although it does not negate it. Sinful men cannot really grasp the true nature of love, therefore, unless they are first taught the responsibility of justice through their common subjection to impartial laws that deal with all human beings alike; indeed, the transmutation of justice can only lead as well to the perversion of love. Justice deals with one's neighbor as a member of society as a whole, whereas love deals with him as a particular person.

95 Ibid., 58.
96 Ibid.
97 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:408.
98 Ibid., 6:407. "In law and justice—that is, the province of government—all men are obliged to support man's God-given rights as universally due to human beings whatever their race, color, or creed. The evangelical knows that no improvement can be made on a government that assures every man his rights, and that limits the freedom of citizens where and when it intrudes upon the rights of others. Evangelicals do not view government as an instrument of benevolence or compassion, since love is preferential and shows favor or partiality." Henry, "Evangelicals in the Social Struggle," 7.
99 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 171. Perhaps Henry could find further support for his argument by focusing on the doctrine of vocation. In one's vocation as a statesman or judge, one must treat everyone fairly and without partiality. Passing judgment and using force are required in one's vocation as a statesman and judge while one might, as an act of love, avoid doing these things on an individual level. Henry is convinced that Romans 13 specifically requires government officials to do these things.
It is easy to see how a state committed to love can easily become a modern welfare state. A worthy question to raise is whether a state committed to justice might not also have a concern for economic welfare. It is not difficult to imagine the notion of distributive justice having an economic element. Aristotle did not think of distributive justice as merely economic in nature but neither did he exclude the economic realm. Henry seems to assume that either relative justice does not include distributive justice or that distributive justice excludes the notion of economic redistribution. I raise the question not to provide the answer but to bring out an element that deserves further study.100

What forms of government are most appropriate for the task set out by Henry? "The New Testament . . . does not approve any one form of government—whether monarchy, republic, or democracy—as ideal, although it does exclude tyranny. The New Testament assumes the legitimate existence of divergently formed nations."101 Henry does believe that Scripture proscribes anarchy and totalitarianism as forms of political existence.102 He says that democracy is a commendable form of government and that it even "incorporates political virtues and blessings to an exceptional degree." The mechanical checks and balances found in modern democracies, he seems to think, are useful restraints on the abuse of governmental power. Nonetheless, he encourages one to "guard against overadulating or uncritically supporting some particular form of government."103 Even democracy is no guarantee for justice.

100 Calvin, for instance, would surely agree with Henry's love/justice distinction, but that did not stop him from calling upon the state to, among other things, care for the poor and provide educational opportunity. See Strauss and Cropsey, History of Political Philosophy, 4th ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 329.


102 "While the Bible prescribes no single form of government, it does repudiate some forms of political existence (e.g. state absolutism and social anarchy)." Ibid., 100-101.

103 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 73.
The weakness of democratic government lies in its tacit assumption that if people have access to vital information they will automatically make the right decisions. This premise overlooks two important things. First, man is preoccupied with narrowly selfish concerns, and second, he needs moral motivation to do what he knows is good and right. Because inordinate selfishness and passion easily overwhelm one's sense of justice, self-government requires spiritual direction in order to succeed. Precisely at this point the Christian message stimulates those virtues which contribute to political and social well-being. . . . To proclaim universally valid principles and to incorporate them into national political documents and life will not assure an adequate expression of political morality. These principles must find reflection in the lives of the citizenry. And when properly comprehended and appropriated, the Christian message energizes those very virtues of community life which best contribute to social-well-being. If regenerated men permeate national institutions with the truth and power of dedicated living, a "new order" of social life may be expected to follow.104

What is the proper role for the church in the political arena? What should it contribute to the quest for justice? Henry carefully circumscribes the role of the church. "The Church's mission in the world is spiritual. Its influence on the political order, therefore, must be registered indirectly, as a by-product of spiritual concerns."105 There are several things the church should do and several things that it should not do. First, we should look at the former.

It is clear to Henry that "preaching and discipling constitute the church's primary responsibility in the world."106 When speaking of the church's responsibility to preach, Henry has a specific task in mind. He means proclaiming the "Good News of God's saving grace to a sinful and lost humanity" for the purpose of "persuading condemned and lost sinners to put their trust in God by receiving and accepting Christ as Savior through the

104 Ibid., 133. "The weakness of the view that the majority will determine the content of legislation is that while it suspends on a majority vote the validity of the Christian or any other view of what is right, it provides no criterion for judging and assessing that consensus. A majority--even a majority of Americans--can be wrong. Majority rule is preferable to minority rule in that it provides a shelter against tyrants, but it does not of itself guarantee the rule of justice." Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 120.

105 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 105.

106 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:27.
power of the Holy Spirit, and to serve Christ as Lord in every calling of life and in the fellowship of His Church, looking toward the day of His coming in glory."107 This is a special task that is the sole responsibility of the church. If the church does not fulfill this mission, she becomes apostate.

In a certain respect, even the faithful preaching of the gospel is a political act. Henry says the gospel "calls for decisions that lead to hope-giving and rehumanizing possibilities."108 But preaching is directed principally to individuals not communities. To the extent that individuals respond, then society benefits.109

The evangelical task primarily is the preaching of the Gospel, in the interest of individual regeneration by the supernatural grace of God, in such a way that divine redemption can be recognized as the best solution of our problems, individual and social. This produces within history, through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, a divine society that transcends national and international lines. The corporate testimony of believers, in their purity of life, should provide for the world an example of the divine dynamic to overcome evils in every realm.110

The second task the church must perform is that of mirroring the kingdom of God to the world. Henry claims that "the church approximates God's kingdom in miniature, mirroring to each generation the power and joy of the appropriated realities of divine revelation."111 Scripture teaches, Henry argues, that "the church's calling is to

107 Henry, Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis, 3-5. "The church's unique mission is to announce to every nation the universal human need of redemption and the glad tidings of God's ready forgiveness of penitent sinners on the ground of the Redeemer's substitutionary life and death, and his offer of new spiritual life through the Holy Spirit." Henry, "Church and State," 9.

108 "While individuals may be addressed either alone or in a group, all effective evangelism in the final analysis must be personal. The goal of evangelism is to reach the world, that is, the great mass of unregenerate humanity, for individual commitment to Christ." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:531.

109 Henry, Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis, 48-49.


111 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:543.
demonstrate what it means to live in ultimate loyalty not to worldly powers but to the risen Lord in a corporate life of truth, righteousness and mercy." 112 The church serves as an example.

The Christian responsibility for a more equitable social order is thus to be fulfilled first within the life of the fellowship of faith, where the passionate concern for righteousness and love is presumably the daily burden of each and all. The mission of the Church is not simply to condemn social injustices; it is to exhibit what can be done to transcend them in a spiritual society of redeemed persons. 113

This task is essential if the church has any hope of persuading the world of the truth of its message. The church will fall short of the perfect standard for which it aims, but it must, nonetheless, pursue righteousness. 114

The third task the church must pursue involves the interpretation of Scripture. He insists that "... the church is mandated to proclaim publicly the revealed principles by which Christ the King of kings will ultimately judge nations and states and does so even now..." 115 These revealed principles are those "which government must promote and

112 Ibid., 4:529.

113 Carl F. H. Henry, "Perspective for Social Action, Part II," Christianity Today, 2 February 1959, 16. "The Church faces the social task, first, of ordering its own life as a community of the faithful in distinction from the world of unbelief, and this it does under God for the sake of all mankind. In this ordering of its own life the redeemed community ought to mirror what is implied in a good society." Henry, "Christian Social Involvement: Its Basis and Method--A Reply to Dr. Dengerink," 29.

114 "To be sure, the church will always be less than perfect in history, and she cannot wait to be perfect before she proclaims the joys of redemption by Christ. But if sanctification is not glorification, nonetheless sanctification is more than justification, and both justification and sanctification set the church apart from the world." Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 120-121. In another place he argues: "The Gospel can rescue men from the guilt and penalty of sin, and in a remarkable degree from its power. But it does not wholly transform the world into the church, nor wholly transform the church into the Kingdom of God." Henry, "Christian Personal and Social Ethics," 1180.

115 Henry, Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture, 118. "Because sociopolitical obligations devolve inescapably upon all Christians as citizens of two worlds, the Church is obliged to indicate what it means for political theory that the Christian life is to be maintained not only distinct from the world, but in relevant and responsible relationship to the whole social-cultural realms and to demonstrate the proper performance of political duty." Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 82-83.
men must observe for the sake of a just society." 116

... evangelical preaching in the pulpits ought to avoid the temptation simply to be concerned with the evangelization of members who have already been evangelized, and to shoulder the responsibility of declaring the revealed principles and criteria by which God intends man and nations to live and by which He intends to judge the world and which, when they violate, they do so at their own peril, inviting ultimately the collapse of any civilization or culture as well as the judgment of God. 117

This entails rather direct involvement in the social realm. Nonetheless, Henry argues, it is clear "the Church must expound the revealed will of God for the political order no less than for the other spheres of life, for all are answerable and subject to divine judgment." 118

Henry points out five reasons why the church must explicate proper social principles. First, "if the Church fails to apply the central truths of the Christian religion to social problems correctly, someone else will do so incorrectly." Second, the church must "dispel misunderstanding of its attitude toward the State" for the "sake of self-protection and self preservation." Third, in an age of excessive governmental power, the church must make it clear what can legitimately be rendered to Caesar and what must be withheld. 119 Fourth, in an age of relativism it is essential that the church remind the world of the true basis of human rights. Fifth, "national life always has a distinctive character." God uses and

118 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 76.
119 In regard to the principles the church must enunciate, none is more important than that regarding the limits of governmental power. "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." Ibid., 98.
judges nations in the course of human history, thus Christians must urge their nation to manifest the will of God. 120

The enunciation of principles leads to a fourth type of political involvement for the church: passing judgement. A clear exposition of scriptural principles will necessitate drawing conclusions about current practices. When Henry calls for the "vigorous declaration of the great principles of social order enunciated in the Scriptures," he means that the church should be explicit in declaration and specific in application. 121 As an example, Henry claims, the church

... has the right and duty to call upon rulers, even pagan rulers, to maintain order and justice. It must stress the divine responsibility of government, condemn every repudiation of divine answerability, and challenge the State's neglect of its duty. The Church cannot content itself simply with denying church membership to the unjust and politically immoral. It must also criticize those who violate, misapply, or refuse to enforce the law. 122

All advice from the church regarding politics must have a sound scriptural base. "The Church's guidance in socio-political matters is nullified unless its statements to church members are guided in turn by scriptural principles." 123 But when scriptural principles are violated, the church must speak. 124

120 Ibid., 82-88.
121 Ibid., 121.
122 Ibid., 81-82.
123 Ibid., 108.
124 "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. If wicked political regimes require what God forbids or disown what God commands, then the
At this point Henry is drawing a fine line that is easily breached. When the church enunciates principles of justice and judges whether those standards are being met or broken, it is, in fact, passing judgement on specific political acts. Its judgement also bears directly on government officials whose careers hang occasionally in the balance. Thus, while the church is discouraged by Henry from engaging directly in practical political matters, as will be shown shortly, he has encouraged it indirectly.

The fifth task the church should undertake is to encourage individual Christians to participate politically to the limit of their ability and opportunity. He argues that "the Church as an organized movement must not allow its own energies to deteriorate into direct political activity, but must encourage its individual members to fulfill their political duties as a spiritual responsibility." Individual involvement will not proceed without guidance if the church has fulfilled its mission by enunciating the scriptural principles of justice. Armed with such knowledge, the church should encourage full individual participation in the political arena.

The church as such must also stimulate members to apply scriptural principles with sound reason and in good conscience to current political concerns, in quest of preferred policies and programs promoting justice and peace. Since God wills the state as an instrumentality for preserving justice and restraining disorder, the church should urge members to engage in political affairs to their utmost competence and ability, to vote faithfully and intelligently, to engage in the political process at all levels, and to seek and hold public office.126

Lastly, the church must pray for the state and urge people to obey it. "The Church is a Christian community may not espouse an ethic of political neutrality and social noninvolvement; rather it must be clearly and openly devoted to the Lord of all principalities and powers and stand unequivocally only for those purposes for which civil government was divinely intended in a fallen society." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:545. "If the Christians' moral duty includes civic and political duty as well, the Church dare not be indifferent to the particular structures and patterns of political order." Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 99.

125 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 105.

126 Henry, Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture, 118.
obliged not simply to pray in private, but also, as part of the whole counsel of God, to proclaim publicly the divinely intended role of civil government."127 This plea for divine assistance combined with a public endorsement of the legitimacy of the state helps to solidify the opinion that Christians are neither apolitical nor antithetical to the state.

If the church should do these things, what are the restrictions on its activities. First, "the church is not ... to use the mechanism of government to legally impose upon society at large her theological commitments."128 The church has a purpose with specific tasks assigned to it relative to that purpose. It is not to preempt those tasks assigned to political institutions. The church is not called to implement or promote a modern theocracy or even a Christian America depending on how one interprets that notion. "The church's evangelization of society will rely on proclamation and persuasion, not on legislation and political coercion."129

The same biblical admonition that Henry uses to circumscribed the role of the state is used to limit the church. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and render unto God the things that are God's." (Mark 12:17) The church must focus upon the things of God.

Were Christians to champion a modern theocracy, they would be at odds with the New Testament doctrine of civil government, for Jesus Christ never instructed his disciples to give to God what is Caesar's. Only at his return in the last days will Christ rule in Caesar's stead; until then, nations will function in a variety of forms, each awaiting its own final judgment when every ruler will bow the knee to the King of Kings.130

The church should attempt to permeate the community by shaping the individuals

127 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 81.
128 Henry, Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture, 118.
130 Ibid., 10.
which compose it, but it should not attempt to use the state as a tool in that process.

The Christian community has every reason, of course, to seek a "Christian nation," that is, a citizenry voluntarily committed to the moral principles of revealed religion and personally related to Jesus Christ, but the promotion of a Christian state raises many problems. For this approach fails to understand that ideally the state is an instrument of justice as due from and owing to all men irrespective of their personal religious belief or unbelief simply on the basis of their divinely created humanity.131

The state must remain apart from the church. Its goals, purposes and methods differ from those of the church.

Present-day obedience to Christ does not require Christians to embody all Old Testament law and all Jesus' teachings into law. On the contrary, obedience to the New Testament requires that Christians not incorporate all biblical imperatives into civil legislation, for two reasons. First, some Old Testament law was intended for the Hebrew theocracy only; second, Christians are not to rely on legal implementation to fulfill divine imperatives that they themselves are to communicate to the nonbelieving world through preaching and persuasion.132

Henry believes the church is mistaken when it attempts to impose its moral code upon the unregenerate world. He states clearly: "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."133

The Church must remember "the political order does not exist for the enforcement of sectarian objectives."134

To argue otherwise would make the church susceptible to two undesirable outcomes. First, it leads to "ecclesiastical exploitation of the state, and second, it results in the political...

131 Henry, Faith at the Frontiers, 110-111.
133 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 77.
134 Ibid., 80. "Christ never committed the cause of his kingdom to a magistrate, never urged that false religions be extirpated by the sword, but provided only spiritual weapons for dealing with heresy and unbelief. It is dangerous for the church to permit the state to assist her, since this may conceal Christ's exclusive authority in spiritual matters." Henry, "The Great Issue," 842.
deterioration of religion." He writes:

Wherever ecclesiastical hierarchies have sought to conform secular law to church law, thereby extending the authority of church law to encompass virtually all of life, Christianity has lost ground in the long run. Under ecclesiastical influence politicians have sometimes adopted proposals initiated and promoted by the Church, so that the Church was not openly responsible for their enforcement. The end-results have been the same, however: ecclesiastical exploitation of the State and political deterioration of religion. ... To impose a particular theory of society and Christian moral ideals upon unresponsive masses both abuses ecclesiastical influence and breeds resentment of church interference in government. Even apart from trying to impose a comprehensive Christian program on society, the Church breeds reaction whenever it seeks to enforce certain precepts that are unsupported by public opinion.135

To preserve the God-given integrity of the church and of the state, the church should not attempt to co-opt the state for its own purposes.

Second, Henry asserts that the church should not get involved directly in practical political matters. All direct involvement must be done by individuals. The church should not hesitate to instruct its members regarding biblical principles, but Henry insists this is different from proposing specific policy alternatives and endorsing specific legislative proposals.136 Henry writes:

I do not think it is the prerogative of the church as an official body to engage directly in politics--whether the endorsement of particular political parties, candidates, or legislation. Christians as individuals do indeed have the duty, to the limit of their competence and ability, of engaging directly in the determination of public issues as they seek in good conscience to particularize the principles of social righteousness in terms of various political options. The corporate Church, however, becomes spiritually vagrant if she becomes a political agency; her mission rather is to proclaim the revealed will of God, including the divine standards by which the world order will be judged, and which criteria Godly people ought therefore to promote and support in the public order.137

His view runs counter to much of contemporary Christian social advice.

Today Christian social action is often so defined as to include the proposing and

135 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 78.


137 Henry, Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis, 71.
drafting of legislation, its direct promotion by association with and membership in agencies organized for legislative objectives, and direct lobbying. Thus political action in virtually every sense becomes a function of the church as a corporate entity, despite the fact that this is not the task for which ecclesiastical bodies spring into existence.  

He condemns such activism in harsh language. When the institutionalized church becomes active in practical politics it "prostitutes its calling and forfeits any claim to spiritual obedience."  

One reason for the church to avoid partisan activity involves those dissidents within the church. For "whenever the Church advances a political ideology or promotes partisan legislation," Henry argues, "its ecclesiastical leaders are soon forced into the position of impugning the integrity of influential Christians who sincerely dissent from the official views." Such action is unnecessary and potentially divisive. A second reason is that "the clergy do not speak with the same competence and authority in practical politics as they do in spiritual and moral affairs. . . . The dignity of the church is damaged when ecclesiastical leaders appear before political bodies to plead special cases in areas where churchmen obviously lack the information necessary to reach a sound political judgment . . . ." Last, it opens the church to manipulation. "A church party can be infiltrated by

138 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 106.

139 Ibid., 108.


141 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 106. Some Christians disagree. Dr. Jan D. Dengerink points to Abraham Kuyper of the Netherlands who founded a Christian political party and was chosen prime minister when his party gained majority support. (See Jan Dengerink, "The Power of the Reformation in Political Life," International Reformed Bulletin, April 1962.) Similar problems arise when one forms Christian political parties. Some Christian theorists have suggested that a Christian political party is a necessary tool of political influence. Henry rejects this idea. "Formation of such Christian parties, moreover, does not rule out infiltration by those who approve their program but deny their faith; it encourages the temptation of politicians to use church identification and ecclesiastical organization as vehicles of personal ambition. Nor does it preclude the party's sponsoring a program that is only presumptively but not actually Christian, and clothing a purely political program with a theological role or religious symbol. Moreover, such parties may endanger Christian unity, since they imply that those who do not endorse
candidates who share only limited sympathy for its goals; candidates in turn are tempted to use church identification as a vehicle of political advancement; through its endorsements the church is placed under subsequent constraint to defend political programs that have unexpectedly gone awry."142 Therefore, he concludes, "nowhere does the New Testament provide the institutional church any authority, jurisdiction, or mandate to wield direct pressure upon government and public agencies for commitment to specific ecclesiastically-approved policies and programs."143

Third, the prohibition on direct political involvement includes fomenting revolution. The church must not act to undermine government. Henry writes:

Certainly the role of the Christian community is not to forcibly demote alien powers (vengeance is mine, saith the Lord). While they now work rebelliously to elevate themselves to absolute value, to enslave mankind (Col. 2:20; Eph. 2:2; Gal. 4:3) and to separate the redeemed from God's love (Rom. 8:35-39), these alien powers were nonetheless first created in God's service. . . . The task of the church includes supporting their rightful claims while calling them back to God's service; the church is to challenge their wrongful ways, and remind them that the openly attested lordship of Jesus pledges the sure doom of all oppressive social and political structures.144

The church should obey, not undermine, government. As a God-given institution, the state deserves respect and obedience. Rather than undermining government, the church should

the political program are deficient in their faith." Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 141-142.

142 Henry, Faith at the Frontiers, 112.

143 Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 46-47.

