

## OVERVIEW

of

Carl F.H. Henry,  
*God, Revelation and Authority*, in six volumes,  
Word Books, 1976 – 1983.

This set of books is in the Evangel Library,  
and this overview is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

Carl F.H. Henry is one of the most well-known and respected theologians alive today, in conservative, orthodox circles at least. He was born in New York City on January 22, 1913, converted to Christianity in June, 1933, obtained the Th.D. from Northern Baptist Seminary in 1942, obtained the Ph.D. in philosophy from Boston University in 1949, was the founding editor of *Christianity Today* in 1956 and continued as the editor until 1968, was the Chairman of the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966, has the *Carl F.H. Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement* at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky named after him, and is the author of many books, the most noteworthy of which is the monumental six-volume work *God, Revelation and Authority*.

These volumes are not the first he published, in fact, according to D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, editors of *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F.H. Henry*, Eerdmans, 1993, “Henry’s 1947 book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* was a watershed.” On the dustcover of *God and Culture*, Stanley J. Grenz says: “In a sense, Carl F.H. Henry launched the contemporary evangelical intellectual enterprise. His *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* came as a clarion call to theological conservatives to leave their self-imposed isolation and bring biblical convictions into the arena of modern culture.” I read many books published centuries ago, that have stood the test of time. Books by Turretin, Calvin, Edwards, etc. I am not a prophet, and forecasting the future (other than by true Biblical prophets) is noted almost universally by failure, but, should Christ not return for some time yet, it wouldn’t surprise me (a significantly hedged forecast!) that these volumes (*God, Revelation and Authority*) will never go out of print and that they will be, if not already, classics. I have such high regard for these volumes, and for the intellect, the knowledge, and the spiritual devotion of their author, that I must confess that I am totally inadequate to review them. Nevertheless, I am foolish enough to make the attempt. Please bear with me and do not judge me harshly.

The entire work is divided into three sections. Section I is *God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations*; this is volume I. This volume is concerned with the fundamentals of theology and philosophy. Section II is *God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses*; this consists of volumes II, III and IV. In fifteen theses Henry summarizes “what can be said for divine revelation in terms of the living God who shows himself and speaks for himself.” His primary concern in Section II is epistemology, that is, the study of the origin, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge (how do we know what we know?). Section III is *God Who Stands and Stays*; this consists of volumes V and VI. These two volumes are concerned with the doctrine of God.

Throughout these volumes, Henry reviews alternative points of view, sometimes in detail, from secular as well as supposedly Christian sources, and occasionally from other religions, illustrating again and again that all perspectives other than that of evangelical Christianity leads to either gross contradictions, absurdity, or despair. He touches on all areas of human endeavor and thought, not just religious. This is so because his firm conviction is that Christianity is True, and therefore is relevant to all areas of life. It is also his conviction that evangelical Christianity had left the arena of human culture and no longer, at least when he began his ministry, was it salt and light within society. Call it, perhaps, evangelical witness, but those who named the institute at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville after him referred to it as “Evangelical Engagement.” I have long thought, that at least in terms of scientific naturalism and all-encompassing evolution that supposedly explains everything, evangelical Christianity had ceased to engage our society a long time ago. It has been pointed out by others that the main opponents to Darwinian evolution were scientists and not Christians, at least in the earlier years. Now, that seems to be changing with the advent of the intelligent design movement. Although I’ve not heard or read anyone making the connection, perhaps the lifelong work of Henry has had an impact here.

It is my intent to review all six volumes of *God, Revelation and Authority*, either one or two volumes at a time, in future issues of the *Evangel News*. I will close this *Overview* with the following quotations from the beginning of volume I: “Religion now has become . . . a matter of personal preference rather than a truth-commitment universally valid for one and all. . . . Religious propagandists themselves for so long have recommended decision not for truth’s sake but for the personal consolation and social stability it brings that untruths are increasingly thought to be the lifeblood of religion. . . . the night of nihilism – a new Dark Ages – may be swiftly engulfing the civilized world, and particularly the West.” That should be enough to whet your appetite!