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God, Revelation, and Community: Ecclesiology and Baptist Identity in the Thought of Carl F.H. Henry

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RUSSEL D. MOORE, PHD*

INTRODUCTION

The most important question one can ask a theologian is where he goes to church. So argues ethicist and provocateur Stanley Hauerwas in his critique of the disconnection between the religious academy and the life of the local congregation.¹ This question has never been more relevant, as ecclesiology has re-emerged as a point of hearty theological disputation across the spectrum of contemporary Christian theology. In mainline Protestantism and the liberationist wing of Roman Catholicism, revisionist theologians struggle with



how a doctrine of the church can fit in movements built on dissent and distrust of authority.² Other theologians seek to ground the doctrine of the church in the Trinitarian life of God, or the *imago Dei* present in humanity. Hauerwas himself is spearheading a project to present the church as a “counter-culture” in distinction to what he dismisses as “Christendom.” Within evangelicalism, “post-conservatives” such as Stanley Grenz attempt to “revision” evangelical theology with the doctrine of the church (or, more precisely, the community of God) as the central organizing motif for doctrinal formulation.³ Meanwhile, “traditionalists” seek to recover a confessional ecclesiology

* Russell D. Moore serves as Dean of the School of Theology, Senior Vice President for Academic Administration, and Professor of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also serves as executive director of the Carl F. H. Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement. Dr. Moore is the author of *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Crossway, 2004). He is also a contributing editor of *Touchstone* magazine.

¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 157.

² See, for example, Natalie Watson, “Faithful Dissenters? Feminist Ecclesiologies and Dissent,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998): 464–484.

³ Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994). See also idem, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL:

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against the backdrop of an increasingly individualized American culture and from a parachurch evangelical ethos that has marginalized ecclesiology behind allegedly more pressing concerns such as evangelism and social action.

The question of ecclesiology is especially important for contemporary Baptists whose confessional DNA is shaped by a particular doctrine of the church. Southern Baptists, whose denominational self-consciousness was forged in nineteenth-century ecclesiological polemics against infant baptism, the Campbell movement, and the Landmark controversy, now are in the midst of a protracted internal debate over what it means for a church to be “Baptist.” The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), after weathering the debates over biblical authority in the 1970s and 1980s, remains badly-fractured between its conservative national leadership and moderate critics (often key leaders, even still, at the state and associational level) on the implications of an “authentically” Baptist doctrine of the church for denominational confessional boundaries, evangelical cooperation, and cultural engagement. At the same time, the previously isolated churches of the SBC enter the twenty-first century perhaps more fully involved than ever with the wider evangelical movement, with Southern Baptists now providing theological and missiological leadership for the more conservative wing of American evangelicalism. The challenge for Southern Baptists is to remain broadly evangelical and yet particularly Baptist, especially in a church culture pronounced by most sociologists as characterized by a “post-denominational” ethos.

With this the case, the ecclesiology of evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry stands as a relevant point of investigation in light of his formative influence on the doctrinal shape of the contemporary SBC. In the late twentieth century, Southern Baptist life and the contemporary evangelical movement intersected on the popular level perhaps most closely in the evangelistic ministry of Billy Graham. At the level of scholarly theological reflection, however, conservative Southern Baptists seeking to articulate a historically Baptist and confessionally evangelical stance on issues such as biblical inerrancy, apologetics, and socio-political engagement increasingly looked to a converted Long Island newspaperman. 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.⁴ Less obvious, but

InterVarsity Press, 1993) and idem, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

⁴ For a discussion of Henry’s influence in shaping the contemporary evangelical movement, see Millard J. Erickson, *The New Evangelical Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1968); Donald G. Bloesch, *The Evangelical Renaissance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary*

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just as real, is Henry's impact on those who would lead the SBC after the dust settled from the inerrancy controversy. "It would not be going too far to say that Henry has been a mentor for nearly the whole SBC conservative movement," observes Barry Hankins, citing Henry's influence on SBC conservatives such as R. Albert Mohler Jr., Richard Land, Timothy George, and Mark Coppenger.⁵ While some Southern Baptist conservatives (especially the SBC's intellectual leadership) readily acknowledge their theological debt to Henry, moderates caution that his influence represents the importation of a dangerously alien northern evangelicalism that threatens distinctively Baptist understandings of ecclesiology, "soul competency," and the separation of church and state.

While Henry served as a key ally in recovering the SBC's founding generation's commitment to revealed truth and scriptural authority, can Henry's theology provide a resource for the next generation of Southern Baptists as they seek to recover a Baptist doctrine of the church? Before one can even ask this question, one must ask if Henry—the quintessential parachurch academic—even had an ecclesiology, and, if so, whether there was anything distinctively Baptist about it. A Southern Baptist examination of Henry's ecclesiology must be considered in the context not only of historic Baptist confessionalism but also ongoing debates within the SBC about regenerate church membership, church discipline, worship, and church planting.

THE UNEASY CONSCIENCE OF PARACHURCH EVANGELICALISM: DID HENRY HAVE A DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH?

The question of whether Southern Baptists are evangelicals has been settled, and the answer is "yes." This is true not only at the level of academic leadership—where Southern Baptist scholars are involved in the Evangelical Theological Society and write for publications such as *Westminster Theological Journal* and *Trinity Journal*—but also at the popular level where Southern Baptist church members read *Focus on the Family* publications for childrearing advice, pay attention to Charles Colson columns for cultural and political commentary, and drive to work with the preaching of John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, and R. C. Sproul on their car radios. This does not mean that Southern Baptists are not ambivalent about their place in American evangelicalism. Baptist historian Timothy George, for instance, laments that contemporary evangelicalism is "an amazing ecumenical fact" which has been notoriously "slow to develop a distinctive understanding of the church." For George, this evangelical ecclesiological anemia can be

and the New Evangelicalism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); and Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998).

⁵ Barry Hankins, "The Evangelical Accommodationism of Southern Baptist Convention Conservatives," *Baptist History and Heritage* 33 (Winter 1998): 59.