144 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:529. "While the New Testament indicates that disobedience may at times be a spiritual duty, it does not encourage a revolutionary attitude toward the state. . . . The New Testament instances in which Christians disobeyed rulers involve refusal to yield to attempts to suppress the proclamation of the gospel. Fulfillment of the Great Commission was explicitly commanded, and in this mission the followers of Christ were constrained to obey God rather than men. . . . The New Testament sets absolutely no precedent for the church's advocacy of mob pressures and guerilla violence as ways of implementing socio-economic changes; the early Christians relied on proclamation, persuasion, and example." Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 47.
teach people about the importance of the state and its appropriate role on earth. "The Church must lead men to understand government as a guardian of justice, must condemn legal infractions as crimes against the State, and must emphasize the culpability of offenders and their need to repent."\(^{145}\) When change is needed, it should be pursued via legal and peaceful means. "Church bodies are obliged to observe civil and criminal laws. And, if protesting those laws as less than just, such bodies should do so by exploring all possibilities for change through legal means . . ."\(^{146}\) Henry gives great weight to the fact that "neither the prophets, nor Jesus, nor the apostles, spearheaded revolutionary movements."\(^{147}\)

The last thing the church is not to do in regard to politics, is to seek narrow self-interest. The church is not to be another special interest seeking to selfishly promote its own agenda. "The Church as Church is not to seek from government its own favored prestige and power in the political realms, nor to support merely what contributes to its own advancement."\(^{148}\) Self-interest, properly understood, according to Henry, is much broader. "The Church's 'self-interest' in matters of government is found in the protection of the rights of all."\(^{149}\) One should not forget that justice is a universal concern. Churches should proclaim this important message. "The Church respects an eternal justice and an authoritative law which is transcendent and objective, and which, on the ground that all men are responsible creatures answerable to their Creator, allows and preserves the

\(^{145}\) Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 81.

\(^{146}\) Henry, "Church and State," 12.

\(^{147}\) Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:429.

\(^{148}\) Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 78.

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 86.
rights of non-Christians as well as of Christians." 150

Henry is certain that the Church should be concerned with public affairs in such a way that is designed to further the public good. It should not merely pursue self-interest. Single issue politics is inappropriate. Henry decries "confrontational activism that promotes Christian legislation and a Christian state." 151 Henry looks back at 18th century England when evangelicals were concerned for public justice, not simply for special evangelical interests. They identified themselves with the whole body politic in the effort to promote civic righteousness. They championed a public philosophy and addressed national conscience. This was not simply a matter of one's private vision of civic decency; it was a divine compulsion to speak of public affairs in the context of transcendent justice and of a universally binding social good. 152

The lack of direct church involvement does not translate into political indifference. To the contrary, the church must be seriously concerned with the pursuit of justice while cognizant of the fact that it cannot be the primary figure in the pursuit of it here on earth. If the church should not be involved directly in politics, then how shall the Christian faith shape the political arena? Henry insist that such influence be done by individuals. Even "if church members are not to be marshaled in support of a political program formulated by an ecclesiastical hierarchy, there is room nonetheless for a large collective impact by Christians in society, as a movement of regenerate individuals seeking in good conscience to apply biblical principles in the arena of public duty, decision, and deed." 153 In fact, it is a duty. "Subject to limits of knowledge and competence, Christians ought to be in the vanguard of the quest for better (that is, more just) laws. . . . Upon every believer falls a public duty to

150 Ibid., 81.
152 Ibid.
153 Henry, Faith at the Frontiers, 113.
register his influence in public affairs, in school and community matters, and in state and national politics." 154

Biblical principles provide the guidelines which must direct the involvement of individual Christians. Expounding upon principle is not enough.

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. 155

The first duty of individuals is to obey the laws of their country. This obligation applies to everyone. "Christian or not, all human beings are to live by the law of the land, assured that God wills civil government to preserve justice and restrain anarchy, and that the legal code itself is therefore answerable to the transcendent will and law of God." 156 This is especially true of Christians. Henry insists that "the Christian's chief duty as a citizen of the community is that of civil obedience." 157 One should be "spiritually inclined" to obey all laws. 158

The Christian's duty to support the State includes observance of tax laws and laws of community order such as speed limits, parking regulations, and so on. He is not to begrudge such obedience to statute law, as if the demands of civil government represent an unavoidable encroachment upon Christian liberty. The Christian community must promote public morality by personal example and a positive spirit toward the State. This requirement is implicit in various scriptural injunctions. 159


155 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 129.


158 Ibid., 79-80.

159 Ibid., 80-81.
Obedience is required because God wills governments to act in such a way to maintain order and preserve peace. Rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's means to render obedience to the laws of the state.160

Are there any exceptions to the duty to obey? Yes.

There is one point, however, where the Christian in the political arena can properly declare God's revealed will and command to be a principle of political action, and that is where civil law requires him or her to do what contravenes what God requires, or requires him or her to do what God prohibits. In the political realm the Christian seeks by his or her actions to obey both God and governmental authorities. But when "the powers" require what violates God's command, the Christian like the apostles will openly declare his or supreme allegiance: "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29).161

There are consequences for individuals who opt for civil disobedience and Henry urges them to accept them willingly.162 Guidance in this matter must come from the church.

"The church must increasingly clarify when obedience to God requires disobedience to the state and, no less, when disobedience to the state constitutes disobedience to God."163

---

160 Ibid.
161 Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 122-123. "The mandate of God's law and of universal justice and interpersonal love transcends that of obedience to all earthly authority." Ibid., 133. An exegetical study of Romans 13:1 would have been helpful. It says, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established." The key word is "submit" which is alternatively translated as "obey" or "be subject." Cranfield says: "It seems virtually certain that in the present verse what Paul is enjoining is not uncritical obedience to whatever command the civil authority may decide to give but the recognition that one has been placed below the authority by God and that it therefore has a greater claim on one than one has on oneself, and such responsible conduct in relation to it as results from such a recognition." C. E. B. Cranfield, The Epistle to the Romans, International Critical Commentary Series (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1979), 660-663. This leaves open the possibility of civil disobedience. For when the state claims greater authority than that assigned to it by God then it is one's duty to disobey the state and to obey the higher authority.

162 "The right of conscientious personal protest and disobedience is recognized, although the resister should be prepared to pay the legal penalties of civil disobedience." Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 132.

163 Henry, Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture, 118-119.
Henry is quick to remind us of the societal consequences of unlawful and violent protest.

In a world in which deliberate violation, however, well-intentioned, readily encourages massive disregard for law . . . the refusal to seek change through duly constituted legal processes may be civilizationally costly. The church knows that God is the transcendent source and sanction of law, and the clergy especially ought to know that man is not above it in the absence of a clear and scriptural mandate for civil disobedience.164

Henry urges Christians to remain within the bounds of the law in combating injustice. "While this process is slower than revolutionary violence, it is in the long run less costly and more permanent in its effects, since it presupposes the legitimacy of law. Reliance on due process of law to eliminate abuse or to reform law remains the best antidote to illegal acts and unjust laws."165 Even if civil disobedience becomes necessary, revolutionary violence is not.

This is an area where Henry remains close to the teachings of Luther and Calvin. The reformers had insisted that civil disobedience, which they frowned upon, must always remain civil. Resistance to the use of violent and revolutionary means began to dissolve in the mid-sixteenth century during the religious wars that were prompted by conflicts between Catholic rulers and Protestant subjects. Tracts such as Vindiciae contra Tyrannos called upon Christians not to suffer injustice or respect existing authority but to rise up and replace tyrants.166 Luther and Calvin had insisted that people should obey even a tyrant. They reasoned that, (1) "no government can be totally bad," (2) "each people receives the government it deserves," (3) "to suffer wrong destroys no man’s soul, nay, it improves the

164 Ibid.

165 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:453.

166 Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos, or "A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants," published in 1579 was a very important tract during this increasingly revolutionary period. Published under the name Stephanus Junius Brutus, it is attributed to a Huguenot author, possibly Philippe DuPlessis-Mornay (1549-1623).
soul," and, (4) obedience is the "basis of all stable social life."167 To resist is to defy God's grant of authority to the ruler and is to sit in God's place as the judge of the nations. Henry seems to agree. Obedience is God's will, resistance is rarely permissible and must be civil in character.

Obeying the law is not enough. One must also strive to influence the law. Christians must remember that

having emphasized the importance of prayer for the State; of study of the Scriptures for principles of social ethics; of discussion among church members over the Bible's bearing on current options; and having emphasized the personal influence of believers upon their fellow citizens, we still face this inescapable fact: Christians have a vital stake in the specific laws on the statute books. . . . The decisive test of genuine political concern lies not simply in developing political theory; it is found rather in transmitting theory into something concrete and politically relevant.168

"Christians are therefore in and through civil authority to work aggressively for the advancement of justice and human good to the limit of their individual competence and opportunity. This they do by providing critical illumination, personal example, and vocational leadership."169

The pursuit of justice must be an active one. It is a command that Christians act. Henry says that "if one professes to be a Christian, talk is no more a substitute for action

167 Strauss and Cropsey, History of Political Philosophy, 338-339. While Calvin seems to disapprove of almost all disobedience, Luther specifically permits it in two instances. One where "we are called upon to commit an act of clear injustice against other" and two, "when secular powers step out of their proper realm and presume to prescribe matters of belief and worship contrary to God's Word." Ibid., 340.


169 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 3:70. "Current issues will not be resolved simply by reiterating elemental guidelines for Christian political involvement such as voting regularly, elevating political integrity and competence above party loyalties, and supporting spiritually devout candidates who manifest political competence and public dedication. Christian duty requires individual commitment to and implementation of practical justice; it is not enough simply to believe in the right and to elect others to promote and practice it." Ibid., 4:435.
than faith is a substitute for works."\(^{170}\) It is a part of one's witness to work for the good. This not always an easy task, but "Christians as individuals do indeed have the duty, to the limit of their competence and ability, [to] engage directly in the determination of public issues as they seek in good conscience to particularize the principles of social righteousness in terms of various political options."\(^{171}\) To do otherwise is an abdication of responsibility. "Anyone who excuses himself from the need of understanding political issues, and foregoes an intelligent opinion of them, is not really worthy of the privileges of citizenship; he cannot escape a measure of blame for the political injustice and human misery that follow ill-judged legislation."\(^{172}\)

Henry is eager for Christians to provide political leadership. What is the mission that humanity ought to perform? "Humanity's work is to shape the cosmos in conformity to the moral and spiritual purposes of the Creator. It is to be constructive, not destructive, and hence is to glorify God and promote the good of humankind."\(^{173}\) In pursuit of this mission people have the opportunity to make a difference in this world.

\(^{170}\) Ibid., 4:547. "While the New Testament as well as the Old emphasizes the social responsibility of the believer, it views good works not as the substance of regeneration but as a consequence and evidence of it." Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis*, 73.

\(^{171}\) Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis*, 71. "By active means he must support and promote those legislative policies most compatible with biblical principles. He must distinguish and evaluate the live options as competently as possible from the standpoint of a just political order." Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 135.

\(^{172}\) Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 132. Thus, he concludes, "the Christian prays daily, and ought to work daily, for God's will to be done on earth, as in heaven. As a citizen of two worlds he will engage actively wherever possible in the struggle for social righteousness to the full limit of personal ability and competence. Existing social structures that frustrate human freedom and public justice must be challenged." Henry, *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*, 122.

\(^{173}\) Henry, *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society*, 104. Thus, "work is permeated by purpose; it is intended to serve God, benefit mankind, make nature subservient to the moral program of creation. Man must therefore apply his whole being . . . to the daily job." Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 48. "Work for the believer is a sacred stewardship." Ibid., 31.
I have stressed that the realm of man's daily work viewed as a divine vocation constitutes the most accessible and natural bridge from the contemplative world of theology to the practical world of economic affairs; that to the extent of their perceptiveness believers ought to be politically alert and active; that all Christians should promote just laws and seek human equality before the law; and that in confronting social injustice the carriers of revealed religion ought not to neglect its unique contribution in nurturing personal regeneration, nourishing neighbor love, and sustaining the noblest moral virtues.174

While all Christians have this responsibility, whatever their vocation, Christian political figures have a special opportunity and merit special recognition. "Christians who opt for a career in politics deserve praise [and] should be heralded, if not as missionaries by vocation, surely as vocational missionaries."175

Henry sees a real need for better people in positions of political leadership. He argues that what the political arena desperately needs is not merely better parties, platforms, and policies, but better persons. The hour has struck for moral courage. . . . Paul's exhortation to the Philippians remains a comprehensive motto for those in public life: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (4:8)."176

Political leaders have a higher calling and should remind themselves constantly that they rule not for the sake of power but for the sake of justice.

In a society in which human beings remain free to mold their immediate political destiny, the principled politician will stimulate the conscience and will of his generation to reach as much as possible for the lasting good. The political leader . . . serves his country and his God best--and his own constituency as well--if he risks all other claims in the promotion of what he confidently believes to be right and just. The scriptural norms and principles will function incomparably to identify the worthiest alternatives.177

---


Henry is anxious for Christians to play leadership roles in society, although he admits that non-Christians can play significant positive roles in the political arena. The advantages to society of Christian leadership are severalfold. The principal advantage is that the Christian should be wholeheartedly committed to justice. Once in power, "the Christian political statesman seeks to sponsor and support just laws and to avoid impositions that might require citizens to act contrary to the will of God and to a good conscience." 178 In addition, "it is usually true that the moral principles of a dedicated Christian politician engender trust. That a Christian politician operates on a distinctive code of public and personal morality should be readily apparent; the public should recognize him as an office-holder of high moral dedication." 179

Christians should not assume that only Christians are the best persons for the job. In democratic regimes, where Christian citizens must engage in the tricky business of judging candidates for office, an emphasis on the Christian commitment or personal morality of competing candidates is wrongheaded. "Emphasis on candidates' evangelicalism often overlooks the equally important matter of their political astuteness, even of their fallibility simply as human beings; electing godly individuals, moreover, does not in and of itself remedy institutional injustices." 180 Moreover, "to judge candidates, irrespective of their positions on fundamental political issues, simply on the basis of personal vices like profanity, drinking, or smoking, is too naive . . . " 181 We should not expect spiritual and moral purity from political leaders. All people have sinned. There are some private matters that are sinful in the eyes of God (lust and covetousness) that have no bearing on the

---

178 Ibid., 133.
179 Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 140.
180 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:440.
qualification for public office. The thing that is important is one's political skill and one's policy views. Henry maintains that:

in the last analysis, sound political judgement requires a verdict on policy no less than on character. . . . In an imperfect world the choices are more complex than whether to support a deceiver who champions flawed political policy or a saint committed to sound policy. Political and ethical realities often force us to choose the lesser of two evils.

What practical guidelines might guide a Christian's involvement? First of all, Henry encourages working with non-Christians in pursuit of justice. He says:

The truth is that a Christian need not restrict political cooperation to those who share his theological convictions, because political order and justice are not responsibilities that devolve only upon persons who respond to the gospel. Whoever recognizes that justice confronts all men as an objective claim may cooperate in seeking and advancing a society of law and order, even if the Christian alone perceives the living God as the transcendent ground of jurisprudence and justice.

Quite simply "Christians may and must work with non-Christians anywhere and everywhere in mutual quest and pursuit of social justice."

182 Henry, "Private Sins, Public Office," 28. "Because human beings have a variety of faults, foibles, and frailties," Henry remarks, "we must distinguish persistent and consequential moral failure from lesser transgressions, noting the stage of life at which they occurred and how the offender handled them." However, "since legislation concerns what is lawful and unlawful" and "respect for law is a prime requisite of an orderly society," it is clear that one who is given to illegality should not serve in public office. Henry says that "exposure of one's legal record is relevant to eligibility for election." Ibid.

183 Ibid., 29.

184 Henry, Faith at the Frontiers, 113.

185 Henry, A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration, 68. "Cobelligerency will be a fact of political life in the decades ahead, not without both gains and losses for each participating group, and not without frequently shifting alliances for preferred ends. Nothing in scriptural revelation or in general revelation precludes an evangelical and a secular humanist from standing together against race discrimination or ecological pollution. A humanist may not want to stand with a theist any more than a theist would prefer to stand with an atheist. But if the issue at stake is human rights and duty or public pollution, not supernaturalism or naturalism, each can ignore what he or she perceives to be a shaky epistemology to jointly commend right action and public justice." Henry, "The New Coalitions," 28. "The evangelical should be counted upon not only to 'go along' with all worthy reform movements, but to give them a proper leadership. He must give unlimited expression to his condemnation of all social evils, coupled with an insistence that a self-
Henry acknowledges that many Christians avoid the political realm because of the necessity of compromise. His position is clear. May a Christian compromise on principle in pursuit of a goal? The answer for Henry is yes. He thinks that

any Christian engaged in the pursuit of social justice is painfully aware that, in a tragic world of fallen men, government decisions often involve a choice between greater and lesser evils rather than between absolutes of good and evil, and that only the church of Christ can witness to a manifestation of absolute good in history. He will, however, avoid both the liberal error of "absolutizing relatives," as if these were identical with the will of God, and also the fundamentalist temptation to consider any gain short of the absolute ideal in history as worthless or unworthy.186

In fact, statesmanship requires such.

The political statesman who seeks the ideal knows that he must cast his vote (if he is also a realist) for the best approximation of that ideal among the surviving options. He does so in humility born of an awareness that he too exists as a member of a finite and fallen society, and in confidence that despite his own limited insights he can rely on the operative providence of the God he serves. The laws that the Christian statesman sponsors are those he conscientiously considers better than rival options, yet he does not consider them unrevisable absolutes; the passing of years, sometimes only of months, may require a preferable alternative.187

In conclusion, Henry has claimed the temporal kingdom will never achieve justice in the fullest sense of the word: righteousness. It can, however, achieve a degree of justice by being impartial and fair. The extent to which justice is achieved depends upon the influence of a proper conception of justice: namely, justice as the will of God. Influence is most significantly brought to bear upon modern society through the institutions of church and state. Christians thus owe allegiance and obedience to both the church and the state. Christians are to strive for righteousness in their personal lives and in their public lives. While realizing that perfect justice is unattainable short of the return of Christ, the duty to work for such is a requirement of God.

Maintaining a sharp distinction between church and state on Henry's principles is a difficult task at best. To the extent that guidance for political matters depends upon Scripture, the church will forever be tempted to extend its influence and transcend its limits. To the extent that guidance in human affairs can be obtained apart from Scripture, separation is more easily maintained but at the price of limiting the authority of the church and limiting what it has to say. When the Puritans in England, the followers of John Knox in Scotland, and the Huguenots in France disparaged human reason, we witnessed a violation of that church/state distinction treasured by Henry. When Scripture is viewed as the final authority, and the church is the only true expositor of Scripture, the possibility, nay the probability of some form of theocratic government emerges. For in practice, the state becomes answerable to the church. If, on the other hand, it were possible for the state to know standards of right and wrong apart from ecclesiastic direction, then the distinction is easier to maintain.

To the extent that Henry follows the two-kingdom approach of St. Augustine and to the extent that he relies upon the idea of a creation ethic, Lutheran scholar Mark Ellingsen thinks Henry may be leaning toward a solution similar to that mentioned earlier in this chapter. Ellingsen summarizes Lutheran social ethics.

The "two-kingdom" ethic is the fundamental basis for all Lutheran social ethics. This view takes seriously the Pauline injunction in Romans 13, which suggests that the state has its own integrity apart from the Church. The two kingdoms, the kingdom of the law to which the state belongs and the kingdom of gospel, cannot be confused. However, this is not to say that these realms do not overlap. The Christian lives in both realms, and God rules in both. God is understood to have established civil government as part of the created order. The state's purpose, then, is to help safeguard the creation by restraining evil in human society.188

The state has guidance in carrying out this important task because all humans have a common ground on which to build. That common ground established at the time of

188 Ellingsen, The Evangelical Movement: Growth, Impact, Controversy, Dialog, 344. The purpose of this particular volume is to explore common ground between the Lutherans and the evangelicals.
creation is natural law.

Thus the task of the Christian, and of all human beings, is to ensure that
government is in fact ruled by the principles of the Second Table (final six) of the
Ten Commandments. That is to say, social ethical responsibility entails that citizens
work to see that justice is served. The Christian can work side by side with the
non-Christian in carrying out these responsibilities inasmuch as, since they are both
creatures who experience the law by which creation is structured, both have access
to a common criterion (the law, justice) for political decision making.189

This common criterion, natural law, was established by God at the time of creation
and is knowable via human reason. The idea of divinely established standards of right and
wrong remains and the clear distinction between church and state is safeguarded. The
church need not dictate to the state the principles of justice, it need only remind the state of
what the state can know on the basis of general revelation.

189 Ibid., 344-345.
CHAPTER SEVEN

PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES

In the 1940s, Carl Henry was regarded as a radical: calling for social involvement in the midst of an audience that was increasingly isolationist. This characterization of Henry changed when younger and more reform-minded evangelicals responded to his message. This new generation of evangelicals often criticize Henry for failing to be specific in regard to practical political and social problems or for taking the wrong side on pressing current political issues. Politically active evangelicals on both his right and left criticize their mentor for failing to provide leadership on the hot button issues of the day. His image has changed and he is now widely perceived as a moderate who is much more concerned with theological than political battles. This characterization is probably correct.

