

## CHAPTER 6      CARL HENRY'S CRITIQUE OF KARL BARTH

### 6.1      A Theological Critique

One important aspect of the enduring legacy of Carl Henry is his engagement and critique of theological methodologies. Henry possessed an intelligent mind that would quickly assess a theological approach and be able to ascertain if that approach encouraged or detracted from the historic position of the church. Henry articulated from the beginning of this theological career, a theological methodology that adhered to “the faith once delivered to the saints,” but in doing so he was particularly adept at pinpointing weaknesses in competing methodologies. This practice was learned at the feet of Henry’s mentor and major theological and philosophical influence, Gordon Clark. As has been referenced already, this approach is known as the apagogic method.<sup>1</sup>

Henry, in *GRA*, uses the apagogic method throughout the six volumes and over three thousand pages. This chapter will focus on the representative use of this method with the theological methodology of Karl Barth.

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<sup>1</sup> Wade, “Rationalist Presuppositionalism: An Exposition and Analysis of Carl F.H. Henry’s Apologetics,” 9–10. “Once Clark has demonstrated the logical consistency of Christian theism as far as he is able, he turns to rival systems to show their inconsistency. This he calls the apagogic method. . . . Henry also uses the apagogic method. In fact, his magnum opus, *God, Revelation and Authority* as a defense of evangelical Christianity and a refutation of rival views on pertinent issues is an example of this method.” Christian theism would for Clark be the Reformed view of Christianity.

Henry references Barth more than any other figure in the entire corpus of *GRA* with over 214 references.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will take a representative look at Henry's critique of Barth in two areas: Barth's doctrine of revelation and Barth's theory of reason. The rationale for this review of Henry's engagement with Barth, is given the stature of Barth in twentieth century theology; his work cannot be ignored and must be addressed in any work addressing theology in the twentieth century.

Karl Barth was a towering figure in the theological field by any standard during the twentieth century. When he first burst onto the scene in the early decades of the 1900s with the publication of his commentary *The Epistle to the Romans*, followed by such works as *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, to the magisterial and massive *Church Dogmatics*, Barth has left a lasting impact on the contours of the theological landscape of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The author wishes to thank Steven W. Ladd, Assistant Professor of Theology and Bible of Southeastern College at Wake Forest, for the generous use of an index of *GRA* that he compiled. The index is unpublished.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (trans. E. C. Hoskyns; New York: Oxford University Press, 1933); Barth, *The Word of God and The Word of Man*; Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (trans. Ian W. Roberston; London: SCM Press, 1930) (widely regarded as a bridge between the two editions of *CD*); Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. For a thorough analysis of Karl Barth's theological career see Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology*. Dorrien provides an excellent summary of Barth's early theological education that led to his break with liberalism. He continues to show Barth's theological development of his theology of the Word and his impact on the theological world. See also Phillip R. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth*. Chief among those theologians that continue to carry the work and legacy of Karl Barth is Thomas F. Torrance. See his *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990). Other representative works of Barth's contributions would include: Hans Frei, *The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909 to 1922: The Nature of Barth's Break With Liberalism* (Ph.D. diss. Yale University 1956); Frei, "Eberhard Busch's Biography of Karl Barth," in *Karl Barth in Re-View* (ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt; Pittsburgh: Pickwick Publications, 1981), 95-116; Eberhard Jungle, *God as Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism* (trans. Darrell L. Guder; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); T. H. L. Parker, *Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970); Robert Jensen, *God after God: The God of the Past and the Future as Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill Co., 1969); Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace In The Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956); George Hunsinger, *How To Read Karl Barth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983). Works

## 6.2 Rational or Irrational—Barth’s view of Reason

Henry placed a premium on rationality. Rational thought is to be distinguished from rationalistic thought. The distinguishing factor between rational and rationalistic is that to be rational is to be as God has designed and equipped man. To be rationalistic is to take man as the center of his universe and rely solely on his powers of mental reasoning and observation in isolation from God. Henry has no problem using the rational capacities given to man by God. But to be rationalistic is to set the creature above the Creator and Henry would have no part in that. This is an area where Henry’s critics attempt to find fault with his theological method. This will be a topic of discussion in chapter 7. Henry affirms the position that God has equipped man with rational capacities to receive a rational, verbal, conceptual self-disclosure. Man’s rational capacity is part of the *imago Dei* and is wedded to the Logos that gives light to every man.<sup>4</sup> In looking at Barth’s view of reason, Henry, following Clark, early on began to detect aspects of irrationalism.<sup>5</sup> In Henry’s articulation on the intelligibility of the Logos of God he writes,

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that take a more critical approach to Barth’s theology would include: Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth’s Theological Method* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 1963, 1997), Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma, The Drift of Western Thought, Frontiers In Modern Theology, Fifty Years of Protestant Theology, God, Revelation and Authority 6 Vols.* A representative sampling of Cornelius Van Til’s ongoing literary engagement with Barth would include the following: *Christianity and Barthianism*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962, 1974); Van Til, *The New Modernism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1946); Van Til, “Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 16 (1954): 135–81; Van Til, “Karl Barth and Historic Christianity,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 4 (July 1937): 108–09; Van Til, “Karl Barth on Scripture,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 3 (January 9, 1937): 137–38. For a survey of those evangelical theologians that rejected Barth, those that were in critical dialogue with Barth, and those that appropriated Barth see R. Albert Mohler’s, “Evangelical Theology and Karl Bart: Representative models of response.” See Henry’s *Fifty Years of Protestant Theology* for an incisive analysis of Barth’s break from classic liberalism and the rise of neo-orthodoxy (pp. 30-83).

<sup>4</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 3:164–247; Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, 59-69, 79-90; *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge*.

<sup>5</sup> Clark, *Karl Barth’s Theological Method*, 62, 125–74. Clark as well as Henry note that in the revision of *CD*’s, Barth backs away from his earlier emphasis on paradox (following the influence of Kierkegaard), but this retreat does not satisfy Clark’s discerning eye as to irrational elements of Barth’s theology.

“In recent years neo-Protestant theologians have focused on the Word of God as a living, divine confrontation of man, only to develop this emphasis on ways patently alien to the Bible. . . . They hold, moreover, that the divine Word of revelation, as personal, cannot be known as object of reason but has its reality only in an internal decision of faith.”<sup>6</sup> Barth in particular is cited by Henry as holding that the Word of God is inherently dialectical or paradoxical.<sup>7</sup> Barth has a deficient view of rational capacity of man. While at one point Barth says God is knowable to man as a result of “language that is bound to the *theos*, which makes it possible and also determines it (*Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, p.16),” Barth fails to emphasize that this self-disclosure of God to man includes the mental equipment to receive that revelation.<sup>8</sup> Barth has ruled out any point of contact for knowledge of God. Man is finite and a sinner. As such, man has no capacity for comprehending the infinite and has no capacity for receiving the Word of God. The reason for man’s lack of comprehension is that point of contact with God has been lost due to the fall of man. In *CD (I/1, p. 273)*, Barth writes that man’s capacity for God has been lost. Barth, even though he stated that he stood in the tradition of the Reformation, is at odds with the Reformers at this point. Henry summarizes the view of the Reformers, “The Reformers understood the image of God in fallen man to embrace the humanity and personality remaining over to sinful man from the creation and found here a point of contact between God and man and between man and man. For the Reformers the fall defaced rather than annihilated the image of God. They insisted therefore that the image

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<sup>6</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 3:164.

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the philosophy behind Barth’s theology see William T. Riviere, “The Philosophy Underlying Barth’s Theology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 91, no. 362 (April 1934): 154–76.