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traced, at least partly, to Carl Henry himself. After all, George notes, “3000 pages with little ink spent on the doctrine of the church” in Henry’s six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority* represents the fact that “evangelical scholars have been preoccupied with other theological themes such as biblical revelation, religious epistemology and apologetics” to construct a workable ecclesiology.⁶ Likewise R. Albert Mohler, Jr., a Baptist theologian who counts Henry as a theological mentor, takes Henry to task because the “most glaring omission in his theological project is the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology).”⁷ Among Southern Baptist conservatives, Mohler, perhaps Henry’s closest successor, has proven to be among the least hesitant to criticize Henry’s strategy of de-emphasizing denominational distinctives for the sake of evangelical cooperation. Citing Henry’s goal to create “an international multi-denominational corps of scholars articulating conservative theology,”⁸ Mohler faults Henry and his colleagues for emphasizing the movement more than the church. “We must respect and understand the logic of the post-war evangelical coalition and yet, we must give primary attention to our confessional communities,” Mohler contends.⁹ While commending Henry’s goal of coalescing evangelicals of various denominations around the fundamentals of the faith and the formal and material principles of the Reformation, Mohler argues that “as we represent diverse confessional communities, united by those two principles ... we must hold each other accountable to them” but “it also means that we must honestly contend with each other concerning those doctrines on which we fail yet to agree.”¹⁰

The force of George and Mohler’s friendly critique is largely borne out by the remarkable lack of systematic attention given to the church not only in *God, Revelation and Authority*, but also in Henry’s entire corpus of scholarship. Against theological sparring partners such as neo-orthodoxy (on the question of biblical revelation), process theology (on the doctrine of God), and fundamentalist separatism (on the propriety of political engagement), Henry seems content merely to have assumed a doctrine of the church. This takes on an ironic edge when examined alongside Henry’s early critique of fundamentalism for its truncated ecclesiology. This does not mean that Henry’s work is completely devoid of ecclesiological interest. Henry sketches out an incipient ecclesiology—though without clear definition or development. This doctrine of the

⁶ Timothy George, “What I’d Like to Tell the Pope about the Church,” *Christianity Today*, 15 June 1998, 41–42.

⁷ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Carl F. H. Henry” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1990), 530.

⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian* (Waco: Word, 1986), 384.

⁹ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Reformist Evangelicalism: A Center without a Circumference,” in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, ed. Michael S. Horton (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 146.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

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church is constructed mostly in terms of ad hoc responses to specific issues troubling the evangelical movement of his day.

Henry's ecclesiological discussions were, for the most part, a subset of his lifelong project to detail an evangelical theology of propositional revelation and biblical authority. Henry included the church as a conduit of revealed truth as one of his pivotal fifteen theses explaining the meaning of divine revelation. Through the church, Henry argued, "God seeks now to embody his revealed purpose in history in a corporate social organism over which Christ reigns as living Head."¹¹ The church, through its witness to the inscripturated revelation of God, ensures that "men stand always but one generation removed from apostolic eyewitnesses and informed by them."¹² He related the church's relationship to the biblical foundation of Christianity also to his pneumatology in the calling, baptizing, and gifting work of the Spirit and to eschatology in his view of the church as the initial manifestation of the coming kingdom.¹³

With Henry's insistence that ecclesiology must be constructed on a firm epistemological/revelational foundation came a corresponding concern for doctrinally-anchored expository preaching as a key aspect of the church's task. This concern asserted itself years before the publication of *God, Revelation and Authority in Christianity Today* editorials that lamented what Henry perceived to be a growing disconnection in evangelical churches between preaching and biblical truth. Sensing that expository preaching was being downplayed in evangelical congregations, Henry warned that many preachers were jettisoning solid exegetical study in order to "make the message light and airy to sustain interest" since "nominal Christians prefer vague generalities, enhanced by the eloquence of Athens, and have no taste for the soul-searching truths of Jerusalem."¹⁴ Henry launched editorial anathemas against both the preacher who minimized a gospel of divine regeneration in favor of revolutionary political rhetoric as well as he "who enjoys the status of what passes for orthodoxy in his denomination but stifles his congregation with his weekly routine of ethical admonitions and moralistic persuasions."¹⁵ "Between a liberalism that, to secularize Christianity, wants to place the altar in the street instead of in the church, and an orthodoxy where the pulpit does little more than moralize in the holy place, there is not much to choose," he asserted. "Each obscures the distinctive feature of the pulpit, for both secularizing the Gospel and moralizing the Gospel are phenomena within the limits of the finite and human."¹⁶ In the

¹¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (6 vols.; Waco: Word, 1976–1983), 2:16.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6:476–541.

¹⁴ Carl F. H. Henry, "Pulpit and Pew: An Appraisal," *Christianity Today*, 29 October 1956, 20.

¹⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, "Crisis in the Pulpit," *Christianity Today*, 4 June 1965, 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

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final volume of *God, Revelation and Authority*, Henry reiterated a high view of preaching that he defined, in contradistinction to existentialist and neo-orthodox understandings, as “a re presentation of the Word of God.”¹⁷

Henry’s concern was not simply with the propositional content of preaching, however. He also pointed to the worship of the regenerate community as a key point of concern in grounding an evangelical ecclesiology in revealed truth. Even before the boiling point of the “worship wars” in conservative Christianity, Henry criticized American evangelical worship as far from conducive to the proclamation of biblical truth. He lamented that “between the covers of every Protestant hymnal are many compositions that should never be dignified by the word ‘hymn’ ” since they are “sentimental in language, introspective in gaze, and horizontally projected.”¹⁸ He questioned the every-week usage of the invitation system as bringing with it the danger that it may “breed familiarity that muffles the call of the Spirit not only at the conclusion of the service but also at other points” while integrating “potential new churchmembers who are in no sense ‘seekers’ or ‘converts.’ ”¹⁹ In the first volume of *God, Revelation and Authority*, Henry expressed dismay at the 1960s-era “Jesus movement” that redefined Christian worship in terms of 1960s youth culture. “The ancient Jews carried reverence to a costly extreme by suppressing the name of Yahweh,” he noted. “The Jesus movement expressed evangelical fidelity not by affirming the Apostles Creed but by shouting Jesus cheers.”²⁰ To this author, Henry once complained about the relationship between the parachurch evangelicalism he championed mid-century and the decline of the worship of the church. “Our youth camps were so successful that now all our worship church services try to mimic our youth camps,” he said.