Robert Fowler, who identifies Henry as a pioneer "within evangelicalism for a new gospel of social concern," also labels him a political moderate.1 His moderation is exhibited in both his practical political views as well as in the spirit and tone in which he presents them. While he encourages others to get involved, he prefers personally to remain apart from the fray. His concern is the intellectual and theological battle, not the political fights that ensue. Although he frequently comments briefly on raging political issues, he has not made a practice of doing detailed and substantive studies of current political issues.

To the extent he became involved in policy issues, his views were generally characterized as conservative. But Henry is not so easily pigeonholed. While he has been

at odds with people such as liberal Republican Senator Mark Hatfield and the radical evangelical editor of *Sojourners*, Jim Wallis, he has also been criticized by those on his right. For example, it has long been rumored that his departure from *Christianity Today* was due to his unwillingness to be more strident in his conservative political and economic stances. Rumors abounded that he was a closet leftist. While maintaining a cautious yet firm commitment to free market economics his reluctance to lionize capitalism raised doubts about his sincerity and may have contributed to his awkward departure from *Christianity Today* in 1968.

Criticism has also been leveled at Henry from the left, even though he addressed squarely, and often sympathetically, many issues of great concern to social reformers. He spoke of the need to care for the poor, to support civil rights, and to promote the cause of peace. At the same time, however, he was patriotic, an avid anti-communist, an opponent of socialism and all revolutionary movements, and a vocal proponent of limited government.

His moderation has managed to both soothe and inflame fellow evangelicals. For example, although he took a conservative stance on the issue of women's liberation, his tone was so conciliatory that he rarely became the target of attack. On the other hand, his stance on abortion has angered many. While remaining a foe of abortion, he demonstrated a willingness to compromise on the most volatile aspects of this issue: abortion in case of rape or incest. His willingness to compromise in an effort to obtain at least some limits on

---


abortion brought him under fierce attack from some forces within evangelicalism.

His moderation is a reflection of both his understanding of what it means to exhibit a Christ-like spirit and a reluctance to impose what might be perceived as a conservative sectarian moral agenda upon society at-large. After all, the church is not to impose its commitments upon society via legislative enactment. But perhaps more so, his moderation reflects what he describes as the difficulty of applying general scriptural principles to practical real life situations. He points out that Scripture does not address every issue that humanity is confronted with today. Thus, one cannot speak with the authority of Scripture in "every realm of human inquiry."\(^4\) All one can do is attempt to apply biblical principles to practical problems.\(^5\) This is a task fraught with difficulty. When one is "inferring particulars from general principles," one should not assume infallibility.\(^6\) Henry confesses that:

Giving political expression to evangelical principles and ideals is not easy, for the crucial problem is how to bridge from normative principles to specific proposals. Supporting one-sided crusades where biblical imperatives seem clear—abortion, capital punishment and pornography, for example—is an easy compromise. . . . Evangelicals need to learn that political action, even when it falls within governmental authority, is often a matter of doing what seems right at the time in view of biblical teaching and available empirical data, but also of being prepared to make later revisions and even reversals in the light of additional information. To work without governing principles from particulars to general policies carries many risks, however, for it is then impossible to reach finality about anything. But even when armed with biblically given principles, one may be confronted with conflicting inferences concerning a preferred course of action; divergent policy

\(^4\) Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:42.

\(^5\) "In respect to politico-economic philosophy the Bible establishes no approved code of detailed legislation, but instead supplies principles by which to resolve particular problems." Henry, "Christian Perspective on Private Property," 101. "On many important contemporary issues we are left to make inferences from such Biblically-revealed principles as the dignity of human life, the corruption of human nature, the indispensable role of civil government. The Bible does not directly settle what these principles imply for some crucial social concerns. . . . But one nonetheless makes the best decision he can in view of the available empirical data illuminated by biblical principles." Henry, *Twilight of a Great Civilization*, 30-31.

priorities also may result in varying practices. . . . What Scripture calls for is responsible choice between options in view of its guidance. While the biblical framework may often have theological support for some particular decision, it does not give us ready-made answers for all legislative situations.

His attempt to apply biblical principles to practical political questions is the focus of this chapter. Although the number of practical issues demanding attention during the last half of a century is almost limitless, I will focus upon five that have drawn the most attention from Henry. In each of the five areas Henry attempts to begin with a scriptural principle and proceed to apply it to the practical alternatives presented. The biblical principles employed include the right of private property, the need to seek peace, the inviolability of human life, the necessity to care for the poor and the importance of impartiality before the law.

In the area of economics, Henry does not advocate any particular economic system, although he does believe that some economic principles are taught in Scripture, namely the right to own private property. He is reluctant to directly associate Christianity with capitalism, but he comes close. He believes "in the compatibility of responsible free enterprise with Christianity." His reluctance is due, in part, to the fact that many arguments for capitalism are merely "utilitarian and libertarian," and thus defective in his eyes and, in part, due to the lack of a specific scriptural endorsement of capitalism.

His support for capitalism is based on the insistence by capitalist theory that private property is essential which is congruent with Christian principles as he sees them. "The Judeo-Christian revelation is clearly on the side of private property. While it provides no carte blanche for a secular capitalistic civilization, the biblical view does not assail private property per se, but assumes its legitimacy and reinforces its propriety as a social

7 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:442.

8 Henry, "The Uneasy Conscience Revisited," 4. Henry points out that many advocates of capitalism point to the fact that religion often enjoys greater freedom in capitalist societies and then conclude that "capitalism is therefore pro-Christian." Henry calls this argument erroneous. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:587.
institution." Henry does not, however, insist upon the absolute inalienable nature of private property. It is an inalienable right vis-a-vis other people, but in the final analysis all things are God's and people are merely the trustees of what God has given them. "Man's property right in respect to God is never absolute or indefeasible, but always derivative and conditional. In respect to the state and society, however, man's property right has formal divine sanction." 10

Yet this emphasis on a divinely given right does not negate individual responsibility. To the contrary, every right entails a corresponding duty. "Scripture nowhere approves private property as a possession that stands wholly at man's free disposition independent of moral and spiritual obligations. Always and everywhere ownership implies responsible possession under God and subjection to the just claim of one's neighbors." 11 One must not forget the purpose for which God has given humanity a right to private property.

All land is intended for appropriate use, primarily that of meeting man's common needs. It is intended first of all for those who work it, not for those who do not work it. . . . A fundamental fact of capitalism is the dependence of great masses of people on land and assets that belong to others. Hence, one must distinguish an order of priority between, on the one hand, property that is necessary for survival, 

9 Henry, "Christian Perspective on Private Property," 97. "New Testament Christianity is often erroneously depicted as normatively communistic. There were times when, for a specific objective, believers voluntarily pooled possessions, but this procedure is never declared to be a Christian moral imperative; private property is not scripturally viewed as evil in itself, and a case can even be made biblically that some property is universally necessary to personal fulfillment. The Eighth Commandment establishes the principle of private ownership, 'Thou shalt not steal' (Exod. 20:15). Scripture sanctions the acquisition of property by legitimate means only (Deut. 25:41 Cor. 9:9ff), . . ." Henry, "Christian Personal and Social Ethics," 1173.

10 Ibid, 100.

11 Ibid., 101. The ownership of property carries with it divinely given responsibilities. "While Christ did not dispute the right of personal possessions, but viewed them as a divine entrustment acquired through the use of God-given talents, he noted that they could all too easily become one's prime concern (Matt. 6:24). Since all we possess is held as a divine stewardship, the apostles emphasize that one who has more than others has greater opportunity to bless those who have less (1 Pet. 4:14f). No true Christian can be rich and use wealth merely for self-gratification (Luke 12:24)." Henry, "Christian Personal and Social Ethics," 1173.
property that is necessary for true freedom, property that is held as a service, and property that is accumulated for profits, and, on the other hand, property that is aggrandized for power and property that cancels the liberty of others. In the latter area there exists a special responsibility for protecting the possibility of regular industry, meaningful labor, and personal freedom for dependent workers. The worst of all solutions is state control of power in a planned society; less objectionable is legislative constraint on the free use of power in a democratic society; preferable is voluntary use of economic power in a morally responsible way in a spiritually sensitive society.12

When a society neglects its responsibilities to others, regardless of its economic system, problems are bound to ensue. Capitalism, no less than other economic systems, is susceptible to such problems. For all the virtues of a capitalist society, Henry says, "one ought not . . . overlook the ethical indictment justly due the possession-mad capitalist man."13 The idea that a person's property is theirs to use as they please unconditionally is a pagan notion.14 Crass materialism and the endless pursuit of wealth for the sake of wealth alone is patently unbiblical.

The only real and permanent solution to economic dilemmas is a new society populated by new men with new hearts. "Neither a capitalist nor socialist society can function constructively apart from moral earnestness; only evangelical Christianity can communicate the transforming virtues essential to the new man and without which society soon mires in self-seeking selfishness."15 Given the fact that even regenerate people are capable of sin, Henry concludes, "the Christian message holds out no prospect of economic paradise" on earth.16

12 Ibid. "The right to possession is not absolute and unqualified, for God is the ultimate Creator and owner of all (Lev. 25:23); man holds what he has in trusteeship for God, and even then, Scripture provided safeguards less accumulation of property permanently disadvantage the underprivileged." Ibid.

13 Henry, God. Revelation and Authority, 4:585.


15 Henry, God. Revelation and Authority, 4:583.

16 Ibid., 4:549. "The Christian conviction that flawed man is by nature selfish will
In a society populated by the unregenerate some limits must be placed upon them.

Henry is calling effectively for a regulated free market.

In the absence of voluntary discipline and as an expression of the corporate conscience of the community, government may be called on to legislate restraints on undesirable uses of property. . . . The exercise of freedom without moral and spiritual maturity soon sets up a demand for legal restraints, including restrictions on rights and liberty. Preventing the misuse of private property contrary to public order and the general welfare is indeed the duty of the state, but that is not its first duty; acknowledging and maintaining private property are the state’s prior responsibility. 17

Regulation is essential but it must not extend to the point where it entails the negation of property rights.

The failure of capitalistic societies to engage in self-regulation propagates socialism and an enlargement of the state.

The socialist removal of certain functions of ownership from the determination of property owners and institution of compulsory charity were aimed in part to overcome the misuse or abuse of property. This possibility is encouraged whenever the use of property is undisciplined by ethical and spiritual considerations. Any doctrine of property devoid of biblical legitimation will inevitably license immoral practices. When man as a sinful creature fashions and justifies the right of property in isolation from divine prerogatives, he no longer properly balances rights and responsibilities, but will compromise the one in protecting the other. Unjustifiable excesses will incur the penalty of unjust restrictions as well-intentioned but misguided reformers seek to erase social wrongs by their techniques of compulsion. 18

To avoid this plight, a responsibly regulated free market must prevail.

Henry relies in part upon empirical evidence to support his preference for a free market. Henry reminds readers that "socialism has nowhere achieved the glittering goals it promised, not even where totalitarian leaders hold absolute state power to enforce it." 19

alert him against the expectation that any economic or political system can be perfect."


18 Ibid., 95.

19 Henry, "Biblical Authority and the Social Crisis," 209. In the final analysis, according to Henry, "the hard fact is that socialism has a plan for the redistribution of
He also points to the "seldom acknowledged . . . (yet) spectacular economic achievement of the market system. Capitalist economics provides incentives that lift a vast multitude from the lowest economic level of society to a self-sufficient middle class."20 The fact that capitalist economies do not do so perfectly leads him to conclude that unfettered capitalism is no more desirable than unfettered socialism.

In conclusion, Henry attempts to redirect efforts to reform society away from the economic realm and to look at the religious and moral realm. The right to private property is a God-given right and any economic system that ignores this basic principle is unjust. But adherence to this principle alone does not result in justice. Moral obligations exist for those who possess private property. "Unjust structures are, indeed, in need of change, but to expect utopian improvement is futile without a moral alteration of the character of humans who pervert the principles of justice."21 Thus, economic solutions will not solve human problems. Individuals must use their property morally.

The second issue that has attracted Henry's attention is war and peace. War is a difficult issue for many Christians. He says,

the tension in Christian ethics is nowhere more anguished than in regard to war. In either case, whether it takes up arms or refuses to do so, the church seems to cloud its mission. This becomes all the more true since modern nuclear weaponry harbors the possibility of such monstrous destruction of civilian life and ecological values; what armed conflict achieves by way of restraining injustice often seems to be sacrificed in the disorder that follows. On the other hand, the victims of unresisted tyranny grieve for the loss of human freedom and dignity.22

Peace must be the priority for Christians but not at the price of justice. "In regard to war, wealth but lacks capacity to produce the wealth it would redistribute; capitalism can produce wealth, provides multitudes of jobs and offers participation to any who would share the risks and rewards of free enterprise." Henry, "Biblical Authority and the Social Crisis," 210.

20 Ibid., 210.

21 Ibid., 213.

22 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:532-533.
the church must stand unequivocally on the side of peace as its ultimate loyalty, even if war is not the worst of all possible evils and in fallen history justice sometimes requires it.\[^23\]

Peace is not mere cessation of conflict, it requires justice.

War is a result of the wickedness of humanity. "It is not governments that cause war but the lists and imperial ambitions of leaders and privileged groups (James 4:2).\[^24\] God wills civil government to use coercion and force to maintain order and peace. Henry accepts this as true both within and among nation-states. It is a serious moral shortcoming for regimes to fail to perform this duty.

Terrible and terrifying as war is—in an atomic age approaching international insanity—its moral necessity derives from the fact that the refusal to challenge an unjust aggressor is an immoral response to wanton injustice, and invites the enslavement and dehumanization of the victims of tyrannical aggression, and the risk of annihilation as the alternative to subjugation. The ever increasing escalation of nuclear destructive potential heightens the criminality of the aggressor, but it does not eliminate the moral duty of potential victims to deny tyrants an unimpeded victory in history.\[^25\]

Henry even violates his own dichotomy between justice and love when he argues that the state must protect the innocent not merely as an act of justice but as an act of love. He contends that "a just war is an act of love to those who are defended."\[^26\]

Henry is careful to respond to the pacifist position that is popular in many Christian circles, including the evangelicals. While he agrees that peace should be the priority of any Christian and that "war is a monstrous evil," he questions whether pacifism is biblically based.\[^27\] In response to the pacifists, Henry asserts that Christ "did not promote 'armed

\[^23\] Ibid., 4:551.


\[^25\] Ibid.

\[^26\] Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 156.

violent revolt,' but neither did he anywhere expound a philosophy of politically relevant pacifism.”28 At one point he says that the pacifist ethic is "incompatible with the New Testament" and he characterizes the peace at any price philosophy as repugnant.29

He thinks the lack of response by the pacifists to gross injustice smacks of indifference to the world. Such indifference has been a target of Henry's throughout his career. Speaking of the prominent evangelical pacifist, John Yoder, Henry writes:

Yoder's doctrine of subordination seems to imply that Christians ought not to strive for an end to slavery and other radical social stratifications in the world, or for an end to military aggression by predatory powers. This seems like a sophisticated way of saying that soul-salvation (the church) has nothing to do with responsibility for the larger body (the world) within the framework of the whole human family.30

Pacifism misunderstands the means by which God wishes to maintain justice in the present order. Henry points to the arguments of Reinhold Niebuhr.

As Reinhold Niebuhr noted, the effort of pacifism to make the peace of the Kingdom of God a present historical possibility places a premium on surrender to evil. It glosses over Christianity's profound insights into the universal sinfulness of man and the fallen nature of human history, and oversimplifies the ethic of Jesus. The New Testament ethic of political justice and peace relies on coercion—the power of the state—to restrain the selfish and sinful impulses of humans. Yet it repudiates militarism, with its exaltation of military virtues to cultural priority, as promotive of war.31

War is undesirable but it can be necessary and Christians should not withhold their support from nations that conduct wars justly.

The problem of poverty is another policy arena that Henry addresses. His profound


30 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:533.

concern for the poor and his demand that not just Christians but all of humanity respond strikes a responsive chord in many liberal and reform-minded circles. His repudiation of the welfare state does similar things for his conservative comrades.

Henry notes that "concern for the impoverished is a biblical hallmark."32 "Poverty, chronic unemployment, human misfortune of any kind are not matters of indifference; they must stir social conscience to action."33 The real question is how to respond.

Biblical commentators interpret Scripture in a variety of ways in regard to its teaching about the poor. Henry derides those who conclude that since "Yahweh has a 'special eye' for the poor," the "rich are wicked per se or that the poor are exempt from the requirements of justice." Rather, Henry contends, "the Bible places no premium either on voluntary poverty or on the acquisition of wealth. But it does warn against materialistic preoccupation and the deceitfulness of riches, and it severely condemns all exploitation of the needy and underprivileged."34 While wealth is not inherently unethical it places upon its possessors a special duty. Wealth is held "as a divine stewardship" which provides "a providential opportunity to minister to others."35 Thus, the real issue is not riches or

32 Henry, "Biblical Authority and the Social Crisis," 206. In the Old Testament, "the Mosaic code stipulated certain rights for the poor, including access to gleanings and to spontaneous sabbatical-year growth. No interest was to be charged by Hebrews on loans to the poor, nor was a profit to be added when food was sold to them. The Old Testament law built into Hebrew politic-economic structures a safety net that enabled the poor to escape perpetual indebtedness." The Old Testament emphasis is repeated and more focused in the New Testament. Henry affirms that "the New Testament even more vigorously than the Old affirms God's concern for the poor . . ." Ibid., 212-213.

33 Henry, "Who Is My Brother's Keeper?" 16. "Yet throughout the long course of history, nothing has done more to stimulate human concern for social compassion and justice than has the Bible. Almost all humanitarian effort in the modern world was nurtured originally not by secular ideology but by biblical theology and ethics. The example of the Good Samaritan bears permanent validity, calling every man to see himself as steward of God's gifts and to respond to the needs of his neighbor." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:546.


35 Ibid., 212.
Poverty but the stewardship of what one has. "The Bible's main focus is on the use of possessions, and reflects a consistent concern for the poor. Possessions enable one to support and advance evangelical witness in the world, to minister to the needs of the household of faith (James 2:16), neighbors (Lev. 19:18), and others in need (Gal. 6:10)." In fact this message is applicable to both the wealthy and the poor.

The wealthy and the less fortunate also are to steward all they have for the good of the whole; everyone's contribution and dedication is to nurture and enrich the global Christian family. God has a special eye for the poor; a special duty for the rich amid the seductive temptations that face both: the former, lust for things as the essence of life, the latter, love of riches. Christians are to stand on the side of the poor against exploitation, injustice and oppression; sensitive to human needs, they are to respond generously as God has enabled them. They are to do all this, moreover, not in a corner, but openly in the midst of mankind--not for ostentatious show, but to manifest what it means to be God's people.

Christians have a special motivation to care for the poor. "Christianity assuredly has a distinctive motivation for compassion in its emphasis that all human beings bear the *imago Dei*, that Christ died for sinners, and that love of neighbor is a cardinal commandment." But the message is not merely for Christians. This message applies to both Christians and non-Christians. "Social responsibility is not a responsibility that devolves one-sidedly on Christians. Sensitivity to the destitute, even on the part of the poor toward each other, is a duty to be shared by all men inside and outside of


38 Henry, "Biblical Authority and the Social Crisis," 207. Caring for the poor is not merely a pre-evangelistic act. "Not every loaf of bread given to the starving prepares the way for evangelistic commitment--nor need it, for feeding the hungry is a duty whether they respond to Christ in this life or not. They have been kept alive not only for the opportunity to find life's true meaning and center, but also for God's sake; unregenerate man bears remnants of the divine image, and God has a purpose in the world even for those who do not respond to the Redeemer." Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:553-554.
Responsibility for compassion in the presence of human destitution and for justice in the social order is as universal as the human race." 39

Scripture contains several necessary reminders about the nature of poverty. First,

The Bible speaks of poverty in two senses—material poverty and moral or spiritual poverty, their interrelationships being far more subtle than many persons imagine. For one thing, moral poverty often dooms its victims to ongoing material poverty; the lack of a spiritual view of reality at any rate condemns man to materialistic misconceptions which obscure even the sacramental significance of bread and water and destine him to a double deprivation and depletion of life. While both kinds of poverty are lamentable, spiritual impoverishment is far worse than material poverty, because those afflicted by the former can, if they will, do something to reverse their plight. 40

All of mankind, apart from salvation, suffers from spiritual poverty. 41 Second, Scripture points out that while material poverty may indeed be the result of spiritual poverty it might have other causes such as exploitation, personal idleness, negligence, or "neglect of good counsel." Thus, "the notion of the 'innocent poor' therefore has somewhat limited applicability." 42 Nonetheless,

For all that, many of the Psalms do ascribe the plight of the poor to enemies and evildoers. The fact that God has a special eye for them is ample reason for God's people to take up the cause of the poor (Job 29:14-16). . . . What Scripture says about the insensitivity of the affluent toward the destitute ought to smite the conscience of both Christians and non-Christians alike. To exploit the poor is wicked, and to neglect their distress, equally so. 43

How should we respond to poverty? The response must begin at the individual level.