<sup>8</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 3:171.

survives the fall as a psychological, mental, ontological reality . . . an existing part of human nature . . . a capacity for faith not shared by a tree or stone.”<sup>9</sup>

As Henry notes in *Frontiers of Modern Theology*, Barth “still disowns conceptual knowledge of God. While the logico–grammatical configuration of meaning is present both to belief and to unbelief, the religious reality is present to only belief. . . . The correspondence and congruity of our ideas with the religious reality involves no epistemological identity between God’s knowledge of himself and our knowledge of him.”<sup>10</sup> The early Barth in *The Epistle to the Romans*, wrote of a disjunction between pagan philosophers and their insistence on conceptual knowledge versus the personal revelation of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>11</sup>

### 6.2.1 Kant and Kierkegaard

Barth in his early phase contended that “divine revelation is given neither in revealed truths nor in the historical Jesus, but is concentrated in interpersonal divine-human confrontation that elicits obedient faith.”<sup>12</sup> Barth is directed in his reductionistic view of the verbal conceptual capacity of man to know God, due to the influence of Kant. Henry incisively and concisely shows the influence of Kant:

Much of this modern theological development stood in witting or un-witting 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,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 1:397.

<sup>10</sup> Henry, *Frontiers of Modern Theology*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 3:225.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 3:277.

since Kant's view excludes revelation in nature and history, as well as in an objective scriptural revelation. Kant's influence was reflected both in the dogmatics of German theologians like Albrecht Ritschl and Wilhelm Herrmann and in the writings of British and American liberals who preferred metaphysical agnosticism over Hegelian idealism as an alternative to biblical orthodoxy. God is for Kant only a transcendental postulate: he conceived metaphysical relationships in terms of ethical ideals for fully experiencing selfhood. 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.<sup>13</sup>

The other major influence on Barth that is pertinent at this point is Søren Kierkegaard. Henry cites the irrational move in philosophy and theology was a reaction against Hegelian rationalism. Hegel's premise was that "the real is the Rational." Unfortunately, from Henry's perspective, Hegel gave his position a pantheistic exposition that paved the way for thinkers such as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud who stressed irrationalism.<sup>14</sup>

The view that came into vogue replaced both the Triune God and patterned reality. This view denied that rational and morality exists independently of human beings and rejected universal rational and moral principles. This reaction against Hegelian rationalism set the stage for contemporary philosophy that would revolt against reason itself.<sup>15</sup>

It would be Søren Kierkegaard that set into motion in Christian theology the irrationalistic trend that Barth would incorporate into his theology. Brunner cites

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 3:278.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 5:359.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 5:360.

Kierkegaard as the one who influenced dialectical theology by emphasizing a radical antithesis between reason and revelation (*Revelation and Reason*, p. 376). Kierkegaard depicted God as totally other in such a way that no human concept or analogy appropriately represents him. Kierkegaard then followed by rejecting univocal or analogical language as appropriate language models that could communicate adequately God to man. Henry quotes Kierkegaard, “If man is to receive any true knowledge about the Unknown (God) he must be made known that it is unlike him, absolutely unlike him. This knowledge the Reason cannot possibly obtain of itself. . . . It will therefore have to obtain knowledge from God. but even if it obtains such knowledge it cannot understand it. . . . How should Reason be able to understand what is absolutely different from itself? (*Philosophical Fragments*, p. 37).”<sup>16</sup>

As Kierkegaard was prone to use the term paradox it is readily seen in his view of the relationship of the rationality between God and man. Nowhere does Kierkegaard attribute irrationality to God. In fact, only God is rational as is his work. This is where the difficulty begins in Kierkegaard’s system as Henry interprets it. Due to the fall of man and his finitude, the works and purposes of God seem irrational to him. The only way that man can know eternal truth is that it comes by special Divine revelation and even then it is in the form of absolute paradox. While Christianity proclaims revelation from God to man, Kierkegaard states that this revelation is not “a communication of knowledge in an intellectual sense which has to be apprehended by man through thought and reason; it is a communication of existence or reality to be apprehended by the act of faith

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 5:361.

(*Kierkegaard: The Melancholy Dane*, pp. 64ff.)”<sup>17</sup> Kierkegaard launched a period of theological irrationalism by asserting both divine revelation and irrationalism. In doing so Kierkegaard asserted that the ultimately real world cannot be grasped by reason, nor can it be comprehended intellectually, but is grasped in passionate decision.<sup>18</sup>

Barth would employ Kierkegaard’s irrationalism in its deprecation of the reason by emphasizing that personal decision was of prime importance in grasping ultimate reality. Again Hegel was the focus of the revolt. Barth rejected Hegel’s misrepresentation that man and the world are the rational externalization of the Absolute mind. It would be Barth, who more than any other theologian who was responsible for embracing irrational revelation in Euro-American thought.<sup>19</sup>

As already mentioned, the later Barth did move in a more conservative direction with respect to the knowledge content of revelation. But it was the early Barth who ruled out the possibility of all ontic statements. In the *Epistle to the Romans*, Barth asserted that God is completely unknowable. Barth emphasizes in an extreme way the transcendence and even the inconceivability of God. Barth in *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (1931), would move in a more conservative direction by asserting that faith is a call to cognitive understanding.<sup>20</sup>

Henry does note that Barth even in his earlier writings showed genuine interest in the knowledge of God. God’s Word is not irrational. Barth opposes Rudolf Otto’s view of God as the “Idea of the Holy.” Barth would write that “whatever else it may be, (it) is at

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 5:362.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 5:364.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 5:365.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 5:366.

all events not to be regarded as the Word of God, for the simple and patent reason that it is the numinous, and the numinous is the irrational . . . (CD, I/1, p.153).”<sup>21</sup> Even as Barth was moving to the more orthodox position as viewed from a conservative evangelical viewpoint, he still came up short. Henry cites a basic intelligibility in Barth’s revised position:

Despite his verbal assurance that theological theses and propositions are finally “adequate” to their object, Barth does not assign reason an adequate role in the knowledge of God. Correspondence and congruity between our theological predications and the self-revealed religious object do not, after all, turn out to be a matter of universally valid truths. The correspondence and congruity emerge only in subjective decision. . . . But evangelical orthodoxy does not depict truth about God as first created in the mind of the believer by the gift of saving faith. Regeneration itself involves a response to previously known truth about God, truth against which the sinner in his unregenerate state had maintained an attitude of revolt.<sup>22</sup>

Barth in his view of the *imago Dei* disallows any possibility of intellectual capacity (reasoning or moral capacity) by which he can know God. Barth allows that communication between God and man happens in sporadic acts where there are no universal, valid shareable propositions (CD II/1, p. 229). Communication between God and man occurs through “the sporadic creative act whereby God enables our concepts to become adequate for knowing him is none other than the sporadic internal act of diving grace on the occasion of penitent response; it is bounded by fore and aft by the hiddenness of God (CD II/1, p. 244).”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 5:369.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. See Thomas M. Smith, “A Critical Analysis of The Image of God in Man According to Karl Barth” (Th.M. thesis Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1983). Smith concludes that Barth has erred in estimation of the ontological content function of the *imago Dei*.

The result of Barth's view of the ontic content of the *imago Dei* has devastating consequences for man. Barth excluded epistemological identity between God and man. Barth disallows objective content to exist from God's revelation to our minds and our knowledge of God as he has revealed himself. He allows only for a partial correspondence of analogy between man's concepts, words and Gods (*CD II/1*, p. 227). As Henry argues for the univocity of knowledge of God, Barth makes no room for univocal knowledge of God even by the sporadic reoccurring miracle of divine grace. The effect is that in spite of Barth's argument to the contrary in relation to the miracle of divine grace on revelation and understanding, "his theology does not convincingly transcend the gulf that isolates human reason from knowledge of God-in-himself."<sup>24</sup>

### **6.3 Man's Mind and God's Mind**

Barth being a representative of the early form of neo-orthodoxy had a deficit view of man due to neo-Kantian epistemology. Henry, in following the trajectory of his theological system, that being founded on two axioms of (1) the ontological axiom– the one living God, and (2) the epistemological axiom–divine revelation, has a divinely inspired view of man. Henry is not left to rationalistic, mystical, or existential alternatives in developing an anthropology that leads to skepticism. Rather, Henry understands that because of divine revelation man is created as "a rational-moral-spiritual creature made in the divine image, a responsible creature uniquely lighted by the Logos (John 1:9a). He is to think God's thoughts after him and is morally accountable for his knowledge of the truth and of the good."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 5:370.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, *GRA*, 5:382.