Behind all of this concern for the local congregation, it seems, lay an “uneasy conscience” about the role of the church in the American evangelical movement Henry and his cohorts led. At times, Henry seemed so ensconced in the subculture of the parachurch offshoots of the movement that he seemed barely to recognize an ecclesiology centered on the local congregation. Henry’s initial critique of the older Protestant fundamentalism included his worry that the fundamentalists did not have a doctrine of the church:

Neglect of the doctrine of the Church, except in defining separation as a special area of concern, proved to be another vulnerable feature of the fundamentalist forces. This failure to elaborate the biblical doctrine of the Church comprehensively and convincingly not only contributes to the fragmenting spirit

¹⁷ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:479.

¹⁸ Carl F. H. Henry. “A Hard Look at American Worship,” *Christianity Today*, 8 December 1967, 28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁰ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:126.

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of the movement but actually hands the initiative to the ecumenical enterprise in defining the nature and relations of the churches. Whereas the ecumenical movement has busied itself with the question of the visible and invisible Church, the fundamentalist movement has often been preoccupied with distinguishing churches as vocal or silent against modernism.²¹

Later, Henry voiced concern at those within the evangelical camp who seemed to posit the church itself, and not merely the mainline ecumenical “super-church” bodies, as the enemy of a resurgent evangelical activism. In an editorial near the end of his tenure at *Christianity Today*, Henry noted with disapproval the proliferation of parachurch ministries as a replacement for the ministry of the local church. Pointing to the fact that a “considerable number of students now arrive at the seminaries with an open aversion for the parish ministry,” Henry charged those Protestant leaders who dismissed the relevance of the local congregation with a spirit of “‘savage joy,’ as though the critics were finding peculiar psychic satisfaction in lambasting the local church.”²² Implicating this cynical attitude toward the church as a factor in the weakening of Protestantism, Henry warned, “Give the Church a bad reputation, convince its members and its future leaders that it is unimportant and decadent, and you are well on the way to killing it.”²³

And yet, despite these warnings, Henry himself is at least partially responsible for the parachurch ethos of evangelicalism—and it is not difficult to see why. The early neo-evangelicals were lambasted, after all, by denominational bureaucrats, who saw evangelical ministries and missionaries as “competition” with churches that had long ago marginalized orthodox believers within their ranks. The bureaucracies’ tactics included such hardball techniques as withholding ordination credentials and even withholding denominational annuity funds from evangelicals (including Henry) who could find no outlet for ministry save in the parachurch entities (such as Fuller Seminary) they created. Resentment at bureaucracy, however, sounded at times much like resentment toward the church itself. For instance, Henry resented those in the headquarters of ecumenical denominations who suggested that evangelical parachurch evangelistic organization members were “isolated from the church.” “How does a group of devoted church members, actively engaged in the Church’s primary task, become ‘isolated from the Church’? In such a context, what does ‘isolation from the church’ mean? Is it anything more than isolation from the ecclesiastical bureaucracy? It is time someone asked the

²¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelical Responsibility in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 35.

²² Carl F. H. Henry, “Crepe-Hangers in the Church,” *Christianity Today*, 29 March 1968, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*

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ecumenical critics of evangelicals. 'What is this "Church" from which some evangelical missionaries are isolated?' "²⁴

Undoubtedly, Henry did not realize just how revealing his question "what is this church?" actually was. Later, however, Henry would recognize that a downplayed ecclesiology, intended to save evangelicalism from the problems of the mainline denominations, actually had led them down some of the same dangerous paths. With the evangelical movement in full bloom, Henry conceded that "the Jesus movement, the Chicago Declaration of young evangelicals, independent fundamentalist churches and even the so-called evangelical establishment, no less than the ecumenical movement which promoted structural church unity, all suffer a basic lack, namely, public identity as a 'people,' a conspicuously unified body of regenerate believers."²⁵ What Henry seemed unable to see was that a "movement" cannot have a public identity as a "people" or as a "body of regenerate believers" —precisely because these terms are explicitly given in the New Testament to Christians in covenant with one another as churches. It is hard to disagree with Presbyterian John Muether when he argues that since "it was the movement, not the visible church, to which Henry's ministry was committed," his "indifference to ecclesiology and confessionalism may explain the failures of the evangelical movement, failures he so candidly describes."²⁶

This does not mean, however, that Henry did not contribute at all to an evangelical ecclesiology. He did so—usually in the context of an attempt to build a consensus of evangelicals around the concept of the Kingdom of God, and away from internal debates between dispensationalists and Reformed theologians. Henry and others in the movement recognized that a sustainable theology of evangelical engagement could not be achieved without some form of consensus on the church. The new evangelical concern over the doctrine of the church was inextricably linked to related soteriological concerns. It was not simply that the denominational church structures had neglected preaching the gospel of individual salvation that galled conservative Protestants. It was also that the liberals had succeeded in turning the denominations into the equivalent of political action committees, addressing a laundry list of social and political issues.²⁷ The problem with

²⁴ Carl F. H. Henry, "Isolated from the Church?," *Christianity Today*, 16 September 1966, 31.

²⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:133.

²⁶ John Muether, "Contemporary Evangelicalism and the Triumph of the New School," *Westminster Theological Journal* 50 (1988): 342. Muether argues that the vapid ecclesiology and lack of denominational identity represented by Henry, his fellow Fuller Seminary faculty, and other leaders of the evangelical movement, along with the commitment of the movement to work through parachurch avenues rather than through the visible church, represents the triumph of New School Presbyterianism over the Old Princeton confessional Reformed tradition.

²⁷ Thus, the rationale for the formation of a National Association of Evangelicals as an orthodox alternative to the ecumenical Federal Council of Churches included the particular complaint about the

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the Social Gospel ecclesiology, Henry concluded, was the same anti-supernaturalism that destroyed its soteriology; Protestant liberalism had replaced a regenerate church over which the resurrected Messiah ruled as Head with a largely unregenerate visible church.²⁸ Henry thereby tied the liberal Protestant view of the church and political action directly to a theologically problematic view of salvation, a “neo-Protestant view” that “substitutes the notion of corporate salvation for individual salvation.”²⁹ Thus, even while maintaining the need for individual action in the public square, Henry maintained that the endless political pronouncements of the churches were an affront to the purpose of the church. “The Church as a corporate body has no spiritual mandate to sponsor economic, social, and political programs,” he argued in the midst of the omni-political 1960s. “Nowhere does the New Testament authorize the Church to endorse specific legislative proposals as part of its ecclesiastical mission in the world.”³⁰ In so doing, Henry pointed out the irony of church officials proclaiming the certitudes of redemption with less and less certainty while simultaneously making sociopolitical statements that seemed to come with their own self-attesting authority. “Is it not incredible that some churchmen, whose critical views of the Bible rest on the premise that in ancient times the Spirit’s inspiration did not correct erroneous scientific concepts should seriously espouse the theory that in modern times the Spirit provides denominational leaders with the details of a divine science of economics?” he asked.³¹

FCC: “It indicated both in pronouncements and practice that it considered man’s need and not God’s grace as the impelling motive to Christian action and that the amelioration of the social order is of primary concern to the Church. In this connection it attacked capitalism, condoned communism and lent its influence toward the creation of a new social order.” James Deforest Murch, *Cooperation without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 47.