"The Christian message involves individual responsibility to use personal possessions for the compassionate care of loved ones and of the needy; it suggests no assignment or

39 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:546.
40 Ibid., 4:550.
41 Ibid., 4:587.
42 Ibid., 6:409.
43 Ibid.
transfer of legal responsibility to the state for the needs of others.⁴⁴ Just as individuals have a responsibility to care for the poor, the individual in poverty also has responsibilities. There is a need to "emphasize to the impoverished the importance of self-responsibility and self-reliance, rather than of dependence on society and on government for survival."⁴⁵

Christians should establish work and/or training programs for the unemployed according to Henry. "The alternative to government panaceas is voluntary action that includes each and every person in some kind of constructive involvement. As his brother's keeper, man as man has universal obligations to his neighbor in need." Henry is willing to concede that "where voluntary programs do not or cannot meet the need, temporary government provision of useful public labor should be the answer."⁴⁶

Henry does not stop at this point. He acknowledges that individual action alone is not sufficient.

The next response is in terms of the nuclear and extended family. The critical importance of the family as the primary social unit must not be undermined by an emphasis on societal care that neglects familial responsibility. . . . Next, the state's special duty to its citizens, paralleling the duty of citizens to the state, is to be reinforced.⁴⁷

State involvement in poverty relief, however, is to be very limited in scope. "No one questions government's proper place in relieving human needs in times of unusual emergency. . . . For the government to assume a continuing, controlling role as benefactors, however, is quite another matter."⁴⁸ Such a idea arises from a misconception regarding the role of government. "Welfare statism stems from the spurious notion that

---

⁴⁵ Henry, "Biblical Authority and the Social Crisis," 210-211.
⁴⁶ Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:552-553.
⁴⁷ Ibid.
government exists not primarily to promote justice but to extend economic security and equality.49 When the desire to provide economic security becomes foremost among governmental goals, undesirable side-effects emerge including the undermining of such Judeo-Christian virtues as "the dignity and duty of work; personal responsibility and integrity; individual initiative; [and] equal justice before the law."50

Society has the responsibility to provide opportunities for individuals to provide for themselves. "The duty of work implies the right to work. The New Testament correlation of working and eating ('If a man will not work, he shall not eat.' 2 Thessalonians 3:10) implies that a society in which joblessness prevails should consider the provision of constructive work a prime concern."51

In conclusion, Henry is quick to assert that, "one's response to the plight of the poor is a significant test of one's sensitivity to biblical justice."52 But the correct response is for concerned individuals to act privately and aggressively to relieve the problem. Government involvement is rarely desirable.

The next policy area concerns the biblical principle that demands equality before the law. Justice demands that all of humanity be viewed equally before the law. This principle compelled Henry to become a proponent of civil rights in ways often unpopular in some evangelical circles. In particular, as a proponent of Christian social activism during the 1960s, he addressed directly the civil rights concerns of blacks. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, his message was expanded to include homosexuals.

Henry wrote early essays condemning racism as it manifested itself in American

49 Ibid., 58.

50 Ibid.


52 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:434.
society. He was disappointed with conservative Christian acceptance of the status quo in regard to racial issues. In his editorials for Christianity Today he urged legislative and judicial bodies to move forward on civil rights issues. He boasts of the time when he "personally wrote Lyndon Johnson heralding his signing of civil rights legislation as his finest hour in the White House." At the same time, he urged leaders of the civil rights movements to show restraint and to be law-abiding in their efforts to demonstrate and provoke change.

The denial of civil rights on the basis of race is a denial of the principle of the equality of all of humanity before the law. "Certainly created inequalities exist in individuals, but just as certainly they exist irrespective of race." To imply that differences based on race are sufficiently significant to permit legal distinctions is racism at its worse. "Scripture condemns racism and God judges it in history." It is a rejection of our duty to love our neighbor. Furthermore, "racial injustice to any minority should be considered implicitly a threat not simply to one's own kind but to all humanity. The Christian has double motivation for identifying with the victims of race discrimination, first, he knows that God created all men of one flesh, and second, that Christ died for all and is head of a body transcending racial situations."

The civil rights discussion among evangelicals becomes especially heated when we

---


56 Henry, "Christian Personal and Social Ethics," 1175.

57 Ibid.
turn to the homosexual community. Most evangelicals agree with Henry that "the biblical revelation declares practicing homosexuality to be offensive to God, a sin that violates the sexual ethics of creation and that calls both for repentance and for conscious change."58 Regardless of the sinfulness of homosexuality, civil rights is a different issue.

Henry argues that Christian discussion on the issue of the homosexual rights is hampered by the fact that the "distinction between human rights and civil rights on the one hand, and human duty and moral license on the other" is often overlooked.59 One may condemn the sinfulness of homosexuality while maintaining their human and civil rights. "To deprive the homosexuals of civil and human rights, as some critics propose, would inexcusably deprive them of what is inalienable to human nature on the basis of divine creation, namely, equality before the law in view of one's humanity. The homosexual is entitled to justice no less than the nonhomosexual."60 As difficult as it may be, "the Christian must also defend and champion the civil rights even of those who live by offensive lifestyles. Freedom to sin is a necessary component of life in fallen society. Civil government does not define personal sin or seek to eliminate it; its concern is with the public good and with justice."61 Christians must distinguish between those moral

58 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:512.

59 Ibid., 4:511-512.

60 Ibid. "The Bible emphasizes that Christians owe love and justice to all persons--homosexuals expressly included--and ought to be the special harbingers of love and justice toward the outcast." Ibid.

61 Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 124-125. It would be inappropriate to characterize Henry as a gay rights activist. He would neither want nor deserve such a designation. Furthermore, the gay rights movement has not and would not adopt Henry as voice for them. In addition to his emphasis on the sinfulness of homosexuality, he has said other things that are certain to repel the homosexual community. For example, he denies that homosexuality is natural. "The debate over the human or civil rights of homosexuals should not be confused by analogies with race discrimination or concerns of religious freedom; people are born with black or white or brown but they are not born gay. Gays can and ought to alter their lifestyle even if we must not infringe upon their political rights." Furthermore, he seems willing to permit communities to place some restrictions on practicing homosexuals. Following his
standards demanded of believers and the rights guaranteed to all members of the human race. One falls within the purview of the church and the other of the state.

The last policy area to be explored relates to the biblical principle of the inviolability of human life. In this regard it is interesting to look at Henry's views on abortion, euthanasia and capital punishment.

The debate over capital punishment has raged throughout Henry's career. His position appears to be congruent with his first principles. First of all, it should be recalled that rights are little more than the flip side of duties. Ignoring one's duties, in his eyes, means forfeiting one's rights. One of man's duties is to respect and honor the lives of others. When one ignores that duty and takes the life of another in a premeditated manner, Henry believes they forfeit their own right to life. The state, in the name of justice, not only may take a murderer's life, it must do so.

Henry is convinced this position is biblical and he marshalls substantial scriptural evidence for his position. Among other texts he points to Genesis 9:6.

The classic text on capital punishment (Gen. 9:6), . . . reinforces universal respect for the sanctity of human life by dooming a murderer to forfeit his life for destroying that of a fellow-human made in God's image. The sanctity of human life is guaranteed not simply by God's original creation of it, but also by a relationship to Him in which all human beings stand perpetually in distinction from the animal world. 62

emphasizes on the civil rights of homosexuals, he hastens to say: "That does not mean, of course, that homosexuals ought to be welcomed automatically as teachers of sex education courses (what about celibates?), or that they necessarily qualify for all other roles whose criteria are determined responsibly by community decision. Homosexuality per se no more automatically excludes or disqualifies a teacher from competence in most areas of learning than celibacy or heterosexuality automatically qualifies someone to teach." Ibid.

62 Henry, Twilight of a Great Civilization, 69. The scripture verse reads: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." (Gen. 9:6, NIV) Jesus "warned Peter that to 'die by the sword' is the punishment proper to those who take human life (Matt. 26:52) . . . " Ibid., 71. "Paul indicates that capital punishment was a prerogative divinely conferred on civil government (Rom. 13:14), and in Acts 25:11 he indicates he would submit to a death sentence if he were 'an offender worthy of death.'" Ibid.
He concludes that "nowhere does the Bible repudiate capital punishment for premeditated murder; not only is the death penalty for deliberate killing of a fellow-human permitted, but it is approved and encouraged, and for any government that attaches at least as much value to the life of an innocent victim as to a deliberate murderer, it is ethically imperative."63

Such an act on the part of the state has as its purpose the vindication of right. In fact for Henry retribution is the purpose for all punishment.64 The ultimate earthly penalty reinforces the importance of human life. "Divine decree of the death penalty, which declares murder an affront to the divine image (Gen. 6) affirms at one and the same time both that human life has immense worth and that its worth can be jeopardized."65

He argues that the same biblical principle is at stake in the debate over abortion, although he strangely seems willing to compromise on this issue. His concern over the abortion issue is obvious. "The present generation's most horrendous injustice lies in its wanton destruction of prenatal human life."66

Abortion runs contrary to Henry's understanding of human worth. He argues that,

Christianity does not measure human life by its functional value to society. Human worth is fixed by divine creation in the imago Dei, and Christ's redemptive death, moreover, proclaims man's worth even in a sinful condition. Functional worth to society is therefore not the prime question to be raised about the survival of the genetically unwanted or disadvantaged, any more than private sexual pleasure, individual convenience, the cultural mindset or totalitarian decree are to be

63 Ibid., 72. "Mankind's duty of rendering life for life is not to be carried out in a context of primate vengeance, but rather in a context of civil government which under God wields the power of life and death. Where the state considers the life of a deliberate murderer to have greater value than the life of an innocent victim, it demeans the imago Dei in mankind and weakens the supports of social justice." Ibid., 71.

64 "The primary purpose of punishment is not the reform of the offender but the vindication of the right and the peace and safety of society." Henry, The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, 134.


considered the final determinant in evaluating fetal life.\textsuperscript{67}

He denies the argument that the abortion debate is actually a debate over women's rights. He insists it is a debate over human rights, namely the rights of the fetus. "Life in the womb is not life as it exists after delivery, but it is human life in some form. This can be argued both biblically and medically."\textsuperscript{68} As a form of human life, the fetus has a right to life that cannot be ignored.

A woman's body is indeed not the property of others but is her own to control under God in responsible relation to society. But pregnancy indicates that she has shared her body and stands in relationship to a second and third party, and through those to society. Abortion cannot be catalogued with suicide as a merely personal decision, since the life involved is not the mother's own, and the question remains whether the fetus has its own right to life.\textsuperscript{69}

Henry is less adamant in his opposition to abortion, in a practical sense, than one might assume. He readily concedes the acceptability of abortion in all of the difficult cases such as incest, rape, when the mother's life is threatened and even when the fetus suffers from severe mental deficiencies.\textsuperscript{70} He reasons as follows:

\begin{quote}
"Thou it was who didst fashion my inward parts; 
thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb

Thou knowest me through and through: 
my body is no mystery to thee, 
how I was secretly kneaded into shape
and patterned in the depths of the earth.
Thou didst see my limbs unformed in the womb,
and in thy book they are all recorded;
day by day they were fashioned,
not one of them was late in growing."
(Psalm 139:13-16 NEB)
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{68} Henry, \textit{Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture}, 59-60. He quotes the psalmist:

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{70} Henry, "The God of Bible and Moral Foundations," 15. "That abortion may be justified in relation to higher values--when the mother's life is threatened, for example, or in cases in incest and rape--is not disputed." Henry, \textit{The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society}, 139.
When childbirth would endanger the mother's life abortion can be morally justifiable. The fetus seems less than human, moreover, in cases of extreme deformity in which rational and moral capacities integral to the *imago Dei* are clearly lacking. The scriptural correlation of sexual intercourse with marriage and the family, furthermore implies an ethical basis for voluntary abortion in cases of incest and rape. But the ready sacrifice of fetal life as a means of sexual gratification and of birth control is monstrous.71

He realizes some Christians disagree with his willingness to accept all of these exceptions to a prohibition on abortion, but he seems to think the good that might result from this significant concession would outweigh its disadvantages. He notes that some persons contend that the sanctity of dignity of full personhood belongs to every fetus--whatever its so-called quality--from the moment of conception, and that the biblical precedent of compassion towards the weak excludes abortion on any ground whatever. But even if therapeutic abortion should be allowable in cases of radical mental deformity, of incest and rape, and of actual threat to the mother's survival, no case could be made on moral grounds for destroying the at least 1,425,000 additional fetuses that comprise America's annual abortion statistics.72

Henry proceeds to encourage evangelicals to fight abortion not so much on biblical grounds as on the basis of "the value system that undergirds the Western society and that views the taking of human life as wicked." He also points to the United States Constitution and its protection of human life.73 This view is congruent with his earlier emphasis on the necessary dependence on tradition and social consensus as a basis for promoting the Christian agenda.

Paul Fowler argues that the acceptance of exceptions in difficult cases provided the open door through which abortion on demand entered American society. Thus, on

---

71 Henry, *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society*, 103. His argument is simple but controversial. "Where incest or rape is involved, one might argue for the legitimacy of abortion on the ground that God wills intercourse and conception within monogamous marriage, and that the aggrieved victim of assault should not in these circumstances be penalized by a violator's aggressions." Henry, "The God of Bible and Moral Foundations," 15.


73 Henry, "Church and State," 10.
pragmatic grounds, he objects to Henry's position. But even more than that, he claims Henry is waffling in his regard for the value of human life. Fowler asks, "Is Henry saying that a child must measure up to certain 'rational and moral' standards to assume the \textit{imago Dei}?" Furthermore, "rape and incest certainly are horrible experiences. But how can the fact that intercourse took place outside of the marriage relationship be used as the moral basis for justifying abortion in these cases? Are we to believe that only those conceived in a marriage relationship are sacred? Are all those conceived outside of marriage open to abortion? We should note that the majority of abortions are done for women conceiving out of wedlock."\footnote{Fowler, \textit{A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought, 1966-1976}, 82.} In other words, if conception outside of wedlock is a good argument for permitting abortions, then few abortions will be stopped. Sharp questions such as these, and the failure of Henry to respond, has resulted in a division between him and those within the anti-abortion movement in America.

Henry feels that the same principles and arguments apply for the question of euthanasia. He says, "in principle there is little if any distinction between euthanasia and abortion."\footnote{Henry, \textit{God, Revelation and Authority}, 4:606.} He points to the consequences of the pro-abortion position.

If the life of a helpless fetus is forfeitable simply because parents sense no moral obligation to spare it and the mother wills its death, do the mother and father, in principle, forfeit any rights to their own survival if they become helpless and their children are disposed to destroy them? If the decision to preserve or destroy rests upon personal convenience or social considerations such as overpopulation, is not the case even stronger for the child's disposal of a parent approaching senility?\footnote{Henry, \textit{Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture}, 59.}

He doesn't, however, consider the consequences of his own position on abortion. If abortion is permitted in the so-called hard cases, might not euthanasia also become acceptable in hard cases.

\footnote{Fowler, \textit{A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought, 1966-1976}, 82.}
\footnote{Henry, \textit{God, Revelation and Authority}, 4:606.}
\footnote{Henry, \textit{Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture}, 59.}
leveled against him are patently unfair. Many evangelicals, if they disagree with an argument, hasten to argue that the position is not biblical. The quick reference to such a basic authority within evangelicalism effectively short circuits worthwhile debate. For example, one scholar wrote: "There is simply no axiomatic connection or logical necessity between Henry's biblical principles and his specific prescriptions." He goes on to assert that Henry is merely parroting "the American way" and is attempting to use Scripture to rationalize "democratic politics and capitalistic economics." Such inflammatory accusations are not only incorrect but unnecessary and are not conducive to the pursuit of truth.

While I would agree with some critics that Henry's biblical support for some of his practical positions borders on proof-texting, it seems this assertion misses the main point. Henry has never claimed that one can turn to Scripture to find answers to practical problems of the sort discussed in this chapter. Rather one must use reason to apply scriptural principles to particular situations. The question becomes, then, not whether a specific position is biblical, but whether a principle is biblical and whether it is being applied properly to the situation at hand. Henry's critics thus have the burden of proving that Henry's understanding of biblical principle is in error or that the conclusions he deduces are false. I would tend to agree that he does not provide as much biblical support for some of his principles as one might expect or desire. Nonetheless, if for no other reason, one should assume that there is more to the argument than Henry often bothers to provide given that there is a long tradition within Christianity that espouses similar

77 Dempster, "The Role of Scripture in the Social Ethical Writings of Carl F. H. Henry," 10. "As Henry argues for particular positions, he seeks legitimation by surrounding that position with so-called biblical principles, imagery, parables, and stories. The more controversial the issue, the more he alludes to parables, key-ideas, and narratives to justify his moral prescription. Thus, the process of justification is more psychological and sociological than logical . . . " Ibid., 15.

78 Ibid., 59.
positions. Thus, one must turn to other sources to follow the debate in greater detail.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

It is surprising that so little attention has been paid to the contributions of Henry. Perhaps this is attributable to the fact that evangelicals have spent the past several decades on the fringes of intellectual and political life in America. This study has attempted to demonstrate that Henry has seriously engaged intellectual and political concerns; perhaps more so than any other leading evangelical figure. Because of his efforts, he merits study as a serious and important thinker.

Henry does not consider himself to be a political philosopher, rather he is a theologian. He has not attempted to construct a comprehensive political philosophy. Even his most ambitious work to date, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, fell short of his own expectations. After writing Christian Personal Ethics, he intended to write a comprehensive volume on social ethics. His editorial responsibilities at Christianity Today, which grew to a circulation of 150,000, were too pressing to permit him to do so. Thus, his one extended effort in the field was little more than a compilation of lectures delivered at Fuller Theological Seminary. In the text he admits that "a fundamental analysis of politics from a Christian point of view lies outside the scope of this study, but it remains one of the urgent tasks of our age."¹

Nonetheless, his theological studies have led him to what he believes are significant

¹ Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics, 77. As late as the 1970s, Henry still was hopeful that he might be able to write a major work on Christian social ethics. However, in a personal letter dated June 1, 1988, he noted regretfully that he had given up his intention to write such a book.
political insights. What can we learn from him? In terms of an analysis, we should ask several questions. What are his contributions to political discourse? What are the political principles that he concludes are indispensable in our quest for justice? What are the problems, if any, with his analysis? What are the implications for further study for evangelicals? What, indeed, has he contributed to the quest for a just political order?

What are Henry's most significant contributions? He has exploded the typical political caricature of an evangelical as a knee-jerk intolerant conservative. He has reactivated a significant element in American society and helped to transform them from an apolitical, anti-intellectual community into a politically active and intellectually alive segment of American society. His final contribution, and probably his most significant one, has been a renewed emphasis on divine revelation as a source of knowledge to guide our quest for justice.

In recent years, evangelicals have had to contend with an image, or more accurately a caricature, that portrayed them "as a bastion of unwavering conservatism" possessed with a "fanatical intolerance of cultural diversity." University of Virginia sociologist James Hunter claims this image is not unrelated to historical reality but it is an inappropriate image for evangelicals today. While the evangelical community is politically conservative, and there are elements within evangelicalism that are extremely conservative, an accurate portrayal of Henry makes it clear that this leading evangelical figure is hardly a knee-jerk intolerant conservative. His conservatism is moderate and intolerance and fanaticism are nowhere to be found.

In two interesting studies, these images are dispelled, in part, for the broader evangelical community. See James Hunter, "Religion and Political Civility: The Coming Generation of American Evangelicals," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 23 (1984): 364-380, and Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987). Hunter claims that "fully developed political divisions covering the entire ideological spectrum exist in [evangelical] subculture." He discovers that evangelicals are more conservative than other voters but not radically so. Furthermore, the fear that the rise of the Christian Right is a serious threat to the liberal traditions of democratic tolerance is unfounded. In fact, "it is fair to say that in principle they strongly
Henry's moderation is apparent when one looks at practical political issues of the past three decades. Throughout this period he was critical of those on both his left and his right. His own positions often defy simple characterization. While a foe of abortion, he seems quite willing to compromise on the issue in the public arena. While demanding that public schools not ignore the decisive role religion has played in American history, he is not an advocate of school prayer. While insisting we have a responsibility to protect ourselves and others from unjust aggression, he questioned the build-up of the American military establishment. While critical of the welfare state, he insists individuals are responsible to provide for those who cannot provide for themselves. While deploring unlawful forms of protest, he was an early advocate of the civil rights movement. While adamant in his opposition to socialism, he warns of the dangers of unfettered capitalism. His practical political positions rarely fit into the stereotypical liberal or conservative framework.