Contrary to Barth et al. who viewed the incomprehensibility of God renders him unknowable, Henry adheres to the biblical view that man does not merely possess the image of God, but is the image of God. As such, man has reason that is made possible by the Supreme Reason. Man's mind and the faculty of reason are connected to the Divine intelligence and not solely dependent on a sensory dependence to the external world or a subjective knowledge of an inner psychological world. Man is a finite and fallen creature. Man's knowledge is dependent and derivative. But this condition does not render impossible the objective and real knowledge of God. God has compensated for man's limitations in the giving of divine revelation that is knowable.<sup>26</sup>

#### **6.4 Propositional or Personal—Barth's Doctrine of Revelation**

Henry viewed the interrelationship between reason and revelation as two sides of the same coin. Both came from God and both were given to man. God equipped man with reasoning ability that allowed for the successful communication between God and man. Revelation, the divine self-disclosure at the initiative of God, was given to man to so that he could know the will and purpose and more importantly who is God is and how to know and relate to God. Having seen the contrast between Henry and Barth on their respective views of reason, it becomes apparent that the divide only widens with respect to revelation.

Henry's position is that revelation is essential rational. The revelation from God is given to man in propositional form. Barth denied both of these of attributes of revelation. Mohler writes of Barth's position, "Barth's rejection of the inherent rationality of revelation, his insistence on the impossibility of speaking of God, and his disparagement

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 5:383–85.

of language doomed his theology to an irrational ambiguity.”<sup>27</sup> Henry cites from Barth’s *CD* the very irrationality that crippled Barth’s theology from wider appropriation:

Barth reflects an indebtedness to contemporary language theory when he insists that “there is not . . . a pure conceptual language which leaves the inadequate language of images behind, and which is, as such, the language of truth” (*CD* II/1, p. 195); indeed he asserts that “in fact, the language of the strictest conceptuality participates in the inadequacy of all human languages’ (*ibid.*). Elsewhere Barth asserts that “our words require a complete change of meaning, even to the extent of becoming the very opposite in sense, if in their application to God they are not to lead us astray” (*CD*, II/1, p. 307).<sup>28</sup>

It is apparent from Barth’s perspective the inherent necessity of a continuing, if albeit sporadic, act of divine grace in God’s communication to man. Henry quotes Barth again to further drive home the irrationality of Barth’s argument:

The real content of God’s speech is . . . never to be conceived and reproduced as a general truth. We may and must of course . . . work with definite general conceptual material, apparently repeating and anticipating what God has said . . . We may do this in words or our own coining or in Scripture quotations. However in that case we must continually be reflecting that this conceptual material is our own work, and not to be confused with the fullness of the Word of God itself. . . . What God said was always different . . . from what we may say and must say to ourselves and to others about its content (*CD*, I/1, pp.156–60).<sup>29</sup>

Henry’s assessment of this passage is representative of the break that Henry has with Barth. Barth does not allow for propositional truth, a position that Henry, as cited earlier in chapter 5, defends as essential for any cognitive information to be shared from God to man. As Henry has argued that propositional statements are not exhaustive of truth, but all truth must have some propositional expression in order to be intelligible and communicative.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mohler, “Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative models of response,” 124.

<sup>28</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 3:290.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, *GRA*, 3:466.

<sup>30</sup> Mohler, “Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative models of response,” 126.

There is no basis in the Scriptures for Barth's theory that divine revelation is nonpropositional, personal truth. Since Barth contends that dogmas are to strive inwardly toward and event and are not to be confused propositionally with dogma—or for that matter with Scripture—does he not therefore reduce Scripture to irrelevance? Must not the dogmatic statements of Scripture then also “strive” for an inner meaning? And for what “inner meaning” are the virgin birth or resurrection narratives to strive?<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, cognitive skepticism is unavoidable. Under Barth's position there is no true knowledge of God. Henry does recognize a change between the early and the later Barth (cf., *GRA*, 3:466), but then Barth, characteristically as Gordon Clark would say, says the exact opposite of what he has said at another point. Henry cites (*CD*, I/2, p. 499), “it is quite impossible that there should be a direct identity between the human word of Holy Scripture and the Word of God.” Later Barth writes, “God's revelation is authentic information about God because it is first-hand information” (*CD*, II/1, p.210).<sup>32</sup> This is but one of many instances (cf. Clark's *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, 125–74) of Barth writing contradictory statements in his theological works that lead Henry to conclude “he [Barth] can only be charged with colossal inconsistency.”<sup>33</sup>

#### 6.4.1 Biblical Authority and Rejection of the Inerrancy

Henry along with other evangelicals applauded Barth when they found common ground. Such was the case with Barth's affirmation of biblical authority. Barth's “theology of the Word of God” is just such an instance. Henry wrote “Barth's bold effort to revive a theology of the Word of God faltered when he refused to identify the

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<sup>31</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 3:468.

<sup>32</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 3:466

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, *GRA*, 3:467.

scriptural word with God's Word."<sup>34</sup> While the Bible became once again a subject of prime importance, Henry et al did not shy away from citing failures, in their estimation, of Barth's *Wort*-theology.<sup>35</sup> There are two primary deficiencies that Henry cites as undermining Barth's theology and in part were the causes that Barth's theology could not stem the rising tide of Bultmannism.<sup>36</sup> These deficiencies arise from two irreconcilable axioms: (1) Scripture is errant in the original; (2) Scripture is the authoritative Word.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, "Where is Modern Theology Going?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1968): 10.

<sup>35</sup> Henry, *Frontiers of Modern Theology*, 66. Henry in 2n writes, "The 'theology of the Word of God' became a descriptive summary phrase for Barth's dogmatics, in view of the appeal by crisis-theologians to divine transcendence, initiative, and disclosure-especially to the God who both acts and speaks. But the dialectical character of revelation, as Barth defined it, precluded an identification of this Word with Scripture. In contrast to the teaching of Jesus (John 10:35) and Paul (1 Thess. 2:13), the crisis theologians demeaned Scripture to 'witness' to the Word, rather than recognizing it as the Word written." Miner Broadhead Sterns recounts the development of what has become known as Barthianism in "Protestant Theology since 1700 (Part Two)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105, no. 417 (January 1948): 59–81. "For Barth the Word of God is Christ, not the Bible. The Word of God is addressed to man in a threefold way: in preaching, in Scripture, and in revelation.<sup>13</sup> The last-named seems to mean the *coming* of the Word of God to man. The fact that Barth puts preaching and Scripture on the same level as means through which the Word of God comes to man is revealing as to his view of Scripture. When God speaks to a man through the Bible, then that is the Word of God to him. Of course, Barth is right in holding that a man may read the Bible without God's speaking to him through it; but he is wrong in thinking that the Bible is not God's Word in that case. Barth has made a radical separation between reason and revelation which is very fine, but he pushes the consequences much too far" (p.70).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. "Why was the theology of Karl Barth unable to stem the tide of Rudolf Bultmann's theories?" Henry's answer can be found in his quote that he takes from Wilfried D. Joest, "A wide gulf separates the emphasis that God has not objective reality at all, but exists only for me, from the emphasis that concedes that there is no objective revelation, yet asserts an objective reality that cannot be objectified by methods of reason and must be won by faith" (pp. 30-31).