²⁸ “Insofar as the professing Church is unregenerate and hence a stranger to the power of true love, it should surprise no one that it conceives its mission to be the Christianizing of the world rather than the evangelizing of mankind, and that it relies on other than supernatural dynamic for its mission in the world,” Henry noted. “Even ecclesiastical leaders cannot rely on a power they have never experienced.” Henry, *The God Who Shows Himself* (Waco: Word, 1966), 15.

²⁹ Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis: The Significance of the World Congress on Evangelism* (Waco: Word, 1967), 74. Henry therefore summed up the defective political ecclesiology of the Protestant left by noting, “The authentic mission of the church is thus asserted to be that of changing the structures of society and not that of winning individual converts to Christ as the means of renewing society. The ‘gospel’ is said to be addressed not to individuals but to the community. This theory is connected with a further assumption, that individuals as such are not lost in the traditional sense, and that the mission of the Church in the world is therefore no longer to be viewed as the regeneration of a doomed world, but the Church is rather to use the secular structures (political, economic, and cultural) as already on the way to fulfillment of God’s will in Christ.” *Ibid.*, 74–75.

³⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, “The Church and Political Pronouncements,” *Christianity Today*, 28 August 1964, 29.

³¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 136–137.

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An evangelical alternative to this politicized Christless church bureaucracy must be developed theologically by evangelicals, Henry asserted. For Henry, the debates over the church were really part of the ongoing debates over the Kingdom and the role of the reign of Christ in the present era. Protestant liberalism's ecclesiology then "still subordinates the person of Jesus to the Kingdom-idea" in locating the Kingdom "in Jesus' work and teaching, not in His person" while others saw the restoration of the Israeli state as the coming of the Kingdom.³² By calling for an evangelical ecclesiology, Henry and the postwar theologians thereby seemed to recognize that the problem was not that Protestant liberalism had too high a view of the church, but rather that it had too low a view, a concern borne out by the Social Gospel theologians' tendency to pit "the Kingdom" against the church.³³

For Henry, however, the inauguration of the Kingdom in the current era meant the "closest approximation of the Kingdom of God today is the Church, the body of regenerate believers that owns the crucified and risen Redeemer as its Head."³⁴ As such, the relationship between the church and the Kingdom prevents either the politicization of the church or its withdrawal from the sociopolitical order. The Kingdom orientation, Henry argued, reclaimed ecclesiology as central to evangelical Christianity, thereby rescuing it from the notion that "the isolated local church, out of effective contact with the larger Christian fellowship, or that the isolated believer, maintaining his personal devotions in independence of the local church, is ethically self-sufficient."³⁵ This individualism, he asserted, infected earlier forms of fundamentalism with "the secular accentuation of individual life," resulting in the tendency to settle "ethical questions by a short-shrift legalism."³⁶ A theology of evangelical engagement, he concluded, could not start from bare individuals, but instead from "the moral perspective of an organic fellowship within which all walls of partition are demolished."³⁷ If the church is a sign of the coming Kingdom, Henry argued, the mission of the church's prayerful focus "must include within its scope Russian totalitarianism, Indian poverty, Korean suffering, American greed; it embraces the hospitals, the factories, the service clubs, the prisons,

³² Henry, *The God Who Shows Himself*, 88.

³³ "In primitive Christian thought the Church was real, but it was like a temporary house put up to shelter the believers till the Lord came and the real salvation began," Walter Rauschenbusch argued. "But the Parousia did not come, and the temporary shelter grew and grew, and became the main thing." Rauschenbusch then was able to argue that the church was necessary for "the religious education of humanity" while the true realization of the Kingdom "awaits religion in the public life of humanity." Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917; reprint, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 232, 145.

³⁴ Henry, *The God Who Shows Himself*, 89.

³⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 205.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 452.

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and the brothels.”³⁸ As a sign of the eschatological Kingdom, governed even now by the ascended Christ, Henry maintained, the church does not have the right to take over the reigns of government, but it does have the responsibility to testify to the righteous justice of the Kingdom.³⁹ Indeed, he noted, the church is to model before the watching world the reality of the inaugurated Kingdom of Christ. The church as focus of Christ’s reign in this age, Henry asserted, is what maintains the distinction between the church and the world.⁴⁰ As such, Henry argued, the politics of the Kingdom enter the present era through the visible demonstration by the church of what it means to live under the eschatological reign of Christ by being a New Society called to “mirror in microcosm” the messianic rule in the new heavens and new earth.⁴¹ This stance therefore cannot be fit into the theological/political categories of fundamentalist withdrawal, Social Gospel triumphalism, or Niebuhrian realism.⁴² The theological foundations for the universal—or “invisible” (as it is, unfortunately, often called)—church were established in Henry’s thought at the most basic levels. What was missing was theological specificity on some of the things that make a church a church—the ordinances, membership, church government, and so forth. It is not debatable that these issues were often intentionally minimized to maintain unity within an evangelical movement seeking to take on Protestant liberalism, separatist fundamentalism, and cultural nihilism. Henry would dispute that the “most important” aspects of ecclesiology were articulated in his thought. Some within the dissident moderate wing of Baptist life would agree with him, counseling that the incipient ecclesiology passed on from Henry to the SBC’s new conservative leadership is both dangerous and at odds with Baptist identity.

³⁸ Ibid., 452–453.

³⁹ “It has the right and duty to call upon rulers, even pagan rulers, to maintain order and justice. It must stress the divine responsibility of government, condemn every repudiation of divine answerability, and challenge the State’s neglect of its duty. The Church cannot content itself simply with denying church membership to the unjust and politically immoral. It must also criticize those who violate, misapply, or refuse to enforce the law. In Barth’s words, the Church is to call the State ‘into co-responsibility before God.’ ” Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 81–82.