Hunter makes no attempt to credit Henry for these developments but it would be difficult to imagine that he deserves no credit for influencing a movement that he helped spawn and has nurtured throughout his entire life.


5 One interesting and surprising incident in Henry's life involves his signature on a rather radical political statement in 1973. Given Henry's association with the political right, his emphasis on the individual, and his patriotism, it seems surprising that Henry signed the Chicago Declaration. Issued with great fanfare, this document, signed by over fifty prominent evangelicals could be interpreted as both a confession that the evangelical community had not sufficiently responded to Henry's call to political action nearly 30 years prior as well as a declaration of an intent to act now. Implicit in the document is an undercurrent of anti-Americanism, a stress on the priority of social structures and a tendency to give an economic interpretation to politics. I have no explanation of why Henry signed his name. He has indicated that he attended because he wanted to provide "balance" to the meeting, but that does not explain why he would sign a document at the end of the meeting that runs counter to his life's work. The signatories of the document
Perhaps Henry's greatest practical achievement was to resuscitate political thinking on the part of evangelicals who were neglecting both their theological heritage as well as biblical directives. Henry is widely recognized for his efforts on this front. Even critics such as Lewis Smedes readily confess that "no single person has done more to awaken the fundamentalist conscience on the score of social ethics than has Carl Henry." His message was sorely needed. Politics is not the final solution to the human dilemma but it is far too important to ignore. "Though the modern crisis is not basically political, economic, or social-fundamentally it is religious-yet evangelicalism must be armed to declare the implications of its proposed religious solution for the politico-economic and sociological context for modern life." He insisted that evangelicals "are warriors with a mission in the world." That mission entails spreading the good news (preaching the gospel of justification) and promoting the cause of justice.

By no means is Henry satisfied with the response to his call. Although his first significant statement was made in 1947, he reiterated the necessity of public involvement throughout his life. To the extent that portions of the evangelical community heeded his call, they often did so in ways disturbing to Henry. "Having emerged from their subcultural cocoon, evangelicals now are often politically and culturally engaged in ways no less troublesome than their earlier disengagement." He blames this faulty engagement represent many leaders among left-leaning evangelicals. For example, John Alexander, Stephen Mott, David Moberg, Richard Pierard, Ron Sider, Lewis Smedes, Jim Wallis and John Howard Yoder. See Ronald J. Sider, ed. The Chicago Declaration (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1974).

7 Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, 84.
8 Henry, Twilight of a Great Civilization, 44.
9 Henry, "The Uneasy Conscience Revisited," 4. "Devoid of a comprehensive political philosophy, evangelicals as individuals or groups tended to be confrontational and single-issue oriented." Ibid., 6.
on a lack of serious thoughtful attention to politics. In other words, instead of thinking and acting, fellow evangelicals are guilty of merely reacting.\textsuperscript{10}

While motivating and justifying active political involvement, Henry also attempted to refute the image of anti-intellectualism among conservative Christians. His earliest serious writings were careful critiques of classical and modern philosophy.\textsuperscript{11} Henry felt compelled in his early works to investigate the truth claims of western philosophers. He concluded that their errors were based upon a misunderstanding of the nature of reality, man and knowledge. If Christianity was to be considered a viable alternative, then the biblical response to these basic philosophical questions had to be articulated. He spent a lifetime in an apologetical defense of the Christian faith. Even in the political realm, simple involvement was inadequate. "The first order of business in presenting an evangelical social ethic is to expose the false assumptions that control the contemporary alternative."\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Henry is disappointed with the response of evangelicals in several respects. They have either gotten involved in ways he disapproves of, or, even worse, their involvement has become divisive within the evangelical community. In part, this is not surprising. As evangelicals return to the political arena, they naturally begin to investigate their own theological heritages in regard to political activism. Robert Johnston makes the interesting observation that the differences today amongst politically active evangelicals can be traced to their different theological heritages. The evangelical camp, broadly defined, includes the Anabaptists, Calvinists, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Arminians. Johnston writes: "In fact, it can be argued that the present divergences in social thought throughout contemporary evangelicalism stem largely from this source--from differing theological traditions that provide conflicting models for social ethics today. Evangelical social ethics reflects in its diversity the variety of theological perspectives out of which evangelicalism springs . . . " Johnston, \textit{Evangelicals at an Impasse}, 79-80. A new text that explores the different religious traditions that compose American evangelicalism is Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds. \textit{The Variety of American Evangelicalism} (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

\textsuperscript{11} Henry, \textit{Remaking the Modern Mind} and \textit{The Drift of Western Thought}.

\textsuperscript{12} Henry, \textit{A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration}, 44-45. Henry called for evangelical engagement in all areas, and even practiced it to a certain extent, viz his involvement and memberships in the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Institute of Religion and Democracy, the American Academy of Religion, the American Theological Society, the American Philosophical Association, the Evangelical Theological Society, the Society of Biblical Exegesis and Literature, the Victoria Institute (Philosophical Society of Great Britain), the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Society of Church History, and the American Society of Christian Ethics. Nonetheless, his
The second order of business was to provide an intelligent statement of the Christian position. Henry spent his career doing this.

Henry's final contribution is his emphasis on divine revelation. Apart from divine revelation, he insists, humanity could not know truth. Our quest for justice would proceed in an interminable fog. We would be lost with no hope of finding our way. He is convinced that human effort alone leads to skepticism and despair. Interest in divine revelation is sorely lacking in the modern era. If our quest for certainty in regard to moral and political matters has gotten us nowhere, perhaps a return to the classic Christian tradition would enable us to regain our bearings.

Henry asserts that Scripture is especially valuable for its clear statements regarding what humans are to do and what they are not to do. "Christianity says that human beings are inescapably answerable to a transcendent, objective good. God has personally revealed Himself and moreover, Christianity affirms, in doing so He has conveyed articulate moral principles and commandments— in short, a divine-command morality that stipulates how we ought to live. The written revelation of God, the Bible, is the sourcebook and standard of Christian morality." 13 This doesn't mean every moral and political question is answered in Scripture, but it does mean those that are addressed are answered in a definitive way that demands our acclamation. "The Bible is not a textbook on science or economics or politics

---

writings were published for the most part by conservative Christian publishing houses which rarely penetrate the larger market place. So while he urged Christians to engage their critics and to actively promote orthodoxy in an increasingly agnostic era, many of his efforts did little more than rally the troops. His most successful effort to engage the broader theological community was his editorship at Christianity Today. Under his leadership, Christianity Today attempted to forge a reputation as a thought journal serving as a counterpart to the more liberal Christian Century. Henry was modestly successful in this regard. After his departure, Christianity Today took a new direction and shifted its emphasis from a scholarly thought journal to a more popular publication. The intended audience shifted from scholars and pastors to the typical evangelical layman. The change occurred much to Henry's dismay.

13 Henry, Twilight of a Great Civilization, 28.
or history, but whoever deletes what it says of relevance to these great concerns soon ends up by repudiating the God of the Bible and substituting false gods and arbitrary views of science and economics and politics and history."14

What are the specific teachings of Scripture regarding political reality? Henry has identified several.

1. Above all else, the sovereignty of God is the most basic political principle. "The sovereign God is . . . the source, stipulator, and sanction of the right and the good. He is the ultimate ground of law and morality. He defines human rights and responsibilities and the powers and limits of human institutions. In matters of law and morality there is therefore a higher referent than the will of the state or the will of the majority, namely, the will of God."15

2. Justice has a transcendent basis in that the will of God is the very definition of justice.16 "God is intrinsically moral and the sovereign source of all ethical distinctions."17

3. Perfect justice awaits the return of Christ. "Only Christ at his second coming will by decisive power inaugurate the permanent and universal rule of justice and peace."18

4. Justice is demanded of everyone. "Justice is nonetheless biblically revealed as obligatory on all human beings and nations."19 "Evangelicals insist that social justice is a divine requirement for the whole human race, not for the Church alone.

14 Henry, Faith at the Frontiers, 77. "The Bible is critically relevant to the whole of modern life and culture--the socio-political arena included." Henry, Confessions of a Theologian, 270.


16 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:437.


18 Henry, "Biblical Authority and the Social Crisis," 218. "The resurrection of the crucified Jesus openly identifies the divinely appointed judge of mankind who guarantees the final victory of justice and righteousness in a triumphant personal return in power and glory that Christians are patiently to expect." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:437.

The revealed commandments and rules of behavior are universally valid."20

5. Government is a divinely mandated institution. "God wills civil government as a framework in fallen human history for preserving justice and restraining disorder."21

6. The social commandments of the Decalogue are applicable today. "Over and above affirming the legitimacy of civil government for the stipulated objectives of preserving peace and order, the Bible, on the basis of a divine-command morality, sets forth certain enduringly valid social principles."22 These principles expressly include the social commandments of the Decalogue.

7. Christians should work through government and in obedience to it in an effort to realize justice in this world. "As citizens of two worlds, individual church members have the sacred duty 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."23

8. Social and political problems are the result of sin. "The evangelical recognizes that social disorders are in the last analysis a commentary on the disorder of private life, and that the modern dilemma is essentially a predicament involving persons who need to be addressed individually."24

9. The message of regeneration is vital. "Evangelical social action throbs with the evangelistic invitation to new life in Jesus Christ. 'Ye must be born again' is the Church's unvarying message to the world. Evangelical Christianity allows the secular world no hopeful program of social solutions that renders merely optional the personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. It holds hope for the social order because it offers the prospect of personal redemption. Individual


21 Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:437.


23 Henry, "Evangelicals in the Social Struggle," 11. "A sensitive Christian conscience may and should be one of the most potent forces for social justice, not only when law requires transgression of divine commandment, but also when law promotes or preserves what is unjust; the spirit of prophetic indignation and protest is the Christian's holy heritage. While the methods of resolving social injustices take different forms in different contexts, Christians should be among the first to indict blatant and intractable injustice that contravenes the transcendent will of God and be ready to promote and support constructive alternatives." Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6:453.

regeneration is not only a chief but an indispensable means of social reform."  

10. The church must proclaim God's will. "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 a part of the whole counsel of God."  

11. The church must model a just community. "The regenerate church as a new society is to exemplify in mind and will the standards by which Christ will judge humanity and the nations." "The mission of the Church is not simply to condemn social injustices; it is to exhibit what can be done to transcend them in a spiritual society of redeemed persons."  

12. Human rights have a divine source and a divine sanction. God has granted the basic rights to life, property and religious liberty to all humans. These rights imply a corresponding duty that the state and everyone else have a moral duty to observe.  

What are the problems, if any, with Henry's analysis? Henry deserves to be defended in the face of two frequent accusations that have emerged from within evangelicalism. He has been accused of two offenses: rationalism and individualism. Prior to a defense of Henry against these charges, a third, and more important challenge, should be addressed. The challenge of natural law. Although he denies being a natural law theorist, Henry's position opens up the possibility of an evangelical natural law tradition. His reluctance to go in that direction is my most serious criticism of his work.  

25 Ibid.  
26 Henry, "Evangelicals in the Social Struggle," 11.  
29 What is meant by natural law? A succinct definition by Leo Strauss is helpful. "By 'natural law' is meant a law that determines what is right and wrong and that has power or is valid by nature, inherently, hence everywhere and always." Leo Strauss, Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy, introduction by Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 137. Paul Sigmund provides a similar definition. "There seems to be a central assertion expressed or implied in most theories of natural law. This is the belief that there exists in nature and/or human nature a rational order which can provide intelligible value-statements independently of human will, that are universal in application, unchangeable in their ultimate content, and morally obligatory on mankind." Paul Sigmund, Natural Law in Political Thought (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1971), viii."The philosophy of the natural law is predicated upon the existence
Except in some Roman Catholic circles, the idea of natural law/natural right is absent in contemporary political philosophy. It was this realization that prompted Leo Strauss to write and deliver his important Charles Walgreen lectures at the University of Chicago in the early 1950s. Strauss argued that "the rejection of natural right is bound to lead to disastrous consequences." He foretold the consequences of this trend.

To reject natural right is tantamount to saying that all right is positive right, and this means that what is right is determined exclusively by the legislators and the courts of the various countries. Now it is obviously meaningful, and sometimes even necessary, to speak of "unjust" laws or "unjust" decisions. In passing such judgments we imply that there is a standard of right and wrong independent of positive right and higher than positive right: a standard with reference to which we are able to judge of positive right. Many people today hold the view that the standard in question is in the best case nothing but the ideal adopted by our society or our "civilization" and embodied in its way of life or its institutions. But, according to the same view, all societies have their ideals, cannibal societies no less than civilized ones. If principles are sufficiently justified by the fact that they are accepted by a society, the principles of cannibalism are as defensible or sound as those of civilized life. From this point of view, the former principles can certainly not be rejected as simply bad. And, since the ideal of our society is admittedly changing, nothing except dull and stale habit could prevent us from placidly accepting a change in the direction of cannibalism. If there is no standard higher than the ideal of our society, we are utterly unable to take a critical distance from that ideal.

When we can no longer judge between just and unjust, we will find ourselves in a world in which anything and everything becomes possible. "If our principles have no other support than our blind preferences, everything a man is willing to dare will be permissible. The contemporary rejection of natural right leads to nihilism—nay, it is identical with nihilism."


30 Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 3.

31 Ibid., 2-3.

32 Ibid., 4-5.
I believe Henry would agree with much that Strauss has said. He would certainly agree "there is a standard of right and wrong independent of positive right," and rejection of that standard leads to nihilism. The one area where he would equivocate is very important. Henry would say that knowledge of natural law, a term he would prefer not to use, depends entirely upon divine revelation. Moreover, mere general revelation is inadequate; propositional Scripture is essential.

It seems that Henry's thought raises the theoretical possibility of an evangelical acceptance of a natural law social ethic. However, he disavows the natural law position. I believe Henry's disavowal is premature. I shall not develop a full-scale evangelical defense of natural law. I will critique Henry and, in the process, demonstrate why I believe evangelicals should pursue this idea. 33

I hasten to say that one must separate the discussion of natural theology from that of natural law. If one defines natural theology as knowledge about the nature of God and natural law as knowledge of standards of right and wrong, then it is clear this distinction is valid. Henry rejects outright the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas. That debate is beyond the scope of this inquiry, although a reconsideration of Aquinas by evangelical

---

scholars would be an invaluable study.  

We must ask, however, does the rejection of natural theology necessarily imply a rejection of natural law? Even if natural theology is impossible, might humanity, on some basis other than Scripture, know some truth that is important politically, even if inadequate for salvation? I am suggesting that even if it is impossible to obtain salvific truth or truth about the nature of the Godhead apart from Scripture, it might be possible to come to a knowledge of some elementary moral truths. The latter may be argued without accepting or conceding the former.

The natural law tradition has pre-Christian origins. It was first posited in the Greco-Roman world, most notably by Aristotle, the Stoics and Cicero. Early natural law theorists argued that there was a "normative order immanent in the cosmos." This order was governed by both physical and moral laws that were accessible to human reason. The tradition was continued by some early church fathers but it reached its pinnacle with St. Thomas Aquinas. With Aquinas, natural law theory takes on a distinctively Christian

---

34 I am not defending Aquinas but in their reformation fervor, evangelicals are prone to caricature Aquinas and are at least susceptible to misrepresenting his work. Perhaps a careful study of Roman Catholicism would be helpful for a fuller understanding of the Thomist position and its relevance to the evangelical community. One reviewer has written: "Aquinas, in Henry's view, was too optimistic about the capabilities of natural reason unassisted by grace and revelation. Possibly Henry himself overestimates the optimism of Aquinas, who acknowledged that reason was wounded by original sin and that human reason is incapable of perceiving all that creatures manifest of God. The _praembulafidei_ for Aquinas are not so much steppingstones to faith as truths which, with the help of faith, we recognize as being within the ambit of reason. Henry somewhat exaggerates the importance of naturally acquired knowledge of God in the Thomistic system." Avery Dulles, review of _God, Revelation and Authority_ by Carl F. H. Henry, in _Theological Studies_ 38 (December 1977): 773-775.

35 The total rejection of any idea of a natural morality is typical of neo-orthodoxy and can even be found in orthodox Judaism, anabaptists such as John Yoder and Roman Catholics such as Jacques Ellul. See Allen Verhey, "The Use of Scripture in Ethics," _Religious Studies Review_ 4 (January 1978): 28-35.

36 See Weinreb, _Natural Law and Justice_, 1-32.

character. Nature was believed to be the creation of the Christian God. "Natural law was
the divine Eternal Law immanent in the creation, accessible to and binding on human
beings."  These new emphases did not alter the essential character of the theory.

Aquinas did not destroy the rational basis of the pagan, Aristotelian-Stoic doctrine
of natural law by substituting the authority of supernatural law, in the sense of truth
revealed in the Bible, in its place. Rather, to use a metaphor, he taught that the
single coin of divine law is stamped on one side by the supernatural law of Judeo-
Christian theology, accepted on faith, through grace, as the word of God, and on
the other side by the natural law of philosophy, perceived by reason. Inasmuch as
both laws emanate from a single source, they can never be in conflict.

Thus, the divine law, in the form of scriptural revelation, and natural law, as perceived by
human reason, are both part of God's eternal law and do not contradict one another.

Subsequent Christian thinkers were influenced significantly by Aquinas. The work
of Richard Hooker, the Anglican divine, closely resembled that of Aquinas.

---

38 Weinreb, Natural Law and Justice, 2.


40 "According to Aquinas the natural law is that part of the eternal law, God's plan
for the universe, in which man shares by his reason; the divine law is God's direct
revelation to man through Christ and the Scriptures. Since 'grace does not contradict
nature, but perfects it,' the divine law confirms the natural law, but it also adds precepts
which could not be known by reason alone." Sigmund, Natural Law in Political Thought,
39.

41 Robert K. Faulker, Richard Hooker and the Politics of a Christian England
(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981); Gunnar Hillerdal, Reason and
Revelation in Richard Hooker (Lunds Universitets Arsskrift, n.s. 1, vol. 543, no. 7. Lund:
CWK Gleerup, 1962); A. P. Entreves, The Medieval Contribution to Political Thought:
Thomas Aquinas, Marsilus of Padua, Richard Hooker (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1939); E. T. Davies, The Political Ideas of Richard Hooker (London: S.P.C.K., 1948);
John S. Marshall, "Hooker's Theory of Church and State," Anglican Theological Review
27 (1945): 151-160; and, Paul Surlis, "Natural Law in Richard Hooker," Irish Church
Luther\textsuperscript{42} and John Calvin,\textsuperscript{43} both leading lights in the great Protestant reformation, accepted the idea of a law of nature. J. T. McNeill claims:

There is no real discontinuity between the teaching of the Reformers and that of their predecessors with respect to natural law. Not one of the leaders of the Reformation assails the principle. Instead, with the possible exception of Zwingli, they all on occasion express a quite ungrudging respect for the moral law naturally implanted in the human heart and seek to inculcate this attitude in their readers. Natural law is not one of the issues on which they bring the Scholastics under criticism. With safeguards of their primary doctrines but without conscious resistance on their part, natural law enters into the framework of their thought and is an assumption of their political and social teaching. . . . For the Reformers, as for the Fathers, canonists, and Scholastics, natural law stood affirmed on the pages of Scripture.\textsuperscript{44}

The reformers acknowledged that the fall of humanity made our comprehension of natural law more difficult. The difficulty of the task did not, however, make knowledge impossible. To the contrary, Luther and Calvin insisted that reason is adequate to provide guidance in human affairs. Henry departs, unnecessarily I believe, from this rich tradition.

Careful consideration of natural morality must include a dialogue regarding God's


willingness and ability to speak clearly and significantly to fallen man, a discussion of
man's ability to hear and understand God's message, and an examination of scriptural
teaching on the subject. Henry has done this task rather well for special revelation but
more needs to be done in regard to general revelation.

Henry has argued forcefully and effectively for the ability of God to communicate to
humanity. If the sovereign God can create the entire universe and all of humanity, *ex
nihilio*, he can certainly find a means to speak to humanity. In fact, inherent in the doctrine
of creation is the teaching that knowledge of some basic truth is assured by the very
structure of creation itself.

