

BOOK REVIEW

of

Carl F.H. Henry,

God, Revelation and Authority, volume V, *God Who Stands and Stays: Part One*,
Word Books, 1982.

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*. Individual reviews of volumes I through IV were given in the March, April, June, and July/August issues. Volumes V and VI, the last two volumes, have the subtitle of *God Who Stands and Stays*. As explained in the Introduction to volume V, Henry writes, "The earlier writings focused mainly on religious epistemology, that is, on the problem of knowledge and the fact of divine revelation as the answer to the question of how we know God. These later volumes [volumes V and VI] emphasize ontology or metaphysics; they probe the nature of the self-disclosing God whom man may know and worship and serve."

The twenty one chapters in volume V have the following titles: "The Reality and Objectivity of God," "The Being and Coming and Becoming of God," "The Living God of the Bible," "Methods of Determining the Divine Attributes," "Relationship of Essence and Attributes," "God's Divine Simplicity and Attributes," "Personality in the Godhead," "Muddling the Trinitarian Dispute," "The Doctrine of the Trinity," "God the Ultimate Spirit," "God the Self-Revealed Infinite," "Divine Timelessness or Unlimited Duration?," "The Modern Attack on the Timeless God," "Divine Timelessness and Divine Omniscience," "The Unchanging, Immutable God," "The Sovereignty of the Omnipotent God," "God's Intellectual Attributes," "Shadows of the Irrational," "The Knowability of God," "Man's Mind and God's Mind," and "Reflections on the Revelation-and-Culture Debate."

As stated above by quoting Henry, the first four volumes of this work are primarily concerned with the need for revelation and that we have it in the Holy Scriptures. The final two volumes of this work are primarily concerned with the doctrine of God. Quoting again from the Introduction, Henry writes "Not only does God *stand under* the universe, but in a classic sense he alone *understands* it. ... By *understanding* we mean ... that God plans and decrees the world and man, and that because he ordains the future he knows all contingencies. ... If man properly knows God he will *understand* him; man either stands under divine revelation and looks up to it, or resorts to revisable conjecture and vain imagination. ... God is not only infinite Mind, but as Sovereign he disposes the future and stands under all creaturely knowledge. In this context we must discuss both God's rational attributes, including his wisdom, foreknowledge and omniscience, and his moral perfections." Perhaps the immediately above quotations display why Henry uses the phrase "God Who Stands" in the title. The "Stays" part of the title is only briefly (the final two chapters) considered in volume VI.

It is Henry's conviction in this volume that we can know little of God's attributes, at least with any degree of certainty, apart from revelation. Without revelation, we are left with "conjecture and vain imagination." That is why God's attributes are an appropriate topic to pursue in "God, Revelation and Authority." It is also important to note that, in Henry's opinion, *understanding* God is essential, and that to say we *know* God in some subjective, experiential way while either denying that objective knowledge of God is possible or that it is nonessential is nonsense. "If man properly knows God he will *understand* him." In the brief space remaining, allow me to concentrate on Henry's concern for Christians to think clearly about objective, Biblical, faith.

In a period of history where we supposedly are more highly educated, on average, than those in earlier periods, it is remarkable how much effort and pages (volumes!) that Henry apparently thinks is necessary to reeducate readers, overturning what has been received by our culture and sadly in many cases our churches, just to arrive at what could be thought of as common sense (except that it is no longer common). On page 216 Henry criticizes those theologians and teachers who advocate understanding Biblical content as myth instead of objective propositions that we can, at least in part, understand. On page 363 Henry writes "Writers on the history of Western thought are only now elucidating the far-reaching import of this decisive revolt against reason in the name of Christian theology. Although professedly writing as a Christian scholar, Kierkegaard inaugurated a movement more deeply antirationalistic than anything to be found in theology or philosophy since the earliest Christian centuries." And finally, on page 382 Henry writes "Knowledge of God is not a possibility that rests simply in man as an ingenious creature. Finite intelligence is not divine intuition; man's own intelligence is not an originating source of divine revelation. Man's intelligence is, however, as much a divine revelation as is nature in general – and more so. Man is a specially created 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."