⁴⁰ For instance, Henry criticized Karl Barth for failing to make this distinction in the nature of the mediatorial reign of Christ by ignoring “the real difference between the divine sovereignty over the present world order and Christ’s kingdom in the Age to come” since “Christ is not related to the world as Head to Body.” Ibid., 151.

⁴¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 67.

⁴² “The strategy stance of the church *vis-à-vis* society is not simply one of the church *for* the world, but of the church *against* the world. The church is ideally an approximate picture of what the world ought to be; the world, on the other hand, is what the church would still be were it not for the reality of grace and restoration to divine obedience. The New Testament looks ahead to Messiah’s inauguration of universal social justice at his return. But it also incorporates into its preaching the divine demand for world righteousness, and in no whit relaxes God’s present requirement of universal social justice.” Ibid., 121–122.

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FROM WHEATON TO NASHVILLE: BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES IN HENRY'S THOUGHT

That Henry is always referred to as an “evangelical theologian” and rarely as a “Baptist theologian,” John Muether notes, is “indicative of the nondenominational character of his ministry.”⁴³ Muether looks to Henry’s autobiography for further confirmation that Baptist identity played little role in his theological formation. For example, Muether points out, Henry contends that the “condemnatory spirit and one-sided propaganda of the ‘come-out-ers’ and the machine loyalty of the ‘stay-in-ers’ ” in the Presbyterian Church, not soul-searching ecclesiological conviction, is what caused Henry to discard plans to seek ordination among the Presbyterians.⁴⁴ Likewise, moderate Baptist historian Barry Hankins considers the SBC conservative claim that Henry is a Southern Baptist to be “factually true and misleading at the same time” since “Henry was reared and educated in the North and Midwest and has spent his entire career in non-Southern Baptist institutions outside the South.” Hankins groups Henry together with Presbyterian apologist Francis Schaeffer as an outside evangelical influence whose writings have resonated among Southern Baptist conservatives.⁴⁵ The early Henry, writing in 1958, would seem to agree with Hankins. Citing his affiliation with the American Baptists and his support of the Conservative Baptist missions society, Henry wrote that he was only “technically” affiliated with both the American Baptist and Southern Baptist Conventions since the church in which he held membership, Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church in Washington, D. C., was dually-aligned.⁴⁶ For Henry, the Southern Baptist Convention was a problem to be solved, rather than a heritage to be claimed. Henry expressed frustration with the SBC’s refusal to join the pan-evangelical cause, or even to link up with the National Association of Evangelicals. Henry blamed his inability to draw the nation’s largest Protestant denomination into the post-war evangelical coalition on the “ecclesiastical isolation of Southern Baptists” rooted in an over-emphasis on denominational distinctives, which Henry identified as a remaining legacy of nineteenth century Baptist Landmarkism.⁴⁷

Such questions have to do with more than denominational tribal identity. Is Henry’s identification with the SBC symbolic of a disjuncture between the current denominational leadership and the Southern Baptist heritage shaped in the nineteenth and early

⁴³ Muether, “Contemporary Evangelicalism and the Triumph of the New School,” 340.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 340–341.

⁴⁵ Hankins, “Evangelical Accommodationism of Southern Baptist Convention Conservatives,” 59.

⁴⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, “Twenty Years a Baptist,” *Foundations* 1 (January 1958): 53. This essay is reprinted in Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore, eds., *Why I Am a Baptist* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 209–217.

⁴⁷ Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis*, 107–109.

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twentieth centuries? Despite Henry's lack of systematic attention to Baptist distinctives, he has not been silent on the matter. In 1958, while still affiliated primarily with the American Baptists, Henry outlined the understanding of Baptist distinctives which first impressed him to become a Baptist while a student at the interdenominational evangelical Wheaton College: the final authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, believer's baptism by immersion, the autonomy of the local congregation, and the separation of church and state.⁴⁸ While not all of these "are distinctively baptistic," Henry notes, "the total combination of these tenets and their special emphasis is unique to Baptists."⁴⁹ Henry's understanding of what he considers to be Baptist distinctives, particularly on the issues of authority and the ordinances, not only sheds light on his ecclesiology, it represents the degree to which Henry stands in continuity with the heritage of the denomination with which he would eventually come to identify.

Consistent with his Baptist heritage, Henry affirmed a regenerate church over which Christ reigns as Head. In fact, he laid much of the blame for the Social Gospel of Protestant liberalism on a largely unregenerate visible church. Consistent with this, Henry listed believer's baptism as the next step, following biblical authority and the priesthood of believers, in a denominational identity quest that would culminate in his 1937 immersion on profession of faith at Long Island's Babylon Baptist Church. Despite his conviction that baptism is defined as the immersion of a believer, Henry fails to provide an apologetic for this viewpoint in his theological project. He speaks of baptism as an "ally" of the preached word which, along with the Lord Supper, are too often "merely appended to preaching as occasional additives or alternatives."⁵⁰ Even so, Baptists will find a more thorough treatment of baptism in the writings of Karl Barth than in those of Carl Henry.

As editor of *Christianity Today* Henry lamented the devaluation of the Lord's Supper as representative of a downgrade in the worship of Protestant churches:

Is it mere memorialism? Is it an occasion for mere sentimentalism? Or, worse yet, is it dispensable? Protestants must remember that whatever the Lord's Supper commemorates, it does not celebrate an absent Christ or a dead figure, imprisoned in past history. It speaks of a victorious, once crucified Saviour who by his Holy Spirit comes to meet his people in the contemporaneity of their worship.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Henry, "Twenty Years a Baptist," 46–47.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁰ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:479.

⁵¹ Henry, "A Hard Look at American Worship," 29.

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Perhaps the key phrase in the above passage is “whatever the Lord’s Supper commemorates.” When speaking of the ordinances, Henry rarely moved beyond the vague generalities that could be embraced by all sectors of the evangelical movement.

