

## BOOK REVIEW

of

Carl F.H. Henry,

*God, Revelation and Authority*, volume I, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations*, Word Books, 1976.

This book is in the Evangel Library,  
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

An overview of the six-volume set *God, Revelation and Authority* was given in the January 2003 issue of *Evangel News*. Volume I, reviewed here, is concerned with preliminary, fundamental issues of theology and philosophy. In the brief introductory chapter to this volume, "Introduction to Theology," Henry writes "Religion now has become 'everyone's own kettle of fish' – a matter of personal preference rather than a truth-commitment universally valid for one and all. The notion seems to be widespread that theology – whether Christian or not – is not truly a rational enterprise at 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. . . . Theology, we shall insist, sets out not simply with God as a speculative presupposition but with God known in his revelation. But 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. . . . The fundamental issue remains the issue of truth, the truth of theological assertions. . . . Durable theology must revive and preserve the distinction between true and false religion, a distinction long obscured by neo-Protestant theologians." And so Henry sets the stage for arguing that Christianity is true, that it is almost the definition of rationality, and that there is such a thing as true religion and false religion, and that there is such a thing as Truth.

Volume I is presented in 24 chapters: 1. The Crisis of Truth and Word, 2. The Clash of Cultural Perspectives, 3. Revelation and Myth, 4. The Ways of Knowing, 5. The Rise and Fall of Logical Positivism, 6. The Countercultural Revolt, 7. The Jesus Movement and Its Future, 8. Secular Man and Ultimate Concerns, 9. The Meaning or Myths Man Lives By, 10. Theology and Science, 11. Theology and Philosophy, 12. Is Theology a Science, 13. The Method and Criteria of Theology (I), 14. The Method and Criteria of Theology (II), 15. Empirical Verification and Christian Theism, 16. Man's Primal Religious Experience, 17. A Priori Explanation of Religion, 18. The Philosophical Transcendent A Priori (I), 19. The Philosophical Transcendent A Priori (II), 20. The Theological Transcendent A Priori, 21. The Philosophic Transcendent (Critical) A Priori, 22. Transcendental Religious Apriorism, 23. Reflections on Religious Apriorism, 24. The "Common Ground" Controversy. This may look to be very ambitious, but each chapter is not long, and the entire volume is less than 440 pages.

In chapter 1, Henry continues with his call for Christians to be committed to truth in the presentation of the Gospel, and in the attempt to be salt and light in society. He says, "A cosmic struggle between truth and falsehood, between good and evil, shadows the whole history of mankind. . . . We need therefore to abandon the notion that modern science and its discoveries are the major obstacles to a living faith in the God of revelation and redemption. In earlier prescientific times, men negotiated their spiritual revolt just as vigorously and did so without invoking science and technology as a pretext."

Throughout this volume, Henry places Christianity and its truth claims in the mainstream of public debate. He discusses empiricism and presuppositions, various views of epistemology, etc., and is very critical of so-called theology that does not engage society on all levels. He claims that Christianity, or any philosophical or religious commitment, must be at least theoretically falsifiable. He says that "Evangelical theism would be falsified if one could disprove the existence of God or of the universe, . . . or if one could disprove the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead . . . or if one could prove the unqualified 'success' of evil. . . . one could theoretically demolish biblical theism by attaching to it an insuperable weight of logical inconsistency." Of course, Henry is convinced that while Christianity is theoretically falsifiable, which any truth claim must be, it is, indeed, true. This first volume is concerned with preliminary considerations, as stated in the title. By preliminary considerations he means basic philosophical and theological commitments. Therefore, he concentrates on such concepts as truth, and how we know what we know, and empiricism and presuppositionalism, etc. If our axioms, our basic assumptions upon which we think and approach reality, are in error, then what follows in our thinking and how we conduct our lives will inevitably also be wrong.

Let me close with a quotation from Henry, from the beginning of chapter 23: "Religion is not a private option; it is a personal necessity and cultural indispensability. Man is inescapably and incurably religious. A spiritual outlook pervades his personal life and shapes the cultural milieu in which he lives and labors. No society long exists without spiritual cohesion, even as the individual life soon falls apart when man no longer considers anything absolutely true or worthwhile." While the life of Christ is of great benefit to each of us on a personal level, He is also indispensable to our neighbors, our society, and indeed the world.