<sup>37</sup> Mohler, "Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative models of response," 128. "Henry did not suggest that Barth denied the authority of the biblical revelation. Indeed, he granted that Barth was capable of granting scripture the most sweeping authority within his dogmatic system. Nevertheless, this authority was granted the text only by the theological contortion of affirming "two irreconcilable axioms." The first axiom, that scripture was errant in the original, was held by Barth in one form or another throughout his dogmatic phase. On the other hand, in seeking to construct a theology of the Word, Barth was forced to grant scripture the authoritative status inerrancy assumes; the second axiom. In Henry's view, Barth's assumption of these two incompatible axioms, with an errant yet authoritative Word, rendered his dogmatics a mass of revelatory confusion."

The first axiom, the errancy of the originals, undermines the second axiom, the authority of the Word. Barth insists that Scripture is errant. Barth believes this is necessarily so due to the limits of his epistemological and anthropological views:

The writers, he [Barth] says, may have used an “antiquated numbers-symbolics or number mysticism, whereby arithmetical errors, whimsies and impossibilities may have crept in” (*I/2*, p. 51), and “the fact that the statement that ‘God reveals himself’ is the confession of a miracle that has happened certainly does not imply a blind credence in all the miracle stories in the Bible. . . . It is really not laid upon us to listen to its testimony when we actually hear it” (*CD, I/2*, p. 65). . . . Barth deploras as “very ‘naturalistic’” the postulate that “the Bible . . . must not contain human error in any of its verses” (*CD, I/2*, p. 525). He attributes error to prophets and apostles in their authoritative teaching: “The prophets and apostles as such even in their office,” he states, “were historical men as we are, and . . . actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word (*CD, I/2*, pp. 528-529). The error that Barth ascribes to Scripture, moreover, is not limited to its historical details, but stretches even to its religious or theological teaching. “The vulnerability of the Bible, i.e., its capacity for error, also extends to its religious or theological content” (*CD, I/2*, p. 509). “There are obvious . . . contradictions —e.g. between the Law and the prophets, between John and the Synoptists, between Paul and James. . . . Within certain limits they are all vulnerable and therefore capable of error even in respect of religion and theology” (*CD, I/2*, pp. 509-510; cf. also *III/1*, p. 80).<sup>38</sup>

Barth’s a priori insistence on the errancy of Scripture is an obstacle that Henry, a champion of Biblical authority and inerrancy, could not countenance. Barth denied inerrancy due to his insistence that the human witnesses to revelation were necessarily fallible. Scripture, while not objectively revelation, is a witness to revelation that is free from error. Scripture as the vessel of revelation does contain errors, and necessarily so. Henry predictably responds, “If the Bible is thus humanly fallible, and necessarily so, as Barth contends, what sense does it make to insist, as he does, on its divine infallibility.”<sup>39</sup>

Henry’s criticism of Barth exposes his position at a very vulnerable point. Barth has asserted that the Bible as a witness to God’s revelation does not give man any divine

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<sup>38</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 4:196.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, *GRA*, 4:197.

“revealedness” in any sense. The Bible does not impart revelation to man. Barth writes, “How can it be witness of divine revelation, if the actual purpose, act and decision of God . . . is dissolved in the Bible into a sum total of truth abstracted . . . and . . . propounded to us as truths of . . . revelation? If it tries to be more than witness, to be direct impartation, will it not keep us from the best, the one real thing, which God intends to tell us and give us and which we ourselves need? (*CD*, I/2, p. 507).”<sup>40</sup>

Barth has missed the essential question. Henry says the question is not whether the Scriptures are mediated through chosen writers, but whether divine revelation is mediated in the form of truths through the prophetic-apostolic writings which communicate accurate truth about God to man? For Barth the answer is, no. This position highlights Barth’s irrationalism. For Barth to maintain this position, one of two things must necessarily be the case: (1) God’s revelation does not involve rational communication, which would mean that there would no way of determining if God intended to tell man anything or what he in fact decided to tell man; (2) Barth must withdraw his contention that divine revelation as witnessed to the written Scripture necessarily conceals the truth, or embrace unequivocally rational revelation.<sup>41</sup>

Barth consistently claimed that he stood in line with the Reformers. He stated that it was the post-Reformation conception of verbal inspiration and inerrancy that froze the understanding of the Bible and removed the continual, sporadic act of divine grace that brought man into confrontation with the Word of God. “This post-Reformation view transformed it [the Bible] from a statement about the free grace of God into a statement

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 4:198.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

about the nature of the Bible as exposed to human inquiry brought under human control.”<sup>42</sup> The loss of mystery in the Scriptures due post-Reformation doctrinal changes to verbal inspiration reduced the Bible to the status of inquiry as any other historical document and ushered in an emergence of secularization with respect to biblical studies. Henry’s comment on this statement was that it was the product of a “deficient view of post-Reformation history.” It was not the Deists or naturalists who asserted the divine authority of Scripture and verbal inspiration. Rather, as Clark has pointed out that secularization precludes belief in the verbal inspiration of Scripture.<sup>43</sup>

Henry summarizes the foundational problem that he sees in Barth’s view of the doctrine of revelation:

The difficulty lies not in Barth’s appeal to divine revelation as the basic axiom of the Christian faith. It lies, rather in his presuming to derive two incompatible positions from the appeal, positions which from the outset ought to be seen as incompatible and contradictory. The axiom that the Bible contains errors and contradictions cannot be reconciled with the axiom that the prophetic-apostolic writings are the Word of God. Barth, in other words, develops his theology in terms of irreconcilable axioms. By trying to maintain these positions side by side, or emphasizing now one view and then the other, Barth burdens his *Church Dogmatics* with confusion. By respecting the law of contradiction, he could and would have avoided irrational tendencies. The difficulties of Barth’s exposition can be overcome only by closing the gap, as Scripture itself does, between divine revelation and the prophetic-apostolic writings, between the Word of God and the Bible.<sup>44</sup>

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined Henry’s critique of Karl Barth’s view of the role of reason and his doctrine of revelation. Henry finds that Barth has a defective

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 4:199.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., *GRA*, 4:200.

epistemological, anthropological, and view of the content of revelation. The foundational reason for these deficiencies is Barth's commitment to a Kantian epistemology and Kierkegaardian irrationalism that denied a rational conceptual content to God's divine disclosure to man. While God is not irrational, per Kierkegaard, God's communication and acts seem irrational to man. Concurrent with the limitations that Barth set on God's ability to communicate to man, was the inability of man to receive this communication, hence the notion that God's communication seems irrational to man.

Not only is there inherent epistemological and anthropological limitations that man faces, but Barth in his doctrine of revelation is committed to two irreconcilable axioms: (1) an errant Scripture in the originals and (2) the authority of the Word. In these two axioms, Henry sees the irrationalism of Barth coming again to the surface. Henry asks the question: Why should Scripture be afforded the authority that only inerrancy can give it Barth, by having an a priori commitment to errancy (i.e., the original Scriptures necessarily contain errors), Barth then makes a leap of faith by declaring that the Bible has authority. This authority is contained in that infallible revelation is contained in the Bible even though it contains errors in all material issues. Henry's commitment to a rational view of man and the verbal conceptual nature of divine revelation is at odds with Barth's view. Consequently, Henry does not find compatibility between Barth's view of reason and revelation and evangelicalism. However, it is Henry's commitment to rationalism that has brought Henry under fire. This criticism of Henry will be the focus of chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 7      **Henry, His Critics, and His Legacy**

As in much of life, one's perspective determines if there is a positive or negative assessment of the particular situation. So it is with Carl F. H. Henry. Depending on who is being asked, Henry is lauded as the leading evangelical theologian of the twentieth century, or deplored as the one who brought back a form of turgid scholasticism. This chapter will examine the principle criticism of Henry and his theological method, and then will look to what legacy he has left.

