

BOOK REVIEW

of

Carl F.H. Henry,

God, Revelation and Authority, volume II, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part One*, Word Books, 1976.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is 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*. A review of volume I was given in the March 2003 issue. Volume II, reviewed here, is the first of three volumes on fifteen theses. The fifteen theses all have to do with divine revelation. The three volumes of fifteen theses may be divided by primary concern with God the Father (volume II), God the Son (volume III), and God the Holy Spirit (volume IV).

Thesis One is that revelation is a divinely initiated activity. Thesis One is synonymous with Chapter 1, "The Awesome Disclosure of God." Thesis Two is that divine revelation is given for human benefit. Thesis Two consists of Chapter 2, "A Place in God's Kingdom," and Chapter 3, "Not by Good Tidings Alone." Thesis Three is that divine revelation does not completely erase God's transcendent mystery, and it consists of Chapter 4, "The Hidden and Revealed God," and Chapter 5, "Self-Transcendence and the Image of God." Thesis Four is that divine revelation is a comprehensive unity and consists of Chapter 6, "The Unity of Divine Revelation." Thesis Five is that the nature, content and variety of divine revelation are exclusively God's determination, and consists of Chapter 7, "The Varieties of Divine Revelation," Chapter 8, "Divine Revelation in Nature," Chapter 9, "The Rejection of Natural Theology," Chapter 10, "The Image of God in Man," and Chapter 11, "Recent Conjectural Views of Revelational Forms." Thesis Six is that God's revelation is uniquely personal, and consists of Chapter 12, "Divine Revelation as Personal," Chapter 13, "The Names of God," Chapter 14, "God's Proper Names: Elohim, El Shaddai," Chapter 15, "God's Proper Names: Yahweh," and Chapter 16, "Jesus: The Revelation of the New Testament Name." Thesis Seven is that God has revealed Himself historically, and consists of Chapter 17, "Divine Revelation in History," Chapter 18, "The Leveling of Biblical History," Chapter 19, "Faith, Tradition and History," Chapter 20, "Revelation and History: Barth, Bultmann and Cullman," Chapter 21, "Revelation and History: Moltmann and Pannenberg," and Chapter 22, "Revelation and History in Evangelical Perspective."

Just what is the theme of the Bible? Many answers could be given, such as redemption. However, it is Henry's burden to present the Bible as God's revelation of Himself to mankind. The Bible is how we gain objective information about who God is, what His attributes are, what His purposes are, etc. Henry approvingly quotes H.D. McDonald as stating "The idea of God *making Himself known* is not so much a biblical idea, as it is *the* biblical idea." Apart from the Bible, just how much can we know about God? Some, of course, since the heavens declare the glory of God. But there is very much indeed that is revealed about God's character and plans in the Bible that we could not otherwise know. The Christian's dependence on the Bible, therefore, is indeed great. Henry says "The content of church proclamation is therefore not just anything and everything. The church's message to the world is not about the energy crisis, pollution, white or black power, détente, the Israeli-Arab conflict, ad infinitum. It is the very specific Word of God. The church is called to proclaim what God says and does. Unless it verbally articulates and communicates the revelation of God, the church has no distinctive right to be heard, to survive, or even to exist." Phillip Johnson, in more recent days, has similar things to say about the church's proclamation in a university context. Henry, as well as Johnson, are very critical of professing Christians who have seemingly lost just what the Christian, i.e. the Biblical, message is.

Let me close with a quotation from Henry, from the beginning of this volume: "Nowhere does the crisis of modern theology find a more critical center than in the controversy over the reality and nature of divine disclosure. . . . God is not the Great Perhaps, a clueless shadow character in a Scotland Yard mystery. Far less is he a nameless spirit awaiting post-mortem examination in some theological morgue. He is a very particular and specific divinity, known from the beginning solely on the basis of his works and self-declaration as the one living God. . . . God heralds his unchanging truth to man once for all and ongoingly; man meanwhile asserts a multiplicity of contrary things about God and his Word."