On the issue of confessional boundaries, however, Henry is much more specific. Henry cites as first in priority in his decision to seek baptism in a Baptist congregation the Baptist distinctive of “the final authority of Scripture above all creeds and speculations.”⁵² Henry notes that reliance upon biblical authority is “more than the first tenet of authentic Baptist belief, it is the foundation stone for the other principles which, if unsettled, jeopardize the total Baptist spiritual structure.”⁵³ Moderate Southern Baptists, drawing heavily upon E. Y. Mullins’s formulation of “soul competency,” would join Henry in affirming that reliance upon biblical authority alone is foundational for Baptist life. Many moderates, however, would interpret such a statement to mean “the freedom of the individual, led by God’s Spirit within the family of faith, to read and interpret the Scriptures” without the confines of confessional statements.⁵⁴ E. Glenn Hinson, for instance, argues that the historic Baptist position of “Scriptures alone” has been compromised by the “catholic” phase of Southern Baptist history in which confessionalism is being thrust upon the denomination by an unbaptistic “fundamentalist faction.”⁵⁵ Jeff Pool warns of an encroaching creedalism within the SBC that threatens to destroy essential Baptist distinctives. Baptist confessions, Pool argues, historically have been merely the expression of “Christian understanding of Christian experience in the form of carefully crafted and organized thoughts.”⁵⁶

Henry displayed no such fears about a “creeping creedalism” in maintaining confessional boundaries. In fact, in the very same article in which he outlines his view of Scripture as sole authority, Henry laments the lax confessional stance both of his ordination council and the Southern Baptist Convention at large.⁵⁷ Indeed, early in his career Henry turned

⁵² Ibid., 47.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “The Covenant of the Alliance of Baptists” adopted by the Alliance of Baptists February 12, 1987, and revised in 1992. See appendix 4 in Walter Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 1993), 85.

⁵⁵ E. Glenn Hinson, “Creeds and Christian Unity: A Southern Baptist Perspective,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23 (Winter 1986): 25–36.

⁵⁶ Jeff B. Pool, “Chief Article of Faith: The Preamble of *The Baptist Faith and Message* (1963)” in *Sacred Mandates of Conscience: Interpretations of the Baptist Faith and Message*, ed. Jeff B. Pool (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 1997), 44.

⁵⁷ “While I have often marveled at the vigorous Sunday school, training union and missionary organizations of Southern Baptists, at the same time I have not always been able to reconcile their strong claims of theological fidelity with the disposition in some quarters to infiltrate biblical theology with biblical criticism.” Henry, “Twenty Years a Baptist,” 53.

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down the offer of the presidential search committee from a Baptist college precisely because they would not require faculty subscription to a formal confessional statement. The school, Sioux Falls College, expected Henry to transform the school into the “Baptist Wheaton.” Henry responded that under such conditions “no Baptist Wheaton would or could emerge and I wished the committee well.”⁵⁸ Likewise, Henry would lead the charge in the 1980s to craft theological boundaries for the evangelical movement, a project which he was unable to sustain long-term.⁵⁹ Henry’s commitment to denominational confessional boundaries manifested itself in his role in the respective controversies of both the American Baptist Convention and, decades later, the Southern Baptist Convention. The wide divide between American Baptist conservatives and liberals on the question of biblical authority can be seen in a dialogue between Henry and Harvard theologian Harvey Cox at the 1968 American Baptist Convention in Boston, Massachusetts. The forum, moderated by an ABC denominational official, represented sharp divisions along the lines of the fundamentalist/modernist controversy between these two theologians within the same denomination.⁶⁰ Earlier, Henry’s quest for confessional fidelity in the ABC would lead to his nomination as recording secretary of the Convention by the Fundamentalist Fellowship at the Grand Rapids convention in 1946. Henry, along with the rest of the conservative slate, was defeated.⁶¹ In siding with conservatives in the SBC controversy, Henry charged moderates with holding a modernist view of biblical authority inconsistent with “the theological and spiritual successors of a generation committed unqualifiedly to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message.”⁶² For Henry, *sola Scriptura* did not mean a knee-jerk resistance to confessionalism.

This is the bone of contention for moderate Baptists wary of the influence of Henry on post-conservative resurgence SBC leadership. They warn that such concern for doctrinal boundaries is a “northern evangelical” stance, inconsistent with Baptist individualism. And yet, such criticisms cannot bear up beneath even the most minimal historical scrutiny. Far before the founding generation of the Southern Baptist Convention, local associations were using statements of faith as boundaries of cooperative endeavors. Southern Baptists contrasted their confessional commitments with the “Bible Only” anticreedalism of Alexander Campbell and the Church of Christ movement. Indeed,

⁵⁸ Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 109.

⁵⁹ This attempt was made at the May 14–17, 1989, Evangelical Affirmations conference on the campus of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. See Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

⁶⁰ Henry provided a transcript, without commentary, in *Christianity Today*. “Technology, Modern Man, and the Gospel,” *Christianity Today*, 5 July 1968, 3–7.

⁶¹ Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 110.

⁶² Carl F. H. Henry, “Getting Down to Business,” *Southern Baptist Watchman*, June 1992, 1.

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during the founding generation, Southern Baptists faced their first confessional crisis with the controversy over Old Testament scholar Crawford Howell Toy's lack of fidelity to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Abstract of Principles in his articulation of a historical-critical understanding of the Pentateuch. This could not be said to be a "power play" by denominational elites, given the furious reaction of grassroots Southern Baptists to Toy's doctrinal infidelities seen in the Baptist newspapers of the time. If these "creedalists" were enmeshed in "northern evangelicalism," it would have certainly come as a surprise to them, since many of them served as soldiers and chaplains in the Confederate army!

Indeed, the difference between the mainstream of Southern Baptist thought and Henry's own viewpoint would be Henry's relative confessional minimalism, especially when it comes to issues related to the local congregation. That Henry chose to minimize the place of Baptist distinctives in his theological reflection is evident in his self-stated goal to rally a movement which "despite doctrinal disagreement over ecclesiology and eschatology" could "cooperate on evangelism as an inescapable mandate" and "shape an orderly list of public goals and approved means to serve as salt, light and leaven in American society."⁶³ In the halcyon days of the early movement, he almost triumphantly announced the arrival of a genuinely evangelical ecumenical movement that could unite conservative Christians "without overstressing denominational distinctions."⁶⁴ When backed against the wall by the *Sword of the Lord* on the right and the World Council of Churches on the left, Henry seemed to equate frank confessional dialogue on the nature of the church with the fundamentalist error in making dispensational premillennialism a test of fellowship. Henry was willing to take firm stands on other highly controversial theological issues, such as his rejection of evidentialist apologetics so popular in the evangelical subculture, without apparent fear of balkanizing the evangelical movement. Furthermore, even with such strenuous efforts to maintain a transdenominational coalition, Henry was forced to concede after the 1970s that "the prospect of a massive evangelical alliance seemed annually more remote, and by mid-decade it was gone."⁶⁵

Henry did indeed see the answer to such disunity in confessional boundaries. But the boundaries he suggested in the "Evangelical Affirmations" conference and his *Christianity Today* articles paled in comparison to the relative confessional precision of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith of 1833, the Abstract of Principles of 1859, or even the *Baptist Faith and Message* of 1963. Henry placed a great deal of hope in biblical inerrancy as providing confessional unity for the evangelical movement. See, for instance,

⁶³ Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 398.