### **7.1      Henry and His Critics**

The criticism that is most often leveled at Henry is that he has employed an alien epistemology in his theology that is more Cartesian than biblical. He has been called rationalistic and a modernist.<sup>1</sup> Typical of this type of criticism can be seen in the comments from William J. Abraham. In his book *The Coming Great Revival: Recovering the Full Evangelical Tradition*, Abraham, in criticizing the evangelical position of inerrancy, describes the debate about inerrancy as sterile and scholastic. The debate surrounding inerrancy is a millstone around the neck of evangelicalism, drowning the movement needlessly in a sea of divisive, defensive, theological rhetoric.

When one looks critically at the benchmark of systematic theology within evangelical circles, Carl F. H. Henry's six-volume work, *God, Revelation, and Authority*. . . . This work represents the distillation of a whole generation's labor and has rightly been lauded

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<sup>1</sup> Chad Owen Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology," 44-60; Thomas Reginald McNeal, "A Critical Analysis of the Doctrine of God in the Theology of Carl F. H. Henry" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986).

as the most important work of evangelical theology in modern times. Henry, as we have seen, was one of the key architects of modern evangelical orthodoxy and he is generally regarded as the dean of evangelical theologians. Yet the climax of his work is deeply disappointing. One looks in vain here for a fresh, invigorating expression of the Christian gospel. There is nothing here that humbles the soul before God, drives one to Christ in fresh love and adoration, inspires one to love one's neighbor as oneself, or encourages one to preach more faithfully. Henry provides no deeply-illuminating account of the human predicament and no penetrating analysis of how the gospel is good news to a broken world. There is no compelling account of Christ; there is next to nothing on the doctrine of Christian life or the work of the Holy Spirit in renewal; there is very little on the nature and demands of Christian community. What we have instead is over three thousand pages of turgid scholasticism. Readers swirl around in a sea of names who are either called in defense as witnesses to the truth or carefully worked over as inconsistent heretics. A dead and barren orthodoxy decked out in a magnificent display of learning is presented as the riches of Christian faith. Even educated readers will soon find themselves suffering from either boredom or indigestion.<sup>2</sup>

The criticism continues that Henry is a Thomist, having ushered in a new scholasticism.

His critics allege that reason plays too prominent a role in his theological system. Additionally, Henry has taken the mystery out of Christianity by reducing revelation to mere propositions.<sup>3</sup>

Hans Frei was one of the first to criticize Henry for being a modernist. Frei criticizes Henry for a narrow and simplistic view of language and truth. Frei asserts that language and truth are culture bound and historically conditioned. Frei employs Barthian language in describing how one can escape those limitations only through the miraculous.<sup>4</sup>

Theologians such as Roger Olson and Donald Bloesch are representative of those theologians who believe that Henry is reductionistic in his view of Christianity. They cite that

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<sup>2</sup> William J. Abraham, *The Coming Great Revival: Recovering the Full Evangelical Tradition* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 36–37.

<sup>3</sup> Patterson, *Carl F. H. Henry: Makers of the Modern Mind*, 165–69.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Frei, "Response to 'Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,'" *Trinity Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 21–24. Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology," 45. Brand cites the following as evidence of Frei's criticism of Henry: "Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 24–25. This volume was assembled from lectures given by Frei in 1983 and 1987. See also Hans W. Frei, "Response to 'Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,'" *Trinity Journal* n.s., no. 8 (Spring, 1987):23–30. This is Frei's reply to Carl Henry's criticisms of narrative theology," (n.10).

Henry has taken the mystery out of Christianity by reducing it to a series of correct doctrines that will direct thoughts into proper thinking about God in *lieu* of leading to personal confrontation with Christ.<sup>5</sup> Brand writes, “The most wide-ranging indictment of Henry as a modern thinker has been offered by James William McClendon, Jr. This theologian argues that Henry’s theological method fits neatly into the modern paradigm, as his “philosophical work” is characterized by the “four recurrent marks” of that epistemological paradigm: It is “human-centered, universalizable, reductionist, and foundationalist.”<sup>6</sup> The one last criticism of Henry that seems to have rallied a wide range of support is his view of the univocity of language. The criticisms of Henry will be addressed in brief as the substance of the response has already been addressed at length in preceding chapters.

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<sup>5</sup> Brand, “Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology,” 47. See Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vols. 1-2 (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1982). David A. Hubbard makes a similar claim in his well known opposition to inerrancy and Henry’s defense of it. See David A. Hubbard, “The Current Tensions: Is There A Way Out,” *Biblical Authority*, (ed. Jack Rogers; Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1977,1978), 176.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Brand gives the following qualifications concerning McClendon’s criticism of Henry: “Modern thought is *anthropocentric* in that it makes human nature the measure of all things. It tends to *universalization* by assuming that ‘what matters for anybody must matter for everybody.’ This tendency assumes that one set of experiences will provide the norm for the rest of culture, and is, thus, ‘imperialistic’ in its approach to knowledge. Further, modern thought is *reductionist* in its tendency to reduce everything to its components in a manner analogous to the scientific tendency to reduce analysis to molecules, atoms and subatomic particles, (an approach found in Positivism) rather than to widen the angle to a more expansive investigation. The fourth of McClendon’s attributes of modernist thought requires a bit more comment. *Foundationalism* refers to the tendency of Cartesian and, to some extent, Lockean epistemologies to construct all of knowledge upon self-evident and indubitable foundations. It is the attempt to find an Archimedean Point from which one’s entire system can be recursively built. . . . For Wittgenstein, [Philosophy] was the attempt to remove the bewitchment to understanding caused by language. This means that there is no such thing as final truth, construed as correspondence to reality, since each community of discourse does nothing more than attempt to mark out, in a coherent fashion, the language game which is endemic to that community. At best, truth is judged by the coherence of the game, or perhaps only as that which works. The search for indubitable and noninferential foundations to universal truth claims, it would seem, had now been permanently banished from the field of respectable intellectual inquiry.” Henry is a presuppositionalist. For a concise summary of his position see *Toward A Recovery of Christian Belief*, 37–60. For a modern treatment of foundationalism see Alvin Plantinga’s *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a treatment on the differences between presuppositionalism and foundationalism see *Five Views of Apologetics* edited by Stanley N. Gundry and Steven B. Cowan.

## 7.2 Critique of the Criticism

In light of the criticism of being a modernist or rationalist, would one be justified in attributing these criticisms as being credible or not? In response to the claim of Henry being a modernist, the verdict would have to be in the negative. Throughout Henry's writings, as evidenced by this paper, one can readily see his reliance, first and foremost, on the self disclosure of God. That this self-disclosure is rational, intelligible, and not prey to the variant methodologies that prize ambiguity or a lack of certitude is readily conceded, but to attribute the moniker of being a modernist on that basis is a misrepresentation of Henry's theological methodology. Henry is criticized for his insistence that biblical truth is communicated primarily through propositional truth. At times the charge is made that Henry only affirms propositional truth. This charge misrepresents the substance of Henry's position. Truth is communicated primarily in propositional form, as this form communicates information that it is either true or false. However, truth is personal in that it comes from a personal God who desires to communicate, rationally and intelligibly, with man. Contrary to mediating theologians who opt for a non-propositional, non-cognitive communication with man, Henry asserts that to hold that position leaves man awash in a sea of skepticism or mysticism. Henry denies that there is an inherent contrast between divine self-revelation and propositional truths. The essence of propositional divine progressive revelation is that it is expressible. Henry writes,

If its content is incommunicable, and has only private significance, then one's personal non-revelation falls by the wayside. Unless the divine 'more' is revelationally vouchsafed, it is but sheer speculation. If it is revelationally meaningful and true, moreover, it is propositionally expressible. No one has ever cited any meaningful example of this divine 'plus,' nor can this be done except in propositional form.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Henry, *GRA*, 3:458.

The glaring inconsistency of Henry’s critics who espouse personal over propositional revelation is, that by and large, they use expressible propositions to affirm the personal non-expressible revelation that man has received from God.

McClendon accuses Henry of being a “twentieth– century Cartesian.”<sup>8</sup> In analyzing the criticism of McClendon it becomes apparent of the role that pluralism plays in his thinking.<sup>9</sup>

McClendon specifically accuses Henry of . . .