The Christian doctrine of creation supplies firm guarantees that the forms of human
knowing and things-in-themselves are not totally heterogeneous. The dependence
of man and nature alike on the transcendent Logos as the ultimate source of all
created structures and forms assures an underlying affinity between man and his
total environment, and involves us at once in the knowledge of ourselves and of
God and other selves. The categories of thought are indeed a priori and not derived
from experience, but neither are they simply determinations of the human mind.
The transcendent God makes intelligible human experience possible as the
sovereign Creator and Preserver of all things. Both the human mind and external
reality have their basis of intelligibility in the Logos of God who structures nature
and sustains man in the divine image. Reality is knowable because the categories of
knowing are applicable to things-in-themselves; human knowledge has ontic
significance. Things outside ourselves have an independently real existence, and
stand in ontological and epistemic relationship to our cognition and sensory
perception on the basis of the intelligible creative activity of the Logos of God. The
dependence both of mankind and of the cosmos on the divine Logos vouchsafes not
only the necessary character and validity of human knowledge, but its objectivity as
well. The possibilities of valid and objective knowledge of God and of the universe
lie in these facts, that by creation man bears the divine image rationally and morally,
and that the fall of man was not completely destructive of this image, so that even in
sin man is proffered revelation objectively communicated by the Creator-Redeemer
God.45

Henry concedes that not only has God created man with the capacity to know him but that
God has generally revealed truth to man via general revelation.

Through the *imago Dei* given at creation every human person gains an ineradicable
awareness that God exists and that other selves and the external world exist. Every
human self, to begin with, knows to be genuine and inescapable a distinction

---

45 Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:393-394.
between God and the not-God, a distinction between good and evil, and a
distinction between truth and falsehood. Every human being is aware, moreover,
that knowing truth and the good puts one in touch with divinity. Not only do all
human beings share these formal aspects of the *imago*, however, but also they
know instinctively and intuitively that God does in fact exist, that the world really
exists, and that other selves actually exist. 46

Regardless of man's "volitional rebellion," general revelation "has an
inextinguishable presence" that "renders the human species morally and spiritually culpable
for revolt against the Deity." 47 Indelibly impressed upon the human heart is the
knowledge of God, self, the world, other selves, and the existence of a moral order. Such
knowledge is not salvific, just as the laws of logic are not salvific. Not everyone adheres
to the moral law, just as not everyone adheres to the principles of logic, but that does not
negate the truthfulness and the usefulness of the idea itself. It is the human tendency to
ignore such knowledge that intrigues Henry.

That the living God continues to reveal Himself universally in nature and
history and in and to the mind and conscience of man is not here in debate. Nor is
the lucidity of that universal revelation in doubt, or its potency in actually and
everywhere penetrating human reason and conscience. We are not to fault the
universal divine revelation as epistemically flawed. There is in divine revelation no
inherent necessity for its epistemic distortion.
The fault, rather, lies with humanity. The frustration of general divine
revelation is due to obstinate and unstable human volition. 48

Therefore, we should turn our attention to the ability of man to understand and benefit from
God's generally revealed message.

Henry's argument loses some of its cogency at this point. On the one hand, Henry
argues that the fall has affected man "in the entirety of his being." 49 On the other hand, he
argues that "the fall conditions man's will more pervasively than his reason." 50 The latter

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
argument seems predominant. He then argues that "only special revelation . . . can master the noetic effects of sin."\(^{51}\) Why only special revelation? If the effects of sin do not render it impossible for the unregenerate to comprehend special revelation (the Bible), why is that so for general revelation?\(^{52}\)

Henry's preference for special revelation is based on two arguments. First, propositional Scripture is objective and, therefore, less susceptible to distortion by fallen man. Second, the idea of "unaided reason," which Henry believes is a part of natural law/natural theology arguments, is unacceptable.

Regardless of his criticism of modern empirical science in the realm of metaphysics, its influence on Henry is apparent. The desire for certitude and objective, definite propositions is undeniable. However, the modern desire for certitude led to the conclusion that values, "oughts," cannot be derived from facts, that which is. Thus, moral truths became the sole province of the will. Henry has endorsed explicitly the existence of moral standards that are knowable by the human race. How does one know these moral standards? Henry claims it is by revelation. And, in his mind, only special revelation is

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 1:329.

\(^{52}\) "Henry's insistence on the rational intelligibility of special revelation also raises questions. He affirms the reality of general revelation, but denies the possibility of natural theology on the grounds that the epistemic consequences of sin have rendered human beings incapable of perceiving this revelation aright (2, 122-123). Only when clearly identified within the contents of special revelation can God's revelation in nature be understood. Special revelation, in contrast, is so perceptible that human beings can ascertain its contents without any supernatural illumination (4, 210). So the epistemic effects of sin do not, evidently, render special revelation unintelligible.

Because Henry never identifies the precise effects of the fall on man's cognitive faculties, it is not clear just why they should be so devastating in the one case and relatively inconsequential in the other. If the consequences of sin are as damaging as he suggests in denying the possibility of natural theology, it is hard to understand how fallen human beings could grasp the contents of special revelation without difficulty. On the other hand, if the effects of the fall are primarily volitional rather than cognitive, as Henry asserts in propounding the intelligibility of biblical revelation, it is hard to understand why natural theology is impossible." Ronald Rice, review of God, Revelation and Authority by Carl F. H. Henry, in Religious Studies Review 7 (April, 1981): 107-115.
sufficiently explicit to penetrate the mind of fallen man. But, he has also argued that
general revelation penetrates the human mind and because of it the human mind intuits
certain basic truths or first principles which can be expressed in the form of a proposition.
For example, the axiom that "God exists" is a clear propositional affirmation that Scripture
verifies but which exists independently of Scripture. Perhaps Aquinas was right when he
asserted that the first principle of the moral law--good is to be done and evil is to be
avoided--is directly known to all humans.53

The idea of "unaided reason" is an anathema to Henry. Henry is extremely reluctant
to assign any sphere solely or even primarily to human reason. He believes it limits the
authority of Scripture. Furthermore, he claims, it opens the door to the possibility of
knowledge of truth apart from Scripture which encourages humanity to seek truth apart
from God. Thus, Henry claims, when Aquinas posited the possibility of natural law, it
was inevitable that Grotius, a 17th century Dutch Protestant, would come along and
secularize the idea. Henry seems to think this possibility outweighs the possible
advantages.54 But one should ask if the possible misuse of truth should negate its

53 "When Aquinas elaborates on the specific content of natural law . . . he begins
with the principle that 'good is to be done and evil avoided,' which he describes as a self-
evident premise comparable to the principles of contradiction in logic. Like all basic
principles of morality, this principle is perceived by a process of direct moral intuition
through a special capacity (Latin: habitus) called synderesis, which is sometimes equated
with and sometimes distinguished from conscience." Sigmund, Natural Law in Political
Thought, 39-40.

"Aquinas states repeatedly that the basic principles of natural law, those principles
that determine human ends according to human nature, are known to us directly and
immediately. The promulgation of natural law is that God has 'instilled it into man's mind
so as to be known by him naturally.' The basic principles are self-evident, indemonstrable,
and common to all. They are 'to the practical reason, what the first principles of
demonstrations are to the speculative reason.' The first principle of speculative reason is
the principle of noncontradiction.

The first principle of natural law, or practical reason, is that 'good is to be done and
pursued, and evil is to be avoided." Weinreb, Natural Law and Justice, 57-58.

54 Henry asserts that Grotius is responsible for secularizing the idea of natural law
in Twilight of a Great Civilization, 153.
advantages. Surely not.

I wonder if the idea of natural law requires the notion of unaided human reason? It seems to me that human knowledge of moral truth via general revelation does not create an independent sphere of human knowledge. God has created the universe and in its structure, and in the structure of the human mind, he has revealed truth to man. Man's God-given rational abilities are capable of receiving, understanding and applying these truths. The human race has imprinted upon it certain innate ideas, and retains the ability to logically think about what they know. The fact that fallen men refuse to acknowledge or obey such principles is significant, but not as significant as the existence and knowability of the principles themselves. Our predisposition to believe our innate ideas may be suppressed due to the fallen nature of sinful man. Our understanding of the natural law may be warped due to our willful distortion of it. None of this effectively eliminates the idea that the natural law exists objectively as a standard for guiding human affairs—a standard that must be forever sought and applied to whatever extent possible. Since Henry asserts, carte blanche, that sin has so distorted the human mind that perception of the moral law becomes impossible apart from propositional Scripture, he must provide scriptural documentation. No supporting documentation has been provided.

To the contrary, there is explicit scriptural support for the idea of natural law. Scripture teaches that all humans have a moral sense of right and wrong. The best evidence is found in the writings of the apostle Paul. In particular, the book of Romans is useful,

55 It is common to argue that natural theology/natural law base knowledge of God and moral law upon empirical data and that such data constitutes proof. Paul Sigmund argues otherwise. "The protagonists of natural law do not really appeal to empirical data as proof that a given principle is contained in the natural law. Such evidence is cited as an indication of a more fundamental (or even 'self-evident') purposive order, or goal in man, which is part of his essential being. The objection, then, to natural law thinking must go further than to deny that one can argue from fact to value—it must deny the possibility of perceiving purposive order or essential regulative principles in human existence." Sigmund, Natural Law in Political Thought, 207-208.
both for its more explicit attention to this theme and due to the audience, the Romans, who could not be expected to be familiar with divinely revealed Jewish law. The most important passage is Romans 2:14-15. Paul writes: "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." (NIV, emphasis mine) In this passage, the apostle is declaring that the basic precepts of the Jewish moral law, generally considered the Ten Commandments, are known by the Gentiles because they are inscribed by God on their hearts. In spite of this knowledge, humans do not obey, but that does not take away from the fact that they know.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. Romans 1:28-32. (NIV, emphasis mine)

In the Reformed tradition, Paul's teachings have evolved into a doctrine of common grace.

In general it may be said that, when we speak of 'common grace,' we have in mind, either (a) those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby He, without renewing the heart, exercises such a moral influence on man through His general or special revelation, that sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and righteousness is promoted; or, (b) those general blessings, such as rain and sunshine, food and drink, clothing and shelter, which God imparts to all men indiscriminately where and in what measure it seems good to Him.56

56 Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 4th revised and enlarged edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), 436. "The origin of the doctrine of common grace was occasioned by the fact that there is in the world, alongside of the course of the Christian life with all its blessings, a natural course of life, which is not redemptive and yet exhibits many traces of the true, the good, and the beautiful. The question arose, How can we explain the comparatively orderly life in the world, seeing that the whole world lies under the curse of sin? . . . How can we account for it that sinful man
Christians could argue that as an act of common grace, God has generally revealed a natural law to humanity through nature and conscience that stipulates a normative moral law to guide human existence on earth. This natural law is knowable because God has revealed it in a way that human reason can discern. The generally revealed natural law is not salvific--no one can be saved by works alone--but that does not limit its earthly utility. This moral law may or may not be acknowledged by sinful people who willfully ignore the truth. But others will accept the message because it coincides with the guidance of their own conscience.

The argument that man can know nothing from general revelation except that he is a sinner is not scripturally warranted. It is an assumption based on an interpretation of the fall that emphasizes total human depravity. But the doctrine of the fall does not eliminate the possibility of natural law. Humans may lack the will to do that which they know they ought to do. Nonetheless, the law still exists. Experience and Scripture teach us that on occasion fallen people can and do adhere to the guidelines of this moral order. If humans are totally depraved, then even rational propositional revelation is worthless. Only an unexplainable personal miracle could change a person. One might believe that sin has so altered human nature that knowledge of God and of the moral law is impossible apart from a divine work of God. Even if this proposition were accepted, it would not negate the

still 'retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior'? . . . How can the unregenerate still speak the truth, do good to others, and lead outwardly virtuous lives? These are the questions to which the doctrine of common grace seeks to supply the answer."

Calvin "firmly maintained that the natural man can of himself do no good work whatsoever and strongly insisted on the particular nature of saving grace. He developed alongside the doctrine of particular grace the doctrine of common grace. This is a grace which is communal, does not pardon nor purify human nature, and does not effect the salvation of sinners. It curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, showers untold blessings upon the children of men." 432-434.
possibility of a natural law social ethic. For it leaves open the possibility that God has wrought a miracle and reintroduced the moral law to humanity as an act of common grace.

Acceptance of natural law does not entail the belief that its teachings effectively replace those of Scripture. Scripture may reiterate some natural law teaching as well as reveal other important moral precepts that believers are constrained to accept. Just because some moral truths may be known independently of Scripture doesn't mean that all moral truth is knowable apart from Scripture. Thus, knowledge of moral truth can never fully replace belief. For political purposes, however, the difference may be very important. That which is knowable might be permissible territory for legislation while that which is believed might be restricted to the believers. Drawing such lines is never easy but is not necessarily impossible.

In conclusion, it seems that orthodox teachings regarding the *imago Dei*, the sovereignty of God, common grace, creation, general revelation—all of which Henry heartily endorses—lay the foundation for the natural law theory. Henry's view impoverishes the richness of this tradition and pre-empts serious consideration of this vital teaching. The political discourse of modern evangelicalism might be enriched and strengthened to the extent that it reconsiders what seems to be a premature rejection of the idea of natural law.

The possibility of natural law is recognized explicitly by widely known Wheaton College evangelical philosopher Arthur Holmes. He says:

(1) Granted (a) that moral values and obligations derive ultimately from the will and character of God, it does not follow (b) that they are known only by special revelation. In ethics as elsewhere, general as well as special revelation pertains, for Scripture speaks explicitly (Rom. 1-2) of moral knowledge that is accessible apart from the specially revealed law of God. Whatever the difficulties in understanding the moral implications of general revelation and whatever the obstacles that result from man's perversity, moral knowledge is still sufficiently possible for man to be held accountable. (2) Granted that the moral law is known by special revelation, it does not follow (c) that biblical morality is wholly other than philosophical ethics. Regardless of men's ethical disagreements, general and special revelation themselves cannot contradict each other, for God cannot contradict himself. Truth
is a coherent whole.\(^{57}\)

An immediate advantage of a renewed interest in the idea of natural law is that it would help Henry maintain his treasured separation of church and state. The existence of a universally intelligible basis for passing judgement on matters of justice and injustice in this world makes it easier to maintain a distinction between church and state. It would also make it easier for Christians to speak to the political world without violating this separation. Recently, Henry wrote: "At least two things in a pluralistic society now remain for evangelicals to clarify: how to encapsulate in legislation moral values that are not merely sectarian, but also constitute the ethical foundation of a viable state; and to identify the political rhetoric most appropriate to a republic in which civil government is the arbiter of neither metaphysical nor theological concerns."\(^{58}\) I propose that evangelicals could respond most effectively to these questions by reviving the natural law tradition.

The most important benefit of such an idea is its universality. Such a standard can be profitably used by all people, in all times, in all places, in their quest for a more just social order. The Christian inclination to relate natural law to divine general revelation and the act of divine creation need not preclude acceptance of the idea by others. But a social ethic derived solely from the Bible, or from Christ, will have little or no appeal to non-Christian individuals, traditions, and societies. It seems, therefore, the universality of the message of evangelicals would be aided greatly by the idea of natural law.

One might ask, why would the believer seek to know that which he already believes to be true. If believers accept the moral law based upon the authority of Scripture, is additional argumentation necessary? I would answer yes. Henry has said that Christians have earthly responsibilities. They have the responsibility to try to shape the world in the


\(^{58}\) Henry, *Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture*, 119.
form of God's will. To do so, one must be able to convince believers and non-believers alike to adhere to God's moral law. Since non-believers by definition do not believe, they can only be convinced to adhere to the moral law via knowledge. If they know something is right, they might accede to it. Thus, Christians have a great moral responsibility to demonstrate to the world that a moral law exists and that it prescribes certain behaviors and proscribes others. This knowledge may not lead to eternal salvation but it certainly makes life on earth more tolerable. It is useful politically since it can be shared among fallen creatures who have innate ideas that correspond with the teachings of this moral order. Thus, as Henry says, "on the basis of the imago Dei that universally survives the Fall, even if blurred, the Christian can declare even of the nonbeliever that concerning certain moral emphases, 'in your heart you know it's right.'" 59

There are also disadvantages to be considered. In the hands of a zealot, a natural law social ethic can become a tool of intolerance and authoritarianism. There is also a significant ambiguity surrounding natural law. What principles are taught? The application of general principles to specific situations is an act fraught with difficulty. Moreover, which precepts of natural law fall under the category of sin and which are crimes? Concerns of this type have perplexed natural law theorists for centuries. Immediate answers are not readily available.

Regardless of the possible problems, the appeal of a natural law social ethic seems apparent. The idea merits further study from the evangelical community. But as Strauss has said, the desirability of the ideas of natural law/natural right is not in and of itself sufficient justification for its resurrection. To the contrary, it only merits reconsideration if

59 Henry, Twilight of a Great Civilization, 33. This is not an evangelistic task although one could argue that acceptance of a normative natural moral law might be helpful to evangelism. It does create an atmosphere where evangelism is freely carried out and it does induce non-believers to accept certain ideas that are compatible with the Christian faith, thus removing obstacles to belief.
it is true. That is the issue to which evangelicals must turn their attention.

Apart from my criticism of Henry for his premature rejection of the natural law tradition, he deserves to be defended against the charges of excessive rationalism and individualism. Accusations of excessive individualism in Henry have been made by several fellow evangelicals. In its crudest form these accusations assert that Henry is little more than a modern-day Lockean individualist. The more sophisticated form of these accusations are theological and sociological in nature. In this form, the charge is that Henry incorrectly answers questions such as: Are social entities natural? Is the individual or the community the foundational element in society? By what principles should they operate? What does Scripture say in this regard?

A relatively crude attempt to identify Henry as Lockean was a component of a major study of Christianity Today from 1956-1976. After a careful review of editorials published during this period, many of them by Henry, Dennis Hollinger concludes that the "highly individualistic social ethic" of evangelicals is drawn less from Scripture than it is from the "doctrine of American individualism." Specifically he argues that "contemporary mainstream Evangelicalism has indeed reflected an individualistic social philosophy," and this individualism "is rooted far more in sociological and historical factors than in Biblical theology." This thesis is common among more liberal critics within evangelicalism who

60 See Strauss' introduction to Natural Right and History.

61 Dennis Hollinger, Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), 1. Hollinger focuses exclusively on editorials during this period. Henry was, of course, editor-in-chief for twelve of the twenty years in question. His opinions were pervasive on the editorial pages.

62 Ibid., 6. "In enunciating a philosophy of social change, mainstream Evangelicals have focused on personal transformation as the means of changing complex structures and social evils. In economic thought the movement has aligned itself with individualistically-oriented laissez-faire capitalism and its concomitant approaches to economic problems such as poverty and development. In political thought Evangelicals have made freedom of the individual the sumnum bonum in both theory and policy issues, and often to the exclusion or minimization of other values such as justice or community welfare." Ibid., 217-218.
decry the tendency of evangelicals to be politically conservative. They argue, in effect, that evangelicals have become a part of middle class America and have sold out to the values of individualism. 63

It is inappropriate to characterize Henry as a proponent of the utilitarian or expressive individualism described by Robert Bellah in Habits of the Heart. 64 His definitions of utilitarian individualism with its emphasis on maximizing self-interest, or expressive individualism with its preoccupation with self-expression, are notions that are completely foreign to Henry. Neither is it accurate to correlate Henry with Locke. Hollinger notes the emphasis that Henry and other editorialists give to the notions of rights, freedom, limited government, and free-market economics and quickly assumes that these notions could have no other basis than the philosophy of Locke. But, Henry does not espouse unfettered freedom, his understanding of rights is preceded by the notion of duty, and his insistence on limited government is not based upon a social contract or recognition of human rights, it is derived from the priority and sovereignty of God. His understanding of government itself is distinctly different from that of Locke. He does not espouse the position that man began in a state of nature and in an act of self-interest contracted with one another to avoid the worse aspects of individual existence. To the contrary, government came into existence

63 "Although Evangelicals have attempted to root their social perspectives in biblical authority, they often have been oblivious to the fact that their thinking is sometimes rooted more in American culture than in the Bible. They have accepted an individualistic framework and then gone to the Bible in an attempt to support it. But the world view of the Scriptures is far different than that of American individualism with its emphasis on the private, autonomous, competitive, self-sufficient individual." Ibid., 237. He points specifically to Locke as the source of American individualism. Arguments of this type have been made by Indiana State University historian Richard Pierard in The Unequal Yoke: Evangelical Christianity and Political Conservatism (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, Co., 1970), and Donald Dayton, "The Social and Political Conservatism of Modern American Evangelicalism: A Preliminary Search for the Reasons," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 37 (Winter 1977): 71-80.

by the will of God who created man as a social being and gave the idea of government to man as an act of grace to restrain man's worse tendencies. Thus, government is not a conventional construct, it is a divine creation. The individualism of Henry is always constrained by moral obligation. Duty and responsibility are stronger elements in Henry's thinking than is unfettered freedom. The commitment to service and stewardship hardly equates with rugged individualism.