⁶⁴ Carl F. H. Henry, "The Vigor of the New Evangelicalism," *Christian Life*, April 1948, 66.

⁶⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, "American Evangelicals in a Turning Time," *Christian Century*, 5 November 1980, 1060.

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the bare affirmation of inerrancy of the canon as the statement of faith for the Evangelical Theological Society, of which Henry was a prominent founder in 1949.⁶⁶ Henry would have argued (correctly) that ecclesiological specific articles of faith could not have unified the coalition needed to combat Protestant liberalism. But, later in life, he conceded that the movement's attempts at parachurch "confessionalism resulted in neither lasting evangelical unity nor a sustainable definition of evangelical identity." As John Muether has demonstrated, biblical inerrancy became the "principal confessional standard" of the contemporary movement, "but history has taught that, by itself, inerrancy fails as a confessional standard."⁶⁷ This is precisely the reason Southern Baptists were able to recover their institutions, just as parachurch evangelicals were losing many of theirs. The SBC had a confessional heritage to which its institutions were being unfaithful, and specific churches to whom these institutions could be held accountable.

It is here also that the Baptist tradition might have been especially helpful to Henry in his attempt to unite evangelicals of differing stripes. While nineteenth century Baptists were forced to defend themselves against paedobaptists for being schismatic on ecclesiological issues, they were insistent that being united and cooperative with other evangelicals need not sweep away their testimony to what they believed to be the biblical doctrines of the believers' church.⁶⁸ Many early Southern Baptists recognized the danger in magnifying the denominational distinctives over the common evangelical faith, but they nonetheless consistently defended and explained Baptist ecclesiology. For instance, J. B. Moody, who was heavily influenced by Landmarkism, warned students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary at the turn of the century that they should "emphasize the most important doctrines, but never so as to neutralize even the least important."⁶⁹ Moody counseled that the "doctor that disdains his patient because he has not the leprosy is as foolish as the preacher who apologizes for dancing because it is not as bad as murder."⁷⁰ Likewise, James P. Boyce, who thought it better to study with Princeton Presbyterians than with nonconfessional Baptists and who eagerly joined with like-minded non-

⁶⁶ The doctrinal statement reads, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs." Later a clause affirming a Trinitarian understanding of God was added to preclude Jehovah's Witnesses from joining the Society.

⁶⁷ Muether, "Contemporary Evangelicalism and the Triumph of the New School," 346.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, the Virginia Baptist *Religious Herald's* insistence that, even without Baptist witness, paedobaptist communions were already divided over issues such as church government and soteriology. "Zeal for the Truth, Not for a Party," *Religious Herald*, 26 February 1863, 1. Similarly, the *Herald* felt it necessary to repudiate paedobaptist suggestions that they had been spreading tracts on baptism to dying Civil War soldiers in Army hospitals. Both sides agreed that such was an inappropriate venue for ecclesiological polemic. "It Is Not True," *Religious Herald*, 4 June 1863, 1

⁶⁹ J. B. Moody, *The Distinguishing Doctrines of Baptists* (Nashville: Folk and Browder, 1901), 4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

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Baptists for evangelism and missions, nonetheless defended Baptist particularities explicitly and unwaveringly.⁷¹

This lack of ecclesiological identity was also a persistent hindrance to Henry's hopes for a pan-evangelical effort for social and political renewal in the United States. Henry recognized that the first priority was a holy church, and only secondarily a righteous nation. But, despite Henry's insistence on a regenerate church as necessary both for the propagation of the gospel and for socio-political engagement, he offered a theological antidote to the impurity of the church, but not an ecclesiological one. Henry called for biblical fidelity and warned evangelicals of the dangers of a dangerously-compromised ecumenical movement devoid of the gospel, but his broadly-evangelical ecclesiology could not address the problem of small-scale "ecumenical movements" of regenerate and unregenerate people existing on the membership rolls of the same congregations. Henry's Southern Baptist forerunners could not have imagined cultural engagement or co-belligerence with other Christians apart from a well-established ecclesiology which seeks, however fallibly, to "draw the line of distinction between the church and the world, exactly where God will place it at the last day."⁷² Similarly, while Henry fervently fought for religious liberty and a church-state separation view consistent with nineteenth-century Southern Baptist distinctives, he did so without drawing on the considerable resources of his own Baptist heritage.⁷³

Nonetheless, most critiques of Henry's anemic ecclesiology have focused on the early Henry rather than the later years of the theologian, in which his activity was concentrated far more within the denominational life of the Southern Baptist Convention. By the end of the denomination's inerrancy controversy Henry was self-consciously a Southern Baptist. He served on the SBC Resolutions Committee at the 1984 convention where he drafted a controversial resolution against women in the pastorate. In 1992, SBC president H. Edwin Young appointed Henry along with George, Mohler, Land, Coppenger, Herschel Hobbs, and others to a Presidential Theological Study Committee which reported its findings to the 1994 Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Florida. The report, which articulated a conservative Southern Baptist response to contemporary questions on the doctrines of Scripture, God, the person and work of Christ, the church, and last things, was adopted by the convention despite fierce opposition from moderates

⁷¹ See, for instance, Boyce's Catechism of Bible Doctrine and the Abstract of Principles, the confessional statement for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

⁷² R. B. C. Howell, *The Covenants* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1855), 126.

⁷³ For an sketch of Henry's views on religious liberty and the relationship between church and state, see his "Evangelical Christianity to 2001 and Beyond: Religious Liberty as a Cause Celebre," address to the 25th annual seminar of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Washington, D.C., 3 March 1992.

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who viewed the report as a “creedalistic” interpretation of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message.⁷⁴ In 1996, he wrote a treatise on the plight of American democracy for the SBC Christian Life Commission, now the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.⁷⁵ Clearly, Henry’s identification with the SBC moved beyond simply his quietly retaining membership at Capitol Hill Baptist Church.