. . . being anthropocentric in that he grants to the *imago Dei* a “central role.” Henry’s philosophy is universalizing in the place he gives to the role of reason. Henry is also a reductionist, a fact that can be seen in his tendency to reduce “Scripture’s content to rational propositions.” According to McClendon, he is a foundationalist, as can be seen in his commitment to “the architectonic [system] with its threefold foundation.”<sup>10</sup>

McClendon’s characterization of Henry as a modernist does not stand the test of scrutiny. As for McClendon’s charge that Henry’s view of the *imago Dei* is anthropocentric, Henry would argue that his estimation of the *imago Dei* emanates from Scripture and is a faithful model that expounds the full scope of the dimensions of the *imago Dei*. While Scripture does not provide

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<sup>8</sup> James William McClendon, Jr., “Christian Knowledge in the Sunset of Modernity,” unpublished paper delivered at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, (February, 1998), 8.

<sup>9</sup> James William McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1975, 1994), 3–10. McClendon is included in those theologians who have followed Hans Frei in the post-liberal movement. While not a monolithic group, they do share common affinities; among those affinities is an antithesis to the use of language as Henry would understand language theory. See Gary Dorrien, “A Third Way in Theology,” *The Christian Century*, 118, no. 20 (July 4, 2001): 16.

<sup>10</sup> Brand, “Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology,” 49. In footnote (n. 52) Brand makes the observation that McClendon never clarifies what he means by “three fold foundation.” “It is not readily apparent what McClendon means by the ‘threefold foundation,’ since he does not elaborate on this matter at this point in the paper. Likely, he is referring back to his earlier comment about Descartes’s foundationalism, when he noted that human thought was built on the foundations of the existence of [one’s] own self or mind, backed by the existence of that mind’s Cause, the mathematically infinite God.”

the exact content of the *imago Dei*, there is no reason for viewing the *imago* as having a vague or indefinite content form before the fall.<sup>11</sup>

Brand's answer to the charge of anthropocentrism is with great clarity:

The charge of anthropocentrism is unfounded. One cannot read (or even skim, since few have actually read all of it) his six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority* and not come away with the impression that God is majestic and sovereign and that this is a theology which sees God as high and lifted up. That Henry spends a great amount of time dealing with such issues as the *imago Dei* is not in itself proof that this is an anthropocentric theology. Few thinkers have accorded the image of God in humans as much attention as did Emil Brunner, who also construed the *imago Dei* as an apologetic point of contact, but McClendon does not paint him with the brush of "modernity." Henry makes it clear that his concerns over anthropology are apologetic and polemical, but it is pretty clear that his dogmatic project is not determined simply by such polemical concerns, and it seems certain that his methodology does not locate "morality and reality alike in *human beings*," but in the sovereign God.<sup>12</sup>

Henry at the outset of his methodology follows the Augustinian example of faith preceding reason. Having rejected Thomism and the irrationality methodology modeled by Tertullian, Henry, while allowing a significant role in his methodology, is certainly not a slave to it. Henry allows reason to function as God has intended it to function, and serve as reason was intended to serve:

The fact that reason precedes faith in some respects does not violate Augustine's position. It does not mean that faith rests upon truths discovered by man's natural or pure reason as with Aquinas. While reason can serve as a negative test for truth, it cannot establish truth; revelation is needed for that. For Henry, as for Augustine, reason was not the ground of faith, even though it was essential for faith. Reason involved faculties necessary for man to know God and what is true. But faith is not in reason; it is in God and his revelation. One must begin with revelation that can be comprehended, and that revelation informs man of reason. All of life is to be interpreted, not through fallen reason, but by divine revelation rationally appropriated.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Richard A. Purdy, "Carl Henry and Contemporary Apologetics: An Assessment of the Rational Apologetic Methodology of Carl F. H. Henry in the Context of the Current Impasse Between Reformed and Evangelical Apologetics" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1980), 508.

<sup>12</sup> Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology," 50.

<sup>13</sup> Walter E. Johnson, "A Critical Analysis of the Nature and Function of Reason in the Theology of Carl F. H. Henry" (Th.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 224.

The charge of reductionism has already been addressed. Revelation comes from a personal God who gives information in expressible (propositional) form *versus* inexpressible form. This impinges on the last charge of McClendon, which could be summarized as Henry using a foreign methodology to state scriptural truth. Given Henry's defense of revelational epistemology and its scriptural grounding, the criticism is more readily leveled at his critics. McClendon and others of his ilk are concerned that in a pluralistic world one can no longer argue with the absolutism of bygone eras. To commit this fallacy is, in McClendon's word, "imperialistic."<sup>14</sup> McClendon and others move from an adherence to the law of non-contradiction in favor of using a coherence or pragmatic view of truth. The consequences portend the inability to argue for absolute truth, to contend for the exclusivity of the Gospel and the authority of the Bible:

There is no essence of religion; religions are neither . . . all more-or-less true nor . . . all more or less evil. It follows that generalizations about religion are generally mistaken, since religions differ in kind, and only concrete, sympathetic, historical and empirical study can tell us about any particular religion. We may call this the practical theory of religion . . . in the sense that its concern is the life shaping . . . practices religions embody.<sup>15</sup>

The last major criticism to be addressed is Henry's view (following his mentor Gordon Clark) of the univocity of language.<sup>16</sup> This criticism comes from all quarters and from within

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<sup>14</sup> McClendon, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology," 51

<sup>16</sup> For a representative presentation of Clark's view on univocal language "The Bible As Truth" is an adequate Clarkian treatment. Clark writes, "This denial of univocal predication is not peculiar to the professors quoted, nor need it be considered particularly neo-orthodox. Although the approach is different, the same result is found in Thomas Aquinas. This medieval scholar, whose philosophy has received the papal sanction, taught that no predicate can univocally be applied to God and created beings. Even the copula *is* cannot be used univocally in these two references. When therefore a man thinks that God is good or eternal or almighty, he not only means something different from what God means by good, eternal, or almighty, but, worse, if anything can be worse, he means

evangelicalism as well as from without. Van Til is a major architect in modern times of the analogical view of language.<sup>17</sup> Clark and Henry defend the view that in order for any true communication to take place between God and man, it is necessarily the case that when God says “rose,” it means the same thing for God as it does for man. This realistic epistemology, as Clark explains it:

By realism in this connection I mean a theory that the human mind possesses some truth—not an analogy of the truth, not a representation of or correspondence to the truth, not a mere hint of the truth, not a meaningless verbalism about a new species of truth, but the truth itself. God has spoken His Word in words, and these words are adequate

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something different by saying that God is. Since, as temporal creatures, we cannot know the eternal essence of God, we cannot know what God means when He affirms His own existence. Between God’s meaning of existence and man’s meaning there is not a single point of coincidence. The Scholastics and Neoscholastics try to disguise the skepticism of this position by arguing that although the predicates are not univocal, neither are they equivocal, but they are analogical. The five professors also assert that man’s ‘knowledge must be analogical to the knowledge God possesses (*The Text*, p. 5, col. 3). However, an appeal to analogy, though it may disguise, does not remove the skepticism. Ordinary analogies are legitimate and useful, but they are so only because there is a univocal point of coincident meaning in the two parts. A paddle for a canoe may be said to be analogical to the paddles of a paddle-wheel steamer; the canoe paddle may be said to be analogous even to the screw propeller of an ocean liner; but it is so because of a univocal element. These three things, the canoe paddle, the paddle wheel, and the screw propeller, are univocal devices for applying force to move boats through the water. Without a univocal element an alleged analogy is pure equivocation, and analogical knowledge is complete ignorance. But if there is a univocal element, even a primitive savage, when told that a screw propeller is analogous to his canoe paddle, will have learned something. He may not have learned much about screw propellers and, compared with an engineer, he is almost completely ignorant—almost but not quite. He has some idea about propellers, and his idea may be, literally, true. The engineer and the savage have one small item of knowledge in common. But without even one item in common, they could not both be said to know. For both persons to know, the proposition must have the same meaning for both. And this holds equally between God and man. If God has the truth and if man has only an analogy, it follows that he does not have the truth. An analogy of the truth is not the truth; and even if man’s knowledge is not called an analogy of the truth but an analogical truth, the situation is no better. An analogical truth, except it contains a univocal point of coincident meaning, simply is not the truth at all. In particular, and the most crushing reply of all, if the human mind were limited to analogical truths, it could never know the univocal truth that it was limited to analogies. Even if it were true that the contents of human knowledge are analogies, a man could never know that such was the case: he could only have the analogy that his knowledge was analogical. This theory, therefore, whether found in Thomas Aquinas, Emil Brunner, or professed conservatives, is unrelieved skepticism and is incompatible with the acceptance of a divine revelation of truth.” Gordon Clark, “The Bible As Truth,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114, no. 454 (April 1957): 165–66.