A more sophisticated version of this argument also exists. Smedes crystallizes the argument.

Dr. Henry, I am inclined to suppose, tends to think of the individual as the basic component of society. He thinks of government and the individual as the two polar existences in society. And this helps explain why many evangelicals are apprehensive of governmental action in the sphere of economics and welfare. On the other hand, . . . [I] tend to see the individual--his rights and duties--in terms of his social nature. Not the individual as such, but the various social spheres are basic to society and the state. The difference in point of view at this level accounts for the difference in perspective on social ethics.65

Christ came to earth and died on the cross, according to Smedes, in order to redeem the whole of creation, not merely individuals within it. Therefore, Christians have an obligation to reform social structures, a part of God's creation, in conformity to God's will. By failing to see social structures as the basic component of society, Smedes claims, Henry does not really provide a social ethic, merely a personal ethic. Smedes argues that "there has to be a social ethic derived from Christian principles, an ethic which prescribes a manner of life for society--the organic form of corporate human existence." Since "forms are terribly important to any social ethics," he insists, "government has a positive calling to see that the various segments of the organic society share properly in the social and economic privileges and responsibilities of the common wealth."66

Smedes does not deny that individual regeneration is both necessary and important,  

65 Smedes, "Where Do We Differ?" 10.

but the sole emphasis on regeneration leads one to overlook the corporate nature of human existence. Structures are in need of change as well as individuals. Smedes wrote: "Unless Christians recognize that structures can work iniquity as well as justice, they will wash their zeal in frustration as they try to reform American society by reforming individuals... The Christian must be aware that if he is to be effective, he too—in his own, constructive but radical way—has to tend to the economic, political, and social structure."67

Henry agrees that Christ died to redeem "creation in its totality," and that social spheres have their own independent existence.68 He, in fact, has argued for the naturalness of social existence. Where he disagrees is the extent to which these social structures can reflect perfect righteousness. "As to my own view, the depth dimension of sin in history seems to me to weigh heavily against a Christian culture this side of Christ's return, although because of the transforming power of the Spirit of regeneration I cherish the hope of wide reaches of Christian culture."69

Those who argue to the contrary, Henry theorizes, are obscuring "the transcendent character of the kingdom of God," correlating the modern state with the kingdom of God, or expecting "Christianity to influence and transform the social order progressively along the lines of a postmillennial eschatology whereby Christians will predictably establish the universal reign of justice on earth prior to Christ's visible return..."70 Henry is convinced these positions are not biblically defensible. He believes Scripture does have something to teach us about community, but we should not attempt to apply it inappropriately to the temporal kingdom.


68 Henry, Faith at the Frontiers, 115.

69 Ibid., 116.

70 Ibid.
In respect to *corporate* achievement, the emphasis of my social ethics falls most prominently on the body of Christ, and only secondarily on the body of humanity. While I insist that individual Christians ought indeed to be politically involved in public affairs, I regard whatever pertains to the world as provisional. The church faces the social task, first, of ordering its own life as a community of the faithful in distinction from the world of unbelief, and this it does under God for the sake of all mankind. In this ordering of its own life the redeemed community ought to mirror what is implied in a good society--not simply as compelled by law and grudgingly approached, but as impressively achieved on the basis of *agape*. Only as the church powerfully reflects in her own community life the direct authority of Jesus Christ can she effectively witness to the world of the perils of ignoring the lordship of the invisible King whose claim the world spurns.71

Hope for a better society, according to Henry, lies in the preaching of the gospel and in the influence of the regenerate on fallen society. The influence of the regenerate will be positive to the extent they derive their moral principles from divine revelation. To the extent these two elements are realized, society can improve. To the extent these two things are not realized, society suffers. Good people are essential for a good society.

It seems that Henry should be praised, not vilified, for his attempt to mediate between the extremes of communitarianism and individualism. There are elements of both in his writings. We find in Henry, as in modern individualist thinking, an emphasis on individual rights, a free market, and limited government. But we also find in Henry an emphasis on social structures, moral duty, and social responsibility. Henry's position is neither strictly communitarian nor narrowly individualistic. His position seems to be something like this. The only perfect community is that which exists in the kingdom of God. Thus, the church, to the extent it reflects the kingdom of God, should reflect true community. People, who are social and political by nature, also try to formulate a sense of community in the temporal world. These efforts inevitably fail in some respect but they are nonetheless important. They are important because the community one lives in significantly shapes the lives of its citizens. However, people's lives are not merely determined by their community. It is possible for an individual to help shape the

71 Ibid., 116-117.
community in which he/she lives. Christians, in particular, because they have in some sense stepped outside the temporal world and have become citizens in the kingdom of God, have the ability, to the extent they adhere to God's will, to critique the community in which they live. They are cognizant of a higher standard by which to judge their own community. The task is never easy given the fact that they are not solely citizens of the heavenly kingdom, they are citizens in both. The question then becomes in what direction should Christians steer their communities. Should they attempt to emulate the kingdom of God on earth? Henry says no. Only God can bring about his kingdom with the perfect justice it will manifest. We must be aware of our limitations and work for that which is achievable, namely, a relatively just society. A society which protects the lives, property, and religious freedom of its people is the best that the temporal world can produce.

Society may be based upon institutions, traditions, and practices but these so-called social elements are the product of individual human decisions. One must acknowledge the influence of social forces on individuals but Henry is not willing to concede that individuals are immune from responsibility because of these outside forces. To argue otherwise, as some seem to do, negates individual responsibility and assumes a posture of determinism. People become pawns. Henry claims people are moral agents held responsible by God for their every action. To study the significance of institutions, traditions, and practices and their relative influence on individual decision-making is a valid enterprise and changing these things may alleviate some problems and even encourage good behavior. But, in the final analysis, fallen individuals will find ways to exploit all forms of social existence. People must be changed.

There is certainly an individualistic strain in Henry but it is less a product of modern enlightenment thinking than of classical Christian philosophy.72 It seems odd that Henry

---

72 There has been a long tradition of individualism within Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity. If one defines individualism as the belief in the inherent dignity of the individual, then Henry is indeed an individualist. Moreover, the Reformation emphasis
is assailed for being beholden to modern liberalism when his opponents turn around and advocate that we become beholden to modern sociological theory. Sociologists such as Emile Durkheim have told us that the principle units of society are institutions, processes, and systems, not individuals. This emphasis on community has become the catchword for modern liberal evangelicals. Henry does not deny the importance of community. Shared practices and traditions are important. Nonetheless, such practices and traditions are not creations of themselves. They are the product of individual decisions. Christians cannot be indifferent to these things. Individuals initiated the structures and practices of each community and only individuals can change them. One could argue that social institutions are as real as individuals but that their character is determined by those individuals most influential in that society. Henry urges Christians to become those influential leaders.

The abuses of excessive communitarianism, as well as the abuses of excessive individualism, must be avoided. Henry's critics insist they are concerned with larger themes such as the ethical character and spiritual condition of the American people. They claim Americans lack a sense of community and have become materialistic. But, if community means an equitable distribution of economic benefits and burdens, which Smedes and Hollinger essentially argue, then life is being defined in the terms of that very materialism these critics despise. They insist the meaning of life cannot be reduced to economics, then they proceed to tell us that the health of a society must be determined by how it treats the poor. Thus, economics is, after all, the key to social justice. The redistribution of economic wealth is the answer. Furthermore, they are not inclined to

on *sola Scriptura*, justification by faith, and the priesthood of the believers all worked together to separate the individual from the church.

discuss the illiberal aspects of a non-individualist philosophy. The resulting dogmatism, intolerance, and authoritarianism raise a whole symphony of other problems. Perhaps regeneration is the key.73

A second charge against Henry that seems patently unfair is the charge that he is a rationalist. This invective is reserved for those who stand accused of substituting human reason for faith in religious matters. Henry's emphasis on the rationality of the Christian faith has led his opponents to accuse him of claiming too much for human reason. In particular, they believe he underestimates the fall of humanity, misconstrues the nature of revelation, overlooks the role of the Holy Spirit in conveying knowledge of truth, obscures the nature of the divine, and reverses that great tenet of Christianity: "I believe in order to understand."74

73 One observer notes that we cannot ignore the enormous social consequences of salvation. "Holding that the saved become one in Christ and that, in response to the gift of salvation by grace, they are obliged to, first, be obedient to God's will and, second, participate in an all-encompassing local church community. That community, in turn, claims to ascertain God's will through its authoritative reading of His word and to enforce it among members. Is such community building not social change in its own right? If, for purposes of speculation, everyone in the United States were integrated into such local church communities, would that not amount to a social transformation of staggering proportions?" He goes on to conclude, "if this is so, we might well ask whether conservative evangelical social ethics, rather than being a 'personal' ethic in 'social clothing,' is not, instead, a social ethic clothed in the now unfashioned and, hence, to many, strange dress of personal morality and individual salvation." James M. Ault Jr., review of Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism, by Dennis Hollinger, in Journal For the Scientific Study of Religion 24 (June 1985): 223-224.


There is another side to this debate. Henry and other presuppositionalists have been accused of being fideists. R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, John Warwick Montgomery, Arthur Lindsley and others adopt a more empirical approach to the Christian faith. Often called "evidentialists," these men argue that the acceptance of axioms without supporting evidence is an act of blind faith. Rationalist constructs to the contrary, anyone who begins from axioms is simply a fideist. See Robert C. Sproul, John H. Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1984).

Henry says the "evidentialists" are "intellectually irresponsible." Evidence for the Christian faith does little more than create "probability" which is not adequate ground for belief. Furthermore, contrary to their claims, the evidentialists are guilty of starting from
Although I cannot do full service to their arguments, I can briefly recount the essence of their contentions. Prominent evangelical theologian Donald Bloesch calls Henry's theology "evangelical rationalism."\(^75\) He contends that Henry underestimates the influence of the fall on the human mind. Fallen humans cannot comprehend the truth of the Christian faith. It must and does seem illogical to them. Bloesch also argues that Henry misconstrues the nature of revelation. Henry's insistence on the propositional character of revelation permits him to consider biblical truth "to be self-evident and accessible to nonbelievers as well as to believers."\(^76\) This, Bloesch argues, is simply incorrect. Faith must precede understanding. Furthermore, he claims that Henry negates the importance of the divine enlightenment of the human mind. If the human mind cannot understand the truths of the faith, then divine enlightenment become necessary. In terms of religious matters, reason becomes useful only after faith. "It can be argued that in his attempt to defend the objectivity and rationality of revelation, Henry loses sight of the mystery of the truth of faith and the decisive role of the Spirit in communicating the intent and purpose of the scriptural message."\(^77\) By focusing upon the rationality of Christianity, Henry is accused by Bloesch of obscuring much that is vital to the faith.

---


\(^76\) "He is adamant in his view that Scripture is basically a repository of divine truths that can be directly apprehended by human reason. As he sees it, revelation in the Bible is 'essentially a mental conception,' 'rational and intelligible communications.' The Bible is held to be 'a propositional revelation of the unchanging truth of God.' Because the biblical propositions come directly from the hand of God, albeit through the instrumentality of human authors, Henry argues for the 'propositional errorlessness' of Scripture. The meaning of the biblical propositions is considered to be self-evident and accessible to nonbelievers as well as to believers." Ibid.

\(^77\) Ibid.
Thomas McNeal continues the attack by insisting that Henry has distorted the true nature of the divine by demanding that the Godhead is rational. He contends that Henry's insistence upon the rational character of God deprives God of much that is important. Perhaps his most provocative contention is that Henry does not belong to the great Augustinian tradition. "Although Henry claims to stand in the epistemological tradition of Augustine, Anselm, and the Reformers who hold to *credo ut intelligam*, the priority of reason over faith clearly demonstrates itself in Henry's system." 78

The priority of reason over revelation is displayed in several ways. First, the arrangement of biblical propositions in a logically consistent system of axioms and theorems is viewed as enhancing the clarity of revelation. Secondly, reason itself is said to be the instrument for differentiating authentic from inauthentic revelation. Thirdly, it seems that in making the rational principle of noncontradiction the measuring stick in determining the truth in revelation, Henry is forced to deny the place of paradox in Christian faith. . . . Finally, Henry's insistence of the ability of unaided reason to comprehend special revelation shows his radical departure from the priority of faith maintained by the mainstream evangelical position through Christian history. 79

Is Henry guilty as charged? No. These men seem to have picked up on one key element in Henry's writing, the importance of reason, and proceeded to assume that it comprises the whole of what he has to say. Henry does not deny there is great mystery about the nature of God, but at the same time he insists that God is rational, that God created rational creatures and that God communicates to those creatures in a rational manner. Those mysterious aspects of the divine nature need not imply the irrational. 80

---

78 McNeal, "A Critical Analysis of the Doctrine of God in the Theology of Carl F. H. Henry," 108. "The problem in Henry's methodology is his ultimate reliance on reason rather than faith in understanding revelation." This understanding might be in error. Does one understand revelation by faith or does one accept revelation by faith and then understand its content by reason? It seems the latter is likely to be within the Augustinian tradition of believe in order to understand. While McNeal contends that "human reason can serve and explicate revelation, but it cannot of itself make sense of revelation," I wonder if he is mistaken to identify this position with that of Augustine. Ibid., 102-103.

79 Ibid., 108.

80 Nuclear physics might be a mystery to me but that doesn't mean it is irrational.
Reason is important for Henry, but he hardly posits man's rational capacities in a way to merit the label rationalist. Henry is not a rationalist in the sense that he derives his first principles or presuppositions from reason; although, like most rationalists, he starts with a first principle. His first principle is something he identifies as an assumption. Admittedly this is begging the question, but Henry would argue that all philosophical systems do the same. He is a rationalist in the sense that once one posits a first principle, one can logically reason to conclusions and consequences. He is a rationalist in the sense that he is systematic in his approach, he employs a deductive methodology, and he adheres carefully to the laws of logic. He is best characterized by J. I. Packer who says:

It would be better to call Henry a Christian rationalist of the school of Augustine, Calvin and Warfield. Like these giants, Henry holds that faith must precede understanding at the deepest level, because of the darkness of the unregenerate mind. However (i) all humans have cognitive inklings of God (the religious a priori), and (ii) it is possible to show anyone the unreasonableness of unbelief, and (iii) showing this is important, both because the idea that God requires us to believe unreasonable things detracts from his honour, and because under God the demonstration may be a step on the unbeliever's road to faith. (This, of course, is rationalism as opposed not to biblical fidelity, but to blind fideism.)

Faith is not the antithesis of reason according to Henry. Rather faith seeks a rationale and one's faith is strengthened to the extent that it can be shown to be reasonable. Apologetics becomes a task of great importance. Explaining the reasonableness of the Christian faith is, in effect, a form of evangelism. The rules of logic prevail among both the regenerate and the unregenerate. One may show to an unbeliever that one's faith is reasonable, coherent, consistent, and non-contradictory given one's presuppositions. One may also show to a non-believer that he or she is not being coherent, consistent, or non-contradictory to his or her basic presuppositions. At this point, one can do little more to convert another. Only the work of the Holy Spirit is capable of enabling one to appropriate and accept the basic premises that are essential for the Christian world-view. Thus, Henry

---

does not deny the mystery of divinity, the fallen nature of man, the importance of the holy spirit, or the priority of faith. Charges to the contrary are ill-founded.82

What are the implications for further study for evangelicals? Even Henry admits that much remains to be done. A reconsideration of the natural law tradition along the lines indicated in the previous section is needed. If God has revealed truth to humanity, and if human reason is capable of discerning those truths, then one must at least consider the possibility that general revelation as well as special revelation is capable of human discernment. There are three other specific areas where evangelicals should focus their efforts. The first issue is the nature of special revelation. A second topic needing further attention is Scripture itself, and the need for a renewed commitment to biblical exegesis. Lastly, I suggest that evangelical scholars pursue the study of classical Christian thinkers who have addressed political issues.

The first area needing further study involves Henry's view of the nature of biblical revelation as propositional. This understanding of Scripture is not the predominant view in theological circles today. Nonetheless, Henry's view does maintain internal logical coherence and is presented in a compelling manner.

The political implications of this view of Scripture are obvious. If Scripture provides us with propositional truth, some of which is political in nature, then divinely revealed

82 I do not want to imply that Henry's emphasis on reason does not raise questions. For example: "Perhaps the greatest difficulty besetting Henry's notion of rational revelation is the a priori character of his argument. To establish the rationality of revelation, Henry does not appeal to the contents of scripture to show that they are in fact meaningful and true. Instead, he appeals to the concept of supernatural revelation and deduces that its contents must be rational. The rationality of revelation, therefore, is something Henry imputes to scripture, rather than a conclusion he reaches by examining the data. It is ironic that a theological proposal asserting the necessity and sufficiency of special revelation as a basis for religious truth should proceed on a deductive basis, rather than by appealing to the actual content of the purported revelation. Indeed, in the final analysis, the position seems self-refuting. The argument that all religious truth must be derived from the contents of revelation is not itself derived from the contents of revelation."

political principles should guide us in practice. If, however, Scripture is not propositional in nature then its value in regard to the world of politics is called into question. Any further study of Henry's political thought must be preceded by an investigation into his doctrine of revelation.

Critics such as Jesuit scholar Avery Dulles admit there is some internal scriptural evidence that suggests the validity of the propositional approach to Scripture. For example, many biblical propositions are declared specifically to be the word of God and whenever Scripture is referred to it is done so as an authority. There is also a fairly long tradition that supports this understanding of Scripture. While Henry would argue that this theory of Scripture can be traced back to the early church, the apostles, and even Christ himself, critics acknowledge that it does go back at least as far as the reformation. In addition, the propositional understanding of Scripture does have an internal logical consistency that is both appealing as well as helpful in resolving doctrinal disputes. Disputes can be resolved by simply turning to Scripture for the correct answer. While drawing conclusions from difficult scriptural passages may not be easy it is certainly easier than arguing over the source to which one must turn when resolving such disputes. Thus, there is a certain utility to this view.83

Arguments against this approach include the following. Nowhere does Scripture claim specifically to be propositional in nature. The closest thing to such a claim is 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good purpose."84 (NIV) There is little evidence that the pre-

83 Dulles also argues that this view "encourages loyalty to the foundational documents and traditions of the Church," gives members "a clear sense of identity," and a "sense of solidarity." It also helps to undermine skepticism. See chapter three in Dulles, Models of Revelation.

84 A significant scholarly debate has emerged regarding the meaning and authenticity of this verse. For example, see William D. Mounce, Pastoral Epistles, Word Biblical
reformation church adopted such a literal reading of Scripture. Perhaps the most intractable challenge to the propositional view has been the rise of modern critical scholarship. Such scholarship has called into question the authenticity as well as the accuracy of many portions of Scripture. By drawing parallels between Scripture and other ancient forms of literature, scholars have implied that Scripture has a human rather than a divine origin. Some scholars purport to find distinct cultural influences in the text as well as historical and scientific inaccuracies. Thus, they argue, Scripture is a mere cultural manifestation of the time. When such matters are called into question, the reliability of the doctrinal teachings of Scripture are also challenged implicitly. Other scholars claim that Scripture lacks internal coherence evidenced by conflicting claims in Scripture itself. The implication being that a perfect divine being would not be responsible for such an inconsistent and contradictory revelation. Thus, again, Scripture is of human, not divine, origin. Critics also argue that even if Scripture is propositional in nature, inadequate attention is given to how individual experiences impact one's interpretation of these propositions. Does one's situation influence how one interprets biblical statements? If not, why not? If so, how firmly can we hold our interpretations and to what degree can we claim that our interpretation is of God? Furthermore, if our interpretations can be culturally and historically shaped, may not the same be said of the original documents.85

Henry's response to these challenges are impressive. Few, if any, scholars have responded in such detail and with such force. It appears, however, that his arguments are falling on deaf ears. While he is praised in evangelical circles for his "decisive" repudiation of contemporary "liberal" scholars he is widely ignored in broader theological circles. Further study on this matter is imperative. My initial inquiry has convinced me that his


85 See chapter three of Dulles, Models of Revelation.
arguments are powerful, important, and worthy of consideration. In all fairness, however, it is also imperative that further study be devoted to the arguments of his opponents.