More than this, at the end of his life Henry found a home in a place perhaps he never expected. At the beginning of the post-war evangelical movement, Fuller Theological Seminary was a bastion of commitment to propositional truth, evangelistic fervor, and the authority and inerrancy of Holy Scripture. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was well on its way into the morass of neo-orthodoxy and beyond. The roles are now, ironically, reversed. The Carl F. H. Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement was founded in 1999 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, whose faculty is made up of many theologians who were shaped by the thought of Carl F. H. Henry. The Henry Institute cooperated with Crossway Books in the republication of *God, Revelation and Authority*, complete with a ceremony at the Louisville campus honoring the then-aging theologian. Fuller Theological Seminary, by contrast, is now well past any commitment to biblical inerrancy, and is the institutional leader of an evangelical left moving further and further into appropriating postmodern understandings of truth and authority.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that as a theologian Henry left his ecclesiology at a relatively undeveloped stage. Did Henry have an ecclesiology, and, if so, was it a *Baptist* ecclesiology? In the pews of Babylon Baptist Church and Capitol Hill Baptist Church, it is apparent that he did. In the pages of his books, articles, and editorials, it is much less apparent—indeed, almost invisible. The fact that evangelicals ask *whether* Henry had an ecclesiology demonstrates the problem that critics of evangelicalism—from within and without—have leveled for years: the movement has yet to foster a deep concentration on the church as covenanted community.

And yet, we must remember that Carl Henry was a man of his time, as all of us are. We must remember that the evangelical movement of the 1940s and 1950s—much like the fundamentalist movement before it—was not “parachurch” by choice. The Billy Graham

⁷⁴ Especially Jeff B. Pool in his *Against Returning to Egypt: Exposing and Resisting Credalism in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998). For the full text of the report, see Timothy and Denise George, eds., *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 147.

⁷⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, *Has Democracy Had Its Day?* (Nashville: ERLC Publications, 1996).

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Crusades met in fairgrounds precisely because the mainline churches did not want his gospel of personal regeneration. Fuller Theological Seminary formed because evangelicals were marginalized in the denominational seminaries (including those of the Southern Baptist Convention). It is far from difficult to see the origins of such a “free enterprise” view of the church, especially when consideration is given to the doctrinal continuity between the older fundamentalism and the new evangelicalism. After all, the denominational structures of the mainline churches were, by mid-century, almost without exception in the hands of the modernists, who (quite illiberally) would tolerate almost anything but orthodoxy. This tension was evident in, among other things, Henry’s loss of his American Baptist Convention retirement fund upon his appointment to the Fuller faculty.⁷⁶

Yes, Henry was naïve about the possibility of a pan-evangelical movement, united around a minimal confession of faith and the inerrancy of Scriptures. But he was right that parachurch evangelicalism—when rooted in healthy, confessional churches—can be an excellent vehicle for Kingdom activity, and for rescuing Christians from the insularity of their own traditions. The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), for instance, of which Henry was a Board of Reference member until his death, is an example of such a parachurch ministry. The current board chairman, J. Ligon Duncan, is also moderator of the Presbyterian Church in America—and no one is more insistent in his scholarship on the importance of Presbyterian polity, infant baptism, and covenant theology. The CBMW leadership and constituency, however, spans the evangelical spectrum from conservative Episcopalians to Southern Baptists to Pentecostals—all just as open about their confessional and ecclesiological commitments, and all just as united around the biblical teachings on gender. The same can be seen throughout evangelicalism. As the “big focus” groups such as the Evangelical Theological Society seem to be splintering apart continually from lack of unity, a coterie of “small focus” groups are uniting around common causes on particular issues of concern while maintaining clearly their specific ecclesiological commitments.

It must also be remembered that Henry did not intend to write a systematic theology, but to concentrate on issues of God, revelation, and biblical authority. The fact that he devoted as much attention as he did to the church demonstrates that Henry did understand the relevance of the covenant community to any discussion of revealed truth. Moreover, one reason for Henry’s lack of specificity in developing a specifically Baptist understanding of baptism and the Lord’s Supper was the fact that the doctrines under attack in his historical context ranged from denial of the classical doctrine of God (in Boston personalist philosophy and process theology) to the denial of intelligible,

⁷⁶ Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 118.

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propositional revelation (in neo-orthodoxy and existentialism)—and many of the liberal theologians against whom he argued were quite committed to Baptist ecclesiology. Conversely, although the evangelical movement included Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, and (later) Pentecostals and charismatics, its leadership was also disproportionately Baptist. Henry, Billy Graham, E. J. Carnell, and other leading figures in the movement were all members in good standing of Baptist churches.

Henry's hopes for a sustainable and theologically cohesive trans-denominational evangelical "movement" were undoubtedly overly optimistic. Even so, Henry's project gave him the space to articulate what may be the most comprehensive and brilliant defenses of Christian epistemology since the Reformation. Through this, churches throughout the evangelical coalition benefited, but especially the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, as they sought to reclaim a legacy of biblical truth against a denominational bureaucracy that seemed to value Baptist distinctives more than the scriptural authority that grounded them. Henry's scholarship produced a generation of men and women who recognized and loved truth—and that led to a convention of churches to which Henry could turn when many of the plumb institutions of the "movement" began to love evangelicalism more than the evangel.

Henry provided Southern Baptist evangelicals with an invaluable model for defending historic evangelical (and Southern Baptist) convictions on God, revelation, and authority. Despite the criticisms of the Baptist left, Henry's commitment to confessional orthodoxy and biblical inerrancy was hardly a "northern evangelical" peculiarity. It was what Christians—north and south, Baptist and non-Baptist—have always believed. The challenge of the next generation is to build on Henry's evangelical orthodoxy with a clear statement of how such truths shape and define the life of local congregations. This means maintaining broad, trans-denominational coalitions, but it also means developing specific ecclesiological models within our own communions. As Richard Lints notes, "Rather than evangelical theologians, there must be Baptist theologians, Presbyterian theologians, Methodist theologians, and so on."⁷⁷ This means that the heirs of Henry need to develop a theology that can speak not only to the crusade tent, but to the baptistery as well.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 321.

⁷⁸ Moore, R. D. (2004). "God, Revelation, and Community: Ecclesiology and Baptist Identity in the Thought of Carl F. H. Henry." *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* Volume 8, 8(4), 23–40.