<sup>17</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology. In Defense of the Faith, Vol. V* (Nutley NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974); *Apologetics* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976). For a summary of Van Til’s analogical view see Jim Halsey, “A Preliminary Critique of *Van Til: The Theologian* A Review Article,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (Fall 1976): 120–36. For an alternative to both univocal and analogical view of language, see William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

symbols of the conceptual content. The conceptual content is literally true, and it is the univocal, identical point of coincidence in the knowledge of God and man.<sup>18</sup>

### 7.3 Henry and His Legacy

The recognition of Carl Henry's contributions to Christianity has long been documented. Henry is typically described as the dean of evangelical theology. His shaping presence as the founding of some of Evangelicalism's foundational institutions is remarkable by any standard.<sup>19</sup> Russ Moore comments on his impact, "Carl F. H. Henry, from his early career on the founding faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary, to his editorship of *Christianity Today* to his authorship of his theological *magnum opus*, *God, Revelation and Authority*, served as the intellectual powerhouse behind the evangelical renaissance in the United States."<sup>20</sup> The fact that in the *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* series, Carl Henry was the lone evangelical representative is significant.

But it may be that Henry's most enduring legacy is his writings,

which number well into the scores of books, articles, editorials, and edited volumes. His theological writing has appeared in seven decades. His most significant achievement is his six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority*, which appeared in three two-volume installments between 1976–1983, but which was never sold *as a set* until Crossway Books reprinted the volumes in 1999. Coupled with earlier works such as *Remaking the Modern Mind* (1946), *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947), *The Protestant Dilemma* (1948), and *Christian Personal Ethics* (1956), to name just a few of those early works, these later volumes demonstrate a consistent, sustained, comprehensive vision for evangelical theology and its place in the world.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Clark, "The Bible as Truth," 170.

<sup>19</sup> Henry was instrumental in the founding and shaping of the Evangelical Theological Society, Fuller Theological Seminary, and *Christianity Today*.

<sup>20</sup> Russ Moore, "God, Revelation, and Community: Ecclesiology and Baptist Identity in the Thought of Carl F. H. Henry," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 27.

<sup>21</sup> House, "Remaking the Modern Mind: Revisiting Carl Henry's Theological Vision," 4–5.

The really noteworthy aspect of Henry's career, is that it was so lengthy and yet it contained a consistency that is virtually unrivaled on the contemporary theological stage. Paul House brings together a nice summary of Henry's theological vision:

This vision was comprehensive in that it considered the proposed evangelical worldview as the hope of the world, not just the way to reform straying American denominations affected negatively by modernism. This vision was a sustained one in that it remained amazingly consistent for over fifty years. It deepened and broadened, especially as it was shared in several cultural contexts, yet retained its basic shape. . . . stated simply, Henry's vision for theology was that it be epistemologically viable, methodologically coherent, biblically accurate, socially responsible, evangelistically oriented, and universally applied. In this way theology will thereby serve the church universal, which was the view of the church most important to him. Henry's vision was that evangelical theology be nothing less than God's means of remaking modern and postmodern minds.<sup>22</sup>

Timothy George summarizes the legacy of Carl Henry:

What made Carl F. H. Henry great? The answer to this question is as myriad as the varied movements, institutions, and initiatives to which this remarkable man gave himself on behalf of the evangelical church during his long and productive life. Along with Harold John Ockenga, the mover and shaker of neo-evangelicalism, Henry established a platform for Bible-believing Christians against obscurantist fundamentalism on the one hand and compromising liberalism on the other. Ever committed to the life of the mind, Henry was the "brains" behind the National Association of Evangelicals, Fuller Seminary, *Christianity Today*, and much more. His trumpet-call in *Uneasy Conscience* set the direction of evangelical social and cultural engagement for the next half-century. Henry was a journalist by training; he never lost the common touch. He could lecture at Harvard and Yale on existentialism and process philosophy one week, and preach a revival in a country church the next week, and do both with integrity and credibility. Henry's *God, Revelation and Authority* is a monumental statement of theological epistemology that still rewards careful study today. Carl Henry was an evangelical statesman, a world visionary, a networker of unparalleled skill, and a shaper of institutions that still bear the imprint of his mind and heart. All of this, and much more, made him great.<sup>23</sup>

George adds one last comment that many will not know about Henry in that . . .

He was an unflagging encourager of others. . . . Carl Henry felt a special responsibility to encourage younger pastors and scholars in their work for the Lord. On his subsequent visits to Beeson as a visiting professor and conference speaker, he always took time to be

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>23</sup> "The SBJT Forum: Testimonies to a Theologian," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 85.

with students. He would preach in their churches on the weekend, eat Chinese food (one of his favorites) with them over lunch, and invite them to his apartment for “theology and tea.” The last time he preached in chapel at Beeson, he spoke from a chair as he was not able to stand. He talked about his conversion to Jesus Christ and what it meant to be born again.<sup>24</sup>

Carl Henry was a man who embodied in the truest sense the calling to loving our Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind. Henry was consistent throughout his lengthy and unbelievably productive academic career, in that he articulated unfailingly a theological vision that sought to confront culture where the battle was the hottest. He modeled for generations of scholars and pastors the way to articulate the great verities of Scripture and discerningly critique alternative views. Henry’s legacy will grow in the years to come as generations look across the theological landscape of Evangelicalism and see the looming shadow of this theological giant who walked among twentieth century Christians.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

In summary, this paper sought to chronicle the role of revelational epistemology in the theological method of Carl F. H. Henry. In doing so, it was important to set the historical context that gave rise to Henry’s emergence on the theological scene of America and the rise and expansion of evangelicalism. The study had as its hypothesis that Henry’s presuppositionalism (defined and expounded) was not held captive to Enlightenment epistemology, but that it is a useful methodology in speaking to the culture and articulating the eternal verities of the Bible.

Chapter 2 started with an examination of the historical situation that enabled Carl Henry to emerge on the theological scene as a major influencer and shaper of what would become known as evangelicalism. In many ways it is instructive to look at the current scene in

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 86.

evangelicalism and then to look at its beginnings through the pen of its principle architect Carl Henry. In doing so, there is a greater appreciation for where evangelicalism has originated, how it thrived, and if it needs a current course correction.

A biographical survey provided key details in Henry's life: his parentage, conversion, early work as a journalist, formative theological education, and marriage. Henry not only would meet his bride at Wheaton College, but also would meet men who would play a major role in his life for decades to follow. Henry was influenced by Gordon Clark, who would become the major theological influence on him; he met Billy Graham and Edward John Carnell. Henry would study at Boston University, earning a Ph.D. in Philosophy. His dissertation on the theological attempt of A. H. Strong in finding a mediating way between orthodoxy and the rising tide of modern thought, would find a developing theological acuity that would distinguish Henry as a theologian/philosopher of the first order. In these early works (and certainly within *God, Revelation and Authority*) Henry follows Gordon Clark in using the apagogic method— a methodology that seeks to show Christianity as consistent and the only rationally—viable belief system, and that shows alternative belief systems to be inconsistent. Henry, following Clark, relies extensively on the laws of logic and principally the law of non-contradiction.