One last observation on this issue. Several evangelical critics of Henry insist that his view of Scripture is derived from the enlightenment. The argument deserves comment here and further study elsewhere. The emphasis on the objective nature of propositions by enlightenment thinkers led to a tendency at the time among theologians to interpret Scripture as only propositional in nature. Henry, critics assert, is a product of this approach to human knowledge.

Arthur Holmes argues that "revelation is not either personal or

---

86 Several serious studies of fundamentalism have pointed to a distinct influence from one strand of enlightenment thinking, namely Scottish common-sense realism. Due to the influence of Princeton University and its seminary during the early years of America, Scottish common-sense realism emerged as a dominant philosophical influence in American theological circles. In fact, it emerged as dominant in most intellectual circles as well. The so-called Princeton School of thought attempted to integrate Scottish common-sense philosophy and Calvinism. The prominent figures include Charles Hodge and Benjamin Warfield of Princeton, and J. Gresham Machen and Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary. One cannot deny the influence of these men on Henry. However, at least one prominent historian on this topic has absolved Henry of being a direct product of the enlightenment. Mark Noll argues that Henry's roots are more accurately traceable to the classical Christian tradition that preceded the modern era. Further study on this topic should begin with the following sources: S. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," Church History 24 (September 1955): 257-272; Mark Noll, "Common Sense Tradition and American Evangelical Thought," American Quarterly 37 (Summer 1985): 216-238; The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983); Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); George Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980); "Understanding Fundamentalist Views of Science," in Science and Creationism, ed. Ashley Montagu (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1984), 95-116; and, "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," in Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 219-263.

87 Several fellow evangelicals object to the use of the term propositional revelation. For example see Bernard Ramm, Special Revelation and the Word of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), 155; Arthur Holmes, Faith Seeks Understanding, 135; and, Bloesch, Essentials of Evangelical Theology. Ironically some of these scholars accuse Henry of failing to come to grips with the Enlightenment. Henry and others like him are accused of being "obscurant" in that they "ignore the Enlightenment and gloss over the problems it raised." In other words, he has failed to adequately address the challenges that modern historical and literary criticism have made of Scripture. Bernard Ramm, After Fundamentalism (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1983), 27. "The central problem the Enlightenment raised for Christianity is that of the
propositional, but both." The exclusive emphasis on propositions is mistaken according to Holmes. There is a personal and subjective side to revelation in that revelation is not merely informative but is also redemptive and experiential.\(^8\)

This camp within evangelicalism often looks to Karl Barth for guidance. Henry's views on Barth were touched upon in chapter three, but a brief account of Barth's position is worthwhile. Barth, it is often suggested, managed to make peace with the historical-critical approach to Scripture spawned by enlightenment critics of Scripture while maintaining "the full theological integrity of Scripture."\(^8\) He does this by claiming on the one hand that "if the writers of Holy Scripture are truly children of their cultures, then they express themselves in the terms, concepts, and vocabulary of their culture. . . . They wrote as anybody would write in their times and in their cultures." Therefore, the Bible is a product of culture that is susceptible to historical and literary criticism. He combines this emphasis, which accepts one product of the enlightenment, with another emphasis that denies the ultimacy of the enlightenment. "Barth's positive thesis is that embedded in the culturally conditioned Scripture is the witness to the Word of God, or to the divine revelation. The Word of God exists 'in, with, and under' the culturally conditioned text."\(^9\) He simply argued that "commonly recognized difficulties in a text [does not] prevent the text from being an authentic witness to the Word of God."\(^9\) Thus, a fallible document becomes the Word of God.\(^9\)

\(^8\) Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth*, 74-77.

This denial of propositional revelation and the emphasis on subjective, personal, and existential experience is an anathema to Henry. Henry, of course, denies that one needs to concede to the challenges of the enlightenment. Furthermore, he rejects the subjective nature of knowledge that is explicit in the writings of Barth. The debate is an extremely important one for the Christian faith and one that has political ramifications. Further study is needed.

A second area where evangelicals must pursue further study involves Scripture itself. The lack of biblical exegesis on the part of Henry is disappointing. On the one hand, this is surprising given his emphasis on Scripture as God's word and as our only reliable source of truth. On the other hand, it is not surprising given that Henry does not consider himself a biblical exegete. He is a theologian concerned with broad themes and doctrines. He does not spend his time doing word studies or close textual analysis. That task is left for others. This leads to an area of study for other politically inclined evangelical scholars. Careful exegetical studies could shed further light on the teaching of Scripture on various political questions. If one expects biblically derived principles to be taken seriously, then those principles must be solidly grounded in Scripture itself.

Henry's arguments could be strengthened or refuted, for example, by a detailed study of justice in Scripture. Several theologians, including some fellow evangelicals, have taken Henry to task for his clear distinction between love and justice. Admitting that many limitations of the writers. Thus, "the truth in the Bible is enveloped in mystery and therefore can only be dimly perceived." However, "the truth of the Bible can only be known as the Spirit makes it known in the event of revelation." Bloesch, Essentials of Evangelical Theology, 1:68-69.

93 Henry is often accused of proof-texting. This word is usually used in a pejorative sense and implies that one uses scripture out of context as evidence to support an idea not derived from Scripture itself. No one can argue that he fails to provide scriptural warrants for his positions. For example, over 7,000 scriptural references are in the six volumes of God, Revelation and Authority. Nonetheless, his use of Scripture is sufficiently ancillary to his arguments that it makes him susceptible to such charges.

94 Gabriel Fackre, Lewis Smedes, Robert Johnston and Nicholas Wolterstorff.
liberal theologians are guilty of overemphasizing God's love at the expense of God's justice, Gabriel Fackre accuses the Christian right of making the opposite error. He insists that God's love is of equal ultimacy, and the resulting paradox is simply one which we must learn to live with. One cannot supersede the other. Voicing a similar argument, Robert Johnston contends that the distinction is wrong-headed.

The Biblical writers do not understand social ethics in terms of one or the other of these human values, but in terms of the nature and activity of God who demonstrated their interconnectedness and indissolubility. God's justice (his righteousness) and his love (his mercy) are not clearly distinguished in Scripture and never separable in fact. Although these qualities are not identical, they 'infect' one another (cf. Isa. 11:5; Jer. 9:24; Hos. 2:19).

To make a distinction, and then base the role of government upon that distinction, is a "sub-Christian notion" that must be dismissed.

In response to these challenges, one should ask: "Does God act justly to fulfill the demands of love or does he act lovingly to fulfill the demands of justice?" Because Scripture teaches the latter, it would appear that God's justice does supersede his love. This seems plausible and in line with orthodox Christianity. A careful exegetical study on Henry's part might have made the argument more convincing.

Along this same line, a careful exegetical study might more clearly define the nature of justice. While some scholars are less inclined to dismiss the justice/love distinction, they do object to Henry's understanding of justice. Lewis Smedes agrees with the distinction, although he denies that Christian love is particular rather than universal, but differs significantly in its application. He agrees one can find in Scripture the notion that

---


96 Ibid., 103.

97 Johnston, Evangelicals at an Impasse, 98.
government is to enforce justice, not to act out of love. Where he differs from Henry is in his definition of justice and in his understanding of human rights. "The difference must exist in our respective ideas of what is embraced among the inalienable rights of men."

Smedes understands those rights as including economic rights. When he speaks of economic rights he means much more than the basic right to property espoused by Henry. He means a right to share in the common wealth of a society and the right to a minimal standard of living.98 A thorough exegetical study of justice could determine the validity of this often parroted suggestion that the Bible defines social justice as "to each according to his or her needs."99

Yale University philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff also objects to Henry's limited understanding of justice. He sees Henry as only wanting the state to protect "freedom-rights." Meaning "the right to act without coercion in one area or another." Wolterstorff believes that benefit-rights are also proper. These are rights that someone has to receive a benefit. As an example, he suggests the right of the disabled to receive an income.100 True justice, which he calls social justice, will include state protection of both freedom rights and benefit rights. He is convinced, and probably rightly so, that when Henry calls for the government to protect rights, "it is not social justice but regulative justice that he is thinking of."101 He argues that "it is impossible to read the Old Testament prophets


99 Johnston, Evangelicals at an Impasse, 98.

100 Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Contemporary Christian Views of the State: Some Major Issues," Christian Scholars Review 3 (June 1974): 320. "A freedom right is a claim on everyone to respect that right. A benefit right is a claim on someone or other to satisfy that right." Ibid.

101 "Henry's view is that the State's proper function is to regulate the activities of its citizens by maintaining a system of laws based on regulative justice and good order. It is not the State's proper function actively to promote social justice, i.e., actively to promote the satisfaction of benefit-rights." Ibid.
without seeing that it was social justice they were calling for. It was the deprivation of benefit-rights that evoked their denunciation. The Christian cannot possibly regard justice as confined to regulative justice.\textsuperscript{102} He insists that "the deprivation of benefit-rights is also a matter of wrongdoing, both individual and collective: a matter of perversity, and of dereliction of duty."\textsuperscript{103} And, therefore, "there is no escaping the conclusion that all justice which falls within the common good--social as well as regulative--belongs within the proper function of the State."\textsuperscript{104}

Perhaps the most interesting part of his argument relates to the traditional interpretation of Romans 13. Henry and others have used this portion of Scripture to limit the role of government. But, as Wolterstorff points out, the apostle Paul is not necessarily providing a comprehensive statement regarding the role of civil authority.

It is clear that what is here uppermost in Paul's mind is the State is called to deal with wrongdoing and that it is authorized to do so coercively. But as to whether the State also has a positive side, Paul here says nothing one way or the other. He is not here giving a general statement as to the nature of the State. He does not say that the whole of the State's proper function consists of restraining by constraining. This becomes especially clear if one considers the context; the only side of the State which is relevant in the context is its negative side.\textsuperscript{105}

Wolterstorff's argument is weakened to the extent that his attempt to find additional support

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 321.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 322.
  \item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid. "What then is the sphere of the State's action? What is the domain of its proper function? A two-fold one. The State's proper function is to regulate the activities of the members of society--both individual and institutional--by a system of laws based on good order and regulative justice. And secondly, the State's proper function is actively to promote social justice."
    "The phrase 'actively promote' is crucial here. When at all possible, the State is not itself to provide the services and engage in the activities which will satisfy our benefit-rights. Rather, its function is actively to promote a society containing institutions which will and can satisfy those rights. For remember, in all its actions the State must respect the autonomy, the sovereignty, of the other institutions in society." Ibid., 324.
  \item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 326-327.
\end{itemize}
for a more positive role for government requires him to go back to the Old Testament and
draw from examples from ancient Israel. He does not address the problems that this raises
such as the unique nature of the theocratic form of government in Old Testament times.

Even a superficial exegetical study of Scripture would help Henry's case. For
example Kittle and Friedrich have pointed out that the Greek word for justice, *Dike*, only
occurs three times in the New Testament and each time it refers to retributive justice. In
fact it is sometimes translated as punishment.\(^{106}\) My point is this, if Henry's political
principles are based in Scripture, then careful study of Scripture will illuminate this fact in
such a way that might help unify the evangelical community.

A final recommendation for further study among evangelicals involves a renewal of
interest in the classical Christian tradition. In the process of revitalizing evangelical interest
in politics, Henry has brought before his fellow believers many ideas that are worth
pursuing. Many of the ideas summarized by Henry have been addressed before in greater
depth and detail by thinkers prior to Henry. His lack of originality is not to be condemned,
rather he should be commended for resurrecting ideas that have pervaded orthodox
Christian thinking for centuries prior to the modern era. In fact, he does not pretend to be a
political philosopher, and it was his desire to revive political and social thinking among
orthodox Christians. A renewed study of the classical Christian tradition would add depth

\(^{106}\) Variant forms of the word appear numerous other times. *dikaios* [just,
righteous], *dikaiosyne* [justification, righteousness], *dikaiou* [to justify], *dikaioma*
[regulation], *dikaiosis* [justification], *dikaiokrisia* [righteous judgment]. It is also
necessary to go back and explore Old Testament usage of the Hebrew words *sedeq* and
*saddiq*. This study would have to deal with many problems. For example, "in rabbinic
Judaism righteousness was completely identified with conformity to the law" which would
tend to support Henry, but obedience to the law included "works of charity and works of
mercy"... such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty,...
mourning with mourners, comforting the broken-hearted and visiting those who were sick
Testament Theology*, translated, with additions and revisions, from the German
*Theologisches Begriffslexikon Zum Neuen Testament*, edited by Lothar Coenen, Erich
Beyleuther and Hans Bietenhard, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library,
and breadth to evangelical political thought. Rather than accepting old cliches and characterizations, a thorough examination of the works of St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and Thomas Hooker would enrich evangelical political discourse. Henry is calling evangelicals to be true to their heritage, and he wants them to expound upon the implementation of that heritage today. Further study in this area would aid the effort greatly.107

Further work in these four areas could help resolve tensions that exist within the evangelical community itself, enabling it to speak with one voice and to present a more viable alternative to the larger intellectual and political world.

In conclusion, Henry bemoans the plight of modernity. Modern naturalism has defined the nature of reality and humanity in such a way that prevents us from discovering real solutions to perennial problems. As a result, modern culture is headed down a slippery slope. "A culture which has lost its unanimity concerning the validity and significance of the spiritual and the moral is not a culture which is doomed to disintegration at some future day; rather, it is culture in the very process of disintegration."108 Humanity must reinvestigate alternative understandings of reality. For Henry the alternatives are reduced to two: biblical theology or naturalistic nihilism.109 Henry pleads for reconsideration of the

---

107 Another interesting study that would shed greater light on Henry himself would involve a review of those who have had the greatest impact on his life. The starting point would be to look at those thinkers and books that Henry himself has identified as most important. These would include Gordon H. Clark, (1902-1986), one of Henry's professors at Wheaton College and later the Chair of the Philosophy Department for many years at Butler University in Indianapolis; W. Harry Jellema, (1893-1982) a one-time chair of the philosophy department at Indiana University; and, Cornelius Van Til, (1895-1987), long time theologian at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He has also identified the two most influential books in his life as The Christian View of God and the World, (1893) by James Orr, a Scottish apologetics professor from the University of Glasgow (1844-1913), and The Origin of Paul's Religion by J. Gresham Machen.

108 Henry, The Drift of Western Thought, 140.

109 Ibid., 160.
Henry's most important contribution to our quest for justice is twofold. He has successfully reactivated a significant element of American society and has helped return them to the political arena. Regardless of their shortcomings and misdeeds in many respects, this element, modern evangelicals, is deeply concerned about the quest for justice. Henry's second contribution is a renewed emphasis upon divine revelation as a source of truth to guide our quest for justice. In an age when the supernatural, the transcendent, and the spiritual have been called in question, it is vital for someone to provide an intellectually sophisticated case for divine revelation. Henry has not convinced the world that biblical theology is the only answer, but he has fought the fight in an era of skepticism and has inspired others to continue in his footsteps.

If evangelicals heed his call, Henry is optimistic about the good that Christians can do in this world. He calls them to actively preach their message to a lost world. "Let us call individuals and nations to a new vision of justice and righteousness. Let us invite a vagabond race to share with us the joys of life redeemed and fit for eternity. For the crisis of our times, the light that shines in darkness is still more than adequate." 110

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books by Henry


Articles by Henry


"America's Future: Can We Salvage the Republic?" Christianity Today, 3 March 1958, 3-7.

"Basic Issues in Modern Theology: Revelation as Truth." Christianity Today, 1 January 1965, 14-17.


"Bible Infallibility: Important or Essential?" Christianity Today, 21 January 1966, 44-45.


"Christ Against the Tyrants." Christianity Today, 2 August 1963, 24-25.


______. "Christian Education and Our American Schools." United Evangelical Action, 1 December 1955, 3f.


______. "Christianity and the American Heritage." United Evangelical Action, 1 July 1954, 3-5.


______. "Christianity in a Troubled World" Ministry (Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS). Spring 1990, 2-5.


______. "The Church and the Kremlin." Christianity Today, 2 March 1962, 24-25.


______. "Confessions of an Editor." Christianity Today, 1 August 1969, 3.


______. "Confronting Other Religions." Christianity Today, 1 August 1969, 31.

______. "Conservative or Liberal--What is the Difference?" United Evangelical Action, 15 January 1949, 3-4.


______. "Dare We Revive the Modernist-Fundamentalist Conflict?" Christianity Today, 10 June 1957, 3f.

Dare We Renew the Controversy? The Contemporary Restoration. Christianity Today, 8 July 1957, 15-18.

Dare We Renew the Controversy? The Evangelical Responsibility. Christianity Today, 22 July 1957, 23f.


Distinction Between Conservative and Liberal Theology. The Watchman-Examiner, 2 December 1948, 1224-1226.


Do We Need a Christian University? Christianity Today, 9 May 1960, 3-5.


An Evangelical Appraisal of Liberation Theology. This World, Fall 1986, 99-107.


"The Evangelical Task." Decision, October 1966, 3.


"Evangelicals and Social Action." United Evangelical Action, 1 March 1951, 7-8.


"Evangelicals Shape Philosophy of Science." Christianity Today, 6 July 1959, 20, 32.

"Evangelicals United for Action." United Evangelical Action, 1 April 1950, 6f.

"Evangelism and Social Action." Crux 16 (September 1980): 24-29.


"Has America Awakened At Last?" *Christianity Today*, 9 November 1962, 28-29.


"Heritage From the Past." Christianity Today, 13 February 1976, 32-34.

"Honoring the Bible as the Word of God." The Gideon, August 1954, 302-316.


"Impress or Evangelize the World?" Christianity Today, 30 March 1962, 24-25.


"Is the Supreme Court on Trial." Christianity Today, 1 March 1963, 28-29.


"Jesus as the Ideal of Christian Ethics." Christianity Today, 4 February 1957, 12f.

"Johnson, King and Ho Chi Minh." Christianity Today, 26 April 1968, 24-25.


"Let the Chips Fall." The Christian Statesman, March 1953, 6-7.


"Lost Momentum." Christianity Today, 4 September 1987, 30-32.


"Man--Machine or Miracle." The Christian Reader, June-August 1974, 40-42.


_______. "Modern Science and Values." The Asbury Seminarian, Fall 1949, 91-98.
_______. "NCC, God and the Schools." Christianity Today, 8 June 1959, 20-22.
331


_______ . "No Other Name." Moody Monthly, August 1948, 866.


"Three Threats to Our American Way of Life." United Evangelical Action, 1 January 1952, 3.


"Visit with Brunner." Christianity Today, 26 September 1960, 46-47.

_______. "Wintertime in European Theology." Part II. Christianity Today, 5 December 1960, 12-14.


_______. "World Evangelism or World Revolution." Decision, November 1966, 1,14


_______. "X Marks the Mystery." Christianity Today, 4 December 1970, 31-32.


Additional Sources


________. "Natural Law in the Thought of Luther." Church History 10 (1941): 211-227.


______. "Is Doctor Henry Right: No!" United Evangelical Action, 15 July 1947, 5f.


Smidt, Corwin. "Evangelical Versus Fundamentalist: An Analysis of the Political Characteristics and Importance of Two Major Religious Movements..." Delivered at the Midwest Political Science Association Meeting in Chicago, April 1983.


VITA

The author, David L. Weeks, is the son of Bob and Dorothy Weeks. He was born June 25, 1958, in Terre Haute, Indiana.

In September, 1976, Mr. Weeks entered Marion College, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Science in political science, religion/philosophy, and business in May 1980.

In June, 1980, Mr. Weeks was granted an assistantship at Indiana State University, enabling him to complete the degree of Master of Arts in political science in August 1981. His M. A. thesis, entitled "Colonial American Puritan Political Thought," was completed under the direction of Professors Robert Puckett, Robert Clouse and James Johnson.

In September, 1981, Mr. Weeks was granted an assistantship and entered the Ph.D. program in political science at Loyola University of Chicago.

In September, 1983, Mr. Weeks was named an assistant professor of political science at Azusa Pacific University, where he teaches courses in political philosophy and American government. In 1988, he was appointed chairperson of the History/Political Science department.

He has published book reviews in the International Journal on World Peace and Christianity Today. He co-authored, with Dr. Robert Puckett, "The Moral Majority and American Foreign Policy," published in the Indiana Journal of Political Science. He has served as co-director, with Dr. Christopher Flannery, for two summer institutes entitled "The Principles of American Democracy." The institutes were supported by a grant from the Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution.
APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by David L. Weeks has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. James L. Wiser, Director
Senior Vice President and Dean of Faculties
Loyola University of Chicago

Dr. Thomas Engeman
Professor of Political Science
Loyola University of Chicago

Dr. Ronald Nash
Professor of Religion/Philosophy
Western Kentucky University

Dr. Raymond Tatalovich
Professor of Political Science
Loyola University of Chicago

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

[Signature]

Date

Director's Signature