Henry had written two earlier theological works *Remaking the Modern Mind* and *The Protestant Dilemma*, which laid his theological foundation that he would amplify in the years to come. However, it was the release of *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* that drew national notice. The Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy was still fresh in the minds of many across the country, and as a result of the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, fundamentalists had become obscurantist in their orientation toward contemporary culture. What

Henry wrote would become a manifesto for evangelicalism in *The Uneasy Conscience* as he called for cultural engagement.

Henry continued to develop his theology, but it would be his role in the founding of Fuller Theological Seminary and the launching of *Christianity Today* that gave Henry a platform to shape the contours of evangelicalism. Henry would not stay at Fuller because the allure of becoming the founding editor of a conservative answer to *The Christian Century* was too great to turn down. Although Henry would have problems from the very beginning with the Board of *Christianity Today* and would depart after twelve years in less than amicable circumstances, it would be his influence during those years as editor that really shaped a maturing evangelicalism.

Chapter 3 picks up and advances an exposition of *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Henry calls for those who were committed to the “Fundamentals of the Faith” to come out of their self-imposed exile and re-engage the culture in fulfilling the mandate of Scripture. While *The Uneasy Conscience* was not of the theological nature of the *Remaking the Modern Mind*, *The Protestant Dilemma* or certainly *God, Revelation and Authority*, it called forth and gave direction to a movement whose time had arrived. *The Uneasy Conscience* following on the heels of *Remaking the Modern Mind* laid out a two-pronged agenda. This agenda called for the rescue of western civilization through the reassertion of an evangelical Christian worldview and the reformation of fundamentalism to accomplish this task.

Henry set out in *The Uneasy Conscience* to show the weaknesses of Fundamentalism. He shined a spotlight on the rigidity and the temperament of the movement that had isolated itself from the larger world, and in doing so, the word itself became either a badge of honor or a term of disparagement. The fundamentalists, while believing in the historic orthodox doctrines of the Church, had marginalized themselves by their failure to engage culture. Henry believed that the

fundamentalists had narrowly focused solely on individual sins and left societal ills untouched. This was due in part to the “Social Gospel” emphasis of a recent by-gone era. Henry argued that a consistent evangelical Christianity was rightly concerned with the individual but could not escape its responsibility to address the wrongs of society.

Henry next addresses a topic that had become a sacred cow to fundamentalists—dispensationalism. Henry takes to task those who view dispensationalism as a litmus test of unity. Furthermore, dispensationalism had provided a mechanism whereby fundamentalists could rationalize their lack of participation in the larger culture. Henry challenged this view and then laid out a plan to re-engage culture with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. The chapter then fast forwards and looks back at evangelicalism since the publication of *The Uneasy Conscience*. Following the re-examination of evangelicalism from the pen of Henry, fundamentalism is examined. A brief survey of competing theories that attempt to explain its origins and its appeal, to the fundamental tenets, the reaction to liberalism and the philosophy that gave rise to liberalism, and the fundamentalist reaction to it, is provided.

Chapter 4 provides an evangelical definition. Recognizing the ambiguity that characterizes much of the scholarly world with respect to definitions, this chapter follows Henry as he writes about what it means to be an evangelical. Henry’s vision is laid out as well as the works that Henry used to articulate his vision. As Henry repeatedly said, evangelicalism was not meant to replace fundamentalism but rather fulfill what fundamentalism should have been before it became obscurantist. Greater treatment is given to the institutional development as seen in the National Association of Evangelicals, the Evangelical Theological Society, and *Christianity Today*. A summary of the advances by evangelicalism are also covered as well as the continuing development of Henry’s theological approach.

Chapter 5 addresses the essential tenets of Henry's theological method. In providing an answer for the modern crisis of "Truth and Word," Henry offers a methodology that is rational, logical, and grounded on the divine self-disclosure of God. The principle focus is on *God, Revelation and Authority* as it represents the mature theological treatment of the central issues of modern theology as Henry sees it. Henry starts his treatment with the issue of truth. Is there such a thing as absolute truth? And can man know it? Henry reacts against the modern tendency to see truth as culturally conditioned and man's consequent reaction that ends in skepticism. Combating this tendency Henry offers the presuppositionalist position as the way out of the current morass. Everyone has presuppositions whether they admit them or not. Henry explains his method with the necessary criteria for verification. Henry posits two axioms of Christianity: (1) the epistemological axiom—divine revelation; (2) the ontological axiom—the living God. In Henry's discussion of these two axioms, he proffers Augustine as a model to follow as man searches for God's truth and word.

Henry believes that the starting place to know truth for man is divine revelation. Henry makes an important point with respect to divine revelation being his starting point. Without the divine interpretation of the divine acts, the acts are subject to wholesale misinterpretation. Major elements of Henry's methodology that are used to verify his axioms are reason (the method for recognizing truth), Scripture (as it the principle of verification), logical consistency and coherence (as test for truth), the theological task (as exposition and elucidation), the task of apologetics (confrontation), a prorism and its development and role since Kant.

Having laid out his method, Henry begins to show how his methodology impacts divine revelation. Consequently one can know that God has spoken in Scripture, and this communication is authoritative. Henry then argues his position on how God communicates to

man through the role of the *imago Dei*, the Logos doctrine, rational language that is verbal and conceptual and univocal. The communication that man receives from God is in propositional form. Henry does not countenance the distinction of revelation as either personal or propositional but sees revelation coming from a personal God Who communicates to man in an expressible (propositional) manner. As God communicates to man, it follows that the Bible is authoritative, is inspired by God and as such is inerrant. Henry sees inerrancy as a logical inference from the authority and inspiration of the Bible. Henry then shows in answering the criticism that inerrancy is a recent theological innovation, that it has existed from the very beginning of Christianity, and has continued until the rise of German Higher Criticism.

Chapter 6 examines Henry's continuing interaction and critique of evangelical alternatives principally the neo-orthodoxy as espoused by Karl Barth. Henry applauded Barth (and others) when he found serviceable portions of their theologies that contributed to historic orthodox Christianity, but he did not shy away from showing deficient elements in rival theological methodologies. The main criticism of Barth revolves around the irrational element in his view of divine revelation. Barth contended that due to God's transcendence only through a miracle of divine grace could man even begin to receive communication from God. What he does receive is appropriated through existential confrontation. Barth denied the possibility of objective revelation. Henry writes that Barth borrows Kantian epistemology and a Kierkegaardian irrationalism that emphasized a radical antithesis between reason and revelation. Barth denies propositional revelation, inerrancy. Consequently, Henry does not see Barthianism as being serviceable to evangelicalism.

Chapter 7 examines Henry's critics and his legacy. Henry is charged with being a modernist and a scholastic. Henry, it is alleged, places reason at the epicenter of his theological

method. In response to this main allegation, it is obvious from even a cursory reading of Henry that he places a high priority on divine revelation and the God who gave it. Henry does employ reason and rationality but only as divine enablements.

Henry's legacy is such that even with the criticism he has received, it in no way diminishes his contributions to the Church. For decades, Henry has called for a radical adherence to the biblical mandate of loving God with all one's heart, mind and soul and loving one's neighbor as one's self. Henry continues the emphasis of the Reformers on the primacy of Scripture. He has given to the Church a prodigious body of masterful theological work. Additionally, he had modeled a desire to pass the baton to the next generation of believers who desire to change the world because their world has been changed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Henry was a theological giant. His footprints have left an indelible imprint on the theological landscape of the twentieth and now the twenty-first century. May they serve as markers to lead man to a deepening love, devotion, and service to the God Who so impacted Carl F. H